

# Leap of faith

## Unexpected conversation resolves rift between sisters



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On Monday, I walked by the union. Okay, let me rephrase. I walked by the union and was struck. Not by something tangible, mind you, but an image.

A guy was standing outside with a huge cross, preaching to a mostly uncaring group of students. I just went by, as I normally would, not paying too much attention to his exact words. I'm sure he figured I was just another deaf passer-by whose soul needed some saving.

If that's what he was thinking, he was mistaken.

His being there set off a series of reactions inside my brain that had been waiting to be ignited for quite some time.

I started thinking about the time my dad told me I would make a good pastor. (A pulpit's just not the same thing as a stage, though.) I thought about how, as a Lutheran, I'm supposed to be spreading God's word. (I'd be too embarrassed to attempt what this guy was doing — thank God he was around to do the job.) I thought about how my two sisters don't care

about any of this.

To borrow from Sesame Street, one of these things is not like the others.

My sisters, Amy and Kristen, aren't into religion. Amy hates going to church. She says she doesn't get anything out of it and she doesn't understand it. Kris doesn't hate it necessarily, but she's just kind of apathetic.

The kicker is that this has bugged me for a really long time.

For three people who were raised in the same environment, why would the two of them have such a different view from me? How could something like a church service move me to tears, but at the same time leave them completely unaffected?

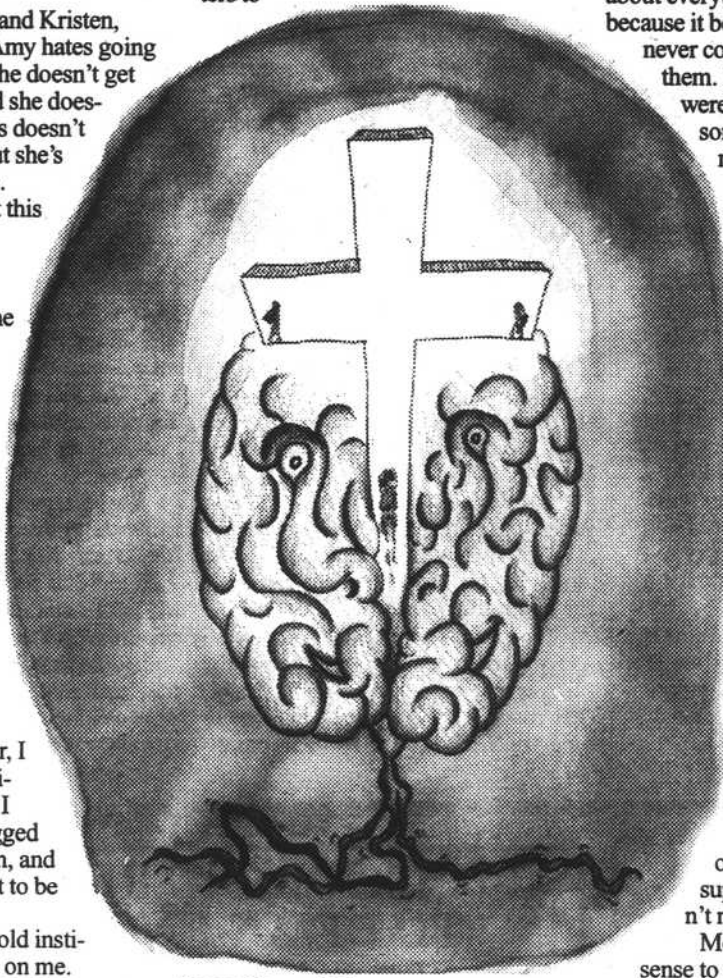
In my mind, it didn't make any sense.

Prior to the summer of my senior year, I shared my sisters' attitude toward religion. I didn't like being dragged to church by my mom, and it only felt significant to be there on Easter and Christmas. It was an old institution that felt forced on me.

In the summer of 1994, I went to a national gathering in Atlanta. I was moved, and to sound incredibly cliched, found God. In about three seconds, everything negative I'd ever felt toward church dissipated. It was

unreal, indescribable. No words could do that moment justice.

Once I'd changed, I wanted my sisters to



SHAWN DRAPAL/DN

feel the same way I did. No matter how hard I tried to get across how excited I was, though, they never cared as much as I did.

Even though they didn't know it,

the whole thing had started to cause a rift between us.

I felt like I couldn't talk with them about everything, especially church, because it began to feel as if I could never completely connect with them. It hurt me that they weren't willing to open up to something that meant so much to me. I resented them for that.

It began to make me feel like our union was crumbling, and I'd never be close to them again.

So, I was bitter for awhile and just didn't bring it up.

Then one night while I was home for Thanksgiving, Amy and I started talking about religion on our way to Wal-Mart.

I told her why I had such an amazing time at that national gathering and that I thought she should try to go. I was pretty sure she wouldn't have an argument against it. She did.

She said something like, "Erin, you know I don't get anything out of our church. The stuff we're supposed to believe in doesn't make any sense to me."

Me: So, what does make sense to you?

Her: Native American spirituality.

Me: Really?

Her: Yeah. It feels right to me. It's in every aspect of their lives — the wind, the water, the sun — it's in every-

thing that makes life. It's not a huge deal, it's just there.

I sat in the driver's seat wanting to retort that it wasn't hard for me to see God in those things, and why couldn't she ... but I didn't. I actually listened to what she was telling me.

I realized that night that I've been convinced for a long time that, because she doesn't believe the same thing I do, her opinions aren't as grounded as mine. It was as if what I said mattered more because I'm the devout daughter who goes to church.

Pretty idiotic of me, eh? The talk we had that night is probably the best one we've ever had. Even though I didn't agree with her, it didn't matter. I finally understood her. I don't resent her anymore for not feeling the way I do.

Why I was convinced that my sisters and I have to feel the same way about God, or anything, is beyond me now. My conviction in my faith is enough to keep me faithful, and how they feel about it personally shouldn't affect anything, especially how I feel about them. They know that my love for them isn't based on conditions.

I only wish that I hadn't put that one condition on it for four years.

So the moral of the story, I think, is this: I truly love Kris and Amy because I accept everything about them, not just what I'd decided to pick and choose.

Whether you agree with your family on issues like politics, sex, alcohol or religion is insignificant. What they say matters just as much as what you say. Sounds elementary, but it took me awhile to get it.

Don't find excuses to find fault among those you love.

Life's too short.

# Secure future?

## Social Security card benefits no longer appealing for this generation



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Do you know where your Social Security card is?

Is it in a file at your apartment, in a box at your parents' house, or maybe in your wallet?

If you have it with you, go ahead and pull it out. Take a good look at it. Don't you just feel good about yourself with that reassuring card?

Notice the smooth, clean blue in contrast to the soft, speckled background. See the strong, defined font arching over the top. And the supportive pillars, upholding, encouraging, strengthening our nation.

Looking at that card, aren't you just proud to be an American? Doesn't that number tell you that you're part of a great country? Mom and apple pie, stars and stripes, "America the Beautiful," winning wars, making babies and donating that 7.65 percent each month.

Social Security. Americana. Crap. Sixty years of siphoning needs to end, but Billy Bob Clinton has just assured that Father Government will secure us socially well into the next century.

**Surplus, surplus, surplus!**  
Bubba submitted the budget this

week, that is, the first budget with a surplus in who knows how long, and directed 62 percent of that lovely overflow to the Social Security coffers.

And what better way to spend the country's spare change than to save Social Security, right? Everybody knows that Gen Xers won't have any funds when we hit the rocking chairs, so we might as well start saving up now.

Better yet, let's not only save that extra wad for Social Security, let's invest it, Clinton says. He proposed that we put \$700 billion into the stock market and wait and see what happens. Let me repeat that, *to see what happens*. The Prez suggests playing investment roulette with our cash, but just with the extra chips we have lying around. I don't care if we have enough excess dough to start buying small countries, we shouldn't hire Dean Witter and head to Wall Street.

Okay, so it's apparent we shouldn't risk the surplus on the market, but Social Security isn't hardly a program worth saving, even for us. Especially for us.

### The Raw Deal

In 1935, America's own governmental wizard Franklin Delano Roosevelt began to work his financial magic to save a Depression-stifled America. I'm sure you've heard about many of his "New Deal" works of genius: the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority or maybe the Public Works Administration. Along with these and many other socialistic masterpieces, FDR came up with Social Security.

And who could argue with a name like that? The nation was trying to recover from the economy-killing Depression, and security didn't sound all that bad. The average American naturally responded negatively to hands-off capitalism. Many ignorantly

thought deregulation and too small government was to blame for the struggling economy.

Plus the program wasn't really going to effect *all* of America, or so they thought. FDR stressed the assistance to the disabled and elderly that were without family. But little did John Q. know then that 142 million schmoes like me would be getting bent over each year.

Social Security made Americans in the '30s feel warm and fuzzy about using big government as required charity to help the underprivileged. Unfortunately, most people feel the same way still today.

### Stupid security

Before Stupid Security, how did elderly Americans even survive? Who did they have to support them? How did they pay their bills? Could anyone retire? Did they just sell plasma until they died?

Oh, the horrors of pre-New Deal America. Old men digging ditches and building bridges, old ladies selling themselves on the street! Insanity.

Wait, maybe they just thought a little differently. Maybe they had to use common sense. People could take their earnings and, get ready for this, save! Or even invest. They could do with their money as they pleased. Big Brother wasn't there to put each week's allowance away for us.

And when people felt like retiring after they had saved up enough, (you guessed it) they retired — some at 54, others at 76. Depending on how wisely they had planned financially. They weren't punished for making money, either.

The government's brochure Basic Facts About Social Security says, "There is a clear link between how much a worker pays into the system and how much he or she will get in benefits." I'll show you a clear link.

Come Social Security time, a low-wage earner receives 60 percent of his pre-retirement earnings, average-wage earner receives 42 percent, and an above-average earner receives 26 percent. So just like the tax system, if you make a lot, you're screwed. We're not allowed to benefit from the capitalistic propaganda that we're force-fed, but instead Daddy Guv-guv can donate to the poor for us.

Does anybody think we're getting scammed here? After the bosses kick in their share, 15 percent of our money is being skimmed by the Washington Gangsters. I bet you could think of a few things to use that extra 15 percent on. Your minds are probably filled with visions of Puff Daddy videos and swingers' parties as we speak, dreaming like you won the lottery. Well friends, that jackpot could be yours with a few legal changes.

### Too risky?

I want that money, not because I'm greedy, but because it's mine. I want to be able to make choices and feel the consequences of them. I realize that may scare some of you, but as humans we are supposed to be free thinkers and doers. We were made to make decisions, and benefit or suffer from them. And we need to decide to change this flawed program. We need to privatize.

Lester C. Thurow, former dean of economics at MIT wrote in his *USA Today* column: "There is no room for the privatization of the basic benefit itself. It is simply too risky for the individual."

Well, Les, I know you've got a degree and all, but all signs point to at least partial privatization. The GOP may be split on the issue, and our buddy Al Greenspan might nix fully privatizing it, but there is a national consensus that we should be able to invest if we want. Were Americans

just "too risky" for our first 150 years? Let us at least have the option of investing part of our money ourselves. Just don't let us cry if we make dumb investments.

I want consequences. I want government to give me my money and let me paint the town red. I want to be able to purchase bonds from the nation of Sri Lanka. I want to have the power to buy stock in the RonCo Food Dehydrator. I want to take my chances in emu futures.

I don't want to be the prodigal son if the republic is my father. If I spend my money on wild women and parties, go broke and run back to daddy, I don't want a big hug and a fattened calf. I want a slap in the face and a kick in the butt. I want the responsibility.

Folks, I'll end on a personal note, with a picture of my granddad. He's 73 years old and lives in a tiny house in Hebron. He eats bacon and bean sandwiches, wears a crooked baseball hat with netting in the back and loves Nebraska football. He lost two wives to cancer, has kids that never call and has every right to sit around collecting checks for nothing each month, enjoying his retirement peacefully. He did, after all, pay into the system. But I wish he didn't have to.

Now do I like how he's able to take trips to Vegas to enjoy the cheap buffets and cheesy concerts? Yes. Would I rather have him sit around in a week-old Depend making Christmas ornaments because he didn't save enough during his lifetime? Obviously not.

But wouldn't it be nice if when we got to be like Granddad, we wouldn't have to sit by the mailbox waiting for a check each month. Instead, we could have financial freedom that we earned. Not from giving Uncle Sam a cut each month for a lifetime, but from being responsible citizens who saved our own money.