

Let Wisdom Be My Garb: Commencement Edition 2019

By: Danien VaShaun Cobb

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Danien Vashaun Cobb; I am a second-year student in good standing at the Washington University in St. Louis – Pacific Campus. What are the odds of Americas finest professors and administrators coming to join us here at M.E.C.C? Pretty astronomical, yes. We come from different places of origin, have different values, different ethnicities, different goals and aspirations, and different sociopolitical world views. There are many in the world today who would take advantage of these kinds of differences and divide people. But today, in this room, at this ceremony, we are not divided; we are standing and sitting together, and the three elements that have bought us together are our **belief** in the power of knowledge and wisdom to change lives, and our **unquestioned love for** and **dedication to Professor Maggie Garb.**

I would like to share with you a story about a crusader. Professor Garb was a person who saw a problem and decided not to complain, but to become proactive, and actually do something about it. This elegant, intelligent, compassionate, lady and her fellow intellectual-warriors started this program five years ago, and as William Shakespeare would say, they braved, “The raging rocks/ And shiver shocks/ [To] break the locks/ Of prison gates” (I.ii.24-27). Back in May of 2015 I walked into this room for the first time ever. I was a stranger in a strange land far, far from home. I saw a petite, chic, lady, dressed in black. I walked up to her and said “Hi, I’m Danien.” This lady wasn’t pretentious, she wasn’t reserved, she didn’t look down on me, or treat me like there was something wrong with me. She offered me her hand and said, “I’m Maggie Garb.” **That handshake** lifted me out of ignorance, depression, and misery; **that handshake** began to dissolve the emotional and mental callouses that had grown around my heart and mind

due to long-term incarceration. But you don't have to take my word for it. I have been honored with the solemn duty of sharing with you all a few testimonies from my fellow colleagues.

Associates in Arts recipient Mark Boyd said, "Prof. Garb was the most dedicated woman I have ever known. She was compassionate, humble, and non-judgmental, her commitment and dedication to education the men here at Pacific was something I never imagined I would see being expressed by someone so accomplished. She has changed the course of our lives from society's outcasts to Might Men with endless possibilities and potential. I love her for being such a giving person and she will never be forgotten."

Fellow colleague Detravis Ross III, whose mother was going through her own ordeal with cancer said, "After I heard about what she was going through I prayed for her every chance I had, as I also prayed for my mother."

Associates in Arts recipient Harvey Galler said, "It was the Fall of 2017, Professor Garb was teaching her Progressive Era history course. A component of the course was about ordinary people effecting change, ordinary people who were urging society to strive for a more equitable distribution of wealth. She taught us about historic figures that she looked up to, such as Chicago's Progressive Era reformer Jane Addams, who although born into wealth decided to go into the poor immigrant communities of late-nineteenth century Chicago and start a settlement house, where she taught the impoverished and illiterate the fine and practical arts they would need to even have a chance of being successful in America. Professor Garb embodied Addams and many like her. Here was this little woman fighting a battle for her life, coming into this dark place and showing us the light. She is still prodding us to put down the weapons of violence and ignorance and fight our battles with intellect and education. Through her I was able to find a

direction in my own life, a direction guided by education, and dedicated to social activism.
Professor Garb was and is a modern-day Jane Addams. She is dearly missed.”

There is not enough time on the clock to recount the personal stories and myriad ways in which Professor Garb exponentially affected the lives of her students here at the Pacific Campus. As a testament to my profound respect and adoration for Professor Garb, I composed a letter to the Prison Education Project Executive Board and urged them to rename the Pacific Campus the Garb Campus. I can honestly and emphatically proclaim that Professor Maggie Garb is the reason I stand before you today, and now I would like to share with you all this most humble and heartfelt elegy I have composed in her honor.

For my mentor, friend, sister, and advisor,

Let Wisdom Be My Garb

Mrs. Incredible, unforgettable, post-secondary scholarship was new to me
It was she who claimed nothing was inevitable, with class, she conducted,
instructed beautifully

Our parting, a sorrow, far too soon for me
On high, she came down, met us where we were at
Brought facts to stump compunctious assumptions
When poseurs pontificated and peacocks preened
Journalist Joan of Arc drew light from deepest dark
Protected beneath her wings, I was freed to dream
My mind, my heart, she ransomed from destruction
Filled my soul with Addams, Bellamy, and Douglass

Job Well Done!

The Sun, Moon, and Stars all agree
Magnificent medleys shall be composed to thee
In perpetuity.