

Jack got me through one of the toughest times of my life. Not my Father's death, though he was there too, entertaining EVERYONE in the nursing home. He'd love everyone, or seem like he did if there was the tiniest bit of cornbread in their wheelchair. No, the toughest time was well before that. The long period of time when I realized hurt. When I had hurt someone. When I was hurt. The dark months I'd come home from work and do nothing. All night. Then go to bed. Serious depression. Months.

Because I'd caused hurt. And I hurt.

Jack made me go for a walk, made me get his food and throw his favorite treat - frozen grapes. Ten years later, just this past October, we buried Jack in the front yard. Right out front. Melodie brought over a *Pterocarya stenoptera*, we planted it on his grave. Tom made a little brick border and put a flower vase out.

At the time, I thought the location was for other people. For everyone who loved him. So they could ride by and see his tree. Or I could, if we ever move away. Rational.

Now, every time I get out of my truck, I think to Jack. I see him. I smile to him. Still I get sad every once in a while. I can't say how much I love him or tell you how heavy my heart is now, how teary my eyes. Even so, as I write this, I'm miles away and I realized that my feelings are more intense when I walk by his tree.

When Eric died, three years ago I think, I didn't think much of the idea of a garden in his honor. Everything seemed unrelated to his life. He and I had only worked a few months together in that garden - it was a new project for us. I can't tell you how long I'll have to stop writing now - to enjoy this huge cry that is coming on.

But the garden with Eric's name on it (in a public, Historic Columbia garden in downtown) has become my place for Eric. He moved. Left his house and his river. In my mind, he was there in spirit for a long time after his death.

Then that place became someone else's. I don't know where he was for a while. Ok, so I know he's always in my cells. I can taste him. Now, since we started gardening a space with him in mind, he's there. How is that? Can someone with understanding of the mind or spirits please explain? Why does a place, a plant growing especially, feel like it has somebody's spirit? Why do I need that living being on which to focus?

Really, tell me. I want to understand. So now that I've picked this essay up again, a few days after I started it, I thought even more about this. While I was writing the first part, my friend Larry was dying. I didn't know it. I learned it a day later. I took to all of his friends and employees a bunch of jonquil bulbs to plant. So they could see him, focus on him.

Sure I could research this finding anthropologist and Southern studies. But I won't. I certain its universal. Plants change. People change, plants grow and come from the earth where we people go back to. They come from us. For me, a plant that recalls a

person, is sort of a mediation point. A focus when I'm sad or reflective. But like a sudden death or a sudden smile, something that captures. Something that pulls me out of the norm of unloading the truck, taking in the mail and the suitcase. Jack's tree snags me, stops me from being wrapped up in duties and reminds me that everything changes.