

Matt

WR 13100

Professor Clauss

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Situation: My best friend, Chris, has a younger brother, David. David is currently a junior at my former high school, McQuaid Jesuit. He is considering becoming involved in the Big Brothers / Big Sisters program that operates through our school. The program pairs students up with one or two first graders at a nearby grade school that primarily has students from disadvantaged homes, many of them having only one parent. As a former member of the program for my senior year, I am writing to David to strongly encourage him to join the program.

My Other Little Brothers

Dear David,

How's it going? It was great seeing you over break when I was hanging out with Chris. You know I always cherish any opportunity I have to beat my best friend's little brother in a couple games of Madden. Anyway, I hope the rest of your junior year is going great, and good luck with your volleyball season that's just around the corner. I wish you guys the best, but actually this letter has nothing to do with volleyball or any of the great times we had playing together. Instead, it deals with a conversation I had with Chris a couple weeks ago. While we were talking, we began to reminisce about some of our favorite high school memories. One of the topics that almost instantly came to mind was all the great times we had together while being involved in Big Brothers / Big Sisters through McQuaid. Chris then informed me that you're considering joining the program, but that you still aren't entirely convinced and have some reservations. David, Bigs will give you the opportunity to make yourself look better on college applications while allowing you to develop a relationship with a Little that can immensely impact both your Little's life and yours.

Like most hardworking high school students throughout the country, you put forth so much effort in school because you're highly motivated to attend an elite university. Consequently, if you had to apply today, you could go just about anywhere in the country if acceptance was based solely on grades and test scores. However, in today's landscape of college admissions, admission departments are increasingly determined at finding and accepting well-rounded students. A quick look at Notre Dame's website confirms this. According to the website, Notre Dame's evaluation criteria are: grades in high school, standardized test scores,

extracurricular activities, evaluations, and essays (“Evaluation”). Realistically, nearly every student who applies to an elite school like Notre Dame will have great grades, high test scores, solid teacher evaluations, and the ability to write convincing essays. The one aspect that can truly set you apart from the crowd of thousands of other applicants can simply be the extracurricular activities that you devote your time toward. You have a solid start in this category, since you’re highly involved in your athletics through soccer and volleyball. Also, being named a captain last year for soccer demonstrates some of your better qualities, such as your leadership. However, athletics can only show off a limited amount of your strong character. Participation in Big Brothers / Big Sisters is a phenomenal way to demonstrate to admission departments that you are a contributing member of society, that you care about improving your local community through personal engagement. Quite honestly, it will make you look better to the colleges you apply to, and when it comes down to it, who wouldn’t want that?

However, joining Bigs only for your college resume is greatly missing the point. Instead, there are much deeper reasons to join Bigs, such as the impact you can have in your Little’s life. I’ve heard you’re rather skeptical of the influence you can have on your Little and the relationship you can build with him or her. Honestly, I was too at first. Looking back to first grade, about the only thing I remember is that I sat the blue table all year. So had I been in this program as a Little, would it even have made an impact on my life considering I can barely remember anything from that time period? Instead of contemplating this question, I can assure you through my own experiences that this answer does not matter. After beginning Bigs, you will quickly recognize that you are making an impact in the present, and that is what really matters. Your Littles will be shy and reserved when you’re first introduced, just as my two Littles, Kaden and Lance, were when I met them. That first day, they stood around, anxiously looking down at their feet, unsure of me the stranger. Not more than four weeks later did they almost tackle me in excitement the moment I walked through the doorway into their classroom, an action which soon became a weekly ritual. Four weeks after that, completing activities became virtually impossible. Instead, all Kaden and Lance were interested in was sitting on my lap, remarking on the amount of hair I had on my face and legs, and telling me stories of their families and friends. You will quickly notice that as the Littles begin to get comfortable with you, they begin to look up to you with an incredible amount of respect. This caused their teacher Mrs. Trick to often joke that she wished she could keep a couple Bigs in her class at all times

because the first graders listened to us much better than they did to her. As you can see, once a bond begins to form between you and your Little, you start to make an impact in their lives, even if it is just through their behavior in their first grade classroom.

Still, sometimes the influence a Big can have on a Little can stretch far beyond the confines of the classroom. Nothing could illustrate this better than the difference my good friend Joey Stockelman had on his Little Cameron. A couple weeks ago Joey reminded me of the time toward the end of last year when Mrs. Trick handed Joey an envelope from Cameron's mom. After we had left the school for the day, Joey opened the envelope and began reading a letter that made the usually unemotional Joey shed a few tears. In the letter, Cameron's mom shared with Joey the difficult transition Cameron had gone through over the past year, and how Joey was able to help Cameron tremendously without even being aware of his impact. That previous summer, Cameron's father was put in jail for armed robbery. Without Cameron's father's income, Cameron's mom was unable to afford rent and was forced to move in with her mother in Dayton, causing Cameron to switch schools. The transition of losing his dad, moving houses, and switching schools was traumatic for Cameron, and he had a rough beginning to the school year. However, as the year went on, Cameron began talking to his mom more and more about a kid named Joey who would visit him at school. Slowly his mood and attitude began to change, going from dispirited and upset to more upbeat and positive. Sure other things came into play that made his transition easier, like Cameron settling in to his new house and making new friends. Still, his mom thought Joey had been enough of a positive influence that she took the time to write him a thank you note for the effect he had in her son's life. Throughout the whole year, Joey had had no idea about Cameron's family situation; the only thing he knew was that Cameron's face absolutely lit up every time Joey walked into the classroom. As you can see here, a Big can make a tremendous difference in a Little's life without even realizing it. David, you could be the next Big to make that type of impact.

Not only do you have the potential to make a positive difference in your Littles' lives, but they can surprisingly have the same effect on you. As nearly everyone at least occasionally does, we take things in life for granted. David, both you and I have been rather fortunate in our lives. We both come from stable families with two present and loving parents, and we were fortunate enough to receive a high quality education by attending good private and Catholic grade schools and high schools. Simply put, we've had a great upbringing, but how often, if ever, do we both

realize and appreciate how fortunate we have been? If you don't often think about this, your perspective just might change after your experience in Bigs. By participating in Bigs, you will have the opportunity to see upbringings very different from yours. For example, you might see situations such as Little Marcus' who lives alone with his aging grandma because both of his parents are completely out of the picture due to their drug abuse; or of Little Deandra who cried to her Big Emma when some kids made fun of her for the free lunches she got in the cafeteria because her family couldn't afford to pay for them; or of Joey's situation with Cameron. Seeing these types of things will certainly make you appreciate your upbringing more deeply while also opening your eyes to those less fortunate who could use your help.

Sometimes a single situation can demonstrate the mutually beneficial relationship between a Big and a Little the best. For instance, my Aunt Mary Lynn just called me last week to share a piece of exciting news. In case you didn't know, my aunt is the secretary at Kaden and Lance's school, something that both Kaden and Lance know and love. In fact, every time they pass her in the hallway, they always stop her to ask about me. One day she was sitting in her office when Lance came running in to give her an invitation for me to go to his First Communion. Unfortunately, the Mass is on May 8th and I won't be out of school by then. Nevertheless, it shows the significant impact I had on him, an influence that was strong enough to warrant an invitation to his First Communion, despite it being a whole year since I last visited him. Though I'm not really his "big brother Matt" as he refers to me when talking to my aunt, it kind of feels like it since he asked me to attend such a family-centered event such as First Communion. To be invited is an incredible and special feeling, something you can only experience for yourself by joining Bigs. For me, this situation just served as another reminder that the time I invested in Bigs was nothing but worthwhile.

Being involved in Big Brothers / Big Sisters was one of the best experiences I had while in high school, and I am confident it could be the same for you. It will make you more appealing to colleges when you apply, while also enabling you to make an impact in a little kid's life who may really need it. Your Little won't be the only one to benefit from the relationship either, as your Little can have just as strong of impact on you. David, in your consideration, as I hope you can see, there are many reasons, both selfish and selfless, as to why you should join Bigs. I hope my personal experiences help to motivate you, and don't hesitate to give me a call or text me if I can help with any questions. You'd make a great Big Brother!

Sincerely,
Matthew

Works Cited

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