



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

MEMORIES OF WORKING WITH DAVID GARMAISE

In 2012, as I took over from Bernard Rivers as Aidspan's ED, Bernard told me he had a "secret weapon" – it was David Garmaise. It is so sad that David has been so ill and now died, but he was my secret weapon too. A phenomenal analyst, critic, editor and writer, David also worked fast. His time from idea to completing a story was sometimes just an hour or two. And GFO readers will know, the observations and descriptions of the Global Fund ecology from David were invaluable, and usually not something one could absorb quickly.

We worked together for 3 years and have since worked on several papers. My inbox contains thousands of carefully written, mistake-free, detailed pieces of writing. If Bernard, Adele, Ida and I (just for starters) could add together all our emails, which we won't (Reader: you are safe), and include his 1000-odd articles for GFO, his Guides and papers (from the Beginner's Guide, to his work on NFM, Allocation or Risk), his 15 years of observing the Fund is not just a book but a series of volumes.

This furious pace could be intimidating for his colleagues: we loved it but feared it too. As the day wore on (his day, in Thailand, was of course 4 hours in advance of ours in Kenya) he got grumpier and less tolerant. I used to warn my other colleagues not to send him drafts after 2pm Kenya time, as it could produce heavily caustic and tricky emails and a lot of red. But he was so capable of mocking himself. One line I kept, written after working on a particularly challenging piece of writing around the Global Fund's struggle with Risk: "I have seen the light! (in my defence, the light wasn't shining very brightly. I had to hunt for it.)".

Because the content that he was writing about was nearly always pretty serious, his humour (deep and joyful, sometimes cynical, always on point) was not always visible to those not on his emails. He ended one to me as we worked through the NFM and allocations: "One more thing: What does the Global Fund

mean by “at the end of a typical four-year period” (as above) or “will typically cover a period of four years” (as in the Board decision)? What does “typically” mean?”

I could give many examples of his fiercely inquiring mind and how he worked through these things. One of his tricks was to take one back to basics – via a country he either called “country x” or “Ruritania.” “If you have an inquiring mind and want to know in what circumstances the grant implementation period and the grant’s allocation utilization period are not the same, here you go: A malaria grant for Ruritania was approved in May 2015....”

In many ways he was a teacher and he certainly taught me so much, but patience once he had explained something once quickly ran out. So one got on the train as quickly as possible.

I don’t know much about his background, and we only met physically about 3 times. He didn’t like traveling much – except from the armchair – and so we kept to the ether. I gathered his father had been a judge, and in his early life he had worked for the Canadian postal service. I like to think his mind got a sound training there through sorting, categorising and communicating in that environment – but it certainly needed more food. His background as a manager – as the head of a Canadian AIDS activist NGO – is mind-boggling, and slightly worrying. But he was furious, he told me, when he realised his friends were dying and no one was doing much. So Bernard’s offer to work on watching, observing, analysing and ultimately supporting the work of the Global Fund – fit the man perfectly. He wanted to keep people’s feet to the fire – “make them make sense” – and help people understand what a good sentence looked like, preferably in a good-size font.

What was it like to work with him (he was always a colleague and I was never his “boss”)? He was funny, driven, and highly critical. He hated jargon (hated it), disliked any sign of ego and just wanted people to understand better what was happening so that decisions could be made that worked in the pursuit of the epidemics. In 2014, after the NFM had been rolled out, we were assessing how GFO had done. He wrote: “Re-reading the articles, I think we could have done better... But that’s hindsight for you.” The capacity to be self-critical made him such a good analyst.

I’ll miss his mind, his emails and his descriptions of the world of the epidemics. How ironic that he has died in the midst of this new pandemic – I wish I could have asked him what he thought of it. But he trained all of us to ask the questions and then keep asking them again, and of course keep watching. But when you write what you have seen, write clearly. Perhaps the only good thing about writing this obituary is that David is not going to be editing it.

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