

## GUIDING, TEACHING, AND DEMONSTRATING: AN ADLERIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

RUDOLF DREIKURS, M.D.

*Chicago, Illinois*

I was born in Vienna, on February 8, 1897. My father was a successful business man, compensating for the fact that, as the youngest of four brothers and a sister, he did not have a chance to go to the University. All three brothers had their doctorate. He tried to show them that he could surpass them, at least financially. My mother was a soft and idealistic woman who somehow supported me in my rebellion against my domineering father who did not spare the rod. I never could live up to his expectations. I was an "only son" with a sister five years younger.

In this connection I remember an incident which took place years later in the large ornamental hall of the University of Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. Alfred Adler had been invited to give a lecture there, but he became sick and asked me to substitute for him. It was a most impressive formal setting, with hundreds of very dignified academicians in attendance. I spoke about education of children. In the discussion I was asked whether I believed in spanking. Quite impulsively I answered, "Yes, I believe that everybody who abuses children should be spanked." I certainly evoked a shock reaction, because at that time spanking was still accepted as an educational method. In that moment I recognized the reason for my outburst: My identification with children—and with all suppressed groups—was an effort to get back at my father who had spanked me frequently.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

My earliest recollection, from the age of five, is about the events of the day my sister was born. For me it became a day of wonder and excitement when I was taken away from home to stay with my cousins to whom I felt very close. I went first to my father's office; I saw there, for the first time, a military funeral passing by and was very impressed with the spectacle. I went for lunch to my favorite aunt, and then was escorted by an uncle to his family outside of Vienna. I suddenly became a man of the world. There is not a trace

of memory about the dethronement, although I was told my resentment over this came out pretty strongly in my becoming such a severe feeding problem that for many months I could not keep any food down, regardless of how everybody tried to cater to my taste.

I was withdrawn and convinced of my inadequacy and stupidity. At the age of six one of my more sophisticated friends mentioned a rare stamp he had gotten and I meekly said, I had it too. Whereupon I was told that I certainly did not understand anything about stamps. Consequently I became an avid philatelist.

The first day I went to school, I was seated next to a boy from a very poor family. He treated me with great respect, in contrast to the neighbor boy who beat me up. I immediately brought the schoolmate home, declaring proudly that now I had a friend, too. I could not understand why my mother disapproved of this friendship and sent him home.

In the fourth grade I went to a private school to skip a year. I felt quite inferior to the wealthy children. I was not particularly well dressed since my father was very stingy in regard to such things as clothes. When I entered the first grade of the *Gymnasium* at age 10, trouble really began. I simply could not learn Latin. Both mother and father sat with me every evening to make me remember the words and the verbs. I almost flunked that year, and throughout the ensuing eight years, I barely passed.

#### ADOLESCENCE AND YOUTH

An interesting aspect of my motivation to learn is my experience with music. A cousin of mine, a half year younger, was a musical genius as a composer and violinist. He probably would have become one of the great musicians of his time had he not been killed in World War I. We were the only two boys in the family, and my father decided that I had to learn to play the violin, too. I was not delighted over the prospect because now I had to study even more, and I had a rather poor teacher. After a few years I wanted to stop. But I was told that since my parents had already invested so much money I had to continue. I wanted to play the piano. So my parents made a deal with me. If I would practice for the next recital which the teacher gave for his students, then I could switch to the piano. And that is what happened. I had a piano teacher, whom I liked very much. I often preferred to talk with her than to play the piano. And before long, I was again tired of practicing. In the meantime

I had discovered the pleasure of sight reading, stimulated by the mother of my best friend, who invited me to play duets with her. After that, I played whatever music came into my hands and I also began to improvise, to "play around." This probably had the expected results, since my parents objected to the time I spent at the piano instead of doing my homework. Their objection became rather vociferous when I discovered Wagner and not only played the score but also sang to it. It certainly must have been distressing to the others in the family, but the consequence of it was that I became a rather good pianist. Not until I met Leonhard Deutsch did I understand how I became efficient on the piano, i.e., through sight reading. Then I began to study composition and almost became a professional musician.

The turning point in my life occurred when I was 16. At that time I was stricken with poliomyelitis, and barely escaped lasting paralysis. While I was away for treatment, my friends joined the youth-movement which affected their lives and mine. After my return to Vienna I joined them and very soon became one of its leaders.

The Viennese youth-movement of 1913 was part of the rebellion of youth, enflamed by the German educator, Gustav Wyneken (1875-1966). He and Alfred Adler were the two personalities who, with their ideologies, had the greatest influence on my life. Wyneken, whom I never met personally, founded in 1906 the Free School Community (*Freie Schulgemeinde*) in Wickersdorf, the first truly democratic school with students as full partners. While he was forced in 1910 to leave this school, he continued to influence the thinking of German youth. At one of the youth gatherings on the Hohe Meissner mountain in October, 1913, Wyneken made his famous appeal to youth to determine its own destiny. From there, a group of university students returned to their communities to propagate the thoughts and ideas of Wyneken. Two of them, Siegfried Bernfeld, who later became a leading psychoanalyst, and Barbizon gathered Vienna high school students in discussion groups where they could freely express themselves. Later we dragged our parents once a week to hear Bernfeld telling them about the problems of youth who had become free to determine their own destiny and looked critically upon adults. I started one of these discussion centers (*Sprechsaal*) in my community and was almost expelled from school because of my "subversive" activities. But inviting our

teachers and parents to come whenever they wanted to hear what we thought of them saved me, because we were not a secret organization. This youth-movement probably had a lasting effect on most of us. I owe my leadership ability to it. At one time I could count 20 of the approximately 100 boys and girls of the movement in Vienna who became internationally known. Among these Otto Fenichel was one of my closest friends. During the war the movement was dissolved.

In 1915, after graduation from the *Gymnasium* I served in World War I as a lieutenant and had a most amazing history: I spent 27 months on the front, many months as a commander of a scout unit, and led many patrols—but never came into a situation where I had to shoot at any one. The big fights occurred always either shortly before I arrived or soon after I had left.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 1918 I was sent by the army to the University of Vienna to study medicine. Before graduating from the *Gymnasium* I had decided to explore the mysteries of the mind. To this end two avenues were open: through psychology which was part of philosophy, or through medicine and psychiatry. Knowing my tendency to go far afield, I thought that medicine and psychiatry would keep my feet on the ground, which philosophy would not. But actually I was not interested in medicine as such, and again, was a poor student, this time at the University, particularly since I became interested in politics as soon as the monarchy collapsed. I organized a group of medical students interested in socialism, and was sent by the student body with two others to represent the University in the Labor Council (*Arbeiterrat*) which was set up after the revolution. Here I met Alfred Adler for the first time. I remember one incident, when we were walking together and he explained to me that anybody can be helped who wants to be helped. This optimism was beyond my grasp, at least then.

During these student days I also attracted the attention of Wilhelm Stekel through the stand I took in a public meeting of faculty representatives with a “mind reader.” At that time I was interested in parapsychology and expected to go into the exploration of its phenomena. However, the suicide of a greatly respected psychiatrist who worked in this field, only to find out that he had been duped by the medium with whom he worked, convinced me that

I would not be clever enough to deal with frauds. It was then only natural that I became interested in another avenue of exploring the mind, namely, psychotherapy.

I could not understand why Freud, Adler, and Stekel could not agree on anything and opposed each other so violently. I wanted to find out for myself. Fenichel and Wilhelm Reich were close friends of mine but they assured me that nobody could come to the psychoanalytic meetings merely as an observer. To be admitted, one had first to undergo psychoanalytic treatment. When I came to a session with Adler I got myself into trouble. Adler made a very derogatory statement about Freud, implying that Freud was all wrong. I spoke up and questioned Adler's right to speak so disparagingly of a recognized fellow scientist, and I was put in my place by one of the doctors. I think it took quite a while after I had joined his group until Adler would trust me. Later I myself carried on his fight with Freud and psychoanalysis.

After I received my M.D. in 1923 I served as intern and resident in the Wiener Allgemeine Krankenhaus. I spent most of my time in psychiatry, particularly under Professor Emil Mattauschek. My work in his department provided two important influences for me: Mattauschek supported me in my first efforts to establish psychiatric social work and mental hygiene in Vienna, and his department brought me together with Dr. Alexander Neuer who served with me as intern and resident. It was his influence which made me become increasingly interested in Adler's psychology. He pointed out that my ideas agreed with Adler well. My conviction about the value of Individual Psychology was established after I started my private practice. Faced with a difficult case, I looked in the literature for some guidance. Reading the books by Adler again, I found my answer and began to understand him. I became part of his group, and at one time was the president of the Adlerian Physicians Society. I started and conducted several child guidance centers (*Erziehungsberatungsstellen*), particularly with Danica Deutsch (1934b).<sup>1</sup> As first secretary of the mental health organization, I also worked with groups of alcoholics and helped to organize a counseling center for suicide prevention (*Lebensmüdenstelle*). I think I was the first psychiatrist to introduce group psychotherapy in private practice in 1929, after experience with the group approach in our child guidance centers, and together with Dr. Julius Metzl in working with alcoholics (1928a, 1928c, 1929a, 1958a, 1959g, 1961d).

## DEPARTURE FROM VIENNA

With the advent of Austrian fascism in 1934, I realized that I had to leave Austria, a conviction reinforced by the threat of Hitler. Our child guidance centers in the public schools were closed with the justification given to me by the new head of the board of education that we do not need "those newfangled ideas." I was told that the old teachers knew what to do with children through not sparing the rod.

As I prepared to leave Vienna, two avenues were open to me. Stekel referred me to a friend of his in Rio de Janeiro who had arranged a trip for him, and Adler wanted me to go to the United States. Until the last moment I did not know which way to go. When Adler died in 1937, an American college which had planned a summer school with Adler invited me to take his place, but suddenly their communications ceased. I found out only many years later that at that time the head of this college had died also. So I went to Brazil, at the invitation of Dr. Antonio da Silva Mello.

Although the reception which I received there was overwhelming, and I was offered to be the head of an Adlerian institute, I refused because my M.D. would not have been recognized there and I would have had to work under a Brazilian physician. I founded an Adlerian society which eventually, however, had to give way to the psychoanalytic influx. I soon decided to go to the United States instead. While I had a difficult uphill struggle there, coming from a position of highly respected leadership to one of an intern in a hospital, from a highly paid experience in Brazil to a condition of no income, this decision proved to be very wise. When I returned to Brazil in 1946 as visiting professor at the University of Rio de Janeiro, I recognized that in Brazil as a newcomer I would never have been fully accepted as a citizen.

## A NEW BEGINNING

Adler had suggested that I go to Chicago to strengthen the group there, and this is where I went. When I arrived, late in 1937, psychoanalysis dominated the field of psychiatry. I was cautioned by my friends and superiors (among them Dr. Kasanin of Michael Reese Hospital) not to oppose it; this could ruin me professionally. Fellow Adlerians were afraid to reveal their identity because of the possible

---

<sup>1</sup>All references are to the Rudolf Dreikurs Bibliography, pp. 158-166.

danger to their professional status and positions. A historical examination of the origin of the psychoanalytic monopoly, its development and decline, is overdue. Its almost unbelievable defamation of those who opposed it, and the efforts to suppress the activities of the Chicago Adlerian group, would form a significant chapter in such a history.

Individual Psychology was at its lowest ebb, both in comprehension and reputation. References in the text books were usually limited to quotations of Adler in regard to the inferiority complex and the will to power. The *International Journal of Individual Psychology*, edited by Adler and published by Sydney Roth, discontinued its publication at the end of 1937 after Adler's death that spring. References in scientific journals regarded Individual Psychology as a historical phase of psychotherapy, without any present significance.

My first activities in Chicago included the establishment of child guidance centers, following the pattern of the *Erziehungsberatungsstellen* which we had conducted in Vienna since 1921 under Adler's leadership. It was significant that the first consultation centers in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles opened under the sponsorship of Unitarian ministers—Wendell Holmes in New York, Curtis Reese in Chicago, and Caldecott in Los Angeles.

The first center I started was at Abraham Lincoln Center, and after Eleanore Redwin arrived in Chicago, we conducted such centers in various settlement houses—Marcy Center, University of Chicago Settlement House, Hull House, Henry Booth House (1943b). Since the continuation of such centers depended on the administration of the institution and was affected by changes in administration, the Individual Psychology Association of Chicago took over the conduct of the centers as one of its services. In 1945 it was decided to make these centers an independent organization, the Community Child Guidance Centers of Chicago (1949c, 1950a, 1951b), with the counselors provided by the Individual Psychology Association and later by the Alfred Adler Institute. The latter was founded in 1951, first on the charter of the Individual Psychology Association of Chicago, and later, in 1963, incorporated as a separate institution.

I was appointed Professor of Psychiatry and head of the Department of Psychiatry at the Chicago Medical School in 1942. This did not stop the opposition which I encountered, mainly for conducting group counseling of parents and children in public. The

Illinois Society of Mental Health and the Metropolitain Council of Social Work supported by the Chamber of Commerce publicly denounced the centers and their staffs, which were now maintained by dedicated lay people, devoted to Adlerian principles. As far as I know, it was the first Adlerian organization in existence consisting entirely of lay people. Other Adlerian groups had accepted lay people as members; but they were led by professionals, which was not the case with the Community Child Guidance Centers. These were completely independent from the Adlerian counselors whom they contracted for services.

A significant development resulted from the initiative of lay people. Parents who moved away from the location of a center, and others who felt the need for further study, organized mothers' study groups. They refused professional leadership. They proved to have more lasting activities than courses given by professionals for parents which naturally stopped functioning at the end of a course. The mothers' study groups, in contrast, continued, almost indefinitely, and spread in the community. Mothers who had outgrown their group started new groups of their own. The parents' study groups—before long fathers were accepted as members—seem to be a most effective way of parent education and of disseminating interest in the knowledge of Individual Psychology. Today they are spread throughout the United States and abroad. In some cities up to 30 or 40 such study groups are conducted simultaneously. They either are the offspring of local guidance centers which are conducted by Adlerians, or of the Adlerian organizations which are now forming in various towns and states, usually after I had been invited by a university for a summer semester.

#### TRAINING EDUCATORS AND COUNSELORS

My first appointment as visiting professor, aside from my teaching at the Chicago Medical School, was at the University of Rio de Janeiro in the spring of 1946. Then followed a great variety of teaching assignments. By this time, I had decided to concentrate my work, apart from the practice of psychiatry in my office, to the field of education and guidance, training educators and counselors, and, through them teachers and parents for their difficult job of raising and influencing children. All my recent books have been devoted to this goal, as were most of my university classes.

In 1947, Carlton Washburn introduced me to the dean of edu-

cation of Northwestern University, and I gave summer courses there for a number of years. My most prominent students and co-workers came from this assignment: Raymond Lowe, Manford Sonstegard, Don Dinkmeyer, all of whom by now continue my work in the academic field of education and guidance. However, here as usual, my appointment ended with the inactivity of my sponsor, Dr. Hamrin. I then was invited as lecturer in education at Indiana University, Gary Extension, as part of a program for the training of teachers of the Gary Public School System. I did not realize at that time that I was replacing psychoanalytically oriented lecturers. It was through their opposition that my appointment was terminated three years later. However, this termination proved to be a blessing in disguise. Instead of continuing my class there, I utilized the material collected during the three years for my book, *Psychology in the Classroom* (1957g). Dr. George W. Hartmann of Roosevelt University invited me to teach there as lecturer in psychology, an assignment which terminated after Dr. Hartmann's death in 1954.

The major breakthrough in the academic field came, in my opinion, when Dr. Lowe arranged my appointment as visiting professor in guidance at the University of Oregon in 1957. My summer semesters which were spent partly at the University of Oregon in Eugene and partly at Oregon State University in Corvallis resulted in a statewide Adlerian movement, presently carried on primarily by Maurice Bullard, director of guidance of the Corvallis schools. Since then, I have tried to arrange appointments in different universities as a means of starting Adlerian training centers in a wide area. Consequently, I taught summer school at the University of Delaware, Southern Illinois University, Texas Technological College, University of Illinois, and Loyola University of Chicago. My students, in turn, in their academic activities, created new groups in various areas. Foremost in the spread of Adlerian psychology through demonstrations are Don Dinkmeyer, Bernice Grunwald, Harold Mosak, Wilmer and Miriam Pew, Bina Rosenberg and Manford Sonstegard who also use their academic positions to teach Individual Psychology. Strong Adlerian centers are developing thus in Southern Illinois; Lubbock, Texas; Dayton, Ohio; Wilmington, Delaware; Wenatchee, Washington; West Virginia; and elsewhere.

On the international scene, I developed an Adlerian movement in Jamaica, after two summer schools at Knox College; in Denmark after an Adlerian summer school; in Greece, working with private

schools primarily; and finally in Israel. I taught at the University of Tel-Aviv and Bar-Ilan University. After training a staff, I founded, three years ago, the Alfred Adler Institute of Tel-Aviv, which is now supported by the government as a training center for school psychologists, counselors, and teachers.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS

A necessary prerequisite for my mobility and freedom to take assignments out of Chicago was the use of multiple psychotherapy (1950i, 1952c). It consists of several therapists working with one patient. This technique was developed in 1946, primarily for the purpose of transferring patients to an associate, Dr. Arthur Zweibel, while I went to South America. The ensuing double interviews, before my leaving and after my return, proved so effective, both for the training of the therapist and for the therapy of the patient, that we decided to keep the system in effect as a regular procedure. Although I was cautioned that assigning patients to an associate would be impossible in psychiatry and would ruin my practice, this dire prediction proved to be false. We have now thirteen therapists in the Chicago group, in addition to myself. They are Robert Cross, Dewey Gilbert, Georgia Greven, Edward Kal, Leo Lobl, Harold Mosak, Stephanie Necheles, Sherwood Perman, Robert Postel, Bina Rosenberg, Bernard Shulman, Adaline Starr, and Achi Yatom. They work together with our patients, both in double interviews and in group therapy. Multiple psychotherapy is perhaps one of my major contributions to psychiatry. It clearly makes therapy an educational process. The double interviews of two therapists with one patient proved to be particularly effective.

In 1940 I started the *Individual Psychology News* as a mimeographed monthly publication, primarily designed to collect and disseminate news about the dispersed European Adlerians and their activities. Volume 2 became the *Individual Psychology Bulletin*, first mimeographed, but printed from Volume 3 on and becoming a scientific journal. With Volume 10 it became the semi-annual *American Journal of Individual Psychology*, as the official Journal of the newly formed American Society of Adlerian Psychology. With Volume 13, it became the *Journal of Individual Psychology*, with Dr. Heinz L. Ansbacher of the University of Vermont taking over from me as editor.

It is difficult for me to assess the contributions which I may have

made to psychology. Usually, students, associates, and colleagues are in a better position to evaluate a person's contributions. It seems to me that I was able to make Adlerian psychology more teachable, primarily through the policy of teaching through demonstrations. I found that lectures and theoretical presentations have a limited effect. Only demonstrations reveal the significance and advantage of the Adlerian approach. In this sense, I did not innovate the technique of demonstration, since Adler introduced it in his work with teachers and with parents. I am not aware, that any of the other Adlerians besides my students continued this technique of presenting live cases to students, professionals, and lay people. Perhaps my teaching experience enabled me to present the material more systematically than it had been done previously, particularly in my books (1945a, 1948a, 1957g, 1959b, 1963a, 1964a). They are devoted to describing a specific technique which can be learned.

The introduction of group psychotherapy into private practice (1959g, 1960d) and, as mentioned before, the development of multiple psychotherapy (1950i) may be considered other major contributions. I also incorporated psychodrama and music therapy (1951h, 1953b, 1955e, 1960e, 1961g) in our regular therapeutic procedures.

Training students to become perceptive, requires the development of diagnostic skills of the instructor. I worked systematically in increasing my own diagnostic perceptiveness through improving my recognizing the dynamics on which the patient operates. My concern with developing diagnostic sensitivity and imparting this skill to others was stimulated by my experience with Professor Chwostek of the University of Vienna. He had the uncanny ability of making a correct diagnosis by merely looking at the patient. Nobody knew whether it was based on vision or smell; but his "intuition" proved to be accurate even in the most complicated cases. I admired his skill, as did all his associates and students. But I regretted that he could not tell us on what he based his diagnosis. I remember that I then and there decided to train my diagnostic skill, but in such a way that I could communicate to others the reasons for my conclusions. Many believe that this sensitivity is "innate," a "talent," and cannot be acquired by training. I know that this is not true. My students have learned to increase their diagnostic skill.

I structured gathering of information, necessary to formulate the patient's life style, through a questionnaire about the patient's

family constellation (1954e, 1963e), and I systematized the interpretation of early recollections (1954e). It thus became possible to train counselors and therapists in recognizing the patient's long-range goals of the life style as well as his immediate goals in a relatively short period of time, and always at the beginning of the therapy.

Lately, I have been concerned with sharpening our diagnostic ability. I have introduced two principles by which it can be done. First, the "two points of a line" (1966b). One needs two points to draw a line; and once a line is drawn, one knows an infinite number of points. If one finds two apparently independent and often contradictory facts about a client, one has to guess which line of logic would make these two data reconcilable. The answer usually indicates the basic concepts of the life style. If new data would not fit the line, then the diagnosis was wrong and a new concept has to be found which explains all three observable data.

The other technique is called understanding the patient's "hidden reason." When one asks a person why he said or did something which is puzzling, he does not know, or will give some rationalization. Then one has to guess what went on in his mind while he acted in word or deed as he did. The patient's reaction to one's guess is absolutely reliable: if the guess is not correct, the patient will deny it. If one does make the correct guess about what he was thinking at that moment, then he will agree compulsively, even if he had been unapproachable before. He feels suddenly understood, which is most effective in establishing a therapeutic relationship. It shows that the unconscious process was just below the surface and can be brought to the patient's awareness. Application of this method requires considerable empathy and perceptiveness. This form of "private logic" is different from the goals, which have to be understood psychologically. Here we have to recognize the immediate logic on which the patient operates.

Another innovation is the recognition of the four goals of disturbing behavior in children which Adler had described but never systematized, and evoking the "recognition reflex" when the child realizes the purpose of his disturbing behavior (1948a, 1957g).

It is my experience that I learn from others about what I am doing. A prominent social worker in Israel said that I deal with each patient as if it were the last time I would see him. True enough, I feel that one does not need time to investigate; in each session one has to see the total situation and do something about it. The

directedness with which I deal with patients may be another of my contributions. I am not afraid of making a mistake nor do I fear that the patient may be harmed. I have too much confidence in him, to be apprehensive. And this may perhaps be my most revolutionary procedure in contrast to the prevalent cautious and patronizing practices in the field of psychotherapy and counseling.

#### PERSONAL ASPECTS

I have not dwelt on more personal aspects of my life. Suffice it to say, that my wife, Sadie G., is my close co-worker, both in writing and teaching. Her major training is in painting and social work, and she worked with Jane Addams at Hull House. More recently she developed special techniques in art therapy with our hospitalized patients. She plays an important role in my classes as the devil's advocate, or the "private logic" of the students. Whenever she senses that students are puzzled or dissenting and do not dare to speak up, she does it for them—and they love her for it.

My children, Eric, and Eva Ferguson, each have a Ph.D. in psychology. She is associate professor at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, and he is a practicing psychologist in Los Angeles, now specializing in legal psychology and developing new and highly effective techniques. I owe both of them a great deal for helping me in my work. Both, through their training in academic psychology, are much more sophisticated than I am.

We have four grandchildren and also "adopted" children in every city and country where we work, i.e., young students to whom we feel particularly close. They, plus my stamps, chamber music, tapes, and photography, round out my life.