



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

REMEMBERING DAVID GARMAISE

David Garmaise died on April 19 after a long struggle with cancer. Over the previous fifteen years, David was the author of about a thousand articles in the Global Fund Observer, and multiple Aidspan Guides and Reports.

Born in Canada in 1948, David left his job as a government official in 1996 to work full-time on HIV/AIDS issues. A few years later he was made Executive Director of the Canadian AIDS Society; he also served as Managing Editor of the HIV/AIDS Policy & Law Review.

David and I met via email correspondence in 2003, a few months after I founded Aidspan and its GFO newsletter. I had written to him about something he had published that I disagreed with; he replied in a very civilised way; and as the conversation developed, it became clear that he knew a huge amount about AIDS, and that he was a superb (and speedy) researcher and writer.

I proposed that he start writing for Aidspan on a part-time basis, and the rest is history.

The work relationship that David and I developed was most unusual. David was based in Canada and then moved to Thailand. I was based in New York and then moved to Kenya. The number of occasions on which we met in person was no more than half a dozen.

Neither of us was much of a telephone person; we were email people. Each of us wrote around 10,000 emails to the other between 2004 and my retirement in 2012 – sometimes in a conversation that went back and forth several times in a day. “Have you heard about X?” “Yep; it’s interesting.” “Why don’t you spend a few hours looking into it?” “OK, done. Here are the key things I found out.” “Great. Could you draft an article focusing on the first three points you mention?” “Sure. But I may not be able to finish it until tomorrow morning.” “I forgive you.”

David did not take kindly to bosses; but then, neither did I. Indeed, he was a bit of an odd duck. But then, so was I. I think he dreamed in bullet points. Me too. He worshipped tight clear writing. Again, me too.

Of course, when similar people try to work together, it sometimes happens that each tries to dominate the other, leading to endless friction. But we never had that problem, or any other. As Aidspace grew, I had less and less time to write articles. Meanwhile, David had zero interest in managing others, in going to meetings, or in raising funds. It was a work relationship made in heaven. Furthermore, David had a wicked and dry sense of humour, which he revealed only occasionally, often in the middle of some dry technical email exchange. The surprise made it all the funnier.

The Global Fund raises and disburses money that has saved millions of lives. I truly believe that David’s work, in which on countless occasions he helped Global Fund applicants and recipients to understand the Fund better, played a key role in this. I told him, in my last of 10,000 emails, that this was so and that he should be proud of it.

Bernard Rivers (bernard.rivers@gmail.com) founded Aidspace and its Global Fund Observer newsletter in 2002. He ran them until his retirement in 2012.

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