

Dear Readers,

For the past five months I've had the joy and the honor to be a foreign exchange student in the State of Texas. I had a great time; I was able to improve my English and meet a lot of amazing people and one of those people were the members of my host family.

My host family included Shannon, my mother, Bruce, my father, Daylan, my sister and Reid, my brother. Shannon and Bruce are very young parents. Although Bruce, who is 37, is not Daylan's and Reid's biological father and just became a part of this family four years ago, he cares a lot about this family and does everything to be a good stepfather. Shannon, who is 33, got Daylan when she was 18 and Reid when she was 20. But she and her husband separated when Reid was one year old. She is the heart of the family. Everything she does has her whole passion in it and I admire her for that. Daylan, who is 16, is the typical all-American-girl. She is pretty, smart and so much fun to be with her! She has an awesome personality. Everybody loves her, including me. :) Reid, who is 13, is very athletic. He plays competitive basketball for the school and plays baseball for the town Sulphur Springs, where I was staying. He is so active and he is really good. This family had to go through a lot because when Daylan was eight years old she was diagnosed with cancer. She had a bad form of leukemia and the doctors just gave her a ten percent chance to survive. Luckily for her, after a long time of struggling, the doctors found a drug that had not been tested by then. Daylan became patient number one that was treated with this drug and it helped her in the fight against cancer. And also when she was rediagnosed with cancer at the age of eleven, she didn't give up. Now she is in remission (cancer free) for five years and that is great. This family held together in this hard time and they are just wonderful people. They are one of the main parts why my stay in the United States was an amazing experience. Daylan became my sister and a wonderful friend. She taught me a lot about life and I'll always thank her for that. Reid became my little brother by getting on my nerves all the time ;) but by having an amazing heart too. And I cannot say how much I have learned from my host parents. They have helped me a lot. I love all of them and I will miss them a lot. However my high school was a great part of my trip too.

Miller Grove School is very small. Counting from kindergarten through high school it has about 200 students. Every grade had on average fifteen students. As a result of the low number of students and attending classes with students from different grades, everybody knows everybody else. And that is great. Everything is very personal and the teachers can work with everybody individually. But the level of education is not as high as it is in Austria. Because the students know the teachers as well and are friends with them there is a lot of private talk during class. However when it comes to sports the school has great opportunities. The coaches are very encouraging and challenge the students a lot. During basketball season almost everybody goes to the games and cheers for the team. It is amazing to feel the so called "school spirit" and feel with the team. It is a lot of fun! I found a lot of friends in Miller Grove. As a newcomer you come here in a small group of people that welcome you, that are happy to help you wherever you need it and learn from you too. I am never going to forget the friends I've made here in Miller Grove and the memories we share together.

This semester has been wonderful. I cannot thank everybody enough who helped me make this come true. I've learned so much. Having this opportunity is awesome and I can only recommend it to everybody, who has the chance to do it and thinks it is right for him. In times it wasn't easy as you can imagine. But in the end you can truly say about yourself that you have two homes, two families and amazing experiences that enrich your life.

Yours,

Karin