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Wolf Adler, D.O., D.C., M.D., LL.B.

by

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A few years ago I was at a homecoming at the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic (LACC). On the campus was a rather conspicuous bulletin board with some photos of several of my old teachers. Under this collection of ragged 8x10 glossies was a simple question - "Who are these people?" For a moment I stood looking at the pictures in stunned silence. "These people had been like family to me. How could the memory of any institution be so short? Maybe it was just me. Maybe I approached my education with a different set of parameters than most.

It should be understood at the outset that for 26 years my main form of employment had been as an actor. The schooling I had received had been far different than the majority of young people. For the most part it had consisted of private schools and tutors. It had also consisted of a great deal of travel and the experience of meeting and associating with gifted and articulate individuals from an early age. My education had been a mosaic of experiences and encounters of great variety and substance, but with little discipline.

It was not until I was in my thirties with three children and 17 years removed from any formal education that I decided to matriculate to chiropractic college. A positive chiropractic experience with one of the members of my family had left me with the determination to become a chiropractor at any cost.

Fortunately, in order to attract more people, the LACC was going through a spasm of reduced academic standards for prospective matriculants. All that was required was a high school diploma and the ability to show you were alive with a GED test. Having satisfied these requirements, I eagerly anticipated my first day of formal classroom study in almost two decades.

One of my first classes was histology with Dr. Arnold Kamman as the instructor. Any illusions I had harbored about becoming a "doctor" the easy way were soon dissolved by the realization that I was being exposed to a rigorous curriculum being taught by some brilliant instructors. While Kamman seemed friendly enough, he was also a disciplined and uncompromising academician. You either knew the subject he was teaching or you didn't, and passing or failing was based on this simple principle.

The Kamman outline was so meticulously complete that when the pages of the outline he would give us weren't ready and we had to resort to the standard *Bailey's Textbook on Histology*, it was clearly revealed that the Kamman "outline" was more focused and comprehensive than the published text we were supposed to be using as the centerpiece of our instruction.

It didn't take long for me to feel the surge of academic intimidation welling from within. After a few weeks I was ready to leave school for more familiar pursuits. Fortunately, my oldest daughter, who was nine at the time, would have none of such thoughts. Her encouragement and belief in what I

was trying to do made leaving impossible. Still, I felt my brain was being trashed by an academic assault of great magnitude with survival never a certainty and lasting from only one day to the next.

At the time, the LACC was in the process of deifying Dr. Arthur V. Nilsson. And there was sufficient cause, for his almost legendary grasp of anatomy and saintly demeanor had endeared him to all who had the pleasure of his company. He was not, however, a great teacher - at least not from my perspective. To some who knew him such a statement might seem an act of academic heresy. It is not meant to be. Certainly, no one could challenge his almost uncanny perception of the human body or his credentials as an extraordinary human being. But it takes more than these qualities to be a teacher. It takes not only an understanding of the subject matter by the instructor but the ability to convey the understanding and knowledge succinctly and with such construction that the student can understand and apply what he or she has learned.

An example of this lack of construction was Dr. Henry Higley. He came to the classroom with a reputation of a distinguished scholar. Indeed, he did nothing to sully this conception. But, as a teacher, he was a disaster. It was known about the school that he would much rather be playing with the computer in his office than standing before a class of what he considered to be academic plebeians.

When he first entered the classroom he looked at everyone for a moment and then would say "Anaquashuns?" We looked at each other. There was a pause, and then he would step to the blackboard and in great detail discuss and diagram any kind of subject that might come to mind. It was obvious that Higley was a learned individual if you could just understand what he was saying. It seems he was born in Central America and came to us with an accent that would challenge the most adroit linguist.

After several frustrating sessions with Dr. Higley it was obvious that a key was necessary to get anything out of the physiology courses he "taught." It was necessary that we decipher what he said every time he entered the class. What did "Anaquashuns?" mean? This would be our Rosetta Stone.

After some discussion among the students it was finally agreed that what he was asking was "Any Questions?" Apparently, his philosophy on teaching was somewhat penurious. If the class didn't ask any questions, then he felt it was his prerogative to assume that we knew all the answers and he was therefore free from teaching and could discourse on anything his fancy might dictate at the time. After that we would decide ahead of time on a question germane to the subject we were supposed to study. It was like opening a flood gate of knowledge. We could learn a great deal as long as we asked the right questions.

On one occasion someone asked what we should study in particular before an upcoming test. Without hesitation he picked up a copy of *Guyton's Textbook of Medical Physiology* and said simply "This book."

Amidst this academic potpourri was the shining light of my learning experience at the LACC. In fact, it should be emphasized that he was one of the finest teachers that I or anyone else had probably ever had.

Sensing the inculcated fears of the chiropractic neophyte, Dr. Wolf Adler began his lectures in an almost casual way. He extended the hand of knowledge in such a way that it would grasp your imagination and make you want to learn more. He brought to the class a broad mosaic of academic and clinical experience and was ready to apply that experience through text and anecdotal recollection.

I can think of no student who didn't look forward to his classes, for we all knew that we would be taught something and would learn. Each class was filled with illustrations that we would copy from the board along with detailed information he would dictate and recollections he would detail to illustrate the clinical relevance of what he was discussing. Interwoven was a delicious sense of humor and an "esprit de chiropractic" (spizzerinctum?) that left the students looking forward to the next class.

It seemed that he had done just about everything. Not only was he a chiropractor, but he was also an osteopathic physician and a lawyer. At times we felt that he must have been teaching in prehistoric times. No one could have done all these things in the short span of a single lifetime.

Three of the most important areas of academic concern for the chiropractic physician are anatomy, physiology and neurology. Fortunately, Wolf Adler taught neurology. He taught other subjects equally well, but without a firm foundation in neurology whatever followed was of diminished value.

When I was the master of my fraternity chapter I decided that it would be nice to honor Dr. Adler for his many years of distinguished service. Accordingly, we gave him a special dinner, a beautiful scroll and several awards. Although it was never openly voiced, I personally felt that he had always been taken for granted and placed in the background to some of the others on the faculty - particularly Dr. Nilsson. Nilsson was beloved by all, and Adler always seemed placed in his rather large shadow.

A few years ago I was given the privilege of inducting Wolf Adler into the Hall of Honor of the LACC. Like all great teachers, he carried with him seeds of knowledge that he planted in the minds of those he taught. After that it was up to us to make that knowledge grow. There is no doubt in my mind that the legacy of his wisdom will last far beyond his length of time on this earth and that many teachers in the future will succeed because of what had been passed on to them by those he taught so well.

He may have sometimes been inappropriately placed in the shadows of others, but he was surely the wind beneath our wings.

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May 18, 1992

Mr. Garrett Cuneo, Editor

California Chiropractic Journal
7801 Folsom Boulevard
Suite 375
Sacramento CA 95826

Dear Mr. Cuneo,

Attached please find a short piece on my recollections of chiropractic education at the LACC, which I submit for your consideration to publish in the *California Chiropractic Journal*. Please do let me know whether you find this suitable.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Richard H. Tyler, D.C.

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