A Moment of Silence for Dr. John Thie

By Joseph Keating Jr., PhD

John F. Thie, DC, a 1956 graduate of the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic (LACC) and founder of the Touch for Health (TFH) movement, passed away at his home in Malibu, California, on Wednesday, August 3, 2005.

He received a terminal diagnosis in February, and succumbed to prostate cancer. Memorial services were held at the United Methodist Church in Malibu on August 10, 2005. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests a donation to one of the several causes dear to Dr. Thie: Malibu United Methodist Healing Ministry (malibuumc-at-malibuumc.org); International Kinesiology College (info-at-ikc-info.org); or Energy Kinesiology Awareness Council (adam-at-awarenesscouncil.com).

Born in Detroit on January 25, 1933, John Francis Thie touched hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people around the globe. In a professional career spanning 58 years, John spread a message of love, compassion and healing to countless folks he never met, and endeared himself to those within his circle of family, friends and business acquaintances. He was a powerful and entertaining speaker - his well-organized concepts amplified by his deep, resonant voice and Kennedy-esque good looks. With Carrie, his beloved wife and teaching partner of 53 years, he traveled the globe spreading a populist message of wellness and self-healing.

John Thie was an activist and leader from the outset. Shortly after graduation from LACC, he joined the faculty of his alma mater and by September 1957, he had been elected vice president of his district chapter (San Gabriel Valley) of the California Chiropractic Association (CCA). (In 1962, he would be elected CCA vice president.) John reveled in marketing chiropractic, the CCA and the LACC at every opportunity; he was an enthusiast for the “Posture Queen” contests of that era. By 1958, he was president of the San Gabriel Valley district. The following year, he was elected president of the LACC’s alumni association and was credited with reinvigorating the organization. His lifelong interest in nutrition was clearly in evidence when, in 1959, he penned the first of many articles for the Journal of the National Chiropractic Association: "Iodine deficiency - a Menace in Human Nutrition." In addition to his classwork as instructor, John was a frequent guest speaker to student groups at the LACC. He and Carrie repeatedly opened their home to chiropractic students for social and professional/political events.
In 1960, just four years out of school, John was named "Doctor of the Year" by the San Gabriel Valley Chiropractic Society. The following year, he was elected president of the Los Angeles County Chiropractic Society. In 1961, he also defeated the incumbent to be elected the Golden State’s delegate to the National Chiropractic Association, a post he would hold until the formation of the ACA in 1964. It was in this capacity that he was introduced to the profession’s national political scene. John was repeatedly invited to speak at NCA conventions on the topic of nutrition, and he was present (in unofficial capacity) for the ACA’s historic first convention in Denver in 1964.

John found the clinical concepts that would captivate much of the rest of his life while attending that first ACA convention. George Goodheart Jr., DC, lectured on the topic of muscle testing during an educational session, and John grew fascinated with the possibility of receiving immediate feedback from the body through these methods. Thie became an avid practitioner of Applied Kinesiology (AK) and a philosopher of its possibilities.

Wedding AK with his populist sentiments, John believed that many of the methods of AK could be taught to and practiced as a method of self-care for all people. He repeatedly urged Dr. Goodheart to author a text for the public on AK. Although Goodheart was not averse to dissemination of his emerging methods to nonprofessionals, he grew weary of Thie’s nudging. Finally, in exasperation, he let Dr. Thie know that if he wanted such a book, John should write it himself.

The prospect of authoring a book was challenging, but John was resourceful. The first edition of Touch for Health: A Practical Guide to Natural Health Using Acupuncture, Touch & Massage, authored in collaboration with then-chiropractic student Mary Marks, was published in 1972. The workbook has since been translated into more than a dozen languages and has sold in excess of 500,000 copies; the method has caught the attention of laymen and health professionals in several disciplines, and has spawned national and international workshops and certification programs.

Ironically, one of the arenas in which the TFH manual and the movement it spawned were not fully accepted was within the ranks of the International College of Applied Kinesiology (ICAK). John, the founding chairman of the ICAK, was not supported in his vision of an AK program for laypeople. Whether for ideological or economic reasons, Dr. Thie’s populist ideas were rejected by some of his peers. Thie maintained his membership in the ICAK, but his mission TFH would take him in a different direction. Touch for Health has evolved independently in the years since.
The commitment to train nonprofessionals in TFH/AK procedures required that John think through some of the same issues that confronted the founder of chiropractic. By its very nature, TFH is an unlicensed practice, and nonprofessionals who employ it run some risk of violating medical statutes. John’s solution, like that of D.D. Palmer, was to declare the method nontherapeutic. Thie moved away from the integration of AK and chiropractic clinical diagnosis. Touch for Health, he insisted, was aimed not at relieving particular conditions or disorders, but at improving the flow of subtle energy through the meridians of the body so as to enhance health. As well, he taught, TFH could be a useful means for early identification of deviation from health.

By the early 1990s, John had elected to retire from active clinical practice. Although he would maintain his chiropractic license, the decision was made to focus more attention on TFH - as a gift to humanity. He turned over rights to teach and certify TFH instructors to his team of international trainers. From this group eventually emerged the International Kinesiology College (IKC), first headquartered in Switzerland and now in Australia, as well as several private kinesiology training institutes. The TFH clinical facility (in Pasadena) was donated to the LACC (now Southern California University of Health Sciences, which has established a John F. Thie Memorial Endowment from the proceeds of the sale of the Thie Clinic properties). John maintained his right to teach and innovate in the field he had pioneered, but was glad to see the TFH movement take on a momentum of its own.

This writer had the pleasure of corresponding with Dr. Thie for several years, and of meeting him in April 2005, several months into his illness. He had the remarkable ability of finding the bright side to this darkest of clouds: his own imminent demise. His charisma was immediately apparent and I felt as though I had known him sometime, somewhere before (we might have met casually on the lecture circuit someplace, but neither of us could recall with any certainty). Over the next several days, as we chatted about the possibility of preparing a biography of his life, I was de facto invited into the family, and enjoyed the camaraderie of wife and sons and numerous visitors to their home. John had always been a magnet, I gather, and in his time of need there was an endless procession of people at the door, on the phone, and on the Internet who wished him well, performed "surrogate balances," and prayed for him in the hope of restoring his health.

John traveled to Lake Tahoe in late June to receive a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the CCA, and to North Carolina in July for his last TFH conference. The latter event was especially bittersweet, for his dire
circumstance was well-known by then, and friends came from far and wide to be with him one more time. He was especially pleased that his former mentor, Dr. George Goodheart, was in attendance. Yet the travel sapped his waning strength, and he was met by severe pain upon his return. For just one of the few times in his life, John consented to strong medication: powerful analgesics to dull the agony of the cancer. He lapsed into unconsciousness in the early days of August, and passed away in his sleep.

For family and close friends, there is a vacancy that can never be filled. But we can be sure that beyond the tears that must flow at his passing, there will always be a wondrous and magical memory of an extraordinary individual who touched so many lives so profoundly. Rest in peace, John Thie, and thank you for all you gave us.

References


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