

Sir Jerry McAndrews: The Passing of a Legend

by
JCS

Dr. Jerry McAndrews was my hero, mentor, and friend, so it came as a shock to hear of his recent unexpected passing. For those who knew this exceptional man, he was not only an icon in the chiropractic profession with many achievements, he was also a gentle giant who wore a constant smile always ready with a story or joke to tell. Moreover, he was the conscience of this profession who spoke for decades about our ethical challenges, academic/research needs, and political dilemmas. Indeed, Jerry was a big man, literally and figuratively, who left an indelible imprint on this profession, and a man I will never forget as a distinguished leader and as my friend.

Stephen Covey, author of the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, challenges his readership about leaving a legacy simply by asking, "What will be your legacy; what will be written on your tombstone?" I daresay there would be few DCs with larger tombstone inscriptions of accolades than that of Jerry McAndrews as a father, son, husband, brother, friend, athlete, warrior, leader, educator, author, spokesman, statesman, and consummate politician for this profession. Above all, he was also a regular guy who loved to talk sports, watch movies, always found time for all of his family and friends, and who will certainly leave a lasting legacy rivaled by only a handful in the ranks of this profession.

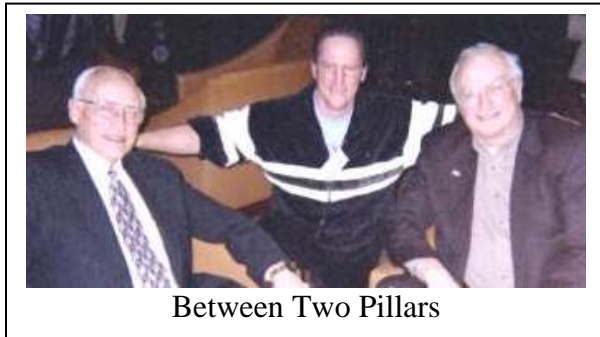
Jerry was more than a statesman, an academician, and a promoter of research in our profession. He was an eloquent advocate who shared his professional wisdom in everything he wrote and every time he spoke. While some chiropractors may be better known by the rank and file as practice gurus, technique entrepreneurs, or as charismatic ideologues, Jerry was at the top of the heap as the rational conscience of this profession who the media and our profession turned to for the definitive statement on any issue.

Indeed, he was legendary as the heart and soul of the rational mainstream in the chiropractic profession, and anyone who ever dealt with Jerry could feel his innate integrity and scholarly intelligence in his every word and by his mere presence; even the most charismatic chiropractic guru couldn't hold a candle to Jerry McAndrews—he was the real thing.

Years ago as a budding writer myself reaching out for advice, not knowing who to turn to for help and long before the Internet or email, I ingrained myself (no, not me) on Jerry when I simply began sending my articles to him for review and, to my amazement, he responded each and every time. That was the beginning of our pen-pal relationship that fortunately blossomed into literary colleagues-in-arms over the last many years.

Whenever I thought I had an astute perspective on an issue, Jerry would pull from his armamentarium a similar article he had written years before. I soon learned there was nothing new in this profession—same old issues, just perhaps with new characters in this on-going play called chiropractic. The more I read his past articles, the more humbled and awestruck I felt by his vast knowledge; indeed, we've lost a reservoir of experience with his passing.

When I finally met Jerry in person at NCLC, he greeted me with his customary big smile, slap on the back as if we were old chums, and called to his brother, "George, this is Jim Smith." By then Jerry was forwarding my commentaries to his brother and, to my surprise, George also gave me a big smile and a strong handshake. I felt honored that both of them took the time to read my essays, especially knowing how busy they were. But that typified each of them—they both had time for the little guys in our profession.



That evening Jerry invited me to join them for dinner along with a few ACA notables. Just listening to their stories and watching these two brothers interact proved their love of this profession and their love for each other.

At one point, I asked everyone at the table who was their most unforgettable character, which always makes for interesting dinner conversation. When it was Jerry's turn, he said it was his father. George nodded in agreement, "I knew you would say that." They both recalled their father and his career in chiropractic. George spoke of his father who suffered so badly from terrible asthma as a young man that despite standing 6'4," he weighed only 140 pounds. His wife forced him to visit the new "quack" in town after previous medical methods failed to help, and after the first adjustment where "his heels touched the back of his head," his father finally slept a full night's sleep.

It so motivated their father that he moved his young family to Davenport to begin his chiropractic education and they later settled in Clinton, Iowa, a quaint 19th century riverside town along the ol' Mississippi just 40 miles upstream from Davenport. Thus began the development of the McAndrews' family ascension in the annals of chiropractic that has led to 29 family members becoming chiropractors.

I often urged Jerry and George to record their many stories in a book; apparently they actually tried to do so a few times, reminiscing about untold events like George's office being burglarized during the Wilk trial and having their phones tapped, forcing them to

speak in the corn fields behind Jerry's home. But, alas, they never produced a manuscript. As Jerry once told me, he was getting up in years and becoming forgetful.

Sadly, the many exploits of these charming men will be lost unless some historian can put their many stories together for our posterity. I can only imagine the hordes of computer files Jerry has left behind for someone to sift through and the reams of transcripts from the Wilk trial that George has accumulated. This is a story that needs to be recorded of the two most influential brothers this profession has ever known.



Richard Brassard, ACA prez, and Don Kern, Palmer prez, with George outside Sacred Heart Church

I'd like to share with you a few of Jerry's more memorable comments that he shared with me:

In one article, "Contemporary Ethical Issues in Chiropractic" (<http://www.stoprondborg.org/Smith/Ethics.htm>) I argued, among many issues, against the use of free spinal exams despite the protestations of those who defended this practice arguing there was no need for regulation because the marketplace would handle the problem.

When I shared this attitude with Jerry, he mentioned:

"Letting the marketplace handle the problems is about as unprofessional as we could get. A 'profession' is supposed to regulate itself. Otherwise, we're not much more than local labor unions, with local building codes, running a trade. We have fifty different local building codes, represented by the fifty state laws. He (George McAndrews) thinks we have 50,000 'professions/local codes.'"

"I am reminded when I hear or read comments about 'letting the marketplace handle it,' of the time my brother George spent a full morning in the first trial in the *Wilk* case. He called me that noon and asked me, 'What in the hell is the matter with you people?'"

"When I asked him what he meant, he said, 'I just spent the worst morning of my professional life trying to defend the behavior of some of the chiropractors out there who make claims far beyond any objective evidence. I felt like I should get up from my chair and go over and sit with the attorneys for the other side.'"

"I apologized for the tough time 'our' behavior had caused for him. He then said, 'Don't get me wrong. The toughest part wasn't the trash so many chiropractors put out, it was that I couldn't find any evidence (for the then 80-some years of chiropractic's existence)"

of a single chiropractor speaking out against the atrocious behavior.”

(McAndrews J. Personal communication. May 8, 1998)

Undoubtedly this explained why George proclaimed years later at the ACA convention in Vancouver, BC, “5% of you are cultists, 5% of you are freaks, and the rest of you keep your mouths shut.” Fortunately, neither George nor Jerry kept their mouths shut on these important issues. Perhaps we all should take their heed and speak out more about the issues of Reform and Progress facing our profession.

Another issue that Jerry disliked was the anti-social stance our radical insurgents took on every issue. While the “philosophers” preach their anti-anything-medical dogma, little did they realize the public wasn’t buying that rap according to Jerry:

“For all these problems, the reward seems to be an image more of ‘anti-medicine’ and ‘anti-science’ than one of ‘pro-chiropractic.’ The confusion to the public and the power brokers is extreme. They simply will not tolerate anecdotal stories about the lack of benefits of the mainstream health delivery system.”

(McAndrews J. Private communication. May 11, 1993)

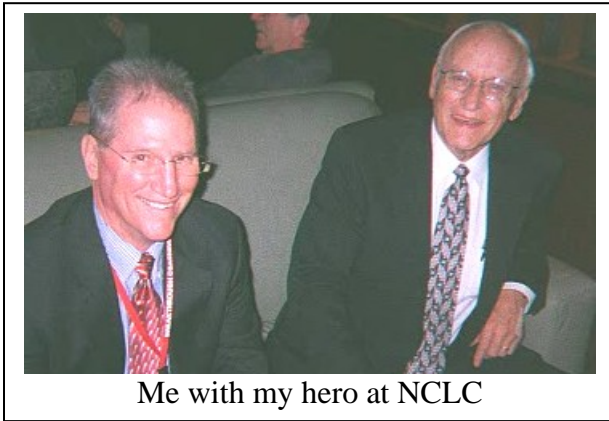


Unity was another topic that Jerry constantly told me was a dead issue. After years dealing with the “loonies” (his moniker for those who oppose unity), he knew they would never agree to join the mainstream chiropractic professionals in the

ACA since their self-interests superseded our professional collective interests. This conflict of interest was a major difference between he and the leaders of the loonies—Jerry wasn’t selling anything nor was he promoting himself as the Savior of Subluxation.

He was, however, a rational diplomat and spokesman for this profession who tired of apologizing for the actions of our loonies and their resistance to Unity. “This won’t be accomplished easily,” as he once told me. “Conversation proves to be a waste of time when you’re dealing with fortune-telling-like faith.” Every time I mentioned the need for Unity in my commentaries, he would send me a short note to the effect: “Jim, you can’t work with these loonies. Don’t waste your time.” He wasn’t being negative; he was simply rational about this dilemma.

My wife and I once had the fortunate opportunity of chatting with Jerry over dessert in the restaurant at the hotel at NCLC while he slowly savored his customary favorite—a bowl of vanilla ice cream. For three hours we listened as he spoke about many issues facing our profession such as legislative issues in Congress, historical events concerning BJ, conversations Jerry had with David Palmer, his involvement with the ICA and ACA as well as in the Wilk case, plus his own personal accounts as a spokesman for our profession. Indeed, he was a treasure trove of stories and a charming storyteller as his friends certainly knew.



Sitting there listening to his many stories left me in awe of this man's storied career, realizing how important his involvement has been for the last forty years. Apparently his reputation preceded him as I watched an endless trail of DCs come to our table to say hello, shake his hand and wishing him the best as if Jerry was holding court. Indeed, he wasn't just another colleague to these admirers; Jerry was treated as royalty in our profession. Although he might have argued against

such praise, to me he will always be remembered as "Sir Jerry."

While the stories about his years as president of Palmer and his involvement in the Wilk case were incredibly interesting, perhaps the most poignant stories he told were about his brother. Jerry recounted how many DCs at first criticized the selection of George as the lead counsel in the Wilk case citing nepotism. Unbeknownst to most, apparently George didn't want to take the case initially, and did so only after no other law firm in Chicago was willing to take on the AMA for the downtrodden chiropractors.

Finally, George capitulated to accept this case principally due to Jerry's urging. Little did the chiropractic profession realize the magnitude of the case or of George's skill as a barrister. According to Jerry who loved to brag about his brother, George not only graduated number one in his class at Notre Dame, but he also had the highest IQ of any law student, and his ultra-successful law practice in Chicago verifies to the fact that the chiropractic profession got a lot more for their money than they realized.

As Jerry recounted to us that night about his brother, at one point it brought tears to his eyes. He sat there misty-eyed, thinking of many thoughts about his brother, choosing his words carefully. "I love my brother, not just because he's my brother, but for what he's done for this profession." Jerry sat silently for a few moments staring straight ahead, thinking undoubtedly of the many feats his brother had accomplished, and finally returned to real time by excusing himself for being so emotional.

We were touched by his obvious love for his brother, and no apology was necessary. In fact, we felt honored to have been there to witness his heart-felt reaction. For those of you who knew Jerry, his Lincolnesque stature was very obvious, and his gratitude for his brother only added to his regal presence. Indeed, this profession is fortunate to have had brethren of this stature fighting our legal battles. As George once admitted, he was “born to try the Wilk case,” and as he told Jerry, “We’ll make this a present to Dad for what they did to him.”

At Jerry’s funeral in his hometown of Clinton, Iowa on June 15, 2006, along with his



extended family of siblings, children and grandchildren, a small group of notable DCs met for brunch in a restaurant near the Sacred Heart Catholic Church before the memorial service began. This group of Jerry’s closest friends spoke of their admiration for him, each recounting special stories about this icon—his fascination with

high-tech toys, his good humor, his love of movies, his close family, and his love of vanilla ice cream—indeed, anyone who ever broke bread with Jerry knew of his sweet tooth for vanilla.

As a tribute to Jerry, former ICA/ACA president Mike Pedigo ordered a bowlful of vanilla ice cream and asked each of use to take a spoonful in honor of Jerry. It was homage akin to eating the wafer and drinking the wine at a Catholic mass.

To all of his many colleagues who loved Jerry but were unable to attend his funeral, may I ask that the next time you have a scoop of ice cream, order vanilla and think of my hero, Sir Jerry McAndrews. It’s a small tribute I’m sure he’d appreciate.

Postscript:

There is a Jerome F. McAndrews, DC, Memorial research fund being established at the NCMIC Foundation for anyone who was touched or moved by Jerry McAndrews and may wish to help perpetuate his love for research. Make checks payable to NCMIC Foundation, 14002 University Avenue, Clive, IA 50325.