

SINCE THE PUBLICATION of *Rounding Third*, I have been receiving requests to speak and write about it, but the increased number of such invitations and the biggest spike in sales came for a dreadful reason: a tragic case of life imitating art.

News reports in October 2010 of gay teens being bullied into attempting suicide led to renewed interest in my novel and more requests to speak about it. The crux of *Rounding Third* involves two high school boys who are bullied to the point that one of them can't take it anymore and attempts suicide. The story is still in the news because, although there hasn't been a recent epidemic of suicides, the topic is still in the news, because for too many people, the hostile climate doesn't seem to have changed. And they have a valid point, with platforms given to people like Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly, Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, Pat Robertson and others, who not only garner fame, but also profit, in sounding and acting like bullies.

Among the newspapers for which I wrote about the crisis was my hometown paper, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. A high percentage of people in the Pittsburgh area read that paper, so any casual friends or distant relatives who might not have known I was gay before my editorial ran, found out in a rather public way. My cousin's widower, who I had always thought of as a bit of a holdover from an earlier, less-progressive era — so old-fashioned he still uses snail mail, never having gotten into that email thing — sent me a long, handwritten letter telling how much he liked my editorial, that he was sure that it would help lots of kids and he admired my courage in being willing to speak out about the topic. Not the reaction I would have expected from him at all, but one that touched me more than the emails from people who have always supported me.

I received many emails from former neighbors, some I haven't seen or heard from since I was a teenager myself. A few of these messages began: "Are you the same Walt Meyer who used to cut our grass..."

Residents of my mother's retirement community stopped her in the hall to tell her how moved they were by my piece and several clipped copies of the editorial, anonymously slipping them under her door. Clearly, even the older generation is getting the message and the times are changing and that people speak out.

However, I also received emails from former students (or parents of former students) of the

grade school and high school I attended, telling me that they (or their children) were bullied at those schools and things do not seem to have improved at those institutions.

A woman sent me an e-mail indicating that her son was being bullied and asking what she could do about it. I referred her to the policies section at the Web site for the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), but too often the policies are on the books — just not enforced. One of the things I tried to do in my novel (without making it a preachy treatise) was show that things are improving, and from state laws to school district procedures, there are rules being enacted. There are teachers, administrators and parents willing to make sure those rules are carried out; the rules are only as good as the people enforcing them.

In part, I wrote *Rounding Third* to purge some of my own unpleasant memories, but also to make a statement about how rough life still can be for gay kids. Some of the first people to read the novel questioned if it may have been a bit exaggerated for effect, but the rash of kids who less than a year ago chose death over a life of being bullied clearly demonstrated the book wasn't embellishment. Nothing in the book is made up. All of the in-

cidents happened to someone I know.

Every 12-stepper learns, the first step in solving a problem is admitting there is a problem to solve, so I hoped my book would spark some awareness, and I am pleased that it has at least helped amplify the conversation. *Rounding Third* has given me the platform from which to speak about how wrong bullying is (whether from peers or parents) and the lifelong damage it can do.

During a speaking engagement I had at Arizona State University, most of the students said they had endured some degree of bullying in high school, but that life was better in college — although one student said he has had more experiences of people yelling "fag" or the like from car windows than he ever had in high school.

Things are getting better, but we clearly have a long way to go. After the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and others in Arizona, it should be clear that violent rants do lead to violent consequences. Even as we get policies enforced at the school level, bullying isn't likely to be toned down until the bullies with the biggest mouths — Beck, O'Reilly, Palin, Gingrich, Huckabee, Robertson, et al. — tone down their rhetoric, or when viewers and listeners simply turn them off. **BC**

MOVING FORWARD

[BY WALTER G. MEYER]

BLADE CALIFORNIA CAUGHT up with author Walter G. Meyer to talk about the ingredients of his book *Rounding Third*. It turns out that his tale about a high school baseball team is loosely based on his childhood.

Meyer's book is part fiction, part reality. "I lived part of it," he said. "I played baseball on my high school team; I had a crush on the star pitcher and I always wondered what would have happened if either of us had acted on our feelings."



IN THE DUGOUT WITH WALTER G. MEYER

An Interview

[BY JOHNNY WAZNEY]

Meyer wrote the story with "young gay men in mind" as his primary audience. He was pleasantly surprised to learn how diverse his audience has become. "A leisure club of elderly straight women contacted me to let me know how much they enjoyed my book," said Meyer. *Rounding Third* has also been chosen as a book of the month for a reading group in Montana. He has also heard from older gay men who have read his book and say that not much has changed regarding the bullying and stress they went through as teens and what their younger peers still endure today.

"The book includes a mosaic of other people's childhood stories strung togeth-

er," Meyer said. In fact, one quote from his book, which is also his favorite quote, came from his cousin who was dealing with a gay issue in her immediate family, "I may not know much about the Bible or being gay, but I know it's wrong to throw your children out when they need you most."

Some college instructors have asked Meyer if they could include his book in their courses. It takes "a brave teacher to suggest a gay love story," said Meyer, but he hopes that we are not far from that reality.

This book is relevant to youth and after the numerous suicides by LGBT teens in 2010, said Meyer. "Things really haven't changed as much as they should, as most people would still rather look the other way," instead of dealing with bullying head on and addressing the wrongs that still need to be made right, he said.

Meyer pointed out that teens have always had difficulties and butterflies when asking someone out on a date. "When you are straight teenager and ask a girl out and she declines, you deal with it," he said. "But, when you are a gay teenager and ask someone of the same sex out, you run the risk of freaking them out, outing yourself perhaps prematurely and — as a result — your life could be ruined." Even as our communities continue to evolve, the same dating scenario Meyer describes is just as likely today as it was when he was a teenager.

Meyer believes "[people] limit ourselves on stereotypes, as too many in the gay community have isolated themselves from the gay world and straight friends to have any idea what is going on out there." He believes that whichever labels we carry, we must breakthrough stereotypes and reach out of our safety zones so that we can assimilate across the label isles.

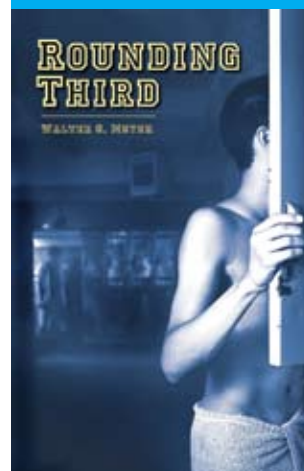
Meyer has done numerous interviews with gay media but wishes that more straight press would pick up on this story and see the characters purely as teenagers. "It is a stealth novel, you really don't realize that this is a gay love story until about 70 or 80 pages into it," Meyer added.

Rounding Third is available online at Amazon. In San Diego, pick up a copy at Obelisk Books. To learn more about the author, visit www.waltermeyer.com. **BC**

ROUNDING THIRD AND GETTING PERSONAL

[BY KEVIN FITZPATRICK]

From the first line of *Rounding Third* I knew that I would identify with this book. Although my situation differs from the situations of the main characters in the book, I greatly identify with their struggle to understand themselves and the world in which they live. I remember years ago stepping up to that line in the sand, coming out, knowing that



to step over it would change my life forever — much like what happens to the protagonist Rob in the novel. That feeling of excitement, fear and relief when you accept who you truly are is something I will never forget.

As the book opens, we find Rob still not really aware that he is gay. Up until the day Josh talks to him on the baseball field, his whole life is devoted to flying under the radar.

But, as Josh brings him out of his shell, Rob starts to develop feelings for him. When Rob realizes that Josh feels the same way, his world turns upside down.

Who can't remember that moment when you realize that you are not the only gay person in the world — and much like Fourth of July fireworks in your head — everything explodes. As their new relationship grows, Rob discovers just how hard Josh's life is with his hardcore Christian parents. Like Josh, I suffered the same pain and struggles of being rejected by the people that I thought were there to protect me. The hurt can cut deep.

After Josh is viciously attacked by fellow students, he attempts suicide. Rob and his family rescue Josh and show him what true, unconditional love really is.

Through it all, Rob grows as a person and his conviction and strength in the face of all he suffers is inspiring as well as moving. As he faces these challenges with a "tomorrow will be better" mindset; he moves forward with a determination and attitude that he won't give in to the hate and bigotry that surrounds him.

I hope that this message is one that teenage readers can learn and follow. It is this message that everyone should take to heart because, just as I experienced with similar difficulties, I know that tomorrow can be a better day.

For any age, *Rounding Third* is highly recommended. **BC**