
Book Reviews

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RESILIENCE. STORIES OF A FAMILY THERAPIST.
Moshe and Tesse Lang. Port Melbourne, Mandarin, 1996. Soft Cover, 258 pages, \$14.95.

Resilience is a collection of stories about clients – their problems, their histories, their therapy and the solutions or resolutions they found (or occasionally failed to find). A collection of the shorter and simpler stories has been published previously under the title *Corrupting the Young*, and in various journals including the *ANZJFT* and the *Networker*.

As readers of this journal will know, Moshe Lang has been practising, teaching and writing about therapy for over thirty years, from his early days as a child psychologist at Melbourne's Bouverie Clinic to being Director of Williams Road Family Therapy Centre. Tesse Lang is a physician with a long career in hospital settings whose work has always involved counselling her patients and their families. The writing of these stories has been a joint affair, with Tesse's role being that of the listener who takes the story in, distils it down to its essence and reproduces it simply and succinctly.

There are over fifty stories in this volume, each a kind of mini case study (although, as Moshe points out, this term fails to capture the uniqueness of each encounter). Each story is followed by a reflection, sometimes containing a rationale for Moshe's therapeutic intervention and sometimes drawing attention to some overarching quirk of human nature which the story illustrates. The book is quite light and compact, yet its small type face and dense layout make it very generous value for money, and it takes a surprising and pleasantly long time to read. *Resilience* is divided into four sections – stories about children, couples, individuals, and finally, about those whose lives have been affected directly or indirectly by the Holocaust. Some of the stories are quite recent, and some go back a long time – indeed the book contains a distillation of wisdom garnered over a long and distinguished career. I found it fascinating for a number of reasons.

Firstly, in an age where adherents to one or the other models of family therapy tend increasingly to stand in hostile opposition to each other, the range and flexibility of therapeutic interventions in these stories are refreshing. Though the stories are undated, one can guess at their place in the temporal development of family therapy theories according to the dominant therapeutic model of the time, from the individual child-centred approach, through structural and strategic models and the era of paradoxical interventions, through brief therapy approaches to more recent narrative styles. Indeed, Moshe admits to having been influenced by a very wide range of people, practices and theories, and so this book of stories manifests, as he puts it, an "archaeology of ideas".

What it behoves us all to remember is that many approaches worked then and work now, and, as Moshe points out, "the context of the relationship in which something is said is often more important than what is said".

Secondly, I warmed to Moshe's humility and willingness to reflect on his work with clients, and with the wisdom of hindsight (and from the standpoint of family therapy's growing awareness of mother-blaming and the inequality in power of families), to look back with chagrin on how he might have intervened differently

with some families to bring about a more favourable outcome. This book is certainly not smug celebration of therapeutic cleverness.

Part IV, dealing with Moshe's work with families who have survived the Holocaust, is particularly poignant. Most of the families who sought his help had consulted a number of therapists in the past, but in every case their Holocaust experiences had not been raised. Indeed, he points out that avoidance of Holocaust experiences in therapy used not to be the exception but the rule. These stories reveal how the denial and repression of the trauma and grief of Holocaust survivors seem to provide fertile ground for secrecy and ambivalence in family relationships between the generations – casting its shadow even onto the third generation. Yet Moshe highlights how Holocaust survivors do rebuild their lives, work, laugh, dance and rear families – evidence of an extraordinary resilience, and it is this resilience of people and families which shines through these stories.

I believe this book will be inspiring to both therapists and the general reader. It is also a timely reminder that survivors of genocide are all around us – in the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal people, and in our refugee populations. We may all need to acquire therapeutic skills to deal with its effects on individuals and families for a long time to come.

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