

## Testimonial Speech by Trish Quan, Little Sister from 1983

*Delivered at the Big Sisters Spring Lunch, May 31, 2010*



I have always been fascinated by stories about how, out of the hundreds of choices people make in the course of a day, one small action can significantly impact the direction of their lives. I would like to tell you my story of how I became involved with Big Sisters and how one decision by another significantly impacted my life.

I met my Big Sister Joyanne in 1983, when I was twelve years old. I lived with my mom, my younger sister, brother. My dad had another family and visited on occasion. We rented a small place in Burnaby and lived on social assistance for most of my childhood. There was little money to go around and

not a lot of extras, but my mom was very resourceful. She found a way to involve us in programs despite our limited means. In the spring of 1983, she approached me with the idea of becoming a Little Sister. At first I didn't like the idea. I was confident in my belief that I didn't "need" any special attention. I was the big sister after all... Although I was apprehensive, I decided to try regardless of my misgivings.

The first day I met Joyanne I liked her right away. She was friendly and fun. Our first outing was a trip to Granville Island to buy the ingredients to make a pizza. Joyanne let me take the lead and decide the flow of our first day. She never pushed me. She made a point of asking me what I liked to do and took it in consideration when she planned things for us. We have had many excellent adventures together such as kayaking, hiking, sailing, plays, movies, shopping, and overnight trips to Seattle and Victoria. Sometimes I felt embarrassed that I didn't have any money. My mom could sometimes scrape up some pocket change for me, but Joyanne never made me feel bad. Although we did many things that were free, she paid for me on many occasions. This was above and beyond what any Big Sister would be expected to do but I was grateful. She always remembered my birthday; she sent me flowers for my sixteenth and my graduation. In my mind, days spent with Joyanne held limitless promise. She has a knack for making people feel special. I am reminded of a quote from Maya Angelou ... "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." That was definitely true of Joyanne. She made me feel special.

When I was 14 I had trouble getting along with my step dad, a typical problem in blended families, so I left home and went to live with my aunt and uncle. School was the last thing on my mind and I began to struggle in math. Joyanne hired a tutor for me so that I could improve to a passing grade. Being a former teacher, Joyanne knew the importance of an education. It was difficult for me to express my gratitude to her but she was always positive. If she was ever disappointed or frustrated in me, she never let on. I appreciated that she never gave up on me. I now work with teens in my profession and I know firsthand how challenging it can be. But when I needed her most, she was the light, at the end of the tunnel.

I continued to move around from age fourteen to eighteen, living with various aunts and uncles, and my father for a time. Joyanne came to wherever I was living and never complained. As a Big Sister, she embodied the type of mentoring qualities that are so important for young women in need of support and I was lucky to have her. I was the first one in my family to graduate high school and I believe that my love of learning to this day is in large part because of Joyanne. She made me see how many possible paths that my life could take if I stayed in school.

At nineteen, we ended our “official” Big/Little Sister relationship and embarked on a friendship with more reciprocity on my part. My life was more on track, I had graduated high school, was working a couple of jobs and I had moved back home. We continued to keep up with the goings on in each other’s lives, Joyanne focusing on growing a family and me starting college. Things were looking up for both of us. In October 1991, at the age of 40, my mom was killed in a car accident. Joyanne, just days away from delivering her second child, stood by me in those darkest of days. My mom was the hand on my shoulder that kept me grounded. When she died I lost my compass and began to flounder...

I quit college in order to look after my young brothers who were home with me and my stepdad who was injured in the accident. In my mind I needed to keep the family going as my brothers were still quite young. Joyanne was there for me to encourage and guide me as best she could. She never forgot me even when I forgot about myself for a while. My mother’s death has changed me indescribably, but I’m a big believer in the human ability to be resilient and continue living a good life in the face of so much pain. Without the continued support of my Big Sister, it would have been a much more difficult task.

It has been almost 20 years since my mom passed away. The care and mentorship of Joyanne got me through it. I’m married now with a daughter of my own. Joyanne has always only been a phone call away. She is as generous with her time to me as she was with everything since I met her. Joyanne is always so supportive and positive. The foundation of friendship we built through Big Sisters is the foundation that I stand upon as a grown woman. My Big Sister is a key person in my life that I look up to, want to learn from and continue to dream and hope with.

This is my story of 27 years of friendship and counting. The most significant thing Joyanne ever did for me was to help remove the barriers keeping me from reaching my potential. Going back to the idea that the decisions we make everyday shape our lives in ways we never expect, Joyanne made the decision to become a Big Sister. In a recent conversation with her, I asked her if she knew when she signed up way back in 1983 if being a Big Sister would have as much impact on my life as it did. She told me that she had hoped it would, but that always her main objective was to make sure that we were having fun. And we did. We had more than anyone could have ever hoped for.

The women who volunteer to be a part of Big Sisters and give of themselves without knowing what is to come sparks a wave of care and compassion that creates a ripple effect that reaches places that no one could predict but everyone would hope for. Thank you for continuing support Big Sisters. It has meant the world to me, and will hopefully continue to reach out and help other girls and young women embark on a journey of a lifetime.

Thank you.