



IN MEMORIAM: MY FAREWELL TO STEVE

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Editor's Note: This is one of two articles written by graduates of the Narrative Therapy Initiative's Training Program following the death of Steve Gaddis, in the spring of 2022.

A few years ago, Juan Gabriel, a very famous Mexican songwriter, died unexpectedly from a heart attack. Many Latin-Americans went into a state of shock and grief. It is fair to say that for many days, our stories of growing up, of love and separation could be heard in any conversation happening on social media, TV, and any corner where there was a Spanish speaking person involved.

Literally, our routine stopped the day we learned about his death, and I felt the world also stopped for a few days.

Juan Gabriel's songs have been with me in very difficult times. I cried then because of his departure, but I was and I am so grateful and happy for having a chance to know about him and benefit from his art. I can tell so many stories about how his songs lifted me up from very dark places, times when he showed me how to care for the simplicity of life, and the humility of any loving act.

My relationship with Steve Gaddis and Juan Gabriel's art have many things in common.

On January 6, 2022, my normal routine stopped, and I reached out to my beloved people in the Narrative Therapy Initiative family. I have found connection with them while sharing tears, laughs, fears, and so many stories. I shared with many my disbelief in my strength to go on without Steve. I struggled to believe in a world that I knew did not matter because he was no longer there to remind me of it. For many days I wondered why the world did not stop when Steve died, but then I remembered, listened, and read the stories...

Let me tell you a little story about why my big blue eyed brother mattered in my life.

Steve and I met in a safety training at a family and children human service organization. We both shared our dislike for the whole concept of protecting ourselves against the people we tried to help, especially children. In one exercise, we were asked to hold each other, pretending one of us was a child out of control with anger. I quickly assumed this role since there was not much pretending; after all, I was so angry about being there in the first place. Steve said, "I won't do anything to you," and, protecting himself from the anger he probably saw in my eyes, we both laughed, talked, and ended the whole silly experience without laying a finger on each other.

A few days after I met him again at the program I was working at, and we were assigned to work together as co-therapists. I was jealous of him being a PhD student; going to graduate school was the only reason I had left Mexico 5 years before, but I got in some complicated detours of my plans. I was angry too about my job title "non-masters level clinician", when actually I was a psychologist. I was told I would be Steve's teacher or coach during this experience. I felt silly and resentful with the subtle ways I kept receiving messages that I was less, or that my value as a professional had little, if any value at all. I tried to prove myself, my language, and my knowledge to Steve. He was always humble, and so real. Once in a while he would say to us in the program, all overworked and underpaid, "Do not hate me. My wife is the one with the money." I began to like him because of his shameless sarcastic comments.

His irreverent attitude towards people with power and privilege surprised me many times, but I felt he was representing my experience. I wished to get to know him more.

Later, Steve was seeking advice about Will and Laurel, one toddler and the other just a baby, who were resisting Steve's and Ashley efforts to put them to sleep. Steve exclaimed, "They do not let us sleep! I am going nuts! What advice can you give me?"

"Try something else," I told him. He laughed with all his body and tiredness. Steve saw me as this skillful mother I had a very hard time believing existed. His regard and respect for me was unexpected and even uncomfortable.

Those times were before Steve had studied with the big narrative guys. He was already a loving, generous therapist. I regularly listened to him and my dear friend Phil Decter having discussions about Narrative Therapy, and I witnessed Steve's attitude towards the family we worked with. He talked to them with respect, and I saw his huge curiosity in action. One night, I remember I had to pull him out of the home of the family we were working with because we saw some police activity outside, and people were coming and going in the house. "We got to go, Steve!" Nana, the matriarch of the family, and I told him. Despite Nana's efforts at ordering one of her relatives to escort us out to our cars, he wanted to continue his conversation with Nana.

Many years after remembering this, he told me about this day. I made fun of his naïve attitude when he asked me, “Did you know that Nana walked with Martin Luther King in the famous march?” His eyes lighted up with admiration again.

I thought for myself, “Oh, I thought your eyes were lighted up by the police car sirens of that night.”

I perceived Steve as naïve in that moment; I was able to reframe naivete with the capacity to have a great place of curiosity to wonder about Nana and her stories.

About six years later, I saw him again in a workshop he gave at the Cambridge Family Institute called “Working with Boys”. I came late and he stopped his class to welcome me in with open arms, with one of his big bear hugs. He invited me into the Salem Center to his office practice, telling me I was always welcome there, I did not go, life was still too complicated for me.

Boston College welcomed me with money and lots of appreciation for my life experience, the perfect combination I needed. Steve was already teaching an elective class on Narrative Therapy. I did not try to register; I figured the class was probably filled already. I had a difficult experience at BC where a former classmate would have been a teacher of mine. She mentioned to me that being in her class was a conflict of interest, and suggested that I drop out of her class. I was outraged and I felt so out of place. I told Steve, and he responded, “Bullshit, she was afraid she didn't have anything to teach you.” It was so easy to be seen by Steve, and I am so grateful life kept inviting us both to more permanent reunions.

A few years after graduate school, my tolerance to injustices at my workplace was getting so thin. I called Steve, and he interrupted my tears that day: “Are you telling me that they are treating you like crap because you are a problem to them, just another angry Latina?” He did not let me answer, saying “I want you to come and join me in this group that I’m starting about social justice. I believe that we can help.” He followed, “Would you like me to meet with your supervisors?”

I thought of him as condescending and naïve but also very endearing and protective. I remembered answering, “No thank you, big hermano, I will have to do without you.”

Steve exclaimed, “I am pretty sure you got this. I just want you to remember you are not alone.”

I worked with Steve, and I continued to see Steve’s ways to connect with each person with wisdom, tenderness, love, and humor. His irreverent attitude had sharpened. I am pretty sure in those meetings we all did annoying things, like showing off our knowledge. I admired his patience, and his tears always surprised me. He told us his intentions were to be close to us and create intimacy. I particularly appreciated his very fresh and casual way to make sarcastic comments on what he heard. One of those daring moments was when one of the participants, a male, read his

letter to white male privilege, or male toxicity. Once he finished, Steve asked him, “Oh are you saying, please fuck off white male privilege?” I loved him so much for it. We all laughed so hard; imagine the effect for me, the only woman of color in those meetings.

I like to think that our sibling connection got strong because of our differences and despite his privileges.

One time he was challenged about not being antiracist enough. He told me something about the anger of the person who challenged him and then he quickly asked me, “How come you are not angry?” I responded, “I just feel that I understand both of you, but you two are not listening to each other.” He was tormented by this misunderstanding. “I am totally okay with listening to the unintended effects of my actions, but I am not okay with anyone imposing their expectations on me,” he said.

One day, Steve invited me to the chair of diversity of inclusion of NTI. We had a conversation about lack of diversity in race in the workshops and in NTI community. He surprised me when he said, “I did not start NTI as a social justice initiative for people of color. I don’t think it is my place to position myself in that way, and no community of color has asked me to take the project. I created NTI to do something to hold the white mental health world accountable for acting as a system of social control that negatively affects many marginalized and disenfranchised communities.”

I was speechless.

He was criticized by the use of his academic language in his presentations; though I appreciated this change. I often teased him, “Yes Dr. Gaddis”, and then he would respond, “Okay, Dr, Morelos, now what will we do?” The way that Steve navigated the academic and professional worlds was tireless and brilliant.

During his time with cancer, I heard some of his challenges, the effects of his treatment, the uncertainty of the future, the pain of Ashley and his kids. I told him “Thank you for continuing to show up for your life despite the difficulties.”

I have so many memories of Steve and the many dreams we started together: Our teaching or, better said, sharing of our knowledges and values, our love for the narrative worldview and our commitment to the narrative revolution. His influence is everywhere in my life, and his always loving ways help me grow my self-love.