



How I came to  
know  
about Adlerian  
psychology  
and how I  
discovered  
how useful it was  
in society

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**I will omit the early years to avoid boring the reader and begin with my education. I started school at the usual age of six; it was a rural school in Minnesota. The first morning I trotted the mile and a half to the building. It was the most terrifying period of my life. I couldn't learn to read; arithmetic was a mystery and spelling even worse. Another boy completed homework for me. The teacher said she didn't know I was so advanced and gave me harder work. This incident plagued me all my life - people who were kind and helpful to me made my life more difficult.**

**My father took me to the county superintendent to test me for high school and he gave me a list of spellings. I only had to detect the mis-spelt word. The superintendent passed me for high school. We went to pick up the repair parts for a two bottomed plough and my father said I had passed for high school but didn't want to go. This was the first I heard of it.**

School had begun in autumn and as I was ploughing the fields I raised my head and there was a car tearing down the road at twenty-five miles an hour with the dust blowing behind it. The vehicle came to a halt and I halted the horses. My aunt Alma told me to stable the horses and come with her. She was a teacher, the first in the Dakota Territory. I stabled the horses and hurried to the farmhouse. My mother put some clothes into a paper sack and aunt Alma and I headed off for New London where my grandparents lived and the high school was located. I wondered what my father would say.

Again I had difficulty keeping up and now I thought I would go home at the weekend and not come back, but my father had oiled the muck spreader and spending my whole weekend milking, mucking out stables and spreading the manure on the fields from dawn to dusk, I revised my perception of high school and got back to the boarding house.

During my last year in high school I wrote to the Saint Cloud Teachers' College at St. Paul, about thirty miles away. I received a catalogue and completed the application form for admission. I also wrote to the high school and requested them to mail a copy of my transcripts to the college. I did not receive any answer to my application.

I worked all summer like a farm hired hand. We finished threshing in August. Periodically I would ask my mother, when my father was present, about my clothes and could I have her suitcase.

Then came the day, I asked my father if he would drive me to the station. 'Where are you going' he asked 'to St. Cloud' I answered. On the appointed day my mother packed the suitcase with a change of clothes and a sweater. I had worked all summer but my father said nothing

about money and I had none. My mother slipped a five dollar bill into my pocket, it was all she had from the chickens she raised and sold. The ten-mile trip to the station was made in silence apart from comments about cattle we passed or threshing. Dad stopped the car near the station 'don't start smoking, don't start drinking and don't start running around'. He didn't say anything about girls. He turned around and left. He did not say anything about money.

I procured my ticket with the five dollar bill it cost \$1.25. I arrived in St. Cloud in the late afternoon, engaged a taxi and asked the driver to taken me to an inexpensive hotel, which cost me \$1.50 for the night.

The next morning I set off on foot for the campus. I entered the building I thought would be administration; there was a short stout man seated at the desk, his sign said Dr. Cockron. I gave my name and enquired where I might register; he turned in his chair, pulled out a drawer, extracted a file, studied it and said 'we will admit you as a student'. I said; 'If I am to continue as a student I will need to find work'. He reached into his desk and extracted a list of people who were willing to hire students. He also gave me a list of boarding houses.

I worked my way through college cleaning windows, lighting boilers, filling them with fuel and washing dishes.

Finally after a year I graduated. My father did not come.

After I received my qualification I taught in rural school and attended summer schools until obtaining my BA. I was offered a post as teacher in St. Paul.

About this time my friend Forest and I got to know the daughter at the boarding house and her friend, who were both

nurses - Margaret married Forest and Ruth married me.

Karen was born and I was drafted into the navy. I couldn't swim and had requested the engineers so I went to sea. Whilst serving in the US navy in the Pacific during the Second World War I was hospitalized for medical reasons. I was shipped back to the US and after several months in hospital I was issued with a medical discharge. Ruth met me at the station accompanied by Karen. She was eight months old when I left and I had not seen her for three years. I picked her up to hug her and she kicked me savagely in the stomach; she had bonded with her mother and would have nothing to do with me for a year or more.

I was accepted better at the university of Northern Iowa, where I had been a member of the faculty at the price labour was paid by school when I was called to military service. The principal, Dr. Curtis, invited me back with enthusiasm. I later consulted him concerning further education. The US congress had passed legislation to provide complete financial support for veterans of World War II to further their education. My application had been rejected because I already had my BA degree. Dr Curtis wrote to the veteran administration telling them that as the teachers' college progressed with its upgrading, the post I held required a PhD. My application was now approved and I gained leave of absence for one year. I completed all my course work except German and one education course which I would complete that summer, when over a brown bag lunch I discussed with colleagues which course to enrol for: 'take advanced child guidance from Dr Dreikurs' they advised.

As I entered the room I was taken aback by the number of middle-aged students who had signed up for the course.

I discovered that Dreikurs' assignments were purposeful, he taught his classes by demonstrating rather than lecturing. Parents, teenagers and children came or were brought in to help teach the class.

The entire class gathered at a kindergarten, the session did not go well and we returned to the classroom to discuss what we observed. I commented on a small boy's disturbing behaviour. I felt he was spoiled and pampered and wanted to have his own way. Dr Dreikurs became more accepting of me after this class and invited me to his family education centre in a ramshackle building in a depressed area of Chicago.

Dr. Dreikurs occupied a chair in front of a group of shabbily dressed women who were smiling happily. The mother he had counselled previously related all the positive things that had happened - no fighting, bedtime without a struggle, pleasant meal times etc. Other mothers asked questions and then he asked if anyone wished to talk with him this week. A mother and her two boys were scheduled, the boys were taken to the playroom, and Dr Dreikurs began the session with 'why did she arrange to talk with him? did she have other children? what were her concerns?'. She related them and after each he enquired 'and what do you do then?' He asked her to describe a typical day from beginning to end. What Dr. Dreikurs was seeking was the purpose the children had by behaving as they did. What was the undisclosed pay off for them.

Then the mother left and the boys were greeted by Dr. Dreikurs who told them their mother had talked with him and he asked the boys why they behaved as they did. He then asked if they would like to know and proceeded to tell them - they usually gave some sort of recognition reflex, which let him know he was correct.

Dr. Dreikurs' skill in counselling families was only fully discernable if one participated in the process. First he established a relationship, then the issues involved and what did you do then, how: many children, the family constellation and a clear picture of the purpose of the behaviour would emerge, and at the end, a commitment from the parents to do as he requested during the week.

After I finished Dr. Dreikurs' class I told him I was going to start a family education centre at the laboratory school, he very generously came at his own expense, travelling overnight in order to support me on the first evening and came again later to encourage me. Dr. Dreikurs was keen that we should have the courage to be imperfect.

Some long time after this had been implemented I made an application to the point four program and was then selected to establish a teacher training programme in Ethiopia.

My wife and family agreed to go and learned a great deal from the experience. Without Dr. Dreikurs' influence I would have had a very difficult time.

The government in Ethiopia had already selected students, all males, to be trained. The skills I learned from Dr. Dreikurs in establishing relationships and understanding the purpose of behaviour were invaluable. The faculty consisted of East Indians, Ethiopians, Americans, British and Africans. We needed help from the village chiefs in order to set up schools for our trainee teachers to work in.

After my two-year tour of duty in Ethiopia I returned to Iowa, visiting Dr. Dreikurs en route. Dr Dreikurs started the International Adlerian Summer Schools ICCASS, and I became part of the faculty for a number of years, visiting many countries in the process. The purpose of

human behaviour and family counselling was the same in any language but an understanding of the culture is very important.

Dreikurs had a sharp side, but was not revengeful and did not harbour bad feeling. He distinguished his Adlerian notions by giving primacy to belonging rather than Alfred Adler and Abraham Maslow's self-actualisation.

Whilst in England I visited the Adlerian society of Great Britain and returned a number of times, many people were very kind and helpful to me including Helen and Ron Anderson, Toni Towns, Dr. Neil and Lillian Beanie, Dr. Weissman, Rita Udall, Herta Orgia and many others too numerous to mention.

We started family counselling centres in England and Ireland. We offered scholarships to the two-week intensive summer school in West Virginia. Anthea Millar, Jenny Clifford, John Murphy and Val McGinley all took the work on and spread Dr Dreikurs' system of family counselling linked with Alfred Adler's lifestyle.

Students were always supervised in their place of work i.e. as interns. The Adlerian Summer School at Green Park in Buckinghamshire started by Don Smart also had family counselling sessions in the same way. Don and I visited Brazil and Peru working with people using lifestyle and family counselling to understand them and be of help to them.

Teenagers in particular need to be counselled in groups because peer pressure is very important.

Dr. James Bitter and I have our new book — Adlerian Group Counselling and Therapy Step by Step published in March 2004.