

Sixty Gather for the First STF and GPA Graduates and Staff Reunion

Roland Platt
April 16, 2017



Easter Weekend, April 14-16, found 60 STF - GPA graduates and past and present staff gathered at Estes Park YMCA in Colorado for the first reunion of its kind.

Alumni from 2001 to 2016 were represented; college students, working professionals, parents, spouses and young children. The lodge was filled with both new and familiar faces, all connected through the common experiences shared on STF/GPA exploring faith, relationships, and our calling in this world.

Initiated by the [STF GPA Alumni Association](#) and supported by an awesome team of alumni - Camarie Eaton ('13-'15), Emiko Cunningham ('12-'15), Kaori Becker ('07-'09), Yuto Ohki ('14-'15), Mitsu Fukuzaki ('13-'15), Rosia Schmidt ('09-'12), and Tasnah Moyer ('07-'10) the reunion was designed as a chance to:

- Connect to each other and our STF GPA family,
- Nourish our spiritual journey
- Share our experiences and lessons
- Create a network of support for continued growth

FRIDAY

Friday began with ice breakers, a welcome, and some quiet time to set intentions for the weekend. Though some had never met, and others hadn't seen each other for years, by the end of Friday the spirit was akin to a large family reunion.





SATURDAY

Saturday morning was marked by “talk”imonies from Mike (‘02-’04) and Adonia (‘03-’07) Hentrich and Jonathan Jesper (‘06-’09) who shared how they’ve carried lessons learned from STF into their relationships, careers, and contribution. For Sean Garrison (‘15-’16), “Seeing how hard the elder alumni are striving for something greater and what they’ve been doing with their lives inspires me to do the same in my life.” Camarie Eaton reflected on how “we have an amazing support group, and there is so much wisdom I can tap into and learn from.”



The rest of the morning, participants broke into small groups based on their year for a more personal sharing touching on some of the challenges faced since graduating, how they’ve navigated their journey, what they’re grateful for right now, and what they’re working towards in their lives. One alumni expressed how it was “so refreshing to talk about this with people I haven't seen in years and to share honestly where they are at. I don't think I would have talked to them about these things without the

questions and environment.” Another shared that “the best part was connecting to people from my year and talking about how we deal with life now and the challenges we currently face but with the freedom to be open and honest like STF times. It was a chance to connect more deeply rather than on a mostly superficial basis like at home.”



Saturday afternoon was a mix of free time and sports, peppered with three “alumni showcase.” Josh Starr (‘08-’10) introduced the “Phenomenon of Modern Boardgaming,” sharing his passion for the artful hobby. Kaori Becker (‘07-’09) led a cooking demo, teaching participants how to make green tea mochi! Jonathan Jesper shared how the principles learned in fundraising can be applied to successful business models. A handful also hiked up to Eagle’s Landing for a breathtaking view of the valley.





After dinner, the group gathered for an informal Q&A session facilitated by Josh Starr covering topics of faith, family, relationships, and navigating our current culture. Given the diverse age range and vast expanse of life experience and collective wisdom, it was a meaningful opportunity to listen and learn from each other. The evening officially concluded with a bonfire and s'mores, but continued into the night with board games and meaningful conversations.



“I personally felt it was amazing to see older alumni and commanders, past and present and hear them share their wealth of wisdom. Some of the best things I heard actually didn't necessarily come from the talks but from casual conversations with them. It's inspiring to see that some alumni still care about the younger generation and are willing to lend that support. It feels nice to know you have elders you can lean on.” -Yoshiha Tsuchida ('13-'14)

“I was glad to hear from such a wide range of alumni (parents, staff, recent grads) in such a comfy setting and realize how similar our struggles/victories are through our fundraising experiences.”

SUNDAY

Sunday morning, some of the current GPA staff - Roland Platt, Kenzo Tanaka, and Francis Marsal - shared a short message, reflecting on the journey of STF/GPA over the last few years, their gratitude to all those who had come and for the chance to come full circle and also connect to the lives and journeys of alumni.

Tasnah Moyer, coordinator for the Alumni Association (AA), then gave a summary of the mission and purpose of the AA, highlighted some of the projects of the last year, and upcoming efforts. As a co-creative effort, alumni were invited to contribute their talents and resources to creating a thriving alumni community.

REFLECTIONS

The [vision](#) for the STF GPA Alumni Association is to create a thriving community of STF and GPA alumni contributing to GPA, their communities, campuses, professions, and the world. It's mission is to support the successful transition of GPA graduates in their first year of post-program experience.

Hosting an annual reunion is one step towards creating such a network of relationships and support.

For many, this was a large take-away from the weekend to realize, "There is a lot of support if I choose to reach out. There are many other people with the same questions as I, and it inspired me to connect more to discover or learn together."



For Michael La Hogue, a grad from 2009-2011 this was "a great opportunity to reconnect with people who I have a deep common experience with and reconnect to who I was and what I did many years ago." For a more recent graduate, Rena Kanazawa ('14-'16), it was "valuable in the way we were able to reconnect to the roots of where we discovered our faith." For another, it was a "great chance to reconnect and meet other alumni, and become open again to how a life of faith continues to grow with us."

A "hopeful, encouraging, and refreshing dose of fun, truth, and inspiration," "this reunion was the best combination of fun and love and those meaningful moments where we could talk about about things that really matter."

In the words of Sirius Thurston ('14-'15), "This was the best idea, can't wait for the next years."

We hope you'll join us!!

