Part II – Twists and turns of fate that prepared and led a dyslexic into teaching dyslexics and finding out what dyslexia is all about:

Part I dealt with my education from birth through college.

Part II covers the period in which **my real education began**. It will also explain why the materials and techniques I developed to teach dyslexics could not possibly be developed in a traditional academic method.

Part III covers the techniques and materials that I developed because of my own dyslexic symptoms and outlook, techniques and materials that work. If you're already convinced I know what I'm talking about, you could skip Part II. But I'm prejudiced. I think Part III will make more sense when you know exactly where I'm coming from and where I've been.

Chapter 7

The ASA: Learning Russian in California and Teaching English in Japan

WHEN I GRADUATED from the University of Detroit, I didn't want to go job hunting. In 1954 most employers didn't want to hire anyone who was draft bait. My college deferment was over. So rather than wait around, I volunteered for the draft.

Because the soonest they would take me was in November, I took a grounds maintenance job working for Joe Szilagyi at Brookwood Golf Club. He made sure I was in top physical shape for the basic training.

Perhaps it was the fact I was in better physical shape and a few years older than most of the men, that convinced the barracks sergeant to make me a platoon leader. I was gung-ho. Now one of the first things that happened was that we all took a battery of intelligence and aptitude tests. On one of them I scored high enough to be tapped by the Army Security Agency. They wanted me. And the ASA had first choice. But the results of the tests were not given out until nearly the end of basic training, just before the bivouac. Apparently the barracks sergeant saw the results. Instead of being a physically hardened hardnosed private that would make a good platoon leader, I was just one of those egg-heads who were going to go into the Army Security Agency.

So all of a sudden, I was relieved of my responsibilities of being platoon leader. Then, on the first night of bivouac I caught guard duty. One night without sleep isn't so bad. I handled the next day's activities with no real problem. Then I was assigned guard duty again. It was supposedly a random thing. It was harder to stay awake this time, but I was in top shape. I could do it. And do it, I did. The third night, they selected guard duty a different way. And again, I had guard duty. That wasn't a coincidence. That morning we packed up our gear and started to march the 15 miles back to our barracks.

I started out somewhere near the back of the main group. It was one of those hurry up and wait marches. Well, I was exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally. I wasn't going to run to play catch up and then stand and wait. I walked a comfortable pace. Rather quickly there were two groups of men. Those in front and those who couldn't keep up who brought up the rear. I was marching to my own drummer somewhere between the two groups. With the Company Commander looking on from his jeep, my barracks sergeant ordered me to either join the first group or fall back with the second group.

I told him to go to hell. He started toward me. I threatened to kill him. I raised my M-1 to an attack position. I used a few very typical army expletives and let him know very clearly that I wasn't going to let him continue "messing" with me. He backed off. I marched by myself between the two groups back to the barracks. I had fully expected to be called into the CO's office. I wasn't. I didn't say anything to the other men. And the other men didn't ask me any questions. Basic training was over. After a short leave I reported to Ft. Devens to sit around waiting for my Top Secret Security Clearance to come through.

Now, anybody who has been in the service will tell you never volunteer for anything. And they're right with one exception. Back then not many men could type and I knew the army ran on typewriters. Today, it's computers, but back then it was typewriters. At the very first morning roll call after arriving there, the sergeant asked if anyone could type. I volunteered. The next thing I knew I was working for the 1st Sergeant and making out the duty roster and typing out the weekend passes. Guess who never went on K.P. and who always had a weekend pass! All of us there had to wait until our clearances came through before we could go to an ASA school. I quickly found out what school I would be going to. It would be the Morse Code school. The thought of spending eight hours a day listening to and transcribing dit dot dits was not at all appealing to me. When I found out that the ASA was also looking for candidates for the Army Language School, I asked to take the test to see if I could qualify. Test taking had become a game to me. It was a game I was good at. I passed

with flying colors. Now, I had to extend my tour of duty if I wanted to go there. I figured one more year would be worth it. I'm sure I was right.

My Top Secret Security Clearance was slow in coming through. Of my group from Ft. Leonard Wood, I was one of the last to get mine. That's why I am so sure that if I would have allowed the protest demonstration to take place at Junior College, either the FBI or the CIA would have refused to grant my TOP SECRET clearance.

The day after my clearance came through, I was sent to the Army Language School in Monterey, California. Once there I had to learn Russian and in a hurry. The army did have a very strong motivational device. Pass and you automatically have a PFC stripe. Flunk and you go to Korea in the infantry. That's real carrot and stick motivation.

Very few ever flunked. First of all they used good screening devices. The average I.Q. was more than one standard deviation above the norm. The language aptitude test took care of the rest. But even then, it's a good thing the Army didn't do what most publishers do. They didn't call up a name university and ask to have the resident "expert" develop the teaching materials. They also didn't go to the universities and ask for teachers who had been certified by the State of California to teach. No, they wanted native speakers for their teachers. These native speakers developed their own texts. And they used teaching techniques they were familiar with. These are techniques that were not then and still are not today used in American schools to any real extent at any level.

Learning Russian was the first real academic challenge I faced. I had to learn a new language and fast and compete against students who not only were bright but who were not dyslexics like myself. Of course, at that time, I didn't even know what the words *dyslexia* and *dyslexic* meant. All I knew is that compared to the others there, I had problems learning. But I learned.

And I learned from teachers who wouldn't be allowed to teach in any American public school. Why? Because they had

not been taught how to teach by teachers who don't know how to teach. You know the old saying: Those who can, do; those who can't, teach. Well, it's been my experience that those who can't teach, teach the teachers. More about that later on.

What I learned at the Army Language School was that the teaching of phonics works, especially in such a phonetically regular language as Russian. We learned to write the alphabet which has a few letters that are just like ours such as the letters a("ah") and o ("oh"). But some Russian letters just look like ours, such as the Russian r which corresponds to the English r and the Russian p which corresponds to our p. And then we have the funny looking letters b, `, q, ~, x, {, l, f, and d

Everything at the Army Language School was carefully structured. Direct instruction was employed in small teacher controlled classes. The part of the direct instruction that helped me more than any other part was the dictation. Sentences spoken at normal conversational speed had to be written down correctly. The hardest part for me was to determine where one word stopped and another started. One phrase in particular stands out in my memory because I mangled it so completely:

"***NAH·BARE·UH·GOO·WRECK·KEY***."

I had no idea how many words were in the phrase. In fact, because it was spoken so fast I couldn't repeat in my head those six syllables. Not until my instructor helped me to break it down into ***NAH*** plus ***BARE·UH·GOO*** and then ***WRECK·KEY*** could I even repeat the phrase after her. Then and only then could I translate it as "On the river bank." Literally: "On bank river's"

I now know where part of my problem was. The moment I have any unknown sound of more than three syllables, it blows right by me. And I'm sure that same phenomenon occurs even with many non-dyslexics, for all intensive purposes. Yes, I know it should be "for all intents and purposes" but that ***is*** the way I heard that phrase for about the first forty years of my life.

Every hour we had a different teacher. They were up front about the reason. They wanted us to learn to react properly to differences in the dialects used by these native speakers. They didn't try to teach us just one correct dialect. They wanted us to be able to translate into proper written Russian the words no matter how slurred or accented by dialect. If I had not been exposed to this method of teaching at the Army Language School, I'm sure I would never have been able to design AVKO's *Speech to Spelling*. or to come up with the concept of "SCRUNCHED UP"1 speech.

Another aspect of the effect of "grammar" and "intonation" within language was lodged permanently in my memory for over twenty-years before I fully understood what it was all about.Because our teachers were native speakers of Russian, they were still learning to speak English themselves. Book English they knew. The common idioms of spoken language and the slang of the streets they didn't know. And they wanted to learn it. So they very often traded "language secrets" with us. In exchange for learning the *#@! words of English, they taught us the Russian equivalents. Off the record, of course.

One day on a smoke break between classes two students were flipping and matching quarters. Our instructor whose nickname was Honey Buns asked them what they were doing. Not knowing her intent, one of them responded, "We're jess flippin' quarters."

When the bell rang to start the class Honey Buns, eager to use her newly acquired slang phrase, asked the class, "Anyone want to flop me for a nickel?"

Nobody volunteered. We just doubled up in hysterical laughter! What she said could really only be interpreted by native speakers of the American language as soliciting. Cut rate or major discount, it could only be soliciting. Even though we all knew it couldn't possibly be her intent.

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1 Linguists, of course, have a nice academic name for this phenomenon, it's called sandhi.(pronounced: Sunday!)

After we had finished the crash course in Russian and just before we were shipped back to Ft. Devens, we were treated to a weapons display at nearby Ft. Ord. We saw all kinds of weapons, Russian, Chinese, British, Japanese. We were allowed to touch them, to hold them, to familiarize ourselves with them. Finally we came to this one rifle that I happened to pick up. I could hardly believe how heavy and clumsy it was. It was then that I was almost killed by the Master Sergeant guide who thought I was being a wise ass. All I did was ask a simple question, "What's this?" The rifle was the M-1. The same one I had with me all through basic training. The same one I had to be able to take apart blindfolded and put back together. In less than a year I had forgotten something I had been using every day for six weeks.

I didn't understand it then. I do understand it better now. Six weeks of intensive learning is not necessarily enough to lock knowledge into a dyslexic's mind. I know because I worked with one dyslexic intensively for six weeks. He lived, ate, slept, and studied at the AVKO Reading Clinic. His reading level soared from the 4th grade level to the 9th grade level. His reading speed on easy reading went from 40 words per minute up to 120 words per minute. When he returned home to Texas, I gave his parents a detailed prescription on how to continue the AVKO program at home. Unfortunately, his parents failed to incorporate the tutoring program into their busy daily routines. Within six months all his gains had been lost just like my knowledge of the M-1 had been lost. With dyslexics the "use it or lose it" concept really applies.

My next stop was the Voice Intercept School at Ft. Devens. It was hush-hush. We weren't supposed to tell anybody anything about what we were studying. Top Secret. Here we studied how to work with short-wave radios, tape recorders, and tell the difference between commercial Russian radio traffic and military Russian radio traffic. We weren't allowed to take anything into or out of the building where we studied. The competition was intense. One student sneaked some material out to study. He was caught, court-martialed, and given a dishonorable discharge. So much for the study ethic.

Our class was told that half of us would be sent to Europe and half to Japan. Whoever scored the highest would get first choice. Whoever scored second highest would get second choice, and so on until all the Europe or Japan choices were taken. Those on the bottom would have no choice. The way the school determined passing or failing was by an arbitrary score of let's say 750 points out of a possible 1,000. I don't remember exactly. But I did know that I had already posted forty more points than the minimum for passing. All a perfect 100% would do for me would raise my passing score. I had already passed. I didn't know which choice would have been better for me. We weren't told where in Europe we would be assigned. We knew nothing about the working conditions of the different types of jobs our training had prepared us for. So I did what many dyslexics might do. Nothing. I put my name on the test answer sheet with the comment. "I've already passed this course. I don't care to compete over where I'm going."

So, for the first time in my life, I graduated from a school dead last. My assignment: Japan. Looking back on my rather bizarre behavior, I now realize something else might have been operating in the background. I had just quit smoking cold turkey. At that point I was smoking a pack and a half a day. The way and the why of my quitting smoking is a little peculiar but revealing. I woke up one morning during my last week of school at Ft. Devens, sat up in bed, reached for a cigarette and then started my hacking and coughing up a bit of phlegm. A thought flashed through my head: *I really ought to quit*. Then another contradictory thought hit me: *I can't quit. I just bought two cartons of cigarettes and a new cigarette lighter*!

If that last thought makes sense to you, then you don't understand how logical most dyslexics are. I suddenly became angry at myself for being so terribly illogical. ***Quitting*** smoking was logical. That hideous, insidious and perverted rationalization of saving money by continuing to smoke got to me. I was so angry with myself for even allowing that irrational thought to enter my mind, I immediately gave away both cartons of cigarettes and my lighter.

About the only thing relating to dyslexia that took place on the troop ship to Japan had to do with seasickness and the concept of *expectations*. Nearly every soldier on board got seasick. They expected to. And they did. There were only fourteen of us specially assigned Army Security Agency personnel on board. We all knew that seasickness had to be more psychological than anything else and we weren't going to get sick. Well, one of us wasn't so sure. He brought along and took his Dramamine. He used drugs. Thirteen of us decided to enjoy the rocking motion and have a positive outlook. It worked. Only once did I come close to vomiting. That was in chow line. The private behind me puked over my shoulder and filled my tray with his vomit. The cooks were understanding. They allowed me to get a new tray and start through the chow line again.

The fourteen of us went to a processing camp outside of Yokohama. From there we were to be assigned. The ASA headquarters in Tokyo got first choice. So I didn't go there. The ASA base in Hokkaido, the Japanese version of Siberia, got second choice. So I didn't go there either. The bottom of the class is the last to be picked.

I got stuck with being stationed just outside the only city in Japan to be spared in World War II, Kyoto, the most beautiful city in Japan. How lucky can a dyslexic graduating at the bottom of his class get!

The next two years were undoubtedly the most enjoyable years of my life. At our base our section worked twenty-four hours a day. To do this we had four shifts but only three working on any one day. For example, my shift might start working six days (8 AM to 4 PM) and then get two days off. Then we would work six days (4 PM to 12 Midnight) and then get two days off. Then we would work six days (Midnight to 8 AM) and then have another two days off before repeating the cycle. But because my section was so overstaffed we usually had two days off each six working days. That amounted to four days of work and four days off. So when I took leaves I only took four day leaves on the four days I was scheduled to work.

If I timed my leave just right, I could get 12 consecutive days off for the price of just four days of leave time. And I used up all my leave time while in Japan!

For the first time in my life I kept a journal. So many things were happening around me. And for the first time in my life I really began to educate myself. Up until this point, I hadn't really been close to any truly educated and intelligent people. There is a difference. Despite my Ph.B. and my majors in literature and philosophy at U. of D, I was out of my league. Some of my best buddies would in casual conversations drop names such as John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, Immanuel Kant, and Bertrand Russell, just as easily as basketball fans can drop names like Charles Barkley, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, and Isiah Thomas.

When I wasn't working, playing chess or bridge, teaching English to Japanese English teachers at the American Cultural Center, visiting the bars, or playing the tourist, I was reading. Never before or since have I read so many books. Never before or since was I so determined to build my vocabulary, to make sure I could understand everything someone was talking about, to make sure I could understand what I was reading. I hadn't realized until then that I had been in the habit of just blipping over words that I really didn't know and not really knowing that I didn't know them.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of knowing what it is you don't know. **If you don't know that you don't know,you can't begin to learn.** This, I'm afraid, is the case of all the biggest names in education today. They know a great deal. They're not dumb. They're well educated. They keep up with each other's work. ***But they don't know what it is that they should know***. Anybody's work that is outside their own closed circle, the big names choose to ignore. For example, why should they read this book? They already know all they need to know about dyslexia and teaching children to read. They won't read it unless they are paid to review it. At a book exhibit, they walk right by. Nose in the air. If they don't stop, if they don't look, and if they don't ask questions, they don't run

the risk of letting people know that there might possibly be something they don't know.

So many things happened to me while I was in Japan, that I could (and did) write a book about them. Remember how I quit smoking? Cold turkey. Strong stubborn streak. But I liked to smoke. I liked to be sociable. The Japanese loved American cigarettes. So dumb me, after a year without a cigarette, thought I could smoke sociably. Uh huh. And the Pope is a Baptist who likes to hunt penguins in the Sahara. Sure. So, I started carrying cigarettes with me. They were only 15¢ a pack back then. I could afford that. And sure enough, I got hooked again. It didn't take me long to start smoking two to three packs a day. A man of moderation in all things. Uh huh.

But not only did I learn history, literature, and philosophy by reading when I was in Japan, I also got the opportunity to study Russian. After about a year, one department euphemistically called Traffic Analysis needed an extra body. Our Voice Intercept was still overstaffed. And I was the lowest on seniority so I got transferred. What I saw was an incredible waste of time and money. Everybody in that section drank coffee, smoked cigarettes, wandered from desk to desk with papers in their hands, and shot the shit. By three o'clock they had an hour to go, and then they got their work done. Everybody was ready to go at 4:00. I was shown what I had to do. After I mastered the intricacies of the job, I decided enough was enough. I wanted out and back to my Voice Intercept job with my friends. What I did was simple. I did my work. I did my work in forty-five minutes. Then, I sat at my desk studying my Russian. There wasn't much they could do. I got called on the carpet, of course. The officer in charge of the section accused me of reading instead of working. I corrected him. I said I was studying. The subject I was studying was my primary Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). I told him I should be commended for my ability to do my work and for improving my MOS skills by studying instead of wasting time with frivolous conversation, as the others in the section were doing. He didn't like my attitude at all. I wasn't a team player. He threatened to assign me to a different daily traffic analysis

report. I told him fine. I could handle that. I told him there wasn't a job in the traffic analysis section that would take me over an hour to complete.

He sputtered, fumed, and dismissed me. He must have known that he was in somewhat of a bind. He could have tried to have me face some kind of kangaroo court-martial. But he also knew I was his superior officer's favorite duplicate bridge partner. I played duplicate bridge with the C.O. at the Officer's Club at Camp Otsu. Because I always wore civilian clothes and because officers weren't supposed to fraternize with enlisted men, I was always introduced as being a civilian from the National Security Agency (NSA) staff that was on our base.

At any rate, I was sent back to my regular section.. So by being super competent where I didn't want to work, I got kicked back to where I wanted to be.

Being a volunteer teaching English in English to Japanese college students and Japanese teachers of English was an incredible experience. Twice a week I went down to the American Cultural Center and taught. I made a number of good friends and learned a great deal about Japanese culture and traditions. I also learned that when English is taught as a second language by someone whose native tongue is not English, the students rarely learn to understand spoken English. It took me a while to figure it out. Basically it's the same reason why so many American students misspell the following phrases:

Correct spelling:	**Typical misspelling**
supposed to	sposta
used to	usta
have to	hafta
should have	should of
what did you	what you (whud juh)

When teaching English in English to Japanese English teachers and college students, I spoke in my normal American speech patterns and rhythms. I DID NOT SPEAK SLOW LEE AN'Duh CARE FULL LEE EEE NUN SEE ATE EACH WORD. Instead, I just spoke normally. This

they wanted. They wanted to be able to understand Americans when they spoke.

But very often I would have to translate. For example, one day I started class by saying in my normal fast but sloppy mid-western speech, “Whudduhyuh wanna cover today?”

I got blank stares. So I wrote it out on the board: What do you want to cover today?

I underlined What do you and said “Whudduhyuh.” Then I broke it down “What” is slurred into “whuh” and “do” is slurred into “duh” and “you” becomes “yuh.” *Whudduhyuh* means *What do you*. Want to becomes *wanna*. They all knew the meaning of the word *cover*. But they didn’t want to put something on top of another thing. They wanted to learn English. So I “covered” the idiom *cover*.

Another time a student was puzzled by the word *affection*. It didn’t make any sense in the sentence to him. So I started to explain what *affection* meant. “No! No! It can’t mean that!” said one of the teachers of English from Doshisho University. “Affection means disease.”

I quietly but firmly contradicted him with “I think you’re confusing the word *affection* with the word *infection*.” Out came the pocket dictionaries. The whole class was gibbering away in Japanese. And then one after another they tried to point out to me that I was wrong. Unfortunately, I couldn’t read Japanese. I had to take their word for it that their dictionaries defined *affection* as *disease*.

Knowing I was right, I simply stated that even dictionaries can make mistakes. This they couldn’t accept. So, away to the huge unabridged *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* I flew.

I read and explained the definitions. But then I saw an entry that blew away my mind. There ***is*** a medical definition. Affection ***does*** mean disease! That part of the body *affected* by the disease is the *affection*!All I could tell them was that the writer of their pocket sized English/Japanese dictionary must have picked what he thought was the most logical definition

and ignored all the others. As a result he happened to hit upon a definition used only by the medical profession. Even then, most doctors and nurses of my acquaintance told me that they had forgotten that medical definition of *affection* when I told them this story.

Later on I was to draw upon these experiences in Japan to develop a method of teaching American students how to translate their speech, their “Ah wanna’s,” “Ah gotcha’s,” “Yor gonna’s,” “We hafta’s,” and “He sposta’s” into the correct written English equivalents of “I want to...,” “I got you...,” “You are (or You’re) going to...,” “We have to...,” and “He is (or He’s) supposed to...”

I will never forget those two incredible years in Japan when I learned more about the Russian language and especially my own English language then I ever did in school.