Remembering Dr. Lyle Wheeler Sherman

JOHN F. HART, D.C.*

Lyle Wheeler Sherman was a chiropractor with a passion for chiropractic. He brought dignity to the chiropractor; but most profoundly, he brought dignity to the chiropractic profession. He rendered a quality professional service and helped his fellow chiropractor do the same. He was a published author and co-developer of various chiropractic instruments. A renowned teacher, former assistant director and chief of staff of the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic in Davenport, Iowa, he was a sought-after speaker at both state and national chiropractic conventions. Dr. Sherman was a man of knowledge and wisdom. Local chiropractors sought his technical advice and assistance which he provided at no charge. Both laymen and chiropractors recognized him as a chiropractic authority. He regularly received letters from patients who had traveled both the medical route and the chiropractic route and were seeking the more specific care offered by Dr. Sherman. He always attempted to accommodate them. His gentle personality and sense of humor, coupled with his exactness in chiropractic analysis and adjustment procedures, won the respect of students, colleagues and patients. His expertise was recognized by his appointment to many state and national offices and by the many awards he received. His greatest and most lasting award was the chiropractic college that bears his name: Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic in Spartanburg, South Carolina--the first chiropractic college in the southeast.

Lyle Wheeler Sherman grew up in the Galesburg, Illinois, area where, at a Campfire Girl social, he met his future wife, Eula Mae Foster, a graduate from Maude Main School of Fine Arts in Galesburg. Before he became interested in chiropractic, Dr. Sherman, a gifted pianist (Moore 1996), was pursuing a career in music and engineering. While planning his career, he worked with his brother in Whitefish, Montana, on the Great Northern Railroad. However, in Whitefish, an incident occurred which was to change his life.

In 1929, the Sherman’s neighbor, Dr. W.H. Pardis, a chiropractor, paid the Shermans a neighborly visit. During the course of the conversation, Lyle Sherman mentioned that his wife Eula had a fever and their planned trip to Spokane, Washington, the next day was in jeopardy. Dr. Pardis offered to check Mrs. Sherman’s spine. Though somewhat puzzled, she consented. Having an interest in engineering, Lyle was impressed with the neurocalometer, a temperature sensing device used in analyzing his wife’s spine. Dr. Pardis found a cervical-spine subluxation and adjusted it. Soon after, Mrs. Sherman’s temperature returned to normal. The Shermans took their scheduled trip to Spokane after all; and later, they both were patients of Dr. Pardis. Lyle’s chronic digestive and throat problems and Eula’s eye problems disappeared under Pardis’ care. The Shermans were most impressed with their chiropractic experience; and with the urging of Dr. Pardis, Lyle Sherman decided he wanted to be a chiropractor. In 1932, he applied for admission at his chiropractor’s Alma Mater, the Palmer School, but was told to re-apply when he was more financially sound. During this period, the Shermans raised chickens. When the registrar (himself a former chicken farmer) learned this during the Shermans’ second visit, the Palmer School admitted Sherman as a student. Lyle Sherman’s chiropractic career began on the credibility of his being a chicken farmer.

Dr. Sherman graduated from the Palmer School of Chiropractic in February of 1934—“The Specific Class,” specific meaning the class was proficient in B.J. Palmer’s new Hole-In-One (HIO) technique. This was also the year that Palmer’s famous treatise on HIO upper cervical work was published (Palmer 1934). For the graduation stage, Dr. Sherman and a classmate constructed a prop in a basement. Part of the prop was a giant book, complete with gold-edged pages. When they had completed the book, they realized that it was...
too big to fit through the doors of the basement! So, they dismantled it and then put it back together again on the stage. The book was open, and the left page read “The Specific Class,” and the right page read *Qui Non Proficit Deficit*, which is Latin for “He who does not advance, fails.” Dr. Sherman and his classmate also constructed four large pillars, two on each side of the book to give a “hall of learning” appearance.

After graduation, Dr. Sherman spent time trying to find a chiropractor proficient in the HIO system with whom he could associate. He was unable to find anyone suitable; therefore, he accepted the offer of a faculty position at the Palmer School. He began teaching in the areas of chiropractic philosophy, orthopedy, clinical pathology and spinography in 1935, the year the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic opened its doors.

In 1942, Dr. Sherman became second in command and Chief of Staff of this unique facility. Although B.J. Palmer was the director, Dr. Sherman had full authority over the clinic until he left Palmer in 1955. B.J. gave Sherman this responsibility because of the trust and respect Sherman had earned, particularly in the later years when B.J. spent more and more time in Sarasota, Florida.

The chiropractic profession had many developments, particularly in the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Clinic. Dr. Sherman was able to utilize his fascination with engineering; and he played a key role in the development of chiropractic instruments and equipment (Sherman November 28, 1995). His research contributions included the development of the neurotempometer, the neurocalograph and the cervical x-ray chair. The neurotempometer, designed to lift the pick-up unit of the neurocalograph at a uniform speed, allowed for easier comparison of subsequent graph recordings. The neurocalograph was a neurocalometer with a graph readout. The cervical x-ray chair contributed greatly to precision cervical spine work by allowing the radiographer to move the patient minutely while seated. Dr. Sherman also played a key role in developing a portable adjusting table, complete with carrying compartments for child-and-adult neurocalometers. Dr. Sherman and his co-workers at the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic developed the system of pattering temperature readings as a form of chiropractic analysis of subluxations which is still in use today (*ICA Review* 1977).

Dr. Sherman’s duties included performing the initial interview of the new patient to establish whether the clinic should accept or reject the patient. Patients generally arrived at the clinic after having first experienced medical care and usual chiropractic care before referral to the upper cervical specialists at the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Clinic, often the last hope for these patients. Mrs. Sherman remembers the desperation of these patients, recounting the story of one patient, rejected by the clinic due to advanced pathologies, who subsequently committed suicide (Sherman November 13, 1995).

Dr. Sherman was also responsible for accommodating requests of field chiropractors to test their various techniques, particularly with B.J.’s electroencephaloneuromentipo-graph. One request, which Dr. Sherman evaluated, came from Drs. Truscott and Frisbie. Dr. Sherman’s name is in one of the Palmer Green Books regarding this incident (Palmer 1950, 204). Sherman’s name also appears under the “Eight Cases” chapter in another Green Book (Palmer 1951, 474).

Though Dr. Sherman’s contributions to the chiropractic profession were many, he remained a most humble man. Recently, Mrs. Sherman received a letter from a former receptionist, Karleen Crary, at the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Clinic. Mrs. Crary recalled an occasion when a patient, thrilled at experiencing greatly improved health because of chiropractic care received from Dr.

*B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Clinic staff, 1945. Dr. Sherman seated in front row on right of B.J. Palmer.*
Dr. Sherman, expressed her gratitude to Dr. Sherman
before a reception room filled with patients. Mrs.
Crary recounted how Dr. Sherman raised his
outstretched arms and said to the patient, "I didn't do
it; I just release the subluxation. God and innate take
care of the healing." The letter goes on to say, "One
thing that stands out so clearly was the dedication,
respect and the love that Dr. Palmer and Dr. Sherman
had for one another...when I was called in to type or
take shorthand, I saw the great depth of the two men"
(Crary 1996).

At Christmas, 1955, a gift came from Karleen
Crary. She had kept a book at her desk for patients to
communicate messages to the Shermans. The book is
full of pages of people's comments expressing their
gratitude to Dr. and Mrs. Sherman. The receptionist
wrote at the end of all the messages that "...so often as patients picked up
this book, their words were 'The
Shermans were so wonderful, I don't
know how to say the things I would
like.'"  

Dr. Sherman was active in the
profession while he was at Palmer
(from Davenport to Spartanburg)
giving yearly educational pre­
sentations at the Palmer Lyceums and
at state and national conventions and,
sometimes, international conventions.
Figure 1 (next page) shows a partial
list of the seminars Dr. Sherman either
participated in or presented.

One particular seminar, in Michigan,
depicts the respect for and obedience
to B.J. that Dr. Sherman felt. In 1943,
the Michigan State Chiropractic Society invited Dr.
Sherman to speak at its annual convention in Detroit.
The Iowa chiropractors also wanted Dr. Sherman to
speak at their convention, scheduled near the time to
the Detroit seminar. B.J. was in Chicago on business
when Dr. Sherman received these requests. The letter
from the Michigan group read in part:

Our members were so greatly impressed
with your ability as an x-ray instructor a
few years ago, that I have been requested
as Chairman of the Educational
Committee, to invite you to be one of our
speakers...We would prefer that your
subject be planned along the lines of x-ray
procedure in relation to spinal correction.

Dr. Sherman forwarded the Michigan letter on to B.J.
in Chicago with his own attached note saying

Dear Dr. Palmer: Have also been asked to
speak at the Iowa convention, Sunday, June
13th. You know your plans as to dates, so
please give your OK or refusal, as I must
notify these people. Sincerely, Lyle
Sherman.

Dr. Palmer felt that the x-ray presentation requested by
Michigan would focus only on the structural aspect of
the subluxation while ignoring the functional aspect,
i.e., neurological interference. B.J. hand-wrote a note
on Hotel Morrison of Chicago stationery saying
Dear Lyle: Mich wants x-ray. You and I want them to get some Ctic*. So, suppose you ask for two talk times 1 for x-ray they want, and 1 for NCM slides you and I want them to get. In other words, you will give them one if they will take one...Sure, give Iowa your slides. It was wonderfully welcomed at both places in the East.

Thanks to you. Hear fine reports about your tireless work for the Clinic. Love, B.J.

Dr. Sherman desired to enter full-time practice and be near the mountains so he moved to Spartanburg, South Carolina, in 1955. During the Palmer Lyceum that year, Sherman received the ICA Chiropractor of the Year Award from Dr. B.J. Palmer. The cover of the

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*Ctic - "chiropractic"
ICA Review, published after Lyceum, pictured a very happy Lyle Sherman receiving the award from a grateful B.J. Palmer. The journal featured another photo of a smiling Lyle Sherman holding the award on his left and receiving a kiss from his wife on his right.

Dr. Sherman's departure must have been bittersweet for B.J., for he was losing his right-hand-man. Dr. Sherman had tried to leave on several occasions only to have B.J. persuade him to stay a little longer. This time, Dr. Sherman was really leaving; but he stayed in close contact with B.J. and his son, Dr. David D. Palmer, over the ensuing years.

On October 1, 1955, the Shermans began construction on a 2,000 sq. ft. office building in downtown Spartanburg. The announcement of the open house held forty years ago appeared in a full page ad in mid-January 1956 in the Spartanburg Herald. The ad showed various contractors who had participated in the construction of the new building congratulating Dr. and Mrs. Sherman. Dr. Earl Taylor, a friend and colleague of Dr. Sherman's, also showed his vote of confidence in the announcement.

News that a chiropractic expert from the world-famous B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic had opened a practice in Spartanburg spread through the Carolinas. Dr. Sherman received many letters from people requesting his help. One man in particular consulted with Dr. Sherman on the advice of his doctor. The letter is part of Mrs. Sherman's collections and says that he suffered with "noises in the head" and had consulted several medical doctors and a chiropractor, all of which were "useless." Dr. Sherman constantly attracted the patients who had been through several experiences searching for a solution to their health problems. These people came to Dr. Sherman because of his reputation and that of his former employer, B.J. Palmer.

Two months after he began practice in Spartanburg, a former patient from the B.J. Clinic, who lived in Illinois, wrote Dr. Sherman, seeking his help. She asks him:

What can you line up down there in case I would have to come, in the way of a place to stay? I would certainly lose faith in chiropractic if I didn't know it can be done. You know that I was pretty desperate when I let Dr. _____ give me pain pills and whiskey, but to no avail. Please write back to us Dr. Sherman and tell me what you think has happened and if you think it will eventually get alright.

There are many letters like this in the Sherman collection from patients seeking Dr. Sherman's help and willing to come long distances to be under his care. There are also many letters from chiropractors asking his professional advice about their patients; and there were many from those interested in setting up their practices in the
Carolinas, like chiropractor Dr. Thom Gelardi, who wanted to be near the expertise of Dr. Sherman. Dr. Sherman always took the time to reply to all these letters in a caring, encouraging and informative way. Dr. Sherman had a knack for capturing the hearts of those involved with the chiropractic profession. James Harrison, legal counsel for the International Chiropractors Association, recently wrote that Dr. Sherman “was one of the few doctors closest to me during my forty years with the ICA.” (Harrison 1996)

Dr. John Bryan, a student intern in the B.J. Clinic who had worked under Dr. Sherman, still “idolizes” him because of his chiropractic skills (Bryan 1996). Dr. Don Thomas, who was an associate chiropractor with Dr. Sherman in Spartanburg, is “so thankful” for having been able to know Dr. Sherman (Thomas 1996).

Dr. Sherman also wrote professional articles. Figure 2 is a list of articles he authored, although perhaps not a complete list.

Dr. Sherman’s commitment to the profession continued in South Carolina. In 1959, after Dr. Sherman moved to Spartanburg, B.J. wrote him saying Have received a full and complete report on the great wonderful work done BY YOU at your meeting in South Carolina...Any General - no matter how great the evidence against, and no matter how great the proof for our work - needs an army helping him to save the battle from going to pot, and to win the battle for humanity. This letter is MY PERSONAL APPRECIATION to you for your part in this crusade. You have proven yourself to be a disciple of a great cause, an ardent worker, and an adherent to a truth greater than any of us. Sincerely, B.J.

In 1963, he helped organize educational seminars in South Carolina every other month (ICA Review 1963). Dr. Sherman gave the fall 1965 Commencement Address at Palmer College. Mrs. Sherman has five letters from Dr. David Palmer expressing his gratitude to Dr. Sherman for his willingness to deliver the address later printed in its entirety in the 1965 fall issue of the Palmer College Alumni News. Also that year, Dr. Sherman won a fellowship in the Palmer Academy of Chiropractic, a most prestigious honor bestowed on him by Dr. David Palmer, who was then president of Palmer College of Chiropractic.

Dr. Sherman was an acknowledged expert in x-ray work. South Carolina became aware of this and subsequently appointed him Member-at-Large on the State of South Carolina Technical Advisory Radiation Control Council in 1967. This same year, the South Carolina Chiropractic Association recognized Dr. Sherman for thirty years of chiropractic service and, in 1971, named Dr. Sherman Chiropractor of the Year. Dr. E.L. Crowder, then Vice President of Development at Palmer College, sent a letter to Dr. Sherman saying “Congratulations, Lyle, no one is more deserving of the honor.” (Crowder 1971) Dr. Crowder’s secretary, Amy Micklewrogji, who had formerly served as secretary to B.J. and Dave Palmer, attached a note to Dr. Crowder’s letter, adding her congratulations and sending her best wishes to the Sherman Family.

When his practice hours were over on Saturday mornings, Dr. Sherman would stay at his office all afternoon; and local chiropractors would come for his advice on their difficult cases. This service he provided without financial reward. His

**FIGURE 2: Articles by Dr. Sherman**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TITLE OF ARTICLE</th>
<th>PUBLICATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 1937</td>
<td>“The Occiput”</td>
<td>The Chiropractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1938</td>
<td>“Axis”</td>
<td>The Chiropractor</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 1938</td>
<td>“Distortions in X-ray”</td>
<td>The Chiropractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1939</td>
<td>“Trauma and Diabetes”</td>
<td>The Chiropractor</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 1941</td>
<td>“Be Specific”</td>
<td>The Chiropractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1948</td>
<td>“Diagnosis Often Wrong Medical Article Avers”</td>
<td>ICA Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1950</td>
<td>“Slipped or Herniated Discs”</td>
<td>ICA Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1952</td>
<td>“What About Research”</td>
<td>ICA Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1954</td>
<td>“They Do Forget”</td>
<td>ICA Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1955</td>
<td>“Ethiopian Project”</td>
<td>ICA Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1964</td>
<td>“Acceptance is Based on Chiropractic Effectiveness”</td>
<td>ICA Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1974</td>
<td>“Checking Our Slipping”</td>
<td>Sherman Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reward came from sharing his vast and expert chiropractic knowledge (Betty Gelardi 1995). Chiropractors were keenly aware of Dr. Sherman’s expertise, but they were not intimidated by him; they felt at ease when he instructed them (Garren 1996).

Dr. Sherman’s skills in matters pertaining to chiropractic impressed students, too. A 1952 letter written to B.J. Palmer from a Palmer student who was also a patient in the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Clinic praised Dr. Sherman for his care:

May I just say that I want to express my most profound gratitude for a successful “stay” in your clinic, case #_____. Dr. Lyle Sherman is a remarkable person both as a professional man and an individual. Realization of this was nil while attending school. The perspective is quite different when one is a patient.

Dr. Perry Rush, a 1976 graduate of Sherman College, recalls a time when Dr. Sherman gave a demonstration of the Palmer toggle recoil thrust before a class and the skepticism the class felt about the speed of the thrust given by a man of Dr. Sherman’s age. The class, very surprised at how fast Dr. Sherman’s toggle was, asked to see it again (Rush 1995).

During his student days at Sherman College, Dr. Leroy Moore recalls an occasion when a spider bit his son. The son’s face began swelling up severely, and the father’s concern mounted. Dr. Moore, new to chiropractic and uncertain of his expertise as an intern, asked Dr. Sherman to assist him in checking his son and to advise him if his son needed adjusting. Dr. Sherman took a neurocalograph reading to check for subluxation and told the boy’s father, “He’s clear,” meaning there was no subluxation present. Still anxious about his son, Dr. Moore asked Dr. Sherman, “But don’t you think we ought to do something?” Dr. Sherman again replied, “He’s clear,” showing his great respect for the body’s ability when free of subluxation. Time proved Sherman’s analysis to be correct (Moore 1995).

Dr. Sherman was famous for being very meticulous about when a patient should get an adjustment. In his 1950 Lyceum address at the Palmer School of Chiropractic, Dr. Sherman told the thousands of chiropractors in attendance that

as a technique becomes more specific, that is as we work closer and closer to the area where pressure exists, we need to know more and more when pressure exists and when it does not exist. I don’t believe there is a man here who has not experienced undoing, with a thrust, that which he had previously adjusted... We would all like to know more about when and when not to adjust.

Dr. Sherman’s main analytical tool in determining the presence or absence of vertebral subluxation was the paraspinal-temperature graph pattern, and he preferred the solid type head piece to toggle on rather than the drop-type head piece (Thomas 1996).

In 1973, Thomas A. Gelardi, D.C., founded the first chiropractic college in the Southeastern United States which he named Sherman College of Chiropractic. Dr. Lyle Sherman, Dr. Gelardi’s mentor, granted the request that the college be named in his honor.

Dr. Sherman was a warm and caring man with a great sense of humor. He was a subluxation-centered chiropractor. Whereas, Dr. B.J. Palmer was more of a fighter for the profession, straight chiropractic in particular, Lyle Sherman was the diplomat. When the need arose to defend chiropractic, he did it with diplomacy (Thom Gelardi 1995). Dr. Lyle Wheeler Sherman died in Spartanburg on August 2, 1977, at the age of seventy-two.
Commenting on Dr. Sherman's life, Dr. Milton Garfunkel, a chiropractor from New York and a close associate of both B.J. Palmer and Lyle Sherman, stated that Dr. Sherman had much to give and sought little in return and truly gave with the heart and soul. As a chiropractor he helped alleviate the suffering of countless humans. As a teacher he commanded the respect of thousands of students and contributed much in the preparation of their chosen life's work. B.J. respected him as one of his most trusted co-workers and assigned to him the responsibilities as Head Clinician of the B.J. Palmer Chiropractic Research Clinic, the only institution of its kind that ever existed in our profession. Because Lyle passed this way our lives were immensely enriched. I have gained much from the wisdom he so generously made available and my association with him in organizational functions was most inspirational and gratifying (Garfunkel 1977).

To conclude Dr. Sherman's story without further mention of his life-long companion, Eula Mae Sherman, would be inappropriate.

During the time the Shermans lived in Davenport, Iowa, Mrs. Sherman was President of the Women's Auxiliary to the International Chiropractor's Association (WAICA) and served as senior editor of the Women's section of the ICA Review. She played a key role in raising funds and commissioning a sculptor for the bust of B.J. Palmer that stands on the campus of the Palmer College of Chiropractic. This bust rests next to the busts of the other three Palmers: Mabel, D.D. and David. Mrs. Sherman has several personal letters in her collection from B.J., Mabel and Dave Palmer congratulating and thanking her for a variety of things she had accomplished over the years. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Sherman was a tremendous driving force behind the man—her man—Lyle Sherman. Today, she lives quietly in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and continues her involvement in various civic and social activities. She is past president of the Spartanburg Business and Professional Women's (BPW) group and past president and charter member of Spartanburg's Altrusa International. She has always shown a special caring for international students. The shared commitment of both Lyle and Eula Sherman, not only to chiropractic and its people but to humanity in general, has been extraordinary.

Dr. Lyle Sherman's contribution to the chiropractic profession brought a dignity and precision to the art and science of chiropractic that is apparent today. This humble, gentle man lived a life that expressed grace and dignity of the human spirit which brought to the chiropractic profession an enhancement that was unique. Lyle Sherman's passing this way has enriched chiropractic. The author feels honored and thanks God for having the opportunity of getting to know this great and humble man better.
REFERENCES


ICA Review. September 1977: 5.


