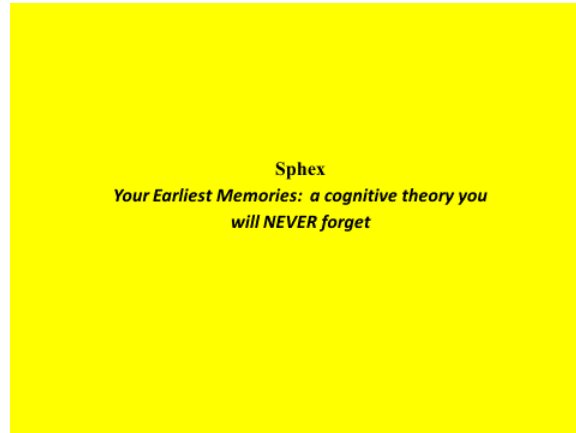


Your Earliest Memories: A cognitive theory you will never forget!

Dr. Ken West
October 20, 2022



Julie Doyle and Reid Wodicka delivered excellent presentations last spring on new ways to help the victims of crimes or students who are repeat offenders in school. Both moved away from seeing individual counseling as the best or sole way of helping others. I agree with them. And, I have made the same movement in my life.

However, Julie and Reid set me to thinking of something else -- of the most valuable technique I left behind. Early recollections.

As a brief background, when I first arrived at the University of Lynchburg, a beloved part of my course load was teaching a graduate course in Theories and Techniques for Counseling Individuals. It was a thrill to go into that class every week. Years later the field of Marriage & Family Counseling was created...and I fell in love with Marriage & Family Counseling and traveled around the nation to study more. In addition to my full-time teaching load, I opened a part-time counseling practice at Richeson Drive Pediatrics in Lynchburg that focused solely on working with marriages and families.

Unfortunately, as I moved away from counseling individuals, I left behind the best technique I've ever known that allows us to understand why we consciously or unconsciously "choose" to do the things we do.

So on August 1st (2022), I decided to begin reading all of the research on early recollections published since 2002 when I moved my focus to Marriage & Family Counseling. And, I am excited to be able to share these ideas with each of you and to place the information in Spheeris's permanent collection in the Jones Memorial Library.

How interesting is this skill you will learn about tonight? I trust most of you will return home and take the first opportunity that arises to ask your significant others or best friends to share their earliest recollections with you.

Tonight we will begin by looking at the life of the founder of Cognitive Psychology and the study of early recollections, Dr. Alfred Adler. After sharing a brief introduction of Adler's life, I will define what Adler considered to be a true early recollection. Afterwards, I will share my major early recollection – I only have four. You will then have the opportunity to write down one of your early recollections. Don't worry, you won't be asked to share it. Afterwards we will look at how to interpret early recollections. Finally, we will examine how Adler thought recollections that limit us unnecessarily could be altered to be more positive.

But first let me tell you about the founder of Cognitive Psychology and the importance of early recollections, Dr. Alfred Adler.

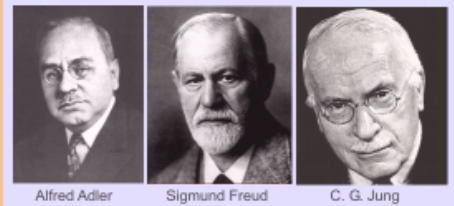
Cognitive Therapy in History: Alfred Adler founder

Alfred Adler
Father of Cognitive Therapy



**99% of all Spontaneous Behavior
is Totally Predictable**

The Freudian Circle



Alfred Adler Sigmund Freud C. G. Jung

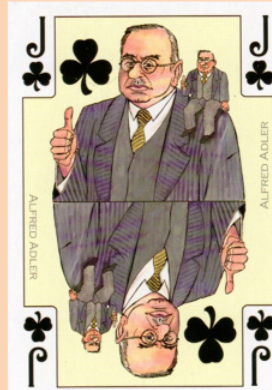
Vienna, Austria
What a Study Group!!!

Adler 1900-1911
Jung 1907-1914

Alfred Adler, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung worked together for several years in Vienna. This was a famous period in psychology as they formed what was called The Freudian Circle.



Alfred Adler



Sigmund Freud



Carl Jung



Adler, Freud and Jung appeared on the cards above that were given out at the Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference in California. There are a couple of jokes associated with this marvelous convention. For example, “This is the perfect conference held every five years. No graduate students speak. And better, no professors give presentations. Only the leaders of different therapies and movements are allowed to speak and give demonstratons.”

The Freudian Circle

Alfred Adler Sigmund Freud C. G. Jung

Vienna, Austria
What a Study Group! Or, was it?
Adler & Freud: 1902-1911
Jung & Freud: 1907-1914

We must never neglect the patient's own use of his symptoms.
[Alfred Adler](#)

I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection.
[Sigmund Freud](#)

"Show me a sane man and I will cure him for you."
 -Carl Jung

What happened to the relationships between Freud and Adler & Freud and Jung?

A CONTROVERSIA
Freud-Adler
 Bernhard Handbauer

"For Freud, a person's primary motivation was sexual pleasure; people were similar to animals and machines; driven by natural forces with no say in what they did."

"For Adler, the primary motivation was self-perfection and equality with others; the emphasis was on what made people different from animals and machines: goals, values, free will."

Freud & Adler

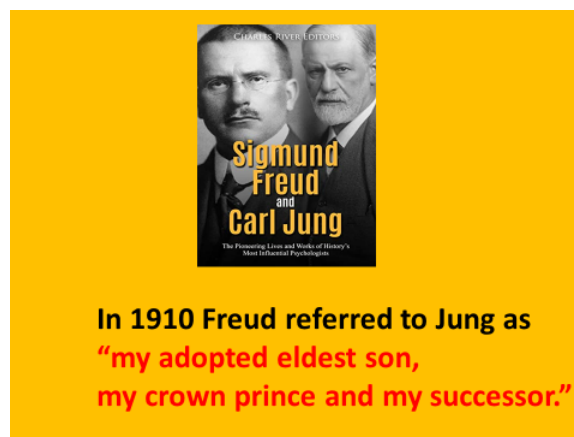
Neither Adler nor Jung were students of Freud. They considered themselves to be equals who studied together. But soon disagreements occurred between Freud and Adler & then between Freud and Jung.

Both Freud and Adler agreed on the importance of our earliest recollections. Freud first thought that early memories potentially conceal troubling conflicts related primarily to sexual abuse but he later adopted a fantasy-based theory of infantile sexual conflicts. On the other hand, Adler felt early recollections illuminate our unique outlook on life and explain our future movements in life.

(See text on PowerPoint above.)

In 1908 Adler wrote a paper that disagreed with Freud's emphasis on sexuality and the two parted ways. As a result of the conflict, Adler resigned as the president of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and as the editor of the society's journal.

The break was so complete that Adler and Freud never communicated with each other after 1912. By 1920 – Freud refused to acknowledge Adler in any way. A story is told that in 1920 a man writing a biography of Adler came to Freud's door to ask him questions about Adler. It is reported that Freud's response was, "I have never heard of the man." And, he closed the door.



Freud and Jung

In 1910 Freud referred to Jung as “my adopted eldest son, my crown prince and my successor.”

But the two stopped working together not long after Jung's lecture tour in America during 1912. During his tour, Jung made clear his objections to Freud's Oedipus Complex and his psychosexual stages in development theories.


This infuriated Freud and led to a falling out between the two. Their last meeting was in 1913. Although Freud lived for over a quarter of a century thereafter, the two men never met, spoke or corresponded again.

(Good Therapy "Alfred Adler Biography," March 2, 2018)

Raissa Adler
Married Alfred in 1897




Jewish Tradition




Children Surround Mrs. Adler
Valentine, Alexandra, Nelly and Kurt
1914

Adler's Spouse and family. They were Jewish.



Adler's Country Home in Austria
1926-1931



Alfred Adler lecturing in Russia

Adler's home in Austria and his early talks before WWII



Hitler's Rise to Power
 Began in 1929
 Completed in 1933

Formation of the Third Reich




Hitler's rise to power threatened Adler's family.

Hitler threatened Austria and took control of it by 1938

Adler with his Jewish Family
 Flees to the United States



Immigration Card to USA
 September 24th, 1933



Alfred Adler with Son Kurt and Daughter Alexandra
 1936
 California

Adler fled with his family to the United States in 1933.

Hitler Orders Troops
Into Vienna
(Adler's Home)

1938





Jews Who Remained
In Austria



Category Three Camp
"Return Not Desired"

Mauthausen Concentration Camp
Austria
1938




Hitler takes over Vienna and Jews were sent to die in concentration camps.

The Adlers were friends with Leon Trotsky, Stalin's enemy.

Stalin deported Trotsky and murdered him in Mexico.



Leon Trotsky



Joseph Stalin

Russia in the 30s

How Many People Did Each Man Kill in Concentration Camps Or Gulags (work camps from which few returned)?



Joseph Stalin

20,000,000 Twenty Million




Adolf Hitler

11,000,000 Eleven Million
(Six Million were Jews)

Adler created a friendship with Stalin's enemy Trotsky. Stalin was vicious.

1937

Stalin Sends Adler's Oldest Daughter, Valentine To a Concentration Camp (Gulag)



1937

Valentine Killed in Gulag



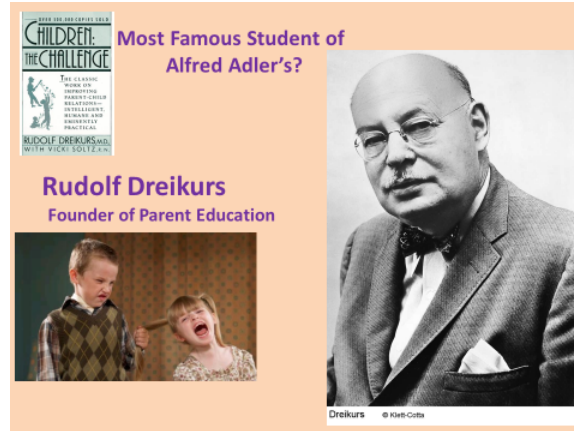
Stalin sent Adler's daughter to a concentration camp where she died.

1937

Adler Dies of a "Broken Heart" While giving a Speech in Scotland



Adler died soon afterwards – his friends said that he died of a broken heart.



Cognitive psychology blossomed and branched out. In fact, several of you here tonight took a parenting class that studied “Children the Challenge” written by Rudolf Dreikurs and based on Adler’s cognitive theory. At one time at Lynchburg College (UL), I taught a course using Dreikurs’ book and methods to 24 graduate students in counseling. They then partnered with 24 school counselors in 24 elementary schools in three cities across Virginia to study Dreikurs’ ideas.

Three of the Major Schools of Individual Counseling

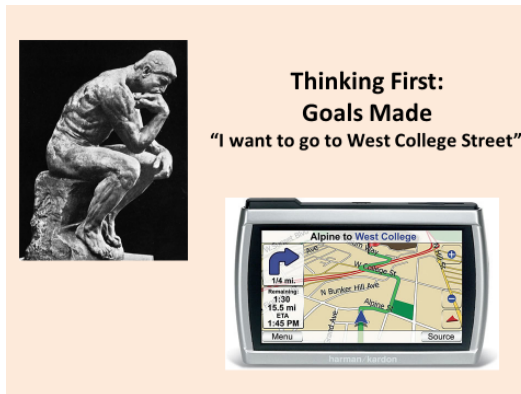
1. Cognitive Therapy
2. Behavioral Therapy
3. Gestalt – feelings based therapy

3 Schools of Thought

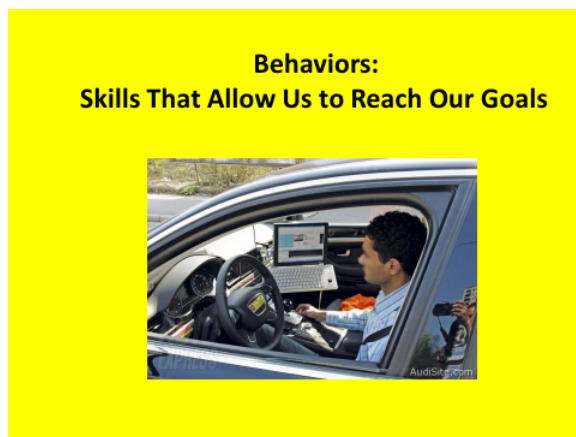
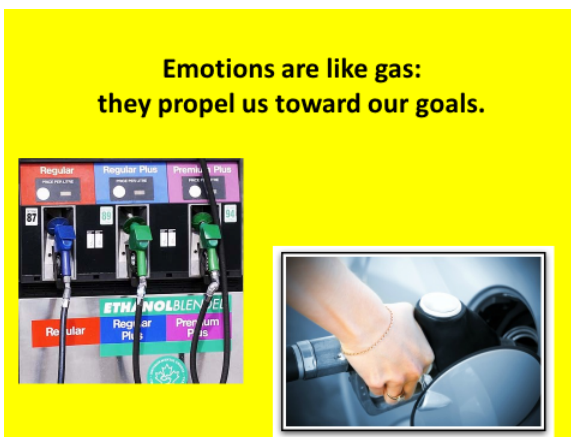
Individual therapy is frequently divided into three major schools of thought: Cognitive, Behavioral, and Feelings. (Of course, there are many additional types of therapy that are used with individuals.) I believe all three theories work if matched with the right clients. But there can be mismatches. For example, if a highly emotional person needs help seeing a therapist whose #1 goal is to increase

emotional expression.....well, that's throwing gas on flames. Maybe a behavioral or cognitive therapist would be more likely to make the needed changes.

Cognitive Therapy
Thinking first.
Then emotions and behaviors.



In Adler's cognitive theory, thoughts come first followed by feelings and behavior. The thoughts ignite feelings and usually lead to specific behaviors.



For example, a person could make a mental plan (cognitive) to drive to a certain place. If people are reluctant to travel or are tired, they might drink a

cup of coffee for energy or use another method to get themselves ready to go (feelings). Then a person will need to use driving skills (behaviors) to arrive at the destination.

Could this ever happen in Lynchburg?

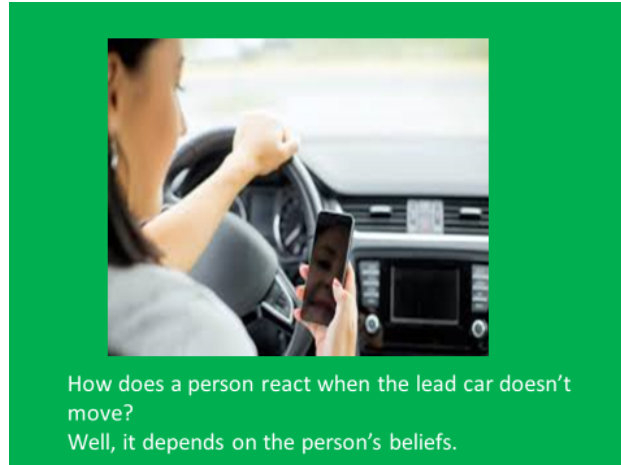


5th Street and
Commerce.
Texas Inn ahead

See the picture above and then:

A volatile driver is stopped behind a person at a red light in Lynchburg, Virginia. The light turns green. But the person in front appears to be texting and doesn't move. Could this happen in Lynchburg, Va.?!?!

(To be said with irony, because the answer is clearly "Yes" in 2022)



How does a person react when the lead car doesn't move? Well, it depends on the person's beliefs. A person might think: "People who are texting at stoplights are dangerous, self-centered, horrible human beings who should be prohibited from driving and forced off the roads." That belief could lead to related feelings and behaviors. Feelings could include tremendous anger or rage. Behaviors follow. This person might start honking the horn, then make a point of passing the car while screaming insults and making threatening gestures at the driver.



Before next PowerPoint:

I wonder if this guy has an early recollection about how a parent handled his misbehavior as a child. Maybe like this:

(Now show the PowerPoint)



Of course, the person behind the car that didn't move could hold different beliefs. "People are really too attached to their phones. I'm not going to be impolite but I am going to gently honk if this driver doesn't move." This driver goes "Toot, Toot," and the car in front moves. That's a gentler solution to the challenge.

**What would a person look like
who was completely calm
and not agitated in any way
by the distracted driver?**

I couldn't find a picture!

People ask, “Can people control their emotions?”

Do we, in this room, have beliefs
that can control our emotions?
You Bet!



Pretend a couple is having a fight. The husband is yelling at his wife: “I cannot believe you would plan something like this without asking me first Mary Margaret. This might be the most inconsiderate thing you have ever done – and you’ve done a truck load of inconsiderate things. While we’re at it, another thing that makes me angry...” he yells. His phone rings and he answers it before finishing his sentence. In a very calm, delightful voice he says, “Hello. Oh, it is so wonderful to hear your voice. Oh yes, Mary Margaret is doing beautifully as always...” So if his beliefs tell him he must be in control then he can summon the control of his emotions and behaviors immediately.



As I mentioned earlier, I moved my attention to M&F therapy but my favorite way of learning about people at a deeper level was through sharing early recollections.

Let's examine three important ideas:

Early Recollections

- Two rules for what makes a childhood memory an early recollection
- My longest early recollection
- Afterwards I'll ask you to write down your early recollection on the paper that was given to you.

Now we need to define what an early recollection is. What are the rules that make it an early recollection? Here is the first of two rules:

What is a true ER and what is NOT?

**An early recollection must be a ONE TIME event.
It cannot be a repetitive event.**

"I would go to my grandmother's house every Sunday for lunch.
It was the most wonderful tradition."
NO! (Repetitive)

"I played on a-T ball team when I was little. We weren't very good.
I got tired of playing and never signed up to play baseball again."
NO! (Not a single event)

An early recollection is a distinct memory of something that happened one time before the age of 7 (some say before age 8). It cannot be something that

happened regularly such as in example one: “I would go to my grandmother’s house every Sunday for lunch.”

And, the second example is also not a one-time event. It was the most wonderful tradition.” NO! (That’s repetitive, not a one time event.)

“I played on a T-ball team when I was little. We weren’t very good. I got tired of playing and never signed up to play baseball again.” No! (Not a single event.)”

This is a One-time event:

One time only – this counts:

I recall one time going to Grandmother’s house when everyone was there – cousins, aunts and uncles. We were all sitting down to eat and the giant light-fixture fell from the ceiling breaking everywhere and everyone screamed and the meal was ruined. My grandmother burst into tears and ran into her bedroom. We all stayed for a while then decided it was best to say goodbye and leave. That’s what we did. Horrible day. We never discussed it again as a family.

One time only. Therefore, the memory above is an early recollection.

I recall one time going to Grandmother’s house when everyone was there – cousins, aunts and uncles. We were all sitting down to eat and the giant light-fixture fell from the ceiling breaking everywhere and everyone screamed and the meal was ruined. My grandmom told my granddad and my mom to go next door to see if the Carltons could help us. In about 20 minutes almost all of the men from the block came and helped granddad clean up and one repaired the electrical damage. Then the food started rolling in from every house in the neighborhood it seemed. It really turned into one of the greatest days I can ever remember.

Totally different memory. It leads to totally different behavior and expectations about life.

This is an extremely different memory. And, it will lead this person to different behaviors and expectations about life. Because it happened only once and at the right age (see below), it qualifies as an early recollection.

Frequent Questions

- 1. What age makes it an “early” recollection?
Answer: Must be before age of 7 (some say 8)**
- 2. How many do most people have?
Answer: 5 or 6**
- 3. What if I have none?
Keep thinking about them.**
- 4. Do early recollections change over time?
Yes, if your guiding beliefs change.**

What is shocking is how few early recollections the average person has from the age of six and under. I’ve seen hundreds of graduate students’ and clients’ early recollections. Yes, some do have more than six. In fact, one client had about 27 but most were extremely brief. It’s the longest ERs that usually contain a person’s most powerful beliefs and directions about how to live.

An Example of How few ERS we remember Dustin’s forgetting



My family took a 5-week tour in a VW van across the United States. Before I talk about it, I want you to understand that I'm about to describe one of the greatest shocks in my life as a parent.

Our son Dustin graduated #1 in his class at EC Glass and with honors from Yale. He also holds a master's degree from the University of Virginia. You may think I'm bragging, but I'm setting up an answer to the question: How many early recollections can a child 6-years-old usually remember?

Those of you with small children may want to leave the room for a moment.

Here is a list of the places we visited. You can see we saw many of the most beloved sights in the USA on our trip.

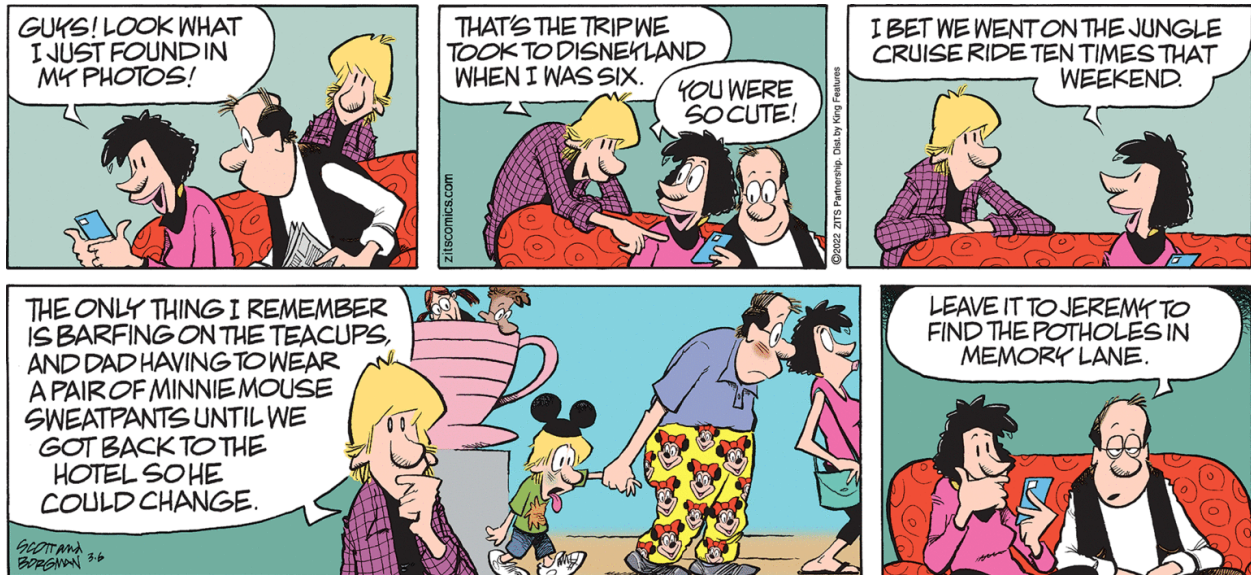
- July 18-August 19 First Out West Trip: Nashville, Memphis – Mud Island, Oklahoma City, Amarillo, Roswell NM, White Dunes, Juarez Mex (P-bull horns, E-bunny piñata, D-cowboy hat), Tombstone, Old Tucson, Gila Bend, Phoenix, Grand Canyon – camped out, Flagstaff, Hiked Grand Canyon 12.2 miles in 9 ½ hours & stopped at overlook, Walnut Canyon, Petrified Forest, Painted Desert, Valley of the Monuments, Ouray, Silverton, Ghost Town, Eureka, Dinosaur Town, Jackson Hole, Tetons – camp out @ Yellowstone (buffalo, elk, mud pots, sulfur pits, geysers, Old Faithful, Plume), Ralph the Pirate visits, Climbed Mt. Washington (3 miles up, 3 down), Tetons – float trip on Ken’s b-day, Cody Wy., Custer’s Last Stand, Little Big Horn, Mt. Rushmore, Cody Wy (rodeo!), KC (KC 8 Detroit 5), St. Louis (Philadelphia 4 St. Louis 3), ride up St. Louis Arch—drive home (Patty has dizzy spells along the way).



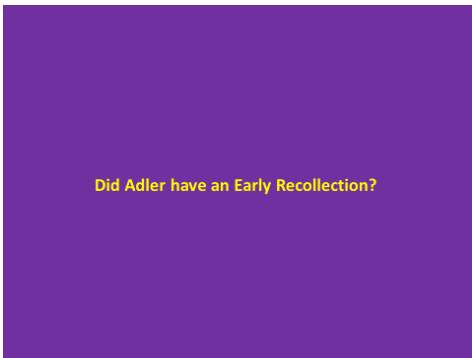
And what did he remember?

Dustin, at age 6, did not remember one “darn” thing from the trip!

When Dustin turned 8-years-old we took a second trip across the United States. He remembers almost everything from that trip.



Oh yes! Even the comic writers realize how few one time events children remember.



A Fictitious Memory

As an adult, Alfred Adler had a vivid memory from childhood of taking a shortcut home through a cemetery. He became terrified and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. After that day Adler never once went close to that cemetery. Later, when he was 35, he visited his old home. He decided to walk through the cemetery – the site of his vivid early recollection. But there wasn't a cemetery there. Nevertheless, he was certain that his memory was absolutely correct. He checked the maps of his neighborhood at City Hall but found there never had been a cemetery there. His entire memory was fictitious.

Why did Adler construct such a memory? When he was five, Adler almost died of pneumonia. However, after he was given the proper treatment, he recovered rapidly. But the fear of death stayed and became a predominant theme in Adler's life and work.

The creation of what turned out to be a fictitious memory was a way for him to express the manner in which he dealt with that fear. Always be on the run.

Adler only slept four hours a night. The rest of the time he worked furiously on what he wanted to leave behind – Cognitive Psychology.

Our early recollections become very important to us. Some happened as we recall. But some of our recollections might be slightly or completely different from what actually happened. This was true of Adler. But all of our early recollections are crucial to the way we see life. Whether they really happened does not matter.

If you doubt this, just compare some of your childhood recollections of the same events with your siblings and other family members. They may remember things quite differently than you do. There may be single events you remember vividly but no one else does. Did these things happen as you recall them? Not even your siblings know for sure – even if they think they do.

Here is my earliest
recollection. I was 4.
Remember ERs are age
6 (some say 7) or
below...and a one-time
event.

Ken shares his most meaningful early recollection:

I only have 4 or 5 early recollections.

This is my longest and most meaningful one.

I was at my grandparents' farm when I was 5-years-old. I was playing chase with my cousin "T". I chased him from the chicken house down a narrow sidewalk toward the house. We reached the kitchen screen door. "T" ran past the door. As I arrived, "T"'s dog burst through the screen and bit me in the face. My nose began spurting blood everywhere.

I kept running by myself around the big farmhouse. My nose was pouring blood. Then I looked up at the giant trees along the driveway. They became blurred and I was absolutely stunned at their colorful beauty. I was spellbound. That's the last part of my memory.

Include these three Questions

- 1. What is the feeling you remember most from the ER?**
Total relaxation and amazement at the beauty of the trees.
- 2. What part of the ER do you remember most?**
The dog shocking me & the blurred beauty of the trees
- 3. What instruction did the ER give you for life?**
Stay away from dogs. Keep moving fast and beauty will follow.

Now it's your turn
Write an early recollection.
Remember you must be 6 (7)
or below. And, it must be a
one time event.

Directions

“Think back to a long time ago when you were little, and try to recall one of your earliest memories, one of the first things that you can remember.”

Include these three
Questions

- 1. What is the feeling you remember most from the ER?**
- 2. What part of the ER do you remember most?**
- 3. What instruction did the ER give you for life?**

Experts' Explanations

How to interpret Early Recs

What do early recollections do for us?

**This quote is from the Ansbachers as told by Dr. Clark
in his book written in 2013.**

**We selectively (purposefully) remember
only those events from early childhood
that are consistent with our present view
of ourselves, the others, and the world**

(Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1937; Clark, 2013).

This quote is from Alfred Adler.

**“There are no “chance memories”” out of the incalculable number of impressions
which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however
darkly, to have a bearing on this situation. Thus, his memories represent his “Story of
My Life”; a story he repeats to himself to warn him or comfort him, to keep him
concentrated on his goal, to prepare him, by means of past experiences, to meet the
future with an already tested style of action.”**



Dr. Alfred Adler



**“We don’t see the world as it is.
We see the world as we are.”**
The Talmud

The PowerPoints below came from several research articles. The results will allow you to determine how your ERs fit with other people's ERs. Also, there is information about the relationship between several careers and the ERs people frequently share who decide to enter those careers.

How does your ER fit into these results?

How old are you in your ER? Only 1 % of people can recall a recollection prior to their third birthday.

Is your recollection pleasant or unpleasant? Pleasant memories outnumber unpleasant ones: 50% pleasant, 30% unpleasant and 20% neutral.

Is your recollection visual? Does it have movement? The majority of ERs have both.

Was their sound? Did you have taste or smell? All three are unusual in most ERs.

Was your ER in black and white? Only 1 in 6 people see color in an ER – color usually has a compelling influence in their lives. This does not mean talent per se but at least appreciation or interest in art, etc.

Were you indoors or outdoors? If your ER is positive, this may remain your preference.

Are you active or more of an observer?

Are you alone or with others?

Are you giving to others in your ER or are you receiving?

If others are in your ER, are they helpful or threatening?

Are some ERs related to the profession we choose?

Scientists and capable political leaders have more ERs showing curiosity, independence of thoughts and skepticism of news received from authority figures. (They are probably questioning the importance of early recollections as I speak.)

The word "mother" showed up most frequently for those in the nursing profession, followed secondly by counselors – two helping professions. This significant finding led to the postulation that the "mother-helper-supporter" image is common among nurses and counselors.

The word "school" appeared more frequently in ERs for individuals considering teaching as a career.

Those individuals considering accounting discussed themes of internal control and mentioning animals and people in their ERs was less frequent. (Stoltz and Apodaca)

Lower income adolescents had significantly more early memories involving angry feelings, while middle class adolescents have significantly more memories relating to emotional highs.

The MOST FREQUENT theme found in the ERs of delinquents was physical or verbal punishment.

Dangerous adult males in maximum security had significantly more aggressive early memories and the nature of the aggression was more severe.

Understanding Early Recollections

Case Studies from Cognitive Therapy

Positive and Negative Early Recollections

(Dr. Arthur Clark in book on "Early Recollections")

**Early Recollection
Thomas Mabry**

"I remember when I was six-years-old I was the brother who loved to read and my older brother loved to go fishing. Dad fished every day he could. One Saturday he said to us brothers that we were both going fishing – 'his favorite son and daughter.'

I felt trapped and knew it would be miserable. We were out in the boat when I dropped my reel and pole in the water. Dad screamed that I was an imbecile and disappointment. We went straight home and he never asked me to fish again. I hid out in my bedroom until Mom came in and hugged me. I tried not to cry but I just couldn't stop.

"I remember when I was six-years-old I was the brother who loved to read and my older brother loved to go fishing. Dad fished every day he could.

Here we see sibling rivalry or division of turf. Also, there appears to be a team made of the older brother and the father. It appears Thomas likes sedentary activities. The brother and dad like physical action.

One Saturday he said to us brothers that we were both going fishing – 'his favorite son and daughter.'

Dad is authoritarian. Thomas is not asked but told what he will do even though his dad knew he did not like to fish. Either by intention or ignorance, his dad tries to motivate by humiliating. Thomas may create a self-fulfilling prophesy that he will fail at things he does not want or like to do.

**We were out in the boat when I dropped my reel and pole in the water.
*Crisis occurs. Thomas makes a bad mistake. What will happen if one errs?***

Dad screamed that I was an imbecile and disappointment.
We went straight home, and he never asked me to fish again.

Dad overreacts and is emotionally abusive again. Dad does not accept differences. He wants each son to be a man's man. When Dad turns his back, it is permanent. One wonders: "Does Thomas shy away from older, controlling males?"

I hid out in my bedroom until Mom came in and hugged me. I tried not to cry but I just couldn't stop.

How did Thomas react when treated harshly and unfairly? He isolated himself. He waited for his mom to come to him and comfort him. One wonders: "Does Thomas always isolate himself when tough times occur? Does he view older women as caring and sensitive – those whose job it is to take care of his emotions?"

Dr. Clark sites this Early Recollection from Sandy along with advice for how a therapist might find strengths in ERs that seem very negative.

Sandy, who is age 30, states, "I remember being on the playground in first or second grade. I wanted to play with a couple of girls who were jumping rope. They wouldn't let me jump rope with them, and I started to cry. Nobody seemed to notice me when I ran off by myself."

This recollection is probably very discouraging. Sandy could carry an active distrust for her female peers and choose to keep to herself. However Sandy's strength is wanting to be a part of a group. She could probably be taught new strategies for seeking acceptance in a group of girls she is attracted to.

The following are examples of various ERs and how they influence people's views of life and their preferred behaviors.

Positive Person's ER

Paul

ER 1 "My parents gave me a huge toy brass horn. I was playing on it and making nice sounds. They were listening to me and looked happy."

Paul's Highlights

Details: The big size of brass horn.

Vivid: Seeing my parents and their sense of delight.

Feelings: Just happy and sort of proud.

Notice the positive view of family in the ER below.

2nd Positive ER

James

"I was about four years old. I was in the back of my house with my mother and father. I saw a yellow buttercup growing on the side of the grass. I picked it and gave it to my mother. She lifted me up and hugged me."

Details: "Seeing all of the beautiful flowers. I especially remember the yellow buttercups."

Vivid: "Looking at my mother's happy face when I gave her the buttercup."

Feelings: "Delight and satisfaction."

Violence and surprise are frequently themes in delinquents' ERs.

Howard

Delinquent's ER

ER 1: "I had been playing with matches in a shed attached to the back of our house. I went into the house, and my mother asked me if I had taken matches from the kitchen. I said 'no.'" She then said nothing would happen if I told the truth. So, I told her that I had taken the matches. Immediately, she whacked me in the face.

Details: "Seeing mom's face as she was talking to me."

Vivid: "Getting hit in the face."

Feelings: "It hurt and I didn't expect it."

Once again a delinquent child's ER contains unexpected violence.

Paul

Delinquent's ER

"It was time to go to school, and I didn't want to go. I ran down the hall, and my father ran after me. He grabbed me by the neck and dragged me to the front door."

Detail: "Running down the hall thinking that I could get out of going to school."

Vivid: "My father grabbing me by the neck."

Feelings: I was powerless and felt humiliated.

ERs for Criminals tend to be similar in the following ways:

Criminals

1. Demands to be compensated for absence of care
2. Feeling shortchanged, they feel entitled to what they want
3. When one feels entitled, one takes what is wanted without guilt.

Red Prius



The car in the picture is my wife Patty's Prius. In 2022 there was a rash of catalytic converter thefts from cars and trucks. It took criminals about 4-5 minutes to jack up a car and remove this part. It was very expensive for owners to replace the catalytic converters. In our frustration, Patty and I both said, "I hope the thieves feel guilty for this." Then we both chuckled knowing that according to research most criminals do not feel the slightest guilt as the following example shows.

In this ER one can clearly see that Milton enjoys being destructive and creates no sense of guilt about what he has done.

Milton

Delinquent ER, lack of regret

"I broke into an old house with a few of my buddies. Nobody was living in the house. We found paint in the cellar. Then we went upstairs and poured the paint all over the floors and splattered it against the walls. It was a lot of fun."

Detail: "Seeing the paint cans."

Vivid: "Getting the paint over everything."

Feelings: "Great. Exciting."

Author: lack of impulse control, emotional detachment, absence of guilt.

From what you have learned and experienced, what early recollections do you believe these characters below might have had?

What early recollections might this man's children remember?



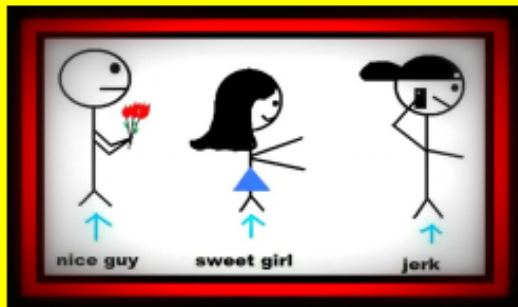
Sadly acts of revenge are common after parents hurt their children.



When ERs are hurtful, young people tend to hurt back.



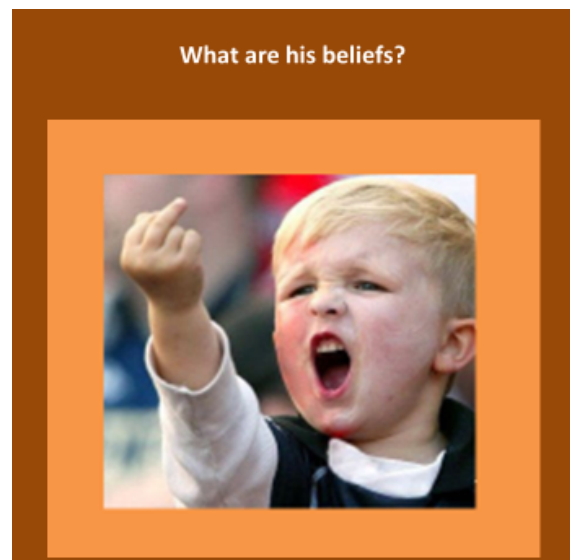
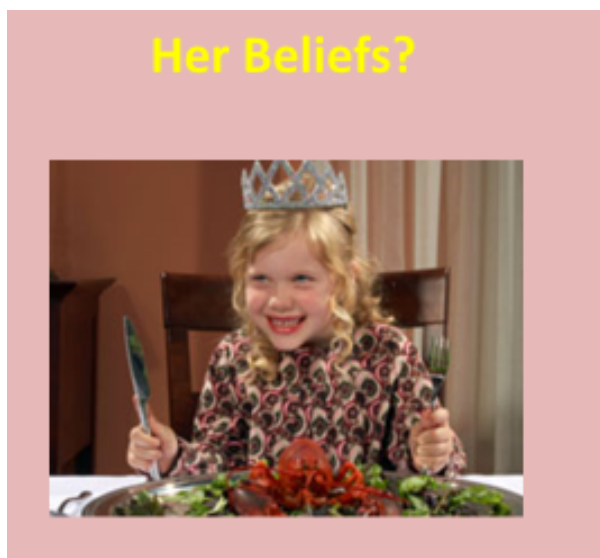
When good girls like bad boys!



What the Pampered and Neglected Have in Common

1. Both feel entitled to what they want
2. Neither has developed a real concern for others or desire to give to others. So they have difficulty with relationships. Both are egotistical.
3. They have not figured out how to contribute positively to others – rather they have a compulsion to feel superior to others through deception, guile or force.

The results of the research above show that two people from the opposite sides of life (being pampered or neglected) usually have the same type of weaknesses. They feel entitled, are egotistical and feel superior rather than equal to others. Maybe the PowerPoints below will make that point:



Children sometimes model their parents' behaviors – good and bad. However, when children grow up, they may marry someone who will not tolerate any negative problem-solving strategies. Although these techniques helped some

people survive childhood, these same people may need to change their thoughts, feelings and techniques in adulthood..

How Do We Learn to Survive Difficult Parents?




**High Control? Blaming others?
These learned behaviors may work
while people are young.**




**In Marriage?
Not so much....**

How Do We Learn to Survive Difficult Parents?



**Silence.
Nothing Ventured; Nothing Lost
May work as a child.**



**In Marriage?
Not so much....**

Reconstructing Early Recollections

**“Neurosis is living today
As if it were yesterday.”
Erich Fromm**



Reconstructing Ours or Others' ERs

**Identifying negative or self-defeating
convictions**

**Changing them to focus on strengths and
abilities**

**And finding alternative skills to move toward
positive change**

Sometimes Counseling Helps: Which new alternative is best below?

Example for the use of ER in Adlerian psychotherapy: We bring the case of a 55-year-old man who came to therapy complaining of not being loved and appreciated. He experienced emptiness and a lack of meaning in his life. The following memory (at age of seven) described those feelings:

"I remember going to bed at night. My mom was at home and I asked her to bring me a glass of water. My mother said, 'You had your glass of water already, now go to bed!'"

Focus: She tells me I had it already.

Feelings: I felt rejected, unloved, no one cares for me.

When asked to reconstruct the memory and tell it in a different way, the client devised various alternatives:

- i. "I asked again and felt even worse."
- ii. "I tried to think of my mother being very tired."
- iii. "I got up and got myself a glass of water and felt good about it." (Lavoni and Shifron)

A loved one's wedding reception



Sometimes a counselor needs a counselor

One very painful moment Patty and I shared was at the wedding reception for one of her five sisters. Her sister's fiancé and I had become good friends. He was about to enter his Ph.D. program in clinical psychology.

After the wedding reception ended, Patty and I were sitting down informally with the new husband and a few other guests. The new husband was reflecting on his childhood and shared this memory: “I was an only child. And, I recall one day being left alone in the house. My mother was nowhere to be found. I looked outside and the car was gone. I was so angry that she would leave me alone. I’ll never forget how mad I was at her. She just didn’t care.”

As you anticipated, when Patty’s sister divorced he initiated it. Why? “Because she was never there for me when I needed her.”

Returning to My Earliest Recollection

Sometimes life, learning & a little bit of luck transform our lives! That has been my case. The luck was having a doctoral professor of mine work with us on our early recollections.

I have only 4 or 5 memories that qualify as early recollections. Here is my most loaded recollection:

Let’s return to Ken’s longest early recollection and examine the first half:

“I was at my grandparents’ farm when I was 5-years-old./

I was playing chase with my cousin ‘T’./

I chased him from the chicken house down a narrow sidewalk toward the house.

We got to the kitchen screen door./

T passed the door. As I arrived, T’s dog burst through the screen and bit me in the face. My nose began spurting blood everywhere./

Notice the first goal when considering your early recollections is to divide them into small parts. You will notice a slash mark (/) that divides one idea from the other in the ER above.

As you look at each of the parts, take every word seriously. As Adler said, we have remembered these because they accurately tell our life story and they give us instructions for how to act in the future.

Here are a few examples from the first part of my recollection in the PowerPoint above:

- The words “Grandparents’ farm” & cousin “T” show that family and the generations of family are important.
- I love to be outdoors
- I am competitive and love action. Chasing my cousin is the beginning of this early recollection.
- I am a visual learner.
- Yes, I was terrified of dogs for decades
- A shock occurs in my early recollection, and I can visually see the results of the dog’s attack.

Below is the part of this early recollection that has influenced my life the most – positively and negatively:

I kept running by myself around the big farmhouse. My nose was pouring blood./ Then I looked up at the giant trees along the driveway. / They became blurred and I was absolutely stunned at their colorful beauty. / I was spellbound. That’s the last part of my memory.”



What guiding beliefs did this early recollection remind me to hold onto? Some that were positive. Some that were negative. Some that could be either positive or negative.

- My professor said at once after I shared the recollection above: “We’ll look at the other parts of your ER, but right now I can tell you that your favorite artists are impressionists.” And, yes, my walls at home were covered with pictures of Monet’s paintings.
- I remember colors, but I am no artist. I love art. Today when we travel overseas or across the country, I select 20 paintings to study in museums and hope they are not on loan to other art museums when we arrive. Probably 40% of the ones I choose are painted by various impressionists or schools related to impressionism. But about 60% are new artists. However, I admit that many of these artists have Impressionists’ leanings.
- And, having a strong visual approach to understanding life may be why I love Dr. Geoff Kershner’s (SpheX member) theater productions – they are always a “sight.” I recall my first play that Geoff directed. We were on the main campus at Sweet Briar College sitting outside on the college’s spectacular and large quad. Suddenly a lady began walking across a faraway

hill and onto the edge of the Sweet Briar quad. Being visually led, I noticed her immediately. Suddenly, the audience became quiet and watched her make her way to the main site of the production. Very visual and creative! Geoff captured the audience with her first steps.

Back to the Recollection

I kept **running by myself** around the big farmhouse. My nose was pouring blood./ Then I looked up at the giant trees along the driveway./ They became blurred and I was absolutely **stunned at their colorful beauty**./ I was spellbound. That's the last part of my memory."

Most importantly, in times of personal trouble and pain the ER instructs me to run alone, run as fast as I can and I will find joy that I did not expect. This becomes a crucial instruction that I will struggle with later in life.



Students scramble to sign up for classes taught by Dr. Ken West, recipient of a national teaching award and columnist on parenting for the Lynchburg News & Advance.

The Positive

- I believe I'm in a room of people that understand this early recollection. Most of us are very achievement oriented. This ER sent me on a lifetime of being achievement oriented – even in difficult circumstances. There was a promise, not of a tangible award, but of an emotional, insightful or artistic

award. All I needed to do was run hard and usually alone. That instruction has significantly influenced many parts of my professional and athletic life.

- Working hard and frequently alone began early – early recollections are like that. My parents used to be amazed that they could drop me off at NC State University in Raleigh, and I would hit a tennis ball against the wall outside of Reynolds Coliseum for hours. I'd take a bucket of balls and hit 10 bucketloads of serves by myself on an empty court. I never thought about those behaviors being different than others' habits. I was just running alone – and I guess I assumed others shared these same behaviors.
- We lived several times in neighborhoods without young people my age. But I could shoot baskets outside the house for hours. I threw tennis balls against the back wall of our house practicing to fulfill my dream of becoming a professional baseball pitcher. Sure, I'd play ball with people if they came around. But usually I was running alone.
- When I was on the high school tennis team, I would return home after practice ended and run three miles. I didn't have as much talent as lots of the players but I worked harder. Run. Don't walk.
- I was selected to be the captain of my high school team that won two state championships and later by my teammates at Wake Forest. I was not captain because I was the best player, but because my teammates knew I worked harder than anyone and left nothing on the court. I imagine that making me captain was the way my teammates showed their appreciation of my work ethic. Run hard and never stop.

The Negative of Running Alone



The Negative

Sure, I often ran down the sidewalk of life by myself. But I never felt lonely or was the slightest bit bothered by it in my younger years. Why? This was the way my early recollection told me that my life could be at its best. And, I assumed I would be this way forever.

But that changed when I graduated from college and went to Princeton Seminary. For the first time I wasn't on a team, and I didn't have teammates or college suitemates around. I hit bottom. I was very alone but suddenly this alone felt lonely.

I loved my professors and classes. And, the professor who was teaching us to interpret early recollections helped us all. During my second semester, he could tell that I was not as happy as I was when I arrived. And, he spoke of the early recollection you have seen above: "A problem with your early recollection might occur if you begin not only to run alone but also to run and stay lonely."

His words hit me so hard....it was true. That was indeed what was happening. He continued: "Ken, you're following the instructions to run alone and the promise that you will always find joy at the end of the run. But I think you need to alter those ER directions."

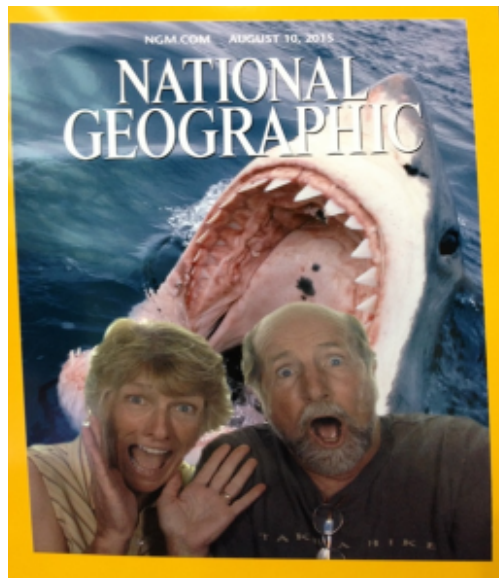
“What should I do?” I asked.

Being a wise professor he said, “I don’t know. But if you’re open to changing that early recollection, I think you’ll find the answer.”

“Ha. I need a miracle,” I confessed.

“Just be open to changing that early recollection. Be open to allow change.”

I did need a miracle. And, it came:



Then the miracles came. Here is the first one – the person who transformed my life. My fellow traveler who in a sense saved me from the sharks of my early recollection that told me to run alone. Patty turned me into a person who could run alone **but also** loved even more running through the days of life with her.



Students scramble to sign up for classes taught by Dr. Ken West, recipient of a national teaching award and columnist on parenting for the Lynchburg News & Advance.

Looking again at the picture above, writing a column a week for 28 years (1,482 columns) and several books required a lot of running alone to achieve the goal. But I have never run lonely again. I restructured my early recollection to include the true loves of my life – we would join in each others' runs in life.



Then other companions in life kept coming along – children and grandchildren. Yes, I still could choose to run alone in life, but as time passed that was not a choice I frequently made.

And then my friends and suitemates whom I lived with at Wake Forest began to gather together regularly. And, we write to each other almost every week.



1970



**2019
Savanah**

There have also been great Lynchburg friends. We played sports together, enjoyed lunches and dinners and traveling and just being with each other. We called ourselves the Real Men and had one day each year when we focused on three events together: a 10 mile run started each annual event, something odd like playing tennis matches with paddle ball rackets would be next, followed by a third event – such as renting a gym, and hiring real referees to take charge as we played each other in basketball.

(The red arrow points to Walker Sydnor who is also a SpheX member.)




Also, many of my faculty friends at the University of Lynchburg remain close even during retirement. By the way, the three friends seen below each has a building named after him at the university. Below are a few pictures of the four of us earlier in our UL careers.

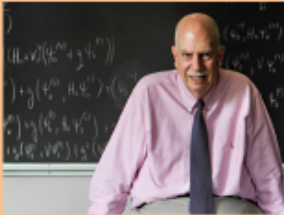
**Retired Professors
Lunch & Exchange**



Professors Ed Polloway & Ken West



Professor Tom Tiller



Professor Julius Sigler

Oh yes, and that fear of dogs. Patty's family had dogs all of her life. And, she decided to train me. We brought home a dog named Wizard. That name was used despite the fact he never learned his name and when we threw a ball he would simply look at us as if to say, "Okay, go get it." Now I like all but a couple of breeds of dogs and a couple of breeds of dog owners.



Enter "Wizard"
1989-2006

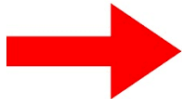


Early recollections. They are not always helpful! When life seems to go wrong and you are not sure why, look at your ERs.

New Challenges

Our Families

September's Virginia's 10 Miler's Virginia's 1 Miler



I think all of us in this room tonight can positively influence our children's and grandchildren's early recollections. Our grandson Orion decided to run in the 1 miler this year. He actually trained and practiced getting down into a sprinter's position to start the race.

The race instructor said before the start, "Be careful not to knock down the people beside you as you start." The boy beside Orion said, "Fat chance that won't happen." And, at the start he knocked Orion down. Being inexperienced Orion was distraught and tried to run too fast to make up time. He developed a side ache and barely finished the race.

Afterwards, he was terribly upset that he had "done so badly." He began focusing on how horrible the boy beside him was, how bad his time was in the race and on how many people finished ahead of him. We feared he might avoid

competition if he became too negative and created an early recollection that would limit his possibilities in life.

We quickly tried to influence his early recollection: “We think it was fantastic that you got up from the street and kept racing.” “And, you showed great spunk running the race and finishing even though you had a side ache.” “What an amazing race you had. I will never forget this one! Bravo.”

Who knows if that helped? All we can do as friends, parents and grandparents is encourage, support and reframe early recollections to open up the future to more positive possibilities.

Bibliography

(Below are the books and articles that provided information to help deliver this oral presentation on October 20, 2022. Because my presentation was oral, I did not footnote each thought. Also, many of the ideas in the paper come from my own training starting over a half of a century ago. Nevertheless, the books and articles below supplied many of the ideas you read about above. Although a formal, academic paper has never been required by Spheeris and this is not one, I have cited my sources below.)

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