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Remembering Garrett...

I first met Garrett when he came in to interview for the Program Assistant’s job in the Advising office. In the interview, we wanted to know why Garrett wanted to work in our office, and he responded, “I want be more socially engaged at Fuller.” I didn’t know if he was telling me that he wanted to pick up women or just to understand what it means to work and serve the campus as part of a team. He was the first person I hired in the advising office, and I am a better person for that decision.

Garrett grew quickly in the job and soon moved up to become an academic advisor. He attained the skills, knowledge and insights to master the most demanding curricula in the School of Theology. He developed a love and a personal concern for the students who desired to pursue doctoral studies after Fuller.

He was a realist and an encourager to the approximately 700 students he served while guiding them through their degrees on the Pasadena campus and the extension sites. I estimated that he was involved with graduating nearly 200 students over the last four years.

Garrett was also deeply involved in the structure of the office. In 1994, the office experienced a significant turn-over in the staff that required us to hire six new people. Garrett, Kay Terrell, and I spent many hours in conversation sorting out the core values of the office that shaped our responsibilities, commitments, and direction for the students, faculty, and administration. These values were: 1) to be competent in all aspects of the curriculum; 2) to select, develop, and nurture an advising team; and 3) to represent as many student constituencies as possible as a resource to the administration and campus. These were the important things that really mattered to Garrett, and he was always challenging me to be a more effective and thinking manager and leader.

Garrett leaves a deep and profound legacy for the SOT Advising office. His technical expertise with computers and graphic design programs elevated our own publications to a new and lasting level. His creativity and skills permeate many forms, policies, procedures, and daily routines in the office. In his last few weeks, he was assisting me with 25 of the most difficult graduation clearances, where he demonstrated his problem-solving and analytical abilities. We were partners in the office, and he deserved every bit of the title “Assistant Director.”

Garrett shared with us his dreams, desires, and loves. He deeply loved Paige and found inspiration in her. He loved his comics and toys and playing the devil’s advocate just so that we would get clearer about ourselves and what we were about. I think Garrett harbored the notion that everyone was a budding artist, and he encouraged and inspired me in my growing interest in photography. He taught me to look deeply at the shadows and the light. I believe he would have considered us a significant part of his seminary family—a safe place where he shared himself and was deeply loved and admired by all in the office.

Every supervisor needs someone like Garrett to make the truly important things happen and to reach beyond the superficial and mundane. I will be forever grateful to Garrett, because he believed in me and I believed in him. He was generous—sharing his talents and skills with many offices on campus. He was compassionate, intense, forthright, a pursuer of truth, a keeper of justice, and a lover of good friends, coffee, writing, and a good cigar. We shared our lives together living in community, working in the advising office, and wrestling with the big questions of life and faith. He was my fellow companion in the journey, and I am deeply missed.
Mystery Play: An Ex-Editor Praises God for Her Grace

I met Garrett four years ago when I first came to the Fuller campus; I was the newly-chosen SEMI editor. Garrett introduced me to the community with an article headlined, “A Designer Praises God for Her Mercy.” I never thought of addressing God with the feminine pronoun until then, but Garrett always brought a new perspective on life and God. As I watched Mystery Play last weekend, I was reminded once again of Garrett’s life and spirit, his flexibility and acceptance of those around him. I thank God for Garrett’s creative spirit, humor, and ability to see as no one else could. I thank Garrett for reminding me of God’s wild character and laughter. Most of all, I thank God for Her grace in allowing me to share in and be a part of Garrett’s life.

Like Gerry, the main character of this play, Garrett was fascinated with mysteries. Garrett’s words from the “Author’s Notes” in the Mystery Play program were: “I began writing this out of the need to express my personal reflection on the nature of God’s actions in the world. I sought to explore how we may interpret God’s mysterious ways without losing the mystery.”

Garrett wrote this surprisingly humorous play two years ago as part of a directed study with professor Rob Johnston and SOT dean William Dymess. The plot of Mystery Play centers around the members of a Christian family who are mourning the death of their husband and father. The individual characters in the play had their own wounds with which they struggled as the death affected their lives. In the midst of these struggles, they dared to ask aloud some unspoken questions that may exist in our hearts: How and where do we find God? Does it have to be limited to the church and supernatural experiences? How can we also encounter God’s grace in the daily, random events of our lives? Do we dare risk to see God’s grace there in the odd moments? How many opportunities of God’s grace do we miss?

This was the heart of Mystery Play: seeing and growing in God’s grace within the imperfectness of our human lives. The father in the play realized before his death that the grace and power of God always exceeded his own attempts at righteousness. He hoped that his children would realize that he was imperfect and was standing in for a much greater, more compassionate and loving, prouder Parent whose grace abounds.

“Part of the struggle is learning to let people experience grace in their own time and in their own way. It’s good for us to be reminded that God’s grace is outside of our control; sometimes we encounter it in strange ways, and other times, though we are surrounded by God’s love, we are unable to experience it in our lives. What do we do in those times?

“We cry out in brokeness and open up to God’s strangely wonderful presence embracing us, walking with us as we work through our salvation,” said Mystery Play director Stacy Tomson.

Thank you, Garrett, for this final gift to us; I did find God’s grace there in the midst of our tears and the laughter. We will all miss you.

Kimberly Kwon
Editor Emeritus of the SEMI

From the Faculty

Garrett’s creativity and insight surfaced time and time again as I read the comments he wrote on student exam papers when he served as my teaching assistant. Never content to settle for mere truths, he pushed himself and others to explore the spaces between truths, where the soul of the self struggles, believes, lives, and dies, with God.

Ray Anderson
Professor of Theology and Ministry

On campus there was no one quite like Garrett: reflective, helpful, talented, creative, gentle, and in and through it all wonderfully nonconformist. We are all poorer for his absence.

Rob Banks
Homer L. Goddard Professor of the Ministry of the Laity

I have lost a valued friend and colleague. While I was Provost, I could count on Garrett to give me honest feedback in a context of support. When I returned to the classroom, his encouragement was genuine and much appreciated. As a student, he was articulate, creative, and open to learning. As a teaching assistant, he was thorough and his comments insightful. As friends, we shared together over meals and at movies. I knew Garrett, and yet I did not know him. We spoke of his struggles; yet tragically they remained his own.

We grieve for Paige. We grieve for Gwen and her staff. We grieve for ourselves. We commit Garrett into the arms of our gracious God.

Robert K. Johnston
Professor of Theology and Culture

These pieces of artwork are examples of the types of illustrations and art Garrett created for the SEMI over the years.
To write about someone you love is hard; to write while you are still reeling from his loss is impossible. Garrett was my friend for nearly four years—three of those years we shared in Advising. I miss him—his incredible generosity, his love for genuinity, his undying loyalty, and his intellectual integrity. I miss his action figures and his comic books. I miss his eyebrow raised and his wry grin. I miss the way he listened to me, and the way he let me listen to him. I miss his coffee runs, Internet browsing lessons, and funky music, always turned up too loud. I miss his unswerving devotion to Paige, his tangible delight in her entire existence.

Monday, however, instead of standing for the bride, we stood for a casket. Instead of Texas wildflowers surrounding us, it was tears and grief and funeral sprays. We were there to celebrate a life he felt we could no longer celebrate. Irony everywhere—so much like Garrett’s life.

Although he loved comics and action figures, movies and music, he was a deep thinker, a contemplative. Although he dressed casually on most occasions, he took himself very seriously as a professional. Although he was shy and sometimes reticent, he loved people deeply and sought out relationships. Although he appeared serious, he had a zany sense of humor. Although his own approach to faith was not what some would define as “religious,” it was one deeply integrated with life—a spirituality that affected every area of his life.

Garrett—a gracious, loving friend; an intense, searching intellectual; an acclaimed artist with great promise; a complex bundle of ironic simplicity—is gone. Yet his impact on me will last forever. I’ll miss him.

*Brenda Holt, Academic Advisor*

Garrett,

I’m not sure what words to use to even begin conveying my thoughts. You made honesty possible. Through your questions and your listening, you helped me speak half-formed thoughts into living parts of myself. Through your humor and your smile you somehow helped me keep the darkness in perspective. You knew darkness, but you knew light as well—you knew light in your being, through how you cared for me and others near to you. Darkness was real to you, and so you knew how to make light real to others. For you, Jesus was never the “canned,” “nice” Jesus of “just think happy thoughts.” For you, Jesus came into the darkness and wasn’t put off by our questions and doubts. Garrett, you lived this honesty. Thank you. I am missing you.

*Elmarie Parker*

*Academic Advising*

Today, it was really hard to get up and start the day. I am mad at the world because the world just keeps going on and my friend is dead. When Garrett left Academic Advising to pursue another job, I created the invitation for his going-away party. It read, “to celebrate our very own superhero, Garrett Omata.” I want people to know that I do not believe Garrett’s act in killing himself was heroic, but his life, the impact he had on my life was heroic. He was my very own superhero. I felt safe with Garrett. I wanted to be like Garrett. I was in awe of him—his incredibly creative, analytical and yet childlike mind; his imagination; his ability to express things in ways I could only dream of expressing them; his depth; his humor; his tolerance and acceptance of people. He inspired me. I think there were some times I didn’t understand Garrett, but that’s part of why I adored him. I wanted so much for my friend to find hope in those last couple of months of his life. I wanted so much for him to know how loved he was. It just wasn’t in him. He couldn’t find that hope. And our love was not enough. My friend is dead. My life will never be the same.

*Joelle Beller*

*Academic Advisor*

To attempt to sum up the man who was Garrett is quite the impossible task. Experiencing the recent loss of his life causes me only to wish for life to be as it was, and to want him back, deeply; but that can never be. The lives Garrett touched will never return to what they were—we are forever changed because of his life and now because of losing him. I have now experienced how life can go awry despite our efforts to love and to comfort and to desire something better.

There are so many who knew Garrett, but I would say that only a few broke through to his heart. In his shy, yet courageous manner, he exuded a passion for life that may extend beyond what I have ever known. He was a man of consistent attention, and not once did he turn away from his desire to give to me. I loved his depth and his willingness to ask the hard questions. Though I am often tempted to ask the hard question of “Why” he chose to end his life, I know better to move on and think of things he did well.

I will remember Garrett the most for how he captured life through his art, his fearless approach to spirituality, and for his special way of believing in me.

I will miss him but never forget him; I am forever changed.

*Kay Terrell, Academic Advising*

When I heard the news, I did not want to believe it. I still do not want to believe it. Garrett is gone. The Light of God surrounds him now, and encloses him in love. There is peace for Garrett now, and for that I am thankful. I am thankful for him, for his life, for having been given the wonderful blessing of knowing him a little for part of his journey. I am thankful for who he was, and for what he taught me. I have known people with artistic talent. I have known people with deep faith in God. I have known people who have fought for truth, for integrity. Yet Garrett combined these qualities within himself in a synthesis unique to him. He was an artist, but more than an artist; faith infused his art, and art infused his faith. He insisted on truth telling, but truth was never less than compassion and love for him. At least that

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Garrett Henry. I still can’t make myself accept that you are gone. I keep vacillating between wanting to call you up, catch up on lost time, hear about the creative things you are doing and the wild things you are thinking. I mean, it’s been about two years since I last saw you. And then I tick-tock back to reality and realize that the only thing I can really do is cry alone for you, Garrett Henry.

I know that losing any friends—especially young ones like you—is devastating. But the deep sense of loss and confusion and anger I feel forces me to look deeper at what’s happening. Who woulda thought? The chick you worked with at a little seminary newspaper three years ago, who you haven’t even seen in over two years...who woulda thought she’d be so affected by your death?

But you must know by now that I’m only one of many. Many. Your life affected so many. Your death grieves so many.

I’ve been thinking about it. And I think one reason your intentional death is such a shock is because you were once so full of life. True life. Like the real stuff of life. Not just the ‘rah rah,’ rainbow, sunny side of life. You explored the dark side of your humanity too. You weren’t particularly concerned about fitting in or changing the world or getting special attention. You were concerned about being you. And expressing you. And being yourself is something most people long to do...but can’t. Or don’t, anyway.

But you were so you. So originally and creatively and uniquely you. Sometimes I forget that God made everyone that way. Original. Unique. Creative. But only some have the courage or the stamina or the strength to actually live that way. Like Atticus in “To Kill a Mockingbird,” you did what was right in being a person...what the rest of us only wished we had the courage to do.

At least for a while. For as long as you could. But then, something happened. I wish I had been closer to you over the past two years to capture somehow a glimpse of understanding at what happened.

I can only guess that your depression and your solution are symptoms. Symptoms not only of the tragic workings of your troubled soul, but symptoms too of a screwed-up society, a world so warped and distorted that people like you who dare to be all God created them to be...are so often swallowed up.

Deeply creative people are often outsiders. As much as you were loved and admired, I think you’d agree that you were something of an outsider. Which is a good thing, creatively. But a disastrous thing for a believer. Like the lost sheep separated from the protection of the flock, outsiders are more vulnerable to the vicious attacks of bloodthirsty wolves.

I’m getting angry. Angry at myself for being out of touch with you for so long...for not being there to somehow tell you all these things to your face when it might have mattered. And I’m sure there are people all over your old life who are saying again and again, “I shoulda....” “if only....” Angry at the world that it so often drives the richly creative, the bold individuals, those true to their calling—drives them right to the brink...and over. Angry at you for listening to the lies that destroyed your creative genius by a suicide that seemed satanic.

It is satanic, you know. And this is coming from me, ‘Mrs. Ex-Charismatic’ that I am. I’ve been told you were depressed. From what I understand about depression, I know it has been held responsible for many senseless, selfish suicides. I’m sure you were unable to think clearly in your depression, but...it’s more than that. It’s spiritual oppression so convincing and so dark and so menacing that logic and common sense and compassion are lost.

I love you, Garrett Henry. And a whole lot of other people here at Fuller and in other areas of your life love you too. Maybe you sensed that. Maybe, tragically, you didn’t. Often we walk through life with only a vague sense of our importance to other people, to God.

One of my best friends in high school, Jeff Braaten, also a brilliant and wildly creative guy like you, also struggled with the bipolar realities of being deeply himself in a world constantly making that difficult. He drove his car off a cliff ten years ago. I will never forget his eyes a week before that...calling out to me for help. Help I was too busy to offer. It was his pleading eyes that led me to make a decision to go to seminary and commit to full-time ministry.

And you, my friend, Garrett Henry. I will never forget you. Sitting at the SEMI computer, your long black ponytail and laptop full of deep secrets, laughing. Your creative life challenges me to strive to be myself more...the me God created. Your tragic death calls me to a deeper awareness and bolder response to the dark seduction of the enemy. You were not supposed to die now.

I do have confidence that God is embracing you and reassuring you that you were not crazy. You were who he created you to be. He understands what went wrong where we all do not. And now may God be comforting you. May his peace, his illogical peace, embrace your family, your fiancée, your friends, and all those who loved you and now deeply miss you.

Victoria Loorz
SEMI Editor Emeritus

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is the part of Garrett I had the privilege of getting to know. Here was a man in whom grace, creativity and the prophetic spirit coalesced in one. Did I know how much of an impact he had on so many lives? Did he know how I learned from him about the sanctification of things we often see only as profane? In two years of knowing and working with Garrett, I fear I failed to adequately communicate that to him. There was always supposed to be time. Now there is, for Garrett, a new mode of time in which time’s usual constraints can no longer hold and bind him. He knows, or will know, the gift he was to us. And for now, I am simply grateful to have been touched and blessed by his life, even though I grieve his loss. Peace, brother, until we meet again across the River!

To Garrett —
THE BEST ADVISOR EVER
A WONDERFUL FRIEND
AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD IN MY LIFE.

Maria Ovando-Gibson
SEMI Editor Emeritus

Thomas E. Brown
SOT Academic Advising
What Angels Do When They're Depressed

Eat hamburgers without tomatoes or lettuce.

Watch sad movies.

Write telephone directories.

Count the number of pins that can fit on their head.

Nothing.

Watch funny movies.

Ponder the reason for existence.

Talk to their Dad.

This comic strip, featuring Toro the angel, was created by Garrett and Kiyoshi Nakazawa.

G.O.

A Haiku
in Memory of Garrett Omata

Through the eyes of sorrow
Deep passion for life remains,
In steel glass it breaks.

Untouched issues find
One searching escapes the trap,
The immortal speaks.

And loudly yells on
Chapels of stained glass pain
He displays poems

These shape views of man
Mystery of life's own play
Portraying struggle.

Hope comes knocking there
A value shed by Christ's blood
Redemption for all.

In of our self's hand
We grasp the ghosts that bind us
But it's all in vain

Hearing our Lord say,
I died so you truly live
Let me take your grief.

The evil one comes
Reaping death and speaking lies
He blames us for all.

We then believe it
Lies become our greatest truth
And then we act it.

The light fades quickly
The stage is bars and quiet,
We bow to finish.

Help us God our Light,
Our life is entirely Yours
Till we have to g.o.

by Jonathan Drahn

the SEMI March 13, 1997
Garrett,

You said:
philosophy of community
truth-telling
claims to value
true act of grace

You said, CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP EAGERLY ANTICIPATED!

Words to us in our dark time...and yours?
Again, thanks dear friend.

We say, CONTINUED relationship eagerly anticipated!
Continued RELATIONSHIP eagerly anticipated!
Continued relationship EAGERLY anticipated!
Continued relationship eagerly ANTICIPATED!

See ya/2,4,3/cmb

Cathy Barsotti

I first met Garrett seven years ago in the laundry room of a Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society (JEMS) college camp. I had already heard of this “Garrett guy” from my friend Kiyoshi and other church friends. By the end of that afternoon, I got a chance to experience why Garrett was Kiyoshi’s cool and interesting best friend as well as his “partner in crime.” It wasn’t, however, until years later when I arrived at FTS and worked alongside Garrett in the Office of Student Services that I got a real glimpse of what made Garrett so special. He quickly became one of my favorite people on campus. One of the great things about Garrett was his realness. His accepting nature made it so easy to say whatever was on my mind and to ‘let it all hang out.’ I will remember fondly his many instances of kindness, the frequency with which he reached out to me, and how much he treasured his friends.

Sally Tsuchihashi
MFT Student

KING KONG VS. GODZILLA BY RODAN

When I think of Garrett, the words that come to mind are:

UNIQUE Abundantly Creative
Loving Playful
Very Cool

Always about the task of Doing Theology
Always available to help

Vivid Memories:
Interviewing for a position in the SOT Academic Advising Office—I especially liked his pony-tail.
Spontaneous conversations—I always felt the freedom and the invitation to be unabashedly myself.
Sam I Am play—I was amazed at the humor, depth of human feeling, and sheer complexity it took to write this stage play.

Garrett: Thank you for the many ways you brought help, clarity, and creativity to the projects you worked on. I admire the depth of your creativity and computer knowledge. I’m so glad I knew you.

Bernice Ledbetter Ervin
DePree Leadership Center

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