



To Honor His Memory

Lance Cpl. Juan Manuel Garcia-Schill leaves a lasting impression on those who knew him, and those he never met

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By **Paul Fattig**

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The young Marine serving in the dangerous, dusty world of war-torn Iraq was clearly tickled with the goodies he received out of the blue.

"Muchimas gracias for sending the care package!" Lance Cpl. Juan Manuel Garcia-Schill, 20, wrote Maria Saldivar in Plano, Texas. "My good friend Jose Sanchez and I took to it like children to candy!

"We use the hand sanitizer all the time," added the Marine, a 2005 graduate of Grants Pass High School. "We greatly appreciate the cup of noodles. They are preferred amongst the Marines. I swear that they are like currency here and I'm rich."

He also thanked her for the other items, from toothbrushes to tuna.

"Enough about our slobbering over your kindness," he continued. "I would like to let you know that we are more indebted to you than you could be towards us."

Saldivar received the letter via regular mail on June 27. "His letter was very moving, full of gratitude — I was so happy to get it," she said.

"But last Saturday (July 7), when I got online to see if he had posted anything new, it said he was gone."

Four days after her letter arrived, the lance corporal, known fondly by friends and family as "Manuel," was killed. He died July 1 during combat operations in Anbar Province in Iraq, according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

He was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, based in Twentynine Palms, Calif.

Although the Department of Defense listed his name as Juan Manuel Garcia-Schill, as did an obituary submitted by his maternal family that ran Tuesday in the Mail Tribune, he was known in high school as Juan Manuel Garcia. He also signed the letter with that surname.

"You don't realize how something like this is going to affect you," said Saldivar, 22, who said she cried when she learned of the Marine's death.

Never mind she had never met him, that she had just picked his name randomly to send a care package. For her, his letter had put a human face on statistics she had read about the war.

His death brings to more than 3,610 the number of Americans in uniform who have died in Iraq since the war started in March 2003, according to The Associated Press. That number includes 61 from Oregon.

"It didn't seem fair — he was just 20 years old," Saldivar said. "I spent all day Saturday and Sunday trying to find people who knew him."

She is among a network of people from Texas to the West Coast whose lives had been touched by the young man with the engaging personality.

In Suisun City, Calif., Angelica Zaldivar, 20, now a homemaker raising two children, will never forget the boy she met in math class in the eighth grade at North Middle School in Grants Pass. He had just moved to Grants Pass from Klamath Falls, where he was born.

"That evening I went to my tae kwon do class and there he was," Zaldivar recalled of the boy she knew as Garcia who would earn his black belt in the martial art by his junior year at Grants Pass High. "We started talking and ended up becoming good friends."

They were there for each other in good times and bad, she said.

"When he first moved to Grants Pass, he had a lot of issues to deal with in his own life," she said. "He opened up and I helped him through it. When I had my hard times, he was there for me. He protected me like a big brother would protect his little sister.

"He also liked to laugh and have a good time," she added. "But when it came down to holding onto his values and what he believed in, he always stood strong for that. He wouldn't change them to be popular."

That friendship was placed on hold when she moved to California with her family in the 10th grade. But it resumed this past January when they began exchanging messages via e-mail.

"He left for Iraq in February so we never got to hang out," she said. "I remember one e-mail I sent him when we were reminiscing and I said I wish we could go back in time. He told me those moments are alive forever, as long as you hold them in your heart."

Speaking with a maturity beyond his years was the Marine's trademark, said Grants Pass resident Jim Maloney, 62, a retired hearing aids specialist. Maloney came to know him as a fellow parishioner at St. Anne Catholic Church in Grants Pass.

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"I meet so many young people who have no clue but it was very clear to him the risks he would be taking," Maloney said, noting he last saw Garcia just before he went to basic training.

"I gave him a rosary and told him I would pray for him," Maloney recalled. "He said, 'Don't pray for me. Pray for my father. We've never been apart and this will be very difficult for him.'" Attempts to reach Garcia's father for this story were

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