

Byron Gentry, D.C.: My Dad, My Friend, My Mentor

An Interview with Dan Gentry, Certified Rolfer™

By Robert McWilliams, Certified Rolfer™

The most incredible and powerful asset you own is your mind. With this magnificent organ, you can heal yourself and others physically, attract wealth and prosperity, smooth troubled relationships—and that’s just for starters!

Byron Gentry, D.C.¹

Byron Gentry, D.C. was born in 1913. His childhood affliction with polio only seemed to give him more determination to improve his own condition and that of others. He became a very successful chiropractor based in Oklahoma City, and first met Ida Rolf at a training she gave in Dallas in 1954. Gentry and Rolf became good friends and colleagues.

*Gentry is credited with influencing Rolwing® regarding the use of focused intention. He published *Miracles of the Mind: How to use The Power of Your Mind for Healing and Prosperity* in 1998, a book written with his wife Mary Gentry about his life and healing work, and especially about his developed use of mental projection. In it, he offers instruction in the use of these techniques, including “The Tool,” a method of using mental projection and physical actions to assess and re-balance the electromagnetic polarities and static charge buildups that may cause pain and dysfunction. Gentry died in 2001 after a lifetime of healing and learning.*

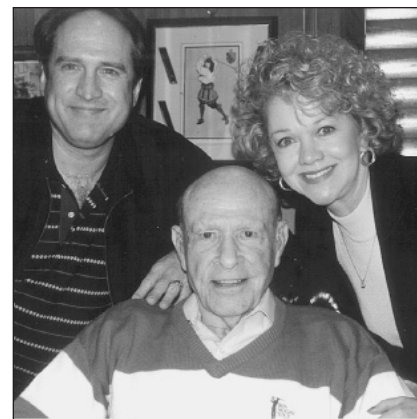
Dan Gentry (pictured with his stepfather and wife, Theresa) is Byron Gentry’s stepson. This interview is the result of a set of written questions given by Robert McWilliams to Dan, and their subsequent “massaging” of the answers. Robert works in Dan’s Rolwing practice during regular forays to Oklahoma City.

Robert McWilliams: In *Miracles of the Mind*, written with your mother, Mary Gentry, Dr. Gentry relates that he first met Ida Rolf at a workshop in Dallas in January of 1954. They continued a professional association, and developed a lasting friendship. Did he ever talk about the early days with Dr. Rolf before she had developed her school in Boulder?

Dan Gentry: The first time Byron met Ida was at a Rolwing demonstration. She asked if there were any volunteers that would like to come up to the front and be worked on. Dad raised his hand. She didn’t know that he had a bad scoliosis caused by polio. She saw him and about died. She

once said to me “Of all those people in the crowd, here comes Gentry with a really bad distortion.” That was the beginning of their lifelong friendship. She told me that Byron Gentry was a friend of Rolwing.

Dad was in the very first class Ida ever taught, and helped her schedule future classes. I am not sure of the exact year or location, but I assume it was in the fifties. Dr. Rolf invited my parents to five annual meetings to have “Gentry,” as she called Dad, speak. They had a mutual respect for one another and were both very strong people, with their own opinions that sometimes collided. Their friendship was like a bother-sister relationship. They



would get upset with one another like bothers and sisters do, and would voice their feelings to each other. They talked on the phone on a regular basis, and shared thoughts and ideas about Rolwing. For example, they discussed how important your intent is when working on a particular area or regarding the whole Rolwing session. She came to Oklahoma City several times and worked on some of Dad’s friends and patients. All I remember of the early years before the establishment of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration® in Boulder was that Richard Stenstadvoid had an apartment in California and the Rolf Institute was a P.O. box where Richard would pick up the mail.

Once when Dr. Rolf was out visiting my parents, she invited me to be a model for the class she was going to conduct in San Francisco. This was in 1976. Rolwing was so intense in those days! When Dr. Rolf asked me to describe the pain, I said that it felt to me like they took a nail, stuck it into a fire, then pushed it deep into my tissue! I remember her saying, while working on me: “I may be ‘paining you’ but I’m not hurting you!” After the treatment with my student practitioner, Neal Powers, I could tell that she had been closely monitoring my session. She would come up and slowly rotate her hand just above my abdomen. The energy and warmth coming from her hand was so peaceful, and soothing, that it would settle me down.

The classroom atmosphere was very serious, and if there was any clowning around, Ida would quickly dismiss you from the room. She would say: “I don’t have time for that! My work is too important and it must be done right!” She would also say that “any monkey could do this

work, so don't make it hard." Ida was very focused and determined that her work would continue into the future. She said that her work was part of the evolution of man, because she was making it possible for man to stand more upright, instead of on all fours, as in the beginning. She was a strong taskmaster on a mission, but had a kind, gentle and loving side at the same time. No one would mess with Ida, because she would put them in their place in a heartbeat. I can see now that history was being made, and feel very lucky to have been a model for a class with Ida. Some of those students are now among the leaders of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration®.

RM: Your mother married Byron in 1966, when you were eleven years old or so. What did you make of your new dad, and his healing work?

DG: The first time I met Dad I was ten years old. My mother was sick in bed and Byron was making a house call to work on her. He bought us a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. That made a big impression on me because it showed that he cared enough to go out of his way to help people that he really did not know that well. The second time I met him was on a Saturday. My mom had some friends over, and I had friends over, and we were playing ping-pong in the basement. We lost our last ball and needed new ones, so I went to see if my mom would get us some new balls. Before I could say anything, Byron smiled very warmly, motioned for me to come to him and asked me what I needed. I told him, and he smiled as he put his arm around me and said, "Sure! Lets go get those new balls," and off we went. After that I was sold on him. That was the beginning of a lifelong close relationship that I still treasure to this day.

The Christmas before my parents were married, Byron bought us a very large Christmas tree. It came with a wooden stand, but was so big that it would tip over. Dad took care of it. He simply nailed it to the living room floor! I had not been around anyone like this in my life. He did not take life so seriously, except when it came to his work.

He was a very generous man in every way and was filled with warmth, kindness and love for others and completely enjoyed helping others. He started teaching me body techniques when I was eleven: how to work on muscles, what to feel for, where to look. He would say, "find the muscle

in spasm, go in slowly and hold it and it will let go in about fifteen seconds," and it would. Right after my parents got married, we were having breakfast and he told me about his mental healing work and asked me what I thought about it. I said, "Okay, I believe you." From that point on I would ask him questions about how he did it, how it worked and I was very interested in possibly trying to do it myself. It seemed so big I did not think I could possibly do it. From age sixteen I started trying to do what he did. I did not feel that was I was having much success but continued to try. In my twenties I started getting pretty good at it, but still needed a lot of work. Since Dad had been a victim of polio, he needed work done on a daily basis. I was happy to work on him and have the opportunity to learn from one of the best in his field. He continued to teach me many techniques throughout the years, even after I became a Certified Rolfer™. I use his techniques everyday in my practice—physical and mental techniques

RM: How had polio affected him, as a person and practitioner?

DG: As a parent he never complained about his physical weakness. I never thought of him as one with an affliction or limited physical abilities. Before becoming a chiropractor he was a basketball and football coach, setting school records for having the most wins in one season in both sports. He coached for two years and both years they were state champions. He was also an excellent golfer, and was involved with raising racehorses for over thirty years. As a practitioner he was more compassionate and understanding about what pain felt like and the limitations it causes. No matter how he felt physically, it did not seem to affect him mentally. He put in twelve-hour days at the office, seeing on average forty-eight people a day for fifteen minutes each, four and a half days a week. He took his work very seriously and was always a student of the field, looking for new information to improve his work. He took many classes in a variety of areas of bodywork, ranging from nutrition and acupuncture to craniosacral therapy. He learned muscle testing, which led him into developing the work called "Miracles of the Mind." The only time he ever mentioned his back was when I was getting married. He said, "Don't worry, Dan, I will stand up straight so your friends will not notice

my back." That thought had never entered my mind.

RM: Can you talk a little about some of his treatment methods?

DG: His work was always precise and to the point to give his patents relief from pain, and to break up muscle constriction that was causing a vertebra to be out of place. Dad was trained in and used acupuncture with his clients on a daily basis, if the patient came in for it, or also if he felt it would particularly benefit them. Dad would also perform acupuncture on his racehorses whenever they were injured or having a problem. Other owners would ask him to do acupuncture on their horses, at times, and he would oblige. He worked on many cats and dogs that were ailing, too. Often this was done by remotely, by telephone. He used his mental techniques to help break up muscle constriction and to get the affected vertebrae back into place. He used the "Tool" for many different situations, too many to mention. He would check them using mental techniques first to see why his patient was hurting before ever touching them with his hands, so he would know what he needed to do to treat them.

RM: Byron developed his ideas about working with mental energy for healing in the Bible Belt area of the country. Was there ever a reaction against this work, there?

DG: Dad did not tell people or patients about his abilities because he was concerned that it would either scare them off or that they would think that he was a witch doctor. The only ones that knew about it were close friends, relatives, and a handful of patients. For years he did most of his mental work by phone with many people throughout the U.S. and internationally. They would call to have him check to find what was going on with their life circumstances or physical conditions and have him work on them from a distance. This work went on for years and continued until four weeks before he died at age eighty-eight, in 2001. It was hard for him to stop, and he continued to work in this way even when he did not have the physical strength for it anymore.

RM: From his book, it is clear that Byron Gentry was determined to follow a "scientific approach" in developing his theories, and he cites you as a researcher. What do you remember about the time you spent working in the clinic in the 70s and beyond?

DG: Dad and I were always talking about what he had recently discovered from his mental and physical checking methods and the best way he had found to treat a particular problem. I was always interested in learning how to treat that condition and make sure I was doing the treatment correctly and efficiently. Sometimes, I would do the work and have him check mentally, from a distance, to make sure I was getting the results I wanted. I also learned many office procedures from him that I use today in my Rolfing® practice. During the 70s I was going to school part-time taking chemistry, anatomy and physiology while working at Dad's office. I was running tests on urine and saliva and putting people on diets according to their test results. The diets were determined by the patients' body chemistry and changing what was out of balance. It was an accurate testing system.

RM: Can you talk a little about the beginnings of your own professional life, and how you became a Rolfing practitioner?

DG: One day I was at my parents' house, and Dad asked, "Dan, would you like to become a Certified Rolfer™?" I said, "Yes, I would," and he said, "Let's call the Rolf Institute®," and the rest is history. It reminded me of when I was ten years old, and he put his arms around me and said "let's go get those ping-pong balls." He talked to me with the same warmth and love as he had done so many years ago. I graduated November 15, 1987, having trained with Jason Mixer, Jim Asher and Neil Powers.

RM: Dr. Gentry trained at the Chicago School of Chiropractic Medicine. His own later research led him to work with what we might now call "energetic approaches" to healing, ranging from reflex points and body vibrational rates to chakras, later adding the acupuncture meridian lines. Can you discuss his theories and practices as they relate to your Rolfing practice?

DG: My work can be arranged into two categories: the physical, and the mental. The physical combines Rolfing with Dad's work, ranging from structural realignment and mobilization to reflex evaluation and treatment. Regarding the mental aspects, I use mental projection and energetic approaches. I have taken Dad's techniques of measuring leg lengths to help determine the answers to the following: A) Is the sacroiliac joint out of place? If so, is it

posterior on the left or the right? B) What vertebrae are out? Are they posterior on the left or the right? Is the atlas out of alignment? Is it back on the left or right? C) What ribs are misaligned and need to be re-aligned? What direction do they need to go? By measuring the legs you can tell what is out of alignment on a skeletal level. It also gives you information on what muscles are in spasm and need work to get the skeletal system back into its correct alignment. As far as ways of addressing this, I would like to quote Byron Gentry regarding the physiology of a muscle: "Anytime you push a muscle together (flexion) for a period of time, it shortens, anytime you apply pressure to a muscle and hold it, it lengthens."

Dad was very interested in craniosacral technique and nerve reflex points, and would treat them first to break the reflex that was causing the muscle(s) to go into spasm. That way the muscles would relax faster and the patient would have less discomfort. He had an entire treatment system that he used on every patient: checking their leg length, doing myofascial work (Rolfing), bone realignment (chiropractic), and working reflex points to break up muscle constriction that was causing the misalignment.

Everything that I have mentioned above about treatment on the physical level, and more, Dad was able to do on an energetic level using mental projection. He would

do an assessment by first making a mental statement about the client, and then checking its validity by bringing his hands together with his arms straight down in front of him. If the statement were not true his left arm would be shorter. It may have taken several statements, getting true and false answers, before knowing what to treat. He would then use strong mental projection techniques to treat and to correct the problem. He could check and treat many different issues and areas and have effective results. He would work on the own mental-control center of his own brain that was used for projection to make his projection techniques even stronger. This was just one of many things he did to improve his abilities.

I have worked to incorporate his mental and physical techniques into my Rolfing practice in every way I could. I do use the Tool with efficiency but I still need more practice with my checking to feel confident with the answers I get. I do not feel I will ever be who he was or do what he was able to do in his work. He was one of a kind. He was Byron Gentry, my dad, my friend my mentor.

NOTES:

1. Gentry, Byron, *Miracles of the Mind: How to Use The Power of Your Mind for Healing and Prosperity*, 1998, Rainbow Books (out of print).

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