

At 102, he's still 'Big Brother' after 53 years

BY WILL JASON
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A man believed to be the country's oldest surviving "big brother" hosted his 67-year-old "little brother" last week at his home in Laguna Woods Village.

Milt Adamson, 102, met Phil Levinson in 1956 through Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters of Los Angeles. The two kept in touch, even as Levinson shipped off with the Army to Germany and Vietnam, and later moved to Seattle.

Now Levinson, who lives in Portland, visits Adamson every few months, and the two speak almost daily.

"Each of us responded to the other and neither of us stopped," Levinson said of their relationship.

Emile Perkins, marketing director for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Orange County, said she recently learned from the national Big Brothers organization that Adamson is the oldest living Big Brother in the U.S.

Adamson was 49 when he met Levinson, who was 14 and had recently lost his father. The elder of two brothers, Levinson said he felt pressure to grow up quickly.

"One of the most common things I heard was 'you're the man of the family now,'" Levinson said. "My connection with Milt really got me away from believing that. It was like, 'it's OK to be a teenager.'"

Adamson took Levinson to baseball games and the driving range, and brought him with him on business trips. The two kept in close contact while Levinson attended college.

Then, on Nov. 23, 1963 – the day after President John F. Kennedy's assassination – Adamson watched as his mentee, who had been a reservist, was sworn into commission in the Army. Levinson left five days later and, except for a few short visits, didn't return to California for more than four years.

"Our contact was letters," Levinson said.

When he returned to California the relationship picked up where it left off, and Adamson, who moved to Orange County in 1979, has since attended major events including Levinson's wedding. Now, after 53 years, it's Levinson's turn to take care of his big brother.

"When I have a problem I can look to Phil," Adamson said.



A photo taken of Milt Adamson (L) and Phil Levinson in June of 1994. The two meet occasionally and keep in contact since they were matched through the Big Brother program in 1956.
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