

Everyone who comes out of the closet faces unique challenges. But just for a moment, imagine having to sit down with an elderly parent over dinner and say that after 25-plus years of marriage, you have come to a realization: You are gay.

Then imagine also having to tell your children, a daughter, now 30, and a son, now 24. Then facing the task of dismantling a life built with your wife. Then having to face the prospects of your peers in the conservative world of insurance finding out.

More importantly, imagine being in your 50s, and simply starting life all over again.

Welcome to the world of Bill Findlay. He is a highly successful businessman, a dedicated and passionate volunteer and a man who has found great inspiration from those closest to him.

"Everyone has been incredibly supportive," he says of those in his life.

Findlay's story is not unique to many of those baby boomers who realized late in life that they had been kidding themselves about their sexuality through the years. He grew up in Iowa, and his parents moved to California after his father's retirement 28 years ago. Upon graduating from Iowa State University, Findlay found himself also moving west, landing in Portland.

He started in the insurance business and found success with a national firm, moving up the ranks until he had achieved what anyone would consider a comfortable lifestyle. He still works for the same company and has created a new firm of his own, William S. Findlay and Associates LLC, which offers business and insurance consulting services.

During most of his adult life, Findlay has been a dynamic leader with nonprofit groups. He is a longtime board member of the Oregon Symphony, was on the national board of YMCA for eight years and served as chairman of the Oregon Public Broadcasting board for 5 1/2 years; under his watch OPB moved into a new facility and transitioned from a totally state-controlled entity into a nonprofit organization.

His current passion is his work with Oregon Health & Sciences University's Center for Healthy Aging, for which he serves as advisory council chairman.

Perhaps it is the fact that his 93-year-old father shoots golf scores that equal his age, still drives and gets around just fine, but aging is something Findlay has been fascinated by for a long time. Then again, it might be that he faced some long-term care concerns when his mother grew ill. Or maybe his experience in the insurance field, especially with life insurance clients, piqued his interest in the topic.

Whatever the case, being able to age gracefully and meaningfully is something that struck

## AGING GRACEFULLY

Gay man raises awareness about long-term care for the elderly

by Tom Stevenson

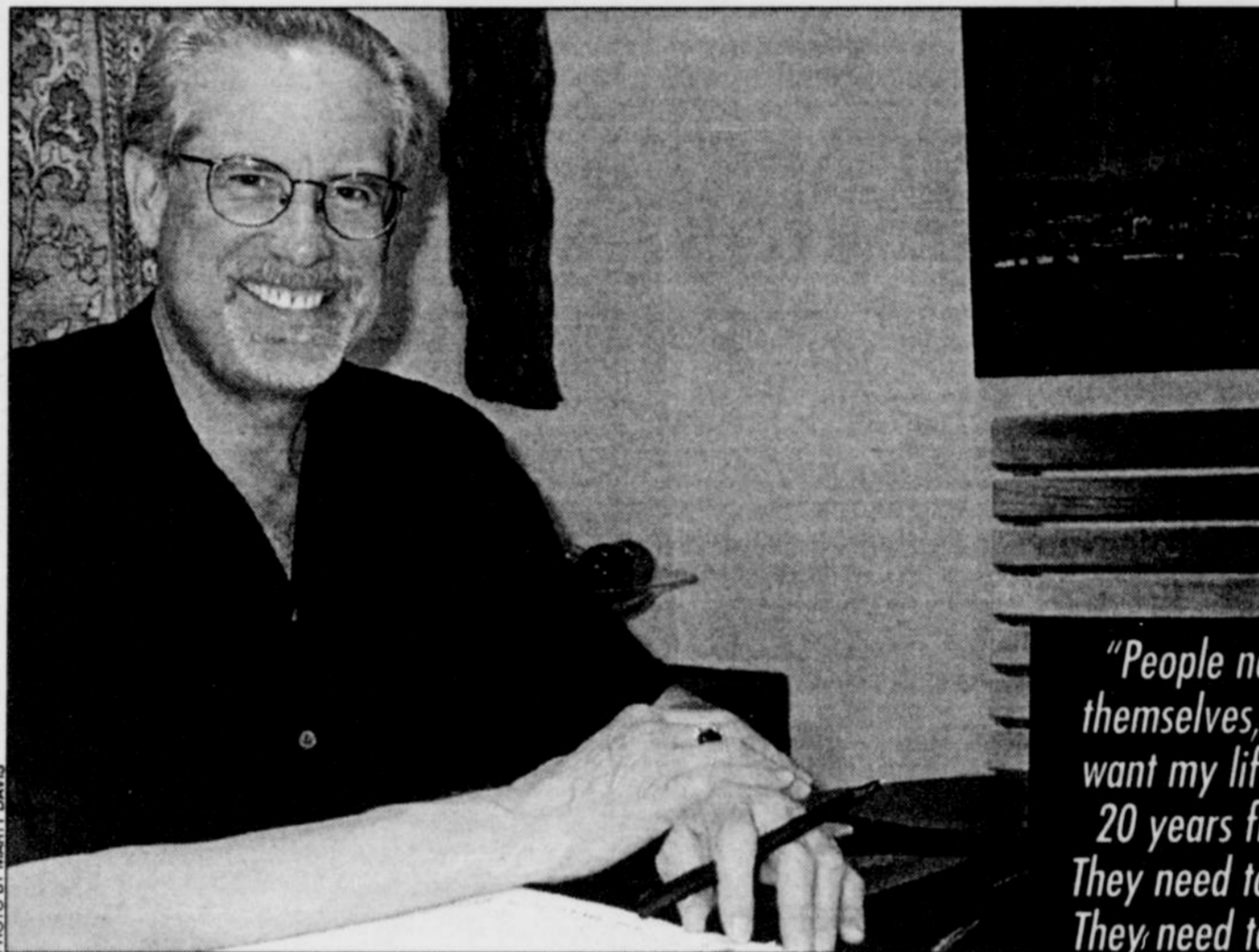


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Findlay as incredibly important. And he says that meeting the needs of the ever-increasing elderly population, including those in the sexual minorities community, is going to continue to become a huge challenge facing the United States.

"I believe that within 10 years, long-term care [for the elderly] will be the biggest domestic and political issue in the country," says Findlay, who adds that skyrocketing health care costs and the lack of choice for some are propelling the hot-button topic into the public forefront.

Part of the work of the OHSU Center for Health Aging focuses on education. "We are really working on educating new and existing practitioners on how to deal with elder patients," Findlay says.

Just how critical are issues involving the elderly? Consider this: OHSU says in one of its publications that by 2025 one in four Oregonians will be 65 or older. That is why the center was created in the first place. The idea is that it can "marshal the power of the university's nurs-

ing, family caregiving, genetics and other medical specialties to help enhance and prolong human vitality and independence. And when sickness and dependence are at issue, the center's focus extends beyond the management of chronic illness to the preservation of dignity, self-determination and quality of life in aging adults."

Findlay notes that along with the traditional issues facing the elderly, the older queer population faces some additional hurdles. For example, he notes, many traditional families have multiple siblings to help take care of Mom and Dad as they age. For gay men and lesbians who have no children, the question must be asked: Who cares for them?

"The majority [of queer elders] simply don't have someone," Findlay says.

That fact becomes increasingly significant when considering whether to seek long-term care in the home or in an institutional setting. The costs, Findlay says, are about the same.

"In-home care is more labor intensive vs. paying for bricks and mortar of the facilities," he says. But for people who do not have the support necessary to remain at home, an institution might be their only option.

Because Findlay has been in the insurance industry for so long and now has become passionately involved in long-term care for the elderly, he can offer some insight regarding how everyone, especially those in the gay and lesbian community, can prepare for the inevitable. "Everyone ages differently," he says, thus it is vitally crucial to begin thinking about elder care early in life.

"People need to ask themselves, 'What do I want my life to be like 20 years from now?'" he explains. "They need to set a goal. They need to determine how to get there. They need to talk to those who can help them get there."

By setting the goal now, Findlay says, people can avoid facing some heavy pitfalls when they become older and need specialized care. The early decisions can help keep a multitude of choices available later in life.

Findlay can look at his own life and see how making choices and setting goals can make a big difference. He did, after all, make a dramatic change in his life when he finally stepped out of his marriage and admitted to himself and others that he was a gay man. He credits his home church, Milwaukie Presbyterian, his pastor, his family and some extremely supportive friends with helping him make the move.

"It was very hard and very scary coming out," he says. "But it has worked out fine."

Findlay looks around today and sees that many of those he feared telling the most have turned out to be more supportive than he ever could have imagined. He did find a partner, but after 2 1/2 years that ended and he is single again. Still, he has evolved as a person, thrown himself into new passions and, well, life is good.

Who could ask for more? **JM**

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—Bill Findlay

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