



An Interview with a Good Neighborhood Doctor

By Rev. Dale Whitney

The first impression was a little strange. When I went to visit local chiropractor Dr. James Dohn at his business address of 3215 East Broadway (right across the street from the now-closed Café Piccolo), I found a small, neatly lettered sign that said “For entry to Dr. Dohn’s office please go around back to an alley entrance – DO NOT ENTER BY THIS DOOR!” I thought this was a little unusual, and it made me a couple of minutes late for my appointment. But in the end there was no problem at all, for what I found “around back” was about eight parking spaces and a spotless white fence and gate that opened onto a lovely, shaded garden area complete with a lily pond full of koi fish. It was a perfect refuge on what was rapidly becoming a very warm and sunny day.

Dr. Dohn, a 75-year-old veteran chiropractor, has practiced his craft at the same location right here in Bluff Heights since 2000. His personal life – like that of so many of us these days – was quite chaotic for many years until he found his true calling at age 46, when he enrolled at the Cleveland Chiropractic College in Los Angeles (fatefully, the same year as the famous Rodney King trial and its many unsettling results).

Jim was born in Los Angeles in 1946, graduated from Ramona High School near San Diego, spent two tours of duty with the Marine Corps in Vietnam, and then worked as a rock and roll stage hand and as a recording engineer. He also took a wild mixture of courses at a number of community colleges as he searched for his eventual career as a chiropractor. This profession allows for an amazing freedom of expression in terms of the particular styles of practice that individual doctors employ.

Since my father was an osteopath, Jim and I discussed the differences between that branch of medicine and chiropractic. Suffice it to say that osteopaths are allowed to prescribe controlled medications, while chiropractors are not. Both employ treatment techniques that we might call “physical medicine,” in the sense that the doctor physically manipulates the patient’s body to produce healing.

At one point, a career counselor who knew how good Jim was with his hands steered him toward his eventual career choice. Evidently the career counselor said: “You want to spend

your career ‘hands on’ helping people with real physical needs that you can treat, not just analyzing their needs and prescribing medication for those needs.” The counselor’s good advice has led Jim to a career of making physical adjustments to his patients’ harmful postures, helping them to develop a sense of rapport and safety, finding a deep communication and a natural trust relationship between patient and doctor, and finally – and I was quite aware of this when listening to the stories of my own osteopath father – naturally entering into very personal and family-oriented counseling with his patients.



Being around Dr. Dohn – even at his “only somewhat advanced” age of 75 – is like being in the presence of a beneficial tornado or whirlwind! He is a “health nut” in the very best sense of that phrase, and his enthusiasm is contagious. He has not had an easy life, but he knows who he is, how he got there, and how his lifestyle and the example he exhibits to the world reflects true health: physically, socially, emotionally, and even spiritually. He has conquered his own substance abuse problems with spiritual help from meetings with others facing the same challenges. He speaks of “innate intelligence,” of the “energy of life” flowing into one’s body unimpeded, of a spiritual dimension that each of us should pursue and identify, each of us in our own way and in our own style.

According to Jim, the focus of his practice is “to empower the self – healing qualities that life has given us.” His most important question to his patients is: “What spiritual tradition were you raised in, and no matter how you feel about it now, what positive elements can you retrieve from it ... so that you can find a notion of God that you can believe in?”

All of these ideas and many more can be found at Dr. Dohn’s website, www.doctordohn.com. Believe me, what I have written here barely scratches the surface of all the good and healthy ideas offered there by this remarkable man right here in our own neighborhood.

Go see him and make a friend for life!

Rev. Dale Whitney was born in Nebraska during WWII and came to California with his father, who was an osteopathic physician, and the rest of their family in 1943. He attended elementary school in the LA area, then junior high and high school in Santa Barbara. He attended Pomona College and San Francisco Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1970 as a Presbyterian minister. He was pastor of Geneva Presbyterian Church in Long Beach from 1971 to 1989 and then was manager of the Harbor Area Farmers’ Markets, a project of the South Coast Interfaith Council, from 1989 to 2016.