

# Stories of a family therapist

Title: **Resilience: Stories of a Family Therapist**  
Author: **Moshe and Tesse Lang**  
Publisher: **Mandarin, 258pp, \$14.95**  
Reviewer: **Caroline Held**

WE TEND to understand our own personal lives more clearer when seen through the eyes of others. Moshe and Tesse Lang, in this delicate insightful study, allow us to become almost voyeurs into the lives of their patients. By referring to 30 brief case vignettes, the co-authors provide us with a unique collection of problems faced by patients of varying ages. *Resilience* is proof that nearly all personal and psychological problems can be solved if approached in the correct manner.

Tesse Lang is a physician who worked for 14 years at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital and then at the Cardiac Rehabilitation Unit at Caulfield Hospital. During these placements, Tesse counselled patients and their families. Moshe Lang is a

well-known family therapist. He has practised and taught psychology and family therapy for well over 30 years and has published extensively in this field.

*Resilience* is divided clearly into four definitive areas: children, couples, relations and generation to generation. Within each relationship and/or age-defined area, the authors draw on specific clinical examples which best provide insights into human behaviour. As Geraldine Doogue states in her Foreword, the book shows "the ability of the human personality to move on, to remain invincible, despite setbacks... (and) leaves an overwhelming sense of hope."

Moshe Lang believes that allowing patients the expression of their problems through "story telling" is itself a form of the healing process. For him, the therapist's role is to listen, and to help his patients' ... give shape and coherence to their stories of pain, confusion, (and) to provide a context for understanding..."

In the section presenting case vignettes focussing on children, Moshe Lang stresses

how his technique of communicating with his younger patients accommodates their level of language development and maturity. He speaks to them in their own language. Each child is unique, and has grown up in a particular family dynamic; hence, each case must be approached on its own merits. He discusses also how in many instances a familial imbalance may cause a child's problems to evolve. For example, a 10-year-old boy who was threatening suicide, was found, after some initial discussions, to have been sexually abused by his cousin. The family dynamic had been incremental in the behaviour of the boy.

The vignettes dealing with "couple" dynamics involved therapy in which people have sought help to alleviate marital difficulties. The Langs believe that each partner, independently of the other, enters a relationship with a unique set of values and experiences in regard to a "philosophy of life and how to relate to the outside world". From these different perceptions can spring marital confusion and dissatisfaction. After all, two people in a relationship bring to it not only

joint issues, but also separate ones pertaining to each as an individual. In the authors' view, the therapist's role is to separate and resolve the issues of the couple and those of the individual. The role of relationship therapy is not, in their view, necessarily to "solve" issues, but to maintain an equilibrium. The key to solving many such problems is communication, be it positive or negative.

The book's final chapter deals with the psychopathology of the Holocaust family and the impact that its survivors' stories have on their families. The authors, in general, express amazement at how resilient survivors are, and how their strength and vitality have enabled them to overcome their pasts and build new lives for themselves and for their families in a new country.

*Resilience* is an enlightening, honest and inspiring study into the lives of people, ordinary people, in the process of learning to cope with day-to-day existence.

▲ *Caroline Held is a reviewer and desktop publisher.*

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