



Big Sisters Gala 2011
October 6, 2011
Pan Pacific Hotel

Cat, mom of Little Sister Shupri – Gala Speech

Good evening, and thank you for inviting us to come and share our Big Sister stories. My name is Cat, and I am here with my beautiful 14 year old daughter Shupri, and her lovely big sister Christina.

Standing here today I have to admit I am humbled. When the idea of getting a Big Sister for Shupri was suggested by my friend, my first thoughts were “I’m not the kind of family that Big Sisters is here for”. I am well educated, professionally employed and Shupri attends a private school. She’s an honour role student and participates in club sports. I really doubted I’d make it past the lady on the phone. But my little girl was struggling, I was tired of fighting and I swallowed my pride, because coming to Big Sisters to me, was about having to admit that I couldn’t do it on my own, but ultimately that I needed to get help for Shupri.

Shupri has struggled with bullying for much of her elementary school experience, and over time, bullying destroys children’s souls. When Shupri was in grade seven I was watching my creative, strong child become quiet, depressed and withdrawn. As a child, she had lost trust in her peers, and lost faith in the adults who were not keeping her safe. Shupri was starting to believe the nonsense she was being fed by these kids. As her mom I was completely freaked out. I knew that my encouragement and support weren’t enough. Shupri needed to have a friend, a mentor. Someone she could look up to, and would help tell her that she has the strength to keep going. Someone who thought Shupri was special-because to me she’s amazing.

Well, Big Sisters didn’t turn us down. Rather they embraced us, and it was during our interview that our Counsellor, Lori, looked at me and said “I know just the Big Sister for Shupri, a woman came into the office a couple of weeks ago to sign up as a Big Sister and one of the childhood experiences she had had, was having been bullied”. That statement meant a lot to Shupri, and she went from the “what am I getting myself into?” to “hey, this sounds kinda interesting”.

Christina has been Shupri’s Big Sister for over 2 years now. And through the end of grade 7 when Shupri was experiencing her personal low, the general trials of entering teenager hood, and the transition into high school; she has had this dynamic, wonderful woman who thinks she’s special.

The relationship between Christina and Shupri is pretty amazing. It’s not that their activities are particularly spectacular, mostly they participate in the Big Sister sponsored activities, and spend time together. The magic is in the connection. When Shupri speaks of Christina, her eyes light up and she smiles.

Over the 2 years that they have been matched, Christina has helped Shupri believe in herself again, and I know that this relationship will be one of the pillars of Shupri's teen years.

Thank you, Big Sisters, for being there for Shupri, and thank you to all of you here tonight for supporting Big Sisters.

Little Sister Shupri, age 14 - Gala Speech

Evening Everyone. I really hope you are all having an amazing night, I know I am. I would like to start off with saying a huge thank you to the whole Big Sisters Organization for giving me this opportunity to tell my own story about what the program has done for me, but also for helping many girls like me through our tough times by giving us a friend and mentor.

This is my story; I was adopted before I was even a month old from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I never thought anything bad about being adopted until I started school. I would wake up, brush my teeth, get dressed, style my hair, eat breakfast, and then get a ride to school. But when I got there, I just wanted to run far, far away, even though I was only 6 years old. The kids at school called me names because I didn't look the same as them, and because I looked nothing like my mom. Everyday was the same. Now when you're little, you don't have the ability to tell yourself "Turn the other cheek," or "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words can never hurt me." So instead of staying strong, I felt sorry for myself and cried. I would love to tell you that during elementary school, or even high school, that the bullying stopped, but I'd be lying. I was in grade seven when the bullying hit its extreme. My mom saw changes in my attitude towards school, my way of looking at life, but worst of all, my respect towards my family.

My mom was struggling to help me, because I was telling her that I didn't want or need any help, when I really did. My mom was trying almost everything, but none it worked. Almost everyone in my life knew something was wrong. My mom was talking to a friend about how life was getting harder for me, and they suggested 'Big Sisters' to her. When my mom brought it up to me, I was nervous and a little against it. I mean, it would mean I would HAVE to open up to someone as well as my mom. But at the same time it sounded like it would be different and fun, so I agreed to it. I had one condition though; my big sister had to have been bullied when she was in school, so she could relate to me. My mom agreed. After those few nerve-racking weeks of waiting, I was matched to an amazing, open-minded lawyer who started to change my bad attitude just by sitting next to me.

Christina is a funny, always laughing woman, who seemed just as nervous as me when we first met. Even though I didn't know her at all, I sensed that her flowing vibe could loosen mine. We were matched, but I didn't know what to expect. But after a little bit of time I opened up to her. That was the moment Christina began to be my "Big Sister."

We have been matched for just over two years, and we have a strong, great friendship. We have done lots of amazing and interesting things together, like some of the Big Sisters events we've attended include, watching a Canuck's hockey game in a "box," and going sailing. We also just hang out together and do stuff at her house, like playing board games, cooking awesome food (the sushi making was the best), and making a cool home-made video for my

homework, that's been splashed all over YouTube. But even though all of this is fun and special, I would love doing absolutely anything with Christina as long as I had her company.

I feel like Big Sisters has changed me – I'm more confident about myself than ever before, and my self-esteem is through the roof- at times. And even though my life at school can still be rough and the bullying still continues, my attitude towards it has changed throughout these three years. Instead of feeling sorry for myself and thinking the world must hate me, Christina has shown me that putting a little more effort into the things that really count in life can conquer all the things and events that are trying to stop me from being who I am. And I believe being who you are is just a treasure in itself.

I believe all these positive reactions are inspired by the help and guidance of Christina. (Thank you sis). And thank you all for your support of Big Sisters.