

When Tami and I first met on that fateful zoom call in July of 2021, I was immediately drawn to her incredibly kind and insightful demeanor – but little did I know that Tami’s arrival to our home in Brooklyn, New York, that November was a true gift that I could have never otherwise imagined.

After we agreed to match, my husband, Scott and I were so excited to welcome Tami into our home. We looked forward to sharing stories about her upbringing in Taubate, Brazil, and the genesis of our growing family in New York City. We were on the brink of starting the rest of our lives, with our 1-year old daughter, Alina, and our second on the way. But, on September 9<sup>th</sup>, just about one month after we matched with Tami, I received a phone call that changed everything.

I had cancer.

At 33 years old after just having given birth to our son Jesse, I was diagnosed with stage 2 Triple Negative breast cancer. At that time, I had no idea what any of that even meant. All I knew was that the tumor was too aggressive to wait even a week before starting chemotherapy. If were to spread, I was told I’d have 5 years maximum. The chemotherapy would cause me to lose all my hair within three weeks, and I was told I’d be spending the majority of the next 6-8 months feeling ill and needing to rest a significant amount. My doctor specifically said to me “You will need a lot of help with your kids.” Needless to say, this was a shock to my entire family. Not to mention, Tami didn’t sign up for entering into a home of people she had never met, during their darkest days, with little-to-no information about what the future would hold.

When I told Tami about my diagnosis, I was expecting her to hesitate about proceeding with the plans to move in with us (which would have been completely acceptable given the circumstances). To my surprise, however, she immediately said to us “Don’t worry. I will be with you soon.” This selfless, incredible young woman did not shy away from a situation that is terrifying. I would later learn that Tami’s extraordinary calm and wise energy was not only a gift to our family, but also to our community.

When Tami arrived, her intrinsic positivity and empathetic wisdom struck a chord with me in a way I couldn’t have imagined before. Not only did she quickly become a part of our family, like a sister or an aunt would, but she taught me to believe in the future. To get my hopes up. Tami introduced me to Church, God, the Bible, and some incredible stories that inspired me to find strength during my darkest days of 16-rounds of chemotherapy and 2 intensive surgeries.

Tami also is an active volunteer at a community Church here in New York. She wakes up early on many Sunday mornings to volunteer at the service and offer support to our community. She has only been here in the USA for about a year, and her impact on my family as well as our broader community in New York is inspiring.

I have distinct memories of coming home from yet another round of intense treatment at the cancer center to find home-made cards saying things like “I love you mommy” with my kids’ handprints inscribed with paint on construction paper. When I was sick in bed, Tami would come upstairs and bring me “special deliveries” from the kids, with hand-written notes telling me how much of a warrior I am. “You are so strong,” she would say to me often. When I had no hair, she

would tell me how beautiful I looked. She made me feel confident when I wore my wig – always complementing me saying how natural I looked. She would assure me that I still looked great even without my eyelashes. I will cherish these moments until the end of time. Today I am cancer free, and I attribute a lot of this to the strength I found during treatment – which was much inspired by Tami’s purposeful message to believe in the future, and to get my hopes up.

Tami brings a spirit of calm wisdom to anybody she engages with. No matter how loud the kids’ tantrums are, no matter how challenging nap time is, she has an unmatched way of persevering with the most tranquil and peaceful momentum. To say I have learned from Tami is an understatement. Even my sister calls Tami often to ask her for advice on her 18 month old. I love how Tami shares ideas with us and learnings about what works and doesn’t work in terms of disciplining our kids, tricks for mealtime, bedtime, and so on. We have become a real team. Tami is also a teacher (she taught over 20 young toddlers at her school in Brazil!). Not only has she taught both of our kids many words in Portuguese, but she goes above & beyond to create a “school” curriculum for them at our home in Brooklyn. She researches educational activities in her spare time & sends me links and ideas to review. She creates learning activities to teach them words, colors, concepts, and emotions. She helps us to ensure our kids are polite – and I am so proud that they can say “thank you” in English and Portuguese!

I could go on about how grateful we are for Tami entering into our lives. We love having Tami in our family, regardless of whether she is “on the clock” with the kids. Not to mention – she brings the wonderful flavor of Brazil to our household and in fact, she won my extended family’s baking competition during Thanksgiving with her special chocolate recipe!

It is my wish that every family and Au Pair can develop a relationship like the one we have with Tami Bueno. I wholeheartedly believe that Tami is a true gift from the universe to our family, and with that, I absolutely think she should be the Au Pair of the Year.