



**COMMUNITY**



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**BFLF Ties Form New 'Family'**

By: **Lisa Hare**

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When Scott Dickman entered the Marine Corps in 1990 at age 18, Bruce Peterson thought he probably wouldn't see his Little Friend again.

"But he showed up on my doorstep," recalled Peterson, "when he was home on leave."

Formed through Yankton's Big Friend Little Friend organization, the relationship between Peterson and Dickman is a bond that has endured more than two decades, and has now brought them to a point in their lives where the roles are shifting.

"(Big Friend Little Friend organization) helped out when I basically had no father figure," Dickman said.

The only son from a single-parent home, Dickman, who once craved the companionship of a male role model, is now in a position to return the favor of friendship.

"I lost my wife of 28 years last July," reflected Peterson as he gazed at photographs of Dickman's 9-year-old daughter, Haley. "But she's helped fill that void," he said, pointing to the little girl he considers his surrogate granddaughter.

Both Peterson and his late wife, Dorothy, were active members of the Big Friend Little Friend organization for many years.

"We didn't have children of own," Peterson said, "so we really enjoyed our time with (the Little Friends)."

Big Friend Little Friend, Inc. is a local nonprofit organization, much like the national Big Brother/Big Sister organizations, that matches a young person in the community with an adult volunteer who can offer support and be a role model. Established in Yankton in 1977, Big Friend Little Friend offers guidance to participants, monthly newsletters and hosts monthly fun functions where all area Big Friends and Little Friends can get together.

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Twenty years into the friendship, Peterson is now an accepted member of Dickman's entire family -- including Dickman's five children and his mother, Ruth Dickman of Yankton. Peterson regularly attends Dickman's family events, holiday celebrations and other get-togethers .

"I don't have time to see him as much as I'd like," admitted Dickman, though he does call or visit Peterson at least once a month.

When recalling the July 4th celebration he attended this year with Dickman's family, Peterson said with a proud smile, "I was sitting in one of those reclining lawn chairs and Haley came running up to me and insisted on sitting on my lap to watch the fireworks."

"He's a real good family friend," Dickman stated. "Haley sometimes refers to him as Grandpa."

Through the years, the two have shared an ongoing friendship with Peterson as an integral part of Scott's growing up.

"I went to Scott's grandfather's birthday celebration," Peterson recalled, "and he told me, You're one of the reasons why (Scott) turned out so good." It was moment of great satisfaction for Peterson and a conversation he said he'd always remember.

Dickman's grandfather has since passed away, and Peterson attended the funeral with the family members.

While not all matches made through the Big Friend Little Friend organization last as long as the one made back in 1984 between Dickman and Peterson, the organization has worked to successfully bring many children and adult volunteers together through the years.

"There is an application process and a background check performed on all volunteers," stated Stacy Winterringer, program director for Big Friend Little Friend. "When the background check is completed, we sit down and have an interview with (the applicant) and two board members. Once that's done, then three board members have to approve the application."

Approved applicants are then shown files of children waiting to be matched.

"We try to match volunteers with kids that share their interests and are compatible, personality-wise," Winterringer said.

Based on the age and gender requested by the applicant, several options are presented to the applicant.

"It can be a difficult decision," Winterringer admitted. "People often feel that by making their selection, they're denying other children who are waiting to be matched."

But Winterringer stated that the best way for people to assist those other children waiting for a Big Friend is to help recruit more volunteers.

"We need male volunteers," Winterringer said. "Right now, we're doing gender-to-gender matches, but we're running out of males."

Big Friend Little Friend currently has 31 unmatched children awaiting Big Friends.

"We have a long list of boys," Winterringer added.

Although the organization holds fun functions throughout the year which all Big Friends and Little Friends can attend -- even those yet unmatched -- Winterringer emphasized that what the children really need is that one-on-one relationship with a positive influence that a Big Friend can provide.

For more information about the program or to volunteer to be a Big Friend, visit the organization's web



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site at [www.bigfriendlittlefriend.org](http://www.bigfriendlittlefriend.org), or call Stacy Winterringer at 665-6365.

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To Become a Big Friend:

- \* Must be 18 years of age or older and a citizen of our community
- \* Must complete an application and personal interview for approval
- \* Willing serve as a friend, good listener, source of encouragement and example of stability
- \* Willing to see Little Friend two to four times a month for at least one year

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