

Big Papa

The Story of Big Papa

Introduction

I would like to introduce myself as Big Papa. I am the founder of Foster Anonymous, a 12-Step program for the Foster Care Community. But I would like you to know that there have been many more before me that were instrumental in my recovery through the 12-Steps. This knowledge is passed from one recovering person to another. In turn, I have brought the 12-Step program to others as a sponsor. I do this without recognition for myself. I do it for you. In the 12-Steps, we give freely of our time and services. Big Papa is just my anonymity. I am not in charge. This program belongs to all of us.

I use the name Big Papa because it helps me stay anonymous with the public, and it helps our members stay anonymous with the public as well. There are people in my life that I would like to protect their privacy. As far as anonymity when you are in public and you want to know if someone else is in the F.A. program, you can say, "Are you a friend of Big Papa?" without breaking your anonymity.

The Story of Big Papa

I am writing my story because, like many kids, I have dealt with similar painful situations caused by loss, death, the law, substance abuse, my own actions, and events out of my control. Some of the more severe tragedies came out of traumatic accidents. One instance occurred when I was younger. I went through a plate-glass window. I was in shock. I received 600 stitches and was in the hospital for two weeks. I thought when the stitches were taken out, I would be healed. I didn't realize the accident created tremendous trauma. It is important to remember these hardships in our childhood because it is where most of our destructive behaviors begin. When I did my 4th step, I thought it was everyone else's fault, but when I went over my part, I was taken back by how many times I played a role in it. As a result of going through a spiritual 12-Step solution, I have become a more worthy son, a better brother, a good friend, and a loving husband and father.

We all suffer trauma, some of it is small, and some of it is deep and long-lasting. We all process it differently. Even though our traumas are different, we bury them away into self. These traumas tend to change our behaviors, and some of the more intense tragedies can cause us wounds that won't heal. Once

these behaviors become part of our lives, they can cause us even more tragedies. These painful traumas become locked into self and are held in by fear, which keeps us from looking at them. It is a vicious cycle, the more tragedies we experience, the more pain we feel, which causes more fear, and deeper into self we go. This leads us into a dark hole of self that we cannot get out of.

The symptoms of these traumas come out in many different ways for different people. In and of myself, I couldn't remove or change my behaviors. I was in denial that they even existed. Yet, I continued to trip over my behaviors caused by my traumatic experiences. You will see how unresolved traumas changed me in my story. My behaviors continued to progress, and my life was extremely unmanageable. The behaviors that made my life unmanageable were self-centeredness, selfishness, egotistical, anti-authority, and anger. When it made me cocky, it was worse. I was diagnosed by therapists and psychiatrists with behavioral problems. They prescribed me many different medications and therapies that didn't work. They only made me feel worse. They were meant to treat the symptoms and never truly dealt with the trauma. My behaviors were an obstacle my whole life. They got worse and worse until I found a solution.

Like many others, I found the key to recovery in the 12-Steps. The behaviors are but a symptom, we must go to the source. This requires a 4th step inventory. The 4th step is a fearless inventory. God took me through my inventory without fear. It was the only way I could face my tragedies.

More of my story:

I grew up in the Midwest in the '70s during a time when kids could roam around the city with less restrictions than nowadays. It allowed me the ability to get away with things that I shouldn't. You will be able to see the progression of my behaviors from my childhood and why I hated authority, why I increasingly got in trouble, and how my life became more and more unmanageable.

From the beginning, I had a tendency to find an outlet and escape. I was a dreamer with big creative ideas. I built go-carts, minibikes, dirt bikes, and cars. I was always busy outside the house, whether it was playing sports or looking for a new hobby. That same creativity and drive found me in trouble as well. We had a big old house with a lot of brothers and sisters. As soon as people were asleep, I would slide down the drainpipe, and I was off and running and carousing with my friends. I loved throwing snowballs at cars

and getting them to chase me. I would stay out all night and sneak back in the morning.

God gave me the gift of sports. It was my great escape. Sports gave me a dopamine “high.” Sports were an outlet like a drug for me. I played every sport you can imagine, whether it was hang-gliding, downhill skiing, bungee jumping, or any of the mainstream sports – anything that gave me an adrenaline rush. I would get really good at a sport and then go on to the next. Either I would quit or get in a fight with the coach. I also tended to get in a lot of fights. I didn’t like anyone telling me what to do. I’ve always had a problem with authority, which interfered with school, sports, jobs, and the law.

I started stealing around the same time. I didn’t care about the things that I stole with my friends. I just enjoyed the risk that I might get caught. And one day, I finally did get caught and wound up being one of the first group of kids to go to “Scared Straight.” (Scared Straight was a program where juveniles were taken to spend a day in the life of an inmate in prison.) Most of the kids were crying, but I actually found it quite humorous. I didn’t recognize these were my defenses for my behaviors and consequences. After that phase of my life, I started hanging out with the older kids. Most of the kids my age would not do the things I was

doing. This is when I found drugs and alcohol. It was so much easier to party than it was to play sports to get my “highs.”

Deep down, no matter how good I was at sports or what I did, my confidence was low, and I felt less than. So, I bolstered it with my ego and used partying to feel normal. I took pride that I could out-drink or out-drug anybody. It was like throwing gas on the fire when I started partying in high school because I still had all my unresolved issues. I started using drugs at a very young age and became addicted. I couldn't stop, so I learned to try to cope with it. It was the most painful thing imaginable. However, I was a resilient kid, and I managed to get through high school. I knew that my life would go nowhere without a college degree, so I struggled with my addiction to drugs and alcohol throughout my college years, but this is where the nightmare began.

College was a place where it was okay to drink and do drugs like I did, so my addiction got worse, and the consequences became real. I got in trouble with the law for drugs, and I was ordered to go to a treatment center. As soon as I got out, I started drinking and using again. This dysfunction not only affected me, but it also affected my family. To step back, I had married my high school sweetheart during college,

and we had a son. So, my actions not only impacted me, but they also hurt my loved ones. I thought eventually I would grow up, but it would be quite a while before my life changed.

After I graduated from college, I became a stockbroker. It was something that I was good at right away, and it was fully charged with adrenaline. I made lots of money for my age, which I turned around and spent on traveling around, doing drugs, and partying. The business was a haven for my partying. Because I was good at my job, they would look the other way when I didn't show up or had to take leave for treatment. It was hard making excuses for myself, tripping over my behaviors, and manipulating my environment. At night the mental pain became unbearable, and in the mornings, I shook like crazy. Sometimes it was so bad I had to go to the hospital. But as soon as I got out, it would continue again. To an outsider, they would think I was totally crazy. Yet, I learned to live that way for many years. I wanted out, but I couldn't stop.

I continued to party. The stock market crashed in 1987, and we were getting into financial trouble. We almost lost everything. The treatment programs and the hospital visits continued. My wife was ready to take my son and leave me. My life had become totally

unmanageable, I was definitely powerless to help myself. I had been through treatment centers, halfway houses, many emergency rooms, and had trouble with the law.

I could tell you a million stories of all the adventures and dangerous behavior that I have gone through, both drunk and sober. Still, they would just amount to the same thing, which was unresolved tragedies from when I was young and the wreckage I created along the way. I am trying to share with you where some of this behavior came from and the depths that I had gone to before recovering.

I went through tremendous pain and suffering and tried many things to get out of it and find a better way. The funny thing is, I had no idea what made me do the things I did any more than the people that tried to help me. I really tried to turn it around, be a good man, and have others proud of me, but I just didn't understand how to do it. This brings me to the saying, "Lack of power is our dilemma." Left to my own devices, I end up in conflict with everything and everyone.

I can assure you that the fosters' difficult experiences are quite similar to mine when I was young. Drugs and alcohol are just a symptom of our behaviors, and the

behaviors come from our tragic experiences. I will now show you what I learned, what I did, and what actually worked. I experienced all types of different therapies and treatments. I talked to psychiatrists, doctors, and therapists. I was prescribed pills. I learned all different types of therapies like cognitive behavior, behavior modification, PTSD, breathing techniques, and anger management, and attended 100's of 12-Step meetings. I could recite everything that treatment offered, but I still continued to suffer. One day when I was at a 12-Step support meeting and totally out of things to try, I looked up at the 12 steps. I always knew they were there, but I wasn't interested in doing them because I thought it would make me a religious fanatic. But at that point, I thought it was better than dying, and I was willing to try anything. I got a sponsor who took me through the steps. I did the steps specifically as guided by my sponsor. My sponsor showed me I could do the steps with a God of my own understanding. When I understood this, I was relieved, and this is when the steps really took hold for me. I had a spiritual experience like the 12-Steps promise. I was just trying to quit drugs and alcohol, but the steps gave me so much more. All the promises came to fruition. God went to the source and removed the problem. My behaviors balanced out. Alcohol and drugs became neutral, and I never

drank again. I lost the desire to drink with no effort on my part. I no longer worried about money. I felt God in my everyday life. He took all the traumatic behaviors from my life. He turned them into a positive. God left me with a wisdom that has guided me all through my life. He taught me how to forgive. He guided me in my business and made it successful. He gave me peace, serenity, and wisdom I never thought possible. These are only a few of the promises I received as a result of doing the 12-Steps. I sponsored a lot of people (all of whom have recovered that did the 12 steps). I have been sober for over 31 years. I have an awesome relationship with my wife, sons, grandsons, and the rest of my family. I've had a successful career. I owned two stock brokerage firms, and I'm financially independent. I was given a freedom I could never have imagined. I was given a fellowship with others in the same boat as me. I've known these people for all these years, and they are like family to me. All my dreams have come true due to the fellowship and experience of working the 12-Steps. I had retired very early at this point of my life, and I was bored and wasn't ready to settle down. I didn't want to play golf all day and hang around with some of my older friends who did nothing but complain about their ailments. I was sitting there wondering what to do. I think of myself

as a contrarian. I do the opposite of what everyone else is doing. I was trying to come up with a way I could spend my life and be of service to other people. Out of the blue, a thought came to me, "Why don't I adopt a kid, and help him through school, show him how to play sports, and help him through his career?" I had never thought of doing this before, so I looked at the thought as a spiritual answer. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea. He would fit right in with my boys, and I would have plenty of time to teach him my experiences. My wife and I completed a Home Study with a social worker and completed the MAPP training class (which are requirements to become eligible for adoption). I thought it would be a really easy process. We found that it took a lot of time and disappointment with not much progress. During this process, I did research and discovered a lot about the behaviors of the fosters. Although our traumas may or may not be exactly the same, they create a similar spiritual sickness and lead to uncontrollable behaviors. It became apparent that the children might be powerless over their behaviors resulting from the tragic experiences they had been through. It occurred to me that a 12-Step program may offer some real solutions for recovery for the foster community that suffer due to their losses and hardships. Of the total people who have recovered in

12-Step programs, most of them suffered from the same childhood traumas that foster kids suffer. Our behaviors are very similar to most 12-Step programs. It became clear to me that a spiritual solution could help. I am uniquely qualified to be of service to them. I'm confident that it will work for the kids too.

I have a lot of faith in the 12-Step recovery process. I've seen it work when nothing else could. I checked to see if anyone else was using a 12-Step program for foster children, and I didn't find anything. If I would have gotten the kid that I was trying to adopt the first time, I may never have thought of creating this F.A. program. This isn't an end-all for the fosters but something that would add to all that the Foster Care community already provides. It would be a lifelong support program where the fosters could develop a bond between foster-to-foster. The healing takes place when one foster talks to another, and they develop their own support group that lasts for a lifetime. I prefer to call it a family. Unity and love will exist in this new family.

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