

## Bright Lopez Vega

It required a leap of faith to apply for the au pair program, but it has turned out to be one of the best parenting decisions we have made. We spent considerable time digging through applications and interviewing candidates. We spoke with multiple qualified candidates but, when we interviewed Bright, we knew she was our match.

Just days after Bright arrived, I left on an international trip taking my baby with me and leaving Bright at home with my husband and two-year-old. After Bright's first week of work, my husband informed me that she was taking over the house. "She's cooking, cleaning, and telling us what to wear," he exclaimed and I couldn't tell if it was glee or nervousness in his voice. Time soon confirmed that this was a good change.

I keep a "chore list" in the kitchen and Bright immediately started taking care of all the daily chores. I had to remind her that these were the responsibilities for the whole family and had to actually ask her to do less. Bright cooks healthy meals, from scratch, every day for our boys. We are vegetarian and she was able to adapt her meals to accommodate our dietary needs. I don't know how she does it, but my boys always finish their vegetables when they eat her food. We love the delicious Peruvian food she has introduced to our family!

Bright loves our children like they are her own. Even when she is off duty, she has been caught snuggling with our baby or playing with our eldest. She buys them things with her own money. I have asked Bright to speak Spanish to our kids so that they can learn her language. When my baby (now 19 months) first started talking, he spoke more words in Spanish than English. My oldest boy just recently turned four and when someone asked him how old he was, he held up four fingers and counted, "uno, dos, tres, cuatro!" My older boy has delayed speech and he has blossomed under Bright's care. She patiently helps him with his speech therapy homework and helps him articulate his words. Without being asked, Bright created her own multi sensory lessons to facilitate his learning.

Bright organizes and hosts play dates frequently. She does this without being asked but with our permission of course. She frequently gets together with other au pairs that watch children of similar ages to our children. She helps the children complete craft projects and facilitates their play. Bright has found events and activities for children in our community that we were not even aware of. Last week, Bright invited our family to a Hispanic Christmas party at our local fire station. Our kids had a blast dancing to Latin Christmas music and hitting the piñata. We love the activities and culture that she introduces to our family.

On Peru's Independence Day, Bright presented our family with Peruvian shirts, with each of our names embroidered on them, and requested we wear them to work. She organized a parade on our street and had our boys marching with the Peruvian flag to their national anthem. The kids loved it and it was a highlight of our year.

When off work, Bright is very active in her church. She has organized a baby shower for a friend and is always willing to help when a church member needs a ride or a friend to talk to. Bright makes a special effort to attend events for the children in her church, such as soccer games and karate programs. She has also helped her friends improve their English skills and prepare for the driver's licensing exam. Even though she is a different religion from our family,

she has attended our family's church to support our children's participation and share special events.

We had such a great year with Brightit that we asked her to stay a second year and, fortunately, she agreed. Our friends and neighbors are very impressed with how well she cares for our children. She is part of our family now and even jokingly calls my husband and I "daddy" and "mommy." We are grateful to Brightit's Peruvian family for loaning her to us to the Au pair program for matching us. We had no idea how much our lives would change when we applied host an au pair. For these reasons, I think she deserves to be "au pair of the year."