

MARJORIE A. SWANSON, MD, PhD

1919 - 1967

Fellow of the Institute
Member of the Board of Trustees



With the untimely death of Dr. Marjorie Swanson we have lost a rare combination in one person of teacher, scientist and friend. She was in close association with the Institute's staff for many of the fourteen years we knew her.

Marjorie Swanson first came to the Institute to attend the 1953 seminar-workshop, returned for an advanced seminar in 1954, and beginning in August 1954, she was on the summer teaching staff for the following five years. Her participation on our staff was interrupted by her medical training, but she returned for the last time in 1965 for the seminar-workshop held at Colorado Academy, when she was already seriously ill.

From 1946 to 1959 Marge was actively involved with her profession teaching biochemistry and carrying on various research projects at Bowman Gray Medical School. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi and the American Society of Biological Chemists, and the author of some twenty scientific papers.

46 She decided in 1959 to take the long strenuous road to becoming a psychiatrist, and at the time of her death had earned her MD and had nearly completed her psychiatric residency at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York.

In her lecture-demonstrations at our Institute seminar-workshops Marge gave remarkably articulate condensations of modern scientific theories in physics, chemistry — especially colloidal chemistry — biology, etc., and their relationships to Korzybski's formulations. Her August 1958 presentation was published by the Institute as Monograph IV, entitled: 'Scientific Epistemologic Backgrounds of General Semantics: Lectures on Electro-Colloidal Structures.' For her valuable contributions she was elected a Fellow of the Institute (1956). She has been a member of our Board of Trustees since 1958.

As a teacher she was brilliant, forceful, effective in leading us through difficult theories, and helping us to relate them to our living. But beyond all this, it was the feeling of love she gave out to her students and friends that left so deep an impression. Reading some of the comments of seminar participants at the end of a course, one is struck by the warmth of their responses, and one can feel through them the loving quality of her giving: 'I have felt the warmth from you since your first contacts There are many things I have dared to examine because I knew you were here When she concluded her final lecture all of the seminarians were impelled to hug and kiss her in gratitude for the infusion of her knowledge and the privilege of being with her for 17 days a spiritual experience.'

And finally, we feel with this participant who wrote: 'You radiate warmth to me. You talk clearly to me and though you pass swiftly and sweep the universe, I can follow the main path. The opportunity to hear your course has been a privilege, but leaves a challenge. I thank you humbly from my heart.'

— Charlotte Read

IN MEMORIUM

by

C. W. Blake
Western Electric Company, New York

From 1919 to 1967 is only forty-eight years. In Marge Swanson's case this was time enough to absorb fantastic amounts of information, to synthesize her personal map of the universe in incredibly accurate detail, to discover the wonderful interrelatedness of most of the elements of her map, and thus to achieve an understanding of the world, its mechanisms and its people that was excelled in its beauty by only a few mental maps in the history of our troubled race. It was a tragically short time for those of us who knew her personally, or might yet have been looking forward to the experience of that privilege. Her death on November 3, 1967 has prevented us from enjoying any longer the exhilaration of expanding our lives and our awareness with the help of her special teaching genius. Marge had a powerful drive to teach us. Her devotion to learning, which one easily infers from a recital of her impressive collection of degrees and honors, sprang from a deeper need to share with us what she had learned and so to make us able to live in an ever bigger world.

I first met Marge Swanson in Winston-Salem at about the time she had just discovered that Korzybski had previously visited this planet and had left behind a remarkable piece of work called Science and Sanity. In a search for material to use in a local discussion group bent on exploring the relationship between Propaganda and World Politics, Marge encountered Korzybski and courageously rose to the challenge of trying to understand his message. The discussion group (initially comprised of a few members of the local chapter of the American Association of University Women) shortly made a detour in its pursuit of Propaganda and began to follow another road. The subject for the collective learning effort was changed, by popular demand, to General Semantics! Within weeks the ladies, finding the meetings most interesting, were bringing their husbands and that is how I first came to an alarmed awareness of the insidious nature of the 'is of identity.' I give my wife, Jane, both credit and gratitude for enlarging my world to include Marge Swanson.

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Marge later told me that her deepest motivation for leading that group involved a desire not to be lonely. She reasoned that by bringing her friends 'through the air lock' (her phrase), she could then communicate with us on new levels having real potentials for satisfaction. She was right. And in the process we learned of a whole new dimension in human life and many of us were unalterably changed by that adventure.

The experiences we shared were not always pleasant. We often served each other as writhing examples of people with horribly inappropriate semantic reactions. We publicly got into many of the troubles which that condition can lead to. Marge learned where the sensitive semantic reaction buttons were in each of us and she pressed them! Sometimes we felt she was merciless, but given enough time and a little insight, we began to see that she loved us; that when Korzybski called G. S. a discipline, he didn't overstate.

'Armchair' gee-essers had a tough time in that group because Marge knew that unless learning reached the gut level, the whole exercise was a waste of time and amounted to nothing much more than an impressive vocabulary lesson.

I rather imagine that Marge had a more difficult experience with loneliness all of her short life than most of us do. Born with an exceedingly quick mind, she must have spent many years in the search for people with whom she could share her unique and somewhat erudite set of enthusiasms: History, Mathematics, Chemistry, Medicine, Psychiatry, General Semantics, and the many other areas in all their complexity that these few labels imply. What else could she do but teach? The choice left to her was to teach us or to settle for small talk with us. We are all richer because she wouldn't settle for the small talk.

As is recounted elsewhere, Marjorie entered Medical School in 1959 — after she had already earned the Ph. D. and was teaching Biochemistry in the same Medical School which she then entered as a freshman! She did this with a plan in mind which she stayed with, in its essence, for the rest of her time with us. She wanted to earn the M. D. as her ticket of admission to become a psychiatrist — because only then could she test the synergetic power of psychiatry and General Semantics working together in rare combination for human benefit.

I am truly sorry on behalf of the race that death has terminated her experiment before it had properly begun. It is difficult not to be convinced that Marge was about to take some important steps toward finding ways to accomplish the long hoped-for prevention and possibly the successful correction of mental illnesses. Think of it! Here was a person able to approach these problems with a thorough knowledge not only of Biochemistry and Psychiatry, but General Semantics as well. What a powerful combination for one person to be able to bring to bear on the solutions of some of mankind's most pressing problems!

We have lost a valued friend. There is no need to ask — we know the bell tolls for us.