

## **Big Brothers makes Big Difference**

**(This article was published on page 31 in the September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004 issue of *Burnaby Now*)**

Teague lives in Burnaby with his mom, three sisters, two cats and a dog. Given that the only other male in the household is one of the cats, it's no wonder that the ten-year old jumped at the chance to get a Big Brother. And while he had to wait for two years before he was matched with his Big Brother, Ari Freitag, Teague says it was worth the wait.

Freitag & Teague have been matched for 15 months, and it's clear that a pretty special friendship has formed. They both admit to being nervous when they first met. Freitag says it was like being on a first date. "I wondered whether or not he would like me," he says, smiling at the memory. On their first outing they went bowling. That turned out to be a less-than-perfect 'first date', as it was 10 pin and the balls were too heavy for Teague. They put the bumper pads up but Freitag's balls kept bouncing off the pads and knocking down all the pins. Despite Freitag's concern that things were not getting off to a flying start, Teague says he had a lot of fun.

Since then they have been more successful in choosing activities that match their skills and interests. They have gone to Science World, visited the Planetarium, watched the Canucks beat the Oilers, hit the mini-golf course, and gone to a Lions game. They have even gone bowling again! This past winter, Teague learned to snowboard so every week they headed up to Cypress Mountain. Hanging out has brought out their mischievous natures and their love of practical jokes. Freitag says that Teague 'gets him' and Teague says Freitag is fun and silly.

Freitag, 33, became a Big Brother because of a powerful experience that he had as a teenager. When he was in grade 12, and 'blowing it off', he went into a group home. He met a man named Ron, and while he only knew Ron for six weeks, Freitag remembers every single day he spent with him. Ron taught him sign language, origami, and how to fix a bike, and he made a lasting impression on Freitag. Thanks to Ron he started taking school more seriously and he graduated. Freitag grew up in a single-mother household without any adult male role models and Ron came into his life at a pivotal moment. Freitag knows first-hand that something profound can come from the simple act of spending time with a young person and the time he spends with Teague is his way of honouring Ron.

Despite his motivations, he hesitated because of the commitment and the 'what if' factor. What if he moved? What if he and his wife got pregnant? They were trying to start a family but it was taking longer than they thought. So Freitag figured that while they were waiting, he should go ahead and become a Big Brother.

Freitag admits he had some common misperceptions about being a Big Brother. He thought it was going to be like social work and would be a huge responsibility. But once he found out that it's about spending a few hours a week having fun, he was ready to sign up. "You are always going to spend four hours a week doing something, so it might as well be this. Besides, I get out of doing chores. But don't write that, my wife hasn't figured out my avoidance techniques yet."

Freitag says that seeing Teague "is the highlight of my week" and that "the match won't end until he gets sick of me." As they joke around with each other, the mutual affection is obvious and it is clear Teague is no where near being sick of Freitag. This is a friendship that could last a life time.

*September is Big Brothers Month and volunteers are needed in Burnaby. For more information please call 604.876.2447 or [www.bigbrothersvancouver.com](http://www.bigbrothersvancouver.com).*