

How I Discovered the Big-Hearted Life

by Randy J. Schum

"I'm sorry, but there is no known cure. Medication can offer some relief, but you'll need to change your lifestyle—drastically." The doctor continued, "It's commonly known as fibromyalgia. The good news is that it won't kill you. The bad news is that you'll probably have to live with it the rest of your life." The rheumatologist had just diagnosed the chronic pain and fatigue syndrome that had plagued me for over a decade. Years before, I noticed telltale symptoms, but they were minor. So, I just ignored them. During that time, I was engaged in charitable activities at church and elsewhere. Overall, I enjoyed good health and didn't let anything get me down. My family was growing and prospering. Life was good. Yet the pain and fatigue steadily grew worse. Though I looked good on the outside, my internal health was taking a nosedive—fast. I needed more sleep to function normally. Alternative foods and eating habits became a necessity, not a choice. I saw different specialists and tried numerous medications, but none provided answers or the hope of relief. I realized the need to reevaluate my commitments and change my lifestyle and had to make some hard personal decisions—reducing or altogether eliminating many activities, even Big-Hearted ones, or so I thought.

One morning, during a quiet time of reflection I asked myself, "what's life all about, and what is my purpose on this little planet?" Was it just about how many possessions I could amass and personal pleasures fulfill? If that was the sum total of my existence, my life would be so empty. I recognized that I was on this earth not only to obtain fulfillment from receiving, but even more from giving, and that I possessed the capacity to love and act with Big-Heartedness.

Through circumstances that shaped my life, I realized that Big-Heartedness was not what I previously imagined. Maybe all I needed to do was simply use my God-given gifts, no matter how small, to help others. At the time, it was all I could do. I soon discovered that a simple phone call or encouraging greeting card could lift a person's spirit. I found that a brief prayer and gentle hug could relieve someone's burdens. The evidence stared me in the face. I saw that the simple, ordinary things I did for people had a more far-reaching impact than I realized.

I began to think about the many wonderful Big-Hearted people I had met over the years. It warmed my heart and put a smile on my face when they came to mind—special people who had sown good things into my life. They saw my potential and encouraged me to look beyond what I could see with my eyes—into the realm of faith and possibility. Many of these kind souls touched my life in ways that some people would consider insignificant, yet they inspired my life greatly. I soon experienced the truth that it doesn't take a college education, great wisdom, or even extraordinary abilities to be a Big-Hearted person and make a difference in people's lives. As I exercised Big-Heartedness, I found that it progressively became part of my nature and began to see opportunities unfold at work, in my neighborhood, in my church, or wherever my footsteps took me. The more I performed Big-Heartedness, the more the desire grew in me. But the most rewarding discovery was that I found I could help change people's lives for good and that indeed has made all the difference.

— Adapted from the Book, *Big-Hearted People; Make A Difference By Living Simply, Giving Freely and Loving Deeply*.