

## Places to Love

"God puts us in places to love," says 25-year-old Lesley Duffy.

The place where Lesley has had an opportunity to share her love has been her match with 12-year-old Jercora.

Lesley and Jercora were matched in February of last year when Jercora's mother was seeking ways for her daughter's life to be enriched. The tall, quiet 7<sup>th</sup> grader needed places to shed the responsibilities of her life and just be a girl.

"She's a girl," shares Lesley. "She loves to go to Target and shop, even if we just walk around. She loves to bake with me and decorate cupcakes. She loves games and movies. She's easy to please and we enjoy spending time together."

Lesley, who moved to Nashville so that her husband, Aaron, could attend Vanderbilt Law School, was part of a one-on-one mentoring program in Chattanooga where she attended college and received a degree in child and family services.

"Working with kids is something that has become my niche," Lesley notes. Her volunteer work in Chattanooga was a five-day-a-week commitment. Her job in Nashville, working in a marriage ministry program in Franklin, precluded her involvement in a more intensive mentoring program for children.

But her familiarity with the reputation of Big Brothers Big Sisters led her to her work as a Big Sister.

"With Big Brothers Big Sisters, we have the opportunity to plant a seed," Lesley says. "Good things can happen."

The match is off to a great start.

Jercora is naturally reserved and doesn't share a lot of emotion with Lesley, but drops hints that the relationship means a lot to her.

"She tells me that her best friend has started talking about wanting a Big so that she can do fun things, also," says Lesley. "I framed a picture of the two of us for her birthday and she keeps it on her dresser and shares it with friends."

Jercora is making progress in her academics, having been recognized as the most improved Math and Science student in her grade at Ewing Park.

Lesley says she knows that continuing to invest her time with Jercora could lead to something positive.

"So many children settle into the wrong path." Says Lesley. "They don't have to settle into that path. I want Jercora to see that."

One thing is for certain, she's on a bright path now.



*Become a volunteer like Lesley. Contact us today!* Be a Friend. Be a Mentor. Just Be There.

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Bill, who was raised in Catholic schools and credits his intellectual and moral development to that experience, approved of Tom's school choice. In fact, he approved of it so much that he made an offer that changed the course of Tom's life: Bill offered to pay for Tom's tuition for all four years at Father Ryan. Tom still has the letter that Bill wrote to his mother asking permission to let him pay for Tom's education.

Tom thrived at Father Ryan. During Tom's senior year of high school, Bill drove him to Indiana to look at colleges, including Notre Dame. Bill was there when Tom graduated from high school. Then, when Tom attended Vanderbilt, Bill helped out with his college costs as well.

Tom went on to law school at Notre Dame, helping to realize a dream that the two Catholic friends had. "I remember walking around the Notre Dame campus with Bill my senior year of high school trying to get tickets to a football game and wondering what it would be like to go to school there," recalls Tom. "It was a great honor for me to be able to take Bill to a Notre Dame football game years later as an alumnus."

To Bill's way of thinking, he's received just as much out of his gifts to Tom, as his younger friend received.

"It's been a great part of my life," says Bill, now married and living outside of Chicago. "He's done so much with what he's received. There are a lot of people who've had a lot more advantages -- kids who've come from wealthy families and real solid families -- who've haven't done as well as Tom."

Bill's belief in Tom -- now an attorney practicing business and employment litigation for Evans, Jones and Reynolds, P.C., in Nashville -- is what Tom cherishes most.

"When I got married, I asked Bill to be my best man," says Tom. "I wanted to recognize our close friendship and to thank him for believing in me and for all he has done for me."

The older Tom gets, the more he appreciates how much Bill has done for him. "I hope it hasn't made Bill feel uncomfortable, but I started sending him cards on Father's Day several years ago. He has certainly been like a father to me, and his involvement changed my life for the better. Without Bill, I wouldn't be half the man I am today."

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