

Cleveland Chiropractic College commencement address
James Edwards, D.C. December 13, 1996

President Cleveland, distinguished faculty members, soon to be graduates of Cleveland Chiropractic College, family and friends. I am deeply honored to have been invited to deliver your commencement address. But I know full well that the graduates not here to hear me. You are here to get that piece of paper that you worked so hard for. But before that happens, I hope I can make a point or two that you will remember.

I dare say that few if any of you remember anything your high school commencement speaker said. Or even your college commencement speaker for that matter. I do. 19 years ago when I graduated from Logan College the commencement speaker was Dr. Ron Harris of Florida and he challenged us to return something to this profession. His comments motivated me greatly and if I'm able to that today for one, or two or three of you, I will be extremely satisfied.

You know, Commencement is an interesting word. Finally, after finishing 6 to 8 years of intensive study, the college awards you a degree in a ceremony that uses a word meaning "beginning." But that its exactly what this is. It is the commencement or beginning of your professional career.

As you begin your career, I hope you realize how fortunate you are to be just to be alive at this given time in the history of the world. Think about it. In all the 6000 years of recorded history through all the wars, plagues and famines this is the best of all times.

But lets take it one step further. Of all the countries to have ever lived in throughout the recorded history of the world, this country, the United States of America is by far the best country to have ever lived in. So in other words, not only are you living in the best of all times, you are living in the best of all countries.

And now you as a doctor of chiropractic are in the best of all professions. I guess what I'm trying to say is, appreciate it, because it doesn't get any better than this. Today, the health care field you've chosen has celebrated its 100th anniversary. Chiropractic care is accepted. It is covered under the medicare law, state workers compensation laws, doctors of chiropractic serve on licensing boards as equal partners with medical and osteopathic physicians, the Federal government has declared that spinal manipulation is the only treatment for low back pain that decreases pain, improves function, hastens recovery.

Chiropractic has finally been discovered by the world. As a result of that discovery and acceptance, the future for you is bright indeed!

Those accomplishments did not just happen. The major reason that we have it so good today is because of the sacrifices past generations made for us. As Cleveland College graduates, you come from great stock. 5 generations dating back to Dr. Cleveland's great grand mother, Dr. Sylvia Ashworth. A lady who is still the only woman to have served as president of a national chiropractic association and was a founder of what is now the American Chiropractic Association. What a tremendous tradition of service to this profession from the Ashworth-Clevelands and what an outstanding example for you to follow.

But, I want to take just a few moments to discuss a pioneer hero who you may not be familiar with. I want you to meet a gentleman named Dr. Lyndon Edmond Lee. Dr. Lyndon Lee, who led the chiropractors in New York in the half-century struggle for licensure, died in his sleep on Sunday, October 23, 1983. He was 95 years old when he died and had practiced in Mt. Vernon, New York for 65 years. He retired in 1979 at the age of 91 only due to a fractured hip.

Dr. Lee's passing brought the finish to one of the more remarkable personal histories of the chiropractic profession. He graduated from Palmer School of Chiropractic in 1915 and was a

charter member of the reorganized New York State Chiropractic Society and became one of the profession's best known figures. He helped draft every licensing bill presented to the New York legislature between 1915 and 1963 when a favorable vote was finally obtained. During his career he had many roles including serving as vice-president-at-large of the American Chiropractic Association in the late 1920s. He served as a member of the committee that established standards for chiropractic licensing examinations in New York State, and served as President of the Federation of Chiropractic Societies. Dr Lee was also a member of the board of directors of the Chiropractic Association of New York State and chairman of its Public Relations and Legislative Committees. Dr. Lee's last award was bestowed upon him at the First Conference on Chiropractic History which was held at the Smithsonian's Museum of American History on June 6, 1981. It was at that time that the Association for the History of Chiropractic named him the recipient of its first honorary award.

I never had the privilege of meeting Dr. Lee. In fact, until his death I had never even heard of this extraordinary gentleman. But after reading of his accomplishments and the dedication he had to his profession, it was obvious to me that chiropractic had lost a true pioneer.

But I want to tell you what I consider Dr. Lee's greatest achievement. In 1933, Dr. Lee was arrested and cited for "practicing medicine without a license." Although he would finally be acquitted, his case was in and out of the courts 30 times within the next three years. Dr. Lee and others like him were singled out and tested by those who were trying to destroy chiropractic during those early years. We have this great profession today because the Lee pioneers were willing to pay the price for what they believed in.

What a debt we owe these pioneers. I guess you could say at that particular time it was their watch. They were responsible for what happened to chiropractic and they were willing to go to jail to protect and defend chiropractic so that future generations would have this wonderful healing art. They paid the price during their watch and because they did, chiropractic survived.

Think about that -- 70 years later it may seem like no big deal. But just think about it. They didn't know how long they would be in jail. Think about what it must have been like to hear that cell door clang shut. Think about how hard it would have been to explain to your children why the police had had come to your house and why their father or mother was now in jail.

Would you have had the intestinal fortitude to have done that? Not knowing if or when you would be free again. Would you have disobeyed the law and stood firm to protect this profession in its time of need?

Albert Einstein summed it up pretty well when he once remarked, "A HUNDRED TIMES A DAY I REMIND MYSELF THAT MY INNER AND OUTER LIFE ARE BASED ON THE LABORS OF OTHER MEN, LIVING AND DEAD, AND THAT I MUST EXERT MYSELF IN ORDER TO GIVE IN THE SAME MEASURE AS I HAVE RECEIVED."

Perhaps the saddest thing about losing the Lyndon Lees of this profession is that I'm afraid we're not replacing them. Today, instead of chiropractors who would go to jail for chiropractic, we have chiropractors who won't join their state or national associations. Today, instead of chiropractors who would go to jail for chiropractic, we have chiropractors who won't support the college they graduated from.

Today, this profession fights for many things... equitable coverage under workers compensation, fair treatment under policies of insurance and medicare treatment codes. Why? What's the purpose? For some, it's for more money and prestige for the chiropractor. But ladies and gentlemen, that's not what it's all about. All of our actions must be aimed at what's best for chiropractic and our patients.

Danny Thomas once said, "ALL OF US ARE BORN FOR A REASON, BUT ALL OF US DON'T

DISCOVER WHY. SUCCESS IN LIFE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT YOU GAIN IN LIFE OR ACCOMPLISH FOR YOURSELF. IT'S WHAT YOU DO FOR OTHERS."

In just a few short minutes, you'll be a doctor of chiropractic and you'll probably think that this wonderful healing art belongs to you. Well, if you think that, then I've got some bad news for you. Chiropractic will not belong to you. In fact, the healing art of chiropractic doesn't belong to any chiropractor. It never has and it never will. Chiropractic belongs to humanity. We are only the caretakers of it for this particular generation.

What we do with it, how we preserve it, how we defend it, how we protect it, how we nurture it will affect many generations to come.

We have been charged with a solemn trust. Our primary responsibility is to take chiropractic and to pass it on to the next generation better and stronger than it was when we received it. That's what it's all about. And the great thing is you don't have to sacrifice your freedom by going to jail.... like the pioneers were willing to do.

In closing let me just say this. I challenge you to get involved with your profession. Support your college Alumni association, join your state and national associations. Not in 5 years, not in 3 years, not in 6 months. Do it on your first day of practice. Serve on committees, become a spokesperson, learn the issues so you too can defend and protect this profession.

Do it now, so in 50 years you can look back and tell yourself that chiropractic is better and stronger today because of your efforts. Then your career and your life will have had a worthwhile purpose. Our chiropractic pioneers did their jobs. It's now your time to protect and defend chiropractic. It is now your watch.