

Politics/2B  
Crash kills three/4B  
Deaths/4B

NOTE: MY SON'S  
FIRST NAME HAS  
BEEN BLOCKED  
OUT TO  
PRESERVE HIS  
PRIVACY.

# Local News

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Section B

## Divorced couple fights for spiritual custody of son

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In the court of King Solomon, [REDACTED] Roffman's soul might have been divided in two — half to the church of Peter, half to the tribe of Abraham.

The bright-eyed, blond boy might then have grown up inspired by two faiths. Eventually, with the wisdom of Solomon and in his own given time, he would have chosen the path for himself.

But this is the story of a modern American divorce and a fight for the spiritual custody of a six-year-old.

[REDACTED]'s father is Jewish and his mother is Catholic. Divorced in 1980, they had agreed to make the major decisions in the child's life

jointly. Now, driven back to court by their religious differences, each wants sole custody.

In Dade Circuit Court, the Solomon option doesn't always work. In the words of the boy's father, Barry, there can be no such thing as a Catholic Jew. One cannot be created by a judge's decree of joint custody. It simply cannot be.

"If your religion means nothing more than a Hanukkah bush with Christmas lights, OK," Roffman said. "But if you regard the *Echod*, one God, as your only God, and you've got an interfaith marriage, you've got trouble."

[REDACTED] speaks with his father's certainty.

"I don't want to go to church because Jesus was a false prophet,"



Six-year-old [REDACTED] Roffman, left, is caught in middle of a battle between his parents over what religion he will be raised in. The father is Jewish and the mother is Catholic.

he announces. "My mother is making me go against my will."

Nevertheless Roffman, 36, admits [REDACTED] agreed to be baptized as a Catholic this month because, he

says, quoting his son, "'Mommy said she was going to place a shield over my head so I wouldn't go to hell.'"

[REDACTED]'s mother, 29-year-old

Castrillo, refused to be interviewed or respond to anything said by her ex-husband.

In court papers, though, she has expressed herself forcefully.

She portrays her husband of five years as a self-proclaimed prophet who became obsessed with the Jewish faith during the marriage. Now, she claims, he is using religion to drive a wedge between mother and son.

[REDACTED] she says, is subject to "constant and continued pressure" to practice the Jewish faith, and to reject her and her family.

The result, she says, is hostility and resentment.

Roffman does not deny that his son's relations with his mother are strained. [REDACTED] he said, does

deed resent that, three years after the divorce, he is suddenly being taken to catechism class and to church.

"You can say he's brainwashed," Roffman argued. "But the fact is, he's been raised a certain way."

Roffman, a science teacher at Arvida Junior High School in Kendall, was not always the militant Jew that he is today.

Growing up in heavily Jewish Northeast Philadelphia, he says he took his religion for granted. The family had "a good Passover" and celebrated the High Holy Days. His mother packed him off to school with ham sandwiches, and he went to Hebrew school from age nine

Please turn to SON / 2B

**FALSE ALLEGATION**

# Divorced parents battle for son's 'soul'

SON/From 1B

until his *bar mitzvah* at 13. That was it.

His religious studies began again only after he married [redacted] Castrillo, a modeling student he met at a party in Miami in 1975.

Castrillo herself was uninterested in religion, according to Roffman. Born of well-to-do Puerto Rican parents, she had been educated in Florida and Europe. Her concerns were more worldly, he said, and indeed, when she filed for divorce, she stressed what she called Roffman's "financial irresponsibility."

[redacted]'s mother, however, is a committed Catholic. Roffman's tug-of-war over Bobby's soul began with her.

"I'm kind of an intellectually curious guy," Roffman said. "I've always been fascinated by Jesus. She was trying to move me to Christianity and we began a running series of arguments. [redacted] got very tired of it."

Roffman set out to resolve their differences by writing a 200-page book that he came to believe had the potential to heal the divisions between Moslems, Christians and Jews. It is an esoteric work, filled with novel theories based on passages from each religion's holy books. Roffman admits that to complete the book and have it published by a vanity press, he became "perhaps a little overzealous."

"I did sell the house — though we made a profit — and things did get financially tight," he concedes. "But it was an important expression for me."

*The Great Christ Debate* sold no more than a few hundred copies and failed to heal even the divisions under Roffman's own roof.

Mostly, it served to deepen his commitment to Judaism and led him to question — for the first time — the validity of Christianity.

His wife had had enough.

"[He] has incurred debts he cannot pay, has pursued illusory goals at the expense of his family, [and] has attempted to indoctrinate the child" in his beliefs, she said in her petition for divorce in 1979.

Religious questions loomed large in the divorce, but they were not resolved at the time.



Barry Roffman, with his son [redacted]

A state social worker, called in to make a home study for the court, said [redacted] had no objections to [redacted]'s "learning about the Jewish religion, as he is part Jewish." But she also said [redacted] felt that at [redacted]'s age, one faith was enough and that the mother planned to baptize him in the Catholic Church. When he became older, he would be able to choose for himself, she told the social worker, according to her report to the judge.

Roffman agreed: [redacted] could choose his religion later. In the meantime, he insisted, the boy would be raised a Jew. He pointed out that [redacted] had been circumcised eight days after his birth in a religious ceremony, at which the mother agreed he would be raised Jewish. That was the religious agreement, according to Roffman.

Castrillo said in a recent court filing that she had understood the mother's religion, under Jewish law, controlled the child's.

The final judgment in the divorce, signed by Circuit Judge Richard Hickey, did not take up the religious issue. [redacted] was to live at Castrillo's Coral Gables home, but both parents were

given joint custody: Both would share equally in decisions over the boy's care, health, welfare and education.

The arrangement worked well until early this year, Roffman claims. The terms of visitation were enforced loosely, with [redacted] spending three weekends a month at Roffman's townhouse in Homestead. Father and son went to temple Friday nights and to Hebrew school on Sundays at the Homestead Jewish Center, where Roffman also teaches.

In January, the smooth relations came to an end. The reason, Roffman claims in a request for more visiting rights, is that "Robert informed his mother that he saw himself as being Jewish..."

Castrillo responded by asking for sole custody and restricted visitation. She agreed that [redacted] said he saw himself as Jewish. But, she said, he had been going to church with her and enjoying catechism.

While Roffman tried to keep [redacted] from anything other than the Jewish faith, she tried to help him "cope with their divergent beliefs," Castrillo said.

She also asked that he be allowed to have a parochial education at Epiphany School in Southwest Dade.

Her solution is for [redacted] to "participate in the Catholic and Jewish faiths; depending upon with whom he is visiting at the time."

To Roffman, that is no solution at all.

"You cannot be a Jew and kneel down to a son of God. It's simple. I wouldn't even mind if he went to church once in a while, as long as he is not forced to kneel," he says.

At the Dade County Family Mediation Unit, supervisor Marty Nolan has worked out such solutions in the past. "Sometimes it works," he said. "It causes confusion, but when the child gets old enough to make his own decision, he does."

"The problem is that some parents feel they are living in part with something that is alien. They forget that when there are children, a divorce never ends and there is no divorce that does not traumatize."

A hearing on [redacted]'s future is scheduled for April 4.