

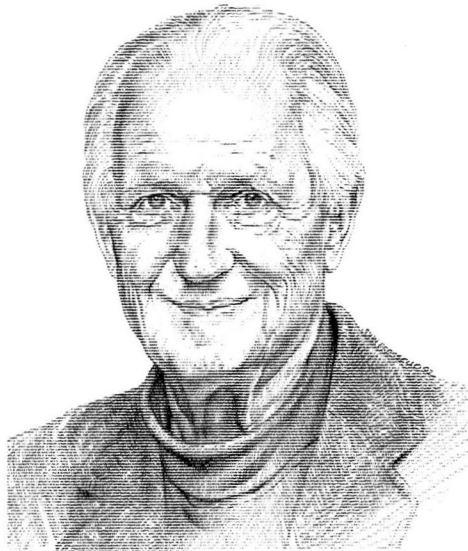
GEORGE CRILE Jr, MD (1907–1992)

GEORGE CRILE, JR, MD, died at the Cleveland Clinic September 10, 1992, just 2 months short of his 85th birthday. He left an indelible imprint on the Cleveland Clinic Department of General Surgery, where he practiced for 35 years, and on the whole sphere of general surgery.

Barney, as he was known throughout his life, having been nicknamed at an early age by his mother, was the oldest son of George W. Crile, MD, one of the four founders of the Cleveland Clinic.

Barney was born in Cleveland in 1907, went to grade and high school at Laurel and University schools, and at Hotchkiss. He went on to Yale University and to Harvard Medical School, where he received his MD degree summa cum laude, graduating first in his class in 1933. His internship was at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis, with Dr. Evarts A. Graham, after which he returned to the Cleveland Clinic in 1934 to continue his surgery training with his father and Drs. Thomas E. Jones and Robert S. Dinsmore. He joined the staff of the Department of Surgery in 1937 and, when Dr. Dinsmore retired in 1956, he was named chairman of the newly formed Department of General Surgery (specialization in surgery had begun at the Clinic under Dr. Dinsmore). He practiced until 1972, when he retired from active surgery, staying on as Consultant Emeritus in surgery and seeing selected patients for follow-up.

This brief outline of Barney's career barely does justice to the incredible personality of the man. From



boyhood on, Barney had developed a questioning spirit. This spirit, along with his intelligence, his voracious appetite for life, his love of poetry and adventure, his love of debate, his skill as a surgeon, and his ability to write, all contributed to the making of a surgeon who, almost more than any other surgeon of the 1950-1975 period in America, changed the direction of cancer surgery from one of progressively more radical procedures to a conservative approach.

Like his father, his initial interest was in diseases of the thyroid. He changed the treatment of papillary cancer to a conservative approach, recognized (with J. Beach Hazard, MD) a new form of thyroid cancer (medullary cancer), and recognized the importance of thyroid hormone feeding in suppressing thyroid cancer growth and recurrence. Later interests included the treatment of portal hypertension, where he was the first to describe oversewing of esophageal varices to control bleeding. In the field of intestinal disease, he and Rupert Turnbull, MD, described the immediate maturing of ileostomy and colostomy stomas, conservative operations for rectal cancer, and emergency colectomy for toxic ulcerative colitis. He was one of the first American surgeons to perform the newly described Whipple operation for cancer of the pancreas (and years later was one of the first to question its value), to perform truncal vagotomy for the treatment of duodenal ulcers, and longitudinal pancreaticojejunostomy for chronic pancreatitis.

His most important contribution, however, was in the field of breast cancer. Influenced by the studies of a few surgeons in England and Europe, he became one of the first and most vocal advocates in the United States for conservative operations for the treatment of breast cancer and for discussing operative approaches with the patient before surgery, allowing her to participate in the decision for therapy. Dr. Crile was initially alone in his efforts to abandon the traditional radical approach (one operation for all stages of breast cancer), but gradually other surgeons began to see the wisdom of his ways. After prospective randomized trials proved him right, the entire Western surgical world began to practice these principles and ideas.

His impact on surgery in America and the English-speaking world was enormous. He was widely quoted, discussed, and vilified by the entrenched surgical establishment, and his motives were questioned, but finally most surgeons have come to agree with his thinking.

He published approximately 400 papers in the surgical literature, innumerable commentaries and articles in other journals, and 12 books including the autobiography, *The Way It Was* (Kent State University Press, 1992), published 1 month before his death. Of the many honors he received, the one that pleased him most was being elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, in 1978. His father had been elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College, and they became the only father and son surgeons to be so honored.

Dr. Crile had a huge general surgical practice because he saw patients quickly and referring physicians had confidence in his judgment and skill. He knew both when to operate and when not to operate. He was highly valued as a consultant and as a surgeon. His conservative approach to thyroid and breast disease, to

blood transfusion, and to some abdominal conditions were initially questioned, but when his results were seen to be good, his concepts were rapidly accepted.

Debate was dear to Barney's heart. Sometimes one wondered what his real thoughts were as he was skillfully arguing and discussing. His aim frequently was to stimulate thought. Often he baited a friend, saying something that he knew was outrageous or controversial, only to engage the discussion. Life was never dull for Barney Crile. His interests in medicine, writing, nature, adventure, and society were pursued with enthusiasm and humor. He had friends from all walks of life and was loyal to all who knew him.

Barney was married for 28 years to Jane Halle Crile, who died in 1963. They had four children, Ann Crile Esselstyn, Joan Crile Foster, George Crile III, and Susan Crile Murphy. In late 1963, Barney married Helga Sandburg, with whom he would spend the last happy 29 years of his life. He and Helga loved to travel and to entertain. Their "Kent Road Film Festival" each Christmas was a gift to their friends, the most astonishing collection of home and travel movies, staged events, and pseudodocumentaries, all narrated and set to music in a gifted fashion by Helga and Barney Crile.

Barney Crile was a unique and enormously stimulating man. His love of life, of travel, of history, and of adventure, his intelligence and wit, and his skill and ability as a surgeon and as an author will forever be remembered by his friends and colleagues.

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