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Victims of Metro Red Line accident were veterans of the system

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Between the two of them, they had worked for Metro for almost 10,000 hours before their careers ended Tuesday under the crush of a three-ton truck backing down the tracks in the middle of the night.

[Jeff Garrard, 49,](#) and [Sung Duk Oh, 68,](#) were veterans of the subway system, familiar with the pulse of work on Metro's rail lines. As technicians for the automated train-control system, they installed and serviced the intricate devices that manage the movement of Metro trains.

Garrard knew his job was not a safe one, said his wife, Grace Ann. Lugging, mounting and maintaining the 50-pound devices that transmit signals to trains along the tracks; relying on a lookout to make sure no trains are in the workers' path; being agile enough to jump out of the way in case of danger -- these are the risks Garrard and Oh took every day.

Yet in 20 years of working for Metro, Garrard, an electronics whiz from the small city of Madisonville in western Kentucky, never even had a close call, his wife said. He was as fastidious on the job as he was at home in Clarksburg, fixing up his family's 90-year-old farmhouse across from Sugarloaf Mountain with such passion that he organized his work shift around it.

"He was so detail-oriented, it made him trust himself," Grace Garrard said. Her husband liked to see results, which is why his work was such a good fit, she said. "He liked to be up and around moving. He liked problem-solving."

Garrard worked the 2:30 to 11:30 p.m. shift because daytime hours at home allowed him to work on restoring the house, set on an acre on a country road.

His widow thinks his shift must have gone into overtime: Garrard and Oh were struck at 1:45 a.m.

The couple's 16-year-old daughter, Emma, woke at 5 a.m., noticed that her father was not home and began to get ready for school. She turned on the TV to a report that two Metro track workers were dead.

At 6:20 a.m., two Metro Transit Police officers knocked on the door and told her mother about the accident but shared no other details. "All I'm getting is bits and pieces from the media," Grace Garrard said.

Grace Garrard, a 49-year-old substitute teacher, said her husband was so careful when he was on the tracks that the truck that backed up and hit him "must have come out of nowhere." He had told her repeatedly in the past year that he was nervous that the aging transit system was not getting enough attention from Metro.

"We need to spend the money on upkeep, and they weren't doing that enough, and that bothered him," Grace Garrard said. "They weren't repairing the old stuff."

The couple met in San Diego, where Grace grew up and Jeff taught sonar technology in the Navy. Her mother admired his pluck at "getting things done," she said.

When Metro was advertising for electronics technicians, they headed east. Garrard loved the job security and the generous health insurance policy that went with it, a matter of life and death for his wife and daughter, who have a congenital heart defect that requires them to wear defibrillators.

The couple had talked recently about Garrard moving into a less-demanding job at Metro. He calculated that he had about seven years before retiring and worried that moving to another department would require him to pay dues all over again.

On Tuesday, Grace Garrard looked at her husband's work boots by the front door and the tools on the kitchen counter he was using in his latest home project.

"It feels like I'm in a bad dream," she said, "and at what point am I going to wake up?"

* * *

Sung Duk Oh had worked for Metro since December 1998. His family lives in a two-story redbrick house on a quiet cul-de-sac in Montgomery Village that ends in a stand of trees. The front light was on after daybreak Tuesday.

A young man who came to the door said the family didn't want to talk about the accident.

John O'Connor, who lives nearby, described the Oh family as "very friendly and very quiet."

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"They are like church mice," he said. "They didn't commingle too much."

O'Connor said Oh often worked on his family's cars and had just bought a new one.

"He was agreeable and always had a good word for people," said Dick Winters, a retired electrician who lives two doors away. "He was an all-around good guy. He would get out and shovel all the walks and sidewalks."

Another neighbor, Beth Aragon, said she thought of Oh when she heard that two Metro workers had been killed Tuesday morning.

"He was such a nice man," Aragon said, sobbing. "He was always very neighborly. Oh my God, I can't even talk."

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