William Donald Kelley, DDS, MS
(1925-2005)

William Donald Kelley, DDS, MS, one of the most significant figures in the history of alternative cancer treatments, passed away on January 30, 2005, at the age of 79. The cause of death was congestive heart failure. He had a long history of heart problems, with severe rhythm disturbances, beginning in the 1960s.

Dr. Kelley was born on November 1, 1925, on an 80-acre "dirt farm" in Winfield, Kansas. His father had died young of a heart attack and, during the Great Depression, his mother raised three sons alone. All three sons went to college, then graduate school, and became successful professionals.

William Kelley was an unusual child. He once told me that when he was three he had a vision of Jesus approaching him, as he was playing in a sandpile. He took him up into his arms and instructed him to become a medical missionary. Kelley later moved to Texas and studied at Baylor University. Under the influence of his father-in-law, he became a successful orthodontist, working 12 to 14 hours per day putting braces on the teeth of the children of Grapevine, Texas. He and his first wife adopted four children and lived the typical suburban existence of the 1950s. In what little spare time he had he restored antique cars. Always a determined worker, he practically lived on candy bars and other junk food.

Around 1960, his health began to deteriorate. The first thing he noticed was diminishing eyesight. He also developed muscle cramps and severe chest pains and went into a severe mental depression. The culmination came in 1964, when he suffered a heart attack and went into a severe digestive problem. He eventually increased the dose to 50 enzyme capsules per day. He then discovered the work of the Scottish embryologist, John Beard, DSc, who early in the 20th century had postulated that pancreatic enzymes were a natural control for cancer. He also encountered the writings of Dr. Edward Howell, author of Enzyme Nutrition, and an early apostle of the raw plant food diet. In time, Kelley healed from his own disease and went on to treat over 30,000 other patients.

Initially, Kelley discovered that while many people did well on this diet, others did not. His second wife, Susie, was one of these. It turned out that she needed rare red meat in order to control her severe allergies. Thus was born Kelley's concept of the Metabolic Type, in which different people, because of genetic heritage and environmental factors, had different requirements for vegetarian or carnivorous diets, raw and/or cooked. Kelley was influenced in his thinking about meat by the work of Vilhjamur Stefansson, the Harvard-trained explorer who, among other things, had shown that the Eskimo remained cancer-free on a fatty red meat diet.

One Answer to Cancer

Kelley was the author of several books, including his self-help book, One Answer to Cancer, first published in 1967, and an updated edition, Cancer: Curing the Incurable Without Surgery, Chemotherapy or Radiation (2001). His tests for cancer included the Kelley Enzyme Test and the Kelley Index of Malignancy. In 1970, Kelley was convicted of practicing medicine without a license, and in 1976 the courts suspended his dental license for 5 years. For a while in the late 1970s he worked in a clinic south of Tijuana.

Dr. Kelley's high point of fame came in 1980, when he treated the popular US film actor Steve McQueen for advanced mesothelioma, a form of chest and abdomen cancer generally caused by asbestos exposure. McQueen died after undergoing surgery in 1980. Kelley later claimed that McQueen had actually been cured, but then murdered because he "was going to blow the lid off of the cancer racket." In the public's mind, however, this failure dealt a blow to all of Kelley's claims of success with cancer.

In the 1970s, Kelley was reasonable in his statements about medical orthodoxy and, although he appreciated the difficulties of changing America's lifestyle, looked forward to a fair and proper evaluation of his method. As time progressed, however, he became increasingly despondent that this could ever happen.

He also became increasingly paranoid. In the 1980s, he moved to rural Washington state. His marriage to Susie had broken up, he lost control of his once-thriving organization, and his mental and physical health began to deteriorate as well. In the late 1980s, he and his then-companion, a cardiologist named Carol Morrison, MD, whom he had allegedly cured of breast cancer, moved to rural Pennsylvania. I visited them twice in the small town of Saxonburg, north of Pittsburgh. I found this couple—a former successful orthodontist and board-certified heart specialist—living in a small rented bungalow on Water Street. They were surviving on Dr. Kelley's monthly Social Security check.

Kelley was a shadow of his former self. Although he still did coffee enemas every day, he had reverted to drinking huge bottles of Coke, to which he ascribed health-giving properties. He and Dr. Morrison seemed only tangentially interested in medicine. They were too busy running their daisy-wheel printer day and night, churning...
out racist and antisemitic tracts. It was hard to connect this bitter wreck of a man with the vibrant individual of earlier decades.

Enter Dr. Gonzalez
It was around that time that Nicholas J. Gonzalez, MD, a recent graduate of Cornell Medical College, first came to prominence in New York as a practitioner of Dr. Kelley's methods. Gonzalez was always scrupulous in crediting Kelley for his contribution to his own work. Yet the Kelley that I met in 1990 seethed with anger at the world, and particularly at those who had tried to help him, including Dr. Gonzalez. Soon afterwards, Kelley even sued Gonzalez in a vituperative nuisance suit. The suit was dismissed, with some unkind words from the judge. After Morrison died, Kelley moved back to his mother's Kansas farm, where his "strange eventful history" had begun almost 80 years before.

Asked to sum up Kelley's contribution, Dr. Gonzalez wrote the following: "Over the years, just about anything that could ever be said about anybody, good bad and indifferent, has been said about William Donald Kelley. Regardless of how true or untrue such statements might be, my wish is that he be remembered for what he truly was, a very brilliant man who sacrificed all personal happiness for what he believed to be the truth. Like so many other brilliant men he fit in nowhere and generated controversy, adulation and scorn for much of his adult life wherever he went and whatever he did.

"The world certainly treated him poorly, and too often in his later years he responded in kind. His faults, like his strengths, are legion and extraordinary and he lived an eccentric life, always on the fringe; at one point during the early 1990s, I heard he was scavenging food out of dumpsters. Despite all this, I have always remained focused, and continue to remain so, on his unique ability to see a truth no one else could see, and stick with it regardless of the cost.

"From the day I first met him, in a chiropractor's office in Queens, in July of 1981, after my second year of medical school, his one goal, his one wish was to have his work properly evaluated and tested, so that if it proved of value, it could be integrated into the mainstream of orthodox medicine. That was to me, whatever was to happen in our own relationship, and whatever he was to say about me in recent years, always an honorable goal, one which I took seriously and continue to work toward.

"In my estimation, Kelley, in his scientific thinking, was light years ahead of the rest of us, both orthodox and alternative. He deserves our respect for his accomplishments, for his trials and severe tribulations, and our forgiveness for his foibles. Someday, I believe his thoughts about the nature of cancer and human disease will become the foundation of a new medicine, not merely a fringe footnote, and the world will remember him at that time with well-deserved appreciation. For now, let's remember him kindly, with gratitude for what he did and what he tried to do."

Ralph W. Moss, PhD