THAT WAS BY MY OTHER MOTHER – CHAPTER 4 (CONCLUSION)
DAVID A. LINWOOD, PHD.*

At summer’s end, in 1948, Korzybski received an unsolicited invitation from Yale University. Professor Filmer S.C. Northrop, Doctor of Letters, author, and Sterling Professor of Philosophy and Law, invited Korzybski to give one of his seminars at Yale University. The Yale student organization had requested to hear from Korzybski himself. Professor Leonard William Doob, the great sociologist and student of human behavior at Yale, also added his own name to the invitation and offered to introduce AK to the audience at the start of Korzybski’s seminar.

This, for Korzybski, was the culmination of his career — to have this validation of his life’s work by the top minds, at a major university, in the fields of philosophy and human behavior. It was evident from the tone of the letter of invitation that this was no invitation to a verbal combat, but a sincere and generous desire to honor Korzybski and have him expound in a full and leisurely manner his basic formulations of general semantics. A large number of the brightest and the best undergraduate and graduate students of Northrop and Doob, plus invited faculty, were signed up and waiting for him to deliver his lectures. The student organization had provided the offer of a generous honorarium and all expenses paid for Korzybski himself and his staff during the seminar.

When Kendig told me I was to accompany Korzybski to Yale, I was floating on air. My job was to sit on the lecture platform with Korzybski, as his graduate student, and take careful notes as he spoke. I was to handle the recording machinery, but also to take written notes, especially of the board diagrams, and to keep track

* David A. Linwood is a Lecturer in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He began his studies in General Semantics with Alfred Korzybski in 1945 at IGS, in Chicago. From 1948 to 1950 he was a student-assistant at IGS at Lime Rock, CT, and served as Korzybski’s lecture assistant at the Yale University Seminar in 1949. He returned to active participation in general semantics with his attendance at the Dedication of Read House, in 2005.
of precisely where he was in his lectures and what he had said.

I watched in fascination as Korzybski came down the stairs from his second floor office, to get into Kendig’s automobile for the trip to New Haven and the Yale seminar. He held onto the railing with both hands in a “death grip” and moved slowly, in obvious pain. But there was a determined expression on his face and an aura of confidence about him. I knew he would make it. I thought to myself, “Neither heaven nor hell would keep this fellow from his seminar at Yale.”

We got him safely into the front passenger’s seat. Korzybski was wearing his usual khakis and a warm, lined trench overcoat that gave him a distinctly military air. His heavy cane was perched on the back seat, ready at hand. I traveled with Charlotte in her little coupe.

Yale was a tour de force. Korzybski was warmly received when he arrived. The next morning, we set up the blackboards, with the basic diagrams, and Korzybski’s big wooden Structural Differential that he had made with his own hands.

The lecture auditorium was well lighted and we could hear Korzybski very easily, even without a microphone and speaker. However, we set up the equipment to make it less stressful for Alfred to project his voice for the many hours a day he would be lecturing.

It was a well-practiced performance that he had done many times over the years... with touches of humor and “little stories” that captured his audience, made them laugh, and made them listen.

At 9 a.m. the audience filed into the lecture auditorium and took their seats. Professor Leonard Doob took the podium and made a brief but accurate introduction of the guest speaker. Alfred was seated comfortably on his padded high stool behind the desk within easy reach of the blackboards. He spoke into a small microphone. The sound system performed flawlessly, and I flipped on the recording equipment which was in top shape and also functioned perfectly. Alfred had a beneficent smile on his face that I had rarely seen. He was really enjoying this.

And so we went into the unabridged, intensive seminar that was to last all week. It was a well-practiced performance that he had done many times over the years. His personal remarks about his own life were kept to a minimum (much to our relief) but he sprinkled his talk with touches of humor and “little stories” that captured his audience, made them laugh, and made them listen.

Korzybski invited the faculty and quite a few of the graduate students to
have lunch with us and to get acquainted. We had a break at mid-morning and at mid-afternoon. We were through lecturing between 3:30 and 4 p.m. as Korzybski desired. I would have some time with Korzybski, at noon, to update his notes and make marks on the board diagrams to indicate what we had covered.

Between 6:30 and 7:30 or so, on one evening, we had a formal dinner, courtesy of the faculty and senior students. I was amazed at Korzybski’s stamina.

We were informed that there were reporters in the audience from the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* magazine. They kept to themselves and did not reveal their identity. After dinner I conferred with Korzybski and did a full recap and analysis of my portions of the day’s lecture, placing it in context with the total performance for the week. Alfred listened intently and seemed very happy with my work. He was really in his element now. On Thursday evening, the faculty gave a special dinner honoring Korzybski. Only Kendig, Schuchardt, and Korzybski were invited. Northrop and Doob attended the dinner and offered brief remarks. Korzybski also made a few brief remarks and thanked the faculty for their warm reception of his work.

*Time* and *Newsweek* published about a half of a column, each, with a concise capsule report and a good half-tone picture of Korzybski which was fairly flattering to his appearance.

On Friday we put in only a half-day and completed the lectures shortly after lunch, before two p.m. We set up a table in the lobby outside the lecture auditorium with Korzybski’s books and papers and various Institute publications for sale. Quite a few students took advantage of the bargain prices, and even several faculty members bought copies of *Manhood of Humanity* and *Science and Sanity*. We all agreed the week-long seminar was a bravura performance. Korzybski was later interviewed by the local press and the reporters from the magazines and New York papers who had sat through a good deal of the lectures.

Major articles appeared in the *New York Times* and the New Haven papers about Korzybski’s lectures at Yale. *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* published about a half of a column, each, with a concise capsule report and a good half-tone picture of Korzybski which was fairly flattering to his appearance. The reporters’ descriptions were very good, considering they had no previous formal training in general semantics. I think this tended to prove that Korzybski had really delivered the goods on explaining himself, and that his audience had listened carefully.

We returned to the Institute on Saturday morning after the Friday wrap-up. A
glorious week! We were all in high spirits. Korzybski wrote a personal thank you note to Northrop and Doob with a thank you also to the student organization that had requested his lectures. Doob wrote a note letting us know how very favorably our lectures were received, and thanked Korzybski for his personal appearance in spite of his obvious physical difficulties. The student organization sent a brief thank you note together with a generous honorarium and a check amply covering our expenses.

As a result of my efforts at the Yale seminar, I was a lot closer to Alfred and we had occasion during the fall and winter of 1948 to talk informally and get to know one another a little better. I recall one sunny winter morning: I was up on the first floor roof shoveling off the accumulation of ten or so inches of snow. When I reached the window outside Korzybski’s second floor office, he slid open the window and leaned out with his elbows on the sill and engaged me in conversation. It was not any kind of formal talk, but just very ordinary conversation. I stood there on the roof next to his window and chatted with great pleasure, he asking me about my personal life and I responding by asking things I was curious about too. He
was a very charming person — not at all an intense “intellectual” type, but a rather
down-to-earth person with a great deal of practical experience gathered from a
lifetime in this country and abroad.

I returned to the University of Chicago in the fall of 1949 to start my graduate
studies in mathematics. On March 1 of 1950 I received a telegram in Chicago from
Kendig that I should come to the Institute right away. Alfred Korzybski had died.
Services were to be held at the Institute in two or three days’ time.

I arrived at the Institute on the morning of the day that services were to be held
for Korzybski, Saturday, March 4, 1950. He was lying in state, dressed in his army
khakis, in his coffin, in the front living room of the Institute. It was the end of an
era! Recorded music played softly in the background while we sat and listened.
Some of Alfred’s favorites were played: The Manfred Overture, Tchaikovsky’s
great work.

The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.
Philosophy and science, and the springs
Of wonder, and the wisdom of the world,
I have essay’d, and in my mind there is
A power to make these subject to itself —
But they avail not: I have done men good,
And I have met with good even among men —
But this avail’d not: I have had my foes,
And none have baffled, many fallen before me —
But this avail’d not: Good, or evil, life,
Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
Since that all-nameless hour. I have no dread,
And feel the curse to have no natural fear
Nor fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or wishes
Or lurking love of something on the earth. . . .

From Manfred, by Lord Byron

Korzybski’s funeral service was marked by passages of his favorite music,
eulogies, poetry, and reminiscence from his many friends and associates. It was a
quiet tribute to a great man. I felt his death as a personal loss.

Well, as life goes, seventy years is not a bad run. And Alfred Habdank Skarbek
Korzybski had achieved a large part of what he had determined to do. He was
buried in the little cemetery in Lime Rock. His wife, Mira Edgerly Korzybska — Mira, the “Wonder Star” — was buried next to him four years later.

The Strange Life History of Smith (concluded)

“Well, Jason, we have received permission from the upper brass here at the hospital to include you in the new experimental program using Henri Laborit’s chlorpromazine.”

“I am greatly relieved, Doctor Chaplin. Last night I started that old sequence of sleeplessness, followed by the ‘churning’ of strange ideas that invaded my mind without invitation. In a short time I began to see those ideas as not so strange. The carousel is starting to accelerate. I am in for a wild ride to a frightening nowhere.”

“Then we shall give you your first medication right now.”

Doctor Chaplin handed Jason a large orange-coated pill, and poured a half glass of water for him. Jason’s hands were trembling but he managed to hold the glass and swallow the pill with a sip of water.

“How long do I wait until I begin to feel some effects?”

“We will likely have to wait for several days to see any onset of effects. We have to experiment for a few weeks until we get the dose just right for you. Each person has a different ‘tolerance’ for this drug. We don’t know exactly why.”

“How can you tell if I am over-dosed?”

“By the way you move — tremor, weakness, loss of coordination. Also blood pressure and heart functioning. I have a list of possible symptoms that I’ve been briefed on.”

“Can’t you just do a blood test?”

“There isn’t any. I am starting you at a median dose level. I’ll watch you, and I have assigned three trained nurses, one every eight-hour shift, to check you and make sure you have your proper medication on time. You should be all right. Tell me right away, or tell the nurse on duty if you feel very disoriented, or extremely drowsy, especially during the day.”

“Will I have to put up with the ‘carousel’ tonight?”

“I don’t know. You may have to for a few days. You will see me every morning now for a while. Not just once a week. At least until we know what’s what. See you tomorrow?”
“Yes, sir. Thank you for all your help.”
“You are quite welcome, sir.”

The next morning Jason returned to Dr. Chaplin’s office. He seemed a bit more up-beat than his usual quiet self.
“Good morning, Jason. How did it go last night?”
“I think the carousel is starting to slow down. I had some of the crazy thoughts, but they seemed to stay crazy — they didn’t begin to sound reasonable at all.”
“Hey — that’s a good sign. Let’s see if that trend continues.”
“Dr. Chaplin.”
“Yes, Jason?”
“I have a good feeling about this kind of therapy.” Jason held up his ring finger. On it was a shining silver band. “I reached for the silver ring on the carousel. I proposed to Juliet, and she accepted. I think this therapy is going to help a lot. I’ve also decided what I want to study when I get out of the hospital.”
“Yes?”
“I’m going for my PhD in biochemistry. I want to study with Laborit.”
“You know, Jason, I think you will do exactly that.”