

### **The Palmer Foundation Inc.**

Walter D. Palmer, J.D./Founder/President

PO Box 22692

Philadelphia, PA 19110

Phone/Fax: 215-569-3501

Email: thewdpalmerfoundation@gmail.com

Web: thewdpalmerfoundation.org



### **Profile: Walter D. Palmer**

Born October 7, 1934, the second of eight children to Walter Palmer (DE) who had a fourth-grade education and Viola Byard (Atlantic City) who had an eighth-grade education.

We lived in a two-story house with a great-grandmother, grandfather, grandmother, aunt and two cousins.

### **Poverty and Race**

In Atlantic City most blacks could not use the public hospital and were born home by a midwife. There was very little employment for blacks who lived on the north side by the bay, while whites lived on the south side by the ocean.

### **Separation**

My five sisters were sent to live with great aunts and stepsisters in Atlantic City and Philadelphia and my father moved to Philadelphia to live in a two-bedroom flat and worked as a janitor at City Hall.

### **Reuniting**

My father sent for my mother and his three male siblings to live with him as we began trying to bring my sisters home.

### **Talents**

As early as five my father taught all of us to have a strong work ethic and I learned music, art, dance, and drama from my father and uncle George Byard.

### **Separation by Death**

My father died when I was twelve years old and I became parentified and as the eldest male in the house, it was my responsibility to help my mother raise my siblings.

### **First Encounter with Juvenile Justice**

After my father's death I started hanging out with some of the older guys in the neighborhood who were known to be thieves, and on one occasion I burglarized a University of Pennsylvania dormitory and got caught by the police when I tried to return the things I had taken. For the next five years I would be in and out of every juvenile facility in Philadelphia and had developed a strong reputation with a lot of jail house authorities.

### **Fighting Everybody's Fight**

All of my life I was chosen or viewed as a protector to the young, elderly, children, women, animals, and the disabled. And between age 13 and 18 I had been shot once and stabbed at least three to four times in fights to protect others. I would be the first generation to graduate from high school, barely passing and avoiding any further police encounters. In order to help my mother raise my seven siblings from 13-18 years old, I worked as a stock boy, paper boy, bus boy, dishwasher, huckster, migrant worker, street musician, singer, dancer, drummer, dramatist, commercial painter, and blueprinter.

### **Curriculum/Training**

- Leadership, Self Development & Social Justice
- Race, Gender, Racism & Diversity Awareness
- Community & Political Organizing

## Music

In my lifetime I have had the distinct pleasure of playing music with some world-renowned artists like Billy Paul, John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, and Sammy Davis Jr., as well as some great tap dancers.

## After High School

After high school I was hired by the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center as a surgical attendant and promoted to a student trainee in a new paramedical training program in respiratory therapy. After graduating four years later at 24 years old, I was hired by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia as the director of what would later become the Department of Cardiopulmonary Care.

During my ten years at CHOP, my mentors were doctors Leonard Bachman, C. Everett Koop and Jack Downes, and because of these men I was able to distinguish myself in this field. And because of my body of work later in my life I was appointed as a fellow in the Philadelphia College of Physicians.

When President John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy had their third child (Patrick), he was born premature with Hyaline membrane disease and I was the chief pulmonary consultant on his case.

## Commitment to Social Justice

Because I personally experienced racism, hunger, poverty, classism, separation, illiteracy, and incarceration, by age eighteen I had made a commitment to fight for social change.

## Education as the Key to Liberation

Because I always played school with my siblings and I never did well in my early years of schooling, I decided to set up a Community Freedom School, which entailed training preschoolers (2-5 years) during the day, elementary, middle, and high school students after school, with adult learning in the evening. The Freedom School and The Palmer Foundation would be the platform to build my social justice legacy for the next sixty-five years.

## Sports as an Outlet

I was inspired by many great athletes from five years old when I first saw the great Paul Robeson in a movie, along with the stories of Jack Johnson and heard a radio broadcast of boxing legend Joe Louis. Jesse Owens' track victories in the 1936 Berlin Olympics had a lasting impact on the whole world, and although I tried boxing, basketball, baseball, and tennis during my teen and young adult years, I was only mediocre. It would not be until I was 25 years old and started running in track and field that I found my stride, and by age forty I'd set a masters world record in the 50-yard dash indoors and became a world class runner, winning over 1,000 medals and trophies in over fifty years of competing. I was able to set records in city, state, national, and international competitions in the 50, 60, 75, 100, 150, 200, 300, and 400-yard dashes indoors and outdoors from age 25 to 75.

## More Education

While at Children's Hospital I went to Temple University to study business administration as well as radio and television production and direction. After that I went to Cheyney State University to study secondary education with a major in social studies and history for my teaching degree

Because I was so involved in the civil rights movement and running the cardiopulmonary department, I resigned from CHOP. I became the director of community organization for model cities, where I could fight for social justice full time and because I had become recognized nationally as a premier community and political organizer. This allowed me to travel inside and outside the country.

## Curriculum/Training

- Leadership, Self Development & Social Justice
- Race, Gender, Racism & Diversity Awareness
- Community & Political Organizing

In 1955 I had created The Palmer Foundation (501©3) tax exempt education organization with the goal of developing educational and training materials for at-risk children and their families. Here is a partial list of social justice issues that the Foundation has worked on over the years:

- Racism/gender bias
- Women/elder abuse
- Housing/homeless
- Adoption/foster care
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Environment/animal abuse
- Police abuse/prison reform
- Illiteracy/education reform
- Health/mental health
- Poverty/welfare rights
- Child abuse
- Suicide
- Anti-gang work

### **Between 1967-1971 notable organizing accomplishments**

- Philadelphia school strike
- Philadelphia Freedom Theatre
- Curbstone College
- Committee on Political Education
- Society for Preservation of African History
- Black United Fund
- Temple University Community Mental Health
- Black People's Unity Movement
- Black Power Conference
- University of Pennsylvania Community Mental Health
- Black Panther International Constitution Convention
- Black Economic Development Conference
- Anti War Convention
- University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Social Work required courses on American racism

In 1971, at the age of 37, I went to Howard Law School to get my Juris Doctorate and graduated at age 40 to help me in my social justice work.

### **After Law School**

My organizing work had me working for a number of governors, US Senators and Congressional Representatives, legislators, mayors, counsel, and presidential candidates, including Jessie Jackson, Jimmy Carter, Shirley Chisholm, and Teddy Kennedy.

### **More Organizing After Law School**

- Citywide Human Rights Committee
- MOVE vs Philadelphia confrontation I (shootout)
- MOVE vs Philadelphia confrontation II (bombing)
- Radio WDAS Unity Day
- Catholic archdioceses school vouchers
- Parental school choice movement

### **Business Consulting**

- Information consultation and education
- National Small Business and Community Association
- Wisconsin Steel Mill (\$500 million project)
- WM Anderson Mechanical Co. (\$50 million project)

### **Curriculum/Training**

- Leadership, Self Development & Social Justice
- Race, Gender, Racism & Diversity Awareness
- Community & Political Organizing

- AL Williams Financial Services (Senior VP)

After helping Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge get charter and cyber school reform, I applied for and received a charter, which was named after me and grew to be the largest (1300 students) preschool to high school charters in Philadelphia. I borrowed eleven million dollars and built a new 5,500 square foot two-story campus on 1.5 acres and rented another high school.

#### Curriculum/Training

- Leadership, Self Development & Social Justice
- Race, Gender, Racism & Diversity Awareness
  - Community & Political Organizing