

A Wish, Fulfilled

Gladette Martin still remembers when a representative from Big Brothers Big Sisters came to her school more than 15 years ago. Gladette, who had two brothers of her own at the time, went home from school and asked her mother whether she could be matched with a Big Sister.

Gladette is now a working single mother with two daughters (16-year-old Demitra and 15-year-old Darshell) and a 14-year-old son, Drew. When Drew started to lose focus in school as a third-grader, Gladette prayed about what to do to find male mentorship for her son, and remembered her own unfulfilled wish about Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee.

"I had been praying about what to do, and I was driving near my office and saw a billboard with the Big Brothers and Big Sisters sign," says Gladette. "I talked to Drew and made a call. Never in a million years would I have dreamed that it would turn out the way that it has."

Brian Donnelly, 38, an insurance executive with Prudential, had moved to Nashville from Atlanta when he got the call to be matched with Drew. Brian, a native of Memphis, had been a Big while working in Atlanta. When he moved to Nashville, he quickly sought an opportunity to work with Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"I've always believed in being involved," says Brian, referring to his reasons for giving of his time to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee. "I've been very blessed. My own father was very involved in my life. It's just an obligation I've felt to give back."

Brian recalls the first meeting with Drew.

"He was very shy and real quiet," says Brian. The two initially connected over a mutual love of sports, and Drew's interest in dogs. The two enjoyed outings to Nashville Kats and Titans games, and would go visit with dogs at the Love at First Sight shelter on Murphy Road.

Gladette shares how Brian diligently called Drew, brought him books and read the newspaper with him in addition to their fun outings. After working with Brian, his focus and his attention to school turned around.

Drew was achieving As and Bs. Gladette started to see how Drew was now calling Brian and noticed how the trust built over ballgames and sharing sections of the newspaper was translating into higher self-confidence at school.

"Brian is really on top of his education," says Gladette. "He's very direct with Drew and works with him on things like looking people directly in the eye when he meets them."

The improved academic performance at Una Elementary, and then Head Magnet School, led the Martins to look at Brentwood Academy, where he starts 8th grade this week. Brian has been involved every step of the way, helping open this opportunity to Drew.

"I don't know where we'd be without Brian, says Gladette. "I was driving Drew home from football practice recently, and Drew was talking to me about a tackle he had made on the field. Drew said 'Mom, I could hear Brian's voice when I was out there.' That says it all for me. Brian is a real blessing to this family."



