

Shorty's little secret

A lesson about a biological anomaly



"Shorty Gellar, you're nothing but a dirty liar!" screamed Stevie.

"I'm not lying, Stevie. Why in the world would I want to lie about something like this?"

"I don't know, maybe you're trying to impress someone. Either way, you're a liar, Shorty!"

Shorty became frustrated. He stood up on top of the lunch table where he and his friends had been sitting, looming over Stevie. By this time, all of the administrators and students in the lunchroom turned their attention away from their chocolate milk pints and hash-brown triangles and focused on Shorty as he prepared to speak.

In the fashion of a great orator, Shorty pointed his finger in Stevie's face as he composed himself. "I'm telling you for the last time, Stevie

McKenzie," he fumed. "One of my testicles used to be in my abdomen!"

The lunchroom's oxygen vanished as one hundred students collectively gasped. All of the grade-school girls looked at each other, perplexed, realizing that they'd heard the word "testicle" before but weren't quite sure what it meant.

The female teachers frantically scrambled, looking for some premature-sexual-word alarm to pull. The male teachers grimaced as they slowly lowered their hands toward their mid-sections. The sex-ed teacher screamed, aware that his lectures were about to seem a lot less interesting.

The students at school that day were never given an explanation of what Shorty Gellar was talking about. Every student's parents were sent a letter from the administration encouraging thought about discussing sexual topics with their children. Most of them didn't bother.

That day, the sex-ed teacher was given orders by the superintendent to go home and find out if anything that Shorty Gellar was saying made any sense. After a long night of research and alcohol, he showed up at school the next morning with exactly what the superintendent had asked for: A

file full of information about undescended testicles.

Like everyone else in school on the day of Shorty Gellar's speech, and many other people for that matter, the superintendent had never heard of undescended testicles. But after spending some time studying the information given to him, he soon was able to understand the condition of which Shorty had spoken and why he had become so angry when arguing with Stevie McKenzie.

The scientific name for undescended testicles is cryptorchidism. The definition of cryptorchidism is the failure of one or both testicles to move from the abdominal cavity to the scrotum through the inguinal canal before birth. According to *Adam.com*, undescended testicles are fairly common in premature infants and occur in about three to four percent of full-term infants. In these cases, the testicles typically descend by three months of age.

It's easy to see why so few people are educated about cryptorchidism. With such a small number of male infants affected, having an undescended testicle does not seem like much of a problem. However, for the

small number of individuals who have been affected, cryptorchidism is not laughable.

Although undescended testicles usually descend spontaneously, there are rare cases in which the problem does not correct itself. Research shows that testicles that do not descend after one year should be evaluated carefully. Recent studies suggest that definitive surgery should be accomplished by three years of age to confirm diagnosis and to lessen the likelihood of developing testicular cancer later in life.

KidsHealth.org lists many other reasons why undescended testicles should be examined. For example, the higher temperature of an individual's body may inhibit the normal growth of sperm in a testicle that is undescended. Furthermore, undescended testicles are more susceptible to forming tumors and are more vulnerable to injury. Finally, an asymmetrical or empty scrotum may cause worry and embarrassment.

The only reason we knew anything about undescended testicles to begin with was we have both known individuals who have suffered from an undescended testicle. One of the testicles in question did not descend

and had to be moved during surgery at age three. Upon interview, the patient told us that he still has a scar on his lower abdomen from the operation.

Later in the same interview, the individual took the liberty of telling us a story about an uncle of his. According to this individual, his uncle was born with a testicle that he was able to move up and down on one side of his body.

After the interview, we continued our research and were unable to find any information about something such as this occurring. "He could move it all the way up to his shoulder," said the interviewee. We're not so sure. You can decide for yourself.

Frankly, we don't know what we expect you to make of all of this. We just thought that we'd take the opportunity to let a few people know about something that we feel is fairly important. Nearly one of every 125 boys is born with an undescended testicle.

We know that there is no way to prevent cryptorchidism. We just want to make sure that everyone is educated. That way, the Shorty Gellars of the world can relax, sex ed can remain exciting as ever, and a few more testicles can find their way home.

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Labor of love

Just another day for just another preacher



The motel room around me moans quietly as it warms in the new day's sun. Next door I can hear Steve moving about, packing his things. My things are still scattered on my bed, so I can see them all at once.

I run through a memorized mental checklist. It isn't really hard to remember things any more - I guess Bible College does that to you. I go through the list forwards, then backwards, then randomly. I count my Bible, my ties, my shoes, two times, three times, four times. The TV's off.

I turn it on and start packing. Morning news blares, "High of 72 today, mostly sunny, low tonight 50. Tomorrow, slightly warmer..." Good, sunscreen weather. I wish I had my sunglasses, but they aren't good for these sorts of gigs. I fold my pants carefully because I hate bothering Steve for his iron, though I know I will have to anyway. He's a stickler for detail; he'll see the slightest crease in my pants.

I zip up my duffel bags, and I'm ready to go. I glance at my watch, have a few minutes still, so I take out my wallet and count my money. Not much, but I get paid after we leave town, and I have enough until then. I check my hair in the mirror. I don't like this hairdo, but ever since I jumped on with Steve it's been this way. I arrange, re-arrange it. I shake my head slightly, messing my hair up, and then straighten it again. A knock at the door.

Steve lets himself in. "Ready to go, Tim?"

"Yeah," I say, turning off the TV. I grab my stuff and follow him out into the sun. The light blinds me. I follow Steve to the vans.

"Lisa's sick today, Tim," Steve says, "so Beth will be your wife today. My kids will become your kids. I'll stand on my own."

I nod. I don't like Beth much. I don't really like Lisa either. We graduated from Bible College at the same time and joined with Steve at the same time. She's nice and all, but there's just something about her that bothers me. She's a dog in some ways, so whimpering, so submissive.

Steve checks us out, and I start packing the vans. Beth walks up with her bags, Lisa follows, but the kids carry her things. They hand me the bags. "Thanks, Jeff and Jenny." The twins run back to the room. "How are you feeling, Lisa?"

She moans, "All right, I guess," she says quietly.

"What's wrong?"

"Just queasy, I guess," she walks to one of the vans, opens a door and sinks into a seat.

"What are you going to do today, if you're not going to help us out?"

"I'll just hang out in the Union, watch and stuff." I hadn't noticed she was wearing her normal clothes, jeans and a T-shirt, without the headband or head covering she usually would wear to a gig. I'm not quite used to the uniform. "Steve doesn't mind too much. I owe Beth." I nod.

Steve comes back, his keys dangling. He tosses a set to me. I hate how he doesn't let me just keep the keys to the van. "There you go, bud," he says, slipping on a pair of sunglasses. We pile into our respective vans. Driving, I follow him out onto the street, to the university we're preaching at today.

Lisa sits idly next to me in the van, occasionally sighing dramatically to emphasize her discomfort. I'm tempted to ask her what exactly is wrong. But I know what it is.

We hit the highway and head into downtown. I scratch at my beard. I hate facial hair. I glance at myself in the mirror. Being blond, it doesn't grow in very heavily or consistently, and it itches horribly. Steve's orders, though. I suppose it will make me look older, which is good I guess, seeing as how I'm not much older than the

crowds I'm preaching to. But I hate it.

Lisa taps at the window. A nervous habit, all the way from Portland she's been tapping that window. I don't say anything. The tapping means she will. I wait for it.

"Do you ever regret joining Steve?" she asks. I'm quiet for a moment.

"I don't know," I shrug. "I don't think about it much. It's what I do, is all."

She looks out her window, tapping. "I wish I didn't join him. I hate this. I hate all the yelling."

"I just don't listen." She is quiet. "I mean, that's all. You have it easy anyway, Lisa; you just have to look supportive and bring me water. What do they do to you?"

She sighs. "Oh, I don't know, I just don't like it." She really makes me angry sometimes. What does she have to do? And that tapping! Let her try standing up and talking for hours under the sun, the same tired arguments over and over, the same students sitting around and calling you a hypocrite when you're just doing your job, but

you can't say that, because it's part of your job not to! I stay silent, not wanting to break the uneasy truce we've implicitly drawn.

Ahead, Steve signals a left turn, and I do likewise. The city engulfs us and we find campus. We drive another several blocks before parking, to conceal our identity slightly.

We get out of our vans, Steve walks up and I toss the keys to him. I get into the back of the van and grab my Bible from one of my duffels. Lisa sticks behind while we go forward, Steve and I in front, Beth and the children behind. Steve takes out some sunscreen and takes a dab. He offers me the bottle. I do the same and pass it to Beth. We walk quietly toward the campus.

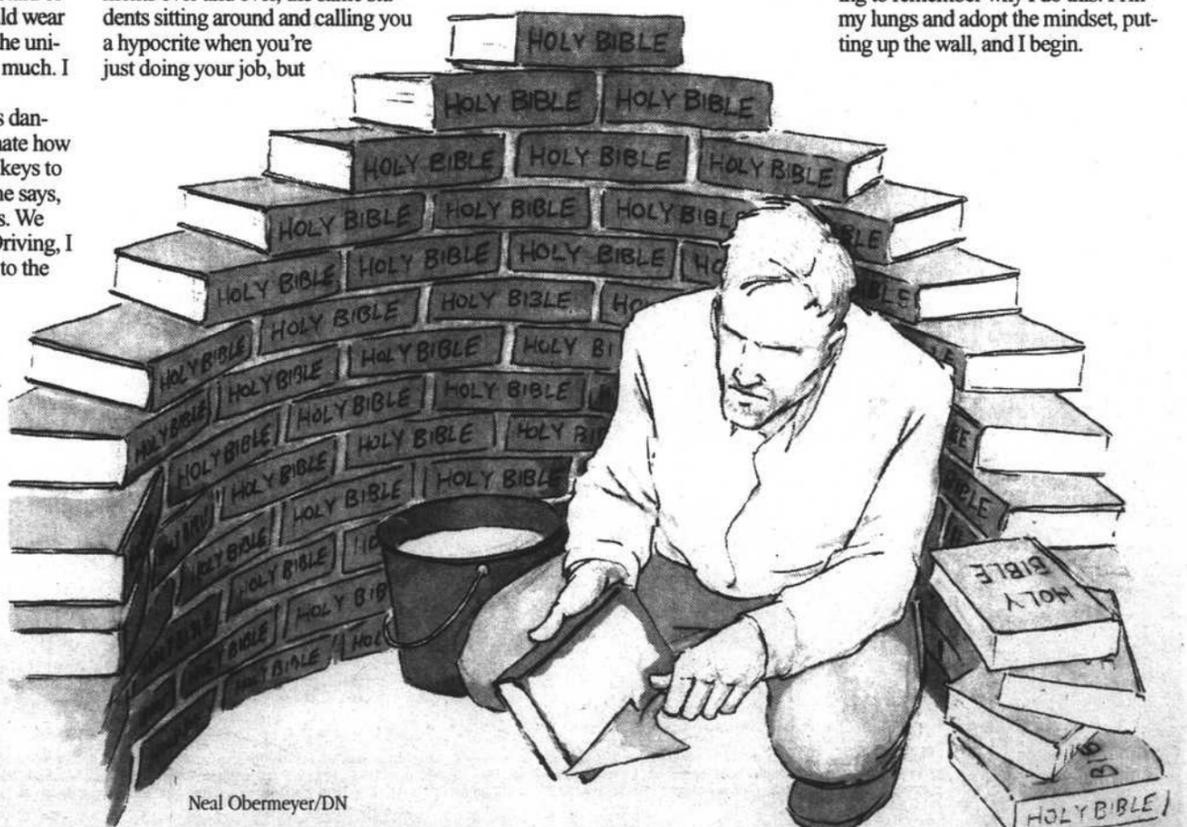
I never can get over how huge these city campuses are. Bible College was just a few buildings, mostly unmarked, in the middle of Portland. I regret joining Steve. He was nice when he recruited us, but I guess I wasn't

thinking long term. Bible College was very aggressive about getting us recruited. I wasn't suited for missionary work, they told me, so I would be best with someone like Steve.

They're probably right, I guess. I don't know these things. I trust them. I love my work, I guess. I don't know if I'm changing things. But Steve says that's not the point. We're not here to change the world. We can't change the world, I guess. We're here to bolster the faithful. That's what it's all about, I guess.

The day's warmth is getting to me. I look up, Steve motions to a bench in front of the Union. I stand on the bench. I look around, a few people are starting to glance at me curiously. Beth and the kids sit down nearby while Steve finds a comfortable distance to do his secondary preaching. I see Lisa in the distance, walking in this direction.

She blends right into the crowd. I grab my Bible a little tighter, trying to remember why I do this. I fill my lungs and adopt the mindset, putting up the wall, and I begin.



Neal Obermeyer/DN

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