



CHIROPRACTIC (GENERAL)

The Life & Legacy of James Sigafosse, DC (1933-2014)

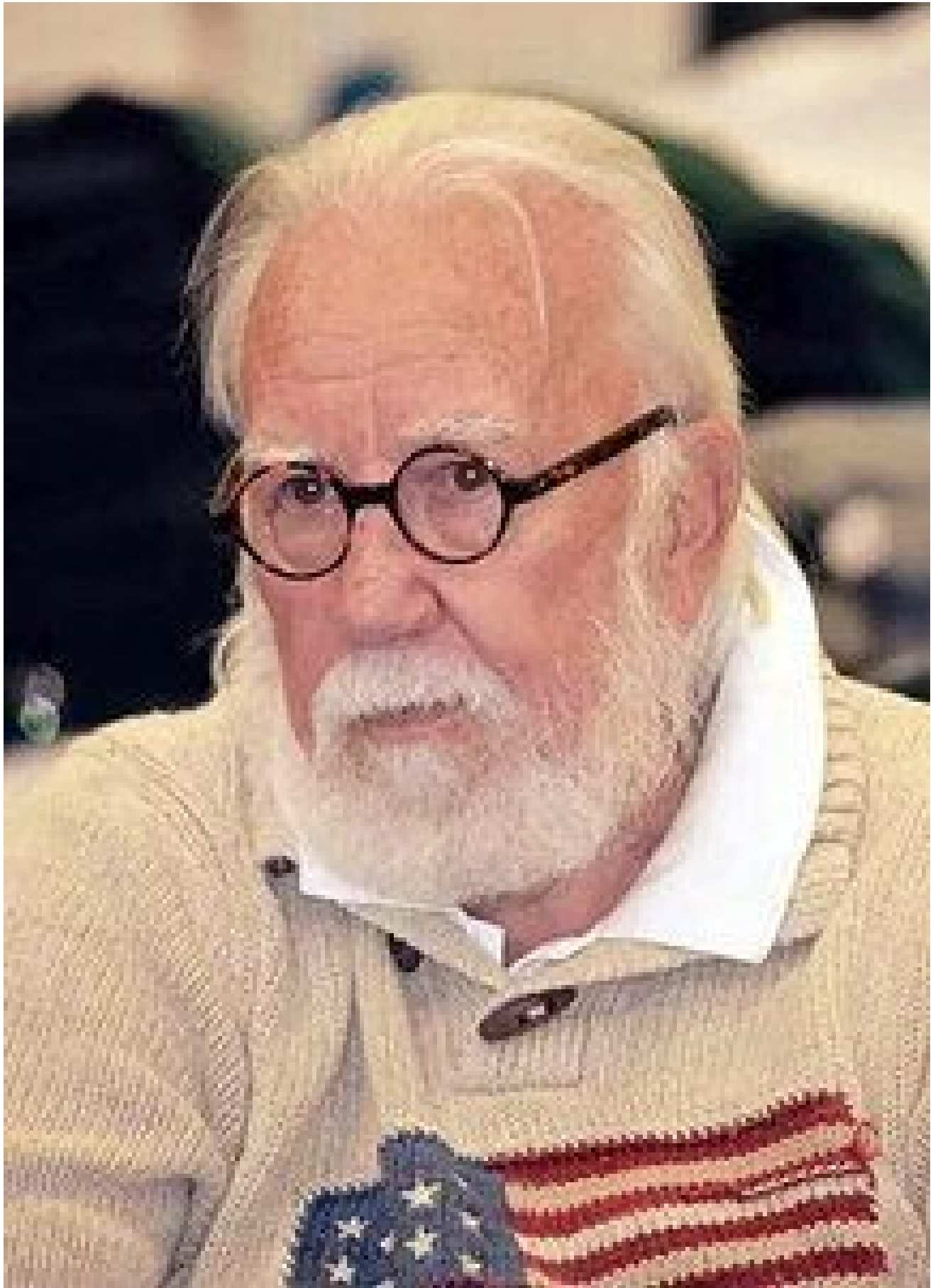
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Surrounded by his family and closest friends, Dr. James M. Sigafosse passed away quietly on Thursday, July 3, 2014. With his wife of 60 years, Patsy, along with his children, Tina, Daun, Kieth, Selina and Carey - all chiropractors - at his side, one of the most well-known voices in the profession has gone silent.

Known around the world as "Jim," "Sig" and "Sigafosse the Great," Dr. Sigafosse was a tireless crusader, encouraging chiropractors to more fully appreciate the power and significance of the chiropractic adjustment, as well as the healing capacity each of us has within us.

Less than a week before suffering an anterior cerebral artery stroke, Sig was a keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the International Chiropractors Association (ICA) in Overland Park, Kan., on the campus of Cleveland Chiropractic College. He was honored at the convention banquet and was awarded the "Herbert Ross Reaver Award" for his decades of courageous efforts on behalf of chiropractors around the world. At the same banquet he also was able to see his daughter Selina inducted into the Fellows of the ICA.

Dr. Sigafosse was present on virtually every stage the profession had to offer. He first revealed his speaking skills in the late 1960s at the Life DE meetings held in Atlanta. As the years progressed, he was welcomed to state association meetings across the country and ultimately to international gatherings of chiropractors. He was as comfortable speaking to thousands as he was speaking in the five-chair waiting room of a DC who had called upon him for counsel and guidance. His message was born of hard work, tragedy, suffering and redemption.



Growing Up

Sig was born to Kitty and Harry Sigafoose on Aug. 29, 1933, in the hard-scrapple town of Winchester, West Va., and grew up on the shores of Chesapeake Bay in the greater Baltimore, Md. area. He graduated from Dundalk High School in 1951 and soon thereafter was drafted into military service in the U.S. Army, where he trained as a sharp-shooter and served as a member of the Military Police until his honorable discharge in 1954.

It was then that he married his beloved Patsy (whom he first met when she was 4 years old and he was 7 years old) on Dec. 4, 1954. They soon left the familiar environs of the Baltimore area and headed to Chicago, where Sig enrolled at the National College of Chiropractic in 1955. While at National, Jim and Patsy were blessed with their first wave of children - Chriss, Tina and Kieth.

Upon graduation from National in 1959, Dr. and Mrs. Sigafoose and family headed to Saegertown, Pa., for a short period of time before moving closer to their roots in the greater Baltimore area, settling in New Freedom, Pa. The years that followed brought four more children: twins Dean and Daun (1960), Selina (1965) and Carey (1967).

The Early Years in Practice: Shaped by Philosophy, Tragedy

Sig's early practice years were rather lackluster and his family circumstances turned tragic with the death of Dean Sigafoose as a young child from bacterial meningitis. This was a critical point in the life of the young father and chiropractor; something Dr. Sigafoose spoke of many times in many settings in the years that followed.

Sig had left National with a strong bias toward chiropractic care as a mechanical treatment for mechanical-originating pain problems. He viewed himself, in his words, as a musculoskeletal specialist, so the thought of adjusting his sick infant son at any point along the way was simply not a part of his conception of chiropractic. He carried this burden with him until the day he died, asking "What if" he had adjusted Dean, and questioning whether his dear baby son would have lived if his father had only given him an adjustment.

Out of this tragic loss came a personal, emotional and spiritual crisis for Dr. Sigafoose, and he unknowingly began a search for his purpose in life. He was miserable as a father and provider; he was seeing about 25 patients a week in practice, and was unhappy and unfilled in his career and life as a chiropractor.

A Turning Point

A good friend from Clearfield, Pa., Dr. Clark Rich, a Palmer graduate practicing in the heart of the Coal Belt, encouraged Sig to join him and attend a meeting in Harrisburg, Pa., to hear a young man from the Atlanta area - Dr. Sid E. Williams. Sig went at Clark's urging / insistence and left in anger, as Dr. Williams challenged the very basis of his life, career and profession. Yet something in the words of this radical chiropractor from the South rang true for him, and Sig returned to hear him again. Then in 1968, Dr. Sigafoose attended a Life DE meeting at the Atlanta Airport Hilton Hotel, and his life was changed.



From Dr. Williams, Sig received a greater vision for chiropractic care, the power and implications of the chiropractic adjustment, the vision of a life of service to humankind through chiropractic, and the Dynamic Essentials message of loving, giving and serving. Sid was expressing. Dr. Sigafosse was a changed man.

There were two stories, oft repeated, that emerged from Sig's initial DE meeting - both important and impactful. Sig spoke of leaving the meeting, walking up a flight of stairs and experiencing a vision of an angel who presented him with a great sword. He was told to "cut a path that others may follow." He took this event very seriously and accepted a sense of responsibility to do as instructed.

In contrast, he often told the story of returning to his office on the Sunday after his first Life DE Meeting and getting rid of his therapy machines, his gowns, and his medical attitude of sickness and disease; throwing them metaphorically and in reality down the stairs and out of his office! No matter how many times you heard the story, no matter how prepared you were to provide the next line if he didn't, it was inspiring to experience what can happen to a man or woman who changes their heart, mind and vision.

Once back in New Freedom, the practice exploded, going from 25 visits a week to 100s of visits a week in less than three months. Sigafosse was a man on fire! It was not long before the little office in New Freedom was taken past its capacity and a much larger clinic was needed to serve the people who came from the neighborhood, county, state, across the country and around the world to be cared for by this most unusual of chiropractors.

Once constructed, the waiting room seated 300 people and the office would consistently see more than

2,000 patient visits per week for years.

Attracting a Spotlight

It was during these years that Dr. Sigafoose began to attract people's attention - a great deal of attention! The chiropractic community was divided about how to make sense of this phenomenon in the Pennsylvania countryside; many sought to emulate his efforts and follow his example, while others sought to restrict and curtail his activities.

Dr. Sigafoose continued to follow his mentor's lead as Dr. Williams spoke of removing barriers to care and making chiropractic care affordable for the masses. Sigafoose was at the point of this spear, offering his community X-ray services at no charge, and using any and every opportunity to tell the story of chiropractic to any and all who would listen or even come within earshot.

One of Sig's most talked-about efforts were his famous (*infamous* in the eyes of his enemies) free chicken dinner patient lectures, the country precursor to today's "lunch and learn" gatherings of many practitioners of many disciplines.

In 1970, Dr. Sigafoose was invited to speak at the Life DE Meeting in Atlanta. It was at this time that the Maynard G. Krebs-quauffed, Van Dyke-bearded, Nehru jacket-attired, native American turquoise and silver "squash blossom" medallion-adorned phenom from rural Pennsylvania was dubbed "Sigafoose the Great" by none other than his mentor, Dr. Sid Williams, and his dear friend Dr. D.D. Humber. The moniker stuck and the personality grew to match the salutation given. Dr. Sigafoose / Sig / Jim / Sigafoose the Great began down his path toward designation as a chiropractic icon.

It was also at this time that Dr. Williams and the participants at the Life DE Meeting began to feel the calling to establish a chiropractic college that would teach about the power of an adjustment; that would value service above self as a chiropractor; and that would place the needs of the public to know about chiropractic above any norm that would seek to restrain that voice.

B.J. had died about a decade earlier, the ICA had split and many ICA leaders had joined with their colleagues in the National Chiropractic Association (NCA) to form the American Chiropractic Association (ACA). Nationally the push was on for the inclusion of chiropractic in the Medicare system, and the ACA and ICA had competing accrediting agencies seeking recognition by the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW). It was a seething, roiling, boiling moment of change for the profession, and the Life DE community did not like the direction in which it appeared to be moving.

In the spring of 1974, Patsy Sigafoose, at Dr. Williams' request, organized a "vacation trip" for Dr. Williams' closest and arguably most successful followers to meet in Ormond Beach, Fla. From this meeting emerged the often-recounted "walk on the beach" where Dr. Williams and his colleagues germinated the seeds of what would become Life Chiropractic College and Life University. Jim and Patsy Sigafoose were at the heart of these discussions, and Sig ultimately became a founding trustee of Life Chiropractic College.

Sig was now a fixture on the program of the Life DE Meetings, drawing an audience that rivaled Dr. Williams' opening sessions on Thursday afternoon. He was a master story-teller with the ability to take an audience from side-splitting hilarity to tears with a glance and a grin. As young chiropractors at the time, Sig, Sid and others on the Life DE platform were bigger than life - and remained so for the rest of their lives.

Dr. Sigafoose was now a much-sought-after speaker for chiropractic meetings across the country and around the world. His personality, charisma and commitment extended beyond the banalities of language and geography, and his contribution to the profession became a global one.

Following in His Footsteps

In the late 1970s, Sig's first born, Chriss, completed his DC degree at Life Chiropractic College (now Life University) and returned home to Pennsylvania, where he literally followed in his father's footsteps in the "big office." Soon thereafter, in 1980, Jim and Patsy headed out of the snows of Pennsylvania and into the sunshine of the Florida Gulf coast, settling in Venice, Fla. Sig's practice emphasis had lessened by this time, as his speaking and consulting talents were more in demand than ever by the mid-1980s.

Someplace along the way, Sig transitioned from a driven practice coach and advisor to a concerned and loving father / grandfather figure for chiropractors of all ages. He wasn't the kindly grandpa that would always give you the benefit of the doubt; rather, he was a sterner soul who held your feet to the fire - not because it felt good for him, but because it was better for you.

Out of this style of leadership and mentorship came a cadre of loyal and dedicated followers who loved just to be in his presence, no matter where he was or what he was doing. When you were with Sigafoose the Great, the world made a little bit more sense and was far more tolerable.

"The Gatherings" came to be in 1989. Small- to medium-sized groups of chiropractors who wanted to learn from the master gathered around the world to enjoy each other's company, to learn from one another and most importantly, to be schooled on a one-to-one basis by Sig. On five continents in dozens of cities and towns, Sigafoose held court, teaching anyone who wanted to learn the nuances of chiropractic, of service and of dedication - all the while continuing to give thanks and acknowledgement to his mentor, Dr. Williams, who had saved his career and life so many years before.

Soon, more Sigafooses graduated from Life Chiropractic College. Chris followed Jim and Patsy to Florida, while Tina headed back to Pennsylvania. To this day, Tina takes care of the folks in Pennsylvania, with almost three decades of practice experience behind her. Upon graduation, Kieth practiced in Europe and Daun headed to Maryland, where he set about developing his life and practice.

Selina followed suit, marrying a young Canadian graduate from Life Chiropractic College, Kevin Jackson, DC. Together, the young couple set about developing their practice and lives together in chiropractic. And Carey, the youngest of the brood, completed his DC degree and headed back to the Chesapeake Bay as his mom and dad before him had done. No single family has had more brothers and sisters graduate from Life Chiropractic College than that of Jim and Patsy Sigafoose!

Like most families, each member of the family was a unique and distinctive as a fingerprint. Chriss, the eldest, was the peacemaker, organizer, nanny and anchor of the crowd. Tina became the consistent, reliable one, working over the adjusting table in Pennsylvania year after year. Kieth is the wheeler-dealer of the family; Daun, the quiet, hard-working, but fun-loving good business man of the bunch. Selina emerged as the matriarch and most public of the next generation, and Carey has stayed eternally young and delightful.

Their individual and collective worlds were rocked in recent years by Chriss' death as a result of the

complications of colon cancer. The tragedy took a toll on everyone, but particularly Jim and Patsy. Losing yet another child was devastating to them. Sig was rocked to the core. Gone was his ever-smiling, fit-as-a-fiddle, friend-to-everyone and enemy-to-no-one son. He didn't speak as publicly of Chriss' passing as he did Dean's. It remained fresh, raw and an emotional struggle for him until his own passing.

A Lasting Legacy

You didn't need to be around Sig for very long to understand his focus and drive. His personality was one of many contrasts: He could be as kind, loving and gentle as any man, but at the same time, you knew he was no one to be toyed with. It was clearly only a fool who would take him on - and once they did, they had better be ready for the fight of their life.

Dr. Sigafoose was a deeply spiritual person. He was a student of Native American spirituality, tradition and lore. He felt a kinship with these perspectives while also embracing Christianity. These perspectives and their compatibility with the writings of Palmer were central to Jim Sigafoose at his core.

He was a voracious reader and a student of history - especially World War II. He read and re-read the "Green Books," extracting more meaning and greater understanding from each read.

His desire to help chiropractors of any age, background or orientation better understand the discipline they were called to was boundless. He eschewed political involvement. He was not an organizational guy - or even a good team player - but he was the best "scout," lone wolf and seeker in the crowd. He held few offices and was not particularly impressed with those who did. He never stopped learning and teaching.

Everyone who knew Sig has their favorite "Sigafoose Story." For some, it was one of the classics he would tell, like The Hog Story, The Story of Mary and the Second Bone in the Neck; or the recounting of a miracle patient seen in the course of one of the many mission trips to Panama and Haiti Sig so enjoyed.

Often he would begin a presentation without direction and no sense of where he was going. He would tell the audience he was waiting for the Spirit to give him the message, and in a matter of minutes the message came and flowed from his soul, heart and mind like a raging river. He unleashed the kind of energy for which you had better be ready, buckled in and holding on.

To Patsy and his beloved children, from each of us who were privileged to have shared him with them, a bid of thanks is owed. Sig shared with us at their expense; we owe them for all he gave us.

Sigafoose the Great has passed. Chiropractic will never be the same. The ramifications of his teachings, guidance and mentorship will emanate from us all in increasingly wider circles over generations to come. Thank you! *Vaya con dios*, Sigafoose the Great!

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