

Bill was a wonderful friend and colleague. His passing was a total shock, especially since I had been out of town so much this summer and we planned to get together the week he died. Bill was really there for me when my husband died and also during the very complicated planning for the National Mall.

I did write a poem, which I would like to share with you. It was inspired because I came home from a trip and found both Bill and a tree outside my house gone. It was a shock that altered the landscape of work and home.

## **Bill and the Zelkova**

By Susan Spain

National Park Service Colleague & FOB (Friend of Bill's)

Back from Boston I find  
Both gone - the tree and Bill  
A loss .....inexplicable  
Why would he take his life?  
Why would they cut the tree?  
Both beautiful and strong  
But now a memory to be held

He held me when my loss was great  
He knew loss as well  
He was there for others - did we not see his need?  
We talked of what cannot be lost  
and how to love those no longer walking here  
The memories to be held that never leave  
But deepen like the sunset

The tree gathered energy growing toward the sun  
Bill - shared energy with ready smile, strong grip, big hugs  
Bill - raw energy on a bike or in water aerobics  
Both the tree and Bill were muscled and sturdy  
His proud mid-western roots are deep  
But the tree was in a space too small to thrive  
Now both are memories to cherish

We knew people twisted words  
and spewed lies willfully  
They could flock like crows to kill a plan  
We strategized National Mall planning  
Bill would be the target - a gift to me  
Bill - dedicated and selfless - mid-western traits he could not lose  
Now leave a memory to hold

That booming voice - like the voice of God  
That from childhood characterized him  
It penetrated time and space  
I smile to think about it still  
Even from his office half a mile away I could hear him  
talking on the phone to Steve behind closed doors in the next office  
Now a memory and smile

The tree like Bill seemed so solid  
Last year it dropped a limb in a storm and its vigor faded  
My neighbors did not like it nor value its shade  
the leafy filter of afternoon sun  
Nor the autumn glow of orange brightening my living room  
It must have brightened theirs as well  
But they did not rejoice in what it gave  
My view has changed with the tree gone  
Our landscape has changed since Bill is gone  
He is now a memory to be held  
Now a promise to watch more carefully for people's pain