

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Meeting Bill Again

William P. Moran, MD, MS

Bill's life experience now drives his passion to undo the impact of disparities, irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference.



I was going into a noon conference presentation for a new potential recruit when I heard a voice with a heavy Boston accent say, "You don't remembah me, do yah? We were at Saint Mahgahret's togethah." We shook hands—I remembered his name, but of course we both had changed in the intervening forty-something years. I struggled to picture Bill as he had been in the second grade when our teacher Sister Elizabeth asked, "Who is your best friend?" I chose Bill, and Bill chose me. All told, we spent six years together at a Catholic elementary school in an inner-city neighborhood. I lost touch with Bill when I transferred from St. Margaret School to begin the seventh grade at another school. My subsequent life path was similar to many readers of *SGIM Forum*—high school, college, medical school, residency, fellowship, marriage, children, and a career in academic medicine.

Bill's path was different. Bill grew up in the same world of "tradi-

tional" Catholic values and rigid Irish beliefs, but Bill was gay. Bill was taunted by classmates, called names, and treated brutally by other adolescents. He was rejected by his father and ran away from home. He dropped out of high school. For a while he lived on the streets of Boston in a world of alcohol and drugs where he suffered vicious and repeated assaults because he was gay. He lived in an incredibly cruel world that beat him physically and nearly destroyed him emotionally.

Bill fought back. He moved in with his aunt in the suburbs and began to rebuild his life. He got a GED, trained to become a certified nursing assistant, and extracted himself from the brutal world in which he had been forced to live. Bill told me about the intervening years when we met 40 years later. At the time he was a coordinator for clinical trials. He is now our medical home team outreach coordinator. He finds people who are lost to follow-up. Bill now uses his

life experience to build relationships with people, some of whom still live in that cruel world from which he emerged. "It's why I love these people—I was one of them. It still happens more than you think!"

In those intervening years, our life paths could not have been more divergent. We began life in the same place in Boston and now work in the same place in Charleston. Bill should have had the same opportunities, the same support, and the same path, but he did not because he is gay. Bill's life experience now drives his passion to undo the impact of disparities, irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference. Bill has made our team dramatically more effective—and made us a better primary care team.

This edition of *Forum* is dedicated to the LGBT community, of which Bill is a member. SGIM is dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice. So is Bill. Thanks, Bill!

SGIM