

The 'Big' connection

By Nicole Muller
Wed May 28, 2008, 04:00 PM EDT

SOUTH YARMOUTH –

Seven years ago, Lynn Lesperance of South Yarmouth found herself an empty-nester. "I had extra time and energy, and I wasn't ready not to have a child in my life one-on-one," said the Yarmouth Port librarian. "I had been hearing about Big Sisters for years, so I called them."

Meanwhile, single parent Elaine Gonet was thinking about the strong positive influence Big Sisters had had on her two older daughters. "I wanted Brittany, who was nine at the time, to have a similar mentor who respects and cares for her. Having Lynn in her life has given Brittany an anchor outside the family and a lot more confidence," Gonet said.

After watching her daughter grow from a child to a teenager under Lesperance's influence, this year Gonet nominated Lesperance for Big Sister of the Year.

"For Lynn to have done this for seven years with such dedication brings tears to my heart," Gonet said.

Lesperance received the Big sister of the Year award May 1 at Boston's Heinz Convention Center.

Making a difference

Big Sister volunteers must undergo a CORI background check, an interview with the local office and their homes inspected to ensure that they are safe places to bring a child. With these necessities accomplished, Lesperance awaited a phone call from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Cape Cod's Centerville office.

"It wasn't long before they called me and said they thought they had a match," Lesperance said. "As the case manager and I were driving to Brittany's house, she said it might not work out because I'm hard of hearing and, at the time, Brittany was having speech and language problems."

Lesperance laughs when recalling the first year of her friendship with Brittany. "Imagine our talks with her

speech and my hearing. But when you've committed to being a Big, and you've been together once a week for a solid year, how does it end, how could it end? She became part of my life."

Just as Gonet admires Lesperance, the feeling is mutual. "Elaine is such a giving, generous person," Lesperance said. "I'm so grateful she shared her daughter with me."

One of the special traditions that has evolved between Lesperance and Lyons is a January birthday/anniversary celebration. Lyons' birthday falls on Christmas Eve, and Lesperance suspected that preparations for the larger holiday overshadowed the event. "Brittany also has a sister who shares the Dec. 24 birth date," Lesperance said.

So in January, Lyons selects a date and a restaurant where she and Lyons celebrate their first meeting and Lyons' birthday. "It's a special evening that strengthens our relationship and the bond we've developed," Lesperance said.

Growing together

The activities that Lesperance and Lyons share have gone from the playground to long discussions about topics ranging from conspiracy theory to euthanasia and moral decisions. We play 'What would you do if ...?' and discuss each other's answers," Lyons said.

They still go to the movies, but the titles have changed to more mature themes that trigger conversation over a sundae at Friendly's. "I don't think I'd have as much experience getting out in the world without Lynn in my life," Lyons said. "She thinks of lots of activities that are really fun."

Lesperance has no doubt that she and Lyons will remain friends long into the future. "I'm Brittany's groupie," she said. "Brittany has always invited me to all her school, sports and music events. I expect that to continue being part of her life when she's grown. I can't imagine not being Brittany's Big Sister — it's like asking me if my husband left, would I go out and get a new one."

"In a lot of ways we've grown together. Ours is a relationship you can't find any other way except one-on-one with a child who's not your own."

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