Michael Zhao

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Logan, Utah , New York, New York

Michael Zhao of Sandy, Utah was a vivacious and headstrong mathematician, always taking the lead and pushing the boundaries of the most difficult tasks. On December 8, 2018, Michael sadly passed away at age 23 in New York City. He had been pursuing his Ph.D. in mathematics at Columbia University with a focus on Number Theory and Algebraic Geometry. Few mathematicians pursue Algebraic Geometry due to the extreme difficulty of the subject, but Michael was not to be deterred. Eventually Michael hoped to secure a tenure-track faculty position in the mathematics department of a major university.

Michael was born on February 2, 1995 in Logan, Utah to Fuli Zhao and Shaoqing Song, and was the older brother of Alan Zhao. He attended the Challenger School, Wasatch Junior High School and then Skyline High School where he earned an International Baccalaureate Diploma. Following high school, Michael earned a B.S. in Mathematics with Honors, with a minor in Computer Science, from the University of Utah. He then earned a Masters in Pure Mathematics from the University of Cambridge in England before beginning work on his Ph.D. at Columbia University in New York City.

Many organizations recognized Michael's promising intellect and generously funded his education. He attended the University of Utah on the Eccles Scholarship and the Barry Goldwater Scholarship. His degree from the University of Cambridge was fully funded by the prestigious Churchill Scholarship. And his Ph.D. was fully funded by a combination of a National Science Foundation Fellowship and a Columbia University Dean's Fellow award. In addition, Google provided Michael with a paid internship during the summer after his junior year at the University of Utah. Michael was very grateful for the kind support provided by all of those organizations and he assiduously dedicated himself to his studies.

In addition to mathematics, Michael loved travel and photography. He visited China, Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, England, Belgium, Austria, Czech, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland where he took many unique photographs. Michael also loved classical music, Japanese literature, Japanese cuisine, and small animals especially cats. He played Rubik's cube and he tirelessly read and discussed philosophy with anyone who was interested in the subject, including his family members. It was his study of philosophy that led him to develop a fondness for mathematics.

From high school to his time of passing, Michael loved helping others. He touched so many so deeply with compassion. His fellow graduate student Cailan Li at Columbia University recounts how Michael helped to guide

him through one of his finals without hesitation. Genuinely mindful of the community, Michael coached younger students and inspired many of them to challenge themselves and persevere in math learning. Michael's academic and scholarly accomplishments, albeit numerous, do not outshine his kindness and generosity toward those around him. Michael had a profound passion for learning everything from mathematics to philosophy and beyond. His intellectual enthusiasm and bubbly personality were contagious.

A constant learner, mentor and loyal friend, Michael inspired those around him with his warmth, wit, and contagious smile. Michael was a truly extraordinary young man, a great role model for youth. He will be remembered dearly with fondness by all who knew him.

Michael's family expresses deep gratitude to Raymond Cheng and Renata Picciotto for their help in putting us in contact with the doctors that treated Michael at Mt. Sinai Hospital, as well as Clara Dolfen and all those Michael got to know at Columbia University. Michael had a great positive influence on his brother, inspiring him to learn mathematics as well.

To honor Michael Zhao's achievement the Honor College of University of Utah will award a scholarship called the Michael Zhao Honors Scholarship to an exceptional math student this year.

To continue Michael's legacy, recognizing his passion for math and keeping him in our hearts, the Mathematics Department at University of Utah is in the process of setting up an endowed undergraduate scholarship in honor and memory of Michael and the Zhao's family welcomes donation to it. This scholarship will be awarded annually to majors in Math who demonstrate academic persistence. A trust has been set up at Mountain America Credit Union with the name "Michael Zhao Scholarship Donation Trust". The beneficiary is the Mathematics Department of University of Utah. For Wire Transfer: ABA Routing Number is 324079555 and Account Number is 011011401368. For writing check: Account Number is 11401368. Donation can also be made through PayPal with recipient email address as shaoqing.song@gmail.com.

Michael is survived by his father Fuli Zhao, his mother Shaoqing Song, his younger brother Alan Zhao, his grandmother Guimei Zhu, his aunts Wanqing Song and Xiaoming Zhao, and his uncles Yaqing Song and Xianglin Zhao.

Visitation will be held at Larkin Sunset Gardens, 1950 East Dimple Dell Road, Sandy, Utah on Friday, December 21, 2018, from 6:00-8:00 p.m. Funeral services will be held at the same location on Saturday, December 22, 2018 at 2:00 p.m. following viewing from 12:00 - 2:00 pm. Interment will occur on April 5, 2019.