

### **Surviving survival guilt**

There was not a name for the syndrome prior the 1960s, when psychologists began recognizing a condition common to Holocaust survivors. That condition came to be known as “survivor guilt,” and it affects those who have endured war, natural disasters, the suicide of a loved one and even job lay-offs.

Dr. Eli Nussbaum, a noted pediatric pulmonologist and author of “The Promise,” is keenly aware of the syndrome.

“I am a consequence of the Holocaust,” said Nussbaum, whose novel opens on the eve of World War II and follows three generations through the aftermath. “Both of my parents lost their families during those years. Because of my family background, I am intimately aware of life’s fragility and how a devastating experience can affect a person emotionally.”

Nussbaum said anyone who is profoundly affected by loss should make the effort to transition from guilt to appreciation of life. He offered these tips for making that transition:

- Seek treatment early. The sooner counseling is provided, the more preventable or manageable guilt may be. The hope is to get the survivor to see the loss of others as the result of misfortune that has nothing to do with personal culpability.
- Watch for delayed reactions. Some survivors do not show symptoms until long after a traumatic event. Anyone who has experienced a life-altering loss and later develops clinical depression or a prevalent sense of self blame should share that information with a counselor. Other possible symptoms of survivor guilt include nightmares, unpredictable emotional response and anxiety.
- Do not turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with feelings. Many people try to deal with survivor guilt by self-medicating, and drug addiction often results.

