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Six years ago the security of Liam's family as he'd always known it was about to be shattered. His father was battling immeasurable mental health issues and making unsafe decisions. This little boy was too young to understand the whole situation but could feel the effects of what was going on.

As Liam's dad became nonexistent in his world, his spirit faded quickly. He was hurting so badly inside, and as he wept, asked his mother, "Does my dad even love me?" Alongside the hurt he was experiencing from his father, Liam was struggling academically and socially.

Liam was making minimal progress in reading and math, but he kept going back every day and tried as hard as he could. Even though he practiced reading nightly at home and was pulled from class for extra help, his progress was minimal. Being pulled from class left Liam feeling even worse because he could not experience school as his peers did. Again, he could feel the effects of what was going on but couldn't understand why he was so different. Liam's self-esteem continued spiraling downward as he was handed paper after paper with "U" for unsatisfactory. This led him to calling himself "dumb" and "stupid."

Eventually, during Liam's second-grade year, he gave up. He quit trying, refused to do work in the classroom, and began arguing with his teacher. He was becoming incredibly withdrawn, shy, argumentative, and embarrassed about his size, lack of a father, and his grades. This nine-year-old boy started refusing to have his picture taken, and his smile was nonexistent. Liam began having panic attacks, and lived in a space of fear.

One of the worst moments was when Liam told his mother he "just wanted to die" and that "nobody could love him because his dad doesn't love him." His mother was scared. Despite her immeasurable love, his mother couldn't give him what he needed. She enrolled Liam in counseling and began seeking answers for his academic challenges. She also made the decision to get him a Big Brother.



January of his second grade year.

From the moment Liam and his Big Brother met, they had an instant connection. They bonded over Pokémon and animals, a favorite for both of them. She explained this bond as one that nobody else could replicate; one that only his Big Brother could share with him and one that is necessary to his success. Their connection was shown in the immediate willingness Liam showed to be vulnerable with his Big Brother. Liam was talkative, he went swimming without saying he was "fat," and was learning that he could rely on a male figure in his life again.

Liam's Big Brother was consistent and true to his word, showing up every time he said he would and spending quality time with him. He would come home and be in such a great mood; something his mother hadn't seen in a long time. When Liam was struggling, he would call his Big Brother to get advice, a pep talk, or reassurance that he was still there for him.



The summer between his second and third-grade year.

Last year, Liam was diagnosed with dyslexia and anxiety, and his dad remains absent. Despite the adversity, he's changed. He is now smiling, teeth and all, and sometimes asks for his picture to be taken. His self-confidence is restored, and he values himself. His outlook, his hope, and his ability to cope with his unique adversity has increased tremendously. Liam is happy again.

Liam loves reading, he is excited to do his homework, and his third-grade teacher says she cannot believe this is the boy whose record was so negative last year. She says, "he is one of my best students, he is eager to learn, helpful, and incredibly kind." He didn't want school to end this year.

Together, Liam and his Big Brother do crazy things like put Mentos in coke bottles and watch it explode in the mall parking lot. They do everyday things like shop at Sam's Club and then enjoy a slice of pizza and a soda afterward. Together they relax, watch movies, and have snacks on Friday nights. They do active things like go swimming and hiking together.

Liam's mother feels a significant part of his renewed happiness is due to his relationship with his Big Brother. The connection they

share has helped him learn to love himself and life again. Liam says he felt "awful" before his Big Brother came into his life, but now he feels "awesome".



November of his third-grade year.