

*-My Grandpa-  
A Life Spent in the  
Pursuit of Truth*



*John Fitz Alan Howard*

Grandpa Howard—A Life Spent in the Pursuit of Truth

I was only twelve years old when Grandpa Howard died. One time I remember visiting him in a sanitarium with my mother. On a few other occasions we visited him in a small home in Sandy, Utah, where a rather funny looking woman took care of him. For some reason he didn't live with Grandma at Aunt Jessie's. He died on July 17, 1953, but I don't remember much about the funeral. There was certainly no fanfare. Later, as I grew and matured, curiosity led me to know more about Grandpa Howard. My mother always said, "He was such a good father," or "Father had a beautiful garden—rows so straight and long—big raspberries, strawberries, tomatoes, corn, asparagus, beets and cherry and apple trees." In her journal I also read that he married Drucilla Sears and left the next day on a mission to Switzerland for three years! Even today, favorite pictures hang on my walls—pictures of Grandpa and Grandma surrounded by their nine children. In my mother's journal I read that one of those pictures was in a Chicago newspaper, and the following was written under the picture: "A Typical American Family." But somewhere along the road something tragic happened, because my grandfather died as an alcoholic. At least that's the final image most of his descendants seem to have.

My father never spoke of his father-in-law, but a year or so before my father died I asked him, "Was Grandpa really an alcoholic?"

He answered, "Well, sometimes he'd come on the train from Salt Lake to Rock Springs and call us from the station. *Lutie* would say, 'Don't give him any money—he'll just spend it on drink.' But I would go down and give him the train fare, buy him some food and send him back."

My sister told me that one time she was walking down the street in Salt Lake City in front of ZCMI's, and Grandpa passed her. She spoke to him, but he didn't even know who she was. Well, there are all the facts. Apparently, my Grandfather Howard didn't amount to much in this life!

However, I will now try to rewrite Grandpa's story based on much more than hearsay. I now have in my possession a 665-page book written in 1910 by my grandfather, John F. A. Howard. I received it only last week. This is more than a book—it's an encyclopedia! It's entitled *Encyclopedia of Chiropractic (the Howard System)*. It contains lectures by Dr. John F. A. Howard and was compiled, published and copyrighted by the National School of Chiropractic, Chicago, Illinois. In the front of this book, there is a picture of the second graduation class of National School of Chiropractic in 1907 and another picture of my grandfather, John Howard, lecturing before a class at this school in 1910.

According to the preface of this encyclopedia, *The Howard System of Chiropractic* goes beyond what we normally think of as *chiropractic*. Quoting from John Howard:

Many. . .such operators have been led to believe. . . that the original cause of all disease has its primary origin in subluxation of the spinal vertebrae, and they are apt to ignore the possibility of subluxation being secondary to other conditions, such as environment, hygiene, occupation, atmospheric changes, diet and functional disturbances due to the use of patent medicines and other drugs, poisoning, etc.  
(Howard, John xxvi)

*The Howard System of Chiropractic* takes into account all possibilities and doesn't discount the fact that other forms of medicine may be necessary. According to this system, all therapy does not end with the manipulation of the spine—extreme thinking on either end is wrong. Within this encyclopedia are chapters entitled “Food and Fasting,” “Diseases of the Skin,” “Cirrhosis of Liver,” “Gastric Ulcers,” “Overeating,” “Sleep Epilepsy,” and of all things, “Alcoholic Habit.” On the subject of alcohol consumption, it is interesting that John himself wrote

But as ignorance cannot excuse us from paying the penalty of any violated laws, he would suffer for his mistake. . . . Had the individual in question received proper adjustment in time, and been fed a properly balanced diet, he would, in all probability, have been saved from falling a victim to the pernicious habit, as his system would not have craved the false stimulants, because, having all that it needed both in food and innervation to carry on its work, there would be no room for morbid appetites to manifest themselves. (Howard, John 160)

In 1995, another book published by The National College of Chiropractic, *In The Making of a Profession: The National College of Chiropractic 1906-1981*, tells the history of this college. Its founder was my grandfather, John Fitz Alan Howard! John was among the “first disciples, those fifteen who had graduated under Daniel David Palmer. . . . Yet if not a Peter, John Howard was most certainly a Paul or a Matthias, a missionary with a broader view of the world than others who also sat in the classroom and clinic of Old Dad Chiro” (Beideman vii).

B. J. Palmer was the son of Daniel David Palmer (Old Dad Chiro) and took his place as President of the Palmer School of Chiropractic. When John Howard decided to start teaching he wrote Daniel Palmer and basically was asking for his blessing. In a letter dated Dec. 17, 1906 Daniel Palmer answered him, saying,

Why should I not approve of your teaching the science of chiropractic, when I consider you a more capable teacher than B.J., have more honesty in your big toe than he has in his head and a more qualified teacher? (Beideman 24)

Since his system of chiropractic was no longer the way that B.J. Palmer professed it should be, John organized his own school.

His modesty probably caused him to have little or no inkling that history might identify him as the prescient genius who would organize and systematize the *foundation* for virtually every characteristic of the chiropractic profession today. (Beideman 26)

On a building in Davenport, Iowa in 1906 were written the words *National School of Chiropractic, Howard System of Adjustment*. At this time John F. A. Howard was the president. He held on to Dr. D. D. Palmer’s classic motto: “Chiro-Chiro, Yes You Bet, Plus Common Sense the Best Thing Yet!!!” (Beideman 27). It was clear to John that the “find ‘em, adjust ‘em, and leave

‘em alone” (Beideman 38) process should nevermore represent the total responsibility of the doctor of chiropractic.

In 1907 John and his wife Drucilla and their five children moved to Maywood, Illinois. In 1910 they built a home on two acres of land surrounded by tall prairie grass and woods. Despite his responsibilities at the school and in the city, he became known as the “doctor on the prairie.” My mother, Lucie Howard James, spoke often of John’s beautiful gardens in Maywood. He loved to have fresh vegetables for the family to eat. He used to say to the children, “We are what we eat!” (James). When all the other children came to school, their lunches were made with white bread, but Lucie recalled, “Ours were made of graham flour and the loaves filled with raisins and nuts. I hated taking it to school and even would hide it and eat it down in the restrooms” (James). More children were born to the family while they lived there.

John felt the need to have a medical degree as well as his chiropractic degree. Simultaneously he was going to Rush Medical School, presiding over the opening of his own school, authoring and illustrating his many volumned *Home Study Course*, and raising a family of nine children. John recorded that writing this study course “required two years. . .and cost a lot of Midnight oil” (Beideman 30). The following is written about John’s *Encyclopedia of Chiropractic (The Howard System)*:

Its comprehensiveness is undeniable, its foresightedness uncanny. It was the most exacting interpretation of chiropractic philosophy and practice of its time. Furthermore, most of it was so prophetic as to have become widely accepted by the vast majority of those practicing chiropractic today. (Beideman 34)

Beideman also writes:

In the annals of chiropractic history, J. R. Alan Howard was one of the least heralded, yet by far the earliest and most progressive developer that the chiropractic profession has ever known, save D. D. Palmer. (Beideman 34)

We know from this history written by Beideman that my grandfather suffered from *burnout*.

Why a family doesn’t talk about these things or make them known, I don’t understand. I always

sensed from my mother that it was just a terrible sadness for the family. Did they even really understand what happened to him? This occurred so many years ago that perhaps breakdowns caused from burnout were not even understood. Gordon Howard, the oldest of the Howard children, wrote the following in a letter (August 9, 1955) to Dr. Janse, National's fourth president:

Finally. . .his health broke down—He said to Mother I am as weak as a kitten but I can't give up too many are depending on me. It was here that Dad's *friend* Dr. Wm. Schulze came in. He put in large sums of money, hired an M.D. and capable people in the office and printing plant. . .moved. . .then at Dad's insistence bought another building. . .Dad finally sold his interest in the school to Dr. Schulze. (Beideman 47)

Beideman wrote the following:

J. F. Howard was thirty-seven years old when he graduated from Palmer. Consequently after thirteen years at the helm of his National School of Chiropractic he was well beyond the then "prime of life," and his thirteen years of devotion to National took their toll. His commitments to his God, family, patients, students, colleagues, and his chosen profession were Herculean. He was selflessly devoted to all of these and so he served them with uncommon intensity. . . . It was only through a superlative personal drive that he was able to retain the love and respect of his wife and nine children. (Beideman 46)

My grandfather was the founder and president of NSC (National School of Chiropractic) until 1919, continued his studies at Rush Medical School, wrote his encyclopedia on Chiropractic including over 300 hand drawn illustrations, originated the first postgraduate school for chiropractors, developed the most outstanding foundation of any school of chiropractic and maintained a private practice. No one seems to be able to identify what really happened between Dr. Schulz and Grandpa when Dr. Schulz took over as President. Uncle Gordon in his letter spoke of them as friends, though we heard through the family *grapevine* that some unjust deals took place between them and that Grandpa was mentally exhausted and in great physical pain. Beideman simply states, "Nevertheless, suddenly Dr. Howard's name, title, and position were conspicuous by their absence in the faculty listing of the 1919-1920 catalog issue of NSC" (Beideman 48).

It's been impossible to document with accuracy John's life professionally after 1926 because most of his personal and professional papers were lost in a fire in Utah a few years after his death, but through family histories we know that for several years he was engaged in research projects, traveling and living, off and on, in Utah, California and Illinois. Beideman noted that "His passing was completely unheralded by his alma mater, the college he founded, as well as the profession that he had developed so well between 1906 and 1919" (Beideman 52).

This story will continue to be rewritten by other members of his family, but Grandpa Howard definitely was not who I thought he was. He was much more! I am honored to be his granddaughter. Even as recently as April 2000 great strides have been taken to restore his good name and contributions. The NCC (National College of Chiropractic) Alumni Magazine of 2000 is filled with the details of converting National College of Chiropractic into the National University of Health Sciences. Within this magazine are great acknowledgements by the president to John F. A. Howard, the founder. Those at the helm of this college today consider him a man who was way ahead of his time. The new university will incorporate the ideas of The Howard System, which went far beyond the manipulation of the spine. Within this magazine is a letter written by my uncle, Lloyd Howard, the youngest and only living child of John F. A. Howard. It is written to Dr. Winterstein, President of NCC:

As you move forward to new horizons. . . I can picture dad cheering on the sidelines—modern pioneers, a new age of reason—in step with a new grand age of enlightenment. . . another step in the fulfillment of a dream he was unable to accomplish in his own lifetime. (Howard, Lloyd 5)

In this magazine Uncle Lloyd also wrote a lengthy article entitled "My Father, Pioneer Physician of Body, Mind and Spirit." In it he wrote:

But in my own memory his greatest achievement was that of husband and father to a fortunate family of children. All of his great power of thought, high purpose, inspiration and compassion of spirit came to full flower at home. "Boys," father would say, with a twinkle in his eye and quick sly wink at mother, "If you want a happy home you must have a happy wife. Find a hard working girl with good intelligence and a good sense of humor. Then treat her like the queen she is. Don't allow her to become a mere household drudge.

Continue to court her and help her to the full flowering of her talents and dreams. Be true to her always. Make love to no other. There is no romance so sweet, no sense of honest integrity so fulfilling as to be ever true to your one and only love.” . . . Then mother with her irrepressible sense of humor might say something like, “Yes boys, listen to your father. All a woman wants from a man is loyalty. Someone who will stick by her and support her through all the trouble she would never have had if she hadn’t married him.” (Howard, Lloyd 18-19)

In April of 2001 the new National University of Health Science in Illinois saw its first graduating class. That evening Lloyd Howard (eighty-eight years old) was the honored commencement speaker. He was introduced as the only living child of the founder of the National College of Chiropractic, Dr. John F. A. Howard, whose ideas and research are now recognized as the foundation of the new university. After his talk an honorary doctorate degree was bestowed upon him in honor of his father and my grandfather, Dr. John Fitz Alan Howard.

It’s amazing how newly discovered facts—known to some, but previously unknown by so many members of our family—have changed my perspective of grandfather’s life.

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