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Reflections on Working with Larry

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Abstract

In longer-form writing with Larry Gostin, especially on global health, I have been particularly struck by how careful he is not to lose the narrative voice, especially of the vulnerable. He truly believes that these stories are "on loan" to us, and that there is an almost holy reverence and devotion we owe to the lives of those whose stories we tell.

Keywords: public health; global health; tribute

I first met Larry in 2007 when I was on the entry-level job market. He was already a legend. I had carefully studied some of his work on reproduction — particularly abortion — for my job talk. He was rightly famous for being the voice of the law professoriate in the major medical journals — it seemed (and amazingly still seems) as though every other week he was publishing in JAMA. His work on HIV/AIDS, Global Health, and emergency powers were well known to me and anyone else who had taken a health law job.

To say I was a bit intimidated was an understatement. But, as I have now seen him do countless times for many others, he quickly put me at ease. There was something in that lilt in his voice, perhaps vestigial from his time in England, and the way he cocked his head when he talked to you that always made you feel like you were saying the most interesting thing he has ever heard; never mind that you might have been saying something quite banal.

Well, in the years since, I have had the pleasures that 28-year-old me could never have fathomed of getting to write with Larry and work closely with him many times. He is a wise co-author and is able to achieve the rare balance of kindness with a critical eye. "This reads awfully well; I am just wondering if maybe we can make it sing a little more?" is one of my favorite Larry-isms I have adopted when speaking to other writing partners. In longer-form writing with him, especially on global health, I have been particularly struck by how careful he is not to lose the narrative voice, especially of the vulnerable. He truly believes that these stories are "on loan" to us, and that there is an almost holy reverence and devotion we owe to the lives of those whose stories we tell.

Having traveled to several parts of the world with Larry and seen his enthusiastic reception, I am thrilled to see how much he is loved and admired by audiences across the globe. But like all great men he does have a flaw: as a dining partner. He is so careful in what he eats, that whenever we dine together, I cannot help but feel like a glutton, a processed food Godzilla. Indeed, I am still haunted by something he said to me in the buffet line for breakfast once that muffins were "cupcakes in disguise."

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