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The Imbroglia of the Professional Greyhound

By Richard C. Schafer, DC, FICC

If you are quiet enough in visiting the pens of a dog track late at night, you'll see the dogs sleeping. Most of them are greyhounds -- slender, swift-running hounds with long legs. It's easy to wonder if they are dreaming of the day when they'll overtake that elusive rabbit -- the promise of heart-wrenching training, discipline, obedience, and effort.

The dogs are generally well cared for, still never allowed to eat until full, and the good ones are popular with the bettors and bookies. To hope that one or two might begin to think about their imbroglia -- their embarrassing misunderstanding -- would be too much to ask. For example, "Is my day-after-day quest truly for a rabbit? A real flesh-and-blood type of hare? Or is it a phony and the deal so rigged that despite my skill and desire I would not be allowed to catch the rabbit?" It's no solace for a thinking hound to realize that his two-legged brethren were caught in a similar trap. He rationalizes that the rabbit must be true, else so many others would not believe.

Such a situation is not tethered to professional greyhounds. Millions upon millions of good-intentioned Soviet citizens have been chasing their "rabbit" under communism for over 70 years and never caught it. Only recently have many started to think -- to question what their leaders have been telling them. The only thing true is that they have a non-profit economy.

Every profession has its radical fringes. Our service is no exception. What bothers me about many on the fanatical right is not their philosophy -- each to their own. The irritant is their blind devotion to the memory of B.J. Palmer, a man that most of his current disciples never met, never knew.

There is no doubt that iconoclast B.J. was a skilled salesman, but he never started or maintained a chiropractic practice or established a chiropractic college. He lacked formal education, but he was not "dumb." He passionately emulated P.T. Barnum and Elbert Hubbard. His writings were self-published, but his worshipers bought them despite their price or substance. He sermonized frequently, but his peers did not

consider him an educator -- except in promoting his dogmatic doctrinaires through mesmerizing rhetoric.

The social class he had was absorbed by association with his stylish, charming, educated, and widely loved wife, Mabel. Although they remained married for 45 years, it was in name only for about half that time. He was not a skilled adjuster: Mabel's cervical spine was destroyed by traumatic arthritis from his poor technic.

B.J. knew how to hypnotize an audience, and how to use this to make himself rich. A graduate was not considered a "specific, pure, unadulterated chiropractor" unless he left Lyceum with a life-size bust and a half dozen portraits "in various thought poses" of the overseer of the Fountainhead.

He placed the Palmer School, his personally owned academy, in bank receivership while he built a pioneer broadcasting station and developed it into a network. In 1930, he wrote a booklet on radio advertising, which long remained standard in that field. Yes, he knew how to sell.

He became a world traveler, the president of five corporations, and an acknowledged collector of fine art. There is no doubt that he possessed business and organizational talent. As self-acclaimed "keeper of the flame," he was suffocating and ruthless to anyone who dared oppose him. Dissent was not tolerated at the school, in his businesses, or at home according to his son, David. Yet, this autocrat knew how to retain the blind loyalty of his disciples, which in his later years consisted of a fundamentalist minority. He was described as an eccentric, a hypocrite, a tyrant, and a genius.

I remember him as a bigot and outlandishly vulgar person. At an early age, I lived for 18 months in an apartment on Brady Street, directly across from the Palmer School of Chiropractic when my father was a student there in the late 1930s. One day I saw B.J. approach and spit in the face of two students who were walking on the sidewalk near "Lit'le Bit of Heaven." I could not understand this and asked my dad what could cause such behavior. I was told that B.J. vehemently hated Jews and so acted on occasion -- yet he would accept their tuition. It was common knowledge that B.J., like Charles Lindbergh, openly supported Hitler in the 1930s.

Fifteen years pass and I find myself in practice for a couple of years and recently married. I proudly asked my bride to join me at the New York State Chiropractic Convention, which I believe was held in Binghamton that year. The social highlight was a formal dinner. The doctors were dressed in their best suits and their ladies beamed in their elegant formals because Bartlett Joshua Palmer, the "hope of mankind," the eminent "developer of chiropractic," had accepted the organization's invitation to be the after-dinner

speaker. The room was majestically furnished, crystal chandeliers sparkled, table candles twinkled, and shortly after dinner the kingly B.J. was introduced in terms befitting royalty. The room hushed in respectful silence. One could hear a feather drop.

"Charismatic" B.J., then the center of the chiropractic solar system, spoke for only a few minutes. His sole topic was a humorless story about two bums masturbating, which he embellished with strikingly picturesque elocution and gesticulation. B.J. was a little fellow when he entered that room; he was smaller when he left.

After dinner I nudged my best friend sitting next to me, a recent Palmer graduate, and whispered, "Is it true he has dementia? Why else would he tell a raunchy story like that with the ladies present? I'm thoroughly embarrassed." My friend replied. "Oh, that's just B.J. You'll remember him for it, and that's what he wants."

My friend was right. After 40 years, I remember him for that.

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Editor's Note:

Dr. Schafer's book on Clinical Chiropractic: The Management of Pain and Disability -- Upper Body Complaints is now available. Please see the Preferred Reading and Viewing list on Page xx, Part #T125 to order your copy.



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