

*Celebrating Paul's Legacy: Activism through Action*

October 26, 2023

Partners In Health transcript for the virtual webinar, *Celebrating Paul's Legacy: Activism through Action* from PIH's first Global Day of Action. With Ophelia Dahl, PIH Co-Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors; and Tracy Kidder, PIH trustee and bestselling author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. This transcript is off the record.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:00:00]

So, first of all, thank you all for coming. Thank you, Tracy. Thank you, Ophelia. You'll see if you're joining us here, there are multiple ways to enjoy this presentation. If you are on the webpage, you'll see that if there are technical difficulties, there is a link below the page and where this video is streaming. You'll see that you can click on that Zoom link underneath and join us back, in case you're having difficulties with the livestream. This is all being recorded, and we will share this later on the same webpage. And if you've registered for this event, you will also be sent the full recording so you can enjoy it and share it with all of your loved ones.

We also, at the bottom, you'll see we have some caption options. So, you can, if you are on the [pih.org/gdoa](https://pih.org/gdoa) page, you will see that below the video, there are two orange buttons. One says, "hide captions," the other says, "English." So, if you are interested in the caption option, you could press the English and down will drop many different options. So, we have today French, Spanish, Russian, and Haitian Creole options, as well as English. So, please choose those if you would like to have this conversation captioned in another language. All right, I think that is our housekeeping notes.

Tracy and Ophelia, I am so excited to have you here. And today is, as you know, Paul's birthday, October 26th. We're celebrating Paul's legacy; Activism Through Action is our conversation today. And I want to really just tell people about this day. So, many months ago, we were thinking about, how can we honor Paul on his birthday? And really, we thought we want to remember him because Paul believed in taking action. So, why not do that? Why not celebrate and honor Paul every year if we can through that theme? And we want to recommit to our work, really focus our efforts to drive forward the movement for health as a human right.

So, thank you for joining us, all, and as a reminder, we will be sharing this recording. Before we jump into our conversation, Tracy and Ophelia, we have a video to share. Ophelia will recognize the speaker here, but I would love my colleagues to please play the Global Day of Action video, and then we'll jump into conversation.

[Partners In Health Global Day of Action video plays with captions. View here:  
[https://youtu.be/E2q\\_VxS24sM](https://youtu.be/E2q_VxS24sM)]  
[00:02:52]

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:02:55]



*This transcript is off the record.*

When my friend, Paul, talked about global health, he often talked about failures of imagination. It wasn't that the best treatments didn't work for the poorest, sickest patients or that world-class hospitals couldn't be built in impoverished areas.

Paul Farmer:  
[00:03:12]

This is going to be the waiting area and medical records area. So, you can see it's going to be very nice. Imagine this all polished up.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:03:19]

It was a failure of imagination, a failure to imagine and pursue a world where all patients everywhere had access to the highest standard of care, a world where no patient died of a treatable disease or stayed sick because they couldn't afford care. Paul not only imagined this world; he dedicated his life to making it a reality.

Paul Farmer:  
[00:03:46]

This is my professional and vocational obsession, and it has been my whole life.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:03:52]

For more than 30 years, Partners In Health has carried that mission forward; treating thousands of patients, training hundreds of clinicians, partnering with governments to improve health systems, and calling for global policy change.

Paul Farmer:  
[00:04:07]

What could be better than being an activist? It's something you're doing because you want to do it. It's something you choose to do. So, I think that's a big deal, being an activist.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:04:16]

We are guided by Paul's vision and grounded in community. We do this work through partnership and accompaniment, being there together as long as it takes. As we continue the work that Paul started, we know that the best way to honor him is through action. A better world is possible.

Paul Farmer:  
[00:04:40]

It's a good time for us to remember that we need to really, really pull together.



*This transcript is off the record.*

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:04:52]

Join us in taking action for global health equity. Together we can carry on Paul's vision for healthcare as a human right.

[Video ends]  
[00:05:10]

Leslie Friday:  
[00:05:12]

Thank you. Thank you, Ophelia, again for helping us with that project and welcome again. So, a little introduction, Ophelia and Tracy, you know each other very well. But for everyone listening and watching us today, Ophelia Dahl is our PIH Co-Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors. Thank you very much for joining us, Ophelia. Tracy Kidder is a PIH Trustee and bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize winner. He is the author of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, and I have my copy here. Thank you very much, Tracy. Welcome. Thank you for joining us today, and I'm really excited to dive in.

So, the first question we have is, we know that you two have been very good friends for many years now, and you have a common friendship in Paul. So, can you remember that first time you met him? Ophelia, I'm going to direct this to you here first and maybe most importantly, what were your first impressions?

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:06:14]

You're right, Leslie. I do remember that time very well, vividly. But I thought, given that today is his birthday, it might make sense to think about not just the first impressions that he made upon us, but also think about the first impressions that were made upon him. And that, without question, is his family of origin. And I just want to make sure that on this day that we think about them and the impression that he made on them because there's absolutely no question that that family that was so filled with love and humor and extraordinary connectiveness and that they stayed close always and expanded out into a bigger family, that that helped to shape him. And I have this on my desk now, so I just wanted to share it, but this is Paul and his mom not too long ago. And I know that a day like today is probably particularly difficult for her, but it was those early connections that... and I think that they all feel part of this work and have been intimately connected.

So having said that, the first impressions made on me: I mean, you know, I was young, 18 or so. And I just remember being blown away by his compassion, interest in everything, and we spent a morning together on the back of a Land Rover. And after I got over my suspicion of why this guy was here in my patch, if you like, he was enormously winning. And this was the thing that he did so beautifully, was that he just made great friends with everyone. But I watched him watching, and that's what I remember very vividly, as he took in all of the surroundings and wanted then to talk about it with me. So, it was that strength of connection and his compassion, and of course his humor. We sat up all night that first night, laughing, laughing, laughing. And that carried on throughout the next 40 years.



*This transcript is off the record.*

Leslie Friday:  
[00:08:26]

Thank you, Ophelia. And Tracy, do you remember? I know you do, because-

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:08:30]

Remember quite vividly, I guess, because I wrote about it, and that's the way I remember it now. But I think it was accurate. I was in Haiti to write about these American soldiers. I was hanging around with a group of special forces soldiers, and especially with this captain who described himself as a redneck from Alabama. I liked the guy tremendously. He had really been trying to do a good thing there, and he and his men hadn't been given any tools. Anyway, one night Paul showed up, and he started asking the captain really pointed questions about a case; there'd been a horrible murder and a political murder. And the captain and his men had arrested the prime suspect, but they couldn't find anyone to testify against him, which isn't surprising. So, they'd let him go, and Paul had come to warn -- I didn't realize what he'd come to do, but Paul had come to say, "You're losing the faith of the people around you."

But he did it in such a way that it struck me as pretty, I don't know, aggressive and kind of mean... not really mean, exactly, but what he was saying was... And then somehow the conversation got into the School of the Americas at Fort Benning in Georgia, and it sort of devolved. And after Paul left, I thought, "Geez, who's this guy? Is he Mr. Self-righteous?" I met him later on the plane back. I went home for Christmas that year, and Paul was sitting in first class, not because he paid for it, but because he took care of patients on planes. And so, he let me sit down with him, and he began to explain things to me. And it was really interesting. I mean, I was so confused about everything that I had seen, and he was wonderfully generous. And also, he explained to me, "Look, I know that captain isn't responsible for the bad decisions made in Washington. I just wanted to warn him."

I mean, I still think that Paul could have used a little bit of diplomacy, but it worked out all right. And I think in a way, the captain was probably grateful, because he had only eight men that were trying to keep the peace among hundreds of thousands of people. Anyway, that was it. So, I ended up liking him quite a bit after that. In fact, we go up in Miami and went and had some coffee, and I almost missed my flight home because I was having such a good time chatting with him.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:11:05]

That sounds about right. Paul did have a wonderful gift to hold a conversation. And Tracy, the next question is for you. You documented some of the ways Paul had a superhuman capacity to work and travel. You were along for that ride for years in researching and then writing *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Just congratulations, it's amazing work.

One thing you observed about him was his encyclopedic knowledge. And if you knew Paul, it was impressive. I love what you said recently about Paul, that he had a memory palace built on patients. Can you elaborate on that? I think that's such a lovely way to phrase it.



*This transcript is off the record.*

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:11:52]

Yeah. I began to realize this on our long... many airplane flights we took together. I mean, he would quiz me about things about TB and so on, and in the spirit of revenge, I tried to find the names of some really bizarre infectious diseases and see if I could stump him. And I remember I said something about something called tropical screw, and of course he knew more about it than I had found in the textbooks, which was very disappointing. But talking with him, watching him on rounds at the Brigham and Women's Hospital, I don't have time to tell you these dramatic stories of saving people's lives, people who were about to be put in hospice and Paul saying, "Nah, he's going to get better. I know what's wrong." He really was amazing.

But little by little, I mean, for instance, when I first saw him doing a spinal tap, I must have asked him, "Do you remember the first one you did?" And he absolutely did. And not only that, he remembered the patient and he remembered the patient's name. And I began to realize that with just a little more probing, I'm not sure he knew it, he realized it, but that an awful lot of what he knew was based on the patients he treated. He knew those diseases through these people, which is sort of extraordinary and kind of beautiful too. So, I think that term memory palace is one that's been used elsewhere, but it did seem like a little palace of memory. And there are so many thousands and thousands of things that can do us in. So, that's really what I had in mind: quite extraordinary, amazing memory.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:13:36]

Yeah. Amazing memory. And I'm sure, Ophelia, you probably had that experience as well. Just maybe being surprised, maybe not by his capacity to absorb and remember, repeat.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:13:49]

I mean, I think at the beginning I probably was surprised, but after a while, it became a point of just enormous pride that you knew that... I mean, certainly I tried to stump him a number of times. I'd try and get him super early in the morning and then ask him what the capital of some utterly far away country that no one really often mentioned. And of course, he knew not only what the capital was, but it was still great fun and that sort of thing. But it also did mean that he didn't forget things that you sort of wanted him to forget, just occasionally. But that was an okay too, because it just meant that he wanted to retain everything he could about those people that he loved. And I mean, his patients too, I don't think it's a stretch to say that he tried to love everybody. And so, I think part of that was trying to remember a great deal about them. So, it was moving. It was moving. Even the things I wish he would forget or not remind me that he had not forgotten, put it that way.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:14:54]

That's right. That sounds very Paul. He cared very deeply. Before I go onto the next question, just as people are coming in and possibly arrived a bit late. Just a reminder that you can, if you so choose, watch this with captions on our [pih.org/gdoa](http://pih.org/gdoa). And you can see two orange buttons: one says "English,"



*This transcript is off the record.*

the other says "hide captions." So, if you want to watch this captioned, you can watch in English, Spanish, French, Russian, or Haitian Creole, which is fantastic. Great. So next up, Ophelia, I want to direct this to you first, but I think it's for both of you really. You have said that Paul's moral clarity really never wavered and that he usually reflected on one question before taking any action, and that was, "Is this good for my patient?" At PIH, we've absorbed that as a philosophy and have even said, our patients are our bosses. Why is that such an important distinction to make Ophelia, in your opinion?

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:16:04]

Well, first, I mean that moral clarity of his, I have to say it never... I was going to say rarely if never came across as somehow arrogant. It felt like a guide star. I think for many of us, certainly many of us at PIH who often wanted to look at things that were deeply complex and layered. And I don't mean he had the answer, but there was that guiding principle around, "Would this be good for our patients?" I think goes all the way back to really our MO, our deeply held belief in option for the poor. Which is really to... "How do you make a preferential option for the poor and most vulnerable?" And I think those patients that you just talked about, keeping them close, those to him were the most vulnerable, particularly in the places where we were working. So, it felt like a way for us to be accountable, staying proximal to people.

And he felt very strongly that your closeness to a community, to a person, to a family was the thing that was going to keep you focused on them and all that was important to them, to get them well, to create... and well, in the broadest possible sense, to make sure they had a shelter, education, that sort of thing. And then I think he was able to pull back and look at, if you're keeping those people proximate to your thoughts, then you can look at pushing bigger levers and affecting policy, but making sure that you don't ever get to the point where you don't have those people in mind. Those are the... I think that's remained for many of us working at Partners In Health, an important guide.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:18:00]

That's such a good point too, because I think you can... Paul walked in all circles, right? So, he was with patients, and he was also at the UN. And maybe Tracy, if you wanted to chime in there too, on that importance of staying proximal to the patient or keeping the patient at center.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:18:18]

I was impressed in two ways, I mean, when I step back. One is these questions, if you opened them up for all facets of them, they're incredibly complex, and you could just get stymied, say, "Well, I don't know what to do." But this was a good guiding principle. And what this also did, it seems to me, was prevented Partners In Health and Paul from ever straying into the question... into confusing human beings with pins on mats, which is sometimes a problem in public health. And I remember, if I can tell a quick story, I was in Moscow with him. We were with a great man in public health. We had quite a lot of wine, as I recall. It was a cold night, and Paul had had a slight quarrel with the fellow, but it was a polite one.

And as we left, I took devil's advocate just to irritate Paul. But I said, "Well, the guy's interested in public



health." And Paul said, "I'm interested in public health too." He said, "But what is the public? Is it a family? Is it a village? Is it a state? Is it a country? Is it a whole region of the world, a continent?" And I realized that this was the way he moved in his mind when he was thinking of what you were supposed to do in the world. You start with the patient, but you'd never lose sight of the continent. I don't know. It just seemed the right way to go about things to me.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:19:55]

Right, right. I think that also moves into our next question rather well, too, because Paul was someone who... he didn't like conflict. That was my sense. He didn't particularly enjoy it, but he definitely got into some good trouble. So, he had a knack for making friends with people in high places too, to achieve a larger goal. So, how did that type of rebellious activism make a difference in global health? And Ophelia, if you don't mind, addressing that kind of rebellious good trouble.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:20:32]

Yeah, I mean, I would lead with the great strength, which is that he tried to make friends with everybody, and that for him to get agitated with people, it would take quite a lot. It happened. But I think that his natural inclination was, "Even if we may come at this from different ways, why don't we form a partnership?" I mean, really partnership, friendship, getting people together was the chief thing that he thought about all the time, whether it was on an organizational level or personal level. But I saw him many times when I wished he'd get into an argument because I felt like the other person would come off much worse. And he often, not by saying, "I'm not going to do it," he would show many of us that it was much, much better if you could get around a table with someone and persuade them, and you better keep your powers of persuasion and communication honed so that you could do that.

It occasionally didn't work, and then he didn't hold back. And you could usually tell it was coming, usually his ears got a little bit red, that sort of thing. And you knew that he was about to stir up some trouble. But I would say I think you're right to focus on good trouble. And I'm not trying to pretend that he didn't get into arguments or that he didn't feel frustrated by some of the... particularly people in positions of... who had power, who had policy control, who were going to decide whether or not this country, region, family, person lived or died. And he saw himself as a barrier lifter, and that when people got in the way of that for no good reason... And sometimes that happened just because people would, in his words, answer a question or pose a question in a way that closed the door instead of opening a door. And he could find ways to keep that door open for a long time.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:22:44]

I love that, the barrier lifter and the door opener. Tracy, what do you think about this? How was that good trouble in your experience?

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:22:52]



*This transcript is off the record.*

Well, I have to be careful about this. I have a terrible tendency, I think, with Paul and a few other people, to hold them to a much higher standard than I would hold myself. But Paul could be sharp tongued, and particularly among people it was safe to be sharp tongued with. I heard a conversation between him and his wonderful friend Jim Kim that was truly shocking to me. It was so angri-fied. And he was a human being. He was not a perfectly controlled person, but Ophelia's right. In my experience, the one time that I wasn't there in Durban, South Africa, but there's a famous thing... I got the footage for them when they're making that documentary, and it's when he was debating a man from the World Bank.

The man from the World Bank had said something truly horrifying, which was that if Africans wanted to curb aids, they would have to learn to curb their sexuality, something to that effect. And Paul, his ears didn't just turn red, his whole face turned red. And he got up and he said... He tried to mute this by saying, "I'm not talking about World Bankers, I mean just bankers in general, but I don't think they've been getting enough sex because they've been so busy screwing the world." And the place... it brought down the house, with thousands of people. He was capable of that. And there were times where I wish he'd done it more.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:24:27]

He had a wonderful sense of humor. I mean, that is also a way of delivering a message, right? It's making a point without necessarily-

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:24:35]

Oh, a sense of humor that was hyper-articulate, and he was hilarious. That was one of the wonderful things about him. He loved his gardening, so you had to go and look at all of his bamboo and other plants and stuff. He called that horti-torture, a little list of these things that he had names for. He had kept these things called bwat lists with these lists of things that he had to do, and he would check them off as he did them. But if he'd already done one of them, he'd put it on the bwat list so he could have the pleasure of checking it off. He talked about there ought to be a magazine, what was it? Okay, Good Hut Keeping was going to be one. Oh, you'd get to Miami Airport to the Admirals Club, and he'd talk about getting cave-aceous at Amirales. I mean, he'd make what he called a cave, a terrace. And I don't know, it just went on and on.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:25:30]

And, almost to the extent, Tracy, that he... And this also comes from his family of origin, and it spreads. It's infectious in that he comes up with new languages, new words. There are so many, I mean, you could almost do thesaurus of words that the Farmer family have come up with that we've all adopted, that sometimes I actually have to remind myself that some other people don't know what we're saying when we say bwat check, cave-aceous, right?

Leslie Friday:  
[00:26:01]



Right.

Tracy Kidder:

[00:26:02]

Yeah, cave-aceous. Here's one of my favorites. So, I was just thinking about it today. I remember him saying to me, "There's only one kind of malaria that's deadly: falciparum. So, which one do you suppose Haiti has?" And then he added brightly, "But it's not drug resistant." And then doing Bill Murray and Caddyshack, he said in the Caddy's voice, "So, we got that going for it." And then by then I knew that I had to answer, I had to add, "Which is nice." You joined that sort of club when you finally figured out all these things. And if you told me once, Ophelia, the family had all kinds of names. And he had a different name when he was traveling than he did when he was-

Ophelia Dahl:

[00:26:45]

Yeah, yeah. His nicknames were different in vacation time and in actual academic time. And perhaps unsurprisingly, Jim Kim, a co-founder, and Todd McCormack indulged in this too. So, it was almost like a sort of... you couldn't find people to work with, really, really work with, who didn't really understand this kind of fabulous, zany quality.

Leslie Friday:

[00:27:13]

Right. That was a lovely, lovely part of Paul for sure, his wicked sense of humor. Today is, as we mentioned at the beginning, his 64th birthday, what would be his 64th birthday. We miss him deeply. You all have mentioned bits and anecdotes and outtakes from a life lived with Paul. Is there any moment that you would want to share now, just thinking about, Tracy maybe, some of the time you'd spent alongside him many years ago now, and Ophelia too, going back decades, back to early days in Haiti, and Tracy, maybe we can start with you if you don't mind.

Tracy Kidder:

[00:27:54]

I have a million small memories, but just to speak about the whole, as it goes, washes back over me sometimes, I really have to say that it was... he showed me a part of the world that I didn't know existed, and it was... sometimes felt like a harrowing of hell. And yet it was the most exhilarating experience of my life. And I... there were little ways in which Paul... I remember him [inaudible 00:28:30]. He was an anthropologist, and sometimes anthropologists get really high-handed, not to say arrogant, about their knowledge.

And I noticed when I was with the soldiers in Haiti that there were these awful saddles that were made of straw, and they abraded the backs of the animals that were being used. And I said something very cautiously to Paul about these saddles, thinking he'd say, "No, these are cultural things, and we can't criticize them," or something. He said, "Oh God, aren't they horrible? Those things are just so terrible." And I felt this enormous relief. I was allowed to describe what I thought I'd seen without being told, "You're not supposed to say that." That was a wonderful characteristic of his, and he was insistently not

what we call politically correct. I wouldn't repeat some of the things he said.

Ophelia Dahl:

[00:29:28]

I was going to say, I mean, that's part of it, right? So, many of these things that felt like they were insider anecdotes... you have to curb yourself a little bit. But that was part of it. It was that... creating intimacy between Paul and another person. But the way he could do it actually with a group of people, and so many people were pulled into this, his ability to make a genuine intimacy with everybody. It wasn't sort of like, "I'll pretend you're my friend today." It was really, and I think that that's why so many people feel today on his birthday, that in some ways they were close to him. And even if they've never met him, his ideas or his books or the stories about him in Tracy's book about Paul really pulled people into his life, and maybe even at times to an uncomfortable extent.

But when I think about anecdotes and outtakes from my time of knowing him, I think about the times when he would pull us all in to be co-conspirators with him. And whether it was somehow managing to get one of us to carry a koi fish from Roslindale to Haiti, and there would be a way to do it, or whether it was a way to get a sample, a medical sample, up to a lab from Haiti, that you would be brought into his confidence, the fact that he was asking you to do this, or smuggle some seeds from here and there too. I mean, I think one can use words... But those are the kinds of things when I think back on, I imagine even people watching this, there'll be many people nodding their heads and saying, "Yeah, I remember when I carried that thing from here to there."

And that was a lovely, lovely thing. And it obviously is connected to the gardens that he created, that Tracy just alluded to, that really felt deeply important to him, the planting and wherever he was, that's what he would do. And I think that there's probably not a place that he went to work where there was not a garden of some kind that had been created by him, and hopefully still look robust and wonderful.

Leslie Friday:

[00:32:00]

Right. And a koi pond, because, as you mentioned-

Ophelia Dahl:

[00:32:03]

And a koi pond, yes.

Leslie Friday:

[00:32:05]

Big fan of the koi.

Tracy Kidder:

[00:32:06]

Plastic bag worked sometimes, plastic bag with a lot of water.



*This transcript is off the record.*

Leslie Friday:  
[00:32:10]

Yes.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:32:12]

Yes, yes. Hard to get it through the security, but hey, it was done.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:32:18]

It was done, amazingly, in so many different ways. So, we have dozens of questions from people who are very excited about this conversation, so I'm going to pull from some of them. I doubt we'll get to all of them. But Tracy, I was hoping you could address this one from Alice Kennedy. Thank you for submitting it, Alice. "When making a seemingly impossible decision or facing insurmountable odds, did Paul have a guiding principle, a credo or mantra to bolster himself or others during great uncertainty?"

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:32:54]

Yeah, I mean, I think again, it was that "What's best for my patient?" And I mean, that can sometimes be... It sounds simple but can sometimes be pretty complicated. And I think that also went to... I remember once we were on a plane going to South Carolina, and we were having good old time, and he was being really funny, and then he suddenly realized that on the plane was a PIH supporter who probably wouldn't have been amused. And the whole tone changed. I mean it was, "This won't be good for my patients." I really think that was what was guiding him and would sometimes pull him back.

But I also think, how did he keep going? That's a question that I can't fully answer it. I could wish that he had found more ways to do that, frankly, and to sleep more. I think he was tormented by the... I mean, this is why I see this as that Paul was in love with the world. He really loved animals; he loved plants. He loved pretty much everything in the world, and he was in proportion offended by the horrible flaws that was sitting right in front of it, because he put himself in the way of seeing those things. I mean, the Moscow Central Prison, the [inaudible 00:34:20].

I may not be answering this exactly, but I think it was just... And he would say things like... Partners know if we get accused of not doing stuff that was sustainable, whatever that meant, and he'd say, "What we have to sustain is our determination to do this work, our commitment to do it." And I think that that was the mantra. How you summon the wherewithal for it, I'm not quite sure, but I always believed that great as he was, wonderful as he was, and seeing around corners and figuring out what should be built and where you should move to and what chances to take next, I feel like the real strength for him came from being a doctor. I think he loved being a doctor first and foremost. And a doctor works with the patient.

Leslie Friday:



*This transcript is off the record.*

[00:35:14]

Yes. Yeah. And I think maybe, Ophelia, that would be a great segue to pulling you into, how does it keep you going, because that's a question as well that many people seem to have. Caroline in particular says, "Ophelia, you were involved in PIH before it existed. From then to now, how has your motivation toward the mission changed? What exactly was the thing, if there was a thing, that kept you at Partners In Health and working?"

Ophelia Dahl:

[00:35:47]

I mean, I would say that my connection to the mission has only grown stronger. I mean, how can it not grow stronger when you see this organization evolve? I mean, there are moments where you wish that things would be a little bit less layered and complicated, but really I think one of the things that I learned to do from a young age with in close connection to Paul and Jim and Todd and others, my friends and colleagues in Haiti particularly, is to learn to embrace the complexity, instead of trying to push away from it and say, "Let's try and streamline our mission just a little bit more. Can we just focus on the one or two things?"

And I think that's one of the most gratifying parts of the work that I have found, that over the years... And maybe it comes with experience in age and that sort of thing, but it feels like, yes, we might crave for the world to be a little less gnarly and complicated, but really that's the piece that's kept me going, because when you see progress against that, however slow it is, or however many forward and backward steps the equation involves, you do know that you're moving things forward. And I really do feel as though, for me, a true torture would be to know how all of the complexity and how much suffering there is in the world that could be alleviated, can be alleviated. And not to find some purchase with some group or some people or just as an individual making a tiny bit of difference. I think that's what probably keeps me going.

Leslie Friday:

[00:37:29]

That's fantastic. And Tracy, I don't know if you wanted to mention anything, too, about why this mission, why this organization that sparked your interest?

Tracy Kidder:

[00:37:40]

Well, I didn't set out to do a good deed. I have to insist on that. I was gratified that this book has lasted as long as it has, and it seems to have helped the fortunes of Partners In Health and so on. But that wasn't my aim. I just thought I had a really interesting story, an unusual one, and I wanted to tell it as well as I could. I have to say though, that in the aftermath, I felt as though I really ought to play whatever little part Ophelia and Paul and Jim wanted me to play, because I had been exposed to something that I really hadn't wanted to acknowledge. And I do believe there's something so fundamental about health.

But Ophelia's right too, that just that simple question, "What's best for my patient," is an enormously



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complicated one. And it doesn't just mean treating illnesses, and it certainly doesn't mean just treating them under mango trees. It means creating a system to treat the illness. It means helping build houses and on and on and doing something about nutrition and maternal mortality. You don't just take on AIDS and TB, you take on the whole thing. So, I'm proud of this organization. I'm proud that it's continued to go on. I'm proud to be connected to it in this small way, although I think I certainly wouldn't want to be giving the orders.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:39:15]

Well, thank you for saying that too, and being part of this conversation, Tracy. Ophelia, maybe this conversation turns to you again. Layla wants to know, "How did you -- Paul, Dr. Kim, Todd, and Tom -- how did you overcome personal challenges, meaning fights among friends to focus on the bigger picture of your work? What would you have to say there?"

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:39:42]

I mean, I feel as though because there was such a foundation of love and trust, which is what all of us really led with, that if you have a foundation like that, you can do all kinds of things and take risks and be mad at or push one another. As Tracy already mentioned, the explosive arguments that Jim and Paul would have, I think all of us have had those pretty explosive arguments, knowing that what we're trying to do is get to a better solution or a way forward. So, I would say that the overcoming... There was so much love there that even when I tried to give Paul the silent treatment, he wouldn't even tolerate it for a minute. He would just overwhelm you with love, which was a really... It was fantastic to be a recipient of that from an early age. And then what was the second part of that?

Leslie Friday:  
[00:40:50]

That was just it. I think people were curious, you know -- how did you make it work for a while, especially among friends? And Tracy, it looks like you want to jump in too.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:40:58]

Yeah, I have a comment. I don't know the answer, and I'm sure Ophelia's got it all right. The impression I have, I remember going to a great figure in public health, a man named Bob Fahey, and he was fascinated. He's the one I think really arranged for Partners In Health to get one of their big important grants. And he said, "It's an interesting organization to have these two powerful, powerful intellects in Jim Kim and Paul at the head of it." He said, "Usually can't make that work." And he said, "I wonder why it is, and I hope it will [inaudible 00:41:30] to," or something to that effect. And what I didn't say to him, but what I would've said was, "Ophelia." She could keep them from killing each other. Jim told me that once. He said something like, "She's the one we're really afraid of."

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:41:47]



I'm very scary, as you can tell.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:41:50]

You are.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:41:53]

Sure, totally. Yeah. Yeah, also a giant brain herself. So, one other question, Tracy. There are so many questions too about *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. And I myself, I read *Mountains Beyond Mountains* and turned to the website and saw that they were hiring three writers, and boom, that is the rest of the story.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:42:14]

What do you mean? [inaudible 00:42:15] Hiring three writers?

Leslie Friday:  
[00:42:17]

No, this was years ago. But Tracy, you're welcome to apply anytime.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:42:25]

Oh, I see.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:42:26]

Yes, yes. So, there are many questions about *Mountains Beyond Mountains* and just the collection of this mountain of material about it. Can you talk to the... what was the most challenging or difficult time, most gratifying or magical moments? People just want to know more about what it was like writing this book.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:42:49]

Well, most of my work was divided in two parts: doing research and then writing, but they always bleed into each other. And I mean, I was getting pretty close to finishing a decent draft, and I rewrite about 10, 15 times. But I was getting close to the end when I went off to [inaudible 00:43:09] with Paul and Ophelia. And I... I take notes, copious notes. I began to use a recorder once in a while, which was particularly useful on one of the journeys I took with Paul on foot, which I used to call it Bataan Death



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March. That was difficult because I felt I was going to die of thirst.

This was by the time we were starting back from going way up toward the border from Cange. And Paul went off and he started calling the farmers and got me some oranges. But then I ate so many oranges so fast, not to get too... I had to find a latrine. And [inaudible 00:43:58], one of my favorite people who sadly he's no longer with us either, he found a good latrine, and on we went. I was so tired. I was the eldest of the group. It was the only excuse that I have, I don't know. But, all of those kinds of things really, they kind of fall to the side. I had a few moments with Paul when -- which were difficult -- when he seemed to be demanding that I see things in a certain way or was accusing me. I mean, one time he seemed to be accusing me of having harmed his cause by having written bad things about it, and I hadn't written anything yet.

There were a few times when he seemed to be... what he seemed to be wanting was hagiography, and I actually said, "No, you can't write about that." I remember one little moment like that where Ophelia intervened and told him to stop it. But for the most part, he was so much fun to travel with because he was funny; he was considerate; when I got sick, he took care of me. I remember one time in a motel room, he broke his toe getting up to go to the bathroom because he didn't want to turn on the light and wake me up. So, I... so, it was quite a nice experience. And as for writing, well, I mean, I've done that for so long. The one thing I could say is that I usually have a couple of hundred notebooks, at least, filled when I was doing almost everything by hand, and then a very small percentage gets used.

This book, I had a much smaller total number of notebooks, but the proportion of stuff that I tried... the stories that I really wanted to tell was much, much higher. I didn't spend an enormous amount of time with Paul. But when you spent a week with him, it was really like a month. The first trip I took with him was a month. He called it a light month for travel.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:46:16]

Wasn't that one of the titles, I believe, light was, yeah.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:46:20]

When we went to Haiti, when we went to South Carolina, we went to that Haiti, then we went to Paris. No, we're constantly going between there and Miami, then to Paris, and then to Moscow. I don't know. That was a light month for travel.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:46:34]

Right. I wonder, Ophelia, if you ever knew where he was in all moments. Who knew where he was? He was quite a prolific traveler.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:46:43]



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Yeah. And he... certainly didn't keep tabs on that.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:46:47]

No, nobody could really, except Paul. Another question here maybe for both of you, and Ophelia, if you don't mind starting. What did Paul say, if anything, about his own legacy? Did you reflect about that at all? And what would he have said?

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:47:06]

I mean, we didn't spend a lot of time reflecting on legacy. I think maybe another way to think about it is what he cared about deeply was would there be, I mean, the thing we've often heard referred to as his retirement plan. And I think that the work that he put into, with colleagues, making sure that partnerships were made with PIH and other organizations; certainly the Brigham Women's Hospitals, certainly Harvard Medical School, and a host of other places, organizations, academic institutions; and making sure that there were students trained to become professors in epidemiology and infectious disease.

And across the board, I think that he felt as though the best thing that he could do would be to make sure that there was an action plan and a group of people who would be part of carrying that mission forward. And that, he and others did really beautifully. We have colleagues and friends who are part of that and carry the mission forward, and do so in a really systemic way, rather than making sure that we only have volunteers to do this. It's to create a system. And I feel like that is one of the most shining examples of his legacy; because obviously investing in teaching, and teachers, and professors, and academics, and researchers; that means that this will go on and on and on.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:48:48]

That's great. And Tracy, too. What do you think on that same topic, his legacy?

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:48:53]

Well, he once told me that what he wanted to do... And this was in the moment of some anguish where I'd written his profile for the New Yorker, and somebody just filled with moral envy had written something nasty. And I shouldn't even have told him about it. And he said, "All I wanted to do is start a movement." And I think as for the legacy of leaving this team, this group, this growing group behind, he had what seemed to me a pretty precise plan, but it was kind of guided by, I think, by the priorities of whatchamacallit, theology.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:49:37]

Liberation theology.





Tracy Kidder:  
[00:49:39]

Right. Geez. Sorry, you know, I forget what's coming first. It's all drawn from Matthew 25, but there are prisoners in there and patients are in there, and students are big in there. I mean, I don't know how many papers there were total in his life, but he stopped being... His name was just become incidental. He promoted his students, and he had very precise places he wanted them to be, and he wanted them to have power in the system so that it was ingenious. And I think it worked.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:50:15]

And speaking of students, we actually have a question, through YouTube, and the question is from Andreas. Andreas says, "I am an MD/PhD student. I'm currently struggling to balance my passion for health equity in medical training with that of my PhD training." Sounds like some people who are meant for a PIH path, possibly. "They seem so disconnected, those two. Any advice?" Maybe Ophelia, what do you think? The question is, "How do I balance that health equity with medical training and PhD?"

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:50:56]

I imagine, from knowing a few academics who are passionate about applying what it is that they're studying, that Paul felt certainly at the time that those two things would compliment each other. And I really do think that they did. The research that he was able to do as a PhD student... served him forever. It really did. His ability to be able to use that to bolster all of the other pieces, including making him a better clinician, a more knowledgeable caregiver. And also, I think to be pretty strategic, he realized that having a PhD would allow him to do certain things, including teaching, that would influence things for the long term.

So, though I believe that his greatest... I mean, I would say to him pretty regularly, "Are you doing the things now that you really love doing?" And he said that, "The things that I want to do are reading, writing, being around patients, and teaching." He was very clear about that... Much as he loved gardening and all of that kind of thing, when I talked about the work that he was doing, that's what he focused on. And I think that being able to do those things were very... He was very clear about that. So, teaching really, he felt, was the way forward. And I don't think you can do that, at least in the sort of capacity that the person who asked that question... I think focus on what he wants to do with it later.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:52:48]

Right. Tracy, did you have anything to add there too?

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:52:50]

I agree. I think if you want to be a good doctor to the poor, you better be a good doctor, for one thing.



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They're not going to be able to usually get a second opinion from somebody. David Walton, I think, said that. But yeah, don't try to jump too fast into this. Get trained, get good at it. And remember, I think one little bit of advice that I would give to younger people, almost everyone's younger than I am now, but would be, don't try to be Paul Farmer. That's not the idea. And I'm pretty sure Paul would say the same. Not everyone can do that, but try to help and try to find your way to it. I mean, I remember someone criticizing people who went into optometry or something, and Paul would point out and say, "Well, poor people have eyes too." So, it's [inaudible 00:53:48] if that makes sense.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:53:50]

I agree. That also makes me think of actually -- if people are interested in that question. So, we recently updated the [pih.org/paul](http://pih.org/paul) page, and you'll see a section about Paul's research. And so specifically, we added some information from his curriculum vitae narrative for Harvard. And it talks about all his research questions, and that drove his clinical and his academic work. So, if you're curious about those underlying areas that inspired him in what he did, that's one way to think about how to blend that medical with the PhD focus. And I can't believe I'm saying this, but we have four minutes left. So, one more question, if I may.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:54:37]

As Paul would say, "We just got going."

Leslie Friday:  
[00:54:40]

We just got going! Did we do this? And he'd always say, "Can we do this again?" And I would say, "Tomorrow, Paul, let's do this tomorrow." So, the last question is really something that many, many people have asked in one form or another. But, for his birthday now and into the future, we want to honor Paul through action. What are some ways that people watching, listening today can take meaningful steps to ensure that health is a human right for all? What can we do? And Ophelia, if you don't mind starting off and then moving to Tracy.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:55:17]

You know, while I don't have a list of things that would be useful, my sense is that people really do have a good sense of what it is that they can do. I think sometimes, to Tracy's point, people tend to focus on the enormity of the issues and feel quickly overwhelmed. John Green said in a conversation with Paul that people's attention is very important. And I focus on that because I think that when there are so many issues pulling at our attention, I think deciding what it is that interests you and going deep, reading about it, becoming interested, realizing that you can change by being in touch politically, locally politically, by using your heft and muscle, which is considerable.

As Paul would say, if you're writing that question, you already have quite a bit of agency. And sort of finding ways to use that, that's really what I would focus on. And the second thing would be to keep at



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the front and center of everything, this notion of equity. And if you're asking yourself that question as you write to your congressperson, your mayor, or indeed getting involved in any organization, just keep that.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:56:44]

Could I put a pitch in too for...

Leslie Friday:  
[00:56:46]

Yes.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:56:48]

Look hard at medicine as it's evolving now in our country. It's not going in a good direction at all. It's going in kind of a horrible one. And you might want to start to sink your teeth into that because it will affect the way things are done in Haiti and elsewhere. And I would go to the PIH website and look for a particular... If you're looking for things in particular to do. Go there, volunteer. I mean, there's all kinds of stuff you can do.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:57:12]

That was such a great segue, Tracy, because I was going to say, well, number one, thank you. Thank you so deeply, Tracy, Ophelia, for spending an hour with us. Thank you to everyone who watched and listened and sent in questions. And as Tracy said, please visit us at [pih.org](http://pih.org). You can find ways to get involved. There's a volunteer button and ways to advocate. You can also follow us on many different social media channels. We're there on all of the channels, but Instagram, Facebook, what was known as Twitter, and all the many different ways that we can connect. Please follow us there. And if you do have an opportunity, donate, consider a donation in honor of Paul today. Thank you again, Ophelia, Tracy. I hope we get to do this again. Thanks to everybody.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:58:02]

Tomorrow.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:58:04]

Tomorrow. All right. It's a deal.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:58:06]



*This transcript is off the record.*

Thank you, Leslie. Thank you, TK.

Tracy Kidder:  
[00:58:08]

Thank you. Thank you, Ophelia; thank you, Leslie.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:58:11]

And thanks to everybody watching, really, this would... I can't help but realize how much this would mean to Paul and to everyone who loved Paul. So, thank you.

Leslie Friday:  
[00:58:20]

Thank you everyone. Have a good rest of your day.

Ophelia Dahl:  
[00:58:24]

Bye-Bye.