SarahJean O’Neill Debut Benefit Art Showcase

Over a year and a half ago, I recognized that something was missing in my life. I was lacking an outlet for helping people. I missed my time as a swim coach and a tutor to kids in special education programs. One of my passions is making myself useful to anyone who needs help. So, I signed up to be a Big Sister with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. I was matched with a sixteen year old girl with an incredible drive as well as a shared love for art.

I chose to make art and host an auction art show in order to raise money to benefit BBBS because I wanted to give back to the organization that has given me a friend in my little sister as well as the opportunity to mentor her and learn from her. My Little Sister is one of the most hard working people I’ve ever met. She is constantly putting in work at school, showing an ethic and drive to take control of and better herself through her education. She is homeschooled and has taken that as an opportunity to dive into multiple languages, sciences, and arts. She is also an accomplished and adventurous athlete, trying everything from skateboarding to competitive speed-skating. She has had to come back from injury, exemplifying what it means to remain focused and determined. My Little Sister has shown me what hard work looks like, and I want to give back to the organization that gave me the opportunity to know her.

Money that is donated to Big Brothers Big Sisters, 90% of it, goes to supporting relationships like mine and my Little Sister’s. The mentoring program at BBBS is free for both of us, and donations help both of us keep having a free experience. Donated money also goes toward paying for activities for Bigs and Littles to do together. For example, frequently made available are tickets to college games and always available are rec center passes. The Big Brothers Big Sisters center also provides a wonderful opportunity for enrichment, with high quality facilities, like the robotics lab, the music room, and the weight room. Donations help to keep these facilities up to date. Donations also help to staff the BBBS program with background-checked professionals in childcare and relationship support.

I wanted to use a love that my Little and I share, our love for art, to give back to the organization that has done so much for us. I believe in BBBS and want to do what I can to keep it the life changing and valuable institution it is.

While the main goal of this project was to impact my community, it was also important for me to do it in a way that challenged myself as well. I have been doing art, mostly oil painting, for a couple years. I have always painted on small canvases, and decided a great way to push myself was to make big pieces. I wanted to paint on six foot canvases, and make something that made a big impression. Canvases, however, are very expensive. To fund my canvases, I set up a Go-Fund-Me; I used the Go-Fund-Me to raise money, but also to get the word out about my show and my intent. The fundraiser was successful, and I purchased three 6’x2’ canvases. The month of January, I painted a bison. The month of February I pained a bull moose, and in March I painted a brown trout. To give my pieces the biggest chance of success in bringing in money, I made wildlife my subject, as Wyomingites love wildlife art. (It doesn't hurt that I love wildlife art
myself.) I drafted an advertisement flier for my show and arranged to have the art show at Bond’s Brewery in Laramie on April 10. It was important for me to have the show at a new local business to help them as well. With the closures of school and businesses, my show was cancelled. However, that in no way means that the show will not eventually happen. I am so excited to host this event with Bond’s when it is deemed safe; I am eager to see how much my work end up contributing to BBBS!

When I was painting, I reflected a great deal on my purpose. I reminded myself constantly that I was so lucky to be able to turn my work as an artist into a method by which to give back to my community. I reminded myself that the relationship I have with my Little Sister is invaluable and the least I can do to thank her is take something we both love and show her there is success and purpose in it. I am capable of giving back, so it is necessary that I do so. This project has been powerful, and I cannot wait to see what it does ultimately.

Bison:

Buff
24”x72”

January 2020
Moose:

Misty Moose
24”x72”

February 2020
Trout:

Brownies in the Forest
March 2020

24”x72”