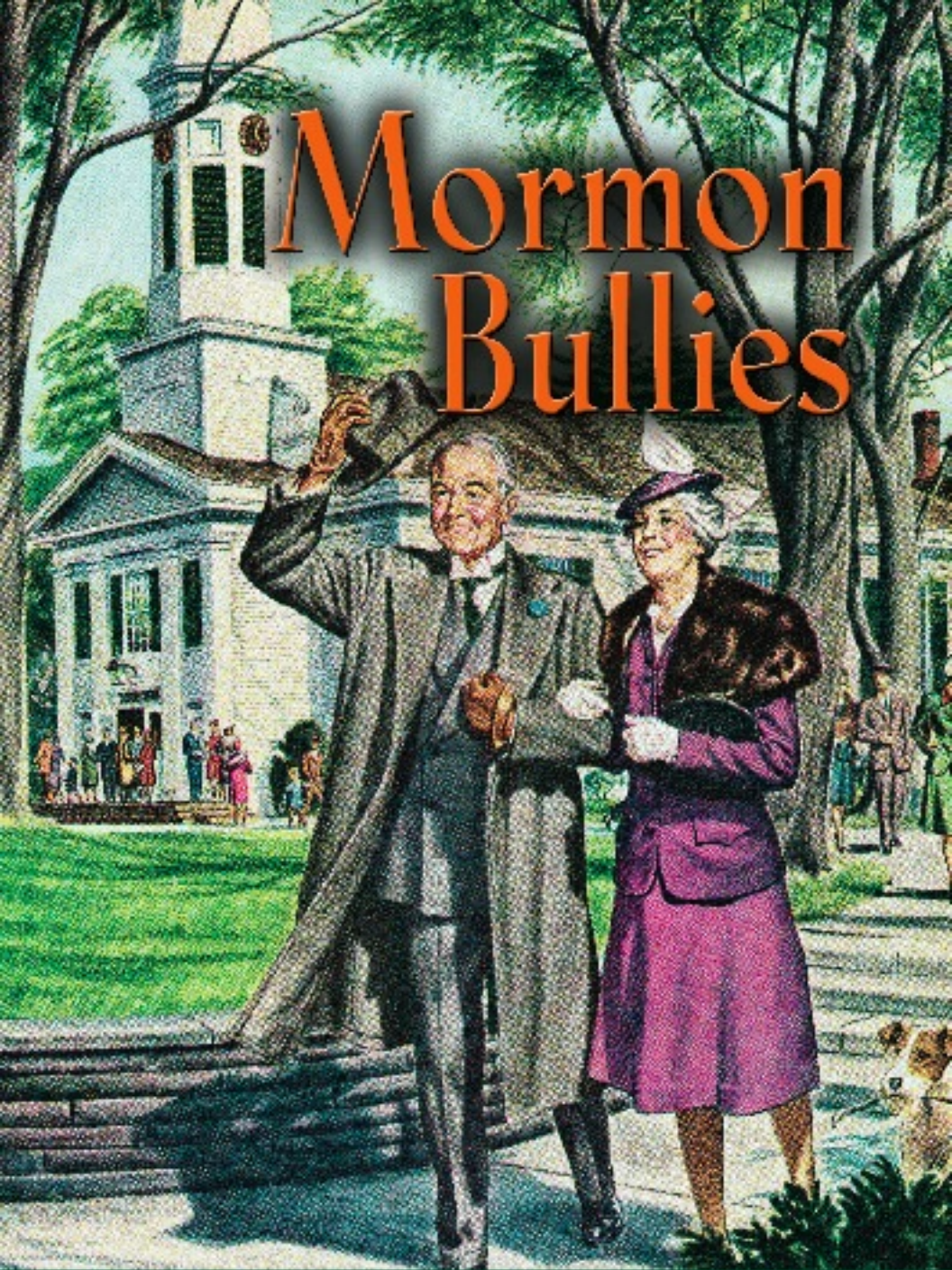
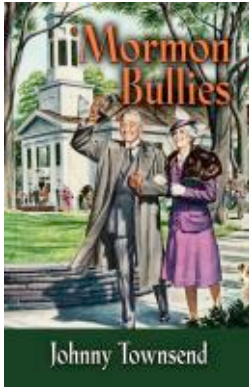


Mormon Bullies



Johnny Townsend



This eclectic mixture of poignant memoir, bristling Op-ed, and literary criticism focuses on three of the most serious issues facing society today - gay rights, the environment, and universal healthcare. With both sarcasm and insight, Johnny Townsend analyzes the arguments against human progress and shows us a way out of the repressive policies that confound reasonable people everywhere.

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Praise for Johnny Townsend

In *Zombies for Jesus*, “Townsend isn’t writing satire, but deeply emotional and revealing portraits of people who are, with a few exceptions, quite lovable.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

Townsend’s stories are “a gay *Portnoy’s Complaint* of Mormonism. Salacious, sweet, sad, insightful, insulting, religiously ethnic, quirky-faithful, and funny.”

D. Michael Quinn,
author of *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*

Johnny Townsend is “an important voice in the Mormon community.”

Stephen Carter, editor of *Sunstone* magazine

“Told from a believably conversational first-person perspective, [*The Abominable Gayman’s*] novelistic focus on Anderson’s journey to thoughtful self-acceptance allows for greater character development than often seen in short stories, which makes this well-paced work rich and satisfying, and one of Townsend’s strongest. An extremely important contribution to the field of Mormon fiction.”

Kirkus Reviews

“The thirteen stories in *Mormon Underwear* capture this struggle [between Mormonism and homosexuality] with humor, sadness, insight, and sometimes shocking details....*Mormon Underwear* provides compelling stories, literally from the inside-out.”

Niki D’Andrea, *Phoenix New Times*

The Circumcision of God “asks questions that are not often asked out loud in Mormonism, and certainly not answered.”

Jeff Laver, author of *Just Call Me Greg*

“Townsend’s lively writing style and engaging characters make for stories which force us to wake up, smell the (prohibited) coffee, and review our attitudes with regard to reading dogma so doggedly. These are tales which revel in the individual tics and quirks which make us human, Mormon or not, gay or not...”

A.J. Kirby, The Short Review

In *Sex among the Saints*, “Townsend writes with a deadpan wit and a supple, realistic prose that’s full of psychological empathy....he takes his protagonists’ moral struggles seriously and invests them with real emotional resonance.”

Kirkus Reviews

“The Rift” is a “fascinating tale of an untenable situation...a *tour de force*.”

David Lenson, editor, *The Massachusetts Review*

“Pronouncing the Apostrophe” is “quiet and revealing, an intriguing tale...”

Sima Rabinowitz, Literary Magazine Review, NewPages.com

The Abominable Gayman—Named to *Kirkus Reviews*’ Best of 2011

In *Mormon Fairy Tales*, Johnny Townsend displays “both a wicked sense of irony and a deep well of compassion.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

This essay appeared originally in
the December 2010 issue of *Q Review*.

Freshman Biology for Mormon Leaders

I remember the day the First Presidency of the LDS Church issued its statement condemning same-sex marriage:

We of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reach out with understanding and respect for individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender. We realize there may be great loneliness in their lives but there must also be recognition of what is right before the Lord.

As a doctrinal principle, based on sacred scripture, we affirm that marriage between a man and a woman is essential to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children. The powers of procreation are to be exercised only between a man and a woman lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, undermine the divinely created institution of the family. The Church accordingly favors measures that define marriage as the union of a man and a woman and that do not confer legal status on any other sexual relationship.

I was at first astonished by the statement. The position of the First Presidency is that it is acceptable for a gay person to experience "great loneliness" and remain isolated and celibate his whole life because the alternative of same-sex marriage

would preclude heterosexual marriage and the procreation of children. The quite obvious point is that celibacy also precludes heterosexual marriage and the procreation of children, so how is it any more “essential to the Creator’s plan”?

I began to wonder how good, intelligent people could come up with such an illogical, untenable position, and the answer came to me in my first-year college Biology class.

In the current civil litigation over gay rights and same-sex marriage, as often happens, secular law becomes influenced by religious tradition. Traditionally, of course, most religions formed rules hundreds or even thousands of years ago, well before we understood human psychology or genetics or much of anything scientific at all. But we as a nation are expected to form all of our civil, not just religious, laws based on the feeling by some ecclesiastical leaders that all human progress stopped at least 2000 years ago.

Everyone knows how Galileo was persecuted by the Catholic Church for stating that the Earth revolved around the sun, that the Earth was not the center of the universe. Religious leaders felt it jeopardized their entire view of the importance of man to God if God didn’t put them literally in the center. Galileo, of course, recanted, but Inquisition notwithstanding, the facts didn’t change, and eventually religion came to accept the facts. And somehow, accepting the truth didn’t bring an end either to religion or to faith.

This conflict between science and religion has gone on for centuries, and there are always endless protests that this particular fact or that one is really a lie of the devil to destroy faith. But facts, after being reproven a thousand times, always eventually come to be accepted by society, and somehow, by some miracle, one of those incredible mysteries of God, faith and religion go on. Many were upset when Newton discovered what really made the rainbow, afraid his discovery would cause

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people to doubt the Flood or God's promise. At the very least, it would rob people of seeing the beauty of the rainbow to know how it was scientifically derived. And yet somehow, despite the fear and condemnation of some religious traditionalists, rainbows are still awe-inspiring, even though every schoolchild knows how they are made. Later generations laugh as they wonder how previous generations could ever doubt that simple truths could hurt the gospel. Religions often resist a change in the status quo, but because we do learn and grow, religion must do so as well. We grow up today without the least quavering of our testimony believing that the Earth revolves around the sun, or that sunlight is made up of different wavelengths of light. The only reason these things could have ever jeopardized faith in the first place was if that faith was based on errors rather than truth.

Some of the most basic principles of biology have only been discovered in the last two centuries. It wasn't until 1855 that Virchow declared that all cells derive from cell divisions of previously existing cells. Before that time, people believed that mushrooms grew spontaneously, that moss grew right out of a rock, that maggots were created spontaneously in rotting meat. Not until 1855, 35 years after the formation of the Mormon Church, 11 years after Joseph Smith's death, and 8 years after the Saints arrived in Salt Lake, did science finally grasp this really rather fundamental principle. And yet the Latter-day Saint Church, one of the newest and therefore least obligated by centuries of tradition, is still old enough to have formed most of its rules before the advent of modern science, especially biology.

But the Mormon Church is one of the main religions fighting same-sex marriage. Other conservative religious leaders are doing the same, the most common feature being that these religious leaders and their followers are trying to impose

their religious doctrines in the state secular courts, so that people of all faiths must abide by their particular religious views. Science is all but excluded from the process, even though the Constitution does not require a separation of “science and state.” As intelligent a species as we are, we also manage to remain ignorant in the midst of knowledge.

Too often, however, we let preconceived notions of right and wrong affect our judgment in noticing the obvious, and then in accepting it. Carolus Linnaeus, inventor of the binomial system for naming all living organisms, named a beautiful flower after one of his benefactors. An ugly, obnoxious weed, on the other hand, he named after a man named Siegesbeck, who continually hampered Linnaeus’ work by insisting that his work was immoral and heretical. Siegesbeck complained because Linnaeus insisted that plants pollinated with more than one recipient. But God would *never* create anything so inherently sinful as promiscuous flowers. It was an insult to all religious people to say otherwise. Somehow, though, we today manage to praise God for his flowers, and our faith doesn’t crumble to dust because of the “spiritual threat” of cross-pollination. Instead, we find it extremely hard to believe anyone could ever find this fact to be a moral issue.

Those are plants, however, and we become more uncomfortable when the animal kingdom is involved. Still, we manage to accept hermaphrodite frogs and the species of eel in which every single member is a functional female for several years until they all eventually grow to be functional males. We know about the species of crocodile where the embryos in eggs develop either into males or females, whatever their genes, based on the temperature of the sand in which the eggs are buried. The same thing happens with sea turtles. We watch the male seahorse become impregnated and carry the young. In the Australian frog *Rheobatrachus silus* and a related species, the *R.*

vitellinus, the mother swallows its own eggs after they have been fertilized, and keeps the growing tadpoles in her stomach, eventually giving birth to tiny frogs which come out through her mouth. Meanwhile, males of the *Rhinoderma darwini* put fertilized eggs in their vocal sacs, and eventually they too have frogs jumping out of their mouths.

We study the fish species in which there is one male for every 24 females, but if the male is killed or removed from the group, one of the females changes into a male almost overnight. There are enough of these species that they're even subdivided into categories—protogynous for those which are born females and then turn into males, and protandrous, for those which are males first and then become females. Then there is the exclusively female species of Amazon mollies, *Poecilia formosa*, and also the species of pea aphid, *Acyrtosiphon pisum*, both species consisting of all females their entire lives, giving birth through parthenogenesis only to females without ever having been fertilized by males, who simply don't exist in their species. Fifteen species of whiptail lizards reproduce in this manner, with no males in those species, either, but there is "lesbianism." Female lizards which have "sex" with another female who plays the "male" role lay more eggs. Some sea snails are hermaphrodites and both sexual partners get pregnant after mating. In some species of frogs, males have oviducts which serve no purpose, but the species had been hermaphroditic in the past, and the tubes haven't fully evolved away yet. If the testicles of male true toads are removed, their rudimentary ovaries, called Bidder's Organs, develop into functional ovaries. These facts exist. We know them. And somehow, we can teach them to students without failing to maintain our belief in the sanctity of marriage.

All right. So these things do take place in animals, some might grudgingly admit. But these are all still rather low

animals. Surely, the higher orders of life don't have these problems. God set us apart.

Of course, if we want to set aside mammals as the highest order, biology still has some lessons for us. Pigs frequently show abnormalities in sexual development, having an ovary on one side and a testis on the other, these "inter-sexes" usually having two X chromosomes with an as yet unidentified gene suspected of causing the intersex "problem." It almost certainly isn't caused by depravity or willful choice. In goats, a single P gene causes hornlessness, but two copies of the gene causes testicles to develop in the female.

We become uncomfortable and afraid in discussing sex, so when anyone says that there may be a biological basis for sexual "abnormalities" in humans, things such as homosexuality, for instance, there is an instant cry of, "But humans are different! God can play around all he wants with flowers and frogs and pigs, but humans are special! That's all there is to it!"

Of course, even freshman biology students know about the variations on the regular XX (female) and XY (male) sex chromosomes. Some babies are born with a single X and no accompanying chromosome (Turner's syndrome), some are born with XXX, and some with XXY (Klinefelter's syndrome) or XYY, all leading to different results in the child. There are even a few XXXX, XXXY, XXYY, XXXXY, and XXXXX. Some males are born without a Y chromosome, and some females are born with an intact Y. In addition to all of these problems, there are also conditions like campomelic dysplasia and autosomal sex reversal, which are caused by mutations in the SOX9 gene, which is related to the SRY (sex-determining region Y) gene. This condition occurs in both males and females.

But these are all freaks of nature, accidents, birth defects, people claim. All right. That may well be. Yet even considering the rarity of these occurrences (ranging from 1 in 1000 births to 1 in 5000), there are still, with a global population of six billion, over 1,200,000 people born with just the X, three million born with XXY, three million more with XYY, and six million with XXX, thus creating more genetically based “sexual freaks” than all the Mormons worldwide, more than the number of Jews slaughtered during World War II. In fact, considering all the genetic sexual variations, there are more “sexual exceptions” alive today than there are members of several major religious denominations. And in addition to genetic abnormalities, there are also “bad” genes which cause genetic diseases, such as the gene which codes for congenital lipoid hyperplasia, where the body will produce no steroid hormones, which can either kill the fetus or leave male fetuses with female genitals. All in all, there are quite a few human beings who don’t fit the pattern they are “supposed” to fit.

“That doesn’t mean they’re not still freaks!” people may still insist. Well, perhaps this is so. God may not have *wanted* people to be born gay any more than he wants babies to be born with an extra chromosome that creates Down Syndrome or with the gene for cystic fibrosis. But it happens regularly. And how can the hermaphrodite or “mongoloid” or gay person possibly be responsible for what their DNA is? Since their DNA doesn’t prevent gays from being capable of feeling or expressing love, however, wouldn’t God’s command to marry, his admonition that it isn’t good to be alone, still apply to them? Studies done on the hypothalamus and with identical twins also suggest a physical or possibly genetic component to homosexuality. It is also possible, therefore, that gays and lesbians are every bit as “natural” and God-created as promiscuous flowers and sex-changing fish. Is it immoral to fill the measure of one’s

creation? Can you condemn people to celibacy based solely on their DNA?

As Bruce Bagemihl points out in his book *Biological Exuberance*, homosexuality has been documented in almost 200 species of animals, some of these mating for life, like a same-sex duck couple who even went so far as to steal eggs from other nests so they could raise their own ducklings. Are all these animals from hundreds of different species sinning? Is there a “duck hell” for these apostate birds?

Who are we to tell God how he *should* have created living beings? We know that “God works in mysterious ways,” and though we should use our God-given brains to learn as much as possible about his creations, it *is* possible we will never understand during our earthly existence just why he made things the way he did.

Not understanding, however, is not justification for denying truth. All truth comes from God, and accepting facts and truths can never be against his will, even if prevailing cultural norms in religion make those truths appear contradictory to God. The Earth does in fact revolve around the sun, even if millions of people used to be completely convinced otherwise.

Some religious leaders claim that “intellectuals” are a danger to faith. But we are not talking about pretentious sophistry. We are talking about freshman biology. Surely, we are to be allowed a basic education and the most modest use of our intellect. Perhaps our leaders can be excused to a degree for their ignorance of these facts. Their biology classes forty or fifty years ago probably didn’t mention Amazon mollies. But if our leaders cut themselves off from the new truths being learned every day, saying “worldly knowledge” is unimportant, they face a flock full of millions and millions of adherents who do know many relevant truths that can’t be denied forever.

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The Inquisition was successful in suppressing Galileo's discoveries for a while, and today's intolerance is politically powerful right now as well, but eventually a generation always arises that will condemn the condemners instead. With study after study after study suggesting that homosexuality has a strong physical and genetic basis, leaders denying the loving and committed relationships that gays and lesbians form will seem increasingly callous, small-minded, and uninspired, and that is more of a danger to the Church than gay marriage can ever possibly impose.

The nation's largest association of Jewish rabbis, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, with more than 1700 Reform rabbis, has already voted to support civil same-sex marriages. Jews have often been at the forefront of civil rights battles, and it seems odd that Christianity's "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" doesn't seem to produce as much equality and justice as Judaism's "don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you." The Episcopal Church and other religions seem to be slowly accepting the principles of logic and justice as well. What it comes down to is whether we believe in a God who insists on double standards or a God who would treat all equally. Can religious leaders battling to legalize injustice really understand the message they are sending their followers?

Several other countries have granted gays full equal rights, including the right to marry, and their countries haven't crumbled into dust. In those countries, heterosexual marriage hasn't been harmed. No straight man has been reported as saying, "Well, gays can get married now. So I guess I'd better not ask my girlfriend to marry me." No woman has told her fiancé, "Well, a temple marriage used to sound good, but if gays can get married, the temple just doesn't hold much meaning for me anymore. Who wants an eternal marriage now?" No

heterosexual couple has gone into counseling saying, “We used to want to have children, but now that my gay cousin married his boyfriend, I just don’t see the point any longer. The idea of having children now repulses me.” Can anyone seriously think gay marriage could affect heterosexuals in this way? And if it doesn’t, in what way could gays committing themselves to each other in love and devotion possibly hurt heterosexual marriage? The commitment to marriage by anyone can only help this institution.

When Mormons hear in science classes that “matter can neither be created nor destroyed,” they accept this fact willingly. They are members of one of the few religions that says God “organized” the world from pre-existing material rather than created it out of nothing. Mormons aren’t the least intimidated by learning or teaching this fundamental principle, while members of other religions cast up defensive walls against this “heretical,” Godless science. But knowledge and truth are always of God, and true religion cannot come into conflict with *any* truth.

Leaders of all religions in America need to remember that they are absolutely free to teach their followers anything they wish about gays and lesbians. They can chastise, even excommunicate, any lesbian or gay couple who marry civilly. They do not have to put up with any of it in their religion. But unless Mormons want Catholics telling Mormons how to live, and Baptists want Jews telling Baptists how to live, and Buddhists want Muslims telling Buddhists how to live, we must maintain a separation of church and state. Religious leaders are endangering their own freedoms by bringing their religious rules to the courts to foist them on others.

Those who claim in their attacks on gays that “This isn’t about science; it’s about morality, and morality doesn’t change!” need only look at the history of their own religions to

see that indeed our perceptions of morality do change. Ordaining a black man to the priesthood was punishable by excommunication among Mormons until a few decades ago. Divorce is now acknowledged in most religions as sometimes necessary, though this was a huge immorality in former times and absolutely forbidden no matter what the circumstances. Polygamy was seen as moral by Mormons at one time and immoral at another. In vitro fertilization is seen as sinful by many religious leaders, and medicine in general is still seen as sinful by some religions, but most of us accept that God gave us the capacity to develop medical techniques as a blessing that we would be wrong to throw away. We feel that people with these phobic views toward science should catch up with the times. The fact is that moral views *can* change with increased knowledge, without it signaling a betrayal of God.

If leaders see homosexuality darkly because of the inaccuracies they were taught forty years ago, this is understandable. But to ignore the blinding light of discoveries over the past few decades suggests a resistance to change even if that change would mean following God more closely. The New Testament gives us an account of Peter's vision in which he was told it was now acceptable to eat forbidden foods. Peter resisted, claiming those foods were unclean. God's reply was, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

Gays and lesbians are impatient that some religious leaders still call them common and unclean, but even Peter had to be reassured three times by God himself before he accepted what he perceived as a change in morality. Today's leaders, who hear these things from mere mortals, certainly are entitled to resist for a while. Yet we don't have angry parents running to the courts to ban the teaching of prisms and light waves in the schools, afraid of their children being "influenced" by this heretical knowledge. In the future, people will look back on our

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time and wonder how the idea of allowing gays to marry could possibly jeopardize anyone's faith.

Of course, if we stand up now for the truth that gays and lesbians are human beings who deserve to be treated the same as all other humans, the less righteous segment of society may condemn and criticize us. But then, standing up for the truth despite opposition has always been the moral path God has expected of the righteous. Science can teach us some previously unknown truths, but it is the moral directive to embrace truth that is an even stronger motive for us to insist on the idea of equal justice for all. Religious leaders need to use both their intellect and their spirit in affirming equality for God's gay and lesbian children. The logic of this any freshman can see. The morality of it, all those committed to God's teachings can see.

A Nobody's Opinion on Healthcare

I believe we need single-payer, universal healthcare in this country.

And just who am I that you should listen to me?

I am a nobody, I'm afraid. I was *almost* a somebody, but I didn't quite make it.

I earned three English degrees and taught at the university level for ten years. During that time, I saw friends and family suffering through the injustices and inequities of our corrupt healthcare system, and I decided we needed to change that system radically to universal care as every other industrialized nation had.

The problem was, who was going to listen to me?

I decided that I would have no clout unless I became a physician myself. So in my mid-thirties, I went back to school to earn a Biology degree.

You have to understand that this was not an easy decision. I had no money and would have to take out student loans. And I hadn't had a math class since the tenth grade. But I knew becoming a physician was the only chance I had to make a difference. So I signed up for remedial math, passed it, and then signed up for "advanced remedial math" and passed that, too.

From there, I moved on to chemistry. It was every bit as hard as I'd feared, but I also found it fascinating. I squeaked by with the lowest possible A. Then came another chemistry, and then two semesters of the dreaded Organic Chemistry. It was all difficult, but I was determined to have a voice in the healthcare debate, so I made additional A's. I was relieved to discover that both sides of my brain appeared to be functioning.

Next I tackled Anatomy, and Microbiology, and Genetics, and Endocrinology. More A's. But then came Biochemistry. In all my four degrees, this was the hardest teacher I ever had.

Yet I was still determined. I wrote out more than 500 note cards for that class alone. I knew the names and shapes of hundreds of molecules and every step in numerous complex molecular pathways.

I not only studied for hours every day, I also learned more for that class than for any other class I had ever taken.

But it wasn't enough. I ended up with a B. I'd never been more devastated in my life. Still, I forged on with Animal Physiology, and Immunology, and Histology, and Neurobiology, and Cell Physiology, and Medical Ethics, and ended up graduating with a GPA of 3.75. Even for my three English degrees, my first love, my highest GPA had only been a 3.6.

Meanwhile, I was also taking care of a sick partner, working full-time, and growing oaks and pecan trees and magnolias from seeds to plant in the country to help reforest the land.

But just so I wouldn't grow too intense, I also did some fun things during this period, like design and sew 25 quilts, take a weightlifting class, and study Spanish and Hebrew. One of my short stories was published in an anthology.

Mostly, though, I concentrated on medicine. I read book after book after book detailing the experiences of nurses and medical students and interns and doctors. I "shadowed" an ENT in her private practice for months. I learned how to read blood pressure and how to give injections to friends who needed them.

I studied universal healthcare in other nations and, despite their occasional limitations, became more and more convinced that our own nation had to follow suit. America wasn't supposed to be a follower—we were supposed to be a leader. But maybe we could do universal healthcare *better* than those

other countries. What I absolutely knew, though, was that we had to try. The current system was simply unacceptable.

So I took part in an internship in a medical school physiology lab, assisting with experiments on rat brains. I helped with medical fundraisers. I volunteered in the surgery department of a hospital.

I was going to go to medical school. I was going to be a doctor. People would listen to me and I'd have a real voice to advocate for universal healthcare.

I applied to medical school six years in a row. I interviewed five of those years.

And I was turned down five times. I didn't have the right "personality" to be a physician, it turned out.

So I'm back to being a nobody. I'm a teller at a credit union now, worried every day about making my loan goals so I can keep my job.

But hey, for now, I've got health insurance, so I can't complain.

Only I do complain. I tell my senators and representatives and even my president that I want single-payer, universal healthcare, but the problem is that the people in Washington aren't listening to nobodies. They are listening to "somebodies," you know, the people with power and money, the people running the health insurance industry, the people who don't want to lose their lucrative jobs of preying on the sick.

I wish I wasn't a nobody. I wish there was a reason to listen to me. But I'm just an average American citizen, a common worker, part of the overwhelming majority who want single-payer, universal healthcare, a person who believes the government should exist to serve all the people equally, right now.

Who in the world would listen to me?



This eclectic mixture of poignant memoir, bristling Op-ed, and literary criticism focuses on three of the most serious issues facing society today - gay rights, the environment, and universal healthcare. With both sarcasm and insight, Johnny Townsend analyzes the arguments against human progress and shows us a way out of the repressive policies that confound reasonable people everywhere.

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