

I call Danisha my sister, but she is even more than that. She has become my co-parent, my daughter, my lifelong friend. I do not think either of us could have guessed what we would endure together over the years, but I cannot think of a better person to have been in our home and be part of our family during it all. We were blessed with Danisha's arrival in January 2019. My husband, at that time, was already severely sick with metastatic cancer, and I had just delivered our second child, my daughter, Alana. From the very first day she arrived, Danisha was a calm presence in our home. Though my husband and I stayed strong for our children, Danisha was the foundation for that strength. She kept our children feeling loved and happy when we were at doctor visits, and she kept them fed and smiling as my husband continued to deteriorate. I asked her every week how she was doing. Was she feeling homesick? Was she feeling sad? Was she making friends? What could we do to make this transition seamless for her? Every time, she would comment on the love she saw in our family and would thank us for making her feel at home. She comes from a similar home – one full of love, a mother who wanted what was best for her children, a father who was doing his best to be everything for them, and children who were grateful and happy for all of that. I believe she felt at home with us, despite our challenges. She saw that we were doing our best to navigate those challenges and saw what we were trying hard to maintain: a loving family who could overcome anything because of the strength of that love. And because of that understanding, Danisha made that love grow even stronger – she clearly had started to see our children as her own family, too. I would come home from work to see her tickling my daughter's belly, peppering both my kids' faces with kisses, and sitting on the floor to build yet another invention with my son. When my husband passed away in late 2019, she continued to provide that love to my children, allowing them to have such a strong sense of stability as our whole world changed. She continued to teach my daughter her letters and numbers and cheerfully sang lullabies every day. She continued to foster my son's natural interests in math and science, teaching him multiplication and division before he ever turned five, and she spent hours building LEGOs, K'nex, and endless origami and science experiments. 6 months after my husband died, the pandemic hit. I never thought it possible, but she even took that in stride. She arrived every morning with a cheery "Good Morning" and ended every day with a goodnight kiss for my children. The pandemic made it so that everyone was now "stuck" together, and as I saw so many struggle to keep the peace in their homes, ours got to hit the reset button together. It had been a whirlwind, but we were all thankful that we had each other to rely on. It got to the point where we were dreading our goodbye, scheduled for January of 2021, and I wasn't sure how anyone could ever feel any more like family than she already had. In fact, we had made the decision to leave the Au Pair program, because there was simply no way we could ever get anyone better suited for our family than Danisha. We were blessed with another opportunity to extend 6 months – we were so thrilled that we celebrated with dessert and wine! – and even though that goodbye is now months away, I already know she will be sorely missed. I haven't met many people in life who I would call irreplaceable, but Danisha is. She is endlessly selfless, kind, patient, and I cannot wait for the day to be an Auntie to her children. Those children will be so very blessed to have a mother who has already shown great strength in the sign of adversity, flexibility, compassion,

and someone who I can truly attest has a beautiful soul. Danisha deserves only the very best in life. She has made the future seem bright for myself and my children, and I hope she feels we have made hers just as bright. I am thankful to the APIA program for allowing us to have this amazing opportunity to enrich each other's lives.