



Dr. William Henry Nelson

November 3, 1923 - January 3, 2020

Loving father of Eva, beloved husband of Mary, William left Omaha, Nebraska at the age of nineteen to complete his doctorate at Columbia University. He went on to hold a distinguished academic career, lecturing at N.Y.U., Rice University, and finally the University of Toronto, St. George, where he retired from University College after twenty eight years. Possessed of a ferociously brilliant mind, unmatched compassion, generosity, and an inviolate sense of justice, Dr. Nelson was a proud civil rights and environmental activist, who prioritized the needs of others above his own at every opportunity. Kind and warm of heart, he had a special affection for animals, and always took the time to rescue and comfort those in need. A personal acquaintance of two U.S. Presidents and an American patriot in the truest sense, Bill always laboured honourably and tirelessly at whatever he did to leave the world a better place. Dad, you're the greatest man we'll ever know. Thank you. If desired, tribute donations may be made to the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Special thanks to Drs. Allaby and O'Shea. Funeral arrangements entrusted to <https://www.circleoflifecbc.com>

Comments



“ Born sickly in 1923, Omaha, Nebraska, survived by his loving family, friends and enemies alike, the lessons of The Great Depression shaped the long and interesting life of Professor W.H. Nelson. Well travelled, a lover of the natural world, and a resident of New York, London, and Texas, Bill worked his way through school holding various jobs including selling ice cream from a truck, night watchman in a funeral home, fast griddle man, ranch hand, gambler, medical secretary, and media commentator. Rejected by the U.S. Army because of a pre-existing heart condition, he unwittingly helped build the Enola Gay; a life changing experience that left him tacitly grim on the subject of war. He never wore a poppy. Insisting that he was unpublished under his nom de plume of St. Clair Coldstream, a street photographer once captured his priceless expression on the very day that he decided to pawn his typewriter and take up a life of playing the ponies. The photo vanished, nevertheless, he had the pleasure of witnessing a dozen Triple Crown Winners during his lifetime. After he was awarded a Doctorate from Columbia University in British History with a minor in American Colonialism, he authored a few books and lectured on American History at N.Y.U., Rice University, and finally, at The University of Toronto for twenty eight years, where he participated in many student protests. Possessed of a proud and loud temper, coupled with matching generosity and an inviolate sense of justice, he was a Civil Rights and Environmental Activist, a personal acquaintance of two opposing U.S. Presidents, and served as President of the U of T Faculty Association for many years. An American Patriot in the truest sense, Bill Nelson always laboured honourably and tirelessly at whatever he did to leave the world a better place. We miss you. Always in our hearts. Special thanks to Drs. Allaby and O'Shea.

nelsoncat23 - January 10 at 11:56 AM



“ Bill was a very good, friendly senior colleague. He was interested in many aspects of the university - not only teaching, but departmental meetings, and after his retirement in the Faculty Association. He was progressive politically. He was admired and respected by his colleagues who loved to recount stories about him, such as trimming a tree at a pretty advanced age.
Laurel MacDowell

colleague - January 10 at 11:07 AM



“ Bill Nelson was a good colleague and a real leader within the department and the university. He was politically one of the shrewdest persons I knew, both on university politics and on the United States. I enjoyed his wit, his insights and his engagement in the world and the university. He was a bird-watcher and a world traveler. Our lunches were too few, but always valued. Condolences to his family. I hope that they can take some satisfaction from a life well lived.

Martin Klein

Martin Klein - January 08 at 08:17 PM



“ Honoured to have known Bill these past thirty years. I relied on his political advice from the local to the global, and always benefitted from it. I will miss his remarkable and funny anecdotes, but will continue to repeat the ones I know. Condolences to Eva.

Elizabeth Legge - January 08 at 05:19 PM