

Leon Lojk and his life-long journey, 1937. – 2014.

Fifty years ago, in 1965; an American psychiatrist Dr. William Glasser wrote a ground breaking book called *Reality Therapy* which became a bestseller in the USA. This was the start of a breakthrough in the development of a new and unknown therapy among other well established therapeutic approaches. At that time, a young Slovenian psychologist Leon Lojk received a gift from his colleague - the same book - and Dr. Glasser's ideas contained within it thrilled him. The same excitement for these ideas stayed with Leon for the rest of his life. In his sickroom in September of 2014, already very ill, Leon wrote his last article "Following the development of Glasser's ideas". Three weeks later, on November 17th he said goodbye for the last time.

Today - in 2015, the book *Reality Therapy* celebrates its golden jubilee. *Reality Therapy* got its golden recognition as a psychotherapeutic approach in Brussels, 2008; when the psychotherapeutic establishment of the old continent welcomed it as one among equals – in the field of psychotherapy. We owe that recognition to Leon who dedicated 40 years of his life to achieving that goal.

An uninformed reader may conclude that there is not better way to live than to work on the task you love with commitment and passion until the last breath. But, it's important to understand the regional context of that time when Leon started working on his goals. He used to say: "I have started at the wrong place and the wrong time. Otherwise it wouldn't have taken so long." The place – the former Yugoslavia, the basic characteristic at the end of 1970s – worker self-management with all its tricks that enabled the "soft" dictatorship of the proletariat; the upbringing of "versatile socialist personalities", which guaranteed single-minded ideological rigidity. Leon was the Principal of the one institution for delinquent girls in the former Yugoslav republic – Slovenia. The political establishment of that era had imposed the façade of a permissive approach in dealing with the delinquent youth. Many viewed the permissive style to be better than the traditional upbringing from the past - which usually included a lot of punishment. This new youth upbringing was imposed on institutions politically and functioned like Potemkin villages. Yugoslav authorities were very skilful in hiding their totalitarianism from the world thus creating the façade: 'as a self-governing society we are taking care of human rights having humane prisons and permissive upbringing'.

Leon began to oppose this system and also started to promote Glasser's ideas publically - ideas that he was already applying in his work. The builders of Potemkin villages start to anger when someone begins to pull their facade down. That's why they chose to criticize the proposed ideas and to discard them. Leon's *Reality Therapy* training in the USA was used against him in a political setup with the threat of 5-7 years of imprisonment on charges of 'abuse of self-management'. Right before the final court session, after two years of

depositions, some 'lost documents' were discovered and Leon was found "not guilty". Nevertheless, he lost his job and was excluded from the field of public education.

Many would have given up at that point, but not Leon. On the contrary, he decided to invite Dr. Glasser to Yugoslavia and initiated the first Reality Therapy training. Because there was no appreciation for this in Slovenia at the time, with help from some Croatian colleagues, he managed to organise first training in Croatia in 1984. In the year 1986, the Reality Therapy Association of Yugoslavia was formed, and Leon became its president.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, almost ten years later, Reality Therapy training started in Slovenia. "Nobody is a prophet in his own country" – Leon said. After all the attacks and refusals that he experienced, the interest for Reality Therapy among Slovenian professionals meant a lot to him. When the 1st European conference for Reality Therapy was held in Portorose - Slovenia in the 1997 - he experienced it as his final satisfaction. Dr. and Mrs. Glasser attended that Conference.

Leon was a fighter, and his fighting skills were patience and perseverance. He would never give up what he valued. He wasn't afraid of what lay ahead despite his previous experiences. His studies of philosophy have surely influenced his attitude and his way of coping. We could say he had a stoical stance in life. That was his most prominent quality until the end. He told me: "We shouldn't fear death. While we are here, she isn't. When she comes, we aren't here." Choice Theory for Leon was something he recognised as his own path to personal freedom and happiness, something worth fighting for and worth proving as well as promoting. He considered it 'The ethics of the future'.

Philosophy was his love. He was skilled at expressing himself through psychology. As psychologist, philosopher and scientist, he utilized his potential to contemplate Glasser's ideas – from the meta-theoretical and scientific standpoints. He has written and published many articles with that topic as well as his booklet: "Scientific Argument for Reality Therapy" published in 2001. We know that from the year 1995; Dr. Glasser started an intensive path of personal development. A view of human behaviour that he developed; then, he called Choice Theory, emphasizing the importance of relationships for human happiness. He also defined mental health, and the therapy he has developed he finally named – The New Reality Therapy.

Some of these ideas didn't sit well with WGI faculty. Leon didn't turn to those who doubted. Instead, with trust and interest, he followed the development of his teacher and stayed closely connected to him - trying to understand. With his own elaborations Leon facilitated understanding of these new ideas for those he was teaching.

He believed that the changes Dr. Glasser introduced lead Choice Theory right to the top of a modern understanding of human behaviour, and that Reality Therapy deserves to be recognised as one among equals. He undertook everything that was required in order to achieve that goal. First, he called all Reality Therapy organisations in Europe to cooperate.

Then in the year 1999 he founded The European Association for Reality Therapy with its office located in Slovenia. Until 2010 he was the president of the EART. The founding of EART was the beginning of the journey to recognition of Reality Therapy in Europe. Leon was a co-founder of Slovenian national psychotherapy umbrella organisation, and first president of its Expert Council. So, 20 years after Reality Therapy was labelled “unwanted” in Slovenia, it entered the ‘temple of Slovenian psychotherapy’ through the main gate. That was one more great achievement. Leon wasn’t vengeful, but a man who is dedicated to connecting and building. He was extremely modest and sensible. In 2007, Slovenian association for psychotherapy granted Leon his Golden Award for development of psychotherapy in Slovenia.

While I’m writing this, I can hear Leon cautioning me that I’m putting him forward, forgetting to mention others who worked with him and those of us who stood beside him. He never talked about his achievements in the first person – always in the plural. He was grateful for the support and he deeply respected his associates. I remember our first trainings for the future WGI faculty. Dr. Glasser and Linda Harshman have given him mandate to lead the faculty training for supervisors and instructors in these parts of Europe. He advised me not to set a fee for the training. “Let that be an investment in our future” – he said. “It’s all returning anyway.” So, we never changed that rule. Those who decide to train to become supervisors or instructors have ‘free entrance’. His colleagues knew him as a caring and generous teacher true to his teaching, who behaved in what he taught others. When I think of him as a teacher, the words from Khalil Gibran’s “Prophet” come to mind: “The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.” People valued that wisdom and in the times of hardship, followed his initiative with trust.

We had created the European Association for Reality Therapy, but still we didn’t get recognition. It was necessary to fulfil specific conditions required by the European Association for Psychotherapy. Everything needed to be documented and Leon took on that job. It wasn’t easy. First of all, thanks to the scientific argument he put through to the EAP, in the 2007, Reality Therapy was accepted as a psychotherapeutic approach practised in Europe. For this to happen, EART needed to reach the status of a European Wide Organisation. After that a new audition took place – proving that our training complies with the conditions for psychotherapy training in Europe. When EART was granted the status of a European Wide Awarding Organisation in 2008, Reality Therapy finally got its full recognition as a psychotherapeutic school. A five-year training that we developed along the way - thanks to changes introduced by the Author and Leon’s constant effort to broaden the understanding of Reality Therapy within the scientific context and define its relations to other psychotherapeutic approaches. Without a doubt, all this required a change in the training approach with emphasis on personal experience, as a result of frequent appeals

from our participants for additional training hours. When we added up the hours, it turned out that our training complies with the qualitative and quantitative requirements set by EAP.

We were offering training in the Counselling and Training Centre, which Leon founded in the year 1996 as our private company. I remember our flight from London where we had a meeting with the faculty from Ireland, UK and Finland working on EART Book of Regulations for Reality Therapy Psychotherapy Training, in December of 2008. There was a lot of turbulence during that flight, but Leon was full of enthusiasm after the meeting - to continue "conquering" Europe. He told me: "None of our children are interested in taking over the work we are doing. There are so many people around us who work with enthusiasm and have our same interests. If this 'thing' falls down from the sky, our heritage will go to people who aren't particularly interested in continuing what we started. I don't want everything wasted like that. We should put our thoughts together with the ones who share our vision and organise an institute." And so in the 2009, along with 20 more colleagues we organised the Institute for Reality Therapy – today European Institute for Reality Therapy. All our business was transferred to the Institute. On the opening ceremony of the Institute, he poured me a glass of champagne and toasted: "Now, the planes can start falling peacefully again. I know there are people who will continue putting in the effort." In the 2011, when the Institute got the accreditation as EAP's training institute, and with it the possibility for all of our participants - after completing the five-year training - to automatically obtain European Certificate for Psychotherapy, Leon experienced the payoff of his all efforts. He was happy.

Leon was diagnosed with cancer in the Spring of 2010. During the first 50 days he survived four serious operations. During his fourth operation I was hardly overcoming fear. When they finally wheeled him into the ward, he winked at me and said: "Chirp, chirp, I'm still alive!" That was Leon! He was always cheerful and ready for a joke. After getting back from the hospital I wanted him to slow down, and suggested to him that he rest for a while. "You are forgetting", he said, "the circumstances don't steer my life, I steer. I don't want to ail, I want to live and above all, that means to work. There are so many things to do. We have to write the book. Without it, it's almost as if we didn't do anything." The book, unfortunately, never saw a sunrise even though we were both working on it. He asked me to promise him to finish what we started. I promised.

Four years he defied the illness. He lived a full life and did all the things he loved to do. When the L.A. conference was announced in 2012, he decided to go. He wanted to meet his teacher one more time. The journey was hard and his aches were strong, but by the look on his face when they finally met I knew it was worth it. "Reality Therapy is already pretty old Bill." – he told him "We are both in wheelchairs".

Leon was full of energy and enthusiasm. People admired that enthusiasm and optimism that he used to spread with his every appearance at any conference. His last appearance was at the European Reality Therapy Faculty Retreat in Medulin, Croatia - in September 2014. He

was a keynote speaker. His planner was full until the end of 2014. “What I don’t finish, you will” – he told me.

For me, who has spent 28 of the most wonderful years of my life with him, Leon was a king. Noble, just and persistent in everything that he did. He was a faithful husband, tender and compassionate, the man who gave family highest priority, caring and friendly father to every one of our children, loving and patient grandfather to our grandchildren. It was impossible not to love him.

Bosiljka Lojk