**AKML 2019 – Symposium**

**Princeton Club, New York City.**

**2019 J. Talbot Winchell Award**

Robert James 11/10/2019

**Acceptance Speech**

Good evening Mr President, Members of the Institute and the New York Society,

friends and supporters.

As we often say in commencing formal proceedings in Australia:

I acknowledge the traditional custodians the Lenape people,

of the land we have gathered on today.

I pay my respects to their Elders past and present,

for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture

and hopes of indigenous people everywhere.

It is indeed my privilege and pleasure to be back again in the Big Apple

and in this gathering in particular, this time with my lovely wife Jeanne,

(whose birthday is today!)

and to accept the Talbot Winchell Award 2019.

When I came here in 2012, I promised my bosses in the Department of

Foreign Affairs in Canberra, that I would be good while overseas, and not

cause any disturbances, diplomatic or otherwise.

Well, on the day after the Symposium,

Hurricane Sandy came to town with a bit of wind, and brought the Atlantic Ocean

into the canyons of New York. I was a guest of the New York Port Authority in

a homeless shelter for a week. I won't say any more about that, but I've

been promised by Marty that it will be nicer this time. Oscar Wilde said

that "The past is like a foreign country - things are different there!"

(I'm sure he was referring to dating and indexing!)

Anyway, we're going well, and do appreciate your hospitality and warm welcome.

We're here not as individuals, but as representatives of our faithful

general semantics groups in Australia, whose greeting I carry. In

particular, my friend and colleague Laurie Cox (now deceased), winner of

the Talbot Winchell Award 2008, the true pioneer of general semantics in

Australia. Laurie was a friend of my fathers in the Air Force 1939-45,

an uncle figure of mine all my life.

I grew up with

 "Science and Sanity",

 "Language in Thought and Action",

 and "Levels of Knowing and Existence".

In recent times, we've been pleased to promote Marty's "Fairy Tales ... "

and other of the more accessible texts.

Our friend David Hewson was here for gs studies a number of times,

and continues as a most insightful and committed teacher.

Pauline and Gavan Callaghan provide a beautiful and welcoming home in Sydney

for our seminars.

Tom and Earl maintain our Melbourne presence,

and we keep touch with our wider community via the website

and other social media.

It's been said here previously, that the discipline and institutions of

general semantics are showing their age, as are many of us members and

supporters. Well, we're not alone. I think that the heyday of people

joining organisations was probably the middle of the 20th century.

Organisations like political parties, unions, scouting movement, and

religious attendance, have all dropped off considerably in the last few

decades in Australia. Many people no longer seek their social interaction

or intellectual stimulation at the School of Arts, the Country Women's

Association, the Mechanics Institute, community service organisations

or their local church.

Young people are generally respectful of spirituality as part of the

human condition, but cynical about institutional religion and dogma, as noted by Alfred Korzybski in “The manhood of Humanity”. This is not helped, of course,

by the scandals engulfing our religious and other leaders.

Young people especially, seek community largely via social media -

Instead of chilling out with half a dozen friends at the cafe or park,

they commune with hundreds of Facebook so-called “friends” in cyberspace.

The social implications of this are yet to be well understood.

The Meetup website service is designed to encourage people into

face-to-face contact, but has **not** been particularly successful for us -

A great number of people register interest, ask questions

and see what we're doing, but will not show up at meetings.

This is not just for GS - It's a pervasive sign of our times.

So this is real challenge for us - It's not enough these days

to write a great book, to conduct interesting and welcoming meetings,

or guest speaker appearances in established community and academic events.

We really appreciate the excellent time-binding contributions

by Bruce and Susan Kodish, Marty Levinson, Ben Hauck and many others

with the website and recent publications, to pass on to our children.

And the loyalty and commitment of so many people here

to develop and maintain the interest and activities around general semantics,

and engagement with the global community.

We feel most welcome here, thank you, most privileged to receive the

J. Talbot Winchell Award 2019, and we look forward to working with you to

promote the many joys and benefits the general semantics has to offer.

Thank you.

Robert James.

11th October 2019