
Dr. Spock Remembered

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The Eighth edition of Dr. Spock's landmark book, Baby and Childcare, was released at a party commemorating his 101st birthday. The festivities took place at Millenium (a gourmet, vegan restaurant) located in the Savoy Hotel in San Francisco, California, May 2, 2004).

We are here today to celebrate — the 101st birthday of one of the most influential men of the last century and the most recent edition of his most powerful book, *Baby and Childcare*. Dr. Spock's story is well known.

He was a Pediatrician who was moved to advance health and well-being by considering both the physical and emotional thereby planting seeds to mature in generations to come.

He was a Humanist – concerned about children worldwide not just our own. His many trips to Cuba emphasize this trait.

He was a Man of Principle– in a certain period of his life he was arrested time and again for what he believed in.

He was an Activist – ceaselessly working for the good of children and those things that effect



Patrick McCarty (standing right) massaging Dr. Dean Ornish and Dr. Spock (standing left) massaging wife Mary Morgan at the Fall Health Classic October 1992

children such as health, education, and nutrition.

From our public point-of-view, it may have seemed that Dr. Spock was destined to easily do all that he did. Yet behind these public events there was a struggle, an internal conflict between who he was sup-

posed to be and who he was becoming.

He was born and reared in Connecticut, with all the qualities and traits of a highly educated gentleman. In other words, he was reared to be thoughtful, display honesty and sincerity, do what was expected

of him, and at the same time, not to express his feelings or emotions openly, as this may make others feel uncomfortable. So from Dr. Spock's earliest education he was taught never to speak out.

After the publishing of his book he found himself a celebrity and in a unique position of authority. He became America's number one defender of children. I don't think he was very comfortable with this lofty position. It went against his early core education.

This position proved to be his struggle. To some degree this struggle defined his life. Perhaps we are faced with similar situations? Situations where our minds interpret one view while our hearts another.

I had the great privilege to work with Dr. Spock.

A highlight event took place here in San Francisco. It was the "Health In America '96" conference that I arranged at the Ritz Carlton. (Neal Barnard, M.D., John McDougall, M.D., Dean Ornish, M.D., John Lee, M.D., Shizuko Yamamoto, Michio Kushi, Meredith McCarty and others were also presenting). For me that event was up there in importance along with my Whitehouse visit with Hillary Clinton.

By this time Dr. Spock's educational format was story telling. Slowly, choosing his words precisely, he would work his message of how to care for our children while telling stories about his own life. He would tell what he had experienced and how it made him feel—quite different from earlier years when the mind had a strong controlling grip. When passion fueled by emotion and heart were implied but left unspoken. (Detractors would argue later that Dr. Spock had lost his mind altogether!) But his conversation was like having your best grandfather sit you on his lap and take you on a journey of significance where you know that

mixed into the action was a message to ponder. Something that if grasped could make you a better person. But mostly you didn't care about that part because you were engrossed in the story. Yet in the end you learned something about yourself, which helped you to deal with life more fully.

Dr. Spock knew the power of influence and sometimes used it in the most subtle ways. Once we were departing the restaurant at the Monterey Bay aquarium and Ben spotted an infant with his parents at a table near the window overlooking the chilly waters of Monterey Bay. He diverted his exit to the ocean-view table and stopped before the child

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and just looked at him intently. After a short while Ben turned to the parents and said, "You have a very intelligent child." He smiled and walked off. I went over to the table to see the mother beaming with pride. I asked her if she knew who that man was. She said, "No." I replied he is Dr. Spock, the baby doctor." Her mouth dropped. She recovered quickly and excitedly blurted, "And he said my child was intelligent!" What influence can a simple comment have on the entire life of a child?

One memorable conversation I had with Ben occurred in Camden Maine when Dr. Spock was 92 years of age. He was finishing up the previous revision of his book, *Baby and Childcare*. He was deter-

mined to advise against the consumption of meat and milk for children. While a radical idea in some circles he had given the topic deep thought. He felt that so many illnesses, such as heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and some types of cancer, could be prevented with the adoption of a plant-based diet in childhood. Almost a decade earlier he had chosen a mostly vegetarian, macrobiotic diet for himself to control his own heart disease and recurring bouts of pneumonia.

I asked him, "What gets you up in the morning? What motivates you? Why do you continue to teach, lecture, and write? Can't you just take it easy? I mean you are 92 years old. You have arrived. Why keep pushing?"

He contemplated my rambling questions and responded, "When I was young my mother told me, 'Benny, you have to help other people'" And I haven't done enough yet.

For me, that said it all. He knew what he wanted. His head and mind long ago had blended with his heart. The two forces worked together in harmony. There was clarity and vision. No wonder he was able to live such a full and long life. With such heartfelt presence, he would never be finished. And he is not. Here we celebrate him and his work. He, and it, live on—both outside in the world and in our hearts.

Happy Birthday, Ben. We love you.

Patrick McCarty has been involved with natural health education for the last 30 years. He is the author of Beginners' Guide to Shiatsu and the co-author of Barefoot Shiatsu, The Shiatsu Handbook, Whole Health Shiatsu, and Macrobiotic Shiatsu Workbook with Shizuko Yamamoto. Patrick is editor of Healthways, the newsletter of the International Macrobiotic Shiatsu Society. He can be reached at pjmccarty@cfl.rr.com.