

In Memorium...

DAVID CURTIS

The following is excerpted from the eulogy delivered at the memorial service in David's honor on August 11 at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Burlington.

by Bill Lippert

It was in 1973 when my path, quite improbably, crossed with David's for the first time.

David was 35, a native Vermonter, a married man, father of three small chil-

the only gay man in the group, or so everyone, including me, thought at the time.

I remember being stunned when I heard that David charged as much per hour for his legal work as I paid per month for rent. I remember too being wide-eyed when David talked of his plans to run for Attorney General, and about his desire someday to run for governor. (I doubt that I would be a legislator today if it weren't for David's influence on me over the years, helping me realize that becoming a

I had the privilege of growing closer to him as he went through major life transformations: making his decision to give up corporate law for criminal public defense; later, moving to Tennessee and South Dakota mostly to work in public legal defense services for poor black and native people, but partly to find enough distance from Vermont to come out as a gay man; coming out in Vermont and choosing to reveal his own AIDS diagnosis to more effectively influence government policy and funding.

Once David had come out, a wonderful new dimension was added to our friendship. We could confide in each other in new ways, and turn to each other for advice or help. When I needed someone to talk with about running for the legislature as a gay man, one of the people I turned to was David.

When I was invited to a White House meeting for openly gay elected officials, and my partner Enrique couldn't attend, David eagerly accepted my invitation. When I wanted someone to help me start a foundation to benefit the gay and lesbian community, David was my obvious partner in the new adventure.

I was also the one who convinced David to go with me for us both to be tested for HIV.

He didn't really particularly want to go, or to know. But as his friend, I insisted he join me to be tested. Of course, it kind of broke my heart — and his, I think — when his test came back, first undecided, and later, positive.

He told me he hadn't really wanted to know. You see, he wasn't all that worried about himself. But he was worried about the effect on his children, and about the possibility of someday not being there for them.

Throughout all of David's life he made many changes, but one thing remained constant: his love for and devotion to his three children, Curt, Jill, and Christopher.

When David was physically in pain or hurting from his many maladies, he would rarely complain. He would rarely let himself cry. But I always knew that if I got him to tell me stories about his children and about how much he loved you, and would miss you, he could then let himself cry.

Thank you for giving your father such joy. That he got to love you meant so much to him!

It was a gift to have David with us for as long as we did. For David was a model of living life generously and fully — right

up to the end!

David was, in fact, an improbably generous man. He accepted collect calls in the middle of the night from convicted murderers, men in prison he had befriended in the course of defending them or appealing their case. I would react with surprise, and he would laugh that funny laugh of his, and assure me, "he's really a nice guy, actually!"

I didn't know anyone else who had such a wide range of personal friends, from governors and senators to men who would live most of their lives behind bars to some whose only place to sleep was in the park. It was a regular feature of knowing David that we could never walk through City Hall Park or walk down Church Street with him without having to frequently stop to say hello to his widely disparate band of friends. His fondness for a person did not rest on their station in life.

Diagnosed with HIV and AIDS, and later with lung cancer and heart arrhythmias, David dodged more bullets than anyone I know. But he didn't slow down any more than he had to. Instead he ran for state senate as an openly gay man with AIDS, became chair of the Democratic Party, hired competent staff to work around him, and, rather unbelievably, continued to schedule couples to marry in his role as a justice of the peace.

(On one occasion, David added unexpected excitement to one lucky couple's wedding day when his heart defibrillator went off while officiating at a wedding ceremony — an ambulance had to be called BEFORE he had gotten to marry them!)

David's life was all about generosity and love, personal change and growth, and living fully committed — right to the end.

We get to stop and mourn and to remember. But David would want us to go on, find the rest of our particular paths, continue living our lives fully.

I will miss his sweet smile, his kiss and hug when we greeted each other, his visits with me to the hospital when my partner was hospitalized, his wise counsel, and most especially his friendship.

Knowing David has been one of my life's finest gifts.

I am grateful that you touched my life so deeply, David. Thank you for loving me, and for being my friend. ▼



Lippert (left) and Curtis attended a White House meeting of openly gay officials. (photo provided courtesy of Bill Lippert)

dren, and a very successful corporate attorney in a prominent Burlington law firm.

I was 23, newly relocated to Vermont, and had just come out as a gay man after graduating from college. Just before coming hiking in Vermont, I had marched in NYC's Gay Pride Parade with 50,000 other gay men and lesbians. Here in Vermont, I was an aide in a day care center, a job which I had almost not gotten because of my bushy beard and long braided hair, which went down to the middle of my back.

By all rights David's and my paths should not have crossed.

But it was the early seventies. Men were reverberating in response to the women's liberation movement, and, through a mutual acquaintance, we both ended up joining the same men's group. There were eight of us. We got together weekly at each other's homes to talk. We did this for several years. I, of course, was

legislator was a real possibility.)

I learned that David had been a Republican when he was elected to the legislature. And I knew he ran as both a Republican and as a Democrat for the Attorney General nomination (a political miscalculation that cost him either nomination, despite receiving the most total combined votes).

But it was only years later that I learned David's political transformation had been greater than I had realized. David revealed to me much later that, while a college student at UVM, he had organized the campus Young Republicans for Goldwater! I enjoyed teasing him about this through our years of friendship.

Never, back in 1973, would I have thought that over 27 years, I would grow to consider David one of my very dearest and closest friends. Never could I have even imagined some of what we would end up doing together as activists, political allies, and personal friends!

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