

[Original is handwritten]

Alfred S. Cook, JR., M. D.

357 Nassau Street, Princeton, New Jersey

TELEPHONE WA 4-1054

9/21/63

Dear Miss Salz,

I am pleased to give you a brief resume of the circumstances leading to our good friend's death. As you will surmise as you read on I am quite pleased the way things went because there was a minimum of suffering from what could have been a most horrible death.

Last fall, on routine examination, I discovered a large aneurysm (swelling) of his abdominal aorta. X-rays confirmed this and I referred him to a vascular surgeon in Philadelphia, Pa. At first, on special X-rays, the condition appeared to be operable, but on inspection directly this was found not to be the case.

The professor was then advised that there was experimental surgery for such a condition being done by a man in Houston, Texas.¹ We all discussed this and concluded in view of the extent of the destruction of the large artery that they surgery would be no better than 50-50 to survive the procedure, let alone live on after that with all of the conditions which develop later.

The consensus of opinion was that he had about six months to live. [-2-] He knew this. He also knew that death could occur two ways: (1) The aneurysm could break down slowly and hemorrhage a bit at a time causing total disability, agonizing pain and much mental suffering in that death was inevitable. (2) The aneurysm could burst completely like an inflated balloon and death would come within 30 seconds.

Fortunately for all of us the latter did occur. The day before his death he was complaining of lower abdominal and low back pains (to his friends). He kept going, however, and was out the night of his death with Dr. Giese [sic] until midnight. Dr. Giese left him at midnight.² He returned at noon the next day, found the lights on, and found the professor fully clothed as before, dead on the floor near his study. I saw the body before it was moved. Nothing had been touched. Careful evaluation revealed death had occurred within minutes after Giese left him the night before. He had not struggled in any way, had made no effort to get up or to reach a

¹ None other than Michael DeBakey, the world-renowned cardiovascular surgeon; see more about DeBakey's judgment of Eka's condition in "Reminiscences", near the end of the chapter on the Princeton years.

² I have always been sure that it was well before midnight when I took Eka home, though I don't recall what I told Dr. Cook when he came to the house after I found Eka dead. Only much later did I discover that Monday, Sept. 9th was the official date of death, not Sunday the 8th. I suppose I said "before midnight", or "around midnight", which Dr. Cook took to be too vague.

telephone, 15 feet away.³ Examination revealed the abdomen to be fully distended with blood from the sudden massive hemorrhage.

[-3-] He died quickly, quietly, and exactly the way he had longed for with this monstrous burden he had carried for nine months. We had discussed this thing in every detail. He had begged me not to prolong agony with hopeless heroic therapy in the event that he went the hard way. Fortunately, I never had to make a choice. He went exactly as we both hoped he would.

He died with the same courage he lived his life with. He has been a great inspiration to me, in life and death, and I'll never forget him. I thank God I was fortunate enough to have known him and had the privilege to attend him.

I don't know what more I can add to this. I had no word of the actual impending death in the twenty-four hours of the onset of trouble.

He wouldn't call me. He would [-4-] never "bother" me with "neurotic" complaints as he told Dr. Giese just an hour before he died.⁴

We were almost fortunate to know him. I was fortunate to live with, and I hope gain some of, his tremendous strength of character. If I can be of any further help to your understanding of this loss of ours please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A.S. Cook Jr. M.D.

³ My own judgment about Eka's position on the floor, at first sight, was that he was heading for that telephone when he collapsed. See "Reminiscences", as above in n.1.

⁴ I don't recall Eka's having made this remark to me, but it sounds true to his character.