



Our Very Lives as Well

One mom's account of her year with a Young Life Amicus student.

BY AMANDA KOLMAN

We didn't arrive at the airport with colorful signs welcoming Ania to America. I was nervous and had forgotten to make the signs. Instead, we stood near baggage claim looking for a girl who resembled the one in the pictures that had drawn us to her, and one who might look a little bit lost. We knew it had been a long day for her. She had missed a connecting flight, was having to communicate entirely in English for the very first time and completely alone. When

she finally came around the corner, exhausted, nervous and relieved to have finally made it, she saw us and began to cry. And I immediately became her "mother," rushing to her side, hugging her tight and telling her it would be OK. It wasn't exactly how I imagined greeting my new Polish "daughter," but God connected our hearts in that moment and I knew it was exactly what we both needed.

Our journey to welcoming Ania had been in the works for months as we filled out paperwork, met with an Amicus representative, and looked through profiles of students who desired to come to America for a year. But, more accurately, our journey had begun years before, when my husband, Loren, first joined Young Life staff, both of us falling in love with the mission to reach every kid with the Gospel.* We had begun to think about what it meant for our family, including our three little girls, to give up our lives for the sake of Christ. First Thessalonians 2:8 says, "Because we loved you, we were ready to share, not only the gospel of Christ, but our very lives as well." For quite some time, the Lord had been moving us toward sharing more and more of our lives, especially with students. This verse began to come alive in our hearts and in our home as we had students over constantly, sharing meals, Scripture and life. The idea of having a student live in our home for 10 months felt like a natural part of that process.

Questions and Answers

At the same time, I had questions about hosting a foreign exchange student. How do you welcome a stranger into your home for a year without feeling like you have a perpetual guest, a situation that could be exhausting to both a host family and a student? How do you care for a student as if they were your own child and set parental boundaries when they clearly have parents on the other side of the world? How do you afford adding a teenager to your household? What if they don't get along with your kids? Loren and I had all of those questions. Truthfully, I had more than he did. He is more adventurous than I am and so his questions basically consisted of different versions of, "How do we sign up?" I knew it might be a stretch, but in the end, hosting an Amicus student seemed like an extension of what we felt called to do, a way to love one student really well by sharing our lives and the love of Christ with her.

So, last August, we brought Ania home and quickly settled in as a family of six. Our girls fell in love with her and the feeling was mutual. And it didn't take long before she felt like a daughter to Loren and me. We were on the sidelines at cross-country meets and tennis matches, in the audience at band concerts, taking pictures before prom, and cheering for her at graduation. We also set curfews, treated illnesses, handed out chores and said "no" when we needed to. We tried to make the most of our year together, visiting family in different parts of the country, and traveling to the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas and the Pacific Ocean. But even

more significantly, we shared important conversations about faith, friendship, dating and the future. We talked about what it means to live as those redeemed and loved by God, as messengers of His Gospel, wherever He has placed us.

And then, in a blink, it was June, and time for Ania to go home. I sat on the end of her bed one night and cried. I could hardly believe this young lady, who had been a stranger from Poland, had become my daughter, and now it was time for her to leave. Now I had different questions. How had I learned to love Ania so completely in such a short time? And how would I let her go?

The answers came quickly. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Christ in us and our understanding of His love creates a deep reservoir of love from which to draw. Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of His Spirit is love..." And secondly, how does any parent let go of their child? They just do. And, they never really do.

The Best Kind of Stretch

Ania boarded a plane in July to head back to Poland and my family was heartbroken, knowing we would miss her deeply. But we also knew now we had family on the other side of the world, and we would always be connected. We were surprised when we arrived home to find gifts and a letter in her room that made us cry all over again. In it she wrote, "During this year, you taught me how to put God's love in my life." I was immediately reminded of why we had started this journey in the first place and so grateful for God's guidance every step of the way.

When I talk to people about what it is like to host a foreign exchange student, I can sense that, for most, it feels like a stretch. I won't deny that it is. But, it is the best kind of stretch that opens us up to more. We understand more about God's love for the whole world. We sense more of His leading to be messengers of the Gospel. And we understand more about what it means to love someone so much that we would share our very lives with them, just like Jesus did for us. We see more of Christ. So, when people ask if we will host an Amicus student again, we say "yes" without hesitation. After all, what more could we want, except more of Christ?

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

To find out more about Amicus and how to host a student this coming year, go to GoWithAmicus.org.

*Loren serves as the Young Life area director in Cañon City, Colorado.

