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Neighbours in the Heart of

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TINY

An exclusive community magazine for the residents of
Perkinsfield, Tiny Beaches & Wyevale

A PERFECT MATCH: JUDY AND LEAH'S INSPIRING BOND THROUGH BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

COVER PHOTO BY KIMBERLY CLAYTON

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Judy and Leah foresee a lasting relationship.

A Perfect Match: JUDY AND LEAH'S INSPIRING BOND

BY MIKE BEAUDIN | PHOTOS BY KIMBERLY CLAYTON—KIMBERLY ANN PHOTOGRAPHY

Judy Swan remembers meeting Leah for the first time at a Big Brothers Big Sisters holiday party.

“My first impression was she was very active and curious,” recalls Judy. “She doesn’t miss a thing. I wondered if I could keep up with her.”

Since that meeting in April 2023, Judy and Leah, residents of Tiny, have formed a meaningful relationship. They visit parks, splash pads, and other places where Leah can meet people and explore. They also enjoy crafting, hiking, and observing animals and insects in nature.

“Our big summer outing was to the Toronto Zoo,” says Judy. “Leah is a fan of everything living, big and small. We explored the zoo for hours, seeing many animals you don’t see regularly. At the end, when I asked her what her favourite animal was, her response was

the ferret. I’m in awe of the gorillas and orangutans but Leah wants to go back and see the common ferret.”

Judy has deep roots in North Simcoe. She has lived in the area and built her home on the same road where she grew up, on land off her parents’ farm. Community has always been important to her. She began volunteering when her three sons were in elementary school, often helping with fundraising events. During the pandemic, those opportunities disappeared, and Judy realized how much she missed being involved. She sought a role that would allow her to contribute ongoing.

“I’ve always known about Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS). As my children have grown into adults, I’ve missed being involved with kids. I joined BBBS in 2021 while there were still some COVID restrictions. I found that challenging as all the training was done



Leah and Judy first met in April 2023.

online. Over time, the Big Bunch Events started up and I could meet and interact with the kids, which was great.”

Leah describes herself simply: “I am eight years old and in Grade Four. I have four cats and one dog. I really love raccoons. I love everything about being in the program and seeing the staff and my Big Sister. I love everything about being with Judy. We have so much fun together. I love being a part of planning our activities. I love the way she makes me laugh. I’m comfortable when we are together. it’s like she’s part of my family. When I am not with Judy, I miss her.

“My favourite thing that I have done with Judy, is going to the Toronto Zoo. I got to see all of my favourite animals. I also enjoy going to the movies, baking/ decorating cookies, and feeding the chickens. I love going to Judy’s and eating cheeseburgers with bacon.”

Leah’s grandmother, Nancy, is the reason Leah joined BBBS. Nancy, who has lived in Tiny for 25 years, had seen the program’s impact on her son in the early 2000s. “The Big Brothers provided him stability and helped him grow. He always had someone to talk to,” Nancy says. She wanted Leah to have the same experience.

“I am so thankful Judy is there for her. She understands Leah’s needs and fills a huge gap. Judy is excellent with Leah, and really like family. Judy and Leah have a great relationship. Judy is the best.”

Judy has noticed significant growth in Leah since they began spending time together. “She has become more confident in sharing her thoughts and ideas about things we should do and see,” Judy says. “I see our decision-making becoming more of a team effort rather than me making most of the decisions, as it was earlier on.”

Leah has also taught Judy how to enjoy more of the little things. “Spending time with Leah has allowed that, as she points out the smallest caterpillar to thinking



Big Brothers Big Sisters offers volunteers a meaningful experience.

we should catch a mouse to feed it. I see and notice more now even when I'm not with Leah."

Judy finds being a Big Sister deeply rewarding. "Being a Big is so rewarding, from the conversations while enroute to our next adventure to being involved in a group event. I was hesitant that my age wasn't the best choice for Leah but she doesn't see age, she sees the time spent. She says we are the perfect match and I have to agree."

Judy sees this relationship as a long-term bond that will grow and evolve. She recalls a recent moment that underscored this. "Leah recently told me she was going to be in BBBS forever," Judy says. "She said she might even become a Big one day. I can see it."

Nancy describes the bond between Judy and Leah as remarkable. "When they first met, it was like an instant connection. The relationship between Judy and Leah is just magical. It's beautiful, really," she says. "They are so good together. Judy is an angel, a godsend. They have such a strong bond. I believe they will be lifelong friends."



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