

*Based on groundbreaking research from
one of the resiliency capitals of the world*

RAISING

RESILIENT

KIDS

8 PRINCIPLES FOR BRINGING UP

**HEALTHY, HAPPY, SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN WHO CAN
OVERCOME OBSTACLES & THRIVE DESPITE ADVERSITY**

**RHONDA
SPENCER-HWANG, DrPH, MPH**

Foreword by Celeste Philip, MD, MPH

Dr. Spencer-Hwang's commitment to share wisdom gathered from Resiliency Capital members is the start of a revolution in holistic parenting. Filled with practical methods to help us begin creating a wellness mindset at home, *Raising Resilient Kids* reminds us that as caretakers and guides for our children, we're entrusted with a miraculous opportunity—the chance to lead by example and show our kids how to live each day with genuine appreciation for this adventure called life. You will learn how to help your children see that caring for body, mind, spirit, and soul one choice at a time can lead to a lifetime of good, especially when it comes to triumphing through adversity.

JUNI FELIX, member of the Behavior Design Teaching Team created by Dr. BJ Fogg; founder and director of Stanford University's Behavior Design Lab; author of *You Are Worth the Work: Moving Forward from Trauma to Faith*

Even the premise of this book—capturing the wisdom of the ages from centenarians to guide today's young parents—is intriguing. Rhonda Spencer-Hwang has distilled an amazing array of advice from those over 100 years of age into a useful set of principles for raising resilient children. With practical references to scientific literature and an engaging writing style, she carries the reader through her own life experiences while sharing simple guidelines for healthy living. Parents of all ages will enjoy and benefit from the wisdom in these pages.

RICHARD H. HART, MD, DRPH, president, Loma Linda University Health

As a family physician, I see patients ranging in age from newborn to elderly, or “from the cradle to the grave,” which gives me the privilege of seeing people as they age. I have often asked my older patients who are doing remarkably well what their secrets are. This book, which is filled with wisdom from centenarians, is written in a very down-to-earth way with funny anecdotes, which makes it easy to read. Its advice will help you raise your children so they can bounce back from the challenges they will face in a less-than-perfect, ever-changing world.

The book is well-researched and breaks the findings down into sensible and thorough solutions to help your children build successful and meaningful lives. I highly recommend it as an entertaining and effective tool to help you raise confident, optimistic children.

JANINE HWANG, MD

Raising Resilient Kids

DR. RHONDA SPENCER-HWANG, DrPH, MPH

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Raising Resilient Kids: 8 Principles for Bringing Up Healthy, Happy, Successful Children Who Can Overcome Obstacles and Thrive despite Adversity

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*This book is dedicated to my husband, Joe,
and our children, Jayden, Joelle, and Julia.*

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

RAISING RESILIENT KIDS INTRODUCES YOU to eight healthy habits that centenarians (people one hundred years or older) have practiced since childhood and that may improve your family's overall health and resilience as well. Before making major changes to health practices such as diet and exercise, however, be sure to consult with your physician.

FOREWORD

WHEN THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS of 2020 forced the world to stop and retreat indoors, parents and experts alike began to worry about how living through a pandemic would impact our children's development.

COVID-19 created an adverse childhood experience (ACE) for nearly every child on earth. What would this mean long-term for a global generation of children?

Research on ACEs is of growing importance as we learn more about their potential lifelong effects on health. Equally important, if not more so, is knowing what protective actions can counter the impact of early life adversity and build resiliency. Fortunately, not long before the pandemic struck, Dr. Spencer-Hwang completed her study of the childhood habits of another generation that had grown up during perilous times—the centenarians who were born around the year the previous global pandemic struck and whose youth was shaped by the Great Depression and Second World War.

In this innovative approach to capturing and distilling the salient life experiences of a vibrant and active community of centenarians, Dr. Spencer-Hwang lays out a blueprint of eight strategies to create a hub of resilience in your own home. The lessons she has gleaned from her interviews are consistent with habits known to mitigate the effects of ACEs and improve overall physical and mental health. As a busy mom herself, she

offers practical suggestions on how your family can begin incorporating all of these principles in your daily life. Although technology has altered our lifestyles since the childhoods of these treasured sages, these concepts are timeless and adaptable—and possibly never more important to us than now.

As you reflect on how the cascading impacts from unavoidable life circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic may be influencing your children, family, and other loved ones, be encouraged by the compelling and inspiring vignettes shared in this work. Be empowered to have faith, set goals, and take action, knowing that these adversities do not preclude living long, healthy lives; rather, this stretching and molding we are all enduring—and how we choose to intentionally respond to our challenges—may strengthen and equip us to stay the course and enjoy many more decades of a joyful, blessed, and healthy life.

*Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
Deputy Director for Non-Infectious Diseases
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

INTRODUCTION

ON A MILD CALIFORNIA WINTER'S DAY a few years ago, I sat on the patio watching my youngest child, one-year-old Julia, babbling away in the sandbox. Her brother and sister were already at school, and I had no classes to teach that day. I didn't have to rush off to a meeting, answer an email, give a health presentation, drive car pool, or settle sibling disputes. I relished this unhurried moment of calm.

Yet I felt uneasy. I knew something was not right and I was headed for trouble. I was teaching public health at a university but privately devouring and feeding my kids junk food. I was teaching the importance of physical exercise and movement but spent most of my time sitting at my desk working while my kids sat in front of the TV. I was dedicated to my church, but my family and I were missing more services than we attended. I had lost my direction—and worse, I was setting up my kids to follow the same rocky path.

Watching Julia dig her way to China with her plastic shovel, I thought about how far our family had drifted from a healthy lifestyle. Like so many other parents, I was overwhelmed by the endless bombardment of daily challenges, accompanied by heaping doses of exhausting stress. As a working wife and mother in a two-career household, dealing with the hectic scheduling demands and conflicts of three children, I found myself making one subconscious decision after another.

*Fast food just this once. I'm too tired to cook.
A marathon of TV for the kids just today. It's sure to settle them down.
Skipping church just this week. We've got so much to do.*

Such days had turned into months and months into years, until these continual “exceptions” to the rule had *become* the rule—and soon characterized our daily lives. Making matters worse, my husband and I were paying for those unsettling selections not only with our own personal health, but with our kids’ health as well.

As a public-health professor, I knew what our choices meant. Many of the consequences that accompany such split-second decisions are readily apparent—like a burgeoning waistline. Others remain hidden—potentially wreaking havoc inside the body—becoming evident only later in life. I understood these facts well, and I worried for my kids. Life hadn’t always been this way, and somehow, I knew I needed to find my way back. Yet I lacked direction and felt paralyzed to make a change.

Ironically, I live and work in Loma Linda, California, a community known worldwide for the health, extraordinary resilience, and longevity of its citizens. Often referred to as a longevity hot spot, Loma Linda is one of only five regions in the world—and the only one in North America—with clusters of centenarians, men and women who have reached a vibrant one hundred years of age.¹

As a working mom, I wanted to do much better at promoting the health and well-being of my own kids. As a professor in the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University, I began to think critically about how to promote health and resilience among all children. After all, many studies have shown that our habits and experiences in childhood lay the foundation for our health as adults. What childhood practices had protected the centenarians in our community from the stresses of hardship and encouraged their accomplishments? I suspected that these senior citizens had much to teach today’s parents about how to raise healthy kids, so I embarked on a study that centered on interviews with as many of the centenarians in my community as I could find.² My quest? To

learn how their childhoods had set them up for resilience and success throughout their lifetimes.

WHAT THIS BOOK CAN DO FOR YOU

Through my research, I discovered eight resiliency principles common to all the centenarians I interviewed. Each is important for immediate and long-term health and resilience, not just for adults, but especially for children. Resilience—the body’s ability to maintain itself both mentally and physically, either preventing disease, illness, or pathological changes in the first place, or bouncing back when illness or disease strikes—is a key factor in our families’ wellness and wholeness. When supported by a positive mindset, resilience (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) enables people to reach their potential, whether in academics, extracurricular activities, or careers. It also promotes health within the entire body.

The resiliency principles help boost the immune system and protect us from everyday stressors, and they provide some degree of protection from ever-present environmental stressors like air pollution and viral outbreaks like COVID-19. I had no idea what was coming in early 2020, but I know that by putting the centenarians’ wisdom into practice, my family and I were better prepared when that pandemic overtook the United States.

By adopting the eight resiliency principles, you and your family will experience immediate and long-term health benefits. Too often we parents practice à la carte health. We pick and choose the health habits we’ll try to adopt—whether because we like them best, they conveniently fit into our schedules, or they support the idea of who we feel our family should be (hello, lacto-ovo, Friday-only pescatarian vegetarians). But choosing just a couple of habits will get you only so far. We need to practice whole health.

Because I know from personal experience how hard it can be to begin and remain committed to lifestyle changes, I provide a number of tools to

*When you
learn, teach.*

*When you
get, give.*

MAYA ANGELOU

help you along the way. I've included a survey in the back so you can take stock of the areas where you are strongest and where you could benefit most from improvement. You'll find several other tools there to help you evaluate your progress along the way, as well as healthy recipes developed by a dietitian and executive chef.

Chapters 1 and 2 give you an inside peek at how a conflict within the Loma Linda community ultimately helped lead me to compromise my family's health—and how I took back control. Chapters 3 through 9 will walk you through one new principle each week. The final chapter will give you the tools to help you and your family keep up your new healthy habits. In these chapters, you'll discover what I learned from the centenarians and how you can begin to apply those lessons in your own family. I encourage you to use a notebook or journal to record your responses to the questions and prompts in each chapter, which will help you track your progress along the way.

Though you can practice one new principle each week, don't worry about covering them all in eight weeks if that's not feasible. Also, if you are pressed for time, look for the "In a Pinch, It's a Cinch" section in each chapter, where I provide you with strategies for kick-starting that specific resiliency principle.

As you complete the program, you and your family are likely to see improvement in three areas of your life: resilience, happiness, and performance (from academics to athletics and beyond), with the added bonus of immune systems that are better prepared for the next epidemic looming on the horizon. Through my university-affiliated health education programs and guest presentations on this topic, I have helped thousands of parents, childcare providers, and school educators put these powerful principles into action. Now it's your turn. This has been a life-changing journey for me, and it can be life-changing for you as well.

PART 1

GET READY...GET SET

WHY RESILIENCE? WHY NOW?

CHAPTER 1

A MOM IN HIDING

*What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide
what kind of difference you want to make.*

JANE GOODALL

IN 2011, A FIGHT BROKE OUT in the Loma Linda community. Just a few years after we'd been honored and lauded for being named the only Blue Zone in North America, a major fast-food chain approached our city council, seeking to open a location in town. Big Macs and McNuggets in the land of longevity? Though we did have one other fast-food establishment, it didn't begin to approach the cheeseburger juggernaut that was the Golden Arches, and at least that other restaurant made sure to highlight a vegetarian option. For some in my community, the Golden Arches were the greasy epitome of fast food in America—just empty, salty calories with no redeeming qualities.

My colleagues at the university, many of them close friends, urged me to join them at the city council meeting. "Make sure you mark your calendar!" I was told. "We need as many people there as possible to stop this monstrosity from rolling into our city." Even little children were quoted in the local newspaper as saying things like "Our Blue Zone is going to die!"

Me? I sat quietly on the sidelines. After all, who could stop this corporation? Wasn't fast food—particularly *this* fast food—woven into the fabric

of America? Its presence in our community was unavoidable; indeed, it was inevitable. Sure enough, despite the protests, it wasn't long before those ubiquitous Golden Arches were displayed prominently on the busiest street in Loma Linda.

For me, a noncombatant in the burger war, the chain's arrival was no big deal. What's another fast-food joint? So shortly after their grand opening, I decided to take my kids for a visit—I was probably one of their first twenty customers.

“Do you guys want an ice cream cone?” I asked my two older kids—both under ten at the time. I told myself that a simple soft-serve ice cream cone wasn't a burger. I remained a semi-practicing vegetarian, right? Very rarely had my kids been exposed to fast food, so I thought of our visit as a harmless taste of American culture.

“Yeahhhh!” they said immediately and in unison, as if they'd waited for this moment their entire lives.

Even with my “no big deal, let's have an ice cream cone” attitude, that first time in the drive-through was a real nail-biter. I kept looking over my shoulder and out the side window like a guilt-ridden criminal. What would my colleagues think if they saw me—a health professor, a researcher, and a dedicated mom—feeding my children fast food?

At the speaker window, I quickly and quietly announced, “Three cones, please.”

“Can you please restate your order?” came the staticky voice through the speaker.

“Three cones to go!” I snapped.

“Hold on.” After pressing what seemed like dozens of keys, the cashier gave me the total, and I pulled my minivan to the first window to pay and receive our guilty pleasures.

As I drove up, I dug through the little tray in the console to count out the exact amount; I didn't want to wait a minute longer for the cashier to make change. Every minute I sat there was a minute closer to getting caught. I placed the money in the hand of the cashier, a teenage girl with glasses. And then I waited.

And waited. And waited. *What are they doing, churning the ice cream?*

Uneasy, I peered into the rearview mirror at the cars behind me in line.

“I’m so sorry it’s taking me so long. I’m still learning the system,” the girl said, adjusting her glasses as if that might somehow help her master the process. The stress radiating off me didn’t help her concentration—she managed to fumble even more with the cash register.

Finally she handed me a receipt and asked me to drive to the next window, where the three vanilla cones were quickly produced. As the food attendant handed me the cones, she smiled and urged me to “have a wonderful day.”

Wonderful? Hardly. My first fast-food purchase on the road to ruin.

Never again, I declared to myself. My kids hadn’t been the ones who’d asked me to stop; this sacrilege was all my idea.

Before long, however, my children were routinely begging me to go for shakes, french fries, or hamburgers. Though I resisted their pleas for several weeks, one afternoon while we were driving, the kids spied the Golden Arches.

Maybe just this one time for a treat, I thought. *What’s the harm?*

Obliging them, but still feeling guilt ridden should any of my colleagues catch me in the act, I searched my car for a disguise. This was no ice cream outing, I realized. This was Operation Eat and Retreat. I dug out sunglasses and, believe it or not, a wig—part of a costume from my work helping kids learn healthy habits. Crumbs from my children’s back seat snacks clung to the top of the wig. No problem. I picked off most of the debris and donned my costume. Once past the drive-through and without being noticed—I hoped—I removed my wig and glasses and turned onto the main drag.

And so it began: a hidden habit our family secretly enjoyed—and felt we couldn’t quit. The more I got away with it, the easier it became to get dinner on the table by passing by the take-out window. As my kids became involved in more after-school activities, I typically felt rushed and at a loss for dinner. If I lacked any set plans, my kids recommended picking up nuggets or a burger. Too often, I obliged.

Then one evening when I was beating myself up for my fast-food sins, my husband chimed in with his two cents: “Don’t worry about it; we don’t go that often.” And so I didn’t worry and carried on with our family’s secret habit.

Our “not that often” became more often than I would care to admit. What had started as a rare treat had turned into a weekly treat and eventually a twice-a-week treat. As the days got busier, I gradually let go of other practices that defined my community’s lifestyle—hikes, leisurely vegetarian meals, weekly Sabbath services. Once I resigned myself to accepting my fate as a harried mom, along came the baggage of guilt and regret.

ON THE MAP

When I first moved to Loma Linda for college, the community’s health-oriented way of life was brand new to me. Having grown up in the Pacific Northwest with its lush cover of fir, cedar, and pine trees, I hated the sight of palm trees, which seemed more like movie props than actual trees. I swore to myself that, after earning my degree, I’d return to life in the verdant, aromatic forests of Oregon. But then I met Joseph, aka Broken Leg Joe—a nickname he picked up after breaking his leg in a mountain-biking accident. Joe was a Chinese American with a great athletic build who grew up in Loma Linda and loved the outdoors. We met at the sprawling university gym, where I was enrolled in graduate school in the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University. Before long, Joe was dragging me off for one outdoor adventure after another. Once we fell in love and got married, leaving Loma Linda was the last thing on my mind, and I gladly accepted a faculty position after I’d graduated.

By our fifth anniversary, we had two children, Jayden and Joelle, and the pace of our lives switched into a whole other gear—like going from a brisk walk to a sprint. We had less and less leisurely time to spend in each other’s company. The comforting hours spent cooking a meal together or playing a game became distant memories. Suddenly there was no time for baking homemade bread, plucking oranges from trees,

kicking back with family, or enjoying simple meals together. Like many other parents today, we ran ourselves ragged just trying to keep up. By the time our surprise baby, Julia, arrived, we were so busy speeding through our days that we were unable to see how chaotic and pressured our lives had become.

Something was happening in my own quiet community as my life sped up. In 2005, Dan Buettner had thrust Loma Linda under the bright lights and onto center stage. This journalist, who had salt-and-pepper hair, a blindingly white smile, and a fondness for black hiking boots, had strategically traipsed the globe along with an investigative team on assignment for *National Geographic*. They were on a quest to discover the longevity hot spots around the world—and they found five of them. Buettner called these hot spots “Blue Zones.” In these exceptional communities, people lived extraordinarily long and healthy lifespans.

My quiet community of Loma Linda had been identified as one of the longevity hot spots. The others include the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, the city of Nicoya in Costa Rica, and the islands of Okinawa in the Sea of Japan and Icaria in the Aegean Sea.

Global Longevity Hot Spot Locations



So how did Loma Linda get on the map? When I arrived here, most of my friends back home had never heard of the town or would have had difficulty finding it in an atlas. Even Siri (had she/it existed then) might have had trouble directing someone here. There were no professional sports teams, no national monuments. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the Seventh-day Adventists (SDA), a Protestant denomination known for celebrating the Sabbath on Saturday rather than Sunday, bought a failed resort in the town and turned it into a sanatorium, nursing school, and medical school. Before long, Loma Linda became home to a large group of SDA practitioners and health professionals known for their healthy lifestyles.

Seventh-day Adventists tend to consume a plant-based diet, one rich in nuts and beans; refrain from smoking, taking drugs, or drinking alcohol; and on average are more physically active than the general population. Their tradition of health is so well established that many SDAs train to become doctors, nurses, dentists, physical therapists, and other health-related specialists. Over 1,400,000 Adventists live in the United States, with the largest group living in Loma Linda.

The Adventist Health Study, launched in 1974 and funded by the National Institutes of Health, is one of the largest ongoing lifestyle studies in the world.¹ Through this investigation, researchers at Loma Linda University discovered that our community's healthy habits were linked to a longer life. And we're not talking about a few months, a year, or even two; my community members typically live up to ten years longer than the rest of the United States population.

When the curiously high number of centenarians in our community hit the national news, reporters sought out my expertise in public health to help explain the lifestyle that had made our city internationally famous overnight. The unique diets and lifestyles of our elderly residents have been examined by several highly regarded scientific studies and investigative reports, but media coverage of the Blue Zones put our city on the map. My phone rang as TV news reporters and journalists—including CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta, ABC's Diane Sawyer, and Oprah's pal Dr. Oz—interviewed our residents

and discussed our community on nationally televised shows. A video crew came from Finland to shoot footage of our little town, while a Belgian crew contacted me about taking part in a documentary. Researchers from countries across the globe emailed and called me, wanting to set up meetings, compare notes, and answer questions. Visitors stopped by my office regularly, and complete strangers requested guided tours of the town.

A FAMILY ON THE RUN

Ironically, even as I explained our town's healthy habits, my norm became stress, sadness, and a pounding headache, driven in part by my food choices, but stoked also by many other aspects of our family's frenzied lifestyle. Hardest hit was Julia—my bonus baby—forced to keep up with our family's hectic and demanding schedules. I couldn't help but notice her growing temper tantrums and increasingly whiny tone. Rather than making time for the open-ended sandbox sessions and endless afternoons spent looking for bugs in the backyard that her siblings had enjoyed, I dragged Julia along to their sports practices, piano recitals, and a million other activities.

To keep Julia occupied and happy, I had not one but two electronic devices, each in a colorful case, as if she needed any further enticement. I even bought a larger purse—like a Mary Poppins carpetbag that produced endless surprises—to conceal all the electronics and my hoard of sugary and salty snack foods, which were more hidden habits. If I needed some time to catch up on work, I didn't think twice about giving all three children computer time or letting them watch television for a few hours. When they were Julia's age, I never allowed my older two children to use, much less have, iPads and smartphones. Now, before the age of two, my youngest was an expert on my iPad and iPhone and worked the TV remote control like a professional couch potato.

*Our daily lives
can become
disconnected
from the hopes
and dreams
we hold for
our family.*

KIM JOHN PAYNE

To make matters worse, my husband was diagnosed with high blood pressure and high cholesterol. His pill containers became a routine fixture in our pantry, stored above the Oreos. Every time I opened the pantry and saw those bottles, I felt a knot in the pit of my stomach. While heart conditions did run in his family, I knew our “convenient” lifestyle wasn’t helping the matter.

And he wasn’t the only one with elevated cholesterol. My yearly screening required by insurance revealed that while my weight was fine, my cholesterol was well above the acceptable range. I was scared and stunned. My husband and I were highly active—we rode mountain bikes at least three times a week and walked together daily. We ate almost no red meat. How could our cholesterol be so high?

The news got worse. In addition to addressing our soaring parental cholesterol levels, our pediatrician recommended that our son focus on his physical fitness to address his rising weight. Me, my husband, and my child—what was next? I worried that all my children could be experiencing hidden health problems. Here I was, a public health professor—someone who wrote grants and developed health programs for parents and their children. I felt the anxiety churning within me, spinning like a merry-go-round. I had to do something. And I knew one thing from my work in public health—I wasn’t alone, either in my unhealthy habits or my unease over how my parenting was affecting my family’s well-being.

This concern is warranted: About thirty-two million kids in the United States have at least one chronic health condition (such as asthma or obesity).² In fact, a leading journal on health policy declared that the prevalence of chronic conditions in children has reached epidemic levels.³ Not only that, but the American Psychological Association reported that stress among families has been rising dramatically, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴

Each chronic condition, such as diabetes, asthma, obesity, depression, and anxiety, is marked by a state of increased chronic inflammation in the body, which can be measured by elevated inflammatory markers in the blood or tissue. In addition to chronic health conditions, continual

stress and environmental contaminants (like air pollution) are linked with increased levels of inflammatory markers. Alarming, scientific studies show that harmful physiological changes from ongoing stress can begin in childhood.⁵ These markers signal that the immune system is being taxed, which sets children up for a range of poor outcomes, and not just in their physical health. Scientists think inflammation may potentially affect mental health by driving the development of depression.⁶ The negative effect of chronic inflammation doesn't stop there; one study of children ages seven to thirteen found that a number of elevated inflammatory markers are linked with significantly lower academic performance.⁷

Most moms and dads sense that something has gone wrong. A national survey of parents found that 90 percent of mothers and 85 percent of fathers worry and feel judged about what others think of their parenting practices, and 69 percent say if they knew more positive parenting strategies, they would use them.⁸ A second survey of teens found that 75 percent

Do You Relate?

Which of the following experiences and feelings do you identify with?

- Hectic family schedules
- Frequent on-the-go dining
- Hidden habits
- Worries about what others think of your family's lifestyle choices
- Concerns about your child's health and/or their success in life
- Routine feelings of exhaustion and being overwhelmed
- A chronic illness experienced by you or a family member
- Extreme concern for family and your ability to thrive when faced with an epidemic or other disaster
- Concerns about what the future holds for you and your family

of kids would like their parents to live healthier too.⁹ Yet all too often, we fail to do what is necessary to make that happen. I know; I was one of those parents.

MAKING THE CHANGE

With all this interest in my community, I felt forced—okay, maybe not forced, but some days it sure felt that way—to live a double life. Here I was a member of the only longevity hot spot in the United States and a university professor who was teaching others how to live healthier lives. Yet I kept the truth of how my own family lived stuffed in a closet, along with the Pringles, Cap'n Crunch, and Oreos. As life turned upside down, I grew more aware of my own struggles and growing unease.

As uncomfortable and guilt ridden as all the media attention made me feel, I might not have noticed my family's gradual descent into the unhealthy modern lifestyle if it hadn't been for my town's sudden celebrity, which made me a little more aware of my surroundings and prodded me to change my habits. And baby Julia, just by digging her way to China in our sandbox, had shown me that what a young child needs is not another Big Mac, iPad, or TV show, but a life lived in the style of those who'd made our community a longevity hot spot. She and my other children deserved not just a centenarian's many years; they deserved the good health that made those years so rich and wondrous.

Sitting there on my patio watching little Julia play, I realized that I felt exhausted from all the hiding and the baggage that came with it. I knew I could do better—I *wanted* better for myself and for others!

As I quietly prayed for change, an answer slowly began to form in my mind. It was time to come out of hiding. I couldn't keep worrying what people would think of me if they knew the truth about the lifestyle I'd created for my family. It was time to put to work my years of training in public health. I felt a spark ignite inside me, and the flame kept growing.

I strapped Julia into her stroller and began meandering through my quiet neighborhood. It wasn't long before I spied a couple of seniors I knew—two women who were best friends, both in their nineties and one

Picture It

Imagine the benefits of the Resiliency Program for you and your family:

- family schedules that don't leave you stressed and tired;
- improved relationships with family and friends;
- increased happiness and harmony in the home;
- enhanced academic performances;
- a boost in health and resilience;
- being better prepared for disastrous events and epidemics;
- the potential for vibrant longevity; and
- many more amazing benefits of the resilient centenarian lifestyle!

of them nearing one hundred. They were out and about for a stroll, gabbing away, delighting in the early morning sunshine. I maneuvered into the empty street, giving the two complete access to the sidewalk. Nearing them, I smiled and waved. The older of the two, Berra, a warm Filipino grandmother, paused for a moment to peer down at little Julia.

Looking back up at me, Berra asked, "Where's your father? We haven't seen him walk in a while. He's getting lazy."

I laughed at their comments about my own dad. In his seventies, he was a mere youngster in their minds. "I'll encourage him to get out and send him your way!" I said.

We chatted briefly and as I left, it occurred to me that those women were just two of the many seniors I saw strolling the sidewalks in the calm, tree-lined neighborhoods, or walking on the trails amidst the natural, wild beauty of the nearby hills, or heading for an outdoor swim at the local gym. In their nineties and hundreds, they remained vibrantly energetic and engaging—always with a warm smile and a wave, especially for baby Julia.

I wondered, *What if there was a way to increase resilience and health in our children by following the wisdom of our community's centenarians?*

Scientific studies show that harmful biological changes begin to take place in childhood and that the experiences of a child can lay the foundation for health, resilience, and lifespan in adulthood. What habits had my elderly neighbors developed as children that prevented the buildup of inflammation and stress? What childhood practices protected them from the detrimental effects of hardships and encouraged success?

Researchers from prominent universities and institutions across the nation—like Harvard, Kaiser Permanente, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)—are learning more about how early childhood experiences influence the development of diseases at all ages and determine how long we'll live. There's a growing consensus that health as an adult is strongly linked to one's childhood, yet we have barely scratched the surface of understanding how our early experiences create the foundation for a resilient life.

As a scholar, I decided to do what I do best. When I got home that afternoon—and on the many days and evenings after—I dived into my research. Given the important role that childhood plays in creating a foundation for resilience and even longevity, I expected to find countless studies looking into the childhood experiences of centenarians. They have, after all, survived for a whole century; how many people can say that? But even with the help of my university library, the many databases available to faculty, and the all-powerful Google search engine, I came up with only a handful of research studies. Even the longevity hot spot researchers focused on the centenarians' health habits as adults rather than on their childhood experiences, and not one study focused on a whole group of centenarians like those living in my famous community. Opportunity knocked—and soon so did I, on many of the centenarians' front doors. Little did I realize that I was about to embark on a journey in which I'd experience a complete paradigm shift—one that would change my family's life for the better.

If you, too, are tired of living life on a merry-go-round and want a better way for your family, take this journey with me as I introduce you to the resiliency principles I uncovered from my interviews with the centenarians. In the chapters that follow, I will tell you more about the discoveries

I made, the lessons I learned, and the eight-week crash course my family began when I decided to apply those lessons to our own lives. Best of all, I will unpack the remarkable change we've enjoyed in our health, happiness, resilience (especially our ability to thrive in the face of an epidemic), and so much more.



HOMEWORK TIME

1. Remembering back before you had a family, how did you imagine your future family life? How did you picture your home with children? How did you imagine yourself as a parent? And how does your current experience match—and/or differ from—what you dreamed it would be?
2. What do you think are your family's pressure points or times when your family members are most likely to experience intense feelings of stress or chaos? What do you do in response to those demands? Does it alleviate the stress or add to it?
3. Write down three ideas for what you think would make your family life better. For each idea, write down one small step you could take toward that goal.