



## REMEMBERING

# Gary Clifford Yamasaki

June 13, 1956 - February 19, 2022



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#### **Tribute from Wiebe and Jeske Funeral Home**

Wiebe and Jeske Funeral Home Staff send our condolences to family and friends.

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#### **Tribute from Mary Derksen**

Relation: We were members of the same church, Emmanuel Mennonite in Abbotsford, BC

Oh, April, know that the Lord will carry you through this time of grief! Praying for you.

Love, Mary

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#### **Tribute from Ed & Louise Janzen**

Relation: Members of the same congregation. I

I'm so sorry for your loss, April. May the God of all comfort keep and sustain you.

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#### **Tribute from Tracey and Leon Schroeder**

Relation: Friends from Valley Crossway Church

Gary was amazingly unique in all the best ways. I can't imagine anyone else having a Twitter feed that was 80% Canucks, 10% movies and 10% New Testament Greek! A true renaissance man, a quiet spirit, a man of God. He will be missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with his dear April his extended family.

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#### **Tribute from Henry and Patti Tanaka**

Relation: We are long time friends of Brian and Kathy Yamasaki.

Our deepest sympathy to the family of Gary Yamasaki.

May your loving memories help you through this sad and difficult time.

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#### **Tribute from Dan Leslie**

Relation: Friend of brother.

While I never met Gary, I have known his brother Brian and family for over 40 years. My condolences go out to Gary and his family.

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#### **Tribute from Linda Yamasaki**

Relation: Cousin

My condolences to April, Brian, Warren and families. I will always remember my cousin with fondness, his soft-spoken manner, politeness and strong faith. Gary lived his life doing what he loved and believed in. His caring for others and his true love for April were always clear. My prayers are with you.

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**Tribute from Shirley Hsu**

Relation: Friends since early days at Peace Church

"In quietness and confidence is your strength," Isa. 30:15. These words describe Gary so well! Although he could converse in depth about a wide range of topics, he was first of all a good listener. We remember fondly his quiet smile and the visits we had over the years, usually over a shared meal in a Chinese restaurant, a pleasure that was interrupted by the pandemic. May that same quiet confidence be yours, April, as you face the days and weeks ahead.

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**Tribute from Ron Voth**

Relation: Colleague

Gary had an office kitty-corner to mine at the college. My sense as an office mate was that he was very focused on his work. He worked hard to connect with the students using many creative means. He was quiet and always had a smile. He was a scholar! Alongside his schoolwork, he diligently worked on his research areas. I'm saddened by his passing. May God's presence be a comfort to his family.

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**Tribute from Ron Dart**

Relation: friend on the trail

Gary was a dear, sweet and caring person, thoughtful and handled disappointments in an honest, wise and generous manner. Tears emerged from my soul when I was told he had crossed the river. I'm sure he will be greeted warmly and well, well done his embrace. The times I spent with Gary are treasured ones and will not be forgotten even though his passing is most painful. I will hold our many emails and times spent together in trust and as a gift from the other side. Ron Dart

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**Tribute from Joy Reimer**

Relation: Friend and Colleague

It was a great privilege to know Gary, work alongside him at Columbia Bible College and to call him my friend. He was a kind and generous man to all who had the good fortune to come into his path. I mourn with you, April, family, friends, colleagues, and students that he taught. Love and prayers for comfort.

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**Tribute from Angelika Dawson**

Relation: Friend

My strongest and fondest memory of Gary is his Sermon on the Mount - when he recited the entire sermon from memory. "Why do a sermon on a sermon?" was how he introduced it. It was a dramatic recitation and it showed me his love for scripture, his desire to bring that to life for others, and his creativity. I also remember doing a story about his Acts class at CBC - modeled on the popular Survivor series. He brought that book to life for his students in a way that I had not thought possible. It was pretty cool. He was kind, quiet, passionate, and so smart. My deepest condolences to you, April, and to Gary's family.

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**Tribute from Harry Leung**

Relation: Know Gary through April, his wife.

Dear Gary, it was an honor to meet you and get to know you.

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**Tribute from Patricia Poynton**

Relation: My cousin Kathy's brother-in-law

So sorry for your loss Brian! My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family during this sad and difficult time!

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**Tribute from Sam Wark**

Relation: Friend of his brother Warren.

Sending my deepest condolences and sympathy to the Yamasaki family.

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**Tribute from Michael Redekop**

Relation: Friend

I've known Gary for around 30 years and he is a person I had great respect for. We shared a love for hockey and have competed against each other in hockey pools for most of the years we've known each other. Before the era of online drafting, we would have the drafts in person. It always brought a smile to everyone's face to see Gary walk in with a big pile of hockey magazines and many loose papers with his handwritten notes. When it was his turn to draft, Gary would always be madly flipping through all his pages, trying to find the secret information he had jotted down somewhere relating to the pick he had in mind for each round. That will always be a priceless memory in my mind.

Aside from hockey, Gary was brilliant in so many ways and I always loved how he could think outside the box. God had gifted him with a beautiful mind, and he certainly used it in a way the glorified God. He taught so many to understand the scriptures better. My kids will never forget the message he presented to Emmanuel one Sunday where he speculated as to Jesus' true birthday (not December 25!).

Gary was always kind and had a personality that was so very likable. The world is missing something without Gary, but heaven has been enriched with his presence.

Condolences to April and the extended Yamasaki family from Janice & I.

We'll miss you Gary. I hope that if the Canucks ever win a Stanley Cup, you'll be able to witness it from heaven.

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**Tribute from Susan Wiebe**

Relation: April was our pastor

Dear April, I wanted to send you my condolences and let you know that I am praying for you and your family. I always appreciated Gary's sermons and I know that his colleagues at CBC thought so highly of him.

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**Tribute from Janet E Boldt**

Relation: Friend and colleague

Gary and I shared a corner; I was in one office and his office was tucked in next to mine. When I began at the college in 1992 I had the incredible gift of having two immediate cheerleaders - April, who was already teaching at the college and just beginning a pastoral role, and Gary, who by his very

nature inspired people, and particularly women, to be all that they could be. A glimpse into Gary's office (which I did often) was to witness a delightful plethora of interests and competencies: theological tomes alongside law textbooks, hockey cards and a hockey pool chart, pop-culture videos, student essays and artistic projects to be graded, pages of intricate Greek characters and reams of proofread pages for his next book, videotaping equipment, scraps of cut-outs for a game board to make the book of Acts come alive for students. Gary had extensive intelligence in multiple areas; he was dedicated and focused on tasks that inspired him and was a creative and caring teacher who demonstrated his passion for the gospel by his life.

I was always intrigued, curious and awestruck about who Gary was and how his heart and brain worked. I know I never figured it out and never would. He was one of a kind, a man I admired, valued and enjoyed. I was deeply saddened by his departure from the college, and now his departure from the world we still inhabit.

Gary, thank you for your rich contribution to my life in countless ways that you perhaps never knew. The world has lost a great and loving man. And I have lost a friend.

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#### **Tribute from Alvin and Irene Ens**

April. Our condolences on the passing of Gary, dedicated Bible scholar and man of so many hobbies. May the memories and future hope sustain you.

Alvin and Irene Ens

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#### **Tribute from Anna Mary Reimer**

Relation: April is the pastor at my sister and brother-in-law's church...Elinor and Waldo Neufeld. I met April several times, but did not have the opportunity to meet Gary.

Dear April , my condolences on the passing of Gary.

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#### **Tribute from Dominique Emmanuel Denguessi**

Relation: Instructor, congregation member, friend

<https://emmanueldenguessi.wordpress.com/2022/02/26/ahead-of-the-game/>

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#### **Tribute from Mona Tokarek LaFosse**

Relation: Teacher and mentor

Gary was my teacher and my first academic mentor. He set me on my career path as a professor of early Christian studies. I met Gary in my first year of Bible college when I was 17 years old. He was newly minted as a professor himself, having trained as a lawyer but resigning after a successful bar exam in order to pursue the study of the New Testament. He introduced me to exegesis. I went on to learn introductory and advanced Greek from him. Learning Greek flung open the richness and depth of early Christian texts. Gary was an excellent Greek teacher—patient, detailed, methodical, passionate, and knowledgeable. Gary was also creative and thoughtful in his pedagogy. I clearly recall a revelatory assignment for our course on the Synoptic Gospels: a close comparison of Matthew, Mark and Luke with the film *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I adapted this idea into a film essay in the New Testament course I now teach every year. Knowing my desire to teach, Gary provided opportunities for me to begin teaching. He allowed me to conduct a tutorial for introductory Greek students, and in my third year of Bible college, he agreed to supervise a teaching internship. Every year, Gary attended the Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings. When I told him of my interest in cultural anthropology and the New Testament, one year he brought back a recently published volume published by the

Context Group who did such work. A number of years later, I became a member of the Context Group myself. In later years, we met at such conferences, either SBL or the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies. Gary always had a full schedule of sessions to attend; such was his passion for lifelong learning. At Bible College, I remember being mesmerized by Gary's performance of the Sermon on the Mount in chapel. I recall the audience's reaction when he said, "if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away," for Gary would enact this literally, having two hands on the pulpit one moment, and the (fake) right hand dramatically flung aside the next! (He did a similar action with a ping-pong ball when he got to the part about plucking out an eye.) Several years ago, I began to perform gospel texts within my own context, and I now teach a course called Performing the Stories of Jesus. Gary was always dedicated to research and publishing despite a heavy teaching load, and I always admired his dedication to this facet of his work. His studies on perspective criticism grew more slowly than he had hoped, but has found its way into narrative and performance criticism, especially within the study of the gospels and Acts. I have many more stories and memories that I hold fondly in my heart. I will miss his wisdom, his unfailing encouragement, and witnessing his steadfast dedication to what was important to him. , , , . Deep peace to you, April, and to all who will miss him.

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#### **Tribute from Janeen Bertsche Johnson**

Relation: Friend

I met Gary in fall 1986 at Associated (now Anabaptist) Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (now Seminary) where we were both MDiv students. Gary and April and my husband Barry and I were part of the same small K-group. We enjoyed eating together, playing games, and talking about all manner of things. I also remember going to MennoHof (Visitors Center) in Shipshewana and seeing a photo of Gary running on the AMBS campus on their wall of Mennonites!

In summer 2000, our family visited Gary and April in Abbotsford, and they took us to see the sights of Vancouver (and taste amazing food at a Chinese restaurant). Although our visits were infrequent in the years after that, it was always easy to pick up where we left off and feel the warmth of their friendship.

On Feb. 23, 2018, I got to have supper with Gary and April while I was in their town for work. Facebook reminded me of that visit on Wednesday morning, and Wednesday afternoon I saw April's post about Gary's passing. I feel great sadness for his loss, and great gratitude that I was honored to know him and enjoy brilliant conversations and laughter with him. April, I will be holding you in my thoughts and prayers. May God's healing love cradle you.

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#### **Tribute from Barry Johnson**

Relation: Friend from Gary's seminary student years at AMBS, Elkhart, Indiana.

Sympathies to April and the family. Gary was one of the nicest people I have ever met. We had a common interest in sports, but one sport he knew little about at the time was basketball. Being a basketball coach in Indiana, I took Gary along to several games, and it didn't take long for Gary to catch the basketball bug that many Hoosiers enjoy. It was so much fun to analyze and dissect the game with Gary. When our paths would cross in the years following, Gary would reflect with fondness about his time of learning about basketball with me. That meant so much to me. He was a great friend - I will miss him so much.

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#### **Tribute from Heather Tanemura**

Relation: Cousin

April, Brian, and Warren.....So sad and sorry for the loss of Gary. May your treasured memories keep

him close. Hugs.

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**Tribute from Joyce Schmidt**

Relation: through our church

Blessings on your wife April & extended family. remember he is in a better place, where we will meet him one day according to God's agenda.

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**Tribute from Karen and Bill Holden**

Relation: Friends of Brian and Kathy

We grew up in South Vancouver with Brian, Gary and Warren. Many days were spent playing ping pong in the basement, playing tag in the neighborhood and going to baseball games at Moberly Park where Gary's dad was an umpire. Brian was our age and we have heard stories about Gary over the years. Gary was five years younger than us so was not really part of our group nor was he in high school with us. We are so sorry for the loss of such an articulate and accomplished man.

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**Tribute from Doug Miller**

Relation: Friend

Here are some of my favorite memories of Gary, some involving April as well, over the past thirty-seven years:

- \* Taking classes with Gary at AMBS.
- \* Studying at AMBS with Gary for our GRE exams.
- \* Gary loves rice!
- \* Gary tells me I MUST listen to Billy Joel
- \* Gary and I both love Calvin and Hobbes
- \* Staying in touch during our doctoral programs, both on the east coast.
- \* Being introduced to Gary's innovative perspective criticism.
- \* Gary loves sports.
- \* Gary loves movies! and we share some of our favorites.
- \* Listening to Gary present at SBL (several times), including his insights on teaching.
- \* Gary is a runner.
- \* The time April and Gary hosted me in BC and gave me a wonderful day in Vancouver: introducing me to dim sum, "Thirteen Conversations about One Thing" (I think that was the movie), great sites along the shore.
- \* All the great times of catching up together at SBL.
- \* Corresponding briefly with Gary during the past couple of months.
- \* Hoping Gary would be strong enough to write the essay on the book of Acts for the Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible project.

April, may all the memories and prayers and blessings assist in holding you up so that you can grieve well in presence of God and God's people.

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**Tribute from Bevan Voth**

Relation: Friend

I am saddened to hear of Gary's passing. I knew Gary from his time at Emmanuel Mennonite Church. Gary was a blessing and inspiration to anyone who met him. He was always ready to listen and his

enthusiasm on the various subjects one discussed with him was infectious. I was always so inspired by the messages and insights he brought to our church services and adult Sunday school sessions. He significantly influenced and deepened my understanding of Scripture and challenged me to dig deeper and consider various perspectives. I am so thankful he shared his gifts and insights in such a humble and impactful way. My condolences to April and to Gary's family.

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**Tribute from Robin Lawrence**

Relation: Colleague and Student at Columbia Bible College

I knew Gary as a colleague and as my Greek instructor at CBC. I remember most how much he came alive in the classroom, bringing life and clarity to challenging subject matter. He was an enthusiastic scholar with a commitment to serving all his students well. I am grateful for the legacy he leaves in all those students whom he empowered and equipped with his love for biblical studies and the practical tools necessary to engage the Bible well. Gary was an excellent steward of his gifts, and we were blessed to have him in our community. My heartfelt condolences to April and all of Gary's loved ones.

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**Tribute from Karen and Rob Hiebert**

Relation: Friends

Our sincere condolences to April and to the family. We pray that you experience comfort and peace as you grieve Gary's passing.

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**Tribute from David Hsu**

Relation: Friend from Peace Church

I met Gary when he and April started to attend Peace Church. He always had a polite and pleasant manner when we conversed. He was then a UBC student. He liked to run and participated in marathons. I will remember Gary as a dear friend in Christ with a resilient spirit, a scholar with an unrestricted mind and a theological teacher with a law degree background.

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**Tribute from Rudy and Laura Kasdorf**

Relation: Were members in the same church in Abbotsford, BC

We want to express our deepest sympathy to you, April, the passing of Gary will leave a vacancy in your daily life style. Gary was a special devote person with sincere care for whomever he meet. We remember, when Gary was asked to preach a sermon on a given Sunday that he had prepared to serve, as his messages were always well explained so that a regular adult could understand with simplicity. We appreciated his excellence and clarity as he spoke. And to April, we wish you God's richest blessings as you continue on life's journey.

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**Tribute from Julene Fast**

Relation: met his wife at church

Hi April,

Julene from Hawkesville - just visited with you in our break out room. I share sadness with you - I know grief well - hearing of Gary's death was shocking - even though I don't know him - having just visited with you - it feels like a punch in the gut. I know your grief is big and huge - how can it not be? I wish for you the whatever it takes to walk the days that come your way - and when whatever it takes is not available may your tears and sobs somehow bring some rest

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**Tribute from Sven Soderlund**

Relation: College professor and friend

Reading these tributes to Gary from April, his brothers and friends, I have learned so much about Gary's life and passions that I didn't know previously. Although I first came to know Gary when he was a student at Regent College, there were aspects of his life and passions that did not come to the surface in that academic setting. For years I thought of Gary as a single minded academic, but his passions for sports, music, movies and much more, clearly show that the canvas of his life was much bigger than just books.

As for the academic books that he did write, these were serious and insightful contributions to scholarship, in particular the broader subject of biblical interpretation. His special interest in the importance of "point of view" (something he learned from the movies he analyzed), was creative and state-of-the-art. I'm not sure all his students would have understood or appreciated the significance of this advanced level of scholarship, though New Testament academics certainly did (and I suspect some students did as well). Along with "point of view" scholarship, Gary's love for the study of Greek came strongly to the fore in his last years, especially in his pursuit of fresh ways to teach introductory Greek. Thankfully he was able to bring some of that work to completion which hopefully will continue to be published along with his others works.

Clearly Gary was a person of broad ranging interests, able to integrate academic life with the best off modern culture. But not only modern culture. Ultimately Gary's commitment was to serving his Lord and the church he loved through a total offering of body and mind to the cause of the gospel. That same quality of commitment was reproduced in his devotion to his wife, April, both to her ministry and to their home together. We understand, April, why you will miss Gary so much. We pray for strength and peace in the next lap of the journey, albeit without Gary at your side, yet never totally alone.

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**Tribute from Lorna Goertz**

Relation: Friend

I've had the privilege of having Gary and April as friends for over 40 years. We learned to know each other when Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond, BC was in the planning stages. Gary was Peace's first deacon of communications and led the library committee. He was also active in our young adults group. Our friendship continued when they went to Elkhart, Indiana and Richmond, Virginia to study and when they came 'home' and Gary began teaching at CBC. Gary put his training to good use, not only as a dearly beloved prof at CBC, but also in discussing the everyday implications of the teachings of the Bible in ways that put things into perspective for people like me. He was passionate about his faith, Greek, movies and hockey and also interested in what was important to others. He will be deeply missed.

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**Tribute from Jean and Phil Hood**

Relation: Friends

Dear April,

Jean and I are deeply sorry for your great loss. We love you and we loved Gary and we loved Gary's many gifts. You both are extraordinarily gifted individuals.

I have been thinking about Gary a great deal and I can't comprehend your personal loss as well as the loss to our community and to those of us who called him friend.



I rarely missed an opportunity to hear Gary teach and I never left one of his sessions without unique or even an exciting new understanding.

Gary was so intelligent yet articulate and innovating. He tackled deep and complex issues and really cared that his students understood. I loved his Lego movies! And I'm always relating 'point of view' to my study of scripture - or almost any other deep-thinking projects I'm working on.

I have been working on historical research and writing and often try to think in terms of Gary's 'directing a scene' employing historical point of view.

I always thought of Gary as a good and personal friend. Part of that was Gary's way of communicating -- an almost one-to-one personal level even while teaching a large group - he cared about his students and sincerely wanted us to understand.

Jean and I are deeply grateful to have known Gary, our lives are greatly enriched for knowing you both.

Jean and Phil

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#### **Tribute from Barb Nickel**

Relation: Friend

Brilliant, generous, enthusiastic, and inspiring are words that come to mind when I think about Gary. Just last fall, I sent an e-mail to Gary asking him about a Greek word I had come across and wanted to use for a talk I was giving. Looking back over the e-mail exchange now, I'm amazed at the time and thought that Gary spent clarifying this word to me, then going on to enthusiastically tell me about his ground-breaking Greek teaching project, into which he had poured thousands of hours! All of this in the midst of his challenging health journey. The words of his e-mail ring so clearly to me: "It's my pleasure to be able to talk about Greek!"

Gary was not only brilliant but also so humble and supportive of others. I remember him and April visiting in the Chilliwack Hospital just after my oldest son, Nicholas, was born. Fast forward thirteen years and this same boy is sitting forward in the pew, hanging on Gary's every word as he explains with great clarity the scientific and biblical occurrences surrounding a new view of the date of Jesus' birth - not December 25! When we talked about Gary following his passing, both of our boys remembered this sermon so well and marveled at it.

I recently learned from April that one of Gary's favourite songs was "The Tree Song" by Ken Medema. What appropriate words to celebrate Gary's life: "I've got roots growing down to the water, I've got leaves growing up to the sunshine, and the fruit I bear is a sign of the life in me..."

It's miraculous to think of all the people that Gary touched with his kind ways and infectious enthusiasm. This is the fruit of a life that continues to bear...

Our prayers are for April and all of the family.

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#### **Tribute from Paul N. Anderson**

Relation: A New Testament colleague in the Pacific Northwest AAR/SBL community

So sorry to hear of Gary's passing; I've so enjoyed his perspectival-critical approach to biblical texts. I hope his legacy continues in addition to his memory as a fine and wonderful person. He'll be sorely missed.

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#### **Tribute from Kent L. Yinger**

Relation: Academic colleague

For a valued and creative colleague. I will miss Gary's warm and genuine Christian spirit at our

academic conferences.

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**Tribute from Nancy Heisey**

Relation: colleague

April, my deepest condolences on the loss of Gary, and prayers for you in the days and months ahead of transition for you.

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**Tribute from Wilma Bailey**

April, I was saddened to learn that Gary passed away. I have fond memories of sharing meals at SBL and once when I was in Vancouver for a meeting. What a kind and generous man! May you be comforted by his memory.

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**Tribute from Joon, Shim, Shina, Dona**

Relation: Friend

Whenever we met Gary and April, he often shared the story of how he met April and how they were high school sweethearts. It was so beautiful to see the love he had for her. His eyes sparkled when he talked with Shina and Dona. Every time, they were reminded of how much he enjoyed and loved discussing with students and young adults. He imparted wisdom on self-awareness to our daughters.

When we visited Mennohof in Shippshewana, we noticed a very small photo in the museum; it was a picture of Gary, during his AMBS days, enjoying a run. We were so delighted to see a familiar face.

Gary and April showed us a simple life which we admired and aspired to emulate. These are moments we cherish deeply and we could see how Gary loved to follow the life of Jesus Christ. We pray that God comfort will be with April and Gary's extended family.

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**Tribute from JUDY BERGEN**

Relation: Instructor

April, you are in my thoughts and prayers.

Gary was a great teacher at CBC. My husband and I both had him as our instructors. I understand your hurt. You are in my thoughts and prayers.

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**Tribute from Gerald Neufeld**

Relation: A friend

I remember how quiet Gary was, but when talking with him I found that he was quite friendly and it was very easy to talk with him. Rie remembers getting into a deep discussion with him related to Japanese culture and how that influences families through generations. I appreciated Gary's research and preaching related to world-views. It helped me understand more deeply how conflicts between people of different world-views add challenges to solving conflicts. I liked how Gary not only could do solid biblical research to understand various passages, he also had some cutting edge ideas on looking at biblical texts from new perspectives and visualised points of view.

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**Tribute from Gareth Brandt**

Relation: colleague and friend

I will remember Gary's thoughtfulness, grace, passion for his craft, and commitment to students. I want to emulate those qualities. I will also remember the more informal times of talking hockey and being part of his hockey pool for many years. Gary was good at balancing his hobbies, marriage, scholarly passions, and commitment to college and students. During my present sabbatical I am reflecting on the upcoming chapter of my own life, and so his legacy in the area of self-care and life-balance takes on additional poignancy.

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**Tribute from Dieter Schonwetter**

Relation: Colleague at Columbia Bible College

Gary was a wonderful colleague who made my transition from grad school to teaching in an academic setting a positive experience. He was also a caring coach who helped me return to the enjoyment of running while I was at CBC and even got me to run in various competitive distance runs. I also enjoyed the times we had lunch or coffee time together as he shared his own PhD journey and his ideas of writing his manuscript for publication. It helped me as I defended my thesis and published portions of it. We are people whose lives are influenced by a community of others, many of whom care and invest in our lives so that we may experience the blessings of togetherness. Gary did that in a number of ways and I am blessed given his time with me.

