

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEWS

The amputee who showed everyone

When he was 4 his mother found him in the kitchen with a knife. He was summoning the nerve to slice off his own fingers. This wasn't because he was crazy but because he was all too sane and understood correctly that the dysfunctional appendages dangling from his misshapen left hand were the source of his physical agony. He wanted relief, however he had to get it.

She stopped but also heeded him, and the very next day she scheduled the operation that she had known he might need. There was no avoiding it anymore. The surgeon cut near the wrist, amputating everything below, and soon the boy returned home to figure out the rest of his life.

He did that by changing exactly nothing about his dreams. He wanted to play football and so he played football, just like his twin brother, except not just like his twin brother, because his brother had an extra tool — an extra hand — that he didn't. No matter. He compensated. He adjusted. What he lacked in reach and grip he made up for in grit and speed.

He impressed many people. He repelled some. When he was 8 the coach of a rival team tried to keep him off the field, first claiming that he had weighed in too heavy for the game and then admitting a different reason. Football, he told the boy, was for people with two hands.

"Like I was defective or something," the boy later recalled. "Like I didn't belong. And that was the moment I realized I was always going to have to prove people wrong."

He kept playing, and grew into a high



FRANK BRUNI
Comment



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

Seattle Seahawks linebacker Shaquem Griffin, left, walks with his twin brother, cornerback Shaquill Griffin, right, following practice June 14, 2018, in Renton, Wash.

school football star in Florida. Kept playing, and became a starting linebacker for the University of Central Florida. Minus one hand, he intercepted balls. Minus one hand, he recovered fumbles. It was something to see, and pro scouts saw it. He was drafted to play linebacker for the Seattle Seahawks this season.

That's Shaquem Griffin's story, and it's a gorgeous, inspiring one when we very much need it. In this rancorous country, we're buffeted more than usual by reminders of humanity at its worst. Griffin is a glimpse of us at our best — of our ability to reframe hardship as challenge, tap extraordinary reserves of determination and achieve not just success but grace.

"It's not some sob story or anything like that," Griffin wrote in an essay in *The Players' Tribune* in March — the same essay where

he remembered being treated as "defective." "It's not even a sad story — at least not to me. It's just my story." He declined to dwell on the cause of his defect: amniotic band syndrome, by which fibrous strands of the amniotic sac wrap around a portion of the developing fetus, strangling development. He focused instead on his response.

His rookie season got off to a rocky start. Many rookie seasons do. In the Seahawks' first game, against the Denver Broncos on Sept. 9, he made mistakes. In the team's second, against the Chicago Bears on Monday night, he sat on the bench.

And that must have been tough, especially in light of how many eyes are on him. Along with Colin Kaepernick and Serena Williams, among others, he was recently chosen by Nike as one of six new "changemakers" for its Just Do It campaign.

He appears in the campaign's glorious "Dream Crazy" commercial.

It's narrated by Kaepernick, who at one point says: "If you have only one hand, don't just watch football. Play it — at the highest level." The images with those words are of Griffin sprinting like lightning, wrestling an opponent to the ground and spreading his asymmetrical arms wide in triumph in the middle of the field.

If that doesn't move you, how about this? That twin of his, Shaquill, refused to go to any college that didn't also want his brother as part of a package deal. They attended UCF together. They hate being apart, and they aren't. Shaquill was also drafted by the Seahawks, to play cornerback.

Shaquem Griffin, 23, understands the power of his example. He welcomes it. "I feel like all the boys and girls out there with birth defects — we have our own little nation, and we've got to support each other," he wrote in *The Players' Tribune*.

Citizens of that nation showed up for the Denver game to watch Griffin's big NFL debut. An article by Robert Klemko in *Sports Illustrated* noted how visibly emotional they were and how they swarmed Griffin's mother, a nurse, who was there, beaming, on the sidelines.

Klemko contemplated Griffin's swelling ranks of fans and the games to come, predicting: "They won't just be amputees, the ones who weep. They'll be mothers and fathers. And nurses too."

And me. I agree with Griffin: This isn't a sad story. But it's most definitely a sob story.

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995 and has ranged broadly across its pages. He has been both a White House correspondent and the chief restaurant critic.

OTHER VIEWS

Government grounds for gobbledygook

By TOM PURCELL

Despite a 2010 law that requires federal agencies to describe rules and regulations in plain language, most government writing is STILL unintelligible. I met with my federal-bureaucrat mole, Deep Gibberish — and his interpreter — for answers.

"When President Obama signed the Plain Writing Act of 2010 into law," I said to Deep Gibberish, "all federal agencies were required to use 'clear government communication that the public can understand and use.' Why do so few do so?"

"Your query poses prospective considerations," said the bureaucrat, "that rise beyond the level of considerations that the voter-taxpayer base may be prepared to ascertain."

"Huh?" I said to his interpreter.

"He said you wouldn't believe him if he told you," the interpreter said.

"Look, content-analysis company Visible Thread found in 2017 that most federal-government websites were in defiance of the Plain Writing Act — still using language that is abstract and unclear," I said.

"Though we comprehend and find favor with those considerations," Deep Gibberish said, "we nonetheless understand that there are arguments in favor of providing the voter-taxpayer base with the previous methods."

"Huh?" I said.

"He said bureaucrats have good reason to use government gobbledygook," the interpreter said.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "Few of our legislators even take time to read the giant bills they pass. Once the bills become law, bureaucrats create rules and regulations using language nobody can comprehend. How can this in any way be good?"

"According to baseline assessments," Deep Gibberish replied, "current employment rates would be adversely affected by changes resulting from actions directed by, but not intended to result in, jargon easily understood by citizens."

"Huh?" I said.

"He said millions of lawyers,

accountants and others make good livings helping their clients comprehend confusing federal language," the interpreter said.

"He also said that if average citizens really knew what government is doing, they'd be livid."

"You're going to have to explain," I told Deep Gibberish.

"Well," he said, "lawmakers and their aides are often persuaded, at the behest of revenue-generating entities, to apply lawyerly terminology to obfuscate clarity in a manner that benefits their outcome."

"He said bills are written in confusing language, in part, to conceal the special favors politicians slip in for their buddies," the interpreter said.

"That's why plain language is so important!" I said.

"The public, however, notwithstanding the active voter-taxpayer base, may or may not acquiesce," Deep Gibberish said.

"He said 'blah, blah, blah,'" said the interpreter.

"Look," I said. "The Regulatory Review reports that the Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS), an independent federal agency tasked with improving federal agencies, recently approved a 'Plain Language in Regulatory Drafting' recommendation. ACUS understands that plain language is essential to increasing public participation in policymaking."

"The public may or may not entertain its desired resolve," Deep Gibberish said.

"He said 'blah, blah, blah,'" the interpreter said.

"The need for clear language is perfectly clear to me," I said. "In a well-functioning republic, citizens must know what their government is up to. Rules, regulations, requirements, forms, letters, etc., must be understandable! It's the law! Now what do you say to that?"

"Are you nuts, pal?" Deep Gibberish replied. "Without government gobbledygook, how are my interpreter and I going to keep earning six-figure government salaries?"

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist for the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*.



YOUR VIEWS

McLeod-Skinner will hold Big Pharma accountable

Many residents of Eastern Oregon are excited about candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner, who is running for Congress in Oregon's 2nd Congressional District. Jamie is committed to ensuring affordable health care, including mental health care, for all Oregonians. Most of us over 40 have had at least some medical issues, and Jamie knows that we should not be denied health care coverage or overcharged for that coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

Jamie's opponent, Greg Walden, has repeatedly voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act with no viable replacement in mind. That would mean Oregonians with pre-existing conditions or mental health issues could once again be denied health care coverage. Walden has voted to repeal the ACA despite the fact that more than 129,000 low-income working residents of his rural district have been able to obtain affordable health care coverage for the first time since the ACA was passed. Walden voted to repeal the ACA despite the fact that

it has created 2,500 new health care jobs in rural Eastern Oregon.

According to his website, Walden has accepted \$411,700 in campaign contributions from pharmaceutical companies. Do you really think Walden will work to reduce the cost of prescription medications or hold Big Pharma accountable for large price increases after accepting that much money in campaign contributions?

Oregon's 2nd Congressional District covers a large, mostly rural area. Our district needs a representative who will hold Big Pharma accountable. Our district needs a representative who will fight for the right for all Americans, including those working at jobs that do not provide health care coverage, to have access to affordable, comprehensive, high quality health care. Jamie McLeod-Skinner is that person.

I urge you to vote in the upcoming mid-term elections, and I urge you to vote for Jamie McLeod-Skinner for Congress. It's time for our district to have a representative who will work for rural Oregonians.

Karen King
Pendleton

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