

After 20 Years, Former Host Mom Reunites with Exchange Student

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- In 1997, Chris left his native home of Germany to begin a life-changing adventure in the United States as an exchange student with a J-1 visa through a Department of State sponsor. Little did he know that he would reunite with his host mom 20 years later, after getting married, having a daughter and making a successful career for himself.

Brenda Ferland decided to host Chris, her first exchange student, because she wanted her sons Asa who was 13 and Zane, then 11 years old with a severe disability, to have an older brother and a positive role model in their lives. She saw an ad about hosting and chose Chris from Germany because of her family's heritage. Chris integrated into their family smoothly and quickly, and Asa and Zane had a new big brother they always wanted.

Chris' first week in the U.S. was not only full of the [culture](#) shock that most international students experience but the next morning after he arrived in Surprise, AZ, he drove 15 hours with his new host mom and host brothers for a family reunion Brenda had planned a year prior. Spending a significant amount of time in a car with someone is a perfect opportunity to bond and to get all of the preliminary questions out of the way. Brenda learned that Chris was excited to eat American fast food, play American football and experience an American prom, and within the first 24 hours of his arrival, Chris had met Brenda's entire extended family.



Brenda, Chris and Chris' daughter

“

It was one of the best experiences of my life.”

Brenda Ferland

Chris became addicted to Taco Bell and Mountain Dew, which hadn't been introduced in Germany back in 1997. For the first 10 years or so, Brenda would mail Mountain Dew to Chris and his favorite Taco Bell hot sauce for his birthday and Christmas. Social media wasn't as prevalent then as it is today, so Brenda and Chris kept in touch via email and phone

and started to connect on Facebook in 2010. Around that time, Brenda learned Chris' father, Peter was a pharmacist and was eager to learn how American pharmacy is practiced in the United States, so she introduced Peter to her personal pharmacist of 15 years. They remain friends to this day.

It's clear Brenda's love for student exchange extended beyond her first hosting experience. She had a love for culture, [education](#), and [travel](#) and wanted to expand her 'global family' by hosting more exchange students year after year. After hosting a total of 14 students from various countries, Brenda's fondest memories are with Chris, “Maybe it's because he was my first student and we both

learned so much that year. Or maybe because Chris just fit in perfectly with our family. He handled our busy life with daily football practice for Asa, weekend football games on Saturday, church on Sunday, and he adjusted well to Zane and his disability. It was one of the best experiences of my life.”

As a result of Brenda’s experience hosting Chris, she pursued a career in foreign exchange. This past June, Brenda had the opportunity to go to Germany for business. When she found out, she called Chris and told him her plans. They were both ecstatic, and Chris insisted that she stay in his home, meet his parents, his wife and his 2-year-old daughter.

“This is what it’s really all about. 20 years later and I am meeting my first exchange student’s natural parents for the first time and my German granddaughter. Add in my “daughter in law”, who I adore, and you have the perfect example of how my lifetime of hosting and working with exchange students has brought me so much joy.”

Hosting an exchange student is an opportunity of a lifetime for both the host family and the student and there are countless reasons why host families continue to host year after year, but here are the top 4 reasons:

You’ll learn about a different culture

You and your family will gain a new perspective and understanding of other cultures and your children will increase their cultural awareness.

You’ll get to be your hometown tourist

You’ll see your community in a whole new light and might even learn something new about your own city and state.

You’ll gain a friend for life

Our students and volunteer host families remain friends for years and even travel to the student’s home country to visit.

You’ll have fun

This is a win-win situation. It’s fun getting to know someone new, and it’s exciting to watch your children flourish in a new environment.

About Education, Travel & Culture:



Brenda and Chris' natural parents



Chris with his wife and daughter

Education Travel & Culture is a non-profit [501(c)(3)] educational exchange organization. Its purpose is to promote international understanding and goodwill by providing high quality educational and cultural exchange programs in the United States and abroad. ETC provides inbound program opportunities for high school students throughout the world to study in an American high school and live with an American family.

For more information, FAQs or to apply to become a host family visit www.edutrav.org or email Sarah Rohler at srohler@edutrav.org

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