

Hearts and Flowers from John Dean

It had been an extraordinary physical and emotional ordeal for John Dean. Most evenings after the hearings, he and his two attorneys, Robert McCandless and Charles Shaffer, retreated to Dean's town house in Alexandria, Va. There, Maureen, his brittlely attractive wife who sat somewhat tensely behind Dean in the hearing room, prepared hamburgers. Then Dean and the lawyers went over the day's testimony and watched evening newscasts but not reruns of the day's performance. After a hot bath and a rubdown by "Mo," Dean would get to sleep by 11:30 p.m. Despite the tension, he said he slept well.

Shortly after the last session, Dean sank into an easy chair, Maureen near him. He agreed to discuss the personal aspects of his week that was with TIME Correspondent Hays Gorey, who had followed him to his home. The cool, meticulous and rather scholarly-looking Dean of the hearings seemed to fade away, as did (at least in his own mind) the earlier Dean, deeply involved in the illegal and unsavory acts. A third Dean emerged, still pleading his case but giving a strangely sentimental picture of his life.

What had been the most difficult aspects of the week of testimony?

Physically, the most exhausting thing was to read my opening statement. Emotionally, the most difficult aspects were having to talk about the President of the United States as the truth demanded and having to involve former associates and friends.

What sustained him during the week?

I knew what I knew. I had no fear of being tripped up in cross-examination. Really, to tell the truth is the easiest thing in the world.

Did he think he was bringing down the Republic or restoring it?

There's a cloud over this city. Until this cloud is removed, the Government will not operate. This nation will recover only when we get to the bottom of this situation. I look upon myself as one who is helping the process.

What thoughts had been running through his mind?

Let me tell you a story. When I was five or six or seven, I was playing with matches behind the garage. There was lots of brush there. It caught fire and burned down the back of the garage. My father asked me if I had done it. I said no. But of course my father knew I had done it. He sent me to my room, saying "John, we'll talk again when you are ready to tell the truth." Then he did a wise thing. While I was in my room, he sent the fire marshal to talk to me. He must have been ten feet tall, wearing a big blue uniform. I can see him to this day. He said to me: "Now, John, you haven't told your father the truth." The impact of the blue uniform as the authority of the law was enormous. I said to myself: "The jig is up." I told my father. He said: "The best way is—tell the truth."

The truth emerges. There's no doubt about it. I expressed the hope today that the Ervin hearings will bring out all the truth, but even if they do not, some day all these facts will come out.

What had he relied upon during the ordeal?

Prayers. Every night, the last thing we do before going to sleep, Mo and I ask each other, "Did you say your prayers?" I almost went into the Episcopal ministry, you know. And I want to tell you, the love of this woman has been one of the greatest sources of strength. You can't imagine how great.

But how had he got involved in the Water-gate mess?

Well, one reason, I suppose, is that I have always been ambitious, always wanted to get ahead. I remember an uncle of mine who once cautioned me: "John, you've got to stop to smell the flowers."

Why had he participated in the cover-up for so long?

Here's an analogy that may make it more understandable. I watch crew racing quite often out there on the Potomac River. You know, if you get involved in crew racing, you're on the team. I pulled my oar a long time. Suddenly I realized the race was over, and that we were going the wrong way. But you know what happens when you drop your oar? It may throw you out of the boat. Well, finally I did drop my oar, and I've been trying to swim to shore ever since—through a lot of muck.

Did he have any regrets?

I should say not. Life is much easier when you can be open. Back to the crew-race analogy again, I did try for a long time to tell the coxswain that the race was over and that we were rowing in the wrong direction. But he wasn't listening, and a couple of members of the crew are still rowing.

What about the future?

I really haven't given that a lot of thought. Some, but not a lot. I do know this: I'm grateful that I am young enough to have plenty of time now to stop and smell the flowers. There are many things I enjoy doing that I haven't given myself time to do. Now I will. I did, after all, rise to a very high position in the Government. I've been there, and I have no desire to go back.

