

INTRODUCTION

The Search

The stories you tell bind you close to one another yet they give you wings to fly out confidently into the larger world. They teach you how the world works and where you belong in it.¹

—Eileen Silva Kindig

I didn't know John Fetzer long. I met him in 1987 when I was hired to work for the Fetzer Institute at the early stages of its development. The administrative building on West KL Avenue in Oshtemo, Michigan, was being built at the time, and its completion and dedication marked the Fetzer Institute's "coming out" into the world.

John was eighty-six years old when I met him—he died a month before his ninetieth birthday. During those few years, John was actively involved in the organization and we participated in many meetings and less formal gatherings around the Institute's activities. But, important to me, we had conversations that were more intimate and deep than might be expected between the founder of an organization and a new employee. Usually our conversations centered on our inner, spiritual experiences. I wasn't alone in feeling close to him. John's was our "grandfather" and those of us working in the organization were his family. At that time, it was the way he wanted the organization to be.

As I have dug into the archives at the Fetzer Institute and gathered the stories of people who knew John Earl Fetzer, I have grown to love and respect John in a much larger way. Not just for what he seeded in the world, but also for who he was and the struggles he faced. As I have come to know him, I have also learned more about my own life. I hope that you, the reader, can come to know yourself better through John's legacy as well.

In reading the stories of John's early years, it is possible to feel the excitement of an eleven-year-old sending messages and picking up baseball scores over the wireless. You can imagine the wonder he felt for this new method of communication that was just unfolding in our culture. Building his first radio receiver and station required a great deal of creativity, ingenuity, and courage. He was stepping into the unknown with a vision of what was possible.

John's story is a story of the spirit of innovation and risk-taking that is characteristic of the Fetzer Institute today. In later sections, there will be stories of John's scientific explorations and spiritual work that offer glimpses into the character of a science of wholeness and other areas that the Institute has been developing. The Fetzer Institute has more than a history: It has a heritage. While history tells us what might have happened in the past, heritage is something handed down to us from our ancestors. It is alive within the current culture. Perhaps John Fetzer's stories can deepen the understanding of the roots of the organization and its purpose and direction.



Without exception, the people I interviewed knew John during his old age, by which time he had developed an integrated and spiritual maturity. I was particularly interested in how they would describe him. What were the values he showed? What personal characteristics did he demonstrate in his interactions with them? There were differences in the language used but remarkable consistency in the essence of how people described him. Nearly everyone commented on his complexity and his sense of humor. He loved anything new, and he did not like waste. He was analytical, questioning, creative, dedicated, eccentric, independent, contemplative, innovative, perceptive, and humble. He was spiritual and visionary. He had courage,

and he was wise and sweet. On the other hand, he was controlling, conservative, private, and secretive. He was a perfectionist. He lived a compartmentalized life. He showed different aspects of himself to different people to the extent that other than his wife, Rhea, there probably wasn't anyone who felt they knew the whole person.



The Fetzer Institute today is an outer expression of John Fetzer's mature values, his soul purpose, and his life actions. By getting to know him more fully, those in the organization can better feel the source of the "wind beneath their wings"—those subtle forces that still influence the Institute as it flies into the larger world.

The Fetzer Institute evolved from John Earl Fetzer's lifelong search. When his interest in the "wireless" began at age eleven, it is unlikely that he knew it would initiate his quest to understand those forces in the universe that you can't see but you know are there. His early days in radio and communications were marked by a fascination with the science and technology of creating radio receivers that could catch the sound waves from stations far from his home in rural Indiana. He was a small-town boy, and tuning into the bigger cities introduced him to the sounds of a larger world beyond his own. Not much was known during those early days of radio about the technology of building stations, but John's creativity and resourcefulness enabled him to build his own receiver sets and later to build his first station. He was an innovator, a pioneer, an explorer.

As we go through my life story, you're going to find that the word "Search" is one of the most paramount activities of my life. I've been searching all my life—not essentially on one subject but on many subjects. I've never been able to rest on cursory knowledge about anything—it must be in-depth and it must be understood. You're going to find practically in the whole history of my life that I've been searching and searching—the evolutionary search. That led to pioneering into things that nobody else had ever done before—not because I necessarily wanted to do something else, but my interests led me to go do that thing because I was curious to know.²

In his early years, John explored the radio receiver and the technology of wireless communication. Later, he explored his capacity as a “spiritual receiver” and the technology of the body and the nature of physical health. His health became a major obsession, and he became a living laboratory to the projects he supported financially. The common thread between his interest in radio and his interest in health was his fascination with energy. His interest in the energy of radio evolved into an interest in the energetics of the human body and human relationship. To John, the body was the ultimate “antenna,” the ultimate receiving station for all types of energy—energy from the spiritual realms as well as from our physical universe. The body was a sending station as well. If the energetics of the body could be finely tuned, if the signals could come through loud and clear, then humanity would be in a healthy state.

... the proper use of energy is the application of a dynamic force field, which in its function describes and prescribes a state of health... love is the unifying energy field that mobilizes the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual resources in the caring and sharing with another. It is an attraction of amplitude, a resonance of renewal.³



When John created the Fetzer Institute, his primary focus was grounded in his interest in energy medicine. This interest centered on energy, on the mysteries of waves, on sending and receiving. His chief inquiry was how to tune the human energy receiver through health, in the same way you tune a radio to receive a station. He also saw the Institute as the means to bring the values of wholeness, freedom, and love into the world and the coming age of “freedom of spirit.” How these interests related to each other wasn’t very clear to most people, but in John’s worldview, they were directly linked.

In the following sections of this book, I hope that the reader will come to understand how John’s life was an exploration into the energy of life, and how the roots of the Institute can be found in his early work in radio. How did John explore energy? How did he use and manipulate energy? How does John’s exploration of energy relate to the work being done at the Institute today? What stories give us a glimpse of his lifelong quest to

understand the energy of life, the energy of health and healing? How did all this relate to “freedom of spirit”?

As a seventeen-year-old, John went through an extremely serious illness caused by complications from influenza he contracted during the great epidemic of 1918. He struggled to live, to regain the health that had suddenly been taken from him. At this early stage of his life, he learned not to link his health to science. Many years later, the evolutionary spiral circled back to focus on health again. By this time, John had broadened his healthcare interests considerably to include alternative forms of healing, specifically those that focused on the energetic.

Of all the subtle energies that John explored in his own health and through his early philanthropic pursuits, the most elusive was his exploration of spirit. With that exploration, he was able to find his heart, to see love as the unifying energy of his life and of the universe. After considerable searching and questing, he came to understand that love was the bottom line. As he told the Institute's board chair, Dr. Jeremy Waletzky, a few days before he died, “the only thing is love.”⁴ It was this energy that fueled his lifelong quest.

