

## Life-Long Big Sister

One of the most rewarding aspects of being a Big Brother or Sister is the ability to make a positive impact on the life of a child. Sherry Gidney's influence as a Big Sister on Elaine "Loni" Sturgis lasted a lifetime. Throughout her Little Sister's childhood, teenage pregnancy, marriage and adulthood, and recent medical struggles, Sherry was steadfast.

After Loni died earlier this year at the age of 43, her daughter found among her mother's things a collection of greeting cards from her Big Sister Sherry that Loni had kept for the past 32 years. "I can't believe how much of an influence you had on my mother's life," Loni's daughter told Sherry. Sherry has a prized card of her own, one that Loni gave her on a recent birthday where she thanked her for being her Big Sister for over 30 years.

When Sherry was matched with 11-year old Loni in 1975, she had no thoughts of a lifelong commitment. Newly married and recently moved to Worcester, Sherry was looking for an opportunity to give back and was impressed with the mentoring role of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"Loni and I had a lot of fun together," Sherry recalled. "We'd go roller skating. Being with her helped me think and act younger." Over the years the Big and Little Sister took classes in stained glassmaking and in landscaping. "Loni really was in her element in the landscaping class," Sherry said. "She filled her yard with topiary shrubs and flower gardens."

The Little Sister's life with filled with dark moments, too. Her mother passed away suddenly when she when she was a teenager. Loni dropped out of school after becoming pregnant. At the urging of her Big Sister, she took classes and completed requirements for a general education degree.

"I didn't try to become a mother to her," Sherry said. "I was there for her as a friend." Sherry also wanted Loni to appreciate the mentoring work of Big Brothers Big Sisters, so the two of them frequently volunteered at events sponsored by the organization.

Loni's brother, Mullen Sawyer, says the relationship with Sherry "was the most profound of her life. Sherry provided my sister with love, support, encouragement and direction. She gave her stability," he said.

At Loni's funeral, Mullen honored Sherry's commitment to his sister by presenting her with a certificate from Big Brothers Big Sisters. It reads, in part: "To Sherry Gidney for her 30+ years of commitment, service, and sisterhood. Your relationship exemplifies what a good match should be."