

A NEW EXPERIENCE, FOR A NEW YEAR

Are you retired? Are you bored? I have a suggestion that may appeal to you!

I want to tell you a little bit about my new adventure last year into the field of In School Mentoring through the Big Brothers, Big Sisters organization.

I noticed last winter that they were looking for volunteers for **one hour a week** to spend time with a student who, for whatever reason, could benefit from some extra one on one attention. The “one hour a week” grabbed my attention and so I decided to check it out.

You’re probably not aware that since I was a little girl I’ve always thought I would be a teacher. My dolls and stuffed toys, and any actual person (like a sibling, or friend) could be found regularly lined up at chairs and tables with books to read, and spellings to learn. So, this opportunity spoke to my childhood dream of teaching, without the stress and years of education!

After the initial meeting with the program director, I was assured that, yes, it really was only one hour a week! I would meet with the student on school property only, so the worry of having responsibility for another person’s child was relieved.

So, once I was ‘hooked’ on the idea, we moved on to the next step. I then had to have a police check done, go through some training, and be interviewed, before they would agree to accept me and look for “a match”. This process took some time so I wasn’t too hopeful of receiving the acceptance and match before the end of the school term in June.

However, around the first of May the director contacted me with two match options from which to choose. It didn’t take long for me to decide to try out this new adventure when one of the matches recommended was a six-year-old girl.

We met at the school for the first time in mid-May, along with the program director, and we connected right away. We each had to sign a contract to be a good and kind friend to each other, to respect each other’s boundaries, and to make an effort to keep our scheduled time together fun for each of us. As a side note here, the students who are in this mentoring program are also volunteering to be a part of the program, which would indicate that they are as excited to be involved as the mentors.

So that was the beginning. We only met a few times before school was over for the summer, but in those few one-hour sessions we got to know each other and found that we really looked forward to our next time together. She is a joy to be with and I look forward to Thursday mornings now every week.

We go outside whenever the weather permits, or we color or play a board game if we're inside. Sometimes we take the board games and coloring books outside. She's quite a social little girl and if other classes are outside for some exercise and fresh air, we often have three or four others around us as well. They quite often want to know who I am, if I'm her Grandma, but she says, "No, this is my guest"! That warms my heart!

I missed seeing her over the summer, and she said she really missed me as well when we got back together in September. She always greets me by running down the hall and gives me a big hug, saying "I missed you!" even if it's only been a week since we've spent time together!

In November, I was honoured to be able to sit with her and her classmates for the Remembrance Day service in the school's gym. Her classmates had drawn posters depicting what Peace means to them, and she had drawn a picture of the beach, captioned: Peace means going to the beach with my sister. I thought: Yeah, me too! It was very special. After the service we went outside for a few minutes and I'd brought her one of the energy balls that I make at Christmas time, (made of dates, nuts, lemon and Craisins) which our grandson loves, BUT ... she was **not** a fan!!! LOL! She had no qualms about telling me she didn't like that treat! A little disappointing after the Halloween chocolate, I guess! Good thing I also brought a Clementine for her as well...peeled, sectioned, and all the "white stringy things" pulled off!!

I've seen her seat in her classroom, and have met her teacher. The staff at the school are very supportive and accommodating to find us a space to spend our time together, as well as just welcoming me as an important part of this little person's education experience.

All in all, it's been a very rewarding experience for me, and I believe for her as well. I look forward to spending time with her for a few more years!

So, if this has awakened the 'inner teacher' in you; or if it just sparks your interest in finding something to fill in an hour a week, I hope you will check it out with the Big Brothers, Big Sisters organization to see exactly what they offer in the way of volunteering opportunities. If it means making even a small contribution to the well-being of a child, then I'm sure you won't be disappointed.



Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Canada