

POET

Kenney Hegland

Poets don't feel deeper, it's just that they don't run away. How to write about a friend who has died. Well, there'll be time enough, first, those few pressing matters at the office. Why is it so difficult to see him, hear him? "About a page," the editor instructed. Too little? No, much, too much.

Jim Graham died young, an event beyond my courage to comprehend. So I'll focus on a facet and be done.

Jim died in a vacuum, a victim of our running, of our refusal to comprehend. His illness was long and serious. Few, except perhaps Jim, faced the probability that it was his last. "Don't worry, Jim, things will be OK. A few more tests, some pills and, why, you'll be as good as new." To Jim's suffering was added the burden of humoring us. What would he have told me had I let him speak?

Jim did not live in that easy vacuum of ignorance. He had an acute sense of man's suffering and devoted his professional life to fighting for and with the poor and the exploited. Jim realized, however, that all battles could not be won; his personal life was marked by compassion.

Jim Graham was a scholar, interested in ideas as ideas, not merely as means. He was an excellent teacher, interested in his students so that they grew rather than merely responded.

It was not his scholarship or his teaching ability that endeared him to his students and to me. It was his basic honesty, his basic poetry.

Were I a better student when he lived.