The theme of Chapter 7, “Kinship,” is that “kinship can blunt the edge of economic adversity.” It contrasts the way in which poverty affects the lives of two very different families, and the ways in which the ties of family and friendship improve the situations of both. The first family represents what is perhaps the stereotypical working poor, under-educated, marginally employed adults with dependent children, buffeted by medical problems for which they lack insurance and which concomitantly result in the inability/reduced ability to work. The second family, a single mother with two minor children, is representative of the multitude of single-mother households in the era of no-fault divorce whose middle-class lifestyles descend into poverty following divorce. The chapter contrasts the way in which social capital and economic background affect the families’ responses to their conditions, the private assistance available to them, and the opportunities presented to the children. Despite the marked differences between them, however, the common thread running through the lives of both families is the importance of enduring family bonds and the success of the parents in establishing community ties and mutually rewarding friendships to the emotional health and overall welfare of the family.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the statement, “kinship can blunt the edge of economic adversity”? Give some examples to support your answer.

2. What are the characteristics of “the deserving poor?”

3. Should government subsidy programs and/or private charities make a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor?

4. Is access to medical care a fundamental human right that government should provide to all citizens?

5. Is evasion of tax laws through use of the barter system morally justified in situations like Tom and Kara’s? Why or why not?

6. Is it morally acceptable for a parent who could find work to choose to stay home with the children and rely on government subsidies or private assistance? Why or why not?