

ReflectionsNewsletter

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Caring Connections

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Live Every Moment

The Butterfly Connection

Rob Mason was built like an NFL defensive lineman, standing six feet, four inches tall, and weighing roughly 300 pounds. And he certainly had the tenacity and work ethic of a superstar professional football player, dedicating himself tirelessly to the workers he represented as a high-level labor union executive. In support of his people, cement masons and plasterers, he traveled 250 days a year.

Rob may have looked and performed his job like a super tough guy, but he was really just a big teddy bear, filled with deep care for others and pure integrity, according to his daughter, Dee. And she wasn't the only one who thought so. Butterflies seemed to share her opinion of this gentle, loving man.

Dee began to develop this theory about her dad during a family visit to a butterfly farm. The Mason contingent was told by the expert guide that it would be unlikely for even one of the countless butterflies to land on them during their tour. They just don't do it very often, the guide explained. Only special people inspire confidence in the butterflies to land on them. Within moments of entering the butterfly cage, more than six perched on Rob.



The butterfly connection was just getting started.

Dee and her dad routinely sat outside during visits. She began to notice how often butterflies joined them. Rob never failed to remark on their beauty. "He was a big guy who liked butterflies," she recently joked, laughing about how odd that interest might appear to others given her father's massive stature and the fragile nature of butterflies.

After Rob was diagnosed with cancer in the fall of 2020, Dee "negotiated" a deal with her dad: I'll fight as long as you will. He agreed, and fight they did for a year and a half. He did so while continuing to work. Despite undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, Rob served his union members with his customary resolve until the end. Dee still remembers that he was on a Zoom call just two days before he passed away in June 2022. While holding up her end of the bargain, taking her dad to every appointment and sleeping by his side every night, Dee went back to school. She earned her Associate of Arts degree and she's about to complete her bachelor's degree. Now she's considering law school. Her father urged her to fight for people as he had done as a union leader. "That's what they need and deserve," he said.

Already a representative with a painters union, Dee is well on her way to fulfilling the need her father considered so important.

But Dee isn't merely following in his footsteps. She is being led, at least in part, by his butterfly bond.

Rob spent his final weeks of life on hospice at Gilchrist's inpatient center in Howard County. One of his nurses at the center, Nona Cummings, said she formed an immediate connection with him. After he passed, Nona decided to present his daughter with a gift. Without any awareness of Rob's affinity for butterflies, Nona gave Dee a butterfly that she raised herself.

Nona was motivated to raise butterflies by the hope that families and friends will think of their loved one when they see a butterfly. "Just like in life, for a short time you have something tangible that you can see and touch and before you know it, it's gone," Nona said. "But you'll always have the memory."

Dee was shocked and amazed by the gift, by what seemed like more than a coincidence. Dee has since gotten a tattoo of the butterfly that Nona gave her.



And ever since her father passed away, the butterflies keep showing up in her life. "When I come home from a hard day of work and want to be with my father, butterflies ultimately show up," she said. "It's like dad went from human form to butterfly form."

To watch a video about Dee's story, visit gilchristcares.org/patientstories.

Gilchrist Wins National Award



Gilchrist has won a prestigious "Hospice Honors" award for "going above and beyond in providing quality care" for patients and their loved ones.

This award recognizes hospices nationwide that continuously provide the highest level of quality as measured from the caregiver's point of view. In other words, the ultimate "judges" for this award are those who know hospices best: the people who have been in their care.

"Hospice Honors recipients are industry leaders in providing quality care and constantly seeking ways to improve," said Ronda Howard, Vice President of HEALTHCAREfirst, the agency that awards this elite honor.

"Of all the awards we win, this one is particularly gratifying to me given that it ultimately comes from those we care for," said Catherine Y. Hamel, president of Gilchrist. "Their experiences with us are what truly matter. This is the single most meaningful measure of what we do. And so I am genuinely overjoyed by this recognition and profoundly grateful for every member of our Gilchrist team."

"This one is particularly gratifying given that it ultimately comes from those we care for."

Overseen by the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) Hospice Survey is a national survey of family members or friends who cared for a patient who died while under hospice care.

A Daughter's Full Circle Moment

In life, there are moments that feel like destiny. Moments that remind us that there's more to our journey than mere coincidence. Meet LaToya Sheppard, who is living proof that life's true purpose can emerge from the most unexpected places.

Less than a year ago, LaToya's world was deeply touched by the compassionate hospice care her beloved mother received from Gilchrist. With over 15 years of experience in healthcare, LaToya understood the importance of her mother receiving the best possible care. Although she had preconceived notions about hospice care she wanted her mom to be comfortable in her own home.

While LaToya lovingly served as her mother's primary caregiver, the hospice team at Gilchrist played an invaluable role, offering not only care but genuine support and compassion. Frequent nurse check-ins, visits, soothing music therapy sessions, and

attention to every detail ensured LaToya's mother had everything she needed, from essential medications to comforting items that eased her days until the very end.

This experience took LaToya on a transformative journey. She realized change was inevitable once her mother passed away. The timing couldn't have been more poignant when LaToya was offered a position as a hospice aide. In a remarkable twist of destiny, she found herself working for the same organization that had recently extended its unwavering support to her family during their time of need. Fate indeed had a plan of its own.



Now, every day, LaToya's purpose is deeply intertwined with her role, where she provides love and support to patients and their families who are going through the same challenges she faced not long ago. Her compassion knows no bounds, and she finds peace in being a source of understanding.

Gilchrist's Staff Made It Happen

When Jeanne McGuire received the heart-rending news that there was nothing more doctors could do to treat her cancer, she and her life partner of 40 years, Sandra Thomas, formulated a plan based on a deeply personal experience.

Roughly 12 years earlier, Jeanne's father turned to Gilchrist to live out his life on his own terms following a diagnosis of terminal cancer. The experience exceeded the family's expectations and left an enduring impression.

"Jeanne was so impressed," Sandra recently recalled, "with how involved Gilchrist's caregivers were with her father and the bonds they built with him. The team even attended his funeral."

Upon Jeanne's diagnosis, the couple contacted Gilchrist. During the initial consultation, the Gilchrist nurse did not present a rigid formula of care. Instead, she asked questions: How do you want this to be? And where do you want it to be? The couple's hope was to find a way to keep Jeanne comfortable in their Harford County home, surrounded by the family they raised and loved there.

"Gilchrist took the direction and sprang into action to make their vision reality," Sandra said. They quickly arranged for a hospital bed to be delivered and then strategically positioned it in the home to meet Jeanne's needs and accommodate lots of family visits.

As Jeanne's illness advanced, Gilchrist expertly and compassionately modified her care.

For example, Jeanne soon needed assistance getting in and out of bed. The Gilchrist nurse immediately stepped in, seeing the bigger picture. She recognized the situation was not good for Jeanne and hard on Sandra. Within a day, the nurse coordinated the delivery and installation of a portable bathroom. Sandra expressed, "that was a relatively tiny thing, but boy did it help us."

"Everyone from Gilchrist showed up. They were never frustrated nor did I ever feel they wanted to be elsewhere," Sandra said. "They attended to everything as if they knew Jeanne and had skin in the game. That was so reassuring."

Sandra added: "Anything we asked for ... Gilchrist's staff made it happen."

*"Anything we asked for...
Gilchrist's staff made
it happen."*

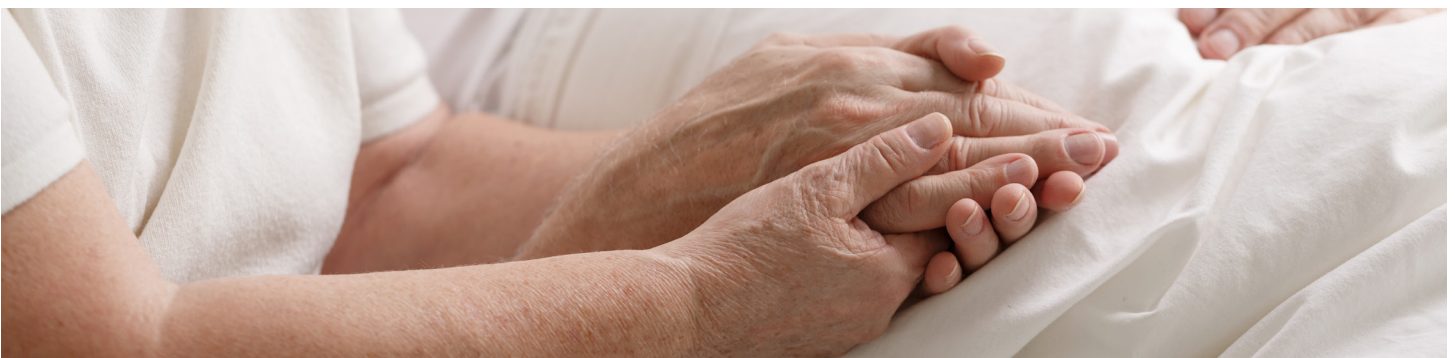
What is more, Gilchrist team members provided essential information in an effective, person-to-person manner. "They turned clinical details into accessible, understandable, and personal explanations," she said. "They were willing to repeat it however many times we needed it. Team members made themselves available to many of us as smoothly as possible."

Following Jeanne's death, Gilchrist continued its caring work to support their family through bereavement counseling.

"It is difficult and emotionally intense to say goodbye to someone you love," Sandra said.

"Gilchrist team members provided invaluable help throughout," she said, "always with a sense of deep personal involvement."

To learn more about Gilchrist's Hospice Care program, visit gilchristcares.org/hospice.



Hospice Care Pioneer, Dr. Jack M. Zimmerman, Reflects On Career

Responsible for Opening One of Nation's First Hospices, Baltimore Surgeon Remained Life-Long Champion of End-of-Life Care

In the spring of 2023, nearly a half century after he opened one of the first hospices in the United States, Dr. Jack M. Zimmerman entered hospice himself, and chose Gilchrist. Despite his advanced age of 96 and his irreversible health condition, Zimmerman's mind remained in his final weeks of life as sharp as the surgical instruments he once wielded as a surgeon.

And during a telephone conversation in early May, he focused that extraordinary mind of his on the public — on all of us — just as he had done throughout his distinguished medical career.

When asked how he would like to see hospice evolve in the years ahead, he did not require so much as a moment to reflect on an answer.

"I'd like to see hospice use become more widespread. I'd like to see more people using it who are eligible," he said from his home in a Baltimore City retirement community, where he was receiving Gilchrist's home hospice care.

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Dr. Zimmerman speculated that one of the primary reasons that more people don't avail themselves of hospice care is a lack of familiarity with what exactly it is. "We need to educate the public about all that hospice offers and its ultimate objective of helping patients to experience a comfortable death," he said. "Education," he emphasized, "is key."

Dr. Zimmerman's own education in hospice began in the mid-1970s when he heard a guest speaker at his hospital, the former Baltimore City institution known as Church Home and Hospital, discuss the novel idea. At the time, the world's first hospice, St. Christopher's Hospice in the United Kingdom, had been in operation for less than 10 years. Zimmerman immediately recognized the power



Dr. Jack M. Zimmerman

of hospice to care for and support his Baltimore-area patients, as well as those throughout the nation. And so off he went to visit St. Christopher's and its founder, Dame Cicely Saunders, to learn more.

A short time later, in 1977, Zimmerman opened the first hospice in Maryland at Church Home and Hospital. It was second only to Connecticut Hospice, established in 1974, on the East Coast of the United States.

Dr. Zimmerman achieved a great deal during his long career in medicine. He specialized in cardiothoracic surgery, devised an innovative method of managing advanced esophageal cancer, and rose to Chief of Surgery for Church Hospital. He also wrote a book on hospice titled "Hospice: Complete Care for the Terminally Ill." The list of accomplishments goes on and on.

But the accomplishment that mattered most to him? "Without question, what I am most proud of in my career," he said, "is playing a role in getting hospice started in our nation."

Dr. Zimmerman peacefully passed away on July 23, 2023 while still in Gilchrist's care.

Loved Ones Take Part in Steps of Hope



Turnout for Gilchrist's 8th Annual Steps of Hope Tribute Walk on June 4, 2023 was tremendous.

This event of remembrance is held each year to provide support for those honoring, missing, and remembering loved ones who have died.

This special gathering incorporates the power of community, nature, and ritual. We are deeply gratified that so many of you participated and found meaning in the communal walk.

To learn more about Gilchrist's Grief Counseling program, visit gilchristcares.org/grief-counseling.



Three Staffers Celebrate 35 Years of Care

In our world of rapid and relentless change, three professionals at Gilchrist's inpatient center in Towson stand out. This past summer, Paula Schaffer and identical twins Tina Maggio and Gina Ranieri-Bender all celebrated their 35th anniversary caring for patients and their loved ones as members of the GBMC-Gilchrist organization. While they've certainly held different roles during their three and a half decades of service, their employer of choice and commitment have remained absolutely constant.



Tina, Gina, and Paula have actually been together for more than their 35 years at GBMC-Gilchrist. The three attended the same college, pursued the same nursing degree, took the same classes, won entry into the same prestigious honor society for nursing, and graduated the same year. Following graduation, they then joined the same organization, GBMC. They took somewhat different career paths during the ensuing years, but all three made their way to Gilchrist – Tina and Gina in 1996, Paula in 2008. Tina and Gina are currently clinical managers, while Paula left a clinical management position to return to her roots as a bedside nurse.

In retrospect, their ultimate professional destination looks like fate. All three advocated for compassionate hospice care well before they began working for Gilchrist. Paula had her first direct encounter with death while interning as a high school student with an order of nuns. A sister died in her sleep, and Paula stepped up to help with the transition. "It came naturally to me," she said. Tina and Gina recognized the need for comfort-focused care when their grandfather was diagnosed with terminal cancer while they were still college students. He died in terrible pain in a hospital intensive care unit, with doctors still focused on an improbable cure. It didn't have to be that way, they believed then – and they believe now.

"If I can help someone not have pain," Gina said, "that's what I want to do."

And all three agree that hospice offers even more than valuable pain management. Hospice enables patients and their families to make the most of the time they have together with the goal to help all involved to live every moment.

Living every moment

When asked what they find so meaningful about working in hospice, Paula, Tina, and Gina gave the same answer: building rich and enduring relationships with those in their care.

Paula, Tina, and Gina have countless stories about the special relationships they've developed through the years and the special steps they've often taken to help patients and their loved ones experience joy and happiness. For example, during the recent pandemic and the resulting visitation restrictions, they took creative steps to bring people together safely. They've coordinated weddings along the way. And they've turned more than one snowstorm requiring staff to stay overnight into a party for everyone at the center.

When asked what, if anything, they would like to change about hospice, all three had the exact same response at the tip of their tongues. Without question, they would like patients and their families to choose hospice earlier – if they're ready, of course – so they can enjoy the many benefits during a longer length of stay. For instance, thoughtful hospice care is focused on giving patients and their families as much control as possible at a time when patients are losing control over fundamental elements of life, such as mobility and eating.

Patients are consulted and play a central role in the development of a care plan that involves medical and non-medical issues alike. The results can be tremendously positive. Even if the *quantity* of their time does not increase (though studies show hospice patients do tend to live longer), patients and families agree the *quality* of life almost always does.

The care and support that hospice staffers provide relieves family members of caregiving responsibilities and enables families to be what they were meant to be – families. "You get to be that person again," Gina said. "You get to have that relationship again."

Find your fulfilling career at gilchristcares.org/careers.



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Twilight
An Evening of Remembrance

Virtual Event
December 10, 2023
7:00 p.m.

Join us as we light up the night in honor of those we have loved and lost.

This virtual event will provide a time of reflection and remembrance in the comfort of your own home. To enhance your experience, we suggest you have a candle on hand during the event.

Register today at
gilchristcares.org/twilight

Registration closes on
Friday, November 24, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.



gilchrist
Welcome Home
Vietnam Veterans

April 7, 2024

Gilchrist's 6th Annual
**Welcome Home
Vietnam Veterans Day
Celebration**

[gilchristcares.org/
welcome-home-celebration](http://gilchristcares.org/welcome-home-celebration)

Event in-person starting
at 11:30 a.m. at Martin's West