

## Children worldwide call Charlotte home

The Klein family maintains close ties to each of its foreign-exchange students.

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Gabrielle Grieb, left, and Elizabeth Klein in Charlotte in 1972, when Grieb first came to Charlotte as a foreign-exchange student. The Klein family has maintained close ties with all the students who stayed with them through the program in the 1970s and 1980s. Courtesy Walter Klein



From left, Elizabeth Klein; Gabrielle Grieb and her daughter, Pauline; and Walter Klein reunite at the Kleins' Charlotte home. Michael J. Solender photo

Watching Gabrielle Grieb of Paris and her daughter, Pauline, navigate with ease in the home of south Charlotte residents Walter and Elizabeth Klein, it was easy to assume the two women were visiting beloved parents and grandparents.

The Griebes and Kleins aren't related, though they refer to each other in such terms. The Kleins hosted "Gabby" almost 40 years ago, as a high school exchange student for a full year when she attended East Mecklenburg High as a senior alongside the Kleins' daughter, Betsy.

Now the Kleins are in south Charlotte and are welcoming Grieb and her daughter for a visit.

Gabrielle was one of several foreign-exchange students the Kleins hosted during the 1970s and 1980s. To this day, the couple maintains contact with each one, referring to them with affection as their children.

Elizabeth Klein was a long-serving board member of the Charlotte Exchange Student Program. "We worked with the American Field Service's Intercultural Exchange Program," said Klein, recalling fondly her involvement in bringing foreign-exchange students to Charlotte. "We felt Charlotte had so much to offer, and we wanted to make sure we got our share of kids to visit here."

The Kleins lived in Matthews when Grieb spent her senior year with them, from 1972 to 1973. They've moved since and now live in Carmel South off Carmel Road. Elizabeth worked hard to match same-age, same-gender students when accepting overseas high schoolers.

"It allowed for a built-in support system both at school and at home and in the community," said Klein.

Grieb nostalgically recalled Charlotte as a place full of wonder and new experiences.

"All I knew before I came was Charlotte was a spot on the U.S. map," said Grieb, who has visited the Kleins a half-dozen times both here and in Europe since her initial stay. "The program had a coordinator in Nancy, France, where I grew up and attended school.

"They encouraged me to apply for the program, as I spoke English and was very interested in the experience to hone my language skills.

"I was hoping to gain employment as a translator, was adventurous and eager to explore the American experience, so I came without doing much research."

What she found was a welcoming and warm family in the Kleins, with a "big heart" that totally and completely embraced her from the first day.

"It was almost like a movie," said Grieb. "They asked me to call them 'Mom' and 'Dad,' and while initially it was a bit difficult, it didn't take long before those names came easily, as I felt they were like surrogate parents to me."

"Everything in Charlotte was so spread out, and there was such a magnificent tree canopy," recalled Grieb. "I wasn't used to the lack of public transportation and using the car to go

everywhere. The difference that was most surprising for me at the time, however, was that the Kleins had a clothes dryer. I kept wondering where the clothes line was to hang the wash and was unfamiliar with such an appliance."

"There was never a problem assimilating," said Grieb. "They gave me love and were very welcoming. At school, all the children at East Meck knew my name, as I was the only exchange student, but it was difficult for me to know everyone's name. Still, it was warm and comfortable, and I never felt out of place.

"I came to Charlotte a girl of 17 and left a confident young woman ready to take on the world."

The visit this spring to the Kleins was the third time Grieb has brought her daughter to see her adopted grandparents. During their two-week stay, there were loose plans for shopping at the mall and a trip uptown to see the sites. The group made it over to their old neighborhood in Matthews, where Grieb was a bit shocked at the amount of development since she saw it last.

Mostly, the Griebs and Kleins took time to enjoy each other's company - which is precisely what families do.

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