

Claude Lewis

Howie



Doctor Recalls Nov. 22

Bul - 10/30/77

All you have to do is mention Nov. 22, 1963, and everybody knows.

But Dr. Malcolm Perry, now a full professor of surgery at the University of Texas' Southwestern Medical School, is one of those who knows best. He was in the middle of it.

Dr. Perry was having lunch at his job at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas when he got the call. The 35th President of the United States of America had been shot.

"They are bringing him into Emergency Room One right now," the telephone operator said. There was disaster in her voice. The tall, reddish-haired 34-year-old surgeon hung up and moved quickly.



The next 30 minutes had to be the most momentous in his life. Even though the blood of John Fitzgerald Kennedy was all over the floor, Dr. Perry removed his dark blue Glen plaid jacket and tossed it into a corner. Then he held out his hands while a nurse helped him onto surgical gloves.

Jackie Kennedy stood nearby in a plum-colored dress. Her husband's blood and pieces of his flesh were all over it. Her face did not change. There were no tears and no words; just this terrible strength that she has.

Perry

It Was No Use

Dr. Perry worked hard, but after 27 minutes of trying to stop the bleeding, trying to get the President breathing again, it was no use. The clock on the wall said it was 1 P.M. when Dr. Perry lifted his hands from inside the President's chest, where he had been massaging the heart. Nothing more could be done for John Fitzgerald Kennedy. He was now of history. So Dr. M.T. Jenkins reached down and pulled the white sheet over the President's face, and nearly the whole world went into mourning.

Yesterday, I talked with Dr. Perry by telephone. He was willing to talk about this day in history ten years ago, but everything he said was understatement. "I simply did my job," he said. "Some people tried to make more of my role than it was. When you're in medicine, you just do the best you can."

His voice was crisp and light on the telephone. The way he spoke, you could tell all the way from Dallas he was one of the decent ones; one of the ones who cared. You knew he did everything he could to save the President, but you got the feeling that Dr. Perry would have done the same for you.

Only 2 Emergencies

"Of course, I'll never forget it," he said. "I realized that I had the most important man in the world on that table, and we did all we could. But the damage was too great. I remember being so involved I wasn't aware of the 20 or 30 things we were working on till it was over; you get so busy. . . . Once you get to work like that everything is so compressed.

"The main thing was that I was trying to secure adequate airway for the President. There are only two real medical emergencies: breathing and bleeding. If you don't correct those problems, nothing else matters. You only have a few minutes.

"Afterward," Dr. Perry said, "everybody was so depressed." There was a massive press conference at the hospital. Then he went home to rest, and the whole world seemed like a grim fantasy. "It was hard to believe that it happened, and I had been right in the middle of it," Dr. Perry recalled. "I remember late into the night having this very unreal feeling; everything seemed unreal after it was all over."

Not Over Yet

But the whole thing was not over for Dr. Perry yet. Two days later he was making his rounds at Parkland Memorial when Dr. Ron Jones, chief resident, reached him. "I hate to tell you this, but they just shot Mr. Oswald, and you're the only one on duty again."

Dr. Perry shuddered. Then he hurried toward Emergency Room Two. Perhaps there was something he could do for Lee Harvey Oswald. But when he got there, he found that Oswald had been mortally wounded.

"What happens," Dr. Perry was asked yesterday, "when you're in the center of grief over the death of the President and you get the man accused of that enormous crime?"

"You do your job," he said without hesitation. "Interestingly enough, you don't feel any different. It's not the job of a doctor to make moral judgements about his patients. I can honestly say you do the best you can for an Oswald, a wine or a President. No matter who is on the table, you give it the full court press.

"Nov. 22, 1963, was a big day in my life and in history. But I didn't do anything special. I simply did my job. It's medicine I'm in," Dr. Perry said with pride.