

*Love, joy, and peace are a state of mind. We choose them.*

# Behind The BIG RED DOOR

From Trauma To Success—  
*Personally, Professionally, And Spiritually*

Angela Webber  
*(Angie Kay)*



INDIE BOOKS  
INTERNATIONAL

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*This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.*

*I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.*

*I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is sort of a splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, "A SPLENDID TORCH"

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# Contents

Foreword	ix
Preface	1
Chapter 1 Two Families Become Three	5
Chapter 2 Freedom Isn't Free	17
Chapter 3 Emotions	27
Chapter 4 Knickknacks On The Shelf	35
Chapter 5 The Cycle Of A Relationship	45
Chapter 6 Five Degrees Of A Customer	51
Chapter 7 Success Starts With You	61
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	81
<i>About The Author</i>	85
<i>Author's Notes</i>	87
<i>Praise From A Friend</i>	89
<i>Works Cited</i>	91

# Foreword

**A**s a clinical neuropsychologist, I observe the importance of mental health in the workplace and in family life on a daily basis. When I earned my PhD from Georgia State University, I had the ambition to improve people's lives by better understanding the power of neuropsychology. In my role as a leadership coach and mentor to high-performance teams, I cannot overstate the importance of the right mental attitude.

In today's society, we are socialized and taught to deal with negative emotions in one of two ways: (a) push them down, suppress them, and hide them away from ourselves and others; (b) let them flow freely as you wish, spewing toxic negativity everywhere. Neither of these approaches is healthy for us as individuals or our society.

Author Angie Webber, through her unique writing style, captures the topic in a way no academic or self-help book can. She lets the reader experience her thoughts, feelings, and actions in a unique and effective way. And her message shows the way to a better approach to dealing with emotions. It is not an approach

of struggling to hide them or spewing them forth, but one of managing them in ways that are adaptive rather than maladaptive.

As Angie points out, our response to our emotions is our responsibility. We get to decide whether to bring calm or anger to the storm. While Angie comes at the issue of managing emotions from a layperson's perspective, and we would not agree on every point she makes, I respect the passion she has for the subject, and her main message is spot-on and accurate. As she points out, processing our emotions and learning to manage them takes time and requires hard work.

For the person who wants to better themselves and manage their mindset, self-examination of our hearts and our minds is a necessary tool. Thanks, Angie, for sounding this alarm and sharing your insights on the importance of managing emotions.

**Steve Swavely, PhD**

Founder and president of Evolution Leadership Coaching,  
author of *Ignite Your Leadership*

# Preface

In customer service, we don't often take life into consideration. What makes individuals react the way they do, or what helps them to be more satisfied and comfortable working with us? The baggage that comes with interacting with the public, co-workers, and bosses can cause us to lose opportunities for success.

The scariest part of opening the Big Red Door is seeing what lies behind it. Having the courage to lay out all the internal struggles means pulling down that handle to peek behind it. We are often surprised to find this is where all the hopes and dreams that we longed for were hidden.

All the years of hiding the hurts and fears that traumatic emotions left behind, we find a new path to journey where we can process the isolation of loneliness from hiding, our bleeding hearts and broken spirits from the sharp tongues and bruises from the blows that life dished out so willingly.

My own journey in its raw state, while sad, was the beginning of all the life lessons that I would need to find my success. The trauma I endured gave me the drive to continue to push past all

the smoke and mirrors of deceit to find the success that is purposed for my life's ambitions.

The emotions that dwell right under the surface of our flesh are one of the keys to success. Sharing how I championed the challenges that tried to hold me back can empower us to find our success by leaning on the techniques I will share.

Understanding trauma and how it affects us and those around us will guide us through the difficulty of emotions and how to harness them so that the battles we fight to hold ourselves together will not hold us back or cause us to hold back others from finding their true success in life.

Many will stay stuck in the world of emotional battles; however, they need the courage to step out and away from all the lies and misinformation, from self-help information, and find better ways to meet those battles head-on and deal with them personally.

The only person that I can control is me. So, no matter what challenge arises, we must try our hardest to keep control of the emotions that arise, keeping the emotions within us neatly organized and in place so when the occasion arises, we are ready with our best response.

Most importantly, in business and the area of understanding those in these traps of life where emotions are overbearing and controlling a person's responses, it becomes important to be able to respond appropriately. When in the social spaces of life, work, friends, or even family, we find ourselves battling within to keep the balance that we so desperately long for.

Businesses are not prepared to meet the challenges for their customers or staff who face these challenges. As the world shifts more and more to the offhand technologies for customer service,



they are not willing to recognize the challenges on both sides of the counter, for their staff or customers.

Life is always in balance, from personal to business and spiritual. We need the compass of all three to guide us in the right direction so that we can not only be successful ourselves but so that we bring as many with us as possible.

Finding the courage to pull down that handle so the door can open and digging deeper into the root of that which keeps us from success will be the best decision you can make for yourself, your family, professionally, and for the peace that comes from within your spirit. Join me as we find success.

***Angela Webber***

Virginia

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*Greater love hath no man than this,  
that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

JOHN 15:13

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## When Two Families Become Three

**M**y biological parents began our family under the stressful conditions of an unplanned pregnancy. It would be years before I came onto the scene; however, by then, much of the damage had been done. The absence of parenting and guidance from their individual families left them ill-equipped to manage family life.

This was especially true of my biological mother. I don't believe from the stories that I have heard that she was prepared to be married and a mom living the day-to-day expectations of what a housewife would require. She began to leave after the second child was born, and for periods of time, she took my two older brothers with her.

Her family struggled with alcohol abuse and other mental and emotional challenges throughout her childhood that I believe caused her to want more from life than feeling stuck in a typical home life. I never had the pleasure of meeting her or any of my extended family from her side after she had left for the last time.

My father's father passed away when he was only three. Growing up without the male role model he would need to guide him through marriage and family life left him working hard to find solutions to help make the relationship work, however, to no avail.

My father's mom, Nana, a widow at a very early age, worked as a nurse and managed to buy a little house that I adored. It was a small two-bedroom, one-bath with a half kitchen. It was so tiny. I believe it was only seven hundred square feet. She grew a peach tree and a grapevine in her tiny backyard, and the smell of gardenias permeated her screened porch. I can still smell the squash plants growing in her garden. She hosted many pastors in her home in Georgia alongside her family and was a firm believer in the protection of deity. She had turned her little backyard into a small Georgia plantation and lived there for many decades while raising and supporting my dad until she became too feeble to live alone. She never re-married because she believed she should be the wife of one man and didn't want another man to come in and hurt her son.

I still cherish all the Saturday nights when it was my turn to spend the night with her. We had so much fun, and I shared her heart for growing plants and quilting, and we bonded over many crafts. She filled in the gaps of life by giving me a safe place to lay my head, if even for a night. She helped where she could and always seemed to enjoy us tagging along with her. She never drove a car, so we learned how to take buses and took many walks.

I have no recollection of meeting any of my biological mother's family. I know of a grandmother and an aunt; however, I have no memory of any of them or of my biological mother. I have been asked often why I don't go find them. I have peace in understanding

that her life may be good, and if she chooses not to make the effort to be a part of us, then pushing to be a part of her could cause her harm, and I choose to refrain from doing that.

## **The Hard Days**

As I have previously mentioned, my biological mother really struggled with her current state. She left for periods of time and would travel with my two older brothers. I find it interesting that she would take us kids on these “adventures”; however, I believe it shows that she must have had some sense of responsibility.

On one of the occasions when she left, tragedy struck. My second oldest brother, named after my father’s father Charles, passed away without warning. It was told to me that she had gone out for some reason, and when she returned, Charles lay in his crib, deceased.

My father was notified and traveled to have the body returned to our home state for burial. Only five or six people attended, including the pastor who performed the service. It makes me sad to think that his life was not grieved by more people. I can’t imagine how forsaken Dad must have felt.

Charles’s passing hit him particularly hard as not only did he lose his son, but also the sting of losing his own father over again due to the namesake of Charles. My biological mom stayed around for a bit, continuing to bear more children.

The final departure came. This would be her seventh time fleeing the life my dad had attempted to provide. My dad returned home from work to find that everything had been taken. The Christmas tree, the gifts, and all the clothes and furniture were gone. Even his clothes were gone. He was only left with one panel of one curtain hanging on one window. This visual burned inside

him like a fire out of control. His main emotion became rage. He had tried everything he knew, and now his kids were gone, and everything he had worked hard for. I can imagine that he feared for our lives as losing one child already left a long-lasting impression on his heart. It seemed personal; she had devastated him. She ran up all the credit card debt and cleaned out all the bank accounts, leaving him completely broken.

He contacted a lawyer and gained custody of all three of us siblings, even though he didn't know where we were. This was unprecedented, as it was in the late '60s and early '70s. The mother was almost always granted custody. My third brother was found first. Then, by chance, he ran into the lady who had me, and she had given him quite a tongue lashing that it had been so long before anyone came to get me. He explained the situation, and we were reunited.

It would be a few more weeks before finding my oldest brother. My dad received a call from the ladies my biological mother and brother were staying with, and they coordinated a time for Dad to come get him after she had left the house. My oldest brother shared years later how relieved he was seeing Dad walk up and bring him home.

She only made contact once. She requested to take me for ice cream. I was not yet one year of age at the time, and Dad, in his grace, granted her request. Panic set in immediately, as he was very concerned about whether she would return me. Gratefully, she did, and we never saw her again.

Dad's hurt and anger dripped on us like a soaked sponge. I don't believe he was even aware of the hurt that he was causing at the time, and later in life, he always apologized for those days. As

adults, we were able to be filled with forgiveness and thankfulness for his protection over us. Even though it was hard, we were safe and had a warm bed and home to live in.

I was still a small child when an angel came to us. We called her Mom. They always shared funny stories of how I would not let my dad hold her hand, and I often sat in between them, staking my claim to her. The safety they represented, I am sure, was comforting and profound to feeling complete within the family unit.

It was also shared that I cried a lot as a toddler. It was assumed that I missed my biological mom, so having my angel with me settled my heart and spirit, leaving me feeling safe and loved. She took the blows and protected us often from Dad's rage.

As I grew older, I quickly learned to stay one step ahead of the outbreaks. I found peace and solace within the walls of my room, and isolation was my friend. I was not as affected by Dad's rage as my two older brothers living at home were. I recall a time when we were watching TV, and all of a sudden, my dad hit my third oldest brother in the head with a can of soda. When we asked why, he replied that it was because he was biting his nails.

These outbursts continued often, and as we got older, we avoided home and interaction with Dad. We used humor to help deflect the drip of anger. Mom was an accountability for my dad. Many of these actions did not occur when her spirit was present.

Due to all the hardships that my brothers endured, their way out was to take their anger out on me. I was the abused sibling who was often overlooked. You may be surprised to know that many sibling groups have a battered sibling. Eighty percent of youth experience some form of mistreatment by a sibling.<sup>1</sup> It is called the forgotten abuse. It has been stated that even therapists

frequently overlook it. The emotional effects are long-lasting, even into adulthood, and often cause families to drift apart and keep their distance.

I still remember the sting of the slap to the side of my face. The pain in my side from being thrust onto the arm of the couch by my third oldest brother. He was the only one living at home at the time, so he really took a lot of the backlash being dished out.

While I was asked often about the bruises, I claimed no foul. No one knew I was hurting; they were hurting too. It was easier to keep the pain hidden within the depths of my soul. There was a time when we were all at the grocery store, and my third oldest brother slipped a pack of Life Savers into my pocket. By the time we arrived home, somehow, my parents knew that they were there, and I was accused of stealing. I received the consequences of this action that I didn't partake of.

The anger being targeted at me started to become mine. I was angry. I was innocent, yet I was receiving the punishment that a guilty child would receive. I was often set up to receive these consequences that were unfairly dished out. The abuse wasn't only physical; it was verbal and emotional. The neglect of affection from my parents left a hole in my heart, leaving me feeling rejected. I believe they did not know this, because they were in their own survival mode as well.

## **A New Family**

I not only gained a new mom, but I also gained a great-grandma, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. My great-grandfather immigrated over from Italy; however, he passed at an early age due to a heart condition. He came here for work and met my great-grandmother, and they got married. My grandfather John married

my grandmother Rose. She was from Ohio and spent a great amount of time with Great-Grandma, who taught her how to cook Italian food to perfection. She was a profound influence in my life as she, too, had a hard childhood, and I wonder if she knew how much I needed her love. Her stories of jumping on the trains to get coal for heat were so unbelievable. I just couldn't imagine it. Her sister was born with a defect, and she lost her mom to childbirth. She was raised by a single dad and other family members.

Grandad survived WWII and the Great Depression, and in doing so, he sought the comfort of heaven to save him. While in the war, he was under a truck under heavy fire and vowed to serve the Lord every day if he saved his life. He became a pastor and served in the ministry until his passing. A promise kept. The trauma of WWII would last decades. The sights he saw were embedded in his mind, and he was truly grateful for life and every moment he could impact others. From growing up in the depression, he left a profound impact of not wasting anything. He got every ounce of toothpaste out of that tube. If he didn't finish his plate, he saved every bite for another meal. Even if it were just one bite, we would have plate inspections to make sure we ate everything possible on our plates. He would not buy himself equipment that would benefit him, such as VCRs or remote-controlled TVs, so Christmas was easy for him. We kept him current with the age of technology. He loved these "toys" and never had cable television. Always the antenna with the foil on the rabbit ears.

It was interesting that my new mom's family had interacted with my dad long before they had started courting one another. My parents had started working in the same office. A mutual attraction had occurred, and a new romance for my dad was on the horizon.



Her aunt was my babysitter, her uncle was a firefighter, and when one of my dad's cars caught fire, he was the firefighter who came to put it out. His pastor was the husband of one of her aunts. He would spend Sunday afternoons with him for guidance and the male role model that was missing in his life. They attended this same church, just at different times. They didn't pass each other while there. However, it was clear that sending this angel to be our mom was proof that the hands of God were all over it. When my dad dropped us off so that he and my now mom could go out, they arrived at her aunt's house, well, it was clear that everyone knew each other.

Now, all of us were under the umbrella of love, joy, and peace. We were now being prayed over, and healing had begun. Life was becoming bearable most days. The connection between us and heaven was being built. Life was calming down, and Dad was healing. Life wasn't all bad. We had great Christmases; we were able to go to Disney World in Florida. Mom was helping Dad to rebuild emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

While the pain of a broken dad was still trickling down from time to time, we were blessed to be accepted by more than just a mom. As a family, my dad and brothers had the support of my mom's family, and we were loved and felt safe with the people around us.

I remember a time when we had to spend a few weeks with our new grandparents. Grandpa liked to sleep in, so no noise was allowed. However, Grandma was very clever to keep us busy and quiet till he was up. Grandpa took us on hikes and showed us different kinds of snakes, and there was this amazing beehive. It had to have been fifteen feet tall and about three feet wide. There

was a library that had caught fire, and the remains had lots of books and this beehive. I still have many books from this library that I treasure, even though they survived rough conditions. I related to them as myself and found them worthy.

Even though life was becoming stable I still was not performing well in school. I was struggling with focus and maintaining good grades, leaving me to graduate in summer school. The loneliness became too much to bear, and I found favor in a young man. Thinking that he would be my hero, I did what I needed to in order to keep him attracted to me. I gave him myself and then found myself pregnant. My hero then rejected me, too.

My father's fears from his trauma were pressed over me, and I was pushed to abort the child. They say aborting a baby doesn't make you unpregnant; it makes you the parent of a dead baby. I was devastated. I had placed my hopes in a person that let me down. I was never able to bond with my child, and I was so devastated at my situation that I couldn't even speak up for myself. I felt no emotions at the time, completely numb, and having no control left me paralyzed emotionally.

I distinctly remember lying in the back seat when all was done. My father asked what I wanted for dinner, and I couldn't even tell you anything after that question. It was later shared with me that for about three months, I was absent emotionally. Even Christians make huge mistakes and choices that don't honor God. The great part is there is grace for us and hope to continue in life.

My third oldest brother also struggled, although he threw himself into sports and found success there. He, too, struggled in school; however, he made it through. He served in the Coast Guard and is definitely a survivor. Though he dished out many

attacks towards me, I know that he was hurting, and my love for him remains; I choose love and forgiveness.

My oldest brother struggled the most. He felt abandoned and forsaken by our natural mother, which was understandable as he remembered her the most. He never understood why she never returned. Even though he was relieved when Dad showed up, my brother longed for her as any son would, and he had no control at his young age to change his circumstances. He did go to find her when he was an adult, and when he did, she rejected him again.

This left him devastated, and again, he would go off for periods of time trying to find his place in the world. My dad's anger clashed with his, and they were often at odds with one another. In an attempt to help him, many therapists were called in, and facilities were used to help stabilize him, but to no avail. They diagnosed him with bipolar disorder to try to define his struggle. However, I have always believed that he was sad and fought within himself against Dad's anger and our biological mom's rejection. In his travels, he would meet ladies, and his rage would fall on them. I still remember the face of one young lady and how bad she looked. My heart sank knowing that the rage was dripping from his sponge.

Our biological mom gave us all one thing: life. For this, we can all be grateful. However, her actions and consequences ripped at the shores of life with the path of destruction she had left. My father was broken, and now we are broken, too. While his intentions were in the right place, his actions often caused more trauma.

As we grew into adults, we took this brokenness with us. For me, I began to search for healing. I wanted to escape and get on with adult life and leave behind a childhood full of hurt. The weight of facing these struggles on a day-to-day basis became too heavy to bear, and I was ready to find freedom.