



It All Started with a Simple 5K Run

This post was written as part of the #Mentor series, which is tied to LinkedIn's student editorial calendar.

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When I first signed up for the Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC's Race for the Kids in the fall of 2007, I had no inkling as to the journey I was about to begin. Race for the Kids, the annual 5K fundraiser and outreach event held in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, is the highest visibility event on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC (BBBS of NYC) calendar and draws thousands of people out on a Saturday to celebrate the mentors and mentees of the program. On a whim, after completing my 5K signup, I also submitted my information to become matched in their mentoring program. A short while later, after being vetted and approved by the organization, I met my "Little Brother", 8-year old Tyce.

Nearly 8 full years later, I cannot overstate the impact this program has had on my life (and hopefully my Little's life as well!). Tyce has not only taught me perspective, courage and kindness, but also has become a true friend, someone to share the experience of life with. While Tyce's challenges are different than mine, at the end of the day, we are both able to encourage and motivate each other to survive life in the Big Apple.

Unfortunately, Tyce has fallen victim to many of his peers in the South Bronx: single-parent household (his dad has been incarcerated during our entire match); lack of male role models; living in a neighborhood full of crime and no well-defined “path” out. This is where I have focused my time and energy, helping to be a male role-model who can provide hope that there is a “path” out and that things that may seem unobtainable to him (college; job; family) are all within his grasp. I reiterate often to him that it is not easy, but he can achieve his goals with hard work. Further, I constantly remind him I am there to support him all along the way. Luckily, Tyce has been blessed with an unbelievable mother who pushes him every single day to be a better person and provides the support that a child needs to succeed.

While there are both ups and downs in our match (sometimes, the 3 mile subway ride to the Bronx is just tooooooo far on a sacred free Saturday), I can say unequivocally the BBBS of NYC program is the greatest volunteer program I have ever been involved with. Whenever I need confirmation of that fact, I take the 2/3 Subway to the South Bronx and see the joy and happiness in Tyce when we set off on one of our adventures (riding bikes; catching a movie; and Yankees Games are some of our favorites). We are going on 8 years of being a match and hope to continue for another 8, through all the excitement and challenges of High School, College and Career for Tyce. These past 8 years have seen us both mature and reach different phases of our lives, Tyce to a teenager and me to a married 30 year old. We have both been able to grow together and help support each other during these times and cannot wait to see what the future holds for us both.

Preston Blankenship is a Big Brother with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City. To become a volunteer mentor or to learn more about Big Brothers Big Sisters of NYC, log onto www.bigsny.org or call 212-686-2042.