

Interview mit Melinda, Couchsurfing-Gast, persönlich, 04.06.2017
Interviewerin: LS, Transkription: GS, Korrektur der Transkription: LS

Luise: Alright. ... So, okay, you did like this world trip, two and a half years, you told me. And you were// #00:00:11-8#

Melinda: Two, two, two years. #00:00:13-3#

Luise: Two years. Alright. Okay. And you were using Couchsurfing from the beginning? #00:00:18-4#

Melinda: Yeah. Actually, the very first time I touched down into South America, I was like shaking and so nervous because I made arrangements for a boy on couchsurfing.com. He couldn't host me, but he was like, "I pick you up from the Airport and take you to your, to your Airbnb". And I had this moment of like "What the fuck am I doing?" Like there's, I'm touching down in Buenos Aires at like 10.30 at night, here I am like, a single girl with like all my valuables, my stuff. Like that, this guy could be, you know, just like rob me or rape me or whatever and he, my flight was delayed, I get off out into the area after I get my bag. And there he is waiting with a sign with my name and he was so sweet. We dropped my stuff off at the Airbnb, he is talking with my Airbnb host, he takes me out to dinner, we go get drinks with his friends. I have like the most, so that's how I kicked off the very first night// #00:01:25-5#

Luise: No way! #00:01:26-2#

Melinda: Of my, like it was like one year and ten months, trip around the world that's like from Couchsurfing. #00:01:32-2#

Luise: Wow. Even though you didn't stay with him. That's so kind. #00:01:37-4#

Melinda: Yeah, and then my, then later my friends from California came to visit me when I was in Buenos Aires and then they, he hosted them because his place has opened up. So my friends were staying with him and so. #00:01:52-1#

Luise: Wow. Yeah, that's a good experience, I guess. #00:01:54-2#

Melinda: Yeah. #00:01:55-1#

Luise: Wow. #00:01:55-7#

Melinda: So from the very beginning I started using it (laughter). #00:01:57-4#

Luise: Yeah. But can remember the first time you heard about it? #00:02:01-3#

Melinda: Yeah. #00:02:02-9#

Luise: And can you also remember what were like your broad, broad thoughts when you heard the name "Couchsurfing"? #00:02:09-7#

Melinda: Yeah, yeah, so I first heard about it in like maybe 2011. And I forgot the exact context where I heard about it, but the, like the second that I heard about and I started learning about it like I had a physiological reaction. I was just like, "Oh, my god, this is amazing. I'm so impressed and in awe that a community like this exists". And so then I started getting involved in the San Diego Couchsurfing meet-up group where every, every

Tuesday we would get together and go like have ((tuxy)) Tuesday. And everyone had couchsurf, like my place was so small, I didn't, I never hosted anyone, but I would go on Tuesdays and meet all these people from all around the world, then like, you know, get to know the people that were regular hosts and I became friends with them. And that's kind of how I initially went into it and so, yeah, but a part, a part of me was like, "Uh, I'm kind of scared like what happens if, you know, I decide to host someone and they like rob me or something?". #00:03:21-8#

Luise: Yeah. And what would you say what is Couchsurfing all about? #00:03:25-9#

Melinda: Couchsurfing is all about a community, it's all about bringing people together, like breaking down barriers between nationalities and languages and ... I'm not being very articulate 'cause I'm hungover, but for me it's all about like a welcoming community, international people, like, yeah, it's an international community. #00:03:59-8#

Luise: That's nice. #00:04:01-1#

Melinda: Yeah. #00:04:00-8#

Luise: And, and can you remember like one or maybe more like rare, very unique or special moments that where you would say, "Ok, without Couchsurfing that wouldn't be possible", except from the one you've already told me? #00:04:13-2#

Melinda: Yeah, I stayed with a host through Couchsurfing and it changed my life. #00:04:20-3#

Luise: Oh really? Wow. #00:04:22-8#

Melinda: I, so I was in India for three months. And I for me at that point I had been in South America, Africa, but like India is like next level and I – I'll tell the whole story. So basically, what happened: I was in Sri Lanka and I was so nervous about going to India just because there was a lot of media coverage about like// #00:04:44-8#

Luise: Especially for solo female travelers. #00:04:45-9#

Melinda: For solo female travelers. Why? There was like a number of very high-profile gang rape cases with that women from Sweden. Like a couple of white tourists, female tourists have been gang-raped and it was very, like all over the news. And so I was like, "Shit, I'm so nervous, I'll be in India" and so I was like, "I think it would be good if I stay with a Couchsurfer when I first get to Delhi, so that I can kind of get a layer of the land whatever". I found this couch, this woman by the name of (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*), 24 year old, Polish girl married to an older rich Indian man. #00:05:25-8#

Luise: Wow. Okay. #00:05:25-9#

Melinda: She'd been living in India for like two years maybe. And she, she looked like us, like pale, like blue eyes, blond hair and I was like, "Okay, I'll stay with her because she probably has a good idea how I can adjust to this new culture". So I was initially supposed to stay with her for like four nights. And I'll never forget like, I at that point, I didn't have a lot of experience with Polish people and the Polish culture and she spoke really good English, but she was so like cold to me. I was like, "Oh my god" – I remember, I wrote my mom, 'cause my mom helped me like pick out which person to write. I was like, "Oh my god, mom, I think (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*) doesn't like me. I think that, like I said

something or I did something to like make her mad, like she just never smiles and she's like, has these dead eyes". I was like, "I think I might ask like, like just say that I'll go somewhere else". And then I didn't, I didn't end up doing that, but then on my, on my last night – I was like so looking for it, to leaving, 'cause I felt a little bit unwelcome – and then she says to me, we were out, and she says, "I'm so upset you are leaving, please stay, I really want you to stay, blabla", and I was like, "What? I didn't think that you liked me".
#00:06:49-3#

Luise: Yeah. #00:06:50-2#

Melinda: And so I ended up staying. It's like, just her exterior was a lot more – I was so used to Western like smile bubbly bubbly – because she wasn't like that, I was like taking it personally, but it wasn't personally at all. I ended up staying with her, I mean we ended up traveling all over India together. So she, okay, this is basically what happened: At the, after the point that I realized like, "Oh, she does like me", I was able to like loosen up and like be more myself. And she, this woman was like, would sit down with me and teach me Hindi phrases and she would like prep me for, "Okay, we're gonna go to the market and like this is gonna be or our mission and this is what's gonna happen: these people gonna come up to you and take pictures and then you say (*Hindi words*), like 'Hey, leave me alone, no'". And she basically like trained me to travel in India as a, as a white female solo traveler and she just taught me so much about like the food and the culture and like explained like the cultural-societal context of everything that happened like, oh my god. So basically, I had like a little boot-camp in Delhi for two weeks with (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*). #00:08:08-0#

Luise: You stayed for two weeks with her? #00:08:10-8#

Melinda: Yeah. #00:08:11-5#

Luise: Wow. #00:08:12-1#

Melinda: Yeah. And then she came and like met me in the north of India and like, yeah, it was just// #00:08:17-1#

Luise: Wow, that's incredible. #00:08:18-4#

Melinda: And I keep, I keep in touch with her and her husband all the time. Like they're just the most incredible people. I like, yeah, she was so, she really, yeah. And yeah, she had like a, like a – 'cause in India, human capital is like their greatest asset, so everyone has like domestic help. And every single day I would wake up and she would have her house help make all different types of dishes, Indian dishes, for me for breakfast, 'cause she didn't know which one I would like. And they would all like, they would listen to me get up and like, like flush the toilet and start cooking, so it'll be ready whenever I came out and it was just like, oh my god, it was amazing. #00:09:05-8#

Luise: Yeah. #00:09:05-5#

Melinda: That was a very, very impactful Couchsurfing experience for me. Like I wouldn't have had, I, like India changed my life, and I wouldn't have had the Indian experience I had if it weren't for (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*). #00:09:16-9#

Luise: Yeah, wow. Yeah, I can imagine. So after that, you were like more confident and you could like be in various surroundings, and at the same time, you know how to like read the signs of other people// #00:09:30-1#

Melinda: Yeah, and like, and it kept me safe like, so for example, like whenever I would be – so, in India like English is one of the primary languages there, but not if, if you're not from like the upper class, you don't speak English. And so she would be like, “Listen, if you're in trouble or you are scared or you need directions or you need help, look for either a man that has an ironed shirt without wrinkles, 'cause that means that he has house help, he will be able to help you, or look for woman with a bunch of gold”, or like she would say “gould“// #00:10:02-8#

Luise: (laughter) #00:10:04-5#

Melinda: ((She had a litte)) accent. And so many times like when I was stranded or I like was in a moment of desperation, I was able to like navigate my way through safely from little tips like that, that she would give me. #00:10:17-5#

Luise: Wow, that's, yeah, that's, what an amazing story. It's like the perfect Couchsurfing story. #00:10:23-1#

Melinda: It was. And it was like because of that, because I was able to like backpack around India in like trains, busses, everything by myself and like be so confident, from that, from that point on, it was, like my life just changed. I was like, “If I can do this ... I can do anything”, and the rest of my trip was just like totally elevated. I just had, yeah, it was, I've not been the same person since meeting (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*). #00:10:54-0#

Luise: Yeah, wow, yeah, I can, I assume that's ... I've never heard such a great story that is like really, you know, you just came there to ask for so little and at the same time you would like, yeah, she would share so much with you. That's really great. #00:11:08-2#

Melinda: Yeah. And then another, another very impactful Couchsurfing experience I also had actually in India was: I stayed with a family. And it was the head of (*name of a very big international company*), so it was a very wealthy family, there was three kids. And this was actually, (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*) couldn't have me until, like I had to stay with this family for maybe like four nights before, before (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*) picked me up. And basically, I had a really severe culture shock when I was staying with this family because a few things happened. One was, at that point, I would, I had never been exposed to the caste system before and the way that they treated their domestic help was very normal for their culture. But it was not like, you know, like the kids, these, the parents will let the little kids hit the// #00:12:04-3#

Luise: Really? #00:12:04-5#

Melinda: I mean not like hard, but like they'd been hitting. And they wouldn't call them by their, they didn't know their names. they'd call them (“auntie”), which just means like sister, big sister. Like, so they wouldn't address them as like their first name basis, they didn't know their names. They were, the way that they would ask them to do things was just very jarring to me. And the other thing that was crazy about it, so I was like thinking, “Why is this rich family, like why they want some random white backpacker staying with them? Like what's their, what are they getting out of it?” 'Cause they spoke English at home, they were very, you know, educated, whatever. The mom was – so, in India, there's,

there's a status if you have Western friends, so she was parading me around//
#00:12:56-3#

Luise: Wow, that's kind of racist, right? #00:12:57-1#

Melinda: Hm, it's like, it's not racist, but it's, it's just like the way that you would walk around like with a new purse or like a new accessory to show around your friends// #00:13:09-1#

Luise: All right, okay. #00:13:11-0#

Melinda: She was taking me around to all her friends' like houses to like get tea, to be like, "Oh this is my friend (*Melinda*), she is from California". And her friends would be like, "Ooooooh", and like be interested to talk to me. And it's, 'cause she had everything, but there is something in their society where it elevates your status if your, if you have Western friends, you're like more interesting, more worldly, more cultured or whatever. And so, I was like, I felt a little bit like a monkey where it was like, she would just be taking me around and it would be like, "Okay, dance, monkey, dance, like say something funny, be entertaining for my friends", and I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is like a very great experience, very interesting, but a little bit exhausting at the same time. I just traveled, you know, long ways to get there". And, yeah, so that was another very interesting experience I had also in India. #00:14:14-3#

Luise: Wow. But yeah, I can imagine that must like at some time felt a little bit awkward, like, "Hey!". #00:14:23-0#

Melinda: Yeah, a little bit awkward, like, "Okay?". #00:14:27-4#

Luise: (laughter) #00:14:26-8#

Melinda: But they were also, I mean, they were so nice, you know. They had like a private driver and they would, one of the days, they were like, "Hey, we made an itinerary for you. You head and go to see all these, like, and our driver is gonna take you, you know, he knows where to go. It's been like an hour here walking around", and, you know, yeah. So they were very generous and lovely. But I was very surprised, I was, I wasn't emotionally prepared to like see the caste system. I felt like a little bit angry at them for having treated their help ... not angry, but judgmental. I felt judgmental towards them, but at the same time I was like, "Oh, they are nice to me". #00:15:14-1#

Luise: Yeah, yeah of course. Yeah. #00:15:16-4#

Melinda: So yeah, it was conflicting, really. #00:15:19-6#

Luise: And how would you describe the perfect Couchsurfer? #00:15:23-2#

Melinda: Mmh, the perfect Couchsurfer? #00:15:25-4#

Luise: Yeah. #00:15:27-2#

Melinda: Someone like to, to be hosted? #00:15:30-1#

Luise: Yes. #00:15:30-8#

Melinda: I think that the perfect Couchsurfer should take a few things into consideration. One is what's the, what's the average market value for staying in a, in like in a hostel or

like a, a more low-in budget hotel. And to take that amount into consideration and then either like, like allocate that amount towards an experience or a gift for your host. I think that's the proper etiquette. #00:16:06-0#

Luise: Yeah. #00:16:06-5#

Melinda: And be, be present. Being respectful of people's space, of their time. Being overly communicative about if you gonna come late or if you have special needs, and, yeah, just very courteous. #00:16:28-5#

Luise: Yeah, yeah that's right. #00:16:30-2#

Melinda: And it's like the, the, yeah, it's like someone who's couchsurfing shouldn't be there to like save money on staying somewhere. They should be there, because they want to make an authentic, cultural exchange and connection. #00:16:44-5#

Luise: Yeah, and so what about the host? What would be a good or a perfect host? #00:16:49-2#

Melinda: Yeah, I think that the perfect, I mean, I've had sooo many outstanding hosts. And there's no like perfect way to do it, but it's like, there's something to be said about when like ... I know, when I was in South America, in Chile, I've stayed with this family and I had been on this bus for, I don't even know how many hours, I was so tired and I will never forget how grateful I was when I showed up there and they had a towel for me ready to go for a shower, they had cooked me a meal in preparation for my arrival, and then they gave me their keys to their house and they said, "We have to go to work now"// #00:17:38-9#

Luise: No way! #00:17:38-5#

Melinda: "You enjoy, we will be back like later tonight and we can do whatever", and they left like right away. They left me alone in their, in their space, in their house and I remember just like being so grateful to have a, like alone time and quietness and just able to like chat, like have internet connection, check my stuff after my shower, like, you know. Oh, and they gave me, they gave me instructions on how to use their washer and dryer, not their dryer, but their washer and ((not dryer)), and like for me having, like right when you get there, those types of comforts// #00:18:22-8#

Luise: Like the basic things, but yeah// #00:18:25-2#

Melinda: It was so powerful to me. I remember like crying a little bit, because I was so grateful, so grateful. Like it meant so much to be able like to clean all my dirty clothes, have a shower and have alone time after being on a shaky bus for twelve hours. I was just like, you can't, like can't even put money on that type of experience. Like when, when, like for me, the perfect Couchsurfer host treats their guests the way they would treat a family member or a friend coming to visit and, you know, like that's the mark of the perfect host. #00:19:05-8#

Luise: But would you say, did you have like some bad experiences? Some situations where you felt like, "Ohh, this is unsafe", or, "I'm not", or, "This seems inappropriate for me", or, "I don't wanna like be here right now"? #00:19:20-5#

Melinda: Yeah, I did. I had a number of those situations, especially towards the beginning of my trip when I kind of ... After I encountered a few situations where I felt uncomfortable

because of male hosts, I started just staying with couples or families or women. And with the exceptions of, yeah, one, one time, when I really wanted to, when I was kind of in a more desperate situation, but yeah. I had like a situation, one situation where this host had ... was very, very sexual with me and like every time we, when we were talking like he would like always just bring the conversation back to sex. And I was just like, I didn't know how to handle it, because I felt, I felt uncomfortable for a number of different reasons, but one being that he was being very generous, like driving me around, all these beautiful places and we were meeting up with his friends, and his actions were very kind. But, and I remember like making a comment to him, like gently asking him to stop like bringing everything back to sex and he continued to do it and I thought, you know, it's probably not great that I'm staying with him, I should probably, I had a little gut feeling, like I should probably just ... come across, coming across as rude and telling him I'm gonna going back to the hostel I was staying at. But like I just didn't had the courage to do it, I was too nervous about looking ungrateful and rude. And so I stayed with him and he crawled into bed with me and I was like, I just didn't know how to handle it, and I like push his hands off me and I was like "Please don't touch me". And then he, he kept advancing and I had like a situation where I like, I jumped up and I was like "If you touch me one more time, I'm leaving!" And// #00:21:38-6#

Luise: Wow. I'm sorry. #00:21:39-0#

Melinda: No, it was, it was fine, but it was very, I felt, I felt very bad about myself for not, so like after that he continued to just like lay in my bed. #00:21:52-0#

Luise: No way! #00:21:52-5#

Melinda: Like not touching me// #00:21:54-0#

Luise: No way! #00:21:53-9#

Melinda: But like I didn't sleep the whole night, 'cause I was just like// #00:21:56-5#

Luise: Of course not. How? // #00:21:56-5#

Melinda: Oh my god. Yeah, and so I felt bad about the situation for a number of reasons, one because I felt like I should have just left. Like my comfort is worth more // #00:22:08-0#

Luise: Like trust you in your feeling. Yeah. #00:22:08-5#

Melinda: Yeah, like I should have just been more bold. And so that was, that was probably the worst experience I had, it wasn't even that bad, but it was a good, it was a really good learning experience for me with setting boundaries up-front and being a little bit more like as a, as a female Couchsurfer, you have the burden of, sometimes you have to look rude to set boundaries. Just because you are a guest, just because someone is being kind to you, doesn't mean that you don't deserve respect and you don't deserve space. And so, yeah. #00:22:44-0#

Luise: What did you do after that? Did you write him a bad reference? #00:22:47-5#

Melinda: I never did. I never did. #00:22:47-7#

Luise: Oh no. Okay. #00:22:49-4#

Melinda: And I still feel a little bit bad about it, because I feel like I owe it to the Couchsurfing community to be like, "Hey, FYI, he was super nice, he did all these like" – oh my god, his family! He brought me over to his mom and dad's house and they were just like the most incredible people – "Like I had a good experience, because of a lot of thing that he did, but like, you know, I wouldn't recommend"// #00:23:17-0#

Luise: He crossed the line. Yah. #00:23:18-4#

Melinda: Yah. And the other, like I had a, one other like not negative experience, but kind of not so great experience when I was staying with a Couchsurfer in Copenhagen. A guy, he was, he was nice, but like he had a business of hosting Couchsurfers basically. Like he would do it to basically get free meals and stuff. And it was like the expectation was very, he was like, I remember like having a conversation with him where he was like comparing the gift I had got him to other gifts, he was like, "I don't" – I got him like a bottle of wine and some other stuff – and he was like, "I prefer my Couchsufers not to get me wine, because I don't drink wine, I much prefer fresh fruit, blablabla". I was like, "Oh my gosh, like, I'm sorry that I didn't know that." And I just remember being out with him and like, when we would like go to buy things, he would just like expectantly look at me like, "Okay, go ahead", you know, and so, but like I was planning on paying anyways// #00:24:34-3#

Luise: Yeah, but you know that// #00:24:34-9#

Melinda: But I was just like, "Oh gosh, I'm very, feeling", you know, like it felt, it felt transactional and// #00:24:44-2#

Luise: Yeah, yeah. #00:24:47-3#

Melinda: Like it didn't, that was the one kind of experience I had where I didn't feel like he was really trying to connect that much. #00:24:55-4#

Luise: Yeah. That's kind of rude I would say, yeah. And what would you take then into consideration before sending a hosting request? So you told me your mom was kind of involved in it? #00:25:10-7#

Melinda: Yeah, yeah, so what, what I, what would I, what would I consider? What data points would I consider before I send a request? Hmm. For me, I prefer to stay with either couples or families or single women. And I look for, I prefer to stay in a room rather than on a couch just because it's more comfortable for me and it's like, I don't really do it for money purposes, so it's like, I like to have, you know, be a little more comfortable. I look for good references and ... I try to think what I was, yeah, I look at their interests and their pictures to, to look for a level of dynamic – I can't talk, dynamic, dynamism, like someone that has something interesting or unique potentially with their personality or their just like interesting job, something that I feel, I could learn from and that, or shared interests ... Yah, that's kind of what I look for. #00:26:29-8#

Luise: And what did you include in your request? So what would like the personal message be like? #00:26:35-6#

Melinda: Yeah, so I did have a little bit of a template (laughter) where I would like copy and paste. I remember like the basic, just the template would be like, "Hey, my name is (*Melinda*), I'm on a two year around the world trip. I quit my job and I'm traveling, I just got to Australia and I noticed something blablabla on your profile", like I would personalize it,

but the first thing would be about me. And I would always say, "If you can't host me, I would just love to meet up with you for coffee or a drink and talk to you". #00:27:13-6#

Luise: Yeah, that's nice. Yeah, that's a good idea. Cool. Okay and, but how was your mom included? Did she? #00:27:24-5#

Melinda: Yeah, so my mom, she came traveling with me for two months. #00:27:28-7#

Luise: Wow, she did? That's nice! #00:27:30-8#

Melinda: Yeah, yeah, it was really awesome. Like Africa, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, a bunch of places, but // #00:27:36-9#

Luise: A good bonding experience. #00:27:38-1#

Melinda: Yeah, it was a great bonding experience. And so, before she left me, like the last country that we were in together was Sri Lanka, and I, like she saw how nervous I was and we had like talked about the strategy of like "Okay, I'll be good, I'll stay with Couchsurfers like for the first, you know, little bit when I get into Delhi to get my bearings before I go off on my own". And she was involved in the sense that she was there with me with my computer and we were going through all the profiles like // #00:28:07-9#

Luise: Oh, that's nice. #00:28:08-6#

Melinda: Like looking at, you know, families. And I remember like whenever I got the response back from (*name of Indian Couchsurfer*), like she was the one I really wanted to stay with, that we were like, „Aaaaahh!“, she was like so excited for me. And so, and like any time I would stay with a Couchsurfer, I wouldn't forward the information to my mom and dad, 'cause they would get really nervous, but I would forward to my older brother. I would be like, "Dude, in case something happens, this is the profile, this is like the address, this is the day that I was, this is the day I'm arriving", so that// #00:28:44-7#

Luise: That's a good strategy. That's nice. #00:28:46-5#

Melinda: Yeah, so that like whenever, I knew most likely nothing would happen, but if something did happen, like there is like a digital footprint of where I went. But I didn't wanna make my parents nervous about it. #00:28:57-1#

Luise: Yeah. #00:28:57-5#

Melinda: In fact, like I didn't even really, yeah, I would never tell my parents when I was couchsurfing pretty much except, with the exception that one time when my mom was with me, because they would get nervous. And they just don't get it. They just don't get the concept. #00:29:17-6#

Luise: What, like what it is about. But, you know, at the same time, I feel sometimes it's like, if a very, I don't know, it feels like you have this responsibility when you arrive at the place or the home of the stranger, "stranger". #00:29:28-2#

Melinda: Yeah. #00:29:28-8#

Luise: You feel like, you know, it's such an intimate space. So how would that make you feel like every time you would enter someone else's home? #00:29:40-6#

Melinda: Yeah, I got used, I got used to it. In the beginning, it felt very ... not uncomfortable, but I would be uneasy, because I just wanted, I was so hypersensitive to being respectful. Even when they'd be like, "Hey, eat anything that you want out of the fridge", I would be like afraid to open the fridge. And, yeah, it was a little bit, draining of energy, because I was so, like, "Aaah". And I still was that way even at the end of my trip, but less, less stressed out about it. I was like more relaxed, I was like still very cautious, like paying attention to non-verbal language and their tones to be like, "Did they really mean that I can have some of this or like are they just being polite?" But, yeah, I got more used to it. #00:30:39-1#

Luise: All right. Okay. And would you always write a reference after you have stayed with someone? #00:30:45-7#

Melinda: No. #00:30:46-4#

Luise: So after the bad experience you didn't write one? #00:30:49-7#

Melinda: I wouldn't like, I only write positive references or I don't at all. #00:30:52-6#

Luise: Oh okay. Okay. #00:30:54-0#

Melinda: And I think most people are that way. That's one complaint I have about Couchsurfing is that ... like there's not a lot of transparency and honesty with the references when someone has a bad reference, they tend to not write anything. #00:31:11-8#

Luise: Yeah, but you know for me that, sometimes I feel like it's kind of hard to decide if you like really wanna stay with someone, because, yeah, you go through the references and, yeah, at the same time it's always so very positive and then, yeah, I feel like sometimes it doesn't work as a security tool. #00:31:35-4#

Melinda: Yeah, right. #00:31:35-3#

Luise: So yeah, but at the same time, I think it's nice that you have the opportunity to write someone something. #00:31:43-5#

Melinda: Yeah, totally. #00:31:45-5#

Luise: But ok. ... I know what you mean. ... So what would you say, especially at the beginning, has a reference ever affected your Couchsurfing activities? Because for starters, I know that sometimes it can be hard to find a place, because you have like no// #00:32:04-6#

Melinda: References? No, I don't think it did, because I think there is something to be said about when you are traveling alone as a female and you have no references, like you are not so much a threat, especially when you look like me in all the pictures like "Aaaaah" #00:32:21-4#

Luise: (laughter) #00:32:21-9#

Melinda: All bubbly. I don't think that it ever – it may have, but not to my knowledge. Like in the beginning, when I didn't have references as a Couchsurfer, I don't think that it affected me. #00:32:36-5#

Luise: Yeah and how did you feel when someone didn't write a reference for you after you stayed with them? #00:32:42-9#

Melinda: Hmm ... #00:32:44-6#

Luise: Did that ever happen? #00:32:46-1#

Melinda: I'm sure it did, but I don't think I ever probably noticed, because I would be without internet for long periods of time. And then like when I would have internet, I would have like all these cyber errands, like booking flights and doing this and doing that. And there have been a number of times when I should have written references for people that I just didn't have time to do, which I felt really, really, really bad about. But it was just because of my circumstance with me having super limited, you know, and bad WiFi connections. And so, yeah, that it, I never had it on my radar that I didn't get a reference or. #00:33:29-7#

Luise: Yeah, yeah, okay. Yeah. ... Let me check. But what would you consider when writing a reference for someone? So what would be like typical topics you would include? #00:33:44-4#

Melinda: I would always include something, I would always make, talk about something very specific that the host did to make my stay comfortable and to make my stay great. I would never be like, "Oh, they were amazing, I had a great stay". I'd be like, "They brought me out with their co-workers and we got beers and they treated me to like the best like (...), and blablabla". And I would include, sometimes I would, I would, I think I would typically try to include something with a note about the environment like, "Oh, I had a very comfortable bed and my own bathroom", just so that future Couchsurfers would know. And if it was not the most comfortable environment, I wouldn't say anything about the environment and, yeah. #00:34:43-6#

Luise: Yeah, but I think that's the same time when reading a review? You would be, "Okay, what's included and what is left out?" #00:34:51-6#

Melinda: Yeah, and so, that's what I try to, try to like subtly cover in like the bottom part of the review. After I said like all the nice stuff. #00:35:00-4#

Luise: Yeah, it's like a little detective thing going on. #00:35:01-9#

Melinda: Yeah, I would like include the things I would be looking at, looking for in the reading of the reviews. #00:35:10-3#

Luise: So how come that you have never hosted so far? #00:35:14-3#

Melinda: So, so far, I haven't hosted, because I like I literally don't have the couch. #00:35:20-0#

Luise: Okay. Yeah. (laughter) #00:35:21-5#

Melinda: Like my living room is turned into another person's room. So I have like, I have like, like my own bed and a floor. But that's one thing I'm really looking forward to living in my next place is having a space and hosting, 'cause I'm so passionate about it. #00:35:39-4#

Luise: Yeah, but do you still participate in Couchsurfing events or meet-ups? #00:35:43-5#

Melinda: I haven't since I got here. But, you know my friend (*name of a friend*), sometimes he hosts Couchsurfers and I love going out with him whenever he has guests and yeah.
#00:35:56-3#

Luise: That's nice. #00:35:57-6#

Melinda: I really want to. #00:35:59-3#

Luise: But you said that you sometimes would stay at an Airbnb as well? #00:36:03-1#

Melinda: Yeah. #00:36:03-6#

Luise: So when would, what on, what would your decision depend on whether you would stay in an Airbnb or prefer to stay at a Couchsurfing place? #00:36:13-6#

Melinda: Yeah, so for me, I might, my preference to stay with Couchsurfers is generally when I first get to a country, so that I can familiarize myself with the culture. Like learn some of the language if there is a different language. I always like to have a little notebook, like "Please", "Thank you", like all the normal things, so I can kind of acclimate myself. Whereas in Airbnb, I would choose that if I was a little bit later, like I, I preferred to stay at each country like a month, I would stay at an Airbnb a little bit later in my trip or if there were no interesting hosts, and no, and I didn't feel like staying in a hostel, I would get an Airbnb. Or like if my host never wrote me back or couldn't host me, I would look at Airbnb and hostel options. #00:37:09-4#

Luise: Okay and would you say there are some differences between those two communities? Those two platforms? #00:37:14-3#

Melinda: Yeah. There's a huge difference I would say. The Airbnb hosts are there for like the monetary transaction. Sometimes you ((stick)) out and you get someone that shares the same value set of the Couchsurfing community and that's, that's really great. But it's still very expecting and transactional, and then the level of the expectation from my end coming in as, you know, being hosted, I'm expecting a towel, I'm expecting a lot more amenities. #00:37:49-6#

Luise: Yeah, sure. You are paying for it, so. Yeah, that makes a difference. And right now, when I came to San Francisco I heard all the about the city's attempts to regulate short-term rentals and especially Airbnb. So how do you feel about that? #00:38:04-7#

Melinda: I think that it, it's really sad, because if you look at ... I don't know, it's so silly. It's all about money. Like the city is shutting it down because the hotels are complaining, because they're having more vacancies and it's, it's just super, it's like, why waste, I don't know, yeah, it's, I don't feel good about it. #00:38:33-0#

Luise: Especially I think, because, you know, it's the, they have some property, it's their house, it's their homes, so why shouldn't they be allowed to do what they wanna do. But at the same time, someone just has, yeah, has this place and it's always listed on Airbnb and he or she would never use it for like// #00:38:50-5#

Melinda: Couchsurfing? #00:38:51-5#

Luise: Yeah. I feel like, yeah. #00:38:54-5#

Melinda: So, yeah. And the other kind of mixed feeling I have about that is, so the place where I'm staying now, the, the guy who is on the lease, he doesn't own it. He lives in Sweden. #00:39:06-8#

Luise: What? Okay. #00:39:08-1#

Melinda: And he, and he was, he was making 1.500 dollars a month overcharging us for rent. #00:39:16-1#

Luise: No way! Okay. #00:39:17-8#

Melinda: Renting out like every room, even the living room. #00:39:22-2#

Luise: Yeah, wow. #00:39:21-3#

Melinda: Like so greedy. And he was so unreasonable, and, but before he had gotten in trouble from the property management company, 'cause he had so many Airbnbs coming in and he, he made 32.000 dollars the year before, like not last year, but in 2015 from Airbnb. #00:39:41-2#

Luise: Wow. #00:39:41-8#

Melinda: Just constantly, he got like a bunch of ... warnings from the property management company like he can't do this anymore. And so I feel like that's very greedy. #00:39:52-4#

Luise: Yeah. Especially, it's not like his apartment. #00:39:54-9#

Melinda: Yeah, it's not, it's not his apartment. #00:39:58-0#

Luise: Wow. #00:39:58-5#

Melinda: He has like really cheap rent, 'cause he got it like six years ago. He doesn't even live here. #00:40:03-1#

Luise: Wow. That's crazy. #00:40:05-2#

Melinda: And so I don't feel. I don't feel positive about that. #00:40:11-3#

Luise: Yeah. Of course. ... So what would you say to maybe like focus on like a more positive topic, what would you say is like the big take home message from your world trip? #00:40:21-3#

Melinda: From my world trip with Couchsurfing? #00:40:25-8#

Luise: As you like. #00:40:26-9#

Melinda: Hmm. #00:40:27-0#

Luise: Let's see where you put your emphasis on. #00:40:28-6#

Melinda: Yeah. Okay. ... My big ... my big take-away was that we just have one life to live. Like this, this is it. Like making excuses why you can't go be the person that you admire, that you wanna be, is just hurting yourself. Like we have a very narrow time period of when we are physically able and we have the desire to go live outside of our comfort zone and

experience all that the world has to offer. And we are gonna blink our eyes and be old then and there is just always gonna be excuses and I feel like we have the burden of going out of our way to just be authentic and to live like, create the life that you want for yourself and that would be, yeah, it's hard to say with one big take away. That probably would be a big take away. #00:41:36-5#

Luise: Yeah. Wow. #00:41:36-2#

Melinda: And then with Couchsurfing, it enriched my experience on literally every single continent on earth except from Antarctica, except from there// #00:41:48-6#

Luise: (laughter) #00:41:49-1#

Melinda: And yeah I'm just, I'm just so thankful for the, the community and the people that I met along the way. #00:41:59-3#

Luise: Yeah, wow. Yeah, I can think ... I'm out of questions so far, but if you feel like if there is anything that you like wanna share or you feel like, "Oh we didn't talk about that ((one))". #00:42:15-1#

Melinda: I don't think no, I think that I covered most of the main basis. #00:42:26-7#

Luise: I think it's like, it's super brave that you did this whole thing on your own. Because as I already said, it's the first time for me traveling alone and, yeah, I think I wouldn't – it's okay for like one month and, you know, like in this kind of university thing, so I know what to do and there are some obligations I still have. Yeah, I think it's like it's really brave that you// #00:42:57-2#

Melinda: Honestly, the scariest part was just do, like thinking about doing it, before I went. Like booking my trip and, you know, I told you I was like shaking before I (laughter) got off the plane. That was so scary, but as soon as I got like, I started doing it, I was like, "Oh, there are literally women from all over the world that are doing the exact same thing as me". Like I always ((had)) encounters with other female travelers that were literally living parallel lives to me. And I was never alone, you know. There's maybe like, in the, in the year and ten months, maybe four days where I was like legitimately like on a bus with like no, knowing nobody, but it's like, yeah, the universe has a way just like connecting you with people, and, yeah. It was the best thing I've ever done for myself. #00:43:55-4#

Luise: Yeah. Yeah, I think so. I think at the same time all those boundaries you have or like, "Oh, I can't do that", it's just really – it's a cheesy way to say – but it's really just in your mind. #00:44:09-6#

Melinda: Yeah, it really is. And, but it's like there's a difference saying that, oh, like your fear is just perceived, like all these boundaries and these reasons why you can't do stuff, you're just making them up, but it's one thing to say it and it's a different thing to really believe it, to really internalize it and to know it with so much confidence that like every part of your body is like, you know, so for me, yeah, I've never in my life been so certain. I've never had such a high degree of clarity about anything other than, before I went on my trip, I was like, "If I could do anything in the world, anything in the world, I would do an around the world trip". Like I never wanted to do something so bad. I, it just lit me up inside thinking about it and talking about it, it was my biggest life goal. I was like, "I have to make this happen, I can't make excuses and I can do this". And I'm so, I mean it sounds cheesy,

but I I feel proud of myself. Like I came from you know a small, a tiny little town in central California, like my parents voted for Trump// #00:45:28-0#

Luise: Oh no. Really? #00:45:29-1#

Melinda: Both of them. Just to give you an idea of how backwards it is. Like a very conservative, small town. #00:45:35-5#

Luise: Wow. #00:45:36-3#

Melinda: And, you know, like no one in my family really traveled before and I didn't know any, I didn't know any females that had done that. And so, in my mind I was like, "Oh, I'm doing this thing that's never been done", and then I get there and I'm like, "Oh, everyone is doing it" (laughter). #00:45:54-8#

Luise: Yeah. #00:45:55-5#

Melinda: But, yeah, so I feel happy that I took the leap. #00:46:01-7#

Luise: Yeah. And I bet, did it, would you say it changes something for your mother as well when she joined you? Would you stay at a Couchsurfing place with her or would you then// #00:46:11-5#

Melinda: No, we stayed at some Airbnbs together and we had very positive experiences, but my mom is more, you know, she got there for travel, so. #00:46:20-2#

Luise: Yeah, but maybe, you know, like traveling, I think, of course it can change your point of view and your way of seeing things, because of this whole intercultural exchange. #00:46:36-3#

Melinda: Yeah, she was ... I don't think she was changed by the, by the experience. She was exposed to some, some novel ideas and perspectives, but like from what I saw with my mom, she got back, she was just like, "Wow, this is all so amazing", and then she went back to (*name of hometown*) and like went back into her old routine very quickly and nothing changed. #00:46:57-1#

Luise: Okay. But nevertheless, I think it's cool that she joined you. I don't think that my mother would have done that. #00:47:04-2#

Melinda: Yeah, it was, it was really special to experience that with her. She was just like super fun, energetic, like amazing person to travel with, but she had so many bags! #00:47:16-6#

Luise: Oh no! #00:47:17-3#

Melinda: She was just leaving for two months and it was always like, "Where are the bags? Where are the bags?" I have like bags all on my arms, on top of my backpack. It was just like, "Argh, Mom! Why do you have so much stuff?" But yeah, it was amazing. Bless her. #00:47:34-7#

Luise: Nice. Cool. Ah, that was so, yeah, I really enjoyed our conversation. That was so interesting. #00:47:41-3#