

CHAPTER 3

Helping Others as an Attribute of Resilience

One of the primary attributes of resilient people is their involvement with others as indigenous helpers who provide social support. Many resilient people are involved in the self-help movement as leaders or participants. In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between resilience and helping others. As Tech (2003) notes in her book on survivors of the Holocaust, “The more accustomed prospective victims are to performing nurturing and cooperative roles, the more likely they are to adapt to changing circumstances” (p. 353). According to Tech, during the Second World War, one partisan group of escaped Jews from concentration camps, the *Bielski Ortiad*, “focused their energies on cooperation, rescue of the oppressed and survival.” The survival rate for this group was 95%, as opposed to 20% for those who joined the Russian Resistance movement. “In times of upheaval, in the ruin of traditional society, cooperation and mutual protection rather than combativeness and competition promote greater odds of survival” (Tech, 2003, p. 354).

Indigenous Helpers

Patterson and Marsiglia (2000) report remarkable similarities in the help provided to others by two cohorts of indigenous helpers from two very different geographic locations in the United States. The similarities included offering assistance to family and friends before it was asked for, an attempt to reduce stress in those helped, and a desire to help people strengthen their coping skills. Lewis and Suarez (1995) identify the primary functions of indigenous helpers as buffers between individuals and sources of stress, providers of social support, information and referral sources, and lay consultants. Waller and Patterson (2002) believe that indigenous helpers strengthen the social bond holding communities together and improve the

well-being of individuals and communities. Often, indigenous helpers are people who have been able to overcome severe traumas and personal problems. Having dealt successfully with their own life difficulties has given them special abilities to help others.

Robert Bly (1986) suggests that indigenous helpers, or what he calls “People of Wisdom,” are known for their expertise in solving certain types of problems. We gravitate to these people because they help us in unobtrusive and informal ways that are often profoundly subtle. Their lack of formal training is offset by their kindness, patience, common sense, and good judgment. According to Bly, people of wisdom provide the support systems in formal and informal organizations that help their co-workers and friends in ways that often have profound meaning to those being helped.

Having seen my father’s work with very troubled union members, I came to believe that certain people in the workplace often act as primary buffers for workers by helping them cope with the stressors of life and by resolving crises. I thought these people would be easy to identify and that each organization would have someone whom others would identify as an indigenous helper. By interviewing these helpers, I hoped that I might be able to develop a list of attributes to identify why and how indigenous helpers function as they do. I thought these folks would be excellent examples of resilient people who had overcome adversity and serious traumas in the lives. I’ve included several examples of indigenous helpers followed by the attributes shared by many of the people I interviewed.

EXAMPLES OF INDIGENOUS HELPERS

Indigenous Helper 1: A good example of a natural helper in an office setting was provided by Sharon Miller, who works in a law firm in San Antonio, Texas. “I work in a highly competitive law office,” she said. “You can’t trust anyone. If you share anything personal, it gets all over the office and it’s used against you in every way imaginable. You can never allow people to think that you’re vulnerable or pretty soon you’re considered weak. We have a wonderful paralegal who is everyone’s friend. She’s a great listener, she’s honest, and she’d never break a confidence. Everyone shares personal and work-related information with her. She’s the office safety valve. If it weren’t for her, the place would explode.”

The woman Ms. Miller spoke of, an indigenous helper, was asked to share her experiences. She said, “I never thought of myself as anything as grand as a therapist, but it’s true that people have been coming to me for advice since I was a child. I grew up in a very troubled home, and I guess I learned to take care of myself in ways that might help others. I’ve learned over the years that listening well, keeping a confidence, and occasionally making suggestions when people ask for them can have a good effect on people’s lives. I don’t think of myself as a therapist or anything like that. I guess I just see myself as a good friend who has something to offer. Lots of times the problems people ask me to listen to are so serious that it’s clear they need professional help. I’m always sure to suggest that if it’s warranted. Other times, people just need a kind person to listen and

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to remind them that they're good people. It's amazing how seldom we seem to let others know that they're really OK people. Folks just get down on themselves sometimes and they need someone to help them see another path.

"I guess I can trace my desire to help others from my own family life. Both my parents had drinking problems. They were kind people, religious people, but they drank to keep their sadness from overcoming them. I knew my job at home was to keep us all together. I didn't mind and we made it as a family. My parents were always very thankful for the help I gave, and I guess I grew up thinking that while we had serious problems in our home and we had no money because my parents couldn't hold down jobs because of the drinking, that we were blessed with love for one another. We were a religious family and we had a great feeling for God and His gifts. I have a wonderful husband and children, and my parents are good people and we're all close. I feel a lot of love for others and if it shows itself and others choose to use me to talk about their lives, I feel God has blessed me with a gift of caring. How can anyone not want to use that gift to help others?"

Indigenous Helper 2: Oscar Anderson has been involved in the union movement in Kansas City for over 50 years as a teamster. He believes in reaching out to his co-workers and helping them in times of need. On weekends, when many of the men in the union are drinking to excess, he is often helping the men who come to his home to discuss their serious personal problems. Oscar is a nonbeliever in counseling and psychotherapy, but what he does looks very much like therapy, in a rough and unorthodox way. He listens well, offers advice when it's needed, and knows where men can get specialized help. He can be supportive and encouraging as well as confrontational and very directive. Now semi-retired, Oscar had the following to say about helping people on the job:

"Most counselors I know," he said, "never tell people that a lot of what they've done in their lives is good. They never praise people for their hard work or their support for families. They never use humor. All they do is criticize. I see a lot of immature young people at work. It's taken them a long time to grow up. You can't help people grow up over night, it takes time. You've got to listen carefully to what they say, praise them for what they do well, and offer some advice and support for what they don't do so well.

"My parents were immigrant people from Norway. We had a tough life and nobody helped us, but we had great pride and we talked about philosophy and literature at home. My father was a socialist and believed that cooperative living was the only solution to the problems we all encountered. He thought the state should help as much as it could but that in the end, it came down to neighbors helping neighbors. He was a strong union man, but when I was 8, he got killed in a union action by some goons the boss had hired. I was angry about it. I was obsessed with the desire for revenge, and I'd think about finding those goons and killing them.

"The funny thing is that when my dad got killed and I had to take many of his responsibilities over, I started thinking of the people who killed him as symbols of what was wrong with us as a people and I wanted to set an example, like my father, of doing good. I read a lot about the life of Jesus, and about Gandhi, and Martin Luther King had a real effect on me. I decided that my anger was a killing emotion and that by helping, by listening, by being the good man

my father was that I'd do much more good for others than if I was full of hate. When I was old enough to work, I joined the same union with the same boss and we built a strong union with love and affection and solidarity. In a sense, we overcame the odds against us and we became a model of how a union could work cooperatively with management. I see others like me in our union and it fills me with joy to know my brothers and sisters in the union understand that when you only care about yourself, you lose the opportunity to grow and expand as a human being and that a belief in something larger than you can lead to great happiness and inner peace."

Indigenous Helper 3: Sam Goldfarb, another natural helper, is a retired manager of a large accounting firm. Sam is originally from Russia but has lived in Minneapolis for 40 years. Someone in his synagogue suggested I talk with Sam because Sam has spent his working years informally helping the members of his synagogue as well as his co-workers. When Sam was interviewed, he was helping to transport an elderly member of the congregation to a doctor's office. Sam is 83 years old.

"You don't go around with a sign on your face that says to come see you if anyone wants to talk," he said, "but you let yourself be around the people who are in trouble. You can tell from their faces and the way they're acting that they're in some trouble in their life. Pretty soon they talk. People love to talk, but only if they feel you won't criticize them. I just listen . . . an old man with an ear and a heart to offer. And when they're done talking, I give them advice, an old man's advice. Sometimes they take it, sometimes they don't. That's life. But most of the time they're grateful to get their problems off their chest."

"You ask why I help others. I grew up in Russia when the Communists took over. Russia was a place of deep anti-Semitism and although many of the early members of the Party were Jewish, it was clear that the Party was full of the same anti-Semitism that had always plagued Russia under the czars. We were lucky. My father knew the score, and we got out just as Stalin was taking over and Russia went crazy with genocide. When we came to America, my father told us that he expected us to make sure that what happened in Russia would never happen in America. This was our home and only by being good to others, by helping when we could, would there be a transformation in the way people treat each other. I've heard it referred to as social capital. Even though we were dirt poor and we had little, we shared what we had and soon, others shared with us too. Soon, our neighborhood which was full of immigrant and racial groups who were supposed to hate each other if you listened to the common wisdom, they were helping each other in every way possible. I stayed with a black family many times when my parents had to work nights. My best friend to this day is Swedish. I began to see as I worked my way through school and I dealt with the anti-Semitism of America that we Jews could hide as we had in Russia and make ourselves invisible, or we could be out front making our mark on the country.

"Many of us became doctors, and social workers, and teachers, and I think it made us a much more giving people. As we gave we got, and I'm convinced that America is a better place because so many immigrants did the same thing. We suffered our tragedies, not by being alone and isolated, but because we lived in a real community where everyone felt our sorrows and gave compassion

and support. That's why I help, and because of it, I've been able to deal with my own tragedies, which have been many, and when I feel too sad to give to others, something inside tells me it will help me feel better and, you know what? It does, always."

Indigenous Helper 4: A colleague and friend of mine is a man of wisdom. He teaches history at a local university but has no training in counseling. He had been through three failed marriages, the death of his parents, and the death of one of his ex-wives when a sudden depression sent him to a therapist several years ago, and since then, he's been reaching out to others. This is what he said about the experience: "I think I've always been the perfect academic: Aloof, a bit arrogant, superior, and not very good in handling the feelings of others. My personal life has been a mess and I've gone through periods when I've had serious problems with my children. When their mother died, even though we'd not been married for many years, and yet another relationship was coming to an end, I just got very depressed. I'd always thought these emotional problems were for weak people not strong, tough, resilient people like me, and it was tough on my ego to go for help. Through the process, which took a long time since I was so defensive, I began to understand that my aloofness kept me from experiencing people. My therapist gave me an assignment to be more friendly to other people, particularly people I'd never meet in academia, and this is what I did.

"Most mornings I'd go to a local café for coffee. The local men would often walk by my table and nod in recognition. Sometimes they'd stop and talk to me about my articles in the local papers about immigration. They were the workmen of America; the plumbers and construction workers, the common laborers and retired railroad workers, the illegal immigrants from Mexico. Their trucks and beat up old cars lined the parking lot outside of the restaurant.

"I have come to value my conversations with these men. Many of them have done badly by women and children, and readily admit it. Some of them are extraordinary people who have done better than most of us. And there are always the men who sit in the back of the restaurant and talk in whispered tones about women. They sound like abusers . . . they sound like children in adult bodies.

"I've learned a lot from talking and listening to the men I meet in the coffee shop. Academics can be pretty disassociated from life, but these men talk like real people, people with flaws, people we all know in our daily lives. When the wives and kids of these men talk to me, [I] get a very sad picture of their behavior. They talk about abuse and neglect, about put-downs, and absences, and mean drinking, and, sometimes, about abandonment. They often describe the impact of insensitive behavior on the women and children who are trying so hard to love their men.

"Sometimes I get a chance to sit with the men and [the] women [in their lives] and listen to them talk about the gender wars they have fought. The men usually sit with their mouths open and often as not say, 'Was I that bad?' Everybody nods their heads. The men have mellowed a lot, so it isn't easy for them to imagine that they've acted so badly in the past.

"Sometimes the men hang around, after the women leave, to assure me that they weren't that bad, but there is an emptiness to their denial; [it] rings hollow. Many times they walk away shaking their heads, angry at me for making them

hear so much bad stuff about behavior they'd rather forget. These men who interrupt me as I try and drink my coffee are ordinary men: Men who have had troubles in their lives; men who drink too much, from time to time, and who can be mean and petty; men who regret their past and have done a thing or two that leave them in the night sweats when they wake up from bad dreams; normal men who have made mistakes; decent guys who cared for the baby at night and have provided for families when it was nearly impossible.

"Sensitive men? Probably not. Romantic men? I doubt it. Men who sweep women off their feet with the power and concentration of their lovemaking? It doesn't seem very likely. These men are just regular 'Joes' who need the guidance and the sweet and tender love of a woman: Men who are better when a woman is in their life than when they are alone; men who can hardly navigate the complexities of life and depend on women in ways that seem childlike at times. Men like Roger, a plumber who joins the early morning construction gang at the coffee shop. He sees me sitting in the back reading the paper and comes over to sit with me. Today he complains about his wife. She's too fat, he says. He's lost interest in her. I look over at Roger, who is perhaps 60 or 70 pounds overweight, and I ask if he's looked in the mirror lately. Does he know that his obesity is as off-putting to his wife as hers is to him? He mumbles something derogatory about my mother, but I see him every day and [over time] he looks . . . thinner. When I see him with his wife, they look nice together . . . warm, maybe even tender in the way mature men and women can be with one another. He doesn't thank me for my advice or say how much his life has improved because of my simple advice. All he does is bring his wife over, an attractive woman in her forties, while I drink my coffee and try to read the paper. He beams at me. See how great my wife looks? his smile says. See what a hunk I must be to attract such a great looking lady? It is thanks enough and I smile at their happiness.

"Another guy, Richard, one of the few Black men who sit in the café, morning after morning, complains to me about the way his wife spends his money. 'She's a shopping junky,' he says. 'There's no way she can spend so much money.' He brings her in one morning, a nice, soft-spoken young woman. She talks to me about how difficult it is for a Black family to make ends meet, but Richard is a good husband and father and they make the money go a little further. Richard wants to buy me breakfast. He feels like dancing in the café. His wife has touched a part of his heart with love seeds.

"Denise sometimes comes for coffee and sits with a group of middle-aged women. Some time ago, she and some of the other women at the table began asking me questions about men. I'd listen and, occasionally, I'd offer a suggestion or two. Denise would come back later and tell me how much better her husband was when she'd try little pieces of the advice I'd give her. The ladies were suspicious, but after a while, all of them asked for suggestions about how to understand the men in their lives. Without fail, enough of the suggestions worked so well that I often felt like I was doing therapy in the back seat of the coffee shop. Ladies would come up to me and ask every manner of question.

"For example, Betty Sue wanted to know why her husband had lost interest in sex. I pointed out a few possible reasons, like fatigue from work or anxiety over finances. 'He's a good man,' she said, 'and we used to have a great love

life.' All of the women in the group raised their eyes in disbelief and said, 'Sure, sure,' but Betty Sue persisted. There was something really wrong, she thought. So I said to her, why not just say to him something like, 'Honey, it sure used to be nice how we'd spend our time in bed. It would be nice to have that again.' Then I said, see what he says.

"The next day she came back with a big smile on her face. All the ladies at the table were ribbing her. Finally, someone motioned for me to join them. 'He thought I wasn't interested anymore,' she said. 'He thought maybe I was seeing another man, and it was making him crazy.'

"I don't know if I'm doing any good. I'm just a historian, after all, and all I know about therapy is what I've observed in my own therapy and what I've learned in life. It just feels right to reach out to people. The more I think about it, the more I think it makes me the happiest I've ever been to help others. It's what my mother used to call a 'mitzvah' or doing a good deed. Since I've been doing 'mitzvahs,' I'm a lot happier as a person, I can say that for sure" (Glicken, 2005a, pp. 1–3).

Self-Help Groups and Indigenous Helpers

In defining self-help groups, Wituk, Shepherd, Slavich, Warren, and Meissen (2000) write, "Self-help groups consist of individuals who share the same problem or concern. Members provide emotional support to one another, learn ways to cope, discover strategies for improving their condition, and help others while helping themselves" (p. 157). Kessler, Mickelson, and Zhao (1997) estimate that 25 million Americans have been involved in self-help groups at some point during their lives. Positive outcomes have been found in self-help groups treating substance abuse (Humphreys & Moos, 1996), bereavement (Caserta & Lund, 1993), care giving (McCallion & Toseland, 1995), diabetes (Gilden, Hendryx, Clar, Casia, & Singh, 1992), and depression (Kurtz, 1988). Riessman (2000) reports that "more Americans try to change their health behaviors through self-help than through all other forms of professional programs combined" (p. 47).

Kessler, Frank, Edlund, Katz, Lin, and Leaf (1997) indicate that 40% of all therapeutic sessions for psychiatric problems reported by respondents in a national survey were in the self-help sector, as compared to 35.2% receiving specialized mental health services, 8.1% receiving help from general physicians in the medical sector, and 16.5% receiving help from social service agencies. Wuthnow (1994) found that self-help groups are the most prevalent organized support groups in America today. The author estimates that 8 to 10 million Americans are members of self-help groups and that there are at least 500,000 self-help groups in America.

Fetto (2000) reports a study done by the University of Texas, Austin that found that approximately 25 million people will participate in self-help groups at some point in their lives, and that 8 to 11 million people participate in self-help groups each year. Men are somewhat more likely to attend groups than women, and Caucasians are three times as likely to attend self-help groups as African Americans. The number of people in self-help groups is expected to be much higher with the

full use of the Internet as a tool for self-help. Participants most likely to attend self-help groups are those diagnosed with alcoholism, cancer (all types), diabetes, AIDS, depression, and chronic fatigue syndrome. Those least likely to attend suffer from ulcers, emphysema, chronic pain, and migraines, in that order (Fetto, 2000).

Riessman (1997) identifies the common functions and purposes of self-help groups as follows: (1) Self-help groups have members who share a similar condition and understand each other; (2) Members determine activities and policies, which makes self-help groups very democratic and self-determining; (3) Helping others is therapeutic for members; (4) Self-help groups charge no fees, are not commercialized, and build on the strengths of the individual members, the group, and the community; (5) Self-help groups function as social support systems that help participants cope with traumas through the supportive relationships between members; (6) Values are projected in self-help groups that define the intrinsic meaning of the group to its members; (7) Self-help groups use the expertise of members to help one another; (8) Self-help group members may find that seeking assistance from the group is not stigmatizing, as seeking help from a health or mental health provider may be; (9) Self-help groups focus on the use of self-determination, inner strength, self-healing, and resilience.

We tend to think of resilience as something uniquely internal to a person, but Riessman (1997) believes that resilience is often a function of a person's social support network. Writing about self-help groups, Riessman provides several explanations of why self-help groups are able to bring out resilience in people who often seem to be highly dysfunctional.

1. Self-help represents among the best defenses against the individuality of a commodity (materialistic) culture.
2. Association around self-help and across conditions produces a degree of race and class mixing that is unusual in our society.
3. The activism of people in self-help organizations offers the resurgence of democratic life among ordinary people in our society, which is crucial if we're to protect and reclaim popular democracy.
4. The people organized in self-help groups have an investment in effective service and can represent a major vehicle for working out and demanding the appropriate role of government in the adequate funding and delivery of services.
5. Members of a self-help group possess social homogeneity and self-determination. Self-determination means that the activity is determined internally by the self-help "unit"—the individual, group, or community. This allows a new dimension of participatory democracy to emerge that is less concerned with issues of control or governance, and more with what the individual or group has to contribute.
6. Paradoxical as it may seem, giving help is the best way of being helped.

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7. The self-help approach is built on the inner strengths of the individual, group, or community.
8. The self-help group is one of many forms of social support that enables individuals to withstand crisis, loss of loved one, or alienation. Supportive relationships provide a buffer against stress. They allow the individual to interpret the situation in a different and much less stressful way.
9. The power of self-help rests on a strong belief in experiential learning, the help-promoting properties of the group (its wisdom), and the mental health benefits derived from a cooperative mutual relationship.
10. Self-help programs share an internal focus rather than relying on external interventions by “experts”—teachers, therapists, clergy, or the state. The emphasis is on what’s inside the individual or community. This internal factor stands out in a number of other self-help concepts: self-determination, inner strengths, indigenous character, regenerative healing (healing from within), and resilience. (Riessman, 1997, pp. 8–10)

Attributes of Indigenous Helpers

Indigenous helpers use helping processes that most people are comfortable with. They listen, give commonsense advice, and are usually gentle people. As one person interviewed said, “I went for professional therapy and the therapist, right away, had me talking to my dead mother who was supposed to be sitting in an empty chair opposite me. It felt really strange. I was having marital problems but I was supposed to talk to my dead mother? I just couldn’t see it. Jim, who is a friend and a very good listener, sat with me at coffee and let me pour my heart out for two hours. He didn’t interrupt, was very supportive and calm, and just said that my marriage had come to a point where it was so difficult for me to make a decision that I needed professional help. He was right, of course, but I would have never sought someone out if it weren’t for him and ultimately, after a few false starts, like the one I mentioned, I found a good counselor and it saved my marriage.”

Indigenous helpers are optimistic. People who seek help from natural helpers often feel accepted, respected, and affirmed. Many people who seek help from indigenous helpers immediately feel more confident in their ability to resolve a problem because the natural helper has defined it in a positive and solvable way.

Indigenous helpers usually learn their helping skills by observing parents or significant adults in childhood. They describe themselves as resilient and rational people who have always been able to resolve their own life problems without needing additional help. Indigenous helpers are usually able to follow their own advice and to lead productive and exemplary lives. It is the healthy lives of the natural helpers that almost always encourages people to seek the helper out.

Indigenous helpers believe in a positive view of people. Almost everyone I identified as an indigenous helper in an earlier work on this subject (Glicken, 1991) expressed a variation on this theme: People are basically good. You should look for

the goodness in them and help them use it as a way of dealing with problems in their lives.

Since helpers have no formal training, the approach they use with others is very gentle and fluid. It feels, according to the people I interviewed who have had experience with indigenous helpers (Glicken, 1991), like talking to a dear friend over coffee.

A STORY OF AN INDIGENOUS HELPER

My mother used to tell me that a relationship with a good friend was much more important than one with an uninvolved relative. That wasn't the way she said it, of course, but that's the gist of her combination of Yiddish, Polish, English, and the soap opera words of wisdom that defined her philosophy of life.

Throughout those years she suffered from a variety of health problems that ended in long hospitalizations. After the Second World War, when news of the death of all of her remaining family came to us in chilling letters from the Red Cross, she developed a sadness that was very close to the surface and often resulted in what we now would think of as chronic depression. During those years of depression she was lost to us, and I now recognize that I felt she had abandoned us. Another story about my family, which is in Chapter 12 of this book, explores those feelings.

My mother was a lover of soaps. I knew the plots of every soap opera on the radio when I was a kid. When I started telling her what would happen next, however, she gave up on telling me the stories. They were all, it seemed to my 10-year-old mind, about betrayal. Betrayal of wives by husbands, husbands by wives, siblings by siblings, and, in my mother's mind, and worst of all, friends by friends.

To my mother, a friendship was as sacred as a marriage. This was not a gray area issue for my mother. You had a friend or you didn't. A person wasn't a friend one day and an acquaintance the next. A friend was a true and loyal companion who knew what it was like to walk through life in your shoes. A friend felt your pain and knew when you were down and needed help. In some mysterious way, according to my mother, a friend could even read your mind.

Loyalty was everything for my mother. If a friend wasn't loyal, a process not unlike a divorce took place. A friend was there when you needed a friend. You didn't have to spell it out, either. Friends *knew* when they were needed. *They just did*. When I would ask how they would know, she'd shrug and say, as millions of Jewish women have said before and since, "Don't ask." It was a phrase of wisdom that I could not appreciate until I began to say the same thing to my daughter.

When my mother died, I can remember walking through a store and listening to several elderly women talking about her and saying things so sweet and tender that it was all that I could do not to cry. She was the neighborhood helper, you see. Even though she was ill most of the time I was growing up, she always had women over, allowing them to talk about anything, even sex. It was

I wrote this story describing my mother and how clear it is to me now that she was an indigenous helper. I hope this story describes the impact she had on me and on others.

shocking to me that my prudish mother, who never said anything bad about anyone and who could only swear in Yiddish (which, as everyone knows, isn't really swearing because the swear words only have assumed and not literal meanings), would allow such talk in our house. And that wasn't all. In our house women talked about alcoholism, domestic violence, child abuse, and even infidelity.

There was an essential sweetness to my mother. She never turned a man away who needed work, always trading fish or hard work for a meal. My friends would come over and feast on chocolate chip cookies so hard we used them as hockey pucks in the winter. They loved her, as did everyone I knew. My school work, which was often miserable and frequently received bad grades, my mother made into the work of a genius. Every paper I brought home was held up by magnets on the refrigerator door. The better the grade, the closer to the middle of the door where the neighbor women could see that this kid they thought was a moron might have some brains in his head yet. Even when she became ill, my mother helped others. "Moishe, take some cookies over to Mrs. Cooper. It would be a shame to waste them." A shame? They were inedible. Even my brother said that her cooking was so bad that when he used to see a sign saying "Home Cooking," or "Mom's Cooking," he used to run like crazy. Still, she gave and always reminded me that giving from the heart, wanting to give, wanting to help—not because it was an obligation, but because it was a burning desire in your heart—this was what made us special as a family. "Sure we're poor, God knows, but we give what little we have. If we don't, how can we be good people? Good people share with others. Good people give back what they've got."

My mother knew that you had to give to receive. When my mother died, the rabbi who spoke at the funeral had never met her, but he said that he'd spoken to her friends and neighbors. She was, he said, a real Jewish woman: tough, tender, and endlessly loyal to her friends and family. When he said that, I knew that no one would ever be that way for me again. She was my mother, but she was also my friend, and I mourned for the loss of both.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THIS STORY

In a very special way, my mother's behavior reflected the Jewish imperative that you give to others (*mitzvot*). My father, who I write about in Chapter 12 and who was deeply involved in the labor movement and civic life, acted in a way that reflected the Jewish belief that you deal directly with the social ills of the world and that each of us has a responsibility to make the world a better place (*tikkum olam*). Together, they created a notion of life that was idealistic, benevolent, and caring. These views of life helped my family cope with illness and poverty and led to idealism and optimism during times of real family difficulty. What follows are other lessons in this story.

1. Giving to others helped my mother cope with serious health problems that would have otherwise completely impaired her functioning.
2. The joy and positive regard she received from helping others made her a positive role model for the children in my family, all of whom believe that what you give to others has a positive impact on your life.

3. My mother's compassion and regard for others, even when she was ill, helped my family remain optimistic and tied to the belief that helping others is the highest form of helping oneself. It was the driving force that helped us through very tough times and later had a significant impact on what my brother, sister, and I chose to do with our lives.

4. The idea that a friend is someone who is a loving and involved person, as important and as powerful as family, is an important lesson, one that has never left me and continues to influence the way I deal with life sorrows. Who could manage without friends?

Recently, I was asked to write a memory of a good friend for his 65th birthday. I hope Sam won't mind my including what I said for this book on resilience, because it speaks to the issue of keeping friends through the rocky times we sometimes have and how friendship is like a love affair: difficult, trying, but ultimately, quite wonderful.

At one point in our friendship, Sam and I had a serious misunderstanding that led to an estrangement of almost a year and a half. As it is the custom for Jews before the High Holy Days to try and work out misunderstandings, my friend called and asked that we meet to reestablish our friendship. I agreed, although I did so with a mix of lingering anger at the reason for our estrangement and guilt at letting things go so long and acting, throughout, in a childish and boorish way.

We met in the village in Claremont on one of those perfect late summer, early fall afternoons in Southern California when the air is warm and soft and you can't imagine living anywhere else. We sat for hours discussing what had happened in our lives during the year and a half when we'd not spoken. There was much to discuss and it felt wonderful to have my old friend listen.

I had just had spinal surgery and wondered if I would ever be the same physically. Sam spoke of his family and of his warm relationship with his wife. He told me about new projects and his excitement at writing books he thought would make a real contribution. He spoke proudly of his work with the Advanced Placement exams in history and of his trips to San Antonio to grade AP exams. And he told me about the achievements of his wonderful children and how he and his children were closer to one another than ever. I felt the same thing was happening with my daughter.

I remember thinking that it was pretty astonishing that my friend could stay with me in spirit throughout our time apart and that he could help us repair our friendship. How many friendships do you have in a lifetime, after all? You can't squander a single one.

Just recently, we played tennis together, had dinner at Mediterranean restaurant, and went to a new synagogue for services. It was both the end and the beginning of the yearly cycle of reading the Torah, but to me it felt like the beginning of a new phase in our relationship. We're both on Medicare now, and, say what you will, it makes you ponder your age. I think we both wondered about the future and whether we would be the same healthy and vigorous men we are now the next time the Torah scrolls are unrolled and a new cycle of reading begins.

As for me, I drove home thinking how fragile friendship is and how to have and maintain a real friendship is, in the words of my mother, everything.

A STORY ABOUT AN INDIGENOUS HELPER STARTING A SELF-HELP GROUP

Jack Holden is the leader of a support group for people with chronic depression. Jack has been depressed much of his life and has come to believe that it is a condition he has to live with, much as he would if he had diabetes or heart problems. Jack is a kind and empathic person, and after reading about a support group for depressed people in another community, Jack volunteered his time to organize a similar group in his community. In preparing for this commitment, Jack met with a number of other leaders of various types of support groups in the community and attended meetings of a local volunteer organization in town to get additional ideas. He wrote to a national organization for depressed people asking for assistance in setting up a group. They sent him a kit that explained how one might go about developing a group and included many practical ideas about advertising, screening group members, where to hold meetings, and how to plan an agenda. Jack was able to use free ads in local newspapers and some spot ads on radio and television. Even so, the response was slow and Jack almost gave up. After 4 months, Jack had the names of 10 people who wanted to be part of the group and who were also willing to help in its development.

The group met over a 2-month period, and, much to Jack's delight, they were willing to work hard, entered into some very useful discussions about the mission and focus of the group, and asked Jack to be their leader under the supervision of a helping professional from the community who had agreed to help. Jack read some books on group leadership that the professional had given him, and he attended a weeklong leadership workshop for new leaders given by the national association he had contacted. Jack found both the books and workshop invaluable. During the first several meetings of the new self-help group, the professional observed the group, but after that she assured Jack that what he was doing was just fine. She agreed to meet with him periodically to discuss the group and to enter into a loose supervisory arrangement. She also told Jack that if there was a crisis, he could always call and they would immediately meet to discuss it. They also agreed that if any group member was unwilling to promise not to commit suicide, if suicide came up in discussion, or if group members were concerned about the possibility of a suicide by any group member, that the professional would be contacted and a further assessment would be made by the professional. Thankfully, this has never happened in the 3 years the group has been actively meeting.

Gradually, the group has settled in with about 15 regular members. That's about all Jack thinks he can handle at one time. A few people have left the group because it hasn't worked for them, but others have taken their place. There are 20 people on the waiting list, and Jack is trying to organize another group to be led by one of the current members who has very strong leadership skills. The group meets once a week for 2 hours in the evening. All of the members have suffered from chronic depression for more than 5 years, and all of the members actively see professionals in therapy and are being seen medically to monitor medication. The mission of the group is to offer support, encouragement,

This case study first appeared in modified form in my 2005 book Improving the Effectiveness of the Helping Professions: An Evidence-Based Approach to Practice. To find a more complete description of the research on self-help groups, the reader may want to consult that book.

help with problem solving, and social events to help group members stay socially active, as well as to disseminate and discuss research information about depression. All the members are responsible for sending one another new articles or research reports via the Internet at least once or twice a month. The group has become so adept at finding new literature that many group members have brought information to their therapists and psychiatrists that was even new to them. The professionals have found that group members who take a very active role in their treatment also do much better in their lives, even though they continue to feel depressed some of the time. For many of the participants, depression is a struggle they have learned to live with through a combination of professional help and the self-help group.

The group believes that it should evaluate whether its work is helpful, and it has developed a testing instrument that measures life functioning in several key areas, including days missed at work; exercise, weight, and blood pressure; number of hours slept each day during the week; and attendance at social events, with reports from spouses, mates, or friends providing a weekly social functioning measure. The instrument also includes a 20-question depression inventory with good reliability and validity called the CES-D (Radloff, 1977). Over time, the evaluation mechanism has shown a gradual improvement in group members' social functioning. The members of the group exercise more, maintain their normal weight, miss fewer days at work, sleep less than they did, and have less depression than before joining the group (as measured by reports from others and scores from the depression instrument). Most group participants have found that even though their depression hasn't gone away completely, they have learned to live with it and get on with their lives more successfully than before.

I observed the group. It is a kind, supportive, and warm group, and many people in it have benefited from Jack's unobtrusive and affirming leadership approach. One group member said, "Jack is so warm and kind, it filters down to the group. People come here and they're pessimistic and hopeless about their depression, but after a few weeks, Jack's optimism is contagious. We all suffer together and depression is an awful thing, but we love one another, we love Jack, and we all live with the hope that we will get better. If Jack left, we'd fall apart. Maybe that's not a good thing to admit, but Jack is the glue that holds us together. I don't mind saying that. He's a wonderful person, and that he suffers from depression like the rest of us makes us love him that much more. There are days when he's too depressed to lead the group and others fill in. We have a buddy system that gives each member another group member to talk to when things get too tough. We go out together for dinner and socialize some. It's like the extended family many of us don't have. We're lonely and isolated people, and having this group is the best thing that's ever happened to me. And I'm glad that we have to maintain our contacts with professionals. It's a safety valve, in my opinion. Depressed people run a high risk of committing suicide. Were it not for the group and the professionals we work with, I couldn't promise not to do it if the feeling came over me really strongly. But the support network we've developed and the professional help keep us from going to extremes, and they give us hope. And for people who feel down most of the time, that's saying a lot."

I asked Jack why he developed the group in the first place. "Part of the reason was selfish," he said, "because I thought it would help me with my

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depression. Part of it came from wanting to help others. I've learned a lot about handling my depression and I felt like sharing it with others. I know that some people have biochemical depressions from birth maybe, but most of the people in group have had awful things happen to them, mostly when they were kids, but not always. We have people in group who were raped or assaulted as adults and they've developed depressions.

"In my case, I was pretty badly abused by my father and brother when I was a kid. I did fine in school and I had outlets, but underneath it all, I was a very sad kid. When I left home, the sadness just got worse. I had no friends and I felt very isolated and lonely. I started going to church near my home and, I don't know . . . it was uplifting. It gave me a sense of who I was. I started helping the church with legal issues and soon people were coming to me with legal questions that were almost always personal issues. I took some counseling courses and I felt good about myself when I was helping. It lifted the depression.

"I won't kid you and say that I don't have very dark moments, because I do. And I won't tell you that since I started the group my life is always happy, because it isn't. But when I help others, when I'm in the group, I feel transformed, like I'm somebody else, and it makes me very happy, almost giddy. I came out of this horrible torture that I endured as a kid, I became educated, I tried to be a good person, and in my own thoughts about myself, it's amazing I've done so well. I'm happy to give back. How else can I make any sense out of what was done to me? It's a way of eliminating what happened because I didn't turn into the mess my father and brother did. I can't imagine a better way to share my gratitude for whatever God gave me to cope with the abuse than to give to others" (Glicken, 2005b, pp. 269–271).

Summary

This chapter on indigenous helpers and self-help groups offers some hopeful evidence that people involved in self-help often experience an increased level of resilience. Helping others seems to be an effective way of helping oneself. Self-help is generally supportive in nature and usually provides an affirming and positive approach to problem solving that emphasizes natural healing, support, and group affiliation.