Because of Linda...
A Volunteer Tutor Becomes Family

Janet Brown

PRE-READING: What makes someone family?

Eleven years ago my sister had a fire in her apartment. My sister had taken us in because my mom was in the hospital with cancer. The fire destroyed our apartment. We had to move to a shelter for two years. My sister got her new apartment first and moved out of the shelter, but I couldn’t move with her. I moved to another shelter in Manhattan, and I started attending a program. It was there that I met my good friend Linda.

Linda was my volunteer tutor for a reading program for people who want to get their GED. I was her first student. She was my escape from the shelter, and the program became my sanctuary. Living at the shelter was a scary experience. At first I had a lot of anger about being in a shelter for two years without my family. Each day when I left the shelter to see Linda, I felt relief. I began to see that learning was helping me plan my future. I began to understand that this shelter wouldn’t be forever.

Linda listened to me tell stories about my life, especially my time in the shelter. We became good friends. She introduced me to her sisters and her brother. After the program’s hours, Linda would sometimes tutor me at her brother’s office. She was his secretary. Soon we started celebrating our birthdays together. We continued meeting for three years. She sent me to a reading program at the local library, where I won an award achieving the highest level in the program. From there, I went to a GED program. Just as I was getting started on my GED, my mother died and I stopped going to classes.

Linda continued to tutor me and encouraged me to go back to school. Four years ago, I finally returned to school, and I still attend classes today. Linda and I continue to meet, but now as friends. She stopped tutoring because of her health and age; she has high blood pressure and difficulty walking.

Linda is like a mother to me. She showed me caring and parenting when I most needed it. When my mother passed, she took her place in a loving way. She makes sure I have the support and guidance that I need to finish my education. Linda did more for me than my own family, but I understand why because we were all in the same situation. Because of Linda, celebrations are a special time for me. She gave me a family to celebrate them with. To this day, we still celebrate our birthdays together.

Janet Brown is a student at Mid-Manhattan Learning Center #5 in New York, NY. Janet was born in Brooklyn, NY. Although she has faced many challenges in her life, she remains positive by focusing on her goal of earning her high school diploma and maintaining good friendships.

POST-READING: What are some specific ways Linda was like family to Janet?

Read the essays on pp. 4-5 and make a Venn diagram showing what is similar and what is different about the writers’ stories.