

Sir Eli Lauterpacht: A Great Mentor

Sir Elihu Lauterpacht. A Celebration of his Life and Work, 13 October 2017

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Although this is a panel on Eli and the Lauterpacht Centre, I actually knew Eli best from having worked with him in his study in Herschel Road. As many here will know, his study was a wonderful place; one of life, learning and laughter. It was once a coach house that belonged to Sir Martin Ryle, the Nobel-prize winning astronomer who had lived next door. Eli purchased the building in the 1970s and converted it into an annex in which someone could live; it became his study and, for a short while, it was also home to what is now the Lauterpacht Centre. Eli would sit at his long desk at the far end of the study. On his left, copies of the International Law Reports lined the wall, and to his right, just below the window, there was a set of draws, which contained what seemed like a never-ending supply of sweets (mostly hard-boiled; sometimes fruit pastilles).

I thought I could add a few words from the perspective of someone at the beginning of their career, specifically about one of Eli's greatest contributions to the field of international law and to the lives of many here today: his mentorship.

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I first met Eli on Wednesday 28 October 2009. I was in London at the time, having just finished an LLM and working as a temp at the Electoral Commission. Eli asked me to Cambridge to interview for a job assisting him with the biography of his father and the completion of his 1996 Hague Lectures. From what I remember, it was a cold and damp day. I arrived at the house just after lunch and was led through the connecting garage, past Jenny's desk to a book-lined study, warmed by a glowing fire. I remember my anxiety disappearing as soon as Eli spoke. At the end of the interview, he asked me when I could begin. I said, "whenever you would like". "Excellent", he replied, handing me a large level-arch folder and pointing me in the direction of a desk. I think I left the house at 9pm, having declined dinner, but been the beneficiary of several cups of tea, crumpets and ginger biscuits.

Eli's remarkable capacity to be a mentor—not just to those at the beginning of their careers, but also to many throughout their lives—is legendary. It is the reason why so many of us owe him so much. It was also expressed through the Centre, which was—and continues to be—an enduring extension of Eli's mentorship. But it's hard to capture his mentorship in words: it was an inherent part of his character, of his personality; it was wrapped up with his generosity of spirit, his passion, his natural curiosity and his enthusiasm.

Of course, there was his knowledge and experience of the law, but much more important was his desire that others should have this knowledge and experience too. Each document drafted, each case pursued, each point of law debated was an opportunity to learn. He was also never one to shy away from giving advice. Early on, when I was struggling to write a proposal for a PhD, Eli gave me some very useful advice: "don't think of writing as a singular event; writing means revision and redrafting; to improve your writing, you must already have words on the

page.” Hearing that advice is one thing, but to watch it being carried out so eloquently was a privilege. One year, on my birthday, he said, “I have a present for you”—I remember being touched by the gesture and immediately thinking that it must be a book, or at the very least something related to international law. But no, it was a large A4 hole-punch: “Andrew, this is the most important thing in my study; it means I can keep everything in folders; I can be organised, which is essential if you are going to be productive. I wanted you to have one too.”

One of the things that marked Eli out as a great mentor was his enthusiasm for what you did and his interest in you as a person. (Although saying this reminds me of the time that I came into his office and immediately started talking about something I had been reading. I must have gone on for some time before he said “Andrew, one minute, it looks like you might be saying something interesting; let me get my hearing aid”.) It sounds like a cliché to say that his enthusiasm was infectious, but it really was; it builds confidence in a young person, and makes them feel as though what they are doing matters—or, at the very least, that it is interesting to someone else. He would always ask “how are you? How is Becky? What are you doing at the moment? How is work going? What are you reading? What did you have for dinner last night?” I remember once arriving back in Cambridge at about 9pm, with some materials from the National Archives relating to his father’s appointment as Whewell Professor and to his father’s involvement in the British *Manual of Military Law*. Eli had suggested I come around “as soon as I was back in Cambridge”: even though some of the documents contained information that was difficult to read, his sheer delight at seeing them was clear to see. I think we worked until at least 2am, finishing with a mug of marmite tea.

Eli would take pleasure in any success that you had, whether publication of a paper or the more mundane, but no less special, occasion of having enjoyed some really good cake (preferably fruitcake). He would always smile with delight and say, “good for you”. Despite the fact that many of my research notes were for his eyes only, he still treated them as a learning opportunity (he would often say that he didn’t like the word “norm”, recalling the fact that Sir Arnold McNair had written on the proofs of his father’s *Private Law Sources*, “must you use the word ‘norms’, which strikes the ordinary British philistine as very highbrow? I would not recognise a norm if I met him in the street.”) Every piece of work—every paragraph, every sentence written—was treated, line-by-line, as though it was about to be sent for publication. Needless to say, this was a powerful learning experience.

Everyone talks about how Eli’s study is a remarkable place: the overflowing books, many containing inscriptions by colleagues and former students; the numerous papers, maps and pictures, some of historic international lawyers, but the vast majority of family and friends; cards from former research assistants; gifts from grandchildren; hard-candied sweets; the iron fireplace; and the list goes on. It’s true, it was a wonderful place to work; a great privilege even. But it was a wonderful study because it was occupied by a wonderful man; it was a reflection of Eli, his life, his enthusiasm, those whose lives he affected and his loving family. It was the home of a great mentor.