



# David made me do it

By Jeannie Gillian, Ph.D., © 2011

1996...  
David would appear in the Hope Center doorway with that smile of his, and ask, "Do you have time for a coffee break? I have some questions to ask about Freud." Those moments with David McNabb continue to be little treasures to remember. During the

beginning of Hope Center's work, David was the teacher; I was his student. He had also shared his invaluable experiences as a person living with HIV during my hope study. What ultimately emerged from the study of hope was the gift of caring with love, not fear, for human beings who are ill. David was, and remains, our role model and source of hope.

Since 1987, David had lovingly cared for dozens of friends in hospitals, desperately ill, dying of AIDS. He explained how he "learned on-the-job caregiving skills from doctors and nurses who are the finest examples of humanity I've known." In his opinion ... "caregiving is a blessing...undoubtedly, it is a calling. It is not a career, not a job, and it most certainly is not a chore. It is the greatest privilege in life, one that most people experience at some point in their lives. It is not to be feared. You can find yourself and find the core of another's being as you care for him."

But even David agreed that being a caregiver can be challenging. In those days we established care schedules, slots of 2-4 hour shifts, but sometimes the shift would last all night. On one occasion, an exhausted David remarked, "You haven't truly been a caregiver until you've changed a diaper for the 20<sup>th</sup> time, at 3 AM."

One day David cautioned me about heartbreaking moments, daunting tasks, and care needs that might be complicated and costly. "Remember," he said, "You won't be able to assist everyone but you must trust yourself to know when and how the Hope Center can help."

Over the years since David died in 1999, many tough moments have challenged our ability to provide supportive care, just as he said. But after careful consideration, and when we know that it is possible to do what is needed, we happily declare, "David made me do it."

## In Memory of David

The flame from the small candle  
danced and flickered in the warm spring breeze.  
The candle was young, its flame strong.  
Its warmth and glow would be felt by many.

Then a dark wind came  
from out of nowhere, without a name,  
a cold foreboding wind  
carrying the sting of death.

The tiny flame shuttered, twisted, and turned,  
bracing itself against the aggressive wind.  
But the wind was relentless.  
As time and suffering passed,  
the flame and wind  
finally learned to understand each other.

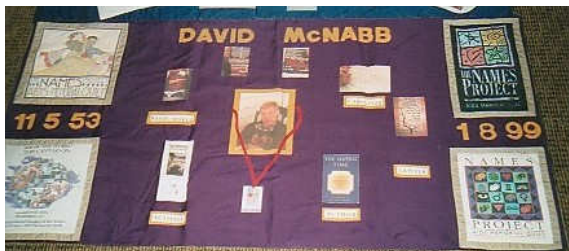
The dark wind ceased to blow  
and for a short while the tiny flame,  
now dim and weak, was at peace.  
But soon the flame was visited  
by a warm gentle breeze-  
a solitary puff-  
and the small flame went out,  
extinguished forever.

But the candle was still young.  
The candle still had life left.

Vernon Lee Gillian  
©February 1999

This poem is in memory of David W. McNabb (1953-1999), a Knoxville lawyer, philanthropist, activist, and caregiver of his many friends living with AIDS. David died on January 8, 1999.

David's panel from the AIDS Memorial Quilt.



Suggested Reading: Furman, J. & McNabb, D. (1997). The dying time: Practical wisdom for the dying. New York: Bell Tower.