CHAPTER 14

Reconnection and Reconciliation

Healing Relational Wounds

> Our future depends on our ability to build relationships and communities that bind us together in common aspirations.
>
> —THE DALAI LAMA, *Harmony in Diversity*

I was often viewed as a resilient person, and came to see myself that way. I accepted the common belief that because I was inherently resilient, I was able to "raise myself up" despite my family's adversities and deficits. Like the resilient individuals from dysfunctional families in many case studies, I followed the conventional wisdom and avoided contact with my family after leaving home. After college, I took the "geographical cure"—traveling halfway around the world, and returning to settle just halfway back, only going home for brief visits. Weekly phone calls were easier, since my father, who never got over the Great Depression, kept an egg timer next to the phone. At 3 minutes he'd announce, "Well, time's up!" and, in mid-sentence, our conversation was over.

Like many of my peers in clinical training, I went into psychotherapy, which focused on my parents' shortcomings, catalogued and embroidered upon with the therapist exploring the negative connotation of their every word and deed. Only later, gaining new vision through a strengths-oriented systemic lens, did I come to realize that my resilience was forged through the hardships faced by my family and because of its hidden strengths, which were not in my therapy story. Through those challenges, I emerged hardier

than I might have if I had grown up in a "normal family" and a placid, "ideal" environment.

Yet the linkage of individual resilience with self-reliance and disconnection from families has been pervasive in the child development and mental health fields. Often encouraged by therapists, recovery movements, or well-meaning friends, many persons avoid contact and assume fixed views of their families as hopelessly dysfunctional and their relationships as beyond repair. The images of their family members become etched in stone as damaged, pathetic, and destructive characters in their early life dramas, as they move on into other relationships. In similar ways, many individuals leave marriages and other significant relationships by casting off old partners, demonizing them, and plunging into new relationships to start afresh.

Some individuals distance from their families as an understandable survival strategy, which may be advisable in cases of persistent strife, abuse, or other extreme situations. Yet in most cases, disconnection is neither a necessary nor optimal pathway for individual resilience—and for the future relationships we build. Like our culture's mistaken view of resilience as simply putting our troubles behind us and moving on, these cut-and-run solutions may bring short-term relief, but they can leave long-term unresolved issues and a pessimism about resolving relational problems, carried along as baggage on life journeys and passed on to the next generation. These disconnections leave a hole in our heart and in the fabric of our lives.

In my experience, we can better gain inner wholeness, deep and lasting bonds, and a compassionate connectedness with the human community through efforts to heal old wounds. In my early research with families of seriously disturbed young adults, I was surprised by the strengths that many so-called "dysfunctional" families revealed in the midst of their adversities. In my practice experience, I found, time and again, that positive changes could occur even in the most troubled relationships and at any time in life. My encouragement of relational repair is based on the conviction (expressed throughout this book) that our resilience is strengthened as we gain a new perspective on past adversity; appreciate the challenges and strengths, as well as the limitations, of those who may have hurt or failed us; make our best efforts to repair bonds; and integrate the whole of this experience into our lives and relationships.

This closing chapter offers guiding principles and case examples demonstrating the possibilities for reconnection and reconciliation. Here, these processes are described in efforts to heal family-of-origin wounds; they also have application in situations involving painful separations and postdivorce family relationships (see Chapter 9). Difficult dilemmas in past grievances are considered. Even when forgiveness and relational repair are not sought or are not possible, the opportunities for personal healing and growth are most often greater than anticipated. Throughout this discussion, I've chosen to speak with a personal voice as well as a professional one, and from an inclusive "we" position, bridging therapists and clients as human beings struggling to come to terms with painful experiences from our past as we move forward and leave our legacies for the future.

THERAPIST, HEAL THY OWN RELATIONSHIPS: PERSONAL JOURNEYS AND REFLECTIONS

If therapists are to help clients overcome pessimism and anxiety about change in long-standing relational patterns, we must have a firm belief that some change is possible in most cases. Such conviction is difficult if we ourselves have given up on change in our own relationships. Similarly, it may be difficult to help partners repair their couple or parent–child bonds while a therapist is stuck, unable to overcome similar impasses or come to terms with situations beyond his or her control. However, therapists can draw on their difficult experience in helpful ways when they have reached a good understanding and reasonable reconciliation following relational breakdown. Curiously, research has not attended to this link between a therapist's own current state of relational repair and the outcome of therapy with couples and families seeking reconciliation of grievances. In the hope that my own personal efforts may inspire others, I offer some of these experiences in coming to know my parents better and in efforts attempting to transform our relationships. As Imber-Black affirms (2012), opening family histories and secrets to the light, despite the anxieties it can raise, can be powerfully healing.

Reconnecting with My Father: Learning about His Adversities, Struggles, and Resilience

Although my early research and practice experiences convinced me that positive changes could occur in even the most troubled relationships, there was one nagging exception: my own relationship with my father, which I had given up on. I felt an uneasy dissonance between the professional and the personal—touting the strengths and possibilities for change in other families, but writing off my father as a hopeless case. For many years I carried disappointment, anger, and shame about my father. He was a shy, unassuming man who walked with a limp. His adage was "Don't get your hopes up too high; then you'll never be disappointed." He made do with little and was looked down upon as a failure by others in our family and

community who were impressed by social status and financial success. I took in this view of him and felt his burning shame. Clearly, it was time to work on my own family relationships.

I was fortunate to consult with Murray Bowen, and doubly blessed to be able to process my efforts with my close friend and colleague Monica McGoldrick, who was also working on her family relationships at this time. We shored each other up, with mutual encouragement to stay hopeful and persevere; our own bond was a wellspring for resilience in our change efforts.

I had many opportunities to practice Bowen's reconnection skills as I reengaged with my father. I had not visited him since my mother's death, 4 years earlier. When I phoned to tell him I wanted to fly out to see him, instead of sounding pleased, he gruffly replied, "Well, don't expect me to pay for your airfare." I took a deep breath and assured him I didn't. Indicating no pleasure at the thought of my visit, he replied, "Well, I have a lot of work; I won't have much time to spend with you. And the apartment's a mess." I took a deeper breath and said, "That's OK. I thought I'd stay with a friend. [This was a break with the norm of a home stay.] I could meet you for dinner after work, if you're free." He retorted, "Oh, you mean you're really coming to see your friends." At this point, with my anger mounting, it would have been easy to chalk up another failed attempt and quit. Here I was, making this great effort, and there he was, unappreciative and hopeless. But I tried not to get defensive or annoyed, and reasserted that my main wish was to see him. The call ended with no inkling of encouragement from him, but I went ahead. When my flight arrived at midday, my dad surprised me by being at the gate; he had taken a sick day so that we could spend time together.

We need to stay mindful that in efforts to reconnect, we must take the initiative and not get reactive if the immediate response is disappointing. In Bowen work, we are not trying to change the other person, but to change the way we relate, which most often opens new possibilities in our mutual interactions. It was also crucial for me to try to understand my father's position. I had been working individually toward reconnection for some time. My call came to him out of the blue and he reacted defensively, to protect his feelings. ("If you don't expect too much, you won't be disappointed.") As I came to realize, he had missed me—his only child—terribly, especially now that he was widowed and alone. I tried to put myself in his place: Why was I calling now? Did I want something from him? Was I just being "polite" and really motivated to visit my friends? Aware of my disappointment and discomfort with him over the years, how would he know that I cared about him and might actually want to see him?

My efforts to reconnect with my father reaped benefits far beyond my expectations. Over the next few years, our relationship deepened with each contact, yet not without occasional friction. He was a quiet man who didn't like to talk about problems or painful subjects. He and his family never spoke about his past. It took my genuine interest in hearing more about his life, and my doggedly persistent urging over many visits, for him to share stories of his childhood and reveal the suffering he had endured and his remarkable comebacks.

My father never talked about his limp; my mother gathered it was caused by a sports injury in adolescence. I seized an opportunity to learn more at a family wedding, cornering my uncle, who had had enough champagne to open up. First, he told me that my father had fallen from his high chair as an infant, breaking his hip. (Later, I learned that he was found to have a congenital hip displacement—with the stigma of genetic disabilities, was it easier for my uncle to tell a story of an accident?) That was in 1909, before advances in modern medicine. My father was encased for many months in a plaster cast from waist to foot—three times by the age of 10. Each time, when the cast was removed, his hip slipped out of place again. This ordeal forced him to spend his childhood at home, unable to walk freely, attend school, or play with his brothers or peers. With tremendous support by his parents (who depleted their modest savings), his hip was finally secured, although by then his leg was shorter than the other one. He started school at the age of 11, where, although he was quite bright, the young children in his first-grade class taunted and made fun of him. Awkward and embarrassed, he left school at 14. He later completed his GED on his own and in the 1930s enrolled in a local college to earn a degree in pharmacy, working for a pharmacist to put himself through school. After 3 years, the college went bankrupt and closed, a casualty of the Great Depression. His boss praised my father's hard work and promised to give him the pharmacy at retirement, if he would continue to work for very little pay through those hard times. When my parents married, they were struggling financially, yet hopeful for the future. Despite their best efforts, the pharmacy folded in 1939 and my father's dreams were once again dashed. My parents then started over, moving to a new community where his uncles acquired a small, failed business for my father to try his hand at. They both worked hard; I was born; and just as they seemed to be doing well, a fire in our apartment building wiped out everything they had. It could be said that I was born into adversity, but we also had good fortune: The day of the fire, I was in the hospital having my tonsils out, which saved all our lives.

I pieced together much of this story as my father and I continued our

journey of reconciliation. Putting his life into perspective fundamentally altered my view of him and my feelings toward him. My anger and disappointment melted as a compassionate understanding of his life emerged. He was no longer a failure in my eyes, but instead a hero, who had struggled valiantly to overcome the many hardships and cruel disappointments in his life. He was a loner, a misfit, never quite comfortable in social situations or in the company of more financially successful relatives. Yet in many ways he was the strongest, most resilient one in his family. He met his life's adversities with courage. Tested repeatedly, he always rose to meet the challenge. His mother's care through childhood and his loving bond with my mother nourished his resilience.

While I was growing up, my father worked 7 days a week, 12 hours a day—except for the occasional Sunday drive we took, when he put up a sign: "Open every day but not today." He managed to build our small four-room house by teaming up with a neighboring carpenter, plumber, and electrician, who traded services with him. My mother also worked very hard as a music teacher, yet always made time for community service projects. My father worked until, at 70, he could no longer stand on his feet all day. Then, living only on Social Security, he got up each day and did full-time volunteer office work for his Shriner's organization—dedicated to raising money for hospitals serving children with disabilities. In clearing out his apartment at his death, I found many service awards, which in his modesty he had never mentioned. I recalled his love of the circus, his once telling me that he wished he could have been a clown, to make children laugh.

I had never understood my father until I was able to piece together the fragments of his life, gaining a sense of coherence. In the early phase of reconciliation, I experienced tremendous sadness at "time lost," as I regretted all those years when my disappointment and shame at my father's deficits had blinded me to his strengths and blocked our relationship. Those last precious years of discovery and reconnection before his death have been a continual wellspring of love and inspiration in my life.

As McGoldrick reminds us, there are few pure saints or sinners in real families. If we look for redeeming qualities in family members who are seen only as villains or failures, we will begin to see them. Following the wisdom of Native Americans, we may have to believe in those possibilities in order to see them. In the same way, if we can believe that even the most troubled or estranged relationships have the potential for change and growth, we are more likely to act in ways that indeed foster reconnection and reconciliation.

Seizing Opportunities to Reconnect: Learning My Mother's Secrets, Sorrows, and Strengths

My mother had been cut off from her family after leaving the Catholic Church and then converting to Judaism when she married my father. Although we received annual Christmas cards from her brother, I had only met him once briefly. He had turned a cold shoulder when my mother sought his support during hard times: "You made your bed, so you lie in it." Shortly before my mother's death, when I was 27 and eager to know her better in what little time we had, she shared a secret she had kept even from my father: she had been a nun for 17 years. She died before I could ask the many questions I was left with.

Several years later, in the usual holiday card to me from my uncle, he mentioned that he was looking forward to a family reunion. However, he offered no details or invitation. Overcoming my initial anger and identification with my mother's painful exclusion, I decided to take a risk and write back to express my interest and ask if I might attend. He replied immediately with a gracious invitation. I learned that the reunion was in honor of the retirement of Sister Honoria as Mother Superior of her order. She was my mother's cousin and had been her closest confidante through their teen years and early adulthood: as best friends, they had entered the convent together at the age of 16. This reunion was an opportunity I couldn't miss.

I also learned that there were other relatives going to the reunion from Chicago—relatives I didn't even know lived in my city. I found myself more anxious than I had anticipated; these newfound cousins were friendly, yet conversation was superficial and awkward, with no mention of my mother. At the reunion, everyone greeted me warmly, but still no one spoke of my mother. I felt strangely as if I had somehow landed in this family all by myself. And I felt a pang of disloyalty to my mother for wanting to reunite with those who had rejected her.

My family therapy tools of the trade saved the day, relieving my anxiety and helping me make connections. Poring over old photographs, I was eager to hear about the whole cast of characters. Then I sat down at the kitchen table with paper and pencil and began to sketch a genogram, asking questions as I drew. Soon family members gathered around, curious and eager to add their pieces or make corrections: "That's not right at all—don't you remember, he ditched her for her younger sister!" The stories began to flow. As I brought up my desire to hear stories of my mother, and revealed that she had told me she had been a nun, they all opened up and dug out photos of her in her nun's habit; they too had been carrying the secret, unsure whether I knew. Over the next 2 days, relatives kept sharing

more stories. I encouraged them to contact others who couldn't be there to "fill in the blanks" and send me any more recollections that might come to them. They eagerly asked me to draw up a complete family genogram and send it to everyone, which I did several months later with a New Year's greeting.

At the reunion, I invited Sister Honoria to go for a walk. She too had hoped for a chance for us to talk. I first wanted to understand how my mother, a good student and gifted pianist, had decided to become a nun. I learned that my maternal grandmother, a deeply religious French Canadian Catholic, had hoped that my mother's brother, whom she favored, would become a priest. When he left the seminary after a year to marry his sweetheart, my mother seized the opportunity to gain her mother's favor by entering the convent.

As I learned about this hidden phase in my mother's life, the discordant parts in my understanding of my mother as a person became more coherent. In her religious life, she earned her college degree, graduating as a Phi Beta Kappa in music, and served as a highly admired teacher, organist, and choir director. But she experienced her deep personal spirituality, humanity, and love of life as increasingly at odds with her hierarchical, ascetic, and cloistered environment. With great anguish, she came to the courageous decision to leave the order for the real world. In that time (the 1930s) such a decision was shame laden and unforgivable. After she left the convent, her mother refused to see her; she died within the year, and my mother was not informed of it until after the funeral. This loss of reconciliation was a deep sadness my mother carried secretly all her life. I now understood the sorrow I had seen in her eyes, the sadness that could find no comfort.

Reaching Out to Widen the Circle

At the family reunion, I felt particularly anxious seeing my mother's cousin Alma. I had a dark memory of her from my childhood, the only time my mother and I visited her. Having married well, she lived in luxury. She received us coldly; my mother said afterward that she thought she was too good for us. Picking up on my mother's embarrassment, I took this to mean that it was my father's fault for being the wrong religion and for our living on the edge of poverty. Seeing her again, I felt intimidated and wary, although she warmed up to me and invited me to visit her.

After the reunion, I kept meaning to visit Alma, but I found myself putting it off. When many months had passed, I finally pushed myself to call and visit. I felt nervous as I approached the house, which looked cold

and dark, just as I remembered. Alma greeted me warmly and had a large box of old photographs waiting for me. As she shared memories over the photos, her tears came. She confessed that she had been very jealous of my mother as a child. Her own father had disappeared on a logging job and was presumed dead, although his body was never found. Her mother, left penniless, was forced to work long hours in a laundry and sent Alma to live with my mother's family. Sealing over her losses and grief, she grew aloof and resentful of the loving bond she saw daily between my mother and her father. It was the reactivation of that old pain that had triggered her defensive coldness when my mother and I had visited her. I hugged her with a new affection when this visit ended, treasuring the many photos and new perspectives she gave me.

Three weeks later, a cousin called to tell me that Alma had died in her sleep. I realized that because of my busy schedule and my procrastination, we had nearly missed this transformative connection. Learning from this experience, I now urge my clients and students not to put off acting on good intentions to overcome painful experiences and heal wounded relationships. This is especially urgent with elders and those with life-threatening illnesses. Yet all of our lives are unpredictable, and we should never take time for granted in any relationship. A key to relational resilience is active initiative—seizing the opportunities before us and persevering to create the new relational possibilities we yearn for.

Naming: Bridging the Divide

Naming is often a way of making connections across the generations and joining families through marriage and child rearing. In my own family, naming became a way for my mother to weave together the disparate threads of her life and identity. Her mother, a devout Catholic, named my mother and her brother Mary and Joseph. After Joe left the seminary, my mother not only took his place by entering the convent; she even took his name, becoming Sister Josephine. When she eventually left the religious order to lead a "normal" life, she held on to that part of her identity by changing her name to Mary Jo, preferring to be called simply Jo. (Interestingly, the same year my mother came out into the world, Katharine Hepburn portrayed Jo in a film version of *Little Women*.) When she married my father and converted to Judaism, everyone called her Jo—but she remained Mary to her family. To bridge the cultural and religious divide and to win the approval of her new mother-in-law, she named me after my father's maternal grandmother, Frimid. (My middle name, Carolyn, is her own mother's name.) Only when I reached adulthood did I learn that Froma (Frimid) is derived from the

Jewish name Fruma, meaning "pious" or "spiritual." My name would thus have had special meaning for my mother. Although she chose a secular life, she embraced Judaism—and becoming temple organist. Later, elected B'nai Birth president, one member accused her of not being a "real Jew," cutting her deeply in an old wound. My parents left the congregation, yet remained personally spiritual for the rest of their lives.

THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION

All family relationships are bound to have occasional conflict, mixed feelings, or shifting alliances. When conflict has been intense and persistent, when ambivalence is strong, or when bonds have frayed, family therapy offers possibilities for repair and relational growth. Reconciliation is not a hasty peace. Rather, it involves a process of mutual reengagement, requiring a readiness on the part of each person to take the other(s) seriously, to acknowledge violations to the relationship, and to experience the associated pain. Reconciliation is more than righting wrongs; it brings us to a deeper place of trust and commitment.

Seeing Others through New Eyes: Changing Ourselves in Relationships

We tend to see things not as they are, but as we are.

> Roscoe grew up in a very troubled family: his mother suffered chronic depression, and his father, who abused alcohol, was harsh and critical. He came to think of his family as toxic and avoided all contact. Still, thoughts of his parents continually triggered inner turmoil and he found himself becoming harsh and critical with his partner and their children. Expanding his fixed view of his parents was the key to change: "I began to understand that the only way all my relationships could change was for me to see my parents with different eyes."

In the work of reconnection and reconciliation, we need to see and hear in new ways. The most important element is respectful, genuine curiosity about the lives and perspectives of others. One of my psychology professors, Neil Postman, offered this valuable lesson: once you have learned to ask questions—relevant, appropriate, and substantial questions—you have learned how to learn, and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know.

In family-of-origin work, we first survey the entire extended family field. A genogram and timeline (McGoldrick et al., 2008) are essential tools to diagram the network of relationships and note important information and the timing of nodal events (see Chapter 6). This map guides discussion to explore the meaning and significance of connections. Whereas individual therapy relies on the internalized images and perspectives of the client, which are inherently partial and subjective, family therapists encourage clients to contact extended family members and others in order to clarify obscured information and to gain multiple perspectives on key family members and relationships.

Opportunities can be seized to reconnect with families at holidays and at events marking transitions, such as birthdays, weddings, bar mitzvahs, graduations, and funerals. We can encourage clients to actively plan and shape family gatherings, and to invite family members to bring photos and memorabilia. One client, wishing to repair cutoffs in her family network, decided to organize a "No-Excuses Family Reunion." On the invitation, she drew message bubbles filled with excuses for not attending: "I'm running in a marathon that weekend," "My cat is scheduled for surgery," "Nobody wants to see me anyway." Humor can work wonders.

Setting out to change others is usually doomed. Such failed attempts reinforce feelings of frustration and hopelessness. As Bowen (1978) advised, therapeutic efforts are most fruitfully directed at changing ourselves in relation to other family members. Follow-through is essential to handle the anxiety generated by the process and by the system's initial self-correcting attempts that undermine change. To achieve success, we must deal with our own anxiety, keep from becoming reactive if initial responses are disappointing, and persist in our best efforts. Because of the recursive nature of human systems, if we change our own part in transactions, vicious cycles are interrupted and change by others is more likely to follow over time. Whatever the response, as the process enlarges our own perspective, we gain a more compassionate acceptance of others' strengths and limitations. As McGoldrick observes, we would all like to be ourselves with our family members—to have them accept us as who we are. But we lose sight of the prerequisite: that we understand and accept them for who they really are, and get past the anger, resentments, and regrets of not being an ideal family.

> I once worked with Lydia, whose daughter, Amber, age 22, had run off with her boyfriend and cut off from the family 4 years earlier, after her father's death in an auto accident. The harder Lydia pursued Amber, the more she distanced, refusing any visit or phone contact. We considered the vicious cycle that had ensued: The mother's pain

and frustration at Amber's estrangement had fueled guilt-inducing complaints that were self-defeating. Amber, further alienated, accused her mother of only needing her to meet her own needs, adding that her therapist agreed (although never having met the mother).

I worked with Lydia's long-standing pain at the double loss of her husband and daughter, and encouraged her own efforts to move on with her life. I supported her efforts to make meaning of Amber's flight—to see it less as a rejection of her mother and to consider other possibilities from a normative, developmental perspective, such as an adolescent's survival strategy at the devastating loss of her father. I helped Lydia sustain hope in the possibility of eventual reconciliation with her daughter, even in the face of repeated rebuffs. I encouraged her to write occasional letters and cards, sending news and photos. It was important to convey the caring yet undemanding message that she loved Amber and was keeping their connection alive and her door open. Lydia called me a year later to tell me that Amber had finally called and then come home for a visit; the healing of their bond was progressing.

The process of reconnection is advanced by redeveloping personal relationships with important family members, repairing cutoffs, detriangling from conflicts, and changing one's own part in emotionally charged vicious cycles. Humor can detoxify emotional situations. In attempting change, Bowen (1978) advised, don't attack, don't withdraw, and don't defend. Clients often ask, "What else is there to do?" The "what else" lies at the heart of effective change: the ability to hold an assertive, centered position, and to express one's own thoughts, feelings, needs, and concerns with respectful consideration of others. This must be accompanied by a genuine effort to understand their positions and to strive for a better relationship (Carter & McGoldrick, 2001).

The use of photos in therapy can help to connect those estranged, as they trigger storytelling about family members, their relationships, and past events. Letter writing and thoughtfully constructed e-mail messages can be another effective aid in reconnecting and in clarifying positions and misunderstandings. Therapists can offer feedback before they are sent, to support clients' best efforts to express their pain, their caring for the other, and their positive aims without attack or defensiveness. Letters, better than e-mail messages, also allow an entire message to be conveyed and considered by recipients without an immediate defensive reply and counterreaction. When a relationship has been strained for a long time, it's wise to proceed slowly, step by step, not expecting too much too soon. We can actively pursue a relationship, but cannot force one. At times, we may need to step

back and renew efforts more gradually or take a different tack. Keeping a systemic perspective helps us to anticipate possible setbacks, understand them, and rebound undeterred.

Learning and Expanding Family Stories of Adversity and Resilience

When people have a fixed negative view of parental deficits, it's helpful to look back more broadly in family history to gain a contextual, evolutionary perspective and to search for nuggets of resilience at times of past challenges. I encourage many clients (and students) to explore their families' migration experiences, attending in particular to the trauma and losses suffered, their struggles and triumphs, and the ways they forged resilience to endure hardship and make their way in a new life.

Some have a thin narrative of their family history, with little or no sense of earlier life journeys. Many learn, for the first time, how family members navigated disruptive life transitions. In many ethnic minority families, relatives, when encouraged, share long-buried painful stories: accounts of forced migration; of slavery, racism, or genocide; experiences of trauma and privation in war-torn regions. Some fled political, ethnic, or religious persecution or impoverished conditions. In all cases, it's important to search for resilience in the midst of trauma, loss, and dislocation (see Chapter 11). As we explore the strengths that enabled families to reorient and prevail, the stories themselves are enlarged. Reconnecting with the strengths of our ancestors can be empowering as we realize the courage, perseverance, and inventiveness that enabled them to endure and surmount adversity.

Respectful Confrontation

In seeking reconnection, ways must be found to express anger and disappointment and yet to be respectful and considerate toward others, as the following case illustrates:

> In one Mexican American family, three young adult sons had all become estranged from their parents, but the mother's heart attack led them to seek help from their priest in mending their relationships. The sons held intense anger toward their father for his long-standing harsh and abusive treatment when they failed to meet his expectations. Yet they were reluctant to come for family counseling: they hesitated to confront him because they had been brought up never to show disrespect to their father. They also feared an explosive reaction. Distancing

from the family had been their adaptive strategy. The family counselor, who was also Mexican American, acknowledged his own hesitation in opening up these wounds, since respect toward elders is such a strong value in Mexican culture. The therapeutic challenge was to face these sensitive issues in a respectful rather than an attacking way, with the goal of reconciliation.

The father, José, pained by his sons' estrangement, was quite open to family sessions to heal the wounds. With the counselor's facilitation, the sons talked about how it had felt to receive his harsh treatment and about their belief that they could never please him. The father hung his head, remaining silent. The counselor asked what was going through his mind. He said that he himself had suffered beatings and humiliation by his father and fled through immigration, never again seeing his father.

José had never spoken about this experience and became tearful in realizing how he had turned into his father, driving his sons away. This acknowledgment led him to make a heartfelt apology. The sons were deeply moved by their father's account and his genuine remorse. Still, at the following session they were uneasy about how to move forward and what to do with lingering feelings about the past. The counselor noted that the family members had mentioned the importance of their Catholic faith but hadn't all gone to church together in years. He asked whether this might be a resource. The mother suggested that they all go to mass the next Sunday and pray for guidance in healing their bonds. After the mass, the oldest son invited them all to his house for tamales (an old family tradition on Sundays), where José met his grandchildren for the first time. The healing had begun.

Weaving Strands into a Larger Whole

The process of reconciliation involves attempts to incorporate disparate aspects of experience into a larger whole while giving each its place. The understanding of diverse aspects of our relationships as parts of a larger whole offers a path out of irreconcilable polarities (e.g., "How could my father have loved me if he hurt me so badly?" "Was it a loving or destructive romance?"). It requires a shift in our perspective from a split view to a larger, holistic perspective—from an "either–or" stance to a "both–and" inclusive position. A parent may be both loving and harsh; a romantic relationship may be both passionate and destructive.

The Courage to Reach Out

Our families build our physical, emotional, and relational resilience through love and trust. I was most fortunate; despite my parents' persistent

hardships and the toll these took on our lives, I never doubted their love and trustworthiness. In many families those resources have been depleted by hurtful actions, such as neglect, long-standing addictions, or physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. When an individual is harmed or violated by a loved one, family transactions—powerful beliefs, patterns of organization, and communication processes—may allow the abuse to be denied or perpetuated. Individuals often distance and cut off altogether from the family when contact reactivates destructive transactional patterns and pain. Yet they carry disappointment, anger, and mistrust with them on their life journeys. Self-doubt and blame can permeate other relationships with partners and children.

Attempting reconciliation takes enormous courage because we may reenter relationships or reach out to others, only to find that they rebuff our efforts or still betray our trust. The work involves both risk and opportunity: the risk of reexperiencing hurt and no change; the opportunity to experience new relational possibilities. The challenge is to reconcile grievances and forgive injuries to the fullest extent possible. When others are unable to respond as we would wish, we have still gained in generosity, and gained a sense that we've done all we could. This facilitates greater acceptance and enables us to embrace life with fuller integrity.

Even in cases of serious past injury or injustice, relationships can be reconciled and past emotional damage healed through work toward reconciliation, as Hargrave et al. (2007) has found in helping people journey toward forgiveness by building love, justice, and trust. His approach involves four intertwined "stations" focused on insight, understanding, providing the opportunity for compensation, and the overt act of forgiving. This work can be painful and difficult. In the course of seeking understanding, we may get in touch with rage and sorrow, or a threatening image of an abuser. Yet when this work is carefully guided, it can be unexpectedly fruitful because it deals with a powerful vortex where past and future relationships can be changed simultaneously.

Creating Rituals for Healing and Reconciliation

Active involvement in meaningful rituals can be valuable in healing strained relationships after family trauma, as in the following case:

> Raymundo, a trainee in our program, told of his powerful experience of a "family healing ceremony" held by a pastoral counselor for him and members of his family of origin. With the family seated around a table, the pastoral counselor first helped them to construct a large genogram and place it in the center of the table. Family members were

invited to tell their own stories of suffering—from drinking problems to intense conflict and abuse. The counselor then asked for accounts of strength and resilience to rebalance their stories, identify potential resources, and generate hope for positive change. He asked each family member to specify the relational impasses they most hoped to heal, and to point out the relevant parts of the genogram. All family members were encouraged to contribute to this healing conversation from their own positions, expressing both their worries and their hopes. As each spoke in turn, the others were asked to listen attentively. Then they were each asked three questions: Did they desire reconciliation? Would they be willing to own accountability for their part in problems? Would they share in responsibility for improving relations? Each in turn affirmed a commitment to these vows and to working together in family therapy to achieve them. In conclusion, the pastoral counselor led a silent meditation for the success of family reconciliation, lighting a candle with all holding hands. For Raymundo and his family, this experience was quite profound and marked a turning point in healing their relationships.

It is never too late for rituals that honor loved ones and foster connection. On the 20th anniversary of my mother's death, I wanted to mark the event in a meaningful way with my husband and small daughter, who had never known her. Inspired by her love of music, I arranged a short memorial concert of carillon bells at my university. This summer, in remembrance of my mother's beloved father, whom she lost at 19 (in a tragic train crash) I'm flying to his hometown for the first time, to lay flowers on his grave.

Time Can Heal Old Wounds: Reconciliation between Adults and their Elders

Fitting the adage that "you can't teach an old dog new tricks," most young people expect that older adults are set in their ways, so relationships with them can't change. However, research advances in human development and neuroscience reveal the potential for growth and change throughout middle and later life (see Chapter 9). As Bateson (1994) observes, in response to new circumstances, individuals can (and may be forced to) reinvent themselves many times over. With life experience and the wisdom that comes with aging, people can and do change their ways. As older adults seek meaning and coherence to their lives, many attempt to come to terms with problematic and regrettable aspects of their relationships and look for new opportunities to repair frayed bonds. This involves accepting what cannot be changed in the past, developing new perspectives on experiences, putting regrets in their place, and celebrating the successes.

Caregiving for an older parent can be complicated by an adult child's lingering anger and pain at not having received good care from that parent in childhood. Unresolved issues from the past can block the ability to see and respond to aging parents as persons facing their own ongoing challenges.

At various phases in the life course, different issues come to the fore and others recede. As we change and grow through our experiences, our remembrance of the past and current feelings about past events and relationships are altered. A conflict over autonomy and control that flared with burning intensity between an adolescent son and his father may no longer be relevant when the son is more secure in his identity in midlife and the father has mellowed with age. Likewise, the impact of past traumatic events may be altered with subsequent experience. A woman's mothering of a newborn is influenced less by her own early relationship with her mother than by the degree of resolution she has achieved in that relationship over time.

Adult development thus presents new possibilities for healing of old intergenerational wounds. In early and middle adulthood, such relationships continue to be renegotiated on an adult-to-adult basis. Rapprochement commonly occurs with such transitions as parenthood, when those in the younger generation directly experience the challenges involved in child rearing and begin to gain empathy for their own parents. As we age, we may find an increasing number of things we need to learn from and can appreciate in our elders. We may discover that our parents, like Mark Twain's father, become wiser every year.

Seeing Relational Issues in Current Context

Many relationships become frozen at an earlier period of conflict or cutoff, as if time stood still. In interviews with troubled families, I was struck how often reactivity to old patterns of interaction could be aroused decades later, keeping us from understanding and appreciating what is happening in a current situation.

Charleen, a 35-year-old single parent, was furious with her father. He left an abrupt phone message saying that he would not come for Easter dinner because she wasn't planning to serve ham, the traditional dinner her mother had always prepared. Charleen was incensed; he knew full well that she was a vegetarian and that she was going to great lengths to prepare a no-meat feast for their extended family. She heard his refusal to attend as a ploy to control her, just as she had always felt controlled by him as a child. She would not give in to him and serve ham!

Charleen's therapist helped to calm her reactivity and, after hearing more about their past interactions, suggested that she take a breath from that childhood experience and try to understand the immediate situation in context—particularly in light of her mother's death a year earlier. Charleen knew that her father had recently retired, but, busy with her own life, she knew little about it. Her therapist encouraged her to call her brother, who was close to their father, and get his ideas on what might have triggered their father's abrupt behavior. She was shocked to learn that her father had been forced to retire. Shortly before his call to her, he had gone in to work the last day and found that his name had already been removed from the door, his office cleared out, and his belongings piled in the hallway.

Charleen's perspective shifted. She had framed the incident, as she usually did, in the context of their old parent–child dynamics—her father's need to wield authority over her. Each time that old drama was reactivated, she rebelled angrily against feeling controlled and manipulated. Now she saw his recent actions in new light: he was recently widowed, living alone, and in a devastating life crisis of forced retirement. She went to see him and found him jolted by the cruel way in which he was terminated and by feelings that he had lost control over his own life. His work world, his identity, his future security, and his dignity were suddenly shattered—and he was alone, missing his wife more than ever. For the first time, Charleen felt truly like an adult with compassion for her elder parent, who was facing losses all around him. She could appreciate her father's urgent need for continuity with his past. She lovingly included her mother's recipe for ham in the Easter dinner preparations.

Healing Sibling Bonds

Sibling bonds can be vital sources in resilience, but can be torn apart by old rivalries and grievances from childhood.

Jimmy, age 34, sought therapy to improve his relationships with his two sisters. They had been estranged since the sudden death of both parents in a car crash 2 years earlier. Old sibling rivalries had pitted them against one another since childhood. Their father had been remote and their mother chronically depressed, with the siblings competing fiercely for the little attention they received. In an attempt to reconnect, Jimmy invited his sisters for dinner, but it was disastrous. His sister Carmen saw a treasured photo of their mother on the mantel and was furious with him for failing to make a copy for her, as he had promised at their parents' funeral. Defensively, Jimmy snapped, "Get off my case!" Carmen lashed out at him for being a "self-centered

mama's boy." He retorted that she was a "spiteful old nag" who stole all their mother's jewelry. Enraged, she grabbed the photo and tore it up; as they struggled he knocked her down, causing a nosebleed. The other sister, Dara, settled things down. But in ensuing weeks, the hostilities escalated: Carmen hired a lawyer to sue Jimmy for damages, and he refused to apologize, blamed the incident on her, and threatened to countersue. Dara sided with Carmen against him. Jimmy's wife berated him for his "childish" plans for revenge.

Intense family triangles can entangle helpers: when the therapist questioned Jimmy's proposed counterattack, he accused her of siding with his sister and wife against him. She clarified her position: She was not colluding with them against him; rather, she was trying to align with his better self. She knew him to be a decent and generous man, and she believed that deep down, he knew he had played a part in the conflict and might have some regrets. He put his head in his hands, sighed deeply, and nodded. They now more calmly reflected on the chain of events and the relational significance of the incident: keeping for himself—or, from his sister's perspective, withholding from her—the photo of their deceased mother, who hadn't been available when they had most needed her as children. Jimmy agreed to take responsibility for his own procrastination, since he knew how much the photo meant to Carmen. The therapist also helped him to see that no matter what his sister had done that had provoked him, he was accountable for his own violent reaction and harm to her. His therapist appealed to his better nature, urging him to apologize for his actions and to cease litigation, which would undermine his aim of improving his sibling relationships. She affirmed his idea to have enlarged copies made and framed for each of them. A later session including all siblings enabled each one to be heard and better understood. The therapist, knowing they enjoyed cooking, offered the suggestion that, in the spirit of reconciliation, they might plan a potluck dinner together, each contributing a favorite dish. At a follow-up session, Jimmy brought photos of them celebrating their reunion.

Serious Illness and Threatened Loss: Time Sensitive Dilemmas

Terminal illness and threatened loss can spark urgency in making amends for past relational grievances before it is too late. Yet, heart-wrenching dilemmas can complicate the situation.

Diane came to see me in an urgent family crisis. She and her husband and their 16-year-old son had a "perfect" family life that now could be shattered. She recounted that she had become pregnant with Jason in

a past relationship. Her boyfriend, Ron, had left town, saying he was sorry but he wasn't ready for marriage or parenthood. She never heard from him again. In despair, she'd married Dwayne, a good friend who knew the baby wasn't his but gladly accepted paternity. Jason had grown up believing that Dwayne was his biological father. Now, out of the blue, Ron had called her from California, saying that he had terminal cancer and wanted to see Jason before he died. She wanted me to advise her: what she should do?

A wise therapist doesn't solve such dilemmas for clients, but helps them survey their situation and options as fully as possible to come to their best decision. First we explored the case for not telling: She worried that the news would be too upsetting for Jason, who was doing well. Her catastrophic fear was that his psychological adjustment and school achievements would plummet. Further, she worried that it could be devastating for her husband, who was such a kind and loving father to Jason, and would risk shattering their stable family unit. She also feared that Jason would hate her for keeping the truth from him and living a lie all his life. I also asked about Diane's own complex feelings. She was enraged that Ron had abandoned her and their son and over the years had never expressed the slightest interest in Jason or contributed to his support. What right did he have to disrupt their lives now?

I suggested that in the next session we explore the other side of the dilemma, and consider the ramifications if she decided *not* to tell her son. On further reflection, she didn't want Jason to learn the truth somehow later on from others. For instance, what if Ron's other children, his half siblings, ever contacted him? He would hate her for lying, and more so for denying him his only chance to know his birth father. After deep soul searching, she decided that Jason had a right to know about Ron and to meet him if he chose to do so. She believed she needed to summon the courage to trust in her son and in the strong bonds their family had forged over the years. We considered how this secret might best be revealed. She decided to first discuss it with her husband, who was very supportive. They agreed to tell Jason together and to hold each other through any upheaval. To be prepared, I asked how they anticipated Jason might react. She thought he might run off, but wouldn't do something destructive and would likely return. I encouraged her to keep a supportive openness to "hang in" with him through an immediate turbulent period.

Jason initially was disbelieving, then enraged at both parents. As predicted, he stormed out of the house. They called his best friend's parents and were reassured that he was there for the night. The next day he returned but refused to talk to them. The following day he asked for Ron's phone number. The parents told him they would support whatever decision he made. Jason decided to go to meet his father.

The visit was short but meaningful. Ron showed sincere remorse for having been so scared and immature in running out on Jason and his mother. He revealed, tearfully, that a day had not passed without his thoughts of Jason. He was also ashamed that he had not sent money for Jason's support. He wanted Jason to know that he had just signed over half of his pension to Jason for college. He said he knew he couldn't change the past and that this wouldn't make up for the lost years, but he wanted to do what he could now. After returning home, Jason was very grateful for his parents' trust in him. I applauded them for their generosity in giving Jason and his father this opportunity. Several months later, at his father's death, Jason went to his funeral, where he began to connect with his half siblings. Through this process, contrary to Diane's fear of losing their "intact" family, their bonds, while expanded, were strengthened.

Healing a Relationship Long after a Death

"Death ends a life, but not a relationship, which struggles on in the survivor's mind, seeking some resolution which it may never find." This opening line in Anderson's (1968) play *I Never Sang for My Father* conveys the protracted anguish experienced when relational wounds were not reconciled before a death. Much of my clinical work involves helping clients find healing, even many years after a loss.

Lena, age 43, came for therapy to explore painful issues around the loss of her mother when she was 9. She had now reached the age at which her mother had died, and she was experiencing a pervasive sense of emptiness in her life. Lena had few memories of her mother, and had always believed that she had been cold and distant and had never loved her. I asked her to bring in old family photos; she had very few. As her mother's health deteriorated, she hadn't wanted to be photographed. In one photo, Lena and several friends were in costumes for a school musical, with her mother to the side. I commented on how struck I was by her mother's fond gaze at her in the photo. She had never noticed that before but could see it at once. She reported at our next session that she'd kept the photo with her all week, looking at it over and over, her eyes brimming with tears each time. She recalled that the photo was taken less than a year before her mother's death, when she was in great pain and limited in what she could do. Nevertheless, she had volunteered to make costumes for Lena and her classmates. Now, seeing evidence of her mother's deeply caring attachment, new memories flowed out of the past darkness, and she began to revise her beliefs and stories to incorporate her mother's love. She realized that she, too, had

withdrawn as her mother's illness progressed, protecting herself from unbearable sadness in her loss.

Lena also realized that because of the long illness, she'd barely known her mother. I urged her to contact her aunt to learn more about her mother as a child and a young woman. Her aunt sent photos and invited her to visit. There she saw her mother's childhood home, heard poignant and funny stories about her mother's life, and learned how high-spirited she had been before her illness. Her aunt gave her a letter written by her mother shortly before her death, confiding that her greatest regret was not being there for Lena and sharing her sorrow that the illness had robbed her of strength to do all she might have for her. Lena's enlarged view of her mother and their relationship, and new connection with her aunt and hometown, were enormously healing. Single with no children, she was a talented schoolteacher, yet had kept to herself, cool and aloof. She now felt more "full of life" and became more engaged in her community, with new spirit in her work and in her connections to students.

Couples on the Brink of Divorce

In every couple relationship, there are troubled times and tensions that can escalate to disconnection. For couples today, the stresses of job and family demands and changing gender role relations heighten the need to negotiate and reconcile differences. Partners from different cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds may bring different values and expectations to their relationship that first attract them to each other but later can fuel conflict. We expect more from marriage than ever before, leading to greater frustration and disappointment when unrealistic dreams and incompatibilities collide. If we can help each partner value the uniqueness of the other and honor the differences, these can add to the richness of the relationship.

Couple therapists, for all our experience, cannot reliably predict which couples will stay together and which will ultimately split up. Some couples come to therapy hoping that we will tell them what they should do or confirm their belief that their situation is hopeless. A partner may consider leaving as the only option when feeling powerless to change things. Therapists can understand their pessimism and yet encourage them not to walk away without assessing with their partners the possibilities for relational healing. Some ruminate over whether to stay or to go, viewing their situation in a "stick with it or leave it" manner; staying means accepting the status quo, which may be intolerable. Couple consultations can help both partners identify and communicate changes needed for them to reinvest in the relationship and work toward shared aims in therapy. Partners can be helped to reframe accusations and complaints in terms of their own needs for a satisfying relationship, and to clarify positive aims to work toward. The possibility of reconciliation for a couple, as for a family-of-origin relationship, depends most on the depth of the will to reconcile. It requires a readiness to take the other person seriously, acknowledge violations, and make amends for the pain suffered.

A strong relationship is a loving collaboration that requires flexibility, mutual accommodation, and shared commitment. Because partners and circumstances inevitably change, all enduring relationships require regeneration, updating, and renegotiation of bonds and mutual expectations (the relational "quid pro quo"). Anderson (2007) proposed the ritual of "promising again," an intentional, mutual renewal of vows requiring that each partner actively choose the other again. Such rituals can be meaningful within or outside religious structures, especially at a transition or crisis. Recommitment—including vows of needed change—is necessary when promises have been broken. The renewal expresses the choice of hope over despair, promoting a vital reconnection to sustain and strengthen a relationship over its life course. Reconciliation, catalyzing needed change, brings partners to a deeper place of trust and commitment.

TRANSCENDING TRAUMA: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

Resilience can be forged out of the cauldron of past trauma as we strive to integrate those painful experiences into the fabric of our lives and our relationships. We can seize opportunities for transformation and growth in our personal lives, our wider communities, and our global connections. Reconciliation is a process of moving toward mutual acceptance and developing a vision of peaceful coexistence (Staub, 2013).

In one of the most painful and enduring photo images of the Vietnam War, 9-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc was running naked, her arms outstretched, screaming in agony and terror as napalm seared her body. She endured a score of surgical procedures and became a political symbol of the horror of war. By her mid-30s, she felt she was finally living a "normal, happy life" with her husband and small son in an Asian neighborhood in Toronto. In an act of reconciliation nearly 25 years after her ordeal, she went to Washington, D.C., to lay a wreath at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day. Speaking before a large audience, she told them:

> I have suffered a lot from both physical and emotional pain. Sometimes I could not breathe. But God saved my life and gave me faith and hope. Even if I could talk face to face with the pilot who dropped the bombs, I would tell him, "We cannot change history, but we should try to do good things for the present and for the future to promote peace." (quoted in Sciolino, 1996, p. A1)

As shown by generations of Vietnamese, we can suffer brutal atrocities and yet not be locked into a perpetual struggle as wounded victims. Avoiding the trap of a victimized life stance is within our power. Instead, we forge resilience by rising above the trauma, transforming the experience to galvanize our determination to make significant changes for the better.

Expanding Possibilities for Forgiveness

In fostering healing and resilience, traumatic events in the past are not erased, but perceptions and feelings concerning them can be fundamentally altered, as well as their implications for our lives going forward. In exploring possibilities for forgiveness, we can encourage clients to shift from endless condemnation of the offender to learn how patterns of harm or injustice evolved and view them in social and historical context. When a relational injustice has occurred in a couple, a family, a community, or between ethnic, political, or religious groups, it's reasonable and just to expect the offenders to be held accountable. Forgiveness and reconciliation are facilitated when wrongdoers accept responsibility for the injustice and resulting harm and vow never again to repeat it. Forgiveness is also fostered by meaningful compensation for past injustices and by trustworthy actions in the future.

In many cultural and religious traditions, forgiveness does not require acknowledgment or compensatory efforts by the offender (Hargrave et al., 2009). In the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, it is said that if you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive. It involves taking a courageous position that frees those who forgive from hatred and bitterness and opens pathways for healing and transcendence. Studies find that the process can reduce health risks and promote resilience in those who forgive (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). As we saw in Chapter 11, when a teenage son was killed, the mother began her journey of forgiveness primarily for her own and her family's healing. As the effects of her positive actions spiraled outward, this also contributed to a remarkable transformation for the offender. The incarcerated youth rose above his initial self-pity to take accountability, convey genuine remorse to the bereaved family, and devote his full efforts to turning his life around. The compassion shown between parents of the victim and those of the offender fostered mutual healing.

Essentially, forgiving a loved one involves relational transformation. The process balances the personal need to maintain integrity and protection with efforts to tap family resources of love and trust that will strengthen the individual and bear fruit in other relationships. Reconciliation may—or may not—involve forgiveness for the part of the relationship that was a violation. Without forgiving that part, one can forgive the person and heal the relationship. Doing so honors the hurtful experience while keeping it in its place so that it doesn't destroy the whole.

Forgive and Remember

Contrary to the popular saying "Forgive and forget," forgiveness does not mean that the slate is wiped clean or that harmful actions should be forgotten. The pain attached to past injustices does tend to fade with time if reconciliation and forgiveness are achieved, especially when love and trust are rebuilt (Flaskas, McCarthy, & Sheehan, 2007). However, if we forget the damage that occurred, we may not learn from it to take the steps necessary to prevent such actions from happening again in the future. Trust is best restored not when family members (or a society) act as if no violation occurred, but rather when they remain mindful of past injustice and strive to relate differently. New terms for the relationship must be set to ensure that such damage never again occurs.

In the family, understanding how past traumas contributed to parental vulnerabilities and limitations does not excuse violations. Family members must be held accountable for their motives, actions, and consequences. To explore possibilities, as therapists we might ask clients: "Are there any parts of the experience that can be forgiven? What might make it possible for you to forgive the person, if not the actions? Would it be possible to forgive the person if he or she made an effort to change and were able to acknowledge and apologize with genuine remorse? To demonstrate genuine interest in you and your well-being?"

Can or should the wounded forgive those who were abusive or destructive? It is not for therapists to make that decision for any individual or family. Although it can be enormously fruitful, the decision is up to each person who has been offended. One woman, understandably, could never forgive her father for killing her mother. Different paths may be taken in varied situations. Forgiveness is complex and may involve violations at multiple system levels. When a priest has sexually abused children he has betrayed his religious vows and the trust of the faith community and also committed criminal acts. When a powerful position is abused, seriously harms another, and violates trust, it must be weighed quite seriously. If some form of abuse

continues to be a threat, the abused person might run an unwise risk in pursuing a forgiving relationship with the offender. Some individuals may decide that forgiveness is not possible for them. In each case, emotional, relational, and ethical dilemmas must be grappled with. As therapists we can try to help clients to gather information, deal with intense emotions, and weigh various perspectives to make events, relationships, and actions more comprehensible as they come to their own decisions.

Intrafamilial relational violations are among the most devastating. In families where there has been abuse, neglect, or other destructive behavior, therapists can strive to help clients reach a position of holding those family members accountable for their behavior. In many cases, therapy can attempt to increase understanding of formative experiences that shaped the vulnerabilities and limitations of offending persons without excusing the deplorable acts, yet gaining empathy for their experiences of suffering. We can encourage clients' refusal to spend their own lives immersed in accusation and bitterness. Above all, this entails our compassionate response to those who have suffered, and yet also extends compassion to parents or other offenders for their hardship and suffering. In many cases, offenders also need therapists' help in forgiving themselves for past wrongs or shameful actions.

The ability of resilient individuals and families to emerge from traumatic situations strong and healthy should not imply that they are weak and deficient if they are more deeply wounded and less hardy in recovery. Judith Herman (1992) has stressed the importance of "moral solidarity," with respect for those struggling with trauma because they are most in need of hope and least in need of another reason to make them feel bad about themselves.

Truth Telling and Justice

In rebalancing stories and legacies of our history to highlight heroes and positive models, we must be careful not to tilt to the other extreme, airbrushing atrocities to reveal only the inspiring. We have to face the unpleasant as well as the affirmative side of the human story, including our own stories as a nation and our own stories of our peoples. Our history as a society, like history in families, is too easily written in the voice of its dominant members, with the experiences of the marginalized and vulnerable silenced (Hernandez, 2002). In many cases, we must have the ugly facts in order to challenge the official view of reality. Sadly, great nations, like our own, too often have difficulty acknowledging and repairing past injustices and harm, from slavery and the genocide of native peoples to the destruction and dehumanization of wars.

Truth is required of justice when human rights have been violated, whether in a family, a community, or a nation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, formed in South Africa to investigate human rights violations under apartheid, was a unique experiment in gathering facts and publishing historical records about past atrocities. Those who committed crimes were obliged, at the very least, to acknowledge their deeds publicly as a necessary condition of a plan for amnesty. Amnesty was then considered and offered on a case-by-case basis. In one situation, for instance, a police captain who had killed 13 women and children admitted his actions and apologized to the victims' families, asking them "to consider" forgiving him. It was then the families' decision as to whether their forgiveness was possible (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002).

Compensation can often further a sense of justice. Yet in some situations, survivors may feel that horrific crimes are beyond compensation. Even when survivors are unable to forgive, telling and learning the truth about past atrocities is important for a brutalized individual, group, or society to bind up wounds. It offers details about what happened and more catharsis for those who have suffered. Making some meaning of the senseless helps to render the horrific intelligible. The ambitious South African experiment was fraught with dilemmas, as many perpetrators seeking amnesty were accused of distorting or covering up facts to deny or minimize their role. Yet in an imperfect world, such societal efforts to resist revenge and retribution and instead to seek a healing justice can foster vital transformation, as has been seen more recently in Rwanda. Reviving trauma can initially increase pain and conflict, especially if the cold facts are brutal. Yet the ability to integrate painful experience and move on with life is furthered by the whole truth, including its comprehension within the context of its time and place. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "the truth will set you free."

Learning from History: Informing and Inspiring Our Best

History is essential to our ongoing understanding of ourselves, our families, and our culture. Humans have a deep need to be connected to our larger community and to our own history. As Griffin (1993) asserts, all history, including the histories of our families, is part of us, such that when we hear terrible secrets revealed, about a grandparent or an uncle, or about our society's past injustices, our lives are made clearer to us, as "the heaviness of unspoken truth" is dispersed. Lifting this heaviness is part of the process of opening communication across the generations and in our social world.

History tends to be written by the most powerful, to support their privilege and legitimize their actions. We need to expand the power of history to people who have been unjustly or brutally treated and marginalized, either within their families or by societies, so that all of us are empowered to use our understanding of the past to inform and inspire our best actions in the present and the future.

Spirit with a Broken Heart

In Ken Burns's powerful video documentary *The West* (Ives, Abramson, & Kantor, 1996), Albert White Hat, a Lakota native teacher and mentor, tells of his struggle to come to terms with the genocidal atrocities committed against his tribe over more than 150 years, which churned inside his entire being:

> "I grew up with a lot of the older people, listened to the stories. The stories were inside of me. I went into a boarding school system and they killed those stories in that system. I came to be ashamed of who I am, what I am.
>
> "In the late '60s I returned to the culture, let my hair grow, and started speaking the language. I did the Vision Quest for 5 years; I fasted. . . . One of those times, it was a beautiful night, the stars were out, it was calm, and around midnight I got up and I prayed and sat there a while. Then all of a sudden I had these flashbacks—of Sand Creek, Wounded Knee—and every policy, every law that was imposed on us hit me one at a time and how it affected my life. And as I sat there I got angrier and angrier, till it turned to hatred. And I looked at this whole situation, the whole history, and there was nothing I could do. It was too much. The only thing I could do, to me, was: 'When I come off that hill I'm going to grab a gun and I'm going to start shooting; and then maybe my grandfathers will honor me if I go that route.'
>
> "I got up and I turned around and faced the East and it was beautiful; there was dawn light. Right above that blue light in the darkness was the sliver of the moon in the morning. And I wanted to live. I wanted to live and be happy. I feel I deserve it. But the only way I was going to do that was if I forgive. And I cried that morning because I had to forgive.
>
> "Since then I work every day on that commitment. Now, I don't know how many people feel that way, but every one of us, if you're a Lakota, you have to deal with this at some point in your life. You have to address that and you have to make a decision. If you don't, you're going to die on the road someplace, either from being too drunk or from putting a bullet in your head. So this isn't history; it's still with us. What has happened in the past will never leave us. The next 100 years it will be with us. And we have to deal with it every day."

As Albert White Hat realized, if we are consumed by rage, however justified, it can enslave our present and our future to past horrors, and preclude our having a decent life.

We may be drawn to the wish-fulfilling fantasy of a time machine that will allow us to go back to the past so that we can change it. Although we can't change the past in that way, we can revise and enlarge our perspectives on that past, learn from it, and vow to live and relate differently. This involves mastering the art of the possible, a core process in resilience.

We can strive to make meaning of past hurt and injustice, and then draw upon our inner resources and bonds with loved ones, our larger communities, and transcendent values in order to live and love to our fullest potential and to leave positive legacies for the future. As children in our families and communities, we had little control over traumatic events; as adults and parents, we have the power and opportunity to do better—with our own children and with all others in our lives. Our shared future will be promising if we can come to understand our lives, gain compassion for the struggles of others, and take up our responsibilities to all living things.