

A Pearl of a Volunteer

Prior to having a mentor, five-year-old Bobby experienced some challenging times. He is the youngest of five grandchildren living with his grandmother Debbie McGuire... and needed an outlet to just be a kid for awhile. Bobby could have been described as withdrawn, shy, and timid – he was used to being "babied" by all the women in his life.

Then he met his Big Sister Pearl, a 29-year-old who works in the music business in digital services. Pearl relays, "When I met Bobby, he wouldn't even say a single word to a new person – not a word! But now, what a huge difference." Bobby's grandmother agrees – "After one day with Pearl, he was a new child!"

While his family is great to be around, there simply wasn't an opportunity for one-to-one attention that a young boy needs while developing his personality and interests. "I'm doing my best, but I didn't have any way for the children to be able to go do the fun things that kids need to do. Then I heard about Big Brothers Big Sisters, and knew I had found my answer," commented Ms. McGuire. (Bobby's two older siblings are also part of the mentoring program.)

Pearl introduced Bobby to a world of opportunities – from boating and mini-golf to building birdhouses and eating sushi. "I cannot believe that child likes sushi!" commented McGuire. "Who would have ever thought?"

One memorable outing Pearl recounted was to the Australian Festival at Centennial Park. Bobby has always had a fondness for climbing... usually reserved to trees, furniture, and the occasional fiberglass structure at the mini-golf course. The festival had a rock climbing wall area that we of course had to investigate.

Bobby got all harnessed up, had some instructional time with the attendant, and up the wall he went. About two-thirds of the way up, he looked down and became terrified – begging to be brought back down the ropes. The attendant obliged, and after some motivational talks with the attendant and his Big Sister, he tried again. And failed again. This process was repeated for a third attempt, and while that endeavor might not be deemed a triumph – his Big Sister points out there were far fewer tears on this final trial.

"I love the fact that Bobby was really, really scared - yet he kept on trying," relayed Pearl. "He teaches me so much every day – but his attempts at climbing a wall really inspired me in my own adult endeavors - just thinking of that terrified, but determined, little face." – but he is so eager to try different things," commented Pearl.

Grandmother and Big Sister agree that Bobby's self-confidence has improved, his personality is now beaming, and even his vocabulary is broader. Bobby and Pearl work on reading and academics just as diligently as they do having fun. "Bobby has become so much more open-minded, not that a six year old can be narrow minded!" (Bobby has celebrated a birthday since their match began).

One day the duo had an entire day's activities where everything had to be something new for young Bobby – a "new day" they called it. They played tetherball, visited an art museum, shopped at International Market, and made chow chow. "He loved everything about the day, even ate chow chow with a spoon!" relays his Big Sister.

Like so many volunteers with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Pearl relays that serving as a mentor has been incredibly rewarding to her on a personal level. "It's the best thing I've ever done for myself," she commented. "I can't imagine a better match... and I am amazed at how often I found so many things in common with this young child."

Pearl is an excellent example of a mentor that has stepped right into a family and made huge strides with a child ready to blossom. "I've been blessed to have so many good people in my life," reports Debbie McGuire. "And that Pearl is a real gem."

Editor's Note: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee creates cross-gender matches between female volunteers and younger boys. Right now, we have 360 children waiting to be matched – 271 of these children are boys.

