

If B.J. Were Alive Today...

From 1906 until his death in 1961, B.J. Palmer, the enigmatic 'Developer of Chiropractic', loomed as a larger-than-life presence at the helm of *The Fountainhead*, as the Palmer School of Chiropractic, the first institution to educate chiropractors, came to be known. As two of the shrinking handful of people alive in Australia today who knew him personally, we sometimes smile and often wince at judgments made, at best, on the basis of what has been written by or about him.

His published addresses were frequently misread because they could be fully appreciated only by those of us who had heard him speak. The father of one of us (MAC) once commented that when B.J. gave him a draft of one of his proposed speeches, he was disappointed until he heard B.J. deliver it to the spellbound Lyceum audience, such was his personal charisma. Even his books cannot be properly understood without taking into account the force of his personality.

During his lifetime, one could not remain lukewarm about this man for long, for he was controversial, creative, unconventional and eccentric. It was not uncommon for him to leave misunderstandings and hurt feelings in his wake: depending on circumstances, he might be forbearing to strangers and uncompromising to friends, reclusive or hospitable to a fault, harshly critical or warmly appreciative, entrepreneurial or philanthropic, dictatorial or conciliatory, assertive or self-effacing, gracious or insulting, sensitive or politically incorrect. What was an absolute constant was his intense focus on the development and advancement of chiropractic.

Part of what drives us to document the history of our profession, particularly as it relates to the Palmers, Australia and what is now Palmer University, is to contextualise the contributions of the Palmer family, the institutions they built, and their ongoing impact on the world. Our readers should by now be aware that without B.J.'s penetrating intellect, visionary ideals, business acumen and unflagging energy, chiropractic may well not have survived to allow succeeding generations of chiropractors to make their own considerable contributions.

Many have used his utterances and published works to speculate on how he might have viewed present-day practice or to justify their own, often anachronistic, position in the mistaken belief that his concepts, methods and policies remained static. Through study of his books, *The Chiropractor* and *Fountainhead News*, and personal observation during our years on campus, we have traced changes in his thinking based on evidence and technology as they became available to him, and we are certain he would be horrified at any suggestion that the philosophy, science and practice of chiropractic should ever stop evolving.

We feel sure that were B.J. able to articulate his opinion of what is happening in today's world, he would express pride in the rapidly growing numbers of chiropractors, that chiropractic is being practised in most countries, and that it is illegal or unregulated in fewer and fewer jurisdictions as time goes on. Growing public acceptance and the recognition given to chiropractic by the World Health Organization would no doubt also please him.

The spread of chiropractic education around the world would probably meet with his enthusiastic approval, but possible ambivalence about the increasing tendency of programs to be sited within universities if this represents loss of professional control over curriculum. The trade-off of better research opportunities—particularly were this to lead to discoveries about the nature of the phenomenon he called *subluxation* and better ways to identify, evaluate and address it—may, however, dampen this concern. While on the subject of research we will be bold enough to suggest that he would be more than a little impatient that research into chiropractic has been slow to move beyond the purely mechanistic paradigm.

The tendency of some to paint chiropractic into a musculoskeletal corner in the absence of hard quantitative evidence of chiropractic's impact on other aspects of health and wellbeing would doubtless be a cause of concern, as would the growing preoccupation with symptomatic relief as opposed to more holistic considerations.

He would likely be bemused by the trend to include chiropractors in multidisciplinary practices and even staffs of hospitals.

Somewhat more difficult to predict is whether he would embrace the concept of a comprehensive wellness approach (e.g. Chiropractic Plus) as an appropriate practice model for chiropractors. Had he been a cooperative patient of such a practice, however, swapping his cigars for regular exercise and his standard American diet (S.A.D.) for more fresh fruit and vegetables would certainly have added years to his life and life to his years, if perhaps not to the extent that he would still be alive today!

The fact is that chiropractic is now ours to defend and develop. If we are to be worthy of that legacy, we must approach the task with intelligence and integrity—remaining awake to emerging possibilities and responsive to changing needs without being seduced by promise of reward or swayed by passing fads—mindful of the contributions of the past, but with our eyes firmly fixed on the far horizon.

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