

I want to tell you a little about how my journey went throughout my time as an active Horizons student and the relationship I maintained after with my Big Sibling.

I started this program when I was four years old with my four siblings and single mother. You could pretty much say we were struggling to figure out how we were going to make it. Luckily a family friend introduced us to this program. At the time, I don't think any of us knew just how much Horizons was going to us all.

Like some of you I attended St. Stans, Horizons had already matched us with our big mentors. Our first outing was bowling which was difficult for me because I was literally too small to carry the ball. My Big Sibling Meg helped carry it so that I would push it out into the lane. That was the first time I bowled.

Several years later on one particular bus trip, I saw Meg reapplying her bright red lipstick. I was undoubtedly staring at her. Out of the corner of her eye, she knew that I was. She reached out her lipstick to me and applied some on me. (I want you to know that I wasn't allowed to wear makeup or nail polish or DATE until I was sixteen, so I kind of knew it was something special for us to share). That was the step into womanhood.

In fourth grade I went to FXW which I know many of you attend. It must have been a couple of years later that I joined the volleyball team. At our first my mom, sisters, and Meg were in the stands cheering us on as hard as they could. We were a brand new team but we didn't win. I was sad about it but Meg made sure to tell me just how hard I worked and that it will get better with time. That was my first experience with disappointment.

In high school, I was at the age where I was allowed to date. As a sophomore at the Latin School of Chicago I had a boyfriend. Needless to say, it did not work out. At a lunch-date Meg and I had, I told her all about it. She became a person I could share my life with beyond academics and sports. She gave me her sweet words of wisdom about boys and made me realize how things happen for a reason. That was my first heartbreak.

In college at Valparaiso University in Indiana, Meg and I saw each other roughly once a year. Being in different states really made visits difficult. The last time I saw Meg was this past Saturday at my college graduation party. It was a small gathering of close family and friends. When making that list, Meg was at the top of it! I told her all about my new position here at Horizons as the Volunteer Coordinator and she was beyond thrilled. I let her know that I had a business card to give her. That was my first confirmation into adulthood.

Meg and many others have often spoken on how crazy life has worked out for me to have come full circle: starting off as a kindergartener not being strong enough to carry a bowling ball to being part of an amazing staff here at Horizons for Youth. I am beyond grateful to Horizons for all of their cheerleading, support, encouragement and unconditional love they have given to me and my family.

Now I want to share some things I have learned along my journey at Horizons that I think will help you on your future successes, which I know there will be plenty of:

- If you think you are trying hard enough, try harder. It can't hurt and may surprise you just how much potential you really have.
- Keep your relationships with Horizons as long as you can, they are a connection to you that many others may never understand or have.
- Thank your parents for their hard work and effort to do everything they can for you. Show them you're thankful by doing well in school.
- Keep Audrey updated. She is a great listener and loves to hear the new things that are happening in your life.
- Give back. If you have the opportunity to help, tutor, or volunteer, think back at how amazing Horizons has been to you. You could be that special person to someone by giving your time.

I am sure there are similar experiences you all have with your mentors and Horizons. There may be many firsts you have already had with Horizons and trust me, there will be many more. Just remember that just as much as your families and Horizons contribute to your successes, you are in control of it. I challenge you all to make a success story for yourself. There may be some errors here or there, but in the end, the little side stories are just as exciting as the final draft.

Thank you again and congratulations to a great year. Congratulations to the class of 2010!