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Jewish grandfather's baptism as Mormon offers writer a new perspective. **PAGE 4**

Our national security is jeopardized by an addiction to foreign oil, trade imbalances and a culture of excessive debt.

# America, addicted

By Frank Schell

**W**hat would happen if instead of delivering canned speeches, the presidential candidates volunteered to take a truth serum and then talked freely about the dangers our country faces?

They would tell us the threat to our national security comes not just from Iranian missiles, Russian tanks or fanatical Islamist hijackers attacking the symbols of American power.

They would tell us that our national security is jeopardized by an addiction to foreign oil, trade imbalances and a culture of excessive debt. And what they would tell us might go like this:

The United States transfers \$700 billion a year to foreign oil producers. Because some producers are hostile to American interests or have values inimical to our own, our country is dependent upon authoritarian regimes whose people despise their own leaders—figures we, for the most part, support.

In this way, our country is not being true to its values of life and liberty. The world will therefore resent us and think we are hypocrites—and some will attack us and our interests, as we have seen. We will have no moral authority. Whether we like it or not, fairly or unfairly, the world expects a higher standard from America.

Energy independence cannot be achieved in two presidential terms. I don't know who said it could, but that was a ridiculous statement.

Beyond debate is that we must look for alternative sources and cut consumption. We must become less reliant on authoritarian or hostile regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Russia and Venezuela.

People who want to develop more solar and wind power and ethanol are right. Those contributions, though small, are needed as part of a total effort.

But that effort also means more nuclear power, which has the scale to reduce reliance on foreign oil by a lot. And it means drilling in Arctic lands and exploiting our coal reser-

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*Frank Schell, a former banker specializing in trade and risk management, is a member of the Dean's International Council of the Harris School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago.*



## How time warps our memories

By Amy Nathan

Of all the stimuli bombarding my teenage children, how much do I need to watch out for? The MySpace friends? The Facebook wall? Reality television or the "explicit" downloaded lyrics? Twenty-five years from now, which of these will have had a lasting impact on my kids?

Based on a recent revisit to the days of my youth, I will put my money on: not much. I saw "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" dozens of times as a teenager. But when I just saw it again at age 44, I did not even remember the premise.

"A 1975 musical comedy film that parodies science fiction and horror films," is how Wikipedia describes "Rocky Horror."

I say it's about a group of transsexual aliens in which one character kills another before serving him up for dinner.

I also say it will be a long time before I eat meatloaf again.

I'm relieved that my seeing this as a 17-year-old had no lasting ill effect. But realizing this also toys with my belief that violent movies, lyrics and television shows stay with us or even breed violence.

"Rocky Horror" is more graphically violent, sexually explicit and poorly made than any movie, television show or downloaded song enjoyed by my 16-year-old son, Zachary. (Well, any that I know of.)

Yet the horror of "Rocky Horror" is not what pops to mind when I think of my nights in the theater surrounded by friends carrying bags of props. I forgot all about the axes and space-ships, but the dance steps and silly lyrics are lodged in memory. And though I often can't remember what I had for breakfast, I didn't miss a beat that night when it came time to fling rice, toss toast or hold a newspaper over my head.

With every scene, memories flooded back—memories of spending fun time with my friends. There was no message, and it was the good stuff that stuck with me.

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*Amy Nathan is a writer in Flossmoor.*

## Editor's note

Perspective will not appear next Sunday but will resume publication on Oct. 5, when it moves into the main section. Send comments to:

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Tribune illustration by Mike Miner

# Bridging a Jewish-Mormon rift

## Grandpa's baptism opens door

By Manya A. Brachear

Grandpa's arms always offered the warmest embrace. But he had an iron fist when it came to being Jewish. Having watched his parents shun his brother Al for marrying a non-Jew, Grandpa didn't marry my Christian grandmother until she had converted to Judaism. Later, my grandfather insisted that a rabbi marry my mom and dad. And he boycotted his sons' weddings when they both married Catholics.

So imagine the shock when I learned that my late grandfather had been posthumously baptized a Mormon.

The news revealed nothing about my grandfather. After all, the baptism wasn't his idea. Instead, it opened my eyes to the role of free will in the belief system of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly called the Mormon Church.

And it gave me a new perspective on a dilemma that generations ago nearly tore my family apart. For years, the "Mormon side" of the family had been no more than shadowy characters in our genealogical soap opera. The "Mormon cousins," as they came to be known, were the descendants of my great-uncle Al, who for years supposedly did not speak to his family because of the Christian woman he chose to be his wife.

The whole saga served as a cautionary tale for many of us about placing religious allegiance above family. Moral of the story: Family came first.

Eventually, my great-grandfather made amends with his son Al. But this was late in life, and by this time even my great-uncle had become a grandfather himself. There was something else: Uncle Al had found Mormonism. And so, another faith entered the clan, a faith that valued family and welcomed new converts with open arms.

When I finally met my

great-uncle and cousins four years ago, I knew we were related just from the same quirky sense of humor we shared.

We had the same family stories, too, even some of the same photos in the family albums. And it was while flipping through those albums filled with family trees that I learned the news. Next to the names of my grandmother and grandfather were dates of their births, their deaths and their baptisms.

My cousins don't archive family history for only sentimental reasons. They do so for a theological purpose. The Mormon Church calls on its members to pour their energies into the salvation of all people—including those no longer on earth.

To make sure every human being has a chance to reunite with God and family in heaven, Mormons baptize the dead by proxy, a practice my cousin describes as a sacred "power of attorney."

Mormons trace their unique custom of baptizing the dead to the New Testament. In one of his letters to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul wrote: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

The verse confuses a lot of Catholics and Protestants. But for Mormons it makes perfect sense. They believe Christianity's intent was restored through their church in 1830. They also



Tribune illustration by Mike Miner

believe God would not deny that good news to previous generations. So to be fair, everyone should get another chance in the next life to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that offer is proffered through baptism.

My cousins say they have lost count of how many posthumous baptisms they have performed, estimating the number to be in the hundreds. The church tracks them in the International Genealogical Index, a database of more than 700 million names that includes celebrities, popes and dictators.

It also lists Holocaust victims, which has led to no shortage of tension between Mormons and Jews. In 1995, Mormons responded to protests from the Jewish community by promising to stop

posthumously baptizing Jews without the consent of their family members. In 2004, the church promised to remove the names of Holocaust victims who had been added to the index without consent from their relatives. For many Jews, posthumous baptisms evoke thousands of forced conversions during pogroms and the Holocaust. It's one thing to offer prayers for someone. It's quite another to seemingly seal their fate without consent.

But Mormons contend that proxy baptism doesn't automatically make a person Mormon. As my cousins explained, the baptisms simply give my grandparents a choice.

Choice is a central tenet to the Mormon faith. They believe God chose to send his spiritual children to earth to

exercise free will by enduring the test of mortality. That freedom or ability to choose does not end when people die.

Even if people in the spirit world no longer have flesh and blood, they still possess the same ego, personality and intellect, which means Grandma and Grandpa "can turn up their noses at this if they want," my cousin said. Because Mormons believe baptism and other sacred rites are required to enter the kingdom of heaven, they perform the rites by proxy "just in case."

I imagined my grandfather downright mad at the arrogance of presuming he would abandon what he had devoted his life to preserving. But when I told my mother about the baptism and braced myself for a flood

of emotions, she surprised me. "Mom and Dad felt that any blessings bestowed upon them . . . long distance couldn't hurt a thing," she said.

Turns out, according to my cousins, my grandfather remained close to his brother regardless of the family tumult. He lent his brother the car and cash he needed to marry. And he helped put some of Al's grandchildren through medical school.

No matter how stubborn my grandfather continued to be with his own children, he always regretted the way his brother had been treated and tried to make up for it until his dying day.

My cousin said the baptism was done out of love, as a way to honor my grandparents. "It is the epitome of not forgetting somebody," he said.

It does come down to choice. We have the freedom to choose whether religion will unite us or divide us. In the past, my family chose to let it divide. Faced with this revelation, I now realize how torn they must have been. Still, I choose to learn from that mistake and appreciate my cousins' gesture.

Heeding that lesson, to me, is the epitome of not forgetting.

Tribune reporter Manya A. Brachear covers religion.

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Letters in shaded boxes spell 'Kerry Wood'

## ADDICTED

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ves, the largest in the world.

Over the years, we have foolishly allowed vested interests to block the energy needs of the largest economy in the world. Some countries in Europe produce more than half their energy from nuclear power. Why can't we? Amazingly, we have a secretary of energy hardly anyone can name. That says it all.

Our national security is also jeopardized by something bland and boring: accounting entries. The potential problems are caused by large trade imbalances and resulting holdings by foreigners of U.S. dollar Treasury debt.

Our country consumes too much, buying more goods from abroad than we sell by more than \$700 billion a year. One result of this is that foreign central banks buy more U.S. treasury bills, notes and bonds.

This helps keep interest rates low, so homeowners and buyers have easier mortgages. But it results in foreign governments—China, Japan and Russia—having influence over our monetary policy.

This transfer of wealth to

foreigners has resulted in what is known in risk management as an undue concentration. No treasury wants to obtain funding from just a few sources; the goal is to diversify across institutions and geographies. But an undue concentration is exactly what is happening now.

If those countries sold large U.S. dollar reserves, they could inflict massive pain on us and chaos on world markets.

Look at China, which holds \$1 trillion of U.S. instruments. What if Beijing decided to sell much of that abruptly? If such an action caused a 30 percent decline in the value of the U.S. dollar, there would be monetary mayhem.

Yes, China would suffer damage to the value of its own reserves. But all conflicts have costs. If the United States can spend \$600 billion to support a new Iraq, the Chinese can afford \$300 billion to bankrupt an old superpower, destroy American standing and seize American assets.

Finally, our national security is imperiled by excessive use of debt. As with mortgages, consumer debt becomes securitized and sold to investors all over the

world. And cheap financing has enabled many highly leveraged transactions in the corporate sector.

But the use of debt, while it can improve return on equity, can be excessive and dangerous when there is a contraction in asset values or revenue. Seen in national terms, unsound and aggressive lending practices have put our banking system at risk in a way not seen since the 1930s.

In recent days, we have seen a terrible reckoning brought about by financial excess and insufficient controls on a systemic basis, resulting in failures, government intervention and mergers of some of America's leading financial institutions.

The government cannot solve all problems, but it can lead by example to encourage development of alternative sources of energy, more savings and less consumption.

I do not know all the answers to our problems. No one does, and anyone who says they do is a fool. But as president, I can help us find solutions, and I can direct others to do so.

Thank you and good night. Now please pass the truth serum to my opponent.

just wasn't appropriate. There were times I scoured the Internet to research why something was rated PG-13 or whether an R movie was OK for my 16-year-old to see. I looked for things that I thought would have a negative impact on him not just at the moment but perhaps for years to come.

Looking into Zachary's future, I think it's likely that the boons in technology, the price of gas, the historic 2008 election all may be hazy. But so will the messages on his Facebook wall and the names of his MySpace friends.

I'm relieved. This doesn't mean I'll stop watching and listening and checking e-mail accounts. It merely means I might take a deep breath and stop worrying—just for a minute.

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## ROCKY

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After all these years, I learned a lesson while doing "The Time Warp." I learned that I might need to lighten up.

When Zachary goes to see horror films, some toilet-humor comedy or "Dark Knight" over and over again, it's like his own "Rocky Horror." At 16, being with friends can make anything fun. The same thing is true at 44. And that alone is what makes it meaningful and memorable. It doesn't have to be deeper than that.

My recent "Rocky Horror" adventure ended long before midnight. Zachary was watching TV and waiting up for me. I enjoyed the role reversal more than anything else. I had relived a bit of my youth and was eager to share my horror, and my joy.

"Do you know what I saw tonight?" I asked. "Rocky Horror."

"Rocky what?" he asked.

"Rocky Horror," I repeated. "Didn't you ever hear of 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show?'"

"No."

Strangely, I was disappointed.

"It was a cult thing in high school."

"You were in a cult in high school?"

"No, I wasn't in a cult. It's a movie," I said. "You had to be there. I mean, 30 years ago you had to be there."

What echoed in my head as we talked were all the times he had said, "It's just a song, Mom" when I looked over what he downloaded to his iPod.

I recalled every time I turned off the television when a kid walked into the room because prime time TV

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