



Gaming site helps reunite mother, daughter

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GLENFORD -- Melinda Jones always liked playing board games with her daughter, Tanya Lingafelter, because it brought the pair closer together.

But in 2003, a large fight caused a rift between the two women leading Jones, of Glenford, and Lingafelter, of Hollywood, Calif., to stop talking for about seven years.

With more than 2,000 miles separating her from her daughter, Jones worried she would never be able to salvage their relationship. Since board games were out of the question, she invited Lingafelter to play games with her on the social game site Winster.com.

After three months of chatting and playing together on Winster, Jones and her daughter are talking every day and planning a reunion this summer.

"I'm glad Winster has brought us back together," Jones said. "I don't know if we could have gotten as close if it wouldn't have been for the game."

A damaged relationship

A mother of four, Jones always had a good relationship with Lingafelter, her only daughter.

"We were really close," Jones said. "We would talk every day."

In 2001, Lingafelter moved to Hollywood and invited Jones to move in with her.

But Jones was unable to find a job in California and the financial stress took its toll, Lingafelter said.

After a huge falling out in 2003, Jones moved to Tennessee and later to Glenford.

"It was very hard for me," Lingafelter said. "I had my son during that time."

Jones also struggled without her daughter in her life, but she didn't know how to make things right.

In December 2009, Jones sent her daughter a Facebook message, wishing her happy holidays.

"I missed her a lot," Jones said. "I didn't know how it would go. I never knew if she would respond."

Lingafelter replied to the message and began talking to her mother on the phone every few months, but they remained distant.

"It was really awkward," Lingafelter said. "We really didn't know what to say."

In February, Jones started playing on Winster. Knowing her daughter loved playing games, she sent her an invitation.

Reconciliation

Created in 2006, Winster.com is a social gaming site that allows friends to play games together and win prizes, said Michelle Kaplan, co-founder.

Kaplan developed the site after realizing she was tired of playing stressful, competitive games.

"All the games on Winster are cooperative," Kaplan said. "It's a really positive friendly environment."

Players on the site use an online chat function to communicate while playing the different games.

"Because people talk so much and cooperate during these games, they build relationships," she said. "We have a lot of people who have reconnected."

Jones and Lingafelter began playing a game similar to a casino slot machine. Players can earn and trade pieces to win prizes.

While they played, they chatted about Jones' life in Glenford and Lingafelter's son.

Soon they were playing on Winster several times a week and talking and texting every day.

"It's great," Lingafelter said. "It seems like we are where we used to be several years ago."

Kaplan said she was touched to hear Jones and Lingafelter's story, but she isn't surprised Winster helped strengthen their bond.

"Winster is sort of a neutral ground; it's a happy place," she said. "It doesn't bring up old issues. You just have fun together."

Although she talks to her mother every day, Lingafelter is eager to see her again. She hopes to visit Ohio this summer.

But until then, she will be meeting her mother online to play games on Winster.

"It really helps to be able to play online with my mom," she said. "It helps me feel close to her even though she is far away."

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