



ATAD

Association for Teenage Diplomats

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The following is an unsolicited letter from a Host Mother that says it all...

Who would have thought?

Four years ago, we were asked to become a host family to an ATAD student from Peru. Admittedly, it was a last minute request. Jessi, almost 18, came home and said Mrs. Cambalik thought we would make a great host family. Zack's Spanish teacher approached him with similar remarks. My husband Fred and I looked at each other with a, "What's one more kid?" look and we called a family meeting. The first question was whether Zack, after having his own room for 15 years was sure he could share his room with another person for 6 months. He said sure. The next question was about family dynamics, specifically how busy everyone is and could we be fair to this student. Again, the unanimous answer was yes.

Edited by Betty Doyle

This first step was the beginning of a journey for our family. We were interviewed, chose one of two students still waiting for a placement and began to make plans for his arrival only a few short weeks away. We corresponded via email with both Santiago and his father, trying to present a realistic picture of our family so Santiago knew what to expect. The day Santiago arrived, we were probably as nervous as he was. The trepidation was all for nothing. Santiago fit in almost immediately. The conversations were easy and he and Zack became fast friends. Within a short time, Santiago was an integral part of our family. Santiago learned to do laundry, make his own breakfast and lunch, and often asked if there was anything else he could do to help. This was not the way he lived in Peru. Santiago also assimilated into the high school very well. He worked hard and competed in track. It is incredible how much we all learned from each other. The six months went by too quickly.

The story doesn't end there though. The Chirinos family invited Zack to come to Peru for the summer. They extended the same hospitality toward Zack that we had toward Santiago. Zack went to school and accompanied the family on vacation. Shortly before Zack came home, he called and asked if we could host Nashira, a friend of Santiago's, the following January. We thought about it and decided yes. Jessi would be leaving for college so that freed up her bed for Nashira to bunk in with Amelia, then 12.

Hosting Nashira went just as smoothly as with Santiago. Nashira is a pleasant young lady with an infectious sunny personality. She took joy in learning every new thing she could. Nashira also worked hard in school and competed in track. We have kept in touch with Nashira, who now lives in France with her mother who remarried, and a stepsister. She is thrilled to no longer be an only child.

When Nashira left, we decided to take a break from hosting. We had Jessi in college and were starting to look at schools for Zack. Life was too busy. Amelia took a message one day for us to call Karen Grover. Karen wanted to know if we knew of any other potential host families, as Daniel Chirinos, Santiago's brother, wanted to come to the US. Fred and I looked at each other and the decision was already made—Daniel is family. He would come to our home. Zack once again shared his room and all went well. Daniel and Amelia became very good friends. Amelia helped tutor Daniel, particularly in geometry (not an easy subject to pick up mid year).

**We're on the
web!**

ATAD.org

*Info and forms for
travel and hosting are
available here!*

The Chirinos family invited us to come "any time." This past summer we took them up on their generous offer. The five of us traveled to Peru in July. How wonderful it was to finally meet this family who entrusted two of their sons to us and who had previously opened their home to our son! We spent several days in Arequipa, seeing the city, visiting Mario's packing plant and the farm. Mario worked through a travel agent to arrange an itinerary that would maximize our visit. We went to Puno, Lake Titicaca, Cusco, and Macchu Picchu before returning to Arequipa and spending the last few days with our new extended family. On our last full day, Mirta and I went to the market together and that afternoon she and I prepared paella together, while Fred and Mario made Sangria.

It was difficult to say chao the following day, though we know we'll see each other again. We've made tentative plans for Amelia to go back to Peru next summer and for Luciana Chirinos to come here through ATAD for the Spring 2009 semester. We've invited Mario and Mirta to come to Rochester to pick Luciana up that June, spending some time here in the United States. Who would have thought that one decision to say "yes" would result in such a wonderful lifelong friendship? – Christine Vojt



From left: Brian Rook-AO 2007, Zach Vojt-AO 2005, Jessi Vojt, Amelia Vojt-AO 2008, Fred Vojt-Father, Christine Vojt-Mother, Mirta Dongo-Chirinos-Mother, Mario Chirinos-Father, Luciana Dongo-Chirinos-IS-2009, Santiago Dongo-Chirinos-IS 2004



A group of ISs and their host families enjoyed "Yuletide in the Country" at the Genesee Country Museum in December

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 16

International Dinner

April 20

Strong Museum

May (TBA)

Hike at Letchworth State Park

June 1

Farewell Picnic

Don't forget to visit ATAD.org for all the information you need to travel or host!

