ON THE EVENING of January 28, 1980, my friend, Greg B. Phillips, arrived at my house for his regular weekly visit. During our conversation, he made a casual offer that triggered a chain of events destined to change my life. He merely suggested that I might like to read *The World of Null-A*, an award-winning science-fiction story about a 26th-century man trained in a special kind of “logic.” (1-4)

My friend knew that for years I worried about the personally and socially destructive effects of illogical human behavior, so he showed no surprise when...
I asked to borrow his book. Reading that intriguing story provided me with a tantalizing taste of general semantics. I had discovered an exciting subject that could help me cultivate more powerful thinking skills than the pure logic I learned in school. General semantics seemed light-years beyond “semantics” because it offered me new ways to think, communicate, act, and react. Immediately, I realized the relevance of it for improving my life.

When I returned the book to my friend, I felt content with my new gems of wisdom. But, to my surprise, I soon found that I could not stop thinking about them. I had to learn more about these fascinating ideas, so I began reading general semantics books cover to cover. For me, that first close encounter with general semantics felt like finding buried treasure.

In addition to studying these methods for better thinking and living, I started using a few of them to deal with the choices and challenges in my daily life.

In the course of a decade, applying these new ideas helped me do the following:

- Think clearly and flexibly
- Communicate accurately
- Argue less often and listen more carefully
- Understand the tricks used by some persuaders in their attempts to sell me a product, an idea, or a lottery ticket
- Distinguish between statements of fact versus statements of opinion, objective reports versus prejudiced judgments, and, in general, sense versus nonsense
- Cultivate a fine-tuned awareness of possibilities that has increased my ability to avoid accidents, especially car accidents.

Using the thinking and living skills of general semantics brings me great rewards: I have fewer unnecessary problems and bad experiences.

Now for comments on general semantics from others:

“[In a general semantics seminar*] participation ... provided me with a safe and supportive environment in which I could understand and practice the [general semantics] principles. As a result, I came away with a deeper understanding and appreciation of life as a process, rather

* This 1991 summer seminar took place at Alverno College, a women’s college in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was conducted by instructors from the Institute of General Semantics.
than an event. I feel more confident in coping with life’s situations and interpersonal relationships.” (5)

— Jane Bachman

“I wish every student in high school had the opportunity to take a class in general semantics …. students seem to love using what we study in class …. I enjoy hearing about how an inference led one astray, how a nonsense argument was resolved, ... or how eliminating to be made a difference in how they perceived the world. Certainly students see the relevance of the course.” (6)

— Ruth McCubbrey

“I have taught general semantics concepts [in high school] since 1963 .... Student response has remained positive, even enthusiastic. I now have the children of former students in the classes.” (7)

— Richard J. Dovgin

“As a new [high school] teacher in 1970, I wrote a semester English course called ‘Introduction to Semantics’ .... I used Language in Thought and Action as a source .... During its height, I had 300 students a year for an eight year period .... At last count, I have exposed more than 4,000 students in varying degrees to the principles of general semantics .... The feedback from past students is gratifying .... I think general semantics has touched their lives.” (8)

— William Doherty

“While ‘everyone’ around us was teaching and talking about ‘common sense,’ Korzybski [the founder of general semantics], for the first time, introduced the uncommon sense of an Einstein to everyday thinking, communicating, and behaving.” (9)

— Sanford I. Berman

Many of the following selections from ETC (1986-1993) describe the usefulness of general semantics in different situations. (10) Open the treasure chest of general semantics, behold the gems of wisdom, take as many as you want, and begin the adventure of discovering important rewards when you apply them in your life.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


9. Sanford I. Berman (former lecturer on effective communication at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, President of Educational Cassettes and past-president of the ISGS), *ETC* 46, no. 4 (Winter 1989), p.356.

10. *ETC*, published quarterly by the International Society for General Semantics, was founded by the late S. I. Hayakawa. In 1993, we celebrated the journal’s 50th Anniversary. Now, thousands of Society members in 50 countries enjoy reading *ETC*. [*ETC* is now published by the Institute of General Semantics, which merged with the International Society for General Semantics in 2004.]
Greg Sawin approached life and general semantics with thoughtfulness, great enthusiasm, and interest. He was fun to be around. He had a gentle, silly sense of humor that made me laugh. “What is happening, Greg?” was always my question when he called. My life seemed better after each call. He was a rare and true friend, helpful and sincere. He truly worked at using the methods of general semantics in his life; for him, just talking about GS was not enough (though talk he surely did). He really wanted to understand general semantics, and to use its power for good in his life. He had the rare courage to question his own premises, and great endurance and patience. He seldom gave up. I and many others loved him.

Jim French, Editor

The General Semantics Bulletin

Table tennis coach, guitar picker, Star Trek aficionado, medical editor, not-quite master chess player, etc., etc.: Greg Sawin inhabited many realms. Those who knew him mostly through their associations with general semantics will likely think of him in certain important but limited ways. Those fortunate to have had a friendship with Greg will have shared much more of the riches of his intellect, found inspiration in his many accomplishments, and been cheered by his triumphs over physical affliction. Farewell Greg. At the very least you live on in your friends’ memories of many unended conversations and in our continued pursuit of shared goals.

Jeremy Klein, Consulting Editor

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