

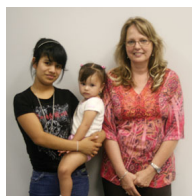
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By VICTORIA CALDERON

• Leader & Times

Imagine a shy little girl in kindergarten. The kind of little girl who won't talk at all when surrounded by unfamiliar people, but when alone with a family member, will talk nonstop. That's the type of child Dalia was when she first entered the Big Brothers Big Sisters program as a Little.

Teresa Schiltz's daughter, who was in high school at the time, was originally matched with Dalia. However, she had to go to college two years into the match. Luckily, Schiltz was kind enough to take over mentoring the young girl, who was about to start second grade. Ever since then, the pair have been inseparable, and it shows.



Dalia and Schiltz have bonded over many things, such as inside jokes, shopping, going to the movies and eating. At the mere mention of a random word, the two begin cracking up over what seems to an outsider like nothing at all. One will say, "the chocolate police" or "Charlie the artist," and the other will begin to giggle. That's just how their relationship works.

"Sometimes we get to laughing so hard we can hardly control it," Schiltz explained.

Schiltz also takes Dalia to trips out of town, and Dalia helps out at Optical 20/20, where Schiltz is the manager. Occasionally, these two interests become intertwined. "We took her on one of our office trips when she was quite a bit younger," Schiltz said, when thinking about their favorite memory together. "We had a good time. She blended right in."

Both ends of the Match have gained a lot from the program. Dalia has gained confidence and come out of her shell considerably since she was in kindergarten, when she could hardly talk to Schiltz, let alone become best friends with her. However, that's exactly what happened. "I can look up to her. It's really nice to just have someone there for me," Dalia said.

And for Schiltz, in a way she has gained not only another daughter in Dalia, but a granddaughter as well. Dalia has a one-year-old daughter, and since Schiltz doubts her own kids are ever going to have children, "it's like having a grandbaby," she said.

Although they have never had any trouble getting along, they have had scheduling issues. With her job as a manager, Schiltz finds it's sometimes like working five jobs, and it's difficult to find time where the two of them can get together. Dalia occasionally has to initiate contact. When they do get the chance to bond, though, they always make the best of it.

As for the future, they plan on staying in touch long after their Match is considered closed. Dalia is planning on staying in Liberal after high school, so it will be easy for them to see each other often. "I don't think [the Match] will ever really close. I think we're close enough that we'll always keep in touch, even if Big Brothers Big Sisters isn't involved. We'll still be Matched," Schiltz said.

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