

LITTLE SISTER

BIG SISTER

Over the years, Pauline and Betty have supported each other through major milestones and still make time to see each other at least three times a year

They met 14 years ago through Big Brothers Big Sisters. Today, Pauline Tremaine and Betty James are as close as full-blooded sisters.

Written by Crystal Rawls | Select Photography by Barry Sigman



Pauline Tremaine almost didn't go to church the evening her friend shared his story about volunteering with Big Brothers Big Sisters. She almost missed seeing the light in his eyes as he talked about the positive experiences the organization brought to his life. But because she went that night 14 years ago, she forever changed both her life and the life of then 6-year-old Betty James. "If I had succumbed to staying at home and not attending the young adults' church meeting that one fateful evening, I would never (have) learned much about Big Brothers Big Sisters from a friend that night," Tremaine shares. "I am grateful to God for blessing me with a life change with my little sister."



Pauline congratulates Betty after her high school graduation ceremony



Pauline and her children Brinn, Brett, and Malea consider Betty another member of the family

Becoming Fast Friends

Soon after that church meeting, the young, energetic nurse attended a Big Brothers Big Sisters gathering and nervously completed a questionnaire. "[It was] a little nerve-racking, since I was just hoping that she or he would actually like my company," says Tremaine. After rigorous interviews, she was matched with James.

The youngest of four siblings, James was adopted by her grandmother. "Despite the circumstances, she provided a normal, happy, loving childhood for each of us the best she [could] in a house located in the outskirts of the Medical Center area," says James.

James's grandmother decided to enroll her in Big Brothers Big Sisters. "(She) suggested it, so that someone younger could be another role model to help guide me growing up and to take me places she could not, due to the limitations of her age," says James. "I was only 6, so I thought it was cool that my grandmother had adopted an older sister just for me, [to have] all to myself."

Tremaine and James first met at McDonald's. As they chatted over french fries, the two became fast friends. "She looked like a doll, like one of those children from a children's magazine," recalls Tremaine. "[She had] perfect hair and a darling dress. She had an angelic personality to match, [was] quite shy, yet [had a] respectful demeanor. We hit it off immediately." James says, "Pauline was always smiling, so I thought, 'Okay, she might be fun [and] nice.'"

Sharing Life's Challenges and Successes

Through the years, Tremaine and James became as much a part of each other's lives as full-blooded sisters. Tremaine introduced James to her parents and younger sister, who accepted James as their own. The two shared a wide range of activities and outings, some of them sponsored by the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization, including attending a Beyonce concert, trips to the Houston Zoo, meeting former WNBA player Cynthia Cooper, and many others. At the end of each outing, Tremaine made sure to include discussions of issues or topics affecting James.

As the years progressed, Tremaine met and married Dr. Brian Tremaine, with James serving as the flower girl at the couple's wedding. Tremaine recently attended James's high school graduation, which was delayed for two years as James cared for her ill grandmother and worked to make bill payments.

Needless to say, they've shared life's ups and downs together and encouraged each other along the way. "When I first met Betty, I was living the typical young, single adult, social lifestyle and was more career-oriented," says Tremaine. "Betty has seen that phase of my life [change] to becoming engaged, married, and having children. Through all that 'busy-ness', Betty was always part of the picture and always a mainstay in my life experiences."

As Tremaine was helping James grow up to be an amazing young woman, James was also helping Tremaine transition into the adult she is now. "I have an overly energetic personality," shares

Tremaine. "Betty complements me with her calmness, [which] gave rise to my more patient and relaxed attitude. Watching and guiding Betty [as she grew up] has made me raise my children confidently." Tremaine adds, "My experiences with Betty have kept me humble about what I have been blessed with, instead of focusing on what I don't have."

A Lasting Sisterhood

Today, 14 years after that first meeting at McDonald's, James and Tremaine make time to meet at least three times per year. "Pauline and I have busy lives, but we always make an effort to contact each other, whether through phone, text, or Facebook," says James. "After 14 years together, we are friends and sisters for the long run. Knowing Pauline has made me make mature and wise decisions growing up, especially compared to my peers and growing up in a challenging part of town where there are temptations to make not-so-smart decisions and take your life in a different or wrong direction."

Big Brothers Big Sisters seeks to provide children ages 6 to 18 who are facing adversity with positive, one-to-one relationships. These relationships are professionally supported and encourage children to have higher aspirations, avoid risky behaviors, have greater confidence, and achieve educational success. To find out more about the organization or how to become involved, call 888-887-BIGS (2447) or visit bbbstx.org. **SLM**

CRYSTAL RAWLS is a freelance writer and technical writer at Fluor Corporation.



Betty and Pauline have enjoyed many outings together



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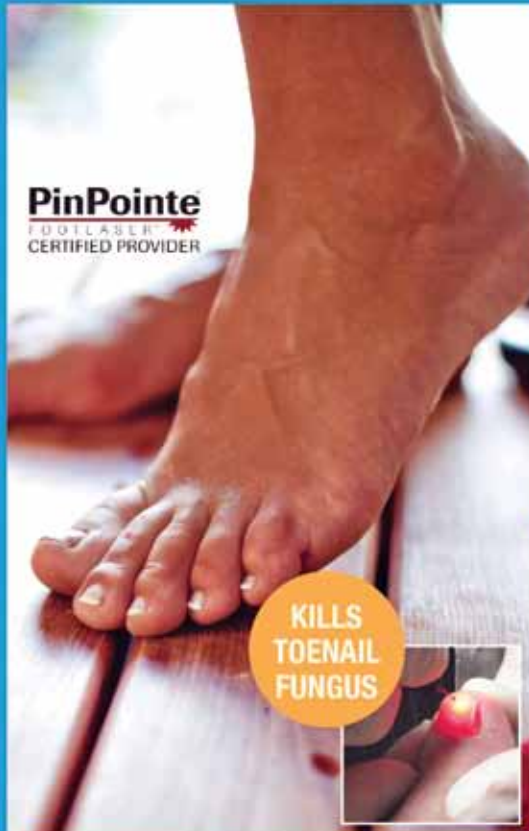
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