

To Whom It May Concern:

I write in nomination of Liraz Zohar as the International Au Pair Association (IAPA) 2021 Au Pair of the Year.

Liraz has been with our family for almost a year and a half – in the time of Corona – and has both transformed herself and transformed our family.

Liraz was born in an ultra-Orthodox home, and spent the majority of her life in an extremely insular and segregated environment. Her opportunities for secondary education were limited. And though she has an amazing and supportive family, she dreamt of a different kind of life as an independent, modern woman who interacts with the world and her Judaism in a way that she alone determines.

After serving her national service in a pediatrics ward, she decided to come to the United States as an au pair. In preparation, she learned to drive. She amassed hundreds of hours in an Israeli kindergarten. She applied to the Au Pair in America program in secret – and overcame fierce objection from her family to come to the U.S. at 24.

She joined our family in the Fall of 2019 at a time of great challenge. Our beautiful 16-month old girl could not crawl or walk. She had to go to physical therapy twice a week, where she would cry and cry. Enter Liraz – Au Pair Extraordinaire. Liraz took copious notes at the physical therapy sessions and replicated her “lessons” in the pool and playground. Within two months she was walking – and then running. Liraz took her running through the snow in Finland, on the beaches of Hawaii and Delaware, through the streets of Nashville, Santa Monica, Annapolis, and Baltimore. She taught her to dance and circle-sit in daily library meet-ups and music classes.

Liraz herself took a full slate of courses, studied French, made friends inside and outside the au pair program, and drove hundreds of miles in Washington, DC traffic without breaking a sweat. She engaged in community organizing with a local non-profit to support paid family leave, visiting the Maryland State House of Delegates, toddler in tow.

And then the world fell off the COVID cliff. Our lives reverted inward. Liraz taught our beautiful girl how to make couscous and Sabbath breads, to speak fluent Hebrew, and helped her separate from diapers and her womb of a crib. She made life bearable, when so much of it was unbearable for us all.

Liraz’s grandparents in Paris were hospitalized with COVID; her parents in Israel are essential workers; her brother was drafted into the military. Her travel plans were cancelled. Many of her au pair friends went home, her college friends left town.

But Liraz stayed and made our lives the better for it. When so many of our friends lost childcare, we were able to continue working long hours from home.

Moreover, Liraz didn't let COVID deter her from her own cultural and educational goals. She threw herself into Halloween full-force, choosing costumes for the family (including the dog) and hosting masked, socially-distant pumpkin decorating meet-up in the backyard. She helped family friends decorate for Christmas. She became politically active, organizing a neighborhood garage sale for Black Lives Matter, writing postcards to Michigan voters encouraging them to vote in the presidential election, and writing to Georgia voters to encourage them to vote in the senate run-off election.

She is taking a full slate of online business courses, excelling in Ivy League classes, hosts a zoom "crafting circle" with friends, and is participating in a four-part seminar in "How to Hack Your Dating Life" at the Jewish Community Center – something that would have been unthinkable to her prior to becoming an au pair.

She has thrived personally, as she formulates her plan for her next chapter as an independent woman in her late-20s, with hopes for her own apartment with the money she has saved as au pair, and eventually owning her own business. She has plans for engaging in community organizing back home to make the lives of women and girls better. She has widened her social circle and her cultural circle, all the while being a devoted daughter, sister, and aunt.

Moreover, she has made our daughter thrive. She has sought out every alpaca farm, horse stables, outdoor safari, pumpkin patch, outdoor story hour, sculpture garden, and child-friendly hiking adventure within a hundred miles. She has created a fearless lioness of an almost three-year old who puddle-jumps in the rain, embraces dogs small and large, and slides, flips, and surfs into pools, lakes, and oceans with abandon, all the while getting her to eat kale, all things spicy, and hummus.

It is impossible to imagine our lives without Liraz Zohar at the center of them, using her encyclopedia brain of early childhood education and psychology as a Rosetta stone to parent through the terrible twos in home confinement. Her zest for life, and journey for self-discovery are an amazing example for all. She has capitalized on every opportunity for personal growth during her time with Au Pair in America.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Gan