IN MEMORY OF LAWRENCE H. COHN: WHITE LION
To the Editor:

I first learned of Larry’s illness during a vacation with my family at Kruger Park in South Africa. While having dinner, a call on my cellphone from Larry’s daughter Leslie drew me away from the table. Leslie relayed the news of Larry’s sudden, severe illness, leaving me visibly distressed.

Upon returning to the table, Maya, my 9-year-old twin daughter, sensed something was amiss and asked if anything was wrong. Despite never having met Larry, her curiosity about him led us to spend the evening reminiscing. I told her about Larry’s profound influence on my life, detailing our evolution from mentor–mentee to a bond as strong as family, sharing tales of his professional excellence and his spirited nature, albeit in a child-friendly manner.

The following morning’s safari in Kruger Park brought us face-to-face with a pride of lions, including a rare white lion cub. Inspired by our guide’s explanation of the white lion’s symbolic significance in African culture, Maya christened it Larry—Larry the Lion. This spontaneous tribute perfectly encapsulated Larry’s legacy, mirroring his stature in cardiac surgery and his nurturing role within our surgical community.

Larry’s commitment to education and his impact on countless cardiac surgeons reshaped academic cardiac surgery globally. He took pride in his trainees, regarding us as his surgical family. This sentiment was shared by his wife, Roberta, and his daughters, Jennifer and Leslie. Larry’s competitive spirit was legendary, extending beyond his professional achievements to personal pursuits like tennis and golf. Operating on him was a career-defining challenge for me; his first words upon recovery—“What was your crossclamp time?”—underscored his competitiveness and unyielding quest for excellence.

Larry’s sometimes-rough, external façade belied his gentle, compassionate soul. His unique approach to relationships revealed a deeply humble and caring individual to those who knew him well.

Of the thousands of patients I’ve treated, Larry was the only one who annually expressed gratitude for the life-saving surgery, reversing the roles of gratitude in our relationship. His teachings transcended surgical skill, imparting valuable life lessons. Larry the White Lion will be profoundly missed.

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