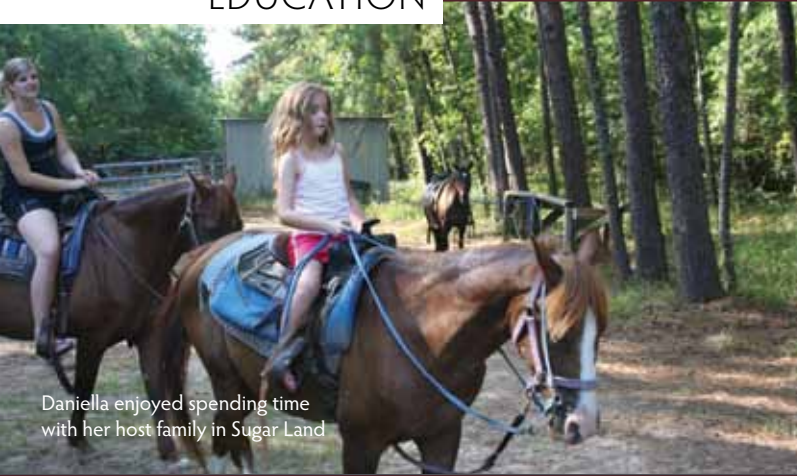


EDUCATION



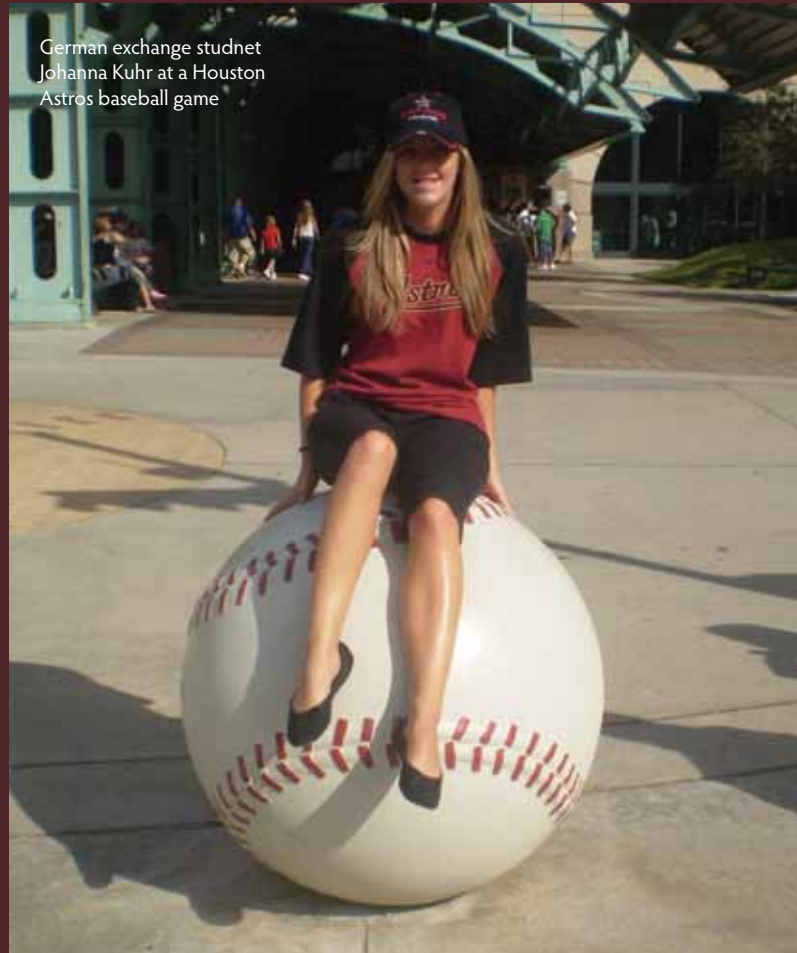
Daniella enjoyed spending time with her host family in Sugar Land



Daniella, pictured with her host family



Daniela Bischof with her host mom, Cheryl Lopez



German exchange student Johanna Kuhr at a Houston Astros baseball game



Anton Wallmark, an exchange student from Sweden, enjoyed a trip to Louisiana with the Brodecki family

Hosts for a Year.

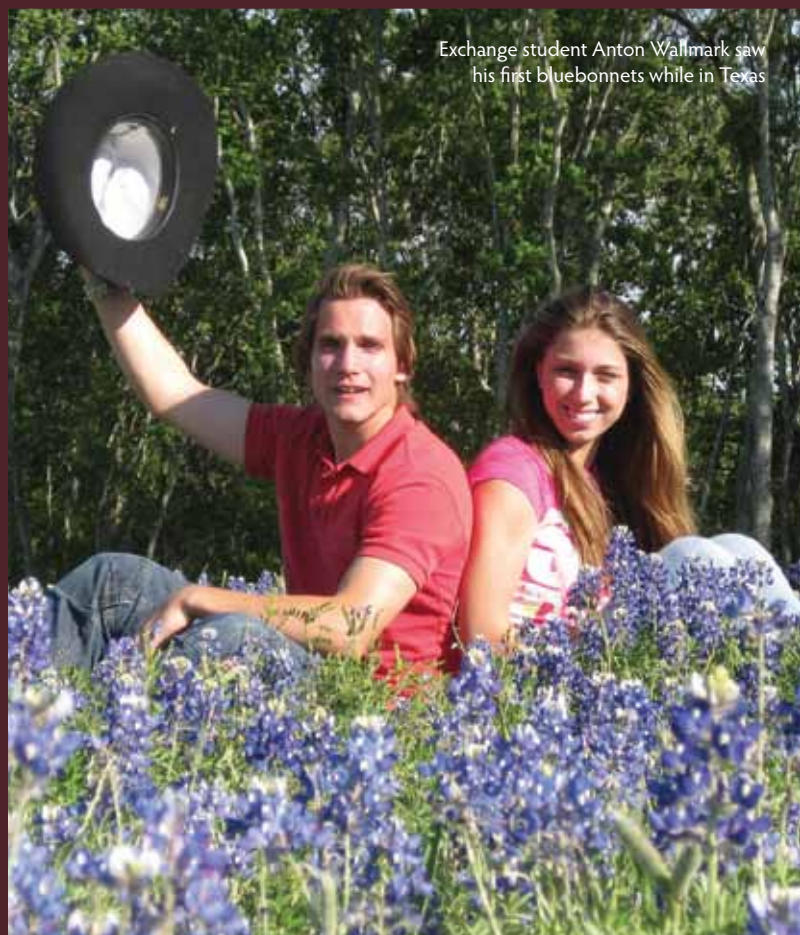
Sugar Land Families Host Foreign Exchange Students



Jackie Brodecki and Gizem Dogan on a trip to Galveston



Sugar Land families have hosted students from several European countries



Exchange student Anton Wallmark saw his first bluebonnets while in Texas




Terri, Jackie and Alan meet Johanna for the first time

Families Forever.

Written by Ingrid Karazincir



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Gizem Dogan, from Turkey, shows off her first cowboy hat at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo



While in the US, Johanna joined the school marching band

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Dr. Jeff Hogan

Gizem Dogan, a Turkish teenager, fell in love with Dr Pepper during her stay in Sugar Land as a foreign exchange student. But unlike most American teenagers, she would not get to enjoy her new favorite drink until her next visit to America. So her host mom, Terri Brodecki sends care packages full of Dr Pepper jelly beans to her home in Turkey. Though they only shared one school year in the same home, they will forever be family.

“We call them our ‘bonus kids,’” Terri says of the foreign exchange students she’s hosted over the years. Like many hosts, the Brodecki family grew attached to their students and they continue to keep in touch with them.

Choosing to Host

Richard and Cheryl Lopez, who had young children at home, decided it would be a good experience for them to spend time with someone from another culture. Richard was contacted by SHARE with information about their foreign exchange program. They received a list of biographies and were able to choose someone who would fit best with their family.

The Lopez family chose Daniela, a student from Switzerland. “It creates a lifetime bond,” says Cheryl Lopez of her experience. Like many students who participate in these programs, Daniela continues to keep in touch with her new American family, and she even returned recently for a visit.

The Brodecki family's daughter was adopted from Russia, so when she came home with a flyer about foreign exchange students, they thought it was a great opportunity to connect her with her roots. Though they were unable to find a match from Russia, they found others who fit right in with their family and gave their daughter the cultural experience she craved.

"It makes you get out and do things," Alan Brodecki says of the many perks of hosting. The family enjoyed taking their student out to water parks, the Renaissance Fair, basketball games and many other activities that we consider normal and routine, but would be a cultural experience for teens from another country.

The Exchange Experience

"You do have to realize they are still teenagers," warns Cheryl. But she adds that they are exceptionally smart and independent. "They are at a crucial age, and it's not always easy. But it can be very rewarding," says Cheryl. "The cultural differences are a learning experience for everyone, so it's important to be open-minded."

Daniela admits, "The hardest part of being an exchange student is being away from my family for a year." But she adds she is more mature now. "It's worth it - it changes your life."

Terri suggests making the students part of the family. "Some people are hesitant to have a student in their home for a year, but you have to just make them part of the family."

Both the Brodeckis and the Lopez's admit that the hardest part is saying goodbye. But for most students and families, it's never a true farewell. They all return over the years to visit their host families and will always treasure their experience as a foreign exchange student in Sugar Land. **SLM**

INGRID KARAZINCIR is a freelance writer and Sugar Land area wife and mother of two, Elise-18 months and Emily-4.

Become a Host Family

Contact one of the following groups who have placed exchange students in Fort Bend in the past.

SHARE!

sharesouthwest.org

EF Foundation for Foreign Study

effoundation.org

Youth for Understanding USA

yfu-usa.org



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