

Al Landfield – A tribute

1924 - 2019

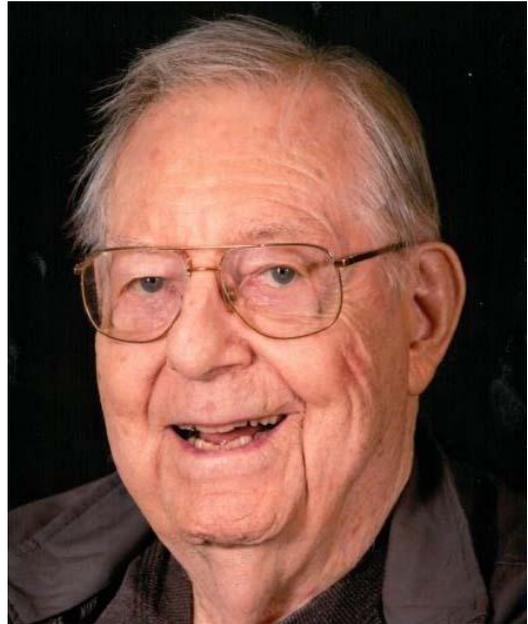
Al Landfield died on January 11, 2019 in Lincoln, Nebraska after a short illness. He was 94 years old, having been born on September 10, 1924.

After serving honorably in World War II, Al completed an undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina and entered the Ph.D. program in psychology at Ohio State University. There, by chance, he met Professor George Kelly. In their first conversation, Kelly asked Al about his thoughts as to why people behaved in the ways that they did. Al gave him some Hullian learning theory explanation. Kelly listened carefully and said something like, “That certainly is one way of understanding people’s actions. But there are many other ways also.” At that moment, Al knew he wanted to learn more about what George Kelly was talking about. He began studying with Kelly and received his Ph.D. in 1951.

Al started his professional career at Purdue University in Indiana. After a few years, he moved to the University of Missouri. During his time there, he was promoted to full Professor. In the early 1970s, he moved to the University of Nebraska where he stayed for the rest of his career. During his career, he garnered international recognition for his work in Personal Construct Psychology and psychotherapy. He was a founding member of the Society for Psychotherapy Research and held what came to be called the First International Congress on Personal Construct Psychology in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1975.

Al was a prolific scholar, as anyone with a knowledge of Personal Construct Psychology knows. He authored or edited five books and numerous chapters and journal articles. His 1971 book, *Personal construct systems in psychotherapy*, was described by one critic as the most powerful set of studies into premature termination in psychotherapy that had been done to date. This volume served as my introduction to Al’s work and led to his becoming a mentor, colleague, and, most importantly, friend for the rest of his life.

I entered graduate school at the University of Nebraska in 1973 to study with Al. He took a young, insecure, anxious student and helped mold me into the professional I became. While I appreciated his scholarship, what I admired most was his values as a person. More than anything, he taught me to bring my humanity into the therapy room, the classroom, and the research room. He also taught me that, while it is important to compromise, there also are times to take a stand for what you believe is right.



I am not alone in valuing this human touch he brought to his work. Bob Neimeyer recently told me, “Most of all, looking back, I value the freedom and challenge Al gave me to write, to think, and to become the best psychologist and exponent of PCT I could be, setting a model of caring and daring that I have tried to step into with my own students in the decades since.”

Al was devoted to encouraging others to continue to elaborate Personal Construct Psychology. He frequently helped other scholars develop their careers. Franz Epting, who worked with Al

on hosting an International Congress in Boston, described coming to know him and appreciate his support over the years. He actively encouraged scholars like Jim Mancuso, Han Bonarius, Fay Fransella, Miller Mair, and Don Bannister, among others.

The home I retired to in Iowa is about 4 hours from Lincoln. So, for over four years, I drove to see Al about once a month. By the time we were having our “Wednesdays with Al,” he was severely disabled by macular degeneration. Over time, he became wheel chair bound as his spine continued to deteriorate, in part due to having

severe fractures in it earlier in life. Despite these incapacities, he never lost his good humor and accepted his life as it was. I will miss my mentor and my friend. Generations of personal construct scholars will feel his loss.

Larry M. Leitner, Colfax, IA, USA

Correspondence address:
lmleitner@gmail.com

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