

CHAPTER 1

Searching for Meaning

Wisdom comes from disillusionment.

~ George Santayana

How strange when an illusion dies. It's as though you've lost a child.

~ Judy Garland

It's very hard to keep your spirits up. You've got to keep selling yourself a bill of goods, and some people are better at lying to themselves than others. If you face reality too much, it kills you.

~ Woody Allen

I suspect that everyone—or nearly everyone—has been disillusioned at some time or other, perhaps many times. You may have been disappointed with your marriage, your career, your parents, your children, your religion, your government, your profession...the list can be extensive. This book is about such disillusionment and how to cope with it. There are many behaviors and ways of thinking that can increase the likelihood of life satisfaction, belonging, and acceptance of our place in the universe, and this book will help you discover them.

Disillusionment seems to occur mainly among the most idealistic people, who are searching for meaning. People with high expectations are often disappointed. They may become disillusioned only in some areas, or they may become completely disenchanted with life, and this leads them to feelings of unhappiness, anxiety, and depression. If you are reading this book, you probably are one of those people.

As you read the morning paper or listen to the evening news, you see that the idealistic world you yearn for does not exist. Instead there are stories of fraud, assault, robbery, and murder. It is not uncommon to hear reports of people hurting others or taking advantage of their weaknesses or lack of knowledge. People in positions of trust, such as clergy, scoutmasters, teachers, and even parents, engage in dishonesty, neglect, or abuse. We live in a world where people don't take responsibilities seriously, where many manufacturers produce shoddy merchandise, and where there seems to be little concern with quality. There is rampant interest in making a fast profit at any expense. Poverty abounds, and the environment is ravaged daily. So few people seem to care. It is not the idealistic world that you thought it was when you were a child.

Perhaps you can relate to how the noted poet Sylvia Plath described the disillusionment in her life: