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Memorial for Larry L. Cummings

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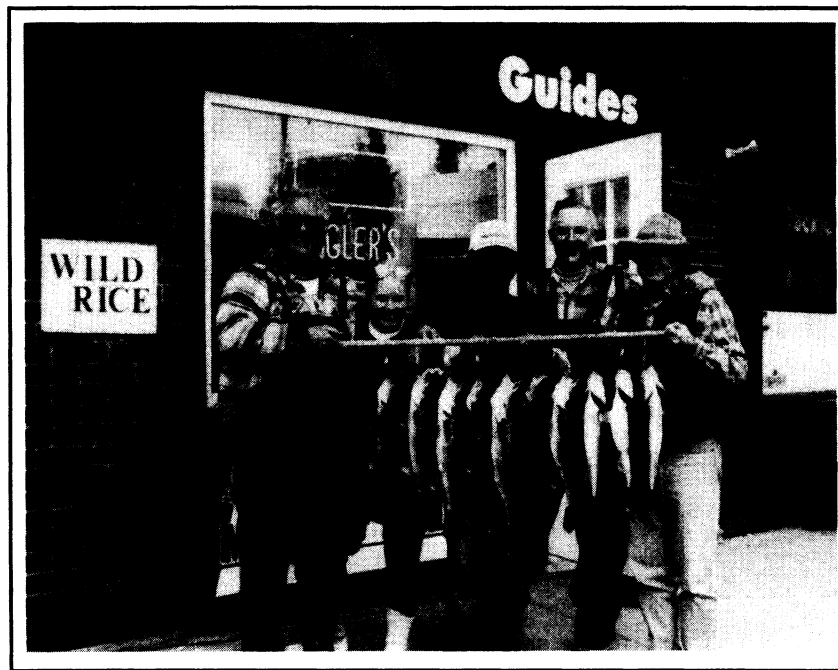
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Memorial for Larry L. Cummings

10.28.1937—6.3.1997

DONALD L. FERRIN
MICHAEL E. LATHAM
BALAJI S. CHAKRAVARTHY
ANDREW H. VAN DE VEN
University of Minnesota



Larry Cummings, Jeannie Porter, Don Pemble, Chris Berger, and John Pierce

With the recent premature death of Larry L. Cummings, the field of management has lost a great scholar and teacher. Larry's many friends and colleagues will miss a source of sincere and expert advice, encouragement, and fraternity.

Larry was one of the first doctoral students in organizational behavior, receiving his D.B.A. from Indiana University in 1964. He taught with distinction at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Northwestern University, and the University of Minnesota. Much of his remarkable career was spent trying to understand “the glue that holds organizations and the people within them together.” Larry published prolifically

and leaves behind seminal contributions in both organizational behavior and organizational theory. He also coedited with Barry Staw the influential annual series, *Research in Organizational Behavior*. Although Larry was to have formally retired from the University of Minnesota in September of 1997, he fully intended to continue his research on psychological ownership, trust, and other topics in partnership with colleagues around the world. Larry's sudden passing denies the field the fruits of this important work.

Besides his great contributions as a scholar, Larry also helped shape the relatively young field of organizational behavior and build many of its institutions.

He edited the *Academy of Management Journal* from 1976 to 1978 and was president of the Academy of Management in 1981. Elected a fellow of the Academy of Management in 1973, he served as dean of the fellows from 1990 to 1993. He was also a fellow of the American Psychological Society, the American Psychological Association, and the Decision Sciences Institute.

Not only did Larry reach the pinnacle of our profession, he was always there to help others on the same journey. As a colleague and mentor, Larry was truly exceptional. At last count, Larry had chaired 56 doctoral committees and served on more than 100 others. He also provided advice and encouragement to students for whom he had no official responsibility. Larry's students are now distinguished academics around the world. In recognition of his service to education, the Academy of Management presented him with its 1995 Distinguished Educator award. At the 1996 Academy of Management conference in Cincinnati, some of his past and present doctoral students from the University of Minnesota and Northwestern University organized a reception for Larry. Each took a few minutes to recount his or her favorite Larry story. They acknowledged that Larry demanded a lot of his students, and yes, he could be intimidating and unpredictable at times. Yet, he was tremendously supportive, both professionally and personally. They thanked him for bringing forth abilities and passions that might otherwise have remained undiscovered and undeveloped. For this, our field will ever be in Larry's debt.

Larry was not just an outstanding academic; he was also a multitalented individual. He was a talented athlete (having played minor league baseball in his early days), an accomplished clarinetist, and a "nearly unbeatable" pool player (to quote someone who saw him in action recently). Moreover, as anyone who knew Larry quickly found out, he was a passionate fisherman. He combined his passions for scholarship and fishing at "The Institute," a lake cabin in Northern Wisconsin that served as a base for both scholarship and fishing. As the many students and colleagues whom he invited to The Institute can attest, he knew just about everything there is to know about the science and art of fishing. In fact, this past year he had taken on a new consulting assignment: field testing new fishing rods for one of the premier fishing equipment manufacturers in the world. And many of the nuggets of wisdom he instilled in his students apply both on and off the water: "Where's the hook?" "Fish

where the fish are!" "Don't pick a dependent variable that doesn't wiggle!"

Larry passed on his passion for scholarship to his children. His daughter Anne holds a Ph.D. in organizational behavior and teaches at the Wharton School, and his son Glenn holds a Ph.D. in English literature and has taught at the University of Virginia and at Sheperds College. Larry is also survived by his mother, Lillian P. Cummings of Franklin, Indiana, and his life partner, Jeannie Porter, of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Complex and powerful as he was, Larry played many different roles in his friends' and colleagues' lives. We collected the following remembrances in the hope that we could capture and share some of the Larry we knew.

Jon L. Pierce

Professor, University of Minnesota, Duluth

Teacher, mentor, coach/cheerleader, colleague, fishing partner, fellow member of the board of "The Institute," and intimate friend. As the words above might suggest, my life was touched by Larry L. Cummings through a number of different venues. Our relationship spanned two and a half decades, a number of different roles, and several of life's arenas. I believe that I was one of the extremely fortunate ones to have connected with this extremely complex (driven, warm, demanding, giving, challenging, nurturing, competitive, and caring) and gifted human being in so many and different ways.

I first met L. L. Cummings in the literature, having read many of his early contributions to the field of organizational behavior. It was this initial influence that encouraged me to join him and do my doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin. During the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, Wisconsin was an intellectually rich environment for a student of organization, and Dr. Cummings contributed significantly to this experience.

My second meeting of Professor Cummings was through the eyes of a graduate student. In my nomination of Larry for the 1995 Academy of Management Distinguished Educator Award, I wrote that "the core of Larry's being can be found in his passion and commitment to doctoral education in the organizational sciences . . . and to those students who are fortunate to study under his care and guidance." Larry worked hard and took seriously his role and the responsibility vested in him by the university and the Academy for the development of students. He freely extended this

responsibility to include care and nurturance for the student as a whole person. Upon graduation and throughout my career, he became my coach and cheerleader—encouraging me to pursue good science and teaching, and orchestrating the celebration of my accomplishments.

Subsequent to my graduation, I had the opportunity to work with and come to know him as a colleague. In this capacity, I saw a person committed to the advancement of the organizational sciences. I saw a person who was incredibly creative, with a powerful intellectual capacity to map complex relationships, providing insight into this glue that connects the individual with the organization. His commitment and contribution to the Academy are reflected in his extensive work with doctoral students, editorship of the *Academy of Management Journal* and *Research in Organizational Behavior*, the publication of more than 140 journal articles, and the 16-plus books edited or co-authored during his 33-year academic career. Even with his retirement from the University of Minnesota, Larry had plans to continue working on making contributions to the advancement of our understanding of the individual-organization relationship.

The third setting in which I met and came to know and experience Larry was outside of the university context. Larry and I came to have an extremely close and intimate friendship. We shared one another's worst of times as well as some of our personal best of times. Larry and I bonded as a result of our mutual love and spiritual connection with the majestic white and Norway pines, the water, and the sand country of northern Wisconsin. In this context, we became fishing partners. Larry was a master fisherman. Had he not become a university professor, Larry could have been a full-time fisherman (yet he never figured out how The Institute's bills would get paid if he fished full-time) or a professional fishing guide—in fact, his career as a guide was about to begin. With a fly rod, casting or spinning rod in hand; with a jib, shallow or deep running crankbait, popper, minnow or leech, wet or dry fly in tow; fishing for large or small-mouth bass, walleye, king or Pacific salmon, or northern pike; at 5:00 a.m., noon, or 10:00 p.m.; in the sun, rain, sleet, or snow, Larry was as much in his element fishing and studying fish behavior as he was in his office in Bascom Hall poring over a manuscript or a student's dissertation at 5:00 a.m. or 9:30 p.m.

My final reflection on Larry, the fisherman, reveals that he would commonly approach fishing much like

he would attack scientific questions, dealing with focus of attention at work, alternative sources of work environment structuring, organization-based self-esteem, and the psychology of ownership: Where are the fish today? With that question, theory construction would find its beginning. Larry and C.B. (Chris Berger, the third member of the Board of Directors of The Institute) would begin to gather facts (temperature, sunny or cloud cover, wind-up, smooth or chop on the water, rising or falling barometer, lake structure) and then the pontification of theories of fish behavior and motivation would begin. All of this theorizing often seemed to work—up at 5:00 a.m., on the water for the first "major" at 5:40, fish all day, back to the lodge for dinner, then onto the water until well after dark. After a day in the rain, when he was cold, wet, and tired, a stringer of fish to fillet, a warm fire, a bottle of good red wine, and a few tales about the "beautiful lake" and "how good it was all along the north shore" would be coupled with the anticipation of another piece of water tomorrow—"so much water to explore and so little time."

Although Larry did not have a particularly strong trust for most institutions, there were a few that touched him deeply. Among those that were major players in his life were Wabash College, the University of Wisconsin, the Academy of Management, and The Institute—a concept, a place to dwell, and a location in the woods surrounded by water in northern Wisconsin. It was at The Institute where Larry found peace and his spiritual connections; it was also on The Institute's lake where Larry died, in the water, at the north end. The Institute was Larry's dedication to family, friendship, fishing, reflection, and the environment.

From all of us whose lives you touched and inspired, thanks, L.L., for the gift. I miss you my friend!

Soon Ang

*Head of Division of Human Resource
and Quality Management
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

*Larry Cummings:
Educator, Mentor, and Spiritual Colleague*

Tributes are never easy to write. Yet, there is much to share about Larry as an educator, as a mentor, and most important, as a spiritual colleague.

As an educator and mentor, Larry believed in his students. His unwavering conviction in their abilities was especially precious in the hearts and minds of foreign students. He was patient and listened actively to stuttering articulations of alternative worldviews as students attempted to push the frontiers of knowledge.

Larry served as external examiner between 1992 and 1995 for Nanyang Business School in Singapore. External examination is a relatively thankless task. Larry had to evaluate more than a dozen sets of examination papers and random selection of examination scripts yearly. Although the official purpose for Larry's visit was to serve as an external examiner, he was also a very much sought after luminary among faculty members. His genuine concern for individual faculty members was evident in his constructive and nonintimidating feedback on teaching and research.

Those who worked closely with Larry know his weakness for diet Coke. Larry suffered severe withdrawal symptoms the first day he arrived in Singapore. There was no diet Coke in sight in school cafeterias or restaurants! Regular cokes are abundant, but the concept of *diet* is alien in Singapore's gourmet-crazed society. We combed the entire island for diet Cokes and managed to locate a limited supply and stocked them in a tiny fridge at the university. We rationed his intake to two cans a day (with lots of ice) so that he could pull through his 2-week external examination duties.

As a spiritual colleague, Larry shared his deep beliefs, his personal relationship with God, and his strivings toward a life of simplicity. Our precious moments of sharing were characterized by intense discussions of classic spiritual books, of devotions, and of our calling to the teaching vocation. Many of these spiritual exchanges on the "meaning of life" took place during hikes to rubber and oil palm plantations and visits to fishing *kelongs* (floating huts for fishing off the shores of Singapore and Malaysia). I miss Larry and our spiritual dialogues. But I also know with full assurance that he dwells in the delight of the Lord, and I am at peace.

Don Pemble

Fishing Guide, Mercer, Wisconsin

Remembering Larry

As I look back at the 17 years that I've been guiding, I can recall many great days of fishing and meeting

many wonderful people. I can recall the days the fishing was bad and the days the clients weren't so wonderful. But the day I remember most is the day I met Larry Cummings.

Three short years ago, I met Larry in a little bait and tackle shop in Mercer, Wisconsin. We talked for a short time, and we set up a couple of dates to go fishing. Those 2 days of fishing blossomed into dozens of trips together.

It was during these days together that I got to know a Larry Cummings that few people knew. Larry was a very generous person, a gifted fisherman, and a real comedian. Most of all, he was my special friend.

With Larry, there was no pressure to put huge amounts of fish in the boat. He was out there to relax, tell stories, share jokes, learn the Turtle Flambeau Flowage, and catch enough fish for a good fish fry.

I was told that Larry demanded nothing short of excellence from his students, and this reflected in his fishing. His desire to learn and conquer the Turtle Flambeau Flowage really impressed me. If he wasn't with me, he was with his loving partner Jeannie Porter pounding the flowage with a determination that I have never witnessed before. And conquer it he did.

Late last fall, I told Larry that his talents and knowledge of the flowage exceeded those of many of the local guides and that I wanted him to join our guide staff. The smile on his face when I told him that was priceless.

Larry spent most of the winter making plans for his guiding career. He would study his map of the flowage that he always took with him when he went fishing. He made sure that all of his equipment was in top shape. And then he purchased his first guide license. He was so looking forward to his future.

His dreams and plans for the future were shattered that fateful day on Ike Walton lake. And my dream of my friend guiding alongside of me came to a sad end.

Larry's picture with a giant Florida bass now hangs in my living room, and I have an album full of pictures of our days together. I will treasure them for the rest of my life.

I miss you Larry. May you rest in Peace.

André L. Delbecq

Professor, Santa Clara University

Larry and I were doctoral students together at Indiana University in 1961 through 1963 sharing an office, classes, and the trials of graduate studies. In

subsequent years as we both aged and matured in our careers, we would often recall this initiation into our profession: two young men excited and committed to the intellectual life, each with his own perspective—his psychological and mine sociological.

Even as a doctoral student, Larry infected us all with his special love of psychologically oriented theory and research. For my generation, he was the spokesman for what was then a new behavioral approach to management thought. In classes, conversations, and tutorials, Larry was always a source of information and provoked new ways of thinking. He possessed a remarkable patience when trying to unravel intellectual puzzles, a command of a vast body of literature, and was generous in bringing his insight to bear on our scholarship, however different our topics might be from his own current research agenda. All of us in the academy know that this generous guidance to young scholars was a charisma that continued throughout Larry's entire career.

Later as a colleague at the University of Wisconsin, I considered the early years that Larry, Alan Filley, Andrew Van de Ven, Fremont Shull, and I spent together to be one of the peak periods of my career: a time when we spent long hours working over fundamental theoretical conceptualization in a collegial atmosphere that approximated the ideal creative team. Much of my lifelong work has benefited from ideas honed in this productive period, constituting a true intellectual legacy.

For a period of time, Larry and I experienced tension between us as our worldviews and notions of appropriate academic roles diverged. But in the past decade, these differences grew smaller and were put aside, and we again found ourselves warm colleagues.

My academic world is a much more lonely place with Larry's passing. For 34 years, I have looked forward to our reunion each year at the National Academy of Management, our exchange of news regarding intellectual adventures, recall of prior work together, and glimpses of our personal journeys through life . . . a cherished moment of reflection.

So this year, Larry and I will simply have to have our visit in quiet spiritual communion, because the annual Academy conference will never be complete without such a conversation. The conversation will center on my gratitude for all he did for me and for so many others in helping us mature as scholars. I am sure he will smile, for I believe death may separate from life but not from relationship.

Sherman G. Franz

Vice President of Medical Affairs, Columbus Regional Hospital, Columbus, Indiana

For most of our lives, Larry and I were friends. I met him at Hoosier Boys State after our junior year in high school. As it turned out, Larry was elected lieutenant governor, and I was elected secretary of state. In our getting acquainted at that time, we discovered that we both would be attending Wabash College a year later. We made several home visits during our senior year and discovered a kinship based on family, sports, and academics. Three days after our parents had delivered us to Wabash College and meticulously unpacked us into our adjoining dorm rooms, we both called our families and told them that we were pledging Sigma Chi fraternity and moving into the fraternity house immediately. It was a shock to our families but a move that eventually benefited both of us as we moved through our college careers.

In addition to being able to just flat out have fun in college, Larry was also the most intense student I have ever known. One of Larry's learning techniques involved writing and rewriting the information he hoped to retain. I could always measure the number of hours he had studied in a given day by the reams of paper that he had written on and subsequently trashed. When studying, Larry also had the habit of fiddling with a tuft of hair above his forehead with his fingers. I could always measure the amount of time and intensity of study by the number of creases in that tuft.

At the end of our second year of college, Larry and I were two of the three young men in our pledge class who absolutely abstained from alcohol. As I returned to the fraternity house after the last basketball game of my sophomore year (I was on the varsity basketball team), unbeknownst to me Larry had made a bet with an upperclassman that I would not touch alcohol if it were offered to me. Larry lost that bet and paid off with a \$5 bill. Larry learned from that event which core values of mine he could absolutely trust (and also when not to bet).

After graduate work and a stint in the U.S. Air Force, I moved with my family to Columbus, Indiana, international headquarters for Cummins Engine Company. It didn't take me long to discover that Larry had an outstanding reputation as a consultant with Cummins and was highly respected by top management of that company.

Through the years, Larry and I visited on many occasions in person or by telephone, and the relationship remained a close one. Larry had a deep and abiding love for Wabash College, and much of our discussion and concerns involved issues confronting our college. I miss Larry very much, but I am much the richer for carrying him with me in cherished memories.

Barry M. Staw

Professor, University of California, Berkeley

For almost 23 years, Larry Cummings and I edited the annual series *Research in Organizational Behavior* (ROB). We worked together on all the papers published in the series, making joint decisions on which manuscripts should be published as well as on the lengthy revision process involved in most of the chapters. Larry was more orderly than I. He was generally more prompt in his dealings with authors and in keeping things on track with the publisher. When I would lose a paper or its correspondence, I could count on Larry to have it in triplicate. Larry was also better than I in playing the bad cop, especially when the author was a personal or professional friend. But even though our styles were a bit different, Larry and I almost never disagreed about a major publishing decision. Few marriages have ever been so stable or so amicable!

When we started working together, I was somewhat skeptical about the partnership. He was an established senior scholar, and I was something of an upstart rebelling against much of the field. In fact, our differences in stature and experience actually were responsible for why we started the ROB series together. Let me explain.

In the 1970s, JAI press began its annuals with a consulting editor from the University of Illinois, who asked many of his Illinois colleagues to start their own series in various aspects of economics, marketing, and business policy. Soon, however, it became apparent

that JAI had too many editors from a single university. This is where I came in. I had recently left the University of Illinois for a job at Northwestern. So I was perfect—a known quantity but someone who was now at a different university.

I quickly accepted the editorship and started working on the first volume. Because I knew the series would only be a success if it published the leading scholars in the field, I started signing up the biggest names who would return my letters and telephone calls. Larry Cummings was of course on my initial list of stars, but I couldn't get a straight answer from him. He said, "Let's talk at the Academy meetings next month."

When Larry and I met at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, he told me that he too was going to start a series in organizational behavior. He had had some initial discussions with Academic Press about setting up a series similar to the well-known *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. But he was shocked to find that there might now be two series competing for the same turf. So what were we to do? Like any good entrepreneurs, we talked merger. I would finish editing Volume 1, including a chapter by Chris Berger and Larry Cummings on organizational structure and attitudes. And starting with Volume 2, Larry and I would work together on ROB. Thus, we began our partnership—a partnership that neither of us thought would last so long or be so intellectually and personally fulfilling.

Today, I work at the same desk at which I edited all those volumes with Larry. It is hard not to look at the telephone notes and letters still taped to the walls of my study. It is hard not to call Larry when I am perplexed about a chapter or undecided about what to do about a particular author. It is hard not to talk to Larry at least once during the week about something related to our work. So far, my solution has been to continue the conversation. I just do it in more hushed tones so my wife and child won't think I have lost it altogether.