

Quiet Heroes

Editorial Staff

Both served prison terms in 1949. -- The photos (taken in 1926) are courtesy of the David D. Palmer Health Sciences Library Archives, Palmer College of Chiropractic.

Editor's note: If you've been paying attention, you'll know that chiropractors in certain parts of the world are still being arrested for "practicing medicine without a license" (see "Arrested in Thailand," Aug. 25, 1997 issue of Dynamic Chiropractic).

No smugness here, for it wasn't that long ago that the same thing was happening on a regular basis to chiropractors in the United States. Take the case of Mack and Kitty Scallon, who were jailed in New York in 1949 for providing chiropractic care to patients.¹ The Scallons were later part of the effort that brought chiropractic licensure to New York state in 1963.

"Quiet Heroes" was the third in a series of articles first published in Chiropractic Conversations, a newsletter edited by DCs Rick and Rebecca Hartman, who have graciously given DC the permission to reprint. The original letters the Hartman's used with the article were courtesy of the archives at Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic.

Prologue

"It's not good enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what is required." -- Winston Churchill

Michael ("Mack") and Kathryn ("Kitty") Scallon were married in 1919. Kitty had suffered from epilepsy since childhood, but shortly after they were married, also contracted tuberculosis. She entered a TB sanitarium, where one kidney was removed in a medical effort to cure her. (How's that for an amazing example of the medical wisdom of the day?)

Upon leaving the sanitarium, she went to a chiropractor. She improved so dramatically from the tuberculosis symptoms that both she and Mack decided to become chiropractors themselves.

After graduation from Palmer, they moved to Manhattan to practice.

They had been in practice over 25 years when they were arrested for "practicing medicine without a license." (There were still no provisions for licensing in New York state at the time.)

A cover letter written by Dr. Mack was recently found at Palmer College in which he was referring one of his patients to Dr. Lyle Sherman at the BJ Palmer Research Clinic. As an aside, Dr. Mack briefly mentions the arrest. He confidently states he and Kitty have a good lawyer who assures them there is nothing to worry about. As it turned out, Mack served a full year sentence; Kitty, frail as she was (her epilepsy persisted throughout her life), served six months of hard labor. They were in their mid-50s.

Their story is more autobiographical than narrative. The poignant words are theirs, not ours, and are excerpted from their letters written from prison to their friend and fellow chiropractor, Dr. Milton Garfunkle. Some letters are stamped "CENSORED," and carry a warning to prisoners as to

what subjects can or cannot be discussed. Their letters and lives speak for themselves.

Sunday, January 23, 1949

Dear Milton,

I sometimes think this is all a horrible dream and when I realize it isn't a terrible feeling comes over me and when I see the bars in my cell I know I'm in jail.

The hard part of it all is the terrible injustice. Two people, whose uppermost thoughts were to help others and who have led such upright good lives, to be put through this humiliation and suffering just doesn't make sense.

Well, I know I must not allow bitterness into my heart and I am trying to hold my chin up and make the best of the situation. But today I am in a depressed mood, remembering last Sunday, our last day together with my dear darling Mack, who is always in good humor and has such a sunny disposition. I don't mind anything as much as I do his absence.

All mail incoming and outgoing is censored. In fact, they take the letter out of the envelope before we get it.

I work in the sewing room. At first they put me running a power machine, but I was so nervous they changed me, so now I sit and embroider. It is very easy and I don't mind it ...

The cells are about 7 feet long and 6 feet wide. Twelve cells on each corridor. We have heat and electricity, running water and a toilet in each cell. I sleep on a cot attached to the wall. I have a good-sized window in my cell and can look out and see the street ...

Well, Milton, I'll close now sending best wishes to you and all we know.

Write me when you can.

Love as ever,

Kitty

Circa January 1949

Dear Milton,

Well Milton, this is the hardest letter I have ever written as there is really nothing to tell you other than I have to stay on Harts Island until some time in September. I arrived here Friday and I believe this will be my address for the duration of my "vacation."

I heard from Kitty today. She seems to be doing all right.

When you and the 2 Joe's are playing cards, you can think of me. I found a couple of pretty good players, so I believe the time will pass OK.

Everyone here is very nice as long as you obey orders and behave yourself.

To me it is just like the army. We sleep in a big room just like a barracks.

No cells.

I am working in the mess hall. It is the cleanest kitchen I have ever seen.

The officers here really know how to treat men as human beings. They are trying to build men who have been convicted by the courts into better citizens.

I heard there's quite an article on "Jail or Compromise" in The Chiropractor. Save it for me.

I will write every so often.

Best regards to all.

Mack

"The cells are about 7 feet long and 6 feet wide. ... When I felt downhearted, I could always perk up again when I thought of chiropractic." -- From a letter to Milton Garfinkle from Kitty, May 15, 1949

May 15, 1949

Dear Milton,

Hello old Pal. I realize how you have been doing so much for us plus your own duties. I hope you won't think I'm selfish in asking you to drop me a few lines.

Milton, hearing of Mabel's death, then Laddie (he was one of our teachers) just made me feel terribly sad. The loss of so many old chiropractic standbys brings an ache to our souls which time alone can appease.

My stay here has been the unhappiest experience I've ever gone through. To be shut in behind bars deflates one's bravery at times. But, thank God, when I felt downhearted, I could always perk up again when I thought of chiropractic and the many people it has helped and how it had helped me back to health after I had tried every other method of healing. With these thoughts, I'd throw my shoulders back again ready and willing to make any sacrifice which would help to free our beloved science.

Between being Mack's wife and a chiropractor I am doubly blessed. So I try to take this cross and bear it bravely to prove myself worthy of these blessings.

I often think of the hearty laughs we've had together and I just laugh all over again. God always gives us something to laugh about, even in our darkest hours.

Well Milton, before you know it, I'll be home again. Gosh what a sweet word that is. I suppose I'll feel strange there for the first few days. I should be back in time to escort Mack home (Sept. 6th).

I am going up on the roof now for an hour. (That's the only outdoors we can have here.) So I'll say so long.

Always your friend,

Kitty

While imprisoned, Milton Garfinkle worked in their office as well as his own. He was practicing "illegally" also, so he was taking a great risk. He collected the money, paid their overhead from it, and set the rest aside for when the Scallons returned.

Kitty was released from prison on a Thursday morning and resumed caring for patients that same afternoon. Kitty voiced one regret: When she first went to a restaurant after being released, she began to eat with her fingers, forgetting that now she was allowed to use utensils.

Mack served his full sentence also, but he didn't stay in the barracks for long. He lived in the warden's home, providing chiropractic care for him and his family. When Dr. Mack's prison term was up, the warden gave him a valuable oil painting in appreciation for the chiropractic care they had received. Mack then returned to Manhattan to practice.

It is an additional expression of the depth of character of the Scallons that they never informed BJ of their arrest and imprisonment. Their reasoning? They didn't want to burden him with their troubles.

Prison did not stop them from resuming practice. They not only practiced for many more years, but they became very involved in the American Bureau of Chiropractic movement in New York. Each chiropractor would establish a group of his or her patients who would petition their politicians for chiropractic causes. These dedicated patient groups would gather once a year, filling Madison Square Garden, in a show of support of their chiropractors throughout the state. These efforts were successful because eventually a New York Chiropractic Practice Act was written and passed.

As to the concluding chapters of their lives? Mack and Kitty never had children. Milton Garfinkle and their other chiropractic friends are also gone. No easily located records tell of their passing. We do know Mack lived into his mid-80s, and Kitty into her mid-90s.

At first this seems a sad final note to noble lives. But further reflection reveals that what records we do have of them are of their finest hours. Perhaps this is as the Scallons would have wanted it.

[Our thanks go to librarians Ruth Ann Smith of Sherman College, and Jetta Nash of Palmer College for their helpfulness. Also special thanks go to Dr. Thom Gelardi, not only for giving of his time, but also for sharing these letters.] -- The Editors

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Reference 1. Quiet heroes: third in a series. Chiropractic Conversations, 1993;11(2):4-6.

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