

Remembering Dr. Sid Williams

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On Dec. 30, 2012, under a bright, clear sky greeted by a crisp winter chill, members of the global chiropractic community gathered for a memorial service marking the passing of an icon of the profession, Dr. Sid E. Williams. Dr. Williams, founder of Life Foundation International, *Today's Chiropractic* magazine, Life University and Life Chiropractic College West, was one of the alpha-ions of the second half of the history of our profession. A visionary, charismatic, outspoken and colorful champion of chiropractic, Dr. Williams was known the world over as "Sid." In his day, there was no one in chiropractic that was not familiar with him and [his efforts](#).

A True Son of the South

Born in Rome, Ga., Sid lived most of his life in the greater Atlanta area. He attended Tech High in Atlanta and completed his undergraduate education at the Georgia Institute of Technology. During his Tech years he was a noted athlete, recognized "pound-for-pound as the finest defensive end he had ever coached" by famed coach Bobby Dodd. Sid's career in college football was capped by being a member of Tech's 1951 undefeated team and by an appearance in the 1952 Orange Bowl. He went on to be inducted into the Georgia Tech Athletic Hall of Fame in 1999.

It was his athletic pursuits that provided his introduction to chiropractic. Injured as an athlete, he lost his strength, stamina and speed. After consultations at the finest medical facilities Georgia Tech could provide, he came under the care of Dr. T.O. Humber, a Grostic practitioner in Atlanta. In this encounter were the seeds of a lifetime of commitment, dedication and leadership in the chiropractic profession.



Drs. Sid and Nell Williams at the Chiropractic Centennial celebration in 1995. Photo courtesy of Dr. Gary Auerbach.

After graduating from Georgia Tech, Sid and Ms. Nell Kimbrough were married. On their honeymoon, they headed for Davenport and the Palmer School of Chiropractic. Together they began their education and a partnership in chiropractic that would extend to his dying day.

While attending Palmer, Dr. Williams was captivated by the writings and the persona of B.J. Palmer. The lore of Dr. Sid holds that he wore the covers off of several sets of the "Green Books" dominated by the writings of B.J.

Sid and Nell returned to the small town of Austell, Ga., 20 miles west of Atlanta, where they began their practice. In very short order the Drs. Williams were attracting regional and then national attention for the success of their chiropractic practice. Soon additional clinics were opened and at the height of the Williams' practice experience, more than 20 chiropractic clinics were operating in and around the Atlanta area due to Dr. Sid's vision and drive.

A Developing National Role

From this success Dr. Sid Williams started to host meetings in his office every Tuesday to help other chiropractors develop the skill and capacity to enjoy the success he and Dr. Nell were experiencing. These Tuesday-night meetings became what we continue to know to this day as the Life Dynamic Essentials (DE) meetings, where Sid, Nell and their longtime friend and colleague, Dr. D.D. Humber, the brother of Dr. Sid's first chiropractor, took their practice success to the profession at large.

It was during this period that B.J. passed away, and the profession seemed to be floundering and in need of leadership. Dr. Williams began to emerge as a powerful figure in chiropractic. The Life DE meetings, hosted by Dr. Williams, continued to grow and to gather more and more attention from the chiropractic community. At this time, Sid was active in the ICA as a member of the Representative Assembly, and he and Dr. Nell were also active in supporting the chiropractic profession with office materials, supplies and equipment through their company, Si-Nel Publishing.

Dr. Sid recognized the need for a charitable foundation working on behalf of the profession and founded Life Foundation International. Life Foundation was chartered and approved as a 501 C (3) service, education and research-oriented agency. About the same time, Dr. Sid founded *Today's Chiropractic* magazine, an internationally distributed voice of the Life movement offering the chiropractic profession Sid's perspective on chiropractic, practice and professional growth. Sid was now an emerging leader in the ICA, a publisher, a foundation president, a journalist and a practitioner.

The 1960s saw the development of the Medicare system in the U.S. By the early 1970s, Dr. Williams became a champion in the efforts to see that chiropractic care was included under Medicare. At the same time, the profession was dealing with the last few states yet to obtain licensure. Active in both of these campaigns, Dr. Williams often related the story of mail trucks delivering countless petitions from concerned chiropractic patients to Senator Wilbur Mills' Washington office. Mills served as the chair of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, and he held that position longer than anyone in U.S. history. He was central to the implementation of Medicare and was acknowledged as "the most powerful man in Washington" at that time. From Sid's perspective, it was the signatures of hundreds of thousands of Americans that he, Life DE meeting supporters and others throughout the profession gathered that turned the tide, causing chiropractic care to be included in the Medicare system.

In a similar fashion, Sid recounted the licensure struggles in Louisiana and head-to-head battles with Louisiana native Joseph Sabatier, MD, the chair of the American Medical Association's infamous Committee on Quackery. Sid often told the story of a chiropractic-led, New Orleans-style funeral in Baton Rouge, complete with a casket symbolizing the death of chiropractic in Louisiana, confronting Sabatier and colleagues on the steps of the state Capitol during the struggle for licensure there.

Dr. Williams' first 20 years in chiropractic set the stage for him to make his biggest and most impactful impression on the chiropractic profession in the decades that followed.

From Practitioner to Chiropractic College Founder and President

In 1973 the U.S. Secretary of Education recognized the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE) as a reputable authority for first professional degree programs leading to the Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.). Suddenly chiropractic education had entered a new era. Dr. Williams had long felt that one of the weaknesses of the profession was the emphasis of its educational programs. This recent change presented an opportunity to take some bold steps and to attempt to improve upon the status quo of chiropractic education in the U.S.

In 1974 Dr. Williams announced the founding of Life Chiropractic College in Marietta, Ga. This announcement was received with great enthusiasm among the supporters of Dr. Williams, the Life DE meetings and Life Foundation International. At the same time, it was viewed with a very jaundiced eye by the leadership of the chiropractic educational community and the newly empowered CCE that had emerged from the hierarchy of the ACA.

In the summer of 1974 at a Life DE meeting, over \$500,000 (the equivalent of \$2.5 million in 2013) was raised. It appeared that Life Chiropractic College would become a reality. On Jan. 20, 1975 with a faculty of three, a staff of three and a student body of 22, President Williams welcomed the pioneer class of Life Chiropractic College to their new campus in Marietta - a leased building formerly occupied by Lockheed Aircraft.

The conventional wisdom held that the powers-that-be would never allow Life Chiropractic College to become accredited. Dr. Williams appreciated the fact that as an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, the CCE was not free to act capriciously. It could make it tough; brutal, in fact - and it did - but sooner or later it had to come down to following the *Standards* of the agency. And at that point, the agency would have no choice but to award its recognition to the fledgling institution.

In November 1977, weeks before the pioneer class of Life Chiropractic College was expected to graduate, Dr. Williams received a letter from then-CCE Commission Chair Orvil Hidde, DC, JD, advising that Life Chiropractic College had been awarded the first level of CCE recognition, Correspondence Status. It was from this point that Life Chiropractic College experienced a meteoric increase in enrollment, from 22 students in January 1975 to more than 1,500 students in January 1981.

Dr. Sid was about to hit his stride. By this time Dr. Williams had moved from the Representative Assembly of the ICA to its Board of Directors, and then in a few short years to its presidency in 1982. This period was important, as it was a time of increased political presence and power in his role as president and subsequently as chairman of the board of the ICA. The increase in Sid's impact on the profession was also due to his efforts at Life Chiropractic College, having transitioned to Life College, with a school of chiropractic and a school of undergraduate studies now beginning to offer a series of undergraduate degrees.

His influence in educational circles of the profession was extended yet again with Pacific States Chiropractic College becoming Life Chiropractic College West. In its initial configuration, Dr. Williams was named chancellor of Life Chiropractic College West while continuing to serve as president of Life College.

The 1990s saw the continued growth of Life College and Life Chiropractic College West, and the transition of Life College into Life University with the addition of several graduate degree programs. This time period included two other important events for [Dr. Williams](#) - the 1995 Chiropractic Centennial and the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. One of the greatly anticipated highlights of the Chiropractic Centennial gathering in Washington, D.C., was the widely promoted appearance of Dr. Jim Parker and Dr. Williams in the same session. Each gentleman offered an excellent presentation, but neither knew it, as each chose not to be present in the room to hear the other. What was expected to be a fiery, nose-to-nose exchange never materialized.

During this time, Dr. Williams and Life University became regular advertisers on Atlanta's Superstation Channel 17, the precursor to today's CNN, HLN and TNT. Dr. Williams was always featured prominently in these ads and they were often the source of many humorous comments around campus, but the net result was that Life University and Dr. Sid Williams were celebrities in the Southeast because of the effort. Dr. Williams became such a regular in the Turner Broadcasting community that on several occasions, he participated in the Turner Trumpet Awards as a presenter, introducing such luminaries as Ray Charles and Tyra Banks.

Harkening back to his athletic days, and having an incredible sense of entrepreneurship, Dr. Williams set about bringing the Atlanta Olympics to Life University. There were no plans to have any Olympic events on the Life University campus or even in Cobb County, so Dr. Williams had to find another way to bring the Olympians and their related publicity to Life University. The answer: a training facility, complete with an exact replica of the track the Olympians would be competing on in Atlanta in the Olympic stadium. The track and the timing system developed on the Life University campus was state-of-the-art and it accomplished its goal by bringing many national teams to Marietta for extra training time. Sid might not have brought the Olympics to Marietta, but he did the next best thing - he brought the Olympic athletes to Marietta, Life University and to an introduction to chiropractic care!

Following the Olympics, Sid secured one of the seven prized Olympic sculptures that had been commissioned by the organizing committee. He had it installed on the campus of Life University in the D.D. Humber Garden of Life, dedicated to the spirit of the Olympic movement and the dedication of all who pursued the Olympic ideals of *Citius, Altius, Fortius* [Faster, Higher, Stronger].

The Closing Decade

As the world welcomed a new millennium, Life University's enrollment was surpassing the 4,000 mark and the university earned several NAIA national championships in basketball and other championships in rugby. However, storm clouds were beginning to form in Dr. Williams' world. He was now in his early 70s and the leadership of the CCE was increasingly removed from his generation and from the experiences that helped to shape him as a chiropractic leader. He soon found himself at loggerheads with the CCE over conflicting perspectives on the profession. In 2002, [he retired](#) from the presidency of Life University.

The decade following his retirement found Dr. Williams enjoying the company of his two children, both Life University graduate chiropractors, and their families, especially his three grandsons. This time also found him suffering the effects of his advancing years and the compounding effect of his athletic endeavors. He continued to be active with Life Foundation International and hosted the Life DE meetings. His role in each arena began to lessen and was brought to close after he suffered a middle cerebral artery stroke on Dec. 24, 2011.

Some Personal Reflections on My Friend and Mentor

It was my good fortune to first meet Dr. Williams as a 16-year-old kid attending a Life DE meeting in July 1968 with my chiropractor and mentor, Dr. Cameron Cassan. I was taken by the man and began a relationship with him that continued as a student at Palmer in the early 1970s and then as a member of the founding faculty of Life Chiropractic College in January 1975. I considered him one of my greatest teachers and one of the most important influences in my life. My respect for him was and is tremendous. He taught me about a "Lasting Purpose" - about loving, serving and giving out of one's abundance with no expectation of return.

Sid breathed fire and passion into the hearts and minds of thousands of chiropractors as he exhorted us to understand and appreciate the contribution we could make to humankind through our lives as chiropractors.

Along the way, I gained an understanding of Dr. Williams that seems to have escaped many who dealt with him. He was the consummate athlete. Every encounter, from hello to goodbye, was an athletic competition. If you saw Sid through this lens he made sense; the farther from this perspective, the less so. I never felt like I worked with Sid; I always understood that I worked for him. Truth be told, I don't think anyone ever worked with him; he was always the center of power and activity. I was fine with that. It was his vision that fueled my dreams and I was grateful to be along for the ride, and I am thankful for all he made possible in my life.

Dr. Williams would often close his presentations by quoting Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life":

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