

FRAN AND SARAH AND BRISTOL (AND JAKE AND TODD AND LEVI)
Written in anticipation of Sarah Palin's address at the Republican Convention

It should come as no surprise to our friends and family, that Fran and I feel a real empathy with the Republican vice presidential nominee, Sarah Palin, and her daughter Bristol. It was 27 years ago that Fran found herself in the same position as dear Bristol—pregnant and unmarried. Of course Bristol is 17 and Fran was 45, but the circumstances were the same. And I, like Levi, faced the prospect of acknowledging to the world that I was the father, and that I would do the honorable thing and marry the mother of my child. There is, however, a confusing blurring as we compare Sarah Heath Palin and Todd Palin (and Levi Johnston) with Fran Morrill Schlitt and Jacob Schlitt.

First, here is Sarah at 44, the Governor of Alaska, and the mother of five. She is a year younger than Fran was when Fran, like Sarah's 17 year old daughter, was pregnant, and unmarried

Fran, like Sarah, was sure that she could have it all. Fran was born in Auburn, Maine and came to Boston as a child. She was a bright youngster, active in Young Israel. When her father ran a seven-day-a-week grocery store, Fran's job was to collect the money that his customers owed. She went on to Brandeis University where she majored in Sociology and was elected Secretary of the Student Council, and graduated in 1957. Fran received her MSW from Boston University, became a highly respected LICSW (licensed social worker), very attractive (with glasses), a political activist (Democratic Socialist of America), gourmet cook, involved in Jewish community, and on the board of her condominium.

Sarah was born in Sandpoint, Idaho, and came to Wasilla, Alaska as an infant. As a child, she would go moose hunting with her father. In high school, Sarah was the head of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and led her basketball team in prayer before games. In 1984, she won the Miss Wasilla beauty contest, and came in second in the Miss Alaska Pageant. Sarah graduated from the University of Idaho, majoring in communications and journalism. At 24, she eloped with her high school sweetheart Todd Palin, a commercial fisherman, an oil field production operator and member of the United Steelworkers, who had also been a member of the Alaska Independence Party. They have five children with very interesting names: Track, Bristol, Willow, Piper and Trig. I don't know if they are named after anyone in either the Heath or Palin families. Sarah served on the Wasilla City Council from 1992 to 1996, was Mayor from 1996 to 2002, ran unsuccessfully for Alaska's lieutenant governor in 2002, and was elected governor in 2006.

I am not sure how I should compare myself to Todd and/or Levi. I once applied for a job with the United Steelworkers, and when the family vacationed near water, I would do a little fishing, but I seldom caught anything. I was once stopped for speeding, but never for DUI. I was never on any school athletic team, though I was the assistant manager of the CCNY football team for one term. Bristol's "bashert" Levi Johnston, is known as "sex on skates" and is on the Wasilla high school hockey team even though he does not

attend. He is home schooled. I only hope that Bristol and Levi have as nice a wedding as Fran and I did, and that their baby will be as terrific as ours turned out to be.

Fran and I will be listening eagerly to (and watching) Sarah's acceptance speech this evening. We realize that she is the choice of the Republican Party's social conservatives and the Evangelicals. (John McCain really wanted Joe Lieberman but he couldn't get the Right's "Hechsher.") Yes, Sarah is pro-life and for teaching creationism, and a member of NRA, and against gay marriage, and has no foreign policy experience, but as Cindy McCain noted, "Alaska is the closest part of our continent to Russia."

I am sure Sarah will make a great speech. She is a very attractive woman. I look forward to seeing her family on stage, but what will they do with Levi?. Will they keep him under wraps the way Martin Morrill tried to keep me under wraps? He also used to take Fran up the back way in his apartment house when his pregnant daughter came to visit, so the neighbors shouldn't see. After we got married, he couldn't have been prouder.

Fran and I wish Sarah and Todd, and Bristol and Levi, and Mr. And Mrs. Johnston a hearty Mazel Tov!

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