

# Big Sister Bulletin

BIG SISTER ASSOCIATION OF GREATER BOSTON

## Big in Boston Bigger Than Ever!

**B**ig in Boston may now be just a memory, but it was certainly an evening of celebrating the friendships of our Big and Little Sisters and creating new possibilities for Greater Boston's girls through the generosity of all those who supported the event. It was this generosity which helped us **raise more than \$500,000**, making Big in Boston 2007 the largest fundraising event in Big Sister history!

The money raised will allow us to provide more girls than ever before with the care and support of a mentor.

The evening was a celebration of friendship and sisterhood: from a

group of women known as **The Women of Simmons College**, who came together to raise an unprecedented \$75,000 as the Presenting Sponsor for Big in Boston, to the evening's honorees, **Divas Uncorked**, a group of African-American women who turned their friendship and love of wine into a thriving start-up venture, to **Zili Misik**, a diverse group of women who set sisterhood to music, to the special Big in Boston cookies, made by two sisters whose love of baking became a successful business. However, the most meaningful examples of the power of friendship

were the Big and Little Sisters, **Elena Proakis Ellis** and **Kaitlyn**, **Katie Eagan** and **Sparkle**, **Ellen DePaul** and **Thelma** and **Angela Johnson** and **Mariah**, who all spoke to a crowd of nearly 500 guests about the life-changing impact of their special friendships.

"When you hear from Little Sisters like Kaitlyn, Sparkle, Thelma and Mariah, the positive impact that having a mentor has had on their lives is evident," said **Deborah Re**, Big Sister's Chief Executive Officer. "It is clear from the outpouring of support for Big in Boston that our community understands why gender-specific mentoring is necessary."



All hail the Chiefs! Ed Piette, Deborah Re, Paul Guzzi and Dolores Mitchell celebrate Big in Boston

In addition to these current matches, one very special Little Sister, **Linda Brennan**, gave a moving speech about how her Big Sister **Marlene Archer** changed her life when they were first matched 44 years ago. Thanks in large part to Marlene's care and support, Linda, who grew up in the Bromley Heath Housing Development of Jamaica Plain, is now a wife and mother of two, working for Lesley University's Threshold Program, which assists young adults with learning disabilities. "Marlene was educated, compassionate and extremely persevering. As I stand here tonight, I can

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Tracy Sharpley-Whiting

## Hip Hop Culture and Today's Girls

TRACY SHARPLEY-WHITING, AUTHOR, PROFESSOR AND CULTURAL CRITIC, DISCUSSES HOW MENTORS CAN HELP GIRLS NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITIES OF TODAY'S HIP HOP CULTURE

Big Sister stays on top of issues affecting today's girls. Because we serve a broad range of girls in our mentoring programs, there is an equally broad range of challenges they are facing. One of those challenges is the often misogynistic attitude put forth by "hip hop culture"—a culture that is arguably becoming more and more mainstream. It is this hip hop culture and its affect on young black women—and really all young women—that Tracy Sharpley-Whiting addressed in a recent workshop presented by the **Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change** at Simmons College and in her latest book, **Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women** (New York University Press, 2007). In her book, Sharpley-Whiting explores the ways in which popular hip hop artists like Lil' Kim and even pop artists like Britney Spears are creating a culture of hypersexuality and consumerism that can negatively affect the way girls view themselves. "In effect, what young black women cannot be, they now buy," observes Sharpley-Whiting in **Pimps Up, Ho's Down**.

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### Highlights

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honestly say that Marlene saved my life," Linda told the audience. And just as Marlene had always been there for Linda, she was there to hear Linda speak at Big in Boston—and to receive a standing ovation from the audience!



Susan Wornick, Deborah Re,  
Mish Michaels and Natalie Jacobson

As a final showing of support for Greater Boston's girls, guests participated in our Matchmaker Challenge. **Mish Michaels**, who was the evening's emcee, handed the show over to surprise guests, **Natalie Jacobson**, formerly of Channel 5 fame and **Susan Wornick**, also of Channel 5. The dynamic duo helped us raise an additional \$26,000 through the Matchmaker Challenge.

Of course the evening would not have been the success it was without the generosity of Big in Boston's corporate sponsors and all those individuals who donated to the event. Additionally, we want to offer our biggest thanks to the event co-chairs, **Regina Pisa** and **John Hamilton, Jr.**, as well as the Big in Boston Committee and Big Sister's Board, who all worked tirelessly to ensure that the event was a hit. We look forward to seeing you again next year at the even bigger and better Big in Boston!



Big in Boston co-chairs John Hamilton, Jr.  
and Regina Pisa with Big Sister Jessica  
Small and Little Sister Dominique

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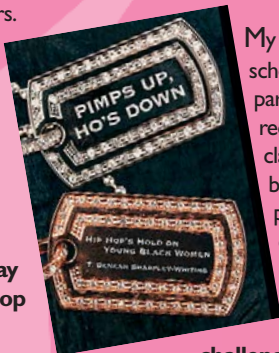
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However, Sharpley-Whiting does see an upside to this barrage of negative messages. It allows for open discussion about the ideas and attitudes that are part of the hip hop culture and how girls can interpret them without falling into a trap of low self-esteem or negative behaviors.

Below she examines the important role a positive female mentor can play in facilitating this discussion and giving girls the confidence they need to make healthy decisions.

### What role do you think an adult female mentor can play in helping today's girls develop a positive self-image?

The role of a mentor in a young girl's development is absolutely critical. An adult female mentor can provide insight (from her own experiences of course) on how best to navigate certain life obstacles, school decisions and opportunities, and possibly even flesh out future career choices. When professional organizations, magazines like **Black Enterprise**, and professionals themselves—from universities to corporate America—encourage people to find successful mentors in their fields in order to scale various career ladders, mentoring for young girls seems like a no-brainer. I think of a mentor as both a well and a compass, one who has a breadth of experience and has gained wisdom from her own choices. She can therefore illustrate through words and deeds life-altering and affirming guidance.



### You are obviously very concerned with women's and girls' empowerment. Did you have any female mentors when you were younger who empowered you to become the woman you are today?

My elementary school teachers in the public schools were wonderful. One teacher in particular stands out: Mrs. Sample. She recommended that I get tested for gifted classes. Her confidence gave me a huge boost in terms of my academic self-perception and achievement. She effectively buoyed my future competitiveness.

### What do you think are the biggest challenges for young girls growing up in urban areas, like Boston, right now?

Unfortunately, this generation of young women is being overwhelmed by a media culture that consistently reinforces ideas that sex and beauty are their primary assets. Because young, poor and urban girls watch more television than other demographics they are particularly susceptible to these notions. Combine this with inevitable peer pressure to trade on that beauty and sexuality and the result is higher risk for STDs, multiple partners and drug and alcohol use. An adult female mentor's role becomes therefore invaluable. The fact that we are also confronting an HIV/AIDS pandemic further leaves this particular population vulnerable, as does sexual abuse, which according to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), is another trouble spot for this generation.

### Your book talks about the negative influences of hip hop on girls and young women, particularly those of color. What do you see in today's pop culture as positive influences for girls?

Hip hop culture has provided us a space to at least dialogue openly and oftentimes boisterously about issues of sexism and misogyny that are pervasive in America and hence certainly much larger than hip hop itself. That space then is an ultimate positive!

### How can girls become more media savvy when it comes to the images they are consuming on a daily basis?

Media literacy is a great start, but the real problem is the Culture with a capital "C". Despite tales of successes and pronouncements regarding the end of gender biases, Culture is in fact biased against young women and girls, particularly those of color. Media images are powerful and seductive. However their real lives **are not** and **cannot** be lived via images that are superficially empowering. What we need is more Cultural literacy—as this is where images emanate. You can turn off the media but you cannot turn off Culture. Young girls need to understand that sexism and misogyny are part and parcel of our world regardless of race and class. They need to be equipped to deal with it in all its forms—media, the workplace, school and so on.

DR. TRACY SHARPLEY-WHITING IS A PROFESSOR OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND DIASPORA STUDIES AND FRENCH AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY.

## Young Professionals Get "Wicked"

There were no tricks, just plenty of treats on October 31, when Big Sister's Young Professional Group hosted the 3rd annual **Wicked Big Pahty** at Ned Devine's. The Halloween-themed soiree raised more than \$5,000 to support our mentoring programs for girls. The event also

brought in some creative costumes, ranging from 80's icons Rainbow Bright, Hulk Hogan and Mr. T to the more culinary-

themed pigs in a blanket and even a box of Dunkin' Donuts munchkins! With all the unique costumes it was difficult for the **special guest judges, the Celtics dancers**, to choose the winners. In the end, "Scariest" went to a baby boy sporting some 5 o'clock shadow, "Best Impersonation" went to Mr. T, "Funniest" went to a turkey and "Most Creative" went to Hulk Hogan.

In addition to all the characters at Wicked Big Pahty, many of our Big Sisters were in attendance as well. They spent the evening enjoying the festivities while talking with other young professionals about being a mentor. They shared stories of all the fun activities they do with their Little Sisters and the good feeling they get from having a positive impact on a girl's life. Several of the guests left wanting to know how they could get more involved with Big Sister!

Special thanks are in order to those who were involved in a "big" way—the **Wicked Big Pahty co-chairs, Ryan Krouskop and Claudia Silva**, as well as the entire Young Professional Group, who planned the exciting event. We also want to thank all those who attended Wicked Big Pahty. Their support will help us serve nearly 3,000 girls in 2007.

If you thought Wicked Big Pahty was a wicked good time, then save the date for our next Young Professional Group event, The Resolution Party, happening January 23, 2008!



Even this unlikely pair can come together to support Big Sister



Mr. T pities the fool who didn't go to Wicked Big Pahty!



# Match Highlight: Big Sister Jill Jorgenson & Little Sister Lizz

ON HER PATH TO SUCCESS A FORMER LITTLE SISTER CANNOT FORGET HOW HER BIG SISTER CHANGED HER LIFE

"Who knows where I would be or what I would be doing if it wasn't for you. I credit much of the person I have become to our friendship and for that I am forever grateful!"

wrote former Little Sister Lizz Gillcrist in a letter

to her Big Sister Jill.

Enclosed with the letter was a photo of a confident, smiling young woman accepting her diploma from Framingham State College. That young woman of course was Lizz, who earned her degree in fashion design this past May. This was an interest which was

sparkled by Big Sister Jill Jorgenson more than 11 years ago when she and Lizz were first matched.

A former home economics teacher, Jill thought it might be fun to share her love of sewing with her Little Sister. Though Lizz had never touched a sewing machine before, she immediately took to it and the two began working on projects from holiday-themed pillows to quilt squares and eventually working their way up to a teddy bear and even reupholstering two chairs at Lizz's house as a Christmas present to her mother. While Lizz credits her Big Sister Jill with getting her started on her career path in fashion design, she also acknowledges the many ways in which Jill truly expanded her horizons.



Displaying one of their many sewing projects

"Jill opened my eyes to totally different things I never would have done otherwise," said Lizz of her Big Sister.

Since both Lizz and Jill

lived on the

North Shore, the two took advantage of what their surroundings had to offer: canoeing on the

Ipswich River, riding bikes on the Minuteman Bike Path and Breakheart Reservation, ice skating at the Peabody ice rink and visiting the Peabody Essex Museum and the Salem Witch Museum. Jill and Lizz would see each other almost every week and Jill noticed how Lizz's confidence grew when it came to trying new activities and facing new challenges, especially athletic ones. Lizz had never been skiing before, so Jill signed them up for Big Sister's annual Wachusett Mountain trip. Faced with her first ride on a chair lift, 11 year-old Lizz looked at her Big Sister and said "You mean we're going up on that?" With her Big Sister by her side for support, Lizz boldly boarded the chair lift. After overcoming her initial fear, Lizz enjoyed her first experience on the slopes so much that she continued to go on school-sponsored ski trips after that day.

**"Being with Jill was something I could count on every week. Who knows what I would have gotten into if I hadn't had that constant in my life?"**

When they weren't busy sharing new adventures, Little Sister Lizz and Jill would often go for walks and just talk about what was happening in Lizz's life. At home Lizz would vie for attention with her younger sister from their single mom, but with Jill, Lizz knew their time together was just for her. "She would just listen to me. It was great," said Lizz. "She didn't preach, she just shared her experiences and I learned from them." Lizz also appreciated the consistency Jill provided in her life. "Being with Jill was something I could count on every week," said Lizz. "Who knows what I would have gotten into if I hadn't had that constant in my life?"

As Lizz experienced the ups and downs of middle school and high school, Jill was there every

step of the way to support her. Lizz knew

she could trust Jill and talk to her about things like what boy she had a crush on or even the heartbreak of failing her first driving test. "I knew I could tell her anything and she wouldn't judge me," said Lizz. As Lizz progressed onto college she would defer to Jill's sewing expertise when she needed help with her fashion design projects. When Lizz moved into her first off-campus apartment at college, Jill was there to help and offered a set of dishes as a housewarming gift.

Today, Jill maintains a relationship with both Lizz and Lizz's mother who is grateful for the role Jill has played in her daughter's life. Lizz is currently keeping busy as a young woman in her early 20s balancing a job at Stride Rite's corporate offices and a boyfriend. However, she and her former Big Sister recently got together for dinner and reminisced about the past while looking forward to the future as well. "She has grown up to be such a lovely, confident young woman, while still full of warmth and laughter!" said Jill. "I foresee us staying in touch well into the future and continuing our wonderful sisterhood."

It is that sisterhood that helped Little Sister Lizz confidently navigate her way from childhood to adulthood. Today, Lizz knows that no matter where she is in life, she can always depend on her Big Sister Jill.



Rollerblading around the North Shore



Attending a Big Sister Appreciation Breakfast

# Focus On: Girl Power

While "Girl Power" is a term often thrown around in mainstream media to entice younger girls to buy into the latest lip gloss craze or pop music phenomenon, at Big Sister "Girl Power" is all about empowering our Little Sisters. Girl Power is the name given to our safety workshop created for Little Sisters ages 7-11 and their Big Sisters. The workshop is held four times a year and is run by three Big Sister social workers who have been specifically trained to facilitate Girl Power programs.

The one-day program originated from the national Child Assault Prevention Project and evolved into Girl Power as Big Sister's social work staff used their gender-specific expertise to tailor the curriculum into a dynamic workshop just for Big and Little Sisters. Like all of our mentoring programs, Girl Power is intended to create a safe space for Little Sisters to address issues and challenges they may be facing with the support of their Big Sister. Central to the workshop is the Girl's Bill of Rights (*see inset*). This Bill of Rights helps create a safe space by outlining what a "right" is and what rights each and every girl is entitled to. Once each of the rights is discussed and understood by the group, all Big and Little Sisters sign it to represent a group commitment.

The social workers then act out skits which demonstrate different scenarios the Little Sisters may encounter: dealing with strangers, responding

to bullying and sexual harassment and even what to do when faced with sexual abuse. Each skit is followed by provocative questions for Big and Little Sisters to discuss. This not only builds the Little Sister's confidence in dealing with these situations, but also opens lines of communication for matches to become more comfortable talking about sensitive issues with each other. "The workshop gave my Little Sister the language to discuss difficult subjects with me," said Karen Graves, a Big Sister who attended Girl Power with her 10 year-old Little Sister Brianna. In the end, Little Sisters leave feeling not only more comfortable talking with their Big Sisters, but also more confident about themselves. "I found Girl Power helpful because it made me feel sure about who I am," said one Little Sister after attending the workshop.

It is essential to Big Sister's work that our programs not only give Little Sisters the confidence, competence and caring they need to succeed, but also continue to evolve with the needs of today's girls. Recently, Girl Power participants began receiving take-home resource guides. One guide is for the Little Sister's family, explaining Girl Power and giving parents or guardians the resources to advocate for their child as well as recognize warning signs of problems their child might be facing. The other guide is given to Big Sisters so they can review the topics covered at Girl Power and continue to reinforce what was learned with

their Little Sisters. Further innovations to be made to Girl Power include plans to incorporate

skits dealing with cyber-bullying and online safety, adding a discussion about domestic violence and creation of a workbook for Little Sisters about how they can continue to make safe, healthy decisions for themselves.

"As much as the program is about informing girls and helping them protect themselves, it is also about celebrating the power and potential of each Little Sister," said Aviva Lubowsky, a Big Sister social worker and Girl Power facilitator. By giving Little Sisters the tools they need to make healthy decisions and develop strong self-esteem, we are redefining the meaning of "Girl Power".



*Girl Power graduates show off their certificates*

## The Girl's Bill of Rights

- You have the right to trust yourself.
- You have the right to say "no" when you do not want to be touched.
- You have the right to say "no" without feeling guilty.
- You have the right to stand up for yourself.
- You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
- You have the right to seek safety.
- You have the right to protect yourself in the best way you can.
- You have the right to ask for help.
- You have the right to be honest with adults.
- You have the right to speak up when you feel uncomfortable.
- You have the right to use your voice.

## Did You Know?

January is National Mentoring Month! National Mentoring Month (NMM) highlights mentoring and the positive impact it can have on young lives. Spearheaded by the Harvard Mentoring Project, MENTOR, and the Corporation for National and Community Service, the first ever NMM was held January 2002. This month-long outreach campaign focuses national attention on the need for mentors, as well as how all of us—individuals, businesses, government agencies, schools, faith communities and nonprofits—can work together to increase the number of mentors and assure brighter futures for our young people.

During the month of January, Big Sister will be celebrating all of the women who give their time each year to volunteer as Big Sisters through our mentoring programs for girls. Make sure you take the time to thank someone who has been a mentor to you!

## 2007 MATCHMAKER CLUB

The following individuals, corporations and foundations made gifts or pledge payments of \$100 or more to Big Sister's Annual Fund between July 28 and November 29, 2007 (excluding Big in Boston donations). Thank you to our generous supporters!

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# Frightening Fun at the Community-Based Halloween Party

**O**n October 20, the only scary part of the day was how much fun the 82 matches were having at **Big Sister's Community-Based Mentoring Halloween Party**. Each year, the Halloween Party provides plenty of tricks, treats, smiles and laughter to our Community-Based Big and Little Sisters, as well as our Big for a Day volunteers and Little Sisters who are waiting to be matched with a Big Sister. As the matches approached the gate to the South End's Blackstone Community Center they

smiled proudly, holding hands and making last minute adjustments to each other's carefully thought out costumes.

Inside the community center, matches were treated to a spooktacular array of Halloween-themed activities, such as creepy cookie decorating, making spooky pins and magnets in the shape of witches, ghosts and bats, a frighteningly fun Big and Little Sister costume relay race and hair-raising Halloween makeovers at the nail and face painting table. The festivities culminated with the much-anticipated Costume Parade where Big and Little Sisters got to show off their costumes, from the silly to the scary, and win prizes for their creativity.

"Funniest" costume was awarded to a Big and Little Sister dressed up as a turkey and a Pilgrim, "Scariest" to a pair of masked ghouls, "Most Creative" to a match dressed as the weather and "Best Duo" went to Big Sister "Jason Varitek" and Little Sister "Josh Beckett". This year's all-around Best Costume award went to a Little Sister

dressed as Pebbles Flintstone—complete with bone hair accessory and dinosaur-skin dress—who took home two passes to Good Time Emporium for her and her Big Sister to enjoy.

The day turned out to be a treat for all, particularly the 30 Little Sisters in attendance who are waiting to be matched and were able to experience the fun and laughter of having a Big Sister for a day. As we continue to engage more of Greater Boston's women and raise more money to support our gender-specific mentoring programs, our goal is to see all of these girls back again next year with a Big Sister of their own!



*And the forecast for today is...*



*Have you seen my dinosaur around anywhere?*

## Big Sister Rides Toward Success

**S**aturday, September 29, dawned warm and sunny...the perfect day for a bike ride. But in Foxborough, MA, 26 dedicated individuals were not just gearing up for a leisurely ride, they were getting their bicycles in gear and strapping on their helmets for Big Sister as they participated in this year's **Rodman Ride for Kids**. The Rodman Ride for Kids is an umbrella matching gift charity that raises funds for children's related social service agencies throughout Massachusetts. The Ride is a 25, 50, or 100-mile non-competitive cycling tour, held each fall since 1991.

Team Big Sister's riders were charged with raising at least \$750 each in sponsorships to support our mentoring programs for girls, but they surpassed their goal and raised **more than \$20,000!** A huge thank you goes out to our riders who went above and beyond our fundraising goals for this event, as well as to all those who generously donated to them. Both the number of riders and the money raised were unprecedented in Big Sister's history of participating in Rodman Ride. With an average cost of \$1,000 to make and support a Big and Little Sister match, the money raised by our riders will go toward matching

another 20 girls in Greater Boston with a caring, adult female mentor. We would like to congratulate these incredible individuals for their efforts.

### Team Big Sister Riders 25-mile Tour

Sarah Berson, Duffy Bond, Colleen Fitzpatrick, Courtney Gerhart, Jessica Good, Susan Hooper, Maren Johnson, Kristen Kohlmeyer, Meg MacPherson, Daniel O'Toole, Charlie Phillips, Deborah Re, Peter Reinhart, Mia Roberts, Allison Rogers, Doug Romich, Trevor Romich, Lisa Scannell and Pat Tietbohl.

### 50-mile Tour

Jessie Saacke, Stephanie Scibilia and Allison Vasil

Not only did we have 22 members of Team Big Sister, we also had several wonderful individuals who volunteered their time to help out at Rodman Ride. These people are Big Sister staff members, friends and family members of riders and Big and Little Sister matches. A big thank you to our volunteers for spending their Saturday afternoon supporting our team.

### Big Sister Volunteers

Big for a Day volunteer, Gail Baker, Big Sister Julie Stephenson with Little Sister Lydia, Big Sister Nancy Christiansen with Little Sister Angelique, Big Sister Amanda Wells with Little Sister Hayleigh, Big Sister Leah Mastrototaro with Little Sister Arismar, Scott Matthews, Big Sister staff member Diane Zipoli, Big Sister staff member Sheila McCabe and her friend Katie Klister, Big Sister staff member Lionelle Demosthene and her sister Lise McKenzie, and Kathy and Tom Johnson, parents of Big Sister staff member and rider Maren Johnson.

We hope to see everyone again next year along with even more new faces who are willing to go the extra mile (or 25!) for Greater Boston's girls!



*Go Team Big Sister!*

Happy New Year!

What's your resolution for 2008? At Big Sister we're resolving to continue our mission of helping Greater Boston's girls realize their full potential and we need you to make a resolution to help us. Please consider hosting a Make the Circle Bigger event to recruit women or raise money for our mentoring programs...or become a Big Sister yourself! As evidenced by the quotes below, your support truly does make a difference:

"My Big Sister Amanda has shown her heart to me and made me feel like I am an important part of her life."

- Little Sister Mercedes

"My Big Sister supports and challenges me, and also exposes me to new things."

-Little Sister Champagne

"Because of my Big Sister Meg, I am able to accomplish things I really like. She has made me strong."

-Little Sister Gloria

Best wishes in the months to come,

Response \_\_\_\_\_

Deborah Re

Chief Executive Officer



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