

From the Editor

Hell Revisited



Michael, left, and Bill as kids

Longtime readers may remember a cover story we ran nearly two decades ago with the arresting headline: “To Hell and Back with My Cousin Michael.”

Michael Billig, a college professor then in his early 40s, was given 50/50 odds of beating his leukemia through a pioneering bone marrow transplant here at Johns Hopkins. His cousin Bill Glovin was there to capture the intense highs and lows of Michael’s medical odyssey, which was ultimately successful.

About nine months ago, Bill—now an editor for the Dana Foundation—reached out to pitch a second article. After nearly 20 years, Michael’s blood cancer had returned, this time taking a more virulent form. Once again, he would need a bone marrow transplant here. Michael was game to have his experience documented again, and Bill could make the time to write about it. Would the magazine want the story? Seeing this as the gift that it was, I gratefully replied “yes.”

Much has changed in bone marrow transplant since Michael’s first experience, as you’ll discover in “Back to the Brink,” largely thanks to advances pioneered here. But you’ll find there are constants as well, notably the roller coaster ride of the months-long treatment protocol, which takes its toll—both physically and emotionally—on patient and family.

Michael will tell you it was all worth it—again. Shortly before we went to press (spoiler alert!), he sent this text to his cousin: “I just got the results from Friday’s bone marrow biopsy. The upshot: ‘no phenotypically abnormal population (of cells) identified.’ None. Nada. Zilch. A fairytale ending!”



Michael, left, and Bill in their 20’s