

PEARLS OF WISDOM

Things aren't looking so hot for Larry Whitton.

He's not particularly elated about his job at the fictional Rio Grande Manor nursing home. Not to mention, his life seems to be slowly but surely decaying—his marriage, his family, and his job.

Then meets Dr. Bill Foster. Coincidentally, Bill just had a stroke and won't be able to work in his same capacity as a counselor. But Bill learns to live with his disabilities.

Falling on the Bright Side, Michael Gray's third book and second novel, draws from his personal experiences of working with disabled people in nursing homes and caregiver groups.

“It was a great honor to meet these people who were dealing with these very challenging situations.”

“I could never have written this book if I hadn't worked in this organization, Friends in Time, that I co-founded with a friend who has Lou Gehrig's disease,” Gray says.

His latest book tells the story of love, loss, and having the courage to make the most of your life, even when times are tough. It shows life with nursing home patients, many of whom are fighting through their final days. “The core of the human being is still there when the opportunities shrink outside. And in a way, it's an opportunity for the deeper kind of kindnesses and presence of a human being to really shine,” Gray says. “To me it was a great honor to meet these people who were dealing with these very challenging situations. And it was very reassuring for me, looking ahead to what might happen to me in my life as I get older.”

FALLING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

By **Michael Gray**
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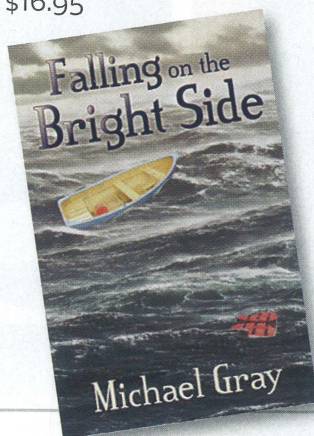


PHOTO BY ANTONIO RAMON/ATM

ATM: How'd your work with Friends in Time start?

GRAY: I took a long retreat at the Nyingma Institute in California, and it sort of got under my skin, and I wanted to live a different life. It occurred to me, “Why don't I link up with my friend who has Lou Gehrig's disease?” We started doing stuff together, and he's an RN who has ALS—Lou Gehrig's disease—and we collaborated in a way where he knew what it was like to be disabled, he also was a very resourceful person, so he led the whole activity with trying to help other people with ALS and then MS as well, because he knew what was going on, both inside and outside.

ATM: Why'd you decide to write a book based on your experiences?

GRAY: So, it's an environment I know a little bit about. ... The idea of collaboration is very present in this book. Larry needs help because he's so discouraged, and so depressed, and so out of touch with his family. ... And an experienced counselor, who I compare to Foster—he's my friend with ALS—has this left-hemisphere stroke and can no longer speak in a way that most people can understand him, and that's a

big problem if your livelihood is talking therapy. So these two men get together, and they help each other. And between them they keep the practice going with Larry the protagonist being able to talk, and then Bill having a practice with clients and then having the wisdom. They both improve each other's lives. And I feel like knowing Foster has really improved my life a lot.

ATM: Did being with and helping these people, especially those in their final days, cause you to look at life differently?

GRAY: Yes. I know a number of people who are just so courageous about continuing to live their lives even when, first of all, they're just tripping and dropping spoons, and later on maybe they're confined to a bed or a wheelchair and can't do a lot of things they used to do. And it really is a measure of somebody's character—how they deal with that.

ATM: Though these people are going through so much, they often become stronger in many ways, it seems.

GRAY: Wisdom ... they understand the course of life, because they see that their lives are forever changed.

—ADAM R. BACA