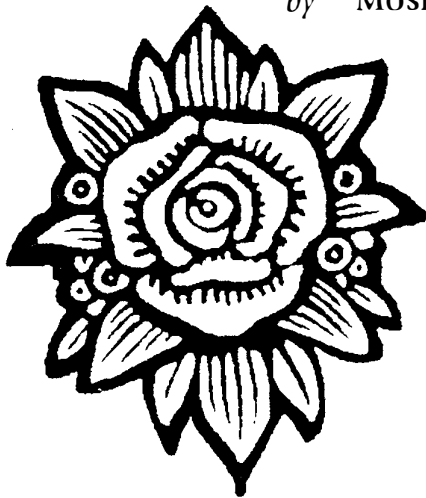


BOOK REVIEW

Resilience

by Moshe Lang & Tesse Lang



Moshe Lang's *Resilience* presents the reader with a keyhole view of the lifetime's work of one of Australia's most experienced family therapists. This collection of case histories provides a varied introduction to his work, covering as it does, his work with children, couples, individuals and survivors of the Holocaust. The book is written in collaboration with his wife, Tesse.

It is a difficult book to categorise. It is not a book of family theory, nor a popularist candid camera angle at the eccentricities and pain we cause ourselves and our most important others. As an ex-publisher I wondered how one would market it. Who would be most interested in such a book?

Resilience fits into the expanding group of case histories collection written by psychotherapists and doctors. Most recently made famous by Oliver Saks and Irvin Yalom. These two writers have a way with words which transcends the strictly therapeutic dimension, creating a good story and an involvement with the individuals described.

Moshe's book can safely be compared with these writers in its accessibility and variety of "characters" described. Its writing style is simple and uncomplicated. If Oliver Saks' writing is more elegant, Moshe's book seems more authentic and the problems his patients encounter are more recognisable and familiar. The conflicts and pain experienced in this book are likely to be those of every woman, man and child.

The book consists of 30 stories or case histories arranged into several sections, with a reflective commentary at the end of each. Such a large number of histories creates a broad landscape reminiscent of a Breughel painting. Reading about such a broad range of cases affirms, for me at least, the variety of human woes and the many different ways we overcome our pain and change. No one individual is as another in her/his capacity to change and grow. While theoretically our woes are classifiable, this book shows how uniquely we each approach our problems. Its such a smorgasbord that I felt a little overwhelmed and sometimes wished for less of a choice. I felt a strong pull to get to know some of these people in greater

depth before moving onto the next story.

However its large number of case histories ensures that there is something for everyone. If for example, your particular interest is children, well there are plenty of case histories and examples of problems and their resolutions for you.

As a child of the Holocaust I would have preferred for a larger part of the book to have been devoted to the section entitled *Generation to Generation*. To have the benefit of someone of the writer's unique experience working with the problems of the survivors of the Holocaust and their children would have been a valuable learning experience. The impact of that particular brand of evil on the survivors needs further amplification. Its particularly important in Australia. For Australia is shelter to many who have experienced the trauma of wars, genocides and profound dislocation. Perhaps that is another book for Moshe!

Completing the book in one sitting has left a most powerful impression of the writer as a marvellously humane and intuitive healer. As a comparative novice therapist, still careful about what and when to say it, I admired Moshe's "courage". His stories highlight the power of the appropriate intervention in the healing of the patient's pain. I enjoyed reading his remarkable use of the paradoxical approach and the appropriateness of many of his interpretations.

Let you think that Moshe only writes about his "successful" case histories and interventions, there are several examples of less successful cases.

Indeed authenticity is a dominant theme in this book. There is the presence of a strong love for his patients. Even when his comments seem almost too casual, one senses his caring and desire to help ease the pain.

Of course the title gives it all away. It is in the end, as all such books are, an affirmation of our capacity to endure and change. It is also confirmation of the strength of the good therapist to support and aid the process towards healing.

This book has provided me with insight into one Australia's leading family therapists and his work. It's given me an insight into how he works and most importantly an indication of what works. Thus highlighting the power of the good therapist in his/her work to help the healing process knowing that in the end it's up to the patient's will to change.

I recommend this book for family therapists and the lay public.

ALFREDA STRESSAC

Alfreda Stressac, LL.B., is a therapist working with adult individuals concerned about their relationships with others and also in the context of their relationship with money. She is researching for a book on the psychological aspects of money.