

Rulon Stacey Personal Recollections

- 1) On Sunday, October 11, 1998, I received an overhead page at Poudre Valley Hospital and in answering the phone I found on the line the operator for the White House. The operator told me that President Clinton wanted to speak to the family of Matthew Shepard and asked if I could arrange that meeting. I told them that I could and asked what time they would like to arrange for the phone call. They told me the time and that they would call back this number when the President was ready.

At the appointed time, I received another overhead page and in answering the phone again found myself speaking to the operator for the White House. I told her that I would find Matthew's father and as arranged would get him on the phone.

However, as I went to find Dennis, I found that Dennis, Judy, and Logan were in Matthew's room having family time with Matthew. Logan had been working up the courage to meet with Matthew and the time had come so the family had gone in to be with him. I knew that this was an important time for the family and was unwilling to interrupt.

I went back to the phone and told the operator that the family had unexpectedly gone in to visit Matthew and I was unable to interrupt them. The operator in a terse voice said to me, "Sir, I have the President of the United States on hold. It would be best to not keep the President of the United States on hold." I told the operator that, "I am so sorry, but there is no way that I am going into that room and break up this family gathering." I told her that the President would either have to stay on hold or that I could call back when the family had finished their time together.

After some discussion, the operator from the White House agreed with the latter alternative and gave me a special number to call. After the family meeting was concluded, I called that number and the family had a discussion with President Clinton.

- 2) After being at the hospital for most of the weekend, I went home late on Sunday, October 11th, for the first time that weekend. After being home for just a short period of time, I received a call from the hospital that Matthew's condition was worsening rapidly and that I should return to PVH. By the time I arrived, Matthew had died. The first time I saw his parents, Dennis and Judy, was in the hallway outside of the Intensive Care Unit. The three of us embraced and cried together for several minutes. After that meeting, I told them that the world would want to know their thoughts and a summary of Matthew's last moments. Judy told me her thoughts and I recorded those thoughts on the document included as Attachment 2.

However, we had previously scheduled a press briefing with the NBC Today Show at 7:00am eastern standard time. Given Matthew's death, we knew that

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we could not break that news to NBC alone at that time, but rather that we would need to let all news outlets know sooner. So, between midnight and 3:00am on Monday, October 12th, I and a few staff members frantically tried to call any news organizations so that we could tell them of a news conference we had scheduled at 4:00am local time on October 12, 1998.

During those calls, we were repeatedly asked if Matthew had died. In an increasingly frustrated voice, I told the reporters that his condition had changed sufficient to warrant us calling a press conference at 4:00am, but that we would have no further comment until then. After working so hard to contact all of the news outlets about the press conference, I remember walking out of the hospital at 4:00am for the news conference and seeing just two cameras. I was wondering if people had gotten the announcement. During the press conference, I remember thinking about Dennis and Judy and their family and how close we had become during the ordeal. I also started to think of my own children and I became emotional in telling the story. I had been honored to be the spokesperson for the family for the past several days and remember feeling ashamed that I had lost my composure in representing them.

Shortly after that press conference, I was scheduled to be on the NBC Today Show and many other programs. Accordingly, it was only later in the morning near 7:00am that I was able to go back up to the conference room in the hospital where the family had been staying.

As I walked into that room (our NeuroSciences Conference Room on the 4th floor of PVH), I saw Dennis Shepard standing alone in the room watching a replay of the 4:00am press conference. It was at that moment that I saw myself on television for the first time. Again, I felt great remorse at having lost my composure during the press conference. My only thought at the time was to walk up to Dennis and embrace him and to tell him how sorry I was for his loss. As we stood alone in that conference room embracing, Dennis assured me that the family was pleased with my representation and the effort I had made on their behalf and his words brought to me great comfort.

- 3) On Sunday, October 11, 1998, for the first time in Matthew's entire stay there was during the afternoon a brief reprieve from the intensity of the past few days. Matthew's mother, father, and brother all gathered at the hospital as well as many of his friends and were simply sitting and talking for the first time. We had established a room for the family members to gather on the 4th floor of Poudre Valley Hospital and during this more relaxed time I walked in to speak to the family. As we were talking and getting to better know each other, Dennis Shepard and I started to compare notes about our collegiate allegiances. He found out that I was a graduate of Brigham Young University and he was from the University of Wyoming. Because these two schools are rivals, we shared many stories of athletic events over the past decades and

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spent a great deal of time harassing each other about our respective schools. The time that we spent reminiscing about BYU and the University of Wyoming was priceless and allowed us for just a moment to focus on something other than the tragedy. Several weeks after the funeral, I received a large Wyoming Cowboys football jersey enclosed in a glass frame. There are two plaques attached to the frame.

The first says,

– RULON STACEY –
PROUD MEMBER OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING
FAN CLUB

– MY MOTTO: –
“I ROOT FOR THE
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING
AND ANY TEAM THAT PLAYS!!!”
“B.Y.U”

– GO COWBOYS –

The second says,

In Appreciation From
THE FAMILY OF
MATTHEW SHEPARD

To this day, the large frame hangs in a prominent location in my office and is one of my most prized possessions.

- 4) In order to attend Matthew's funeral, we chartered a small plane from a meeting I was attending in Steamboat Springs to where the funeral was being held in Casper, Wyoming. As the pilot was attempting to land, the cloud ceiling was much lower than he anticipated and we came out of the clouds misaligned with the runway with very little room to adjust. At the last minute, the pilot was able to maneuver the plane hard to reach the runway.

The pilot, my wife, Linda, and I were able to land safely. Because of the weather, ours was the last flight in and no other flights were allowed to depart for some time. We ended up staying in Casper for several days and attended the family gatherings before and after the funeral. Because I was with the family, I was fortunate to never witness the protests going on outside. However, I was there as Matthew's uncle suffered a heart attack and was one of the ones to rush to provide CPR which unfortunately proved unsuccessful. I remember wondering as we were gathering for Matthew's funeral and

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providing CPR and emergency services to his uncle just how much one family could be asked to endure at one time. It was an incredible experience to see the resiliency of the Shepard family.