

## **GOING TO OHIO STATE AND TO GEORGE A. KELLY**

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Forty-two years after the death of Professor George Kelly, I am recording personal memories of him, my major research professor at Ohio State University (OSU). I also am describing my journey to OSU. This manuscript documents parts of my own life and also describes a man who contributed so much to my professional career. I completed my Masters and Doctoral research under his direction. I also served as his Graduate Assistant during the second semester of my third graduate year.

I am including a second section in which I describe my views about the early developments of Professor Kelly's Personal Construct Psychology (PCP).

Putting PCP into my own words, I believe that human beings differ from one another at birth. I believe that stimuli are filtered through cognitive structures that exist at birth. I reject the assumption made by the behaviorist, John B. Watson, that we are born with white slates on which stimuli write. I believe that human beings think and create. In short, I do not believe that the external stimulus is king. I believe that any event can be viewed in more than one way. I think that George Kelly's use of the "personal scientist" as the root metaphor for his theory was novel and a valid way of understanding human motivation.

I accept the philosophical assumption called the Reflexivity of Theory. If a psychological theory includes all human beings, one should be able to consider the behavior of the theorist within his own theory (Oliver & Landfield, *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 1962, 18, 114-121). This article was reprinted in the *International Journal of General Semantics*. In other words, one should at least try to understand the behavior of George Kelly within his own theory.

I now begin with my own educational history. I was a first semester student at Muskingum College, a small Liberal Arts school located in central Ohio. I was drafted into the Army after one semester and sent to Fort McClelland, Alabama for four months of infantry training. I then was sent to Auburn University, then known as Alabama Polytechnic. There, I completed two semesters of basic Engineering before the program closed. Having received Infantry Training, I ended up in an Infantry unit in France.

My military experience ended in a deep and muddy hole located in a forest. Snow was a foot deep. I was wet and cold. I lacked the proper foot ware needed for such conditions. Battalion Aid diagnosed my problem as Trench Foot. When a Medic cut the shoes from my feet, they swelled to twice their normal size. Eventually, I was placed in a hospital in Paris for one week. There, two surgeons inspected my feet each morning. The younger surgeon wanted to amputate several toes. The older surgeon wanted to wait. His position prevailed and I was flown to a hospital in England. For many weeks, I laid flat on my back, my feet propped up on a large pillow. I was given Codeine around the clock.

Finally, I was placed in a wheel chair and taken to a library with the fancy name of USAFI or the United States Armed Forces Institute. I was introduced to a librarian who asked me if I had ever read about philosophy. I said, "No." He gave me a book that described several systems of ideas. After reading this book, I returned to the library and asked this librarian, "How can you prove which one is best?" He gave me a book on Industrial Psychology. I read about the famous Hawthorne study in which lighting was increased on some production lines; lowered on others. Nothing was done on the control lines. Production increased even on lines with lowered

wattage. I was impressed. Doing something for workers, even something ridiculous, could prove better than doing nothing. I now was developing a dual interest in philosophy and science, an interest that carried over to my later years.

When I was able to walk short distances, I was taken by hospital ship to a port near North Carolina. I was placed in a Rehab hospital. There, I had the opportunity to see both the Duke and North Carolina campuses. I loved the natural beauty of Chapel Hill and decided to apply for admission to the University of North Carolina. I needed the warmer climate because of my feet. I did not know that this choice would lead me to Ohio State University.

My next step was to decide how best to finance my further education. I had two choices. I could opt for education under the GI Bill. That would give me thirty months of education. However, since I had a disability, I could apply for education under Public Law 16. That meant that I would need to undergo a full day of psychological evaluation. I drove to the Rochester Institute of Technology for Psychological testing. I experienced an exhausting day during which I developed a dim view of Psychologists. Late in the day, my tested findings were reviewed. I had high scores in the area of Engineering. However, my interests and values did not match those of successful Engineers. My interests and values were a perfect match for Psychology. That was crazy. The psychologist recommended that I take at least one Psychology course at Chapel Hill. My dim view of this man changed when he recommended that I receive the full forty-eight months of education.

When I enrolled at the University I decided to take one psychology course. The Professor who taught this beginning course and a lab was Dr. John Frederick Dashiell. He was a dynamic lecturer, maybe because he was partly deaf. He talked excitedly about the new frontiers of Psychology. He used baseball stories from his short professional baseball career to illustrate certain ideas. All the students loved the guy. In the lab, he sometimes stood behind my lab desk and said, "That is very good Mr. Landfield." Eventually, I decided on a Psychology major. Of some interest to me was the fact that Dr. Dashiell

was one of the early Presidents of the American Psychological Association. Also, of great interest, was the fact that even as he "ran rats," he was curious about all aspects of Psychology. He was a General Psychologist. In my final year at Chapel Hill, I asked Dr. Dashiell what one does with an undergraduate degree in Psychology. He looked at me for a moment, then said, "You attend Graduate School and obtain a Ph.D. There is no real future for anyone without that degree."

I now had twenty-four months of education available to me. I asked him where I should go. He replied that the real action in Psychology was at Ohio State. So, I said, I want to attend Ohio State. He smiled and told me to apply to the Chairman of the Department at OSU, Dr. Burt. Apparently, they were personal friends.

I got married and temporarily lived in her father's summer Cottage on Cheat Lake in West Virginia. Finally, I received a letter from Dr. Burt saying that I had been accepted. We packed up and my father-in-law drove us to Columbus, Ohio. Two days before our departure, I received another letter, this time from the Graduate School, stating that my application had been rejected. Now it made common sense to call Dr. Burt. Instead, I believed that there was a clerical error. We moved to Ohio. When I talked with Dr. Burt, I was informed that it was not a clerical error. A new Admissions Committee had overturned Dr. Burt's decision.

When I asked Dr. Burt what I should do, he replied that I should take the Ohio State Psychological Exam, known as the OSPE. It was a general aptitude test. When I obtained a hundred percentile on the exam, I was admitted to the Graduate School and to the Department. When I began my graduate work at OSU, I wanted to become a General Psychologist like my undergraduate Professor at the University of North Carolina. When I told Dr. Burt that I wanted to become a General Psychologist, he replied, "There is no such animal as a General Psychologist. That was in the past. Now, you have to specialize." I asked him about the specialties at OSU. He told me that I should talk with the heads of the different programs. Then he added that many of the program heads were still on vacation. However, Dr. George Kelly was in his

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office that morning. He called him. Minutes later, I knocked on the door of Dr. Kelly's Office. A short, rotund, smiling man with an Irish face greeted me. "Come in Mr. Landfield, have a seat." He sat down opposite me and leaned forward. "Mr. Landfield, what do you think Psychology is all about?" I responded with something about what I had learned at North Carolina. He swiveled his chair to the window. Then, he swiveled back and leaned forward. "That is all very interesting. Many Psychologists believe in what you have said. However, there are other ways to look at all of that."

The light bulb went on for me. I knew at that moment that I had to know more about this man and his thinking. I decided at that moment to major in Clinical Psychology as a way of knowing more about those new ideas.

Dr. Kelly told me about the Research Meetings that would be held each week for eight weeks. Students would present their research idea for a Masters Thesis. If students liked a particular idea, they would vote the presenter out of the remaining meetings. Students reacted to this requirement in different ways. My reaction was to accept the challenge. If I couldn't do it, I didn't belong in the program. Some students left the program. One student, a new acquaintance of mine, shifted to graduate work in Social Administration. I was voted out in the fourth week. I had stumbled onto a study in which a researcher had correlated child delinquency with overstatement. It made no sense to me that delinquency caused overstatement. I proposed that children overstate in areas of unfulfilled need. I did find evidence for this hypothesis. This study was not done within Personal Construct Psychology. I had no knowledge of it then. Only later did I learn about it in my third year of graduate study as I read mimeographed copies of the first drafts of the Kelly theory.

The third year, I ran out of government money. To help me financially, I was given a Graduate Assistantship for two Semesters. First, I was assigned to Dr. Boyd McCandless. He asked me to punch hundreds of IBM cards. The second semester, I was assigned to Dr. Kelly. When I asked him about my duties, he replied, "Oh, you

might dust my books once in a while." He smiled.

One afternoon, I was working late in the secretarial office outside Dr. Kelly's office. I was coming up with some research ideas. I looked up when Dr. Kelly was leaving his office. Impulsively, I asked him if he could listen for several minutes to a research idea. He agreed to my request and sat on the edge of my work table. Quickly, I summarized my thoughts. He responded with the following statement: "Mr. Landfield, I don't follow all that you are saying, but I see the wheels going around. What is most important are those wheels going around." He departed. He could have easily cut me down and made me feel like an idiot. I have known professors who would delight in having that kind of opportunity. Kelly supported my intention. Kelly did not give me many words of support during those years at OSU. However, when he did, his comments made a critical difference in my life. He always treated me with respect in his formal way.

Shifting to a period about ten years after my departure from OSU, when I was a Professor at the University of Missouri, Dr. Kelly was invited to speak at the University. I had breakfast with him at his hotel. I began our conversation by talking about my friend Professor Frank Shaw who died suddenly at the age of forty-three. Kelly had met him once and Frank had written to him about the possibility of encouraging a subject to attempt a reconciliation of the two poles of a Personal Construct. Frank was writing a theory he called Reconciliation Theory. When I stated that Frank was the type of guy that would jump off our planet just to see what was out there, Kelly responded with. "Al, I have been under threat all my life." He later pointed out why he did not like Frank's idea of reconciliation. He equated it with the work of the Philosopher Hegel. Hegel introduced the sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. George felt that Hegel's idea would end up with a final synthesis in the autocratic German State. Later, I asked my friend Don Oliver, a Professor of Philosophy, about Kelly's comment. Don, who read Hegel in German,

stated that George was wrong. I wish I could have put the two men together.

I saw another face of George Kelly, whom I now called George, at a Psychological conference in Chicago. He saw me alone in a hotel corridor and invited me to accompany him to a Clam and Oyster bar in the basement of the hotel. He was very proud of the fact that he could locate this bar from anyplace in the hotel.

Several years later, I became concerned about my finances. I applied for a Chairman position at a University in another State. I called George and asked if he would give me a recommendation. He said that he could give me a good one. However, after I returned from a trip to this University, I received a waiting letter from him. I pulled out a three page letter from the envelope. He had typed it himself. Letters from George usually were more formal. This letter was most personal. He was worried that I would take the job. He gave me a dozen reasons why it would be a mistake. He was emotional in ways that I could not have predicted. I was seeing another face of George Kelly in relation to me.

Returning to my earlier years at OSU, I want to comment on how it can make a difference in understanding George Kelly if you were on his research team during those four years when he was Director of Clinical Training. Dr. Kelly told his research students about his problem with students who hung around OSU for a dozen years with no plans to finish their Doctoral work. Dr. Kelly took on the unpleasant task of eliminating those with no plans for completion. I could understand why he did this. However, students who did not know Dr. Kelly when he was Director of Clinical Training, tended to treat this information negatively. We all know about rumors. My maternal grandmother had her own take on rumors: "Take them with a grain of salt."

I must agree that Dr. Kelly could be tough in his administrative role. For example, each semester, he called in clinical students and asked them about their progress in the program. He also asked them to state target dates for further progress. If students were missing their target dates, I am sure they felt uncomfortable. Since I was married with limited financial resources, I

had to make rapid progress on my Doctoral studies.

Another example of his toughness came late the second year. I had tested a child whose level of intelligence was very low. It was not a complex case, and I wrote a good report. Unfortunately, it was Friday afternoon when I received a call from a physician who was seeing the boy. The parents were coming to Columbus from a distance. He needed the information now. I tried to contact my Clinic supervisor for approval and could not locate him. I should have tried other Professors to give approval for sending the information to this physician. Using my common sense rather my clinical sense, I sent the information without an approval. Monday, Kelly called me into his office and reamed me out. He said I had acted in an unprofessional manner. I should have tried to get approval from another staff member. For example, I could have called him at his home. That was my first lesson in professional ethics.

Moving forward to the early years when I was a Professor at the University of Missouri, twice Dr. Kelly called me. The first time, he told me about Don Bannister, from England, a visitor at OSU. Would I and my wife be able to entertain Don and his wife, Linda. I said that we could. This was my introduction to Dr. Don Bannister, an external research member of the British Medical Research Council.

A year later, Dr. Kelly again called me. Would I and my wife entertain Han Bonarius and his wife Marja. Han was working on his Doctoral at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Now I had met two men who would play important roles in my life and in the early history of PCP.

It was 1965. I decided to take a sabbatical. I was interested in London and Don Bannister. Don and his friend, Miller Mair, would sponsor my sabbatical at a unit of the University of London. Late in 1966, my family traveled to London. Don and Miller met us at our boat dock. They had rented a large station wagon, called a Shooting Break. Most of our luggage was strapped to the top of the wagon. They took us to a small bed and breakfast hotel in London. After

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ten days, Don and Miller collected us and took us to our flat they had arranged for. This flat was close to Miller's townhouse. Don had arranged a car rental for me and Miller had arranged for school enrollment for our two children.

It was in London that I met Dr. Fay Fransella who became a leader in the PCP movement in Great Britain after Don's death. I also met Neil Warren, a lecturer at Brunel University, London. I will never forget sitting in on a meeting of the Kelly Club hosted by Fay Fransella. Don, Miller, Neil, and Phillida Salmon were present at this meeting. Dr. Salmon later wrote an important book in *Developmental Psychology*.

I became well acquainted with Neil Warren. One day, Neil invited me to visit Brunel University. Late that afternoon, Neil pulled a letter from his file. "I received this letter from George Kelly directly after his visit to London in 1964. He participated in the Symposium on PCP. As you know, I chaired that Symposium. I have not shown this letter to anyone. Having come to know you, I can trust your opinion about this letter. Read it. Give me your opinion. I then will give you my opinion."

My comment: "I think after George reached New York, he stayed overnight. He rented a typewriter and wrote most of the evening. His review of a problem childhood is painful to read. His stress must have been great to share it with someone he knew only a short time. He showed good judgment in trusting you. You also were Chair of the Symposium and could assess his distress objectively. He felt he was a failure and the Symposium was a failure. I remember Kelly saying that if British scholars liked his theory, it would become important in Psychology. George is miserable about his failure and has to share it with someone he trusts. He says you may show the letter to others after his death. To show the letter to me must have been difficult. The letter upset you and you had to share it with someone." "Neil responded, "That reflects my own analysis. The tragedy is that George did well and people liked him. The Symposium was well received. As for the letter, I don't want anyone else to see it. The letter could be misunderstood."

Neil never showed this letter to anyone else and later destroyed it. I corresponded with an

administrator of his University after Neil's death. The letter could not be found. This letter is important in that often George tended to downplay the importance of his theory. This letter clearly showed that the theory was at the core of his own Construct System.

Others had heard him talk about the theory as though it was just another theory. Professor Ansbacher, Editor of the *Journal of Individual Psychology*, had heard him do this. When Professor Ansbacher received copies of the Oliver & Landfield article, referred to earlier, he sent a copy to George whom he said he knew well. In Kelly's letter of response to Ansbacher's letter, he again downplayed the importance of his theory. This was ridiculous to Ansbacher who wrote about these communications with Kelly in a letter to me about a second manuscript on *Reflexivity of Theory*.

Following the death of Dr. Kelly in 1967, I wrote to Mrs. Kelly. I explained to her that I had written to the Editor of *Psychological Abstracts*, asking that Personal Construct Theory and Personal Construct be coded in the *Journal*. My request was rejected. I explained to Mrs. Kelly the idea of starting a Clearing House, a Library, where references would be sent. At the end of each year, these references would be distributed to the Members of the Clearing House. I then asked Mrs. Kelly if she could share the Magpie List of people to whom George sent an unpublished paper each year. Mrs. Kelly sent the list. I sent a letter to people on this list, asking if they wanted to participate in this Reference Library. About one third stated that their interest was more in George than his theory. However, even these people said that it sounded like a good idea. We began with about sixty members. Within several years, the list had expanded to about two hundred, representing twenty-four countries.

Following our first International Conference (1975), now called a Congress, the Clearing House annual letter would be used to announce the site of the next International Congress. Once the Congress had been established, it no longer was mercenary to use the list for this purpose.

In 1974, Dr. David Levine, Chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Nebraska, asked me to take the responsibility for a

Nebraska Symposium on PCP. The Nebraska Symposium is sponsored each year by the Department and is published by the University of Nebraska Press. My first decision after Dr. Levine's request was to contact Don Bannister. Don decided to visit Lincoln to help me prepare for the conference. After Don's departure, I asked David if we could hold the Symposium in the fall semester of 1975. Usually the Symposium is held in two sessions, three persons speaking in the Fall and three in the Spring. David liked the idea of an International Conference held just in the Fall. Inviting speakers to this conference was aided by the networking of persons writing in PCP. Networking had given me the advantage of knowing most of the speakers personally. I invited Don Bannister, England; Miller Mair, Scotland; Han Bonarius, the Netherlands; Jim Mancuso, SUNY at Albany; Seymour Rosenberg, Rutgers University. A speaker not committed to PCP was Ted Sarbin, University of California, a friend of Jim Mancuso. I also read a paper.

Two years later, Dr. Fay Fransella chaired the Second International Congress at Oxford University. Don Bannister chaired another Congress at Cambridge University. Dr. Han Bonarius chaired the third Congress at the University of Utrecht. Professor Jack Adams-Webber chaired a fourth Congress at St. Catherines, Canada. Dr. Adams-Webber was Dr. Kelly's last graduate student at Brandeis University. Franz Epting and I chaired the Fifth Congress in Boston. Many more Congresses were held throughout the world.

To close, I wish George Kelly could have known about the expansion of his theory into the world. Mrs. Kelly did know and she attended the first conference in Lincoln in 1975.

My final comment relates to the question: Who was George Kelly? My answer came in the form of a statement he made to members of his research team. "I could sit up all night working over a drafting board and feel refreshed in the

morning. I get tired working with people. It's more important to work with people."

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Al Landfield* is Emeritus Professor at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, NE, USA. He was one of George Kelly's first students and a foremost scholar and practitioner of Personal Construct Psychology and Psychotherapy. He later became a professor at Purdue University, the University of Missouri, Columbia, and in Lincoln, Nebraska. He is best known for his contributions to the theory and for his introduction of the Interpersonal Transaction Groups in 1975/78, the pyramiding technique in 1971, and developing systems of construct content coding in 1971, and wrote and edited a number of PCP classics. He organised the famous Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, later known as the First International Congress on PCP, in 1975. He lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the American Midwest, a few hours from Kelly's birthplace. (*Eds.*)

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