

Resilience

Anne Deveson

Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2003

Anne Deveson is well known as a writer, documentary film-maker and former head of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. She has had a lifelong commitment to social justice issues. Her 1992 (2nd edition, 1998) publication *Tell me I'm here* describes Deveson's personal journey with her son Jonathan who lived with a diagnosis of schizophrenia for seven years before his tragic death from a drug overdose.

Resilience, her most recent publication, like *Tell me I'm here*, is a part-autobiographical piece, weaving Deveson's compelling personal narrative with relevant literature and research in the area. This time, the key focus is adversity and the role that personal and systemic resilience play in how we cope with it. Deveson explores her own childhood and adolescence in more depth than she has done hitherto. She develops some new insights and reflects upon the challenges she and her family faced as they dealt with wartime separations, refugee status, financial hardship and mental illness. This leg of Deveson's personal journey appears to challenge her fantasy of 'a normal childhood' and confront her with the need to unravel the mysteries of resilience.

Deveson ignites our curiosity in relation to how personal challenges arise – be it the challenge of a serious mental illness, that of family dysfunction or homelessness. Drawing upon the work of high profile developmental researchers such as Michael Rutter and Urie Bronfenbrenner, Deveson

shares her fascination with the ecological niche. How communities can support individual coping and adaptation is convincingly presented with some poignant case examples. Like Plato, Deveson is clearly convinced that it 'takes a village to raise a child'.

Throughout the book runs the story of a powerful, but tragically brief, partnership Deveson forms with Robert Theobald, her 'defrocked economist' lover. Theobald was widely respected as a passionate advocate for the prioritising of community resilience over individualism. The last third of the narrative focuses on Robert's dying and on his death. We are gently invited to join Deveson at her bedside vigil. There we confront our own mortality – the ultimate and final challenge to resilience!

This book is powerfully engaging in its intermingling of honest revelation and hopeful critique. It has much to offer those working with children, adolescents and families where hopelessness and despair can impair focus on strength and untapped resources.

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