Like many who had never heard of Chappaquiddick, I was startled to discover that Mitt Romney also had a fatal accident in 1968. (Newswire.net -- April 16, 2018) -- I’m looking forward to seeing the newly released film about Ted Kennedy’s fatal automobile accident off the Chappaquiddick bridge in 1969, where his 28 year old blonde staffer, Mary Jo Kopechne, was killed. Not out of meanness, or ghoulishness (I’ll almost certainly have to look away if they show her slowly dying), but because I hear the young writers who had never heard of Chappaquiddick, last week I was startled to discover, while reading Mitt Romney’s Wikipedia page, that Mitt Romney also had a fatal accident in 1968, where his mission president’s wife, Leona Anderson, was killed while he was driving the mission car through Southern France. “Is this story even real?” I wondered, “And if so, why didn’t I, or absolutely anyone I asked in Utah, ever hear it?” We had closely followed his presidential campaign with hope, prayed for his success, and voted for him in faith, only to be aggrieved at his loss. His 2012 loss to Obama upset me so, I didn’t even turn on Fox News, or pay attention to politics for many months, and I had been a daily Fox News junkie since 9-11.

So out of curiosity, not malice, I went down the research rabbit hole to find out the details about this accident, and emerged a week later with a troubling conclusion how Mitt Romney and his team have been deliberately distorting the truth of what actually happened after the accident for 50 years. I feel compelled to share my factually based conclusions for two reasons: 1. Because I love sharing the truth when I’ve found it, whether those truths be religious, political, or practical, and 2. I see a similar pattern of deception in Romney’s campaign to take Utah’s Senate seat today. Before accusing me of unfairly dredging up an old, horrible, private tragedy, consider this incident is not something Mitt Romney wants buried in the past. Just the opposite! In June 2007, to introduce himself to the nation in preparation for his first run for the U.S. presidency, he worked with the Boston Globe to publish a puff feature article entitled “Touched by Tragedy, a Leader Emerges from a Life of Privilege” in which this 1968 tragedy was the primary focus as a turning point in his life. In 2012, preparing for his second run at the presidency he again worked with Boston Globe writers to produce his biography “The Real Romney” and again chapter 4 "A Brush with Tragedy" is pivotal: taking him from the day before the accident to his decision to join Bain and company.

Some will also accuse me of doing this for personal political gain, since I filed to run for this same Senate race, however I know sharing what I found is going to incur a tidal wave of hateful and accusative comments among my fellow Utah Republicans, and by doing so I am almost assuredly sacrificing any chance I had to be chosen in the coming state delegate convention.

I’ll start with the few indisputable facts about the tragic accident, compare what happened at Beaulac to what happened at Chappaquiddick (Spoiler alert: Mitt was NOT, I repeat, was NOT responsible for the death of his mission president’s wife), then the problems with Romney’s contrived narrative after the accident, and finish with how it is relevant to Mitt Romney’s campaign today.
The tragic accident occurred on Father's Day, June 16, 1968 while Mitt Romney’s father, George, then governor of Michigan, was a leading Republican candidate for President of the United States. In the Bordeaux Region of France, Mitt was driving one of the French mission cars, a Citroen DS 21 designed for 5 passengers, with six adults crammed inside. Between his mission president, Duane Anderson (a physically large man), in the passenger seat, and Mitt, was the mission president’s wife, Leola Anderson, taking a good part of each front bucket seat, and without a seatbelt. In the back seat were Bertin Farel, President of the Bordeaux district and his wife, Suzanne, and Mitt’s companion, David Wood.

Mitt was driving north on N254, Le Grand Route, through the small village of Beaulac, when just past the intersection of La Rue Postal, he collided head on with a Mercedes 180 sedan. Andre Salarnier, an LDS member from Bordeaux, quickly came to the aid of the traumatized group, and took a picture of the two cars involved in the accident. From the picture you can easily see how the unfortunate passenger without a seatbelt in the middle of the two front seats, made a hole going through the windshield which surely contributed to her death.

Here is how what happened at Beaulac is completely different from what happened at Chappaquiddick. Ted Kennedy
may have been driving drunk - Mitt Romney certainly was not. Ted Kennedy might have been able to save the life of Mary Jo Kopechne after the accident, and could therefore be considered responsible for her death - Leona Anderson died in the accident because she was the sixth person riding in a car designed to carry only five safely. The mission president, who was also in the car, had ultimate authority and therefore responsibility for the fatal decision to overfill the car, not Mitt Romney. Ted Kennedy was surely driving recklessly, whether inebriated or not, when he drove off the bridge - Mitt Romney had just stopped a few minutes previous to his accident to help pick debris of the road from another car crash, and everyone in the car was spooked, and talking about how dangerous it was to drive in France, so Mitt was driving as cautiously as he was capable of, when he should have slowed down as he passed through the village of Beaulac.

Here is what is similar. Both Ted Kennedy and Mitt Romney were scions of very wealthy, very politically powerful families, and what happened after both accidents was similar. Once informed his son had been injured in a serious car accident, and his mission president's wife had also been killed in this accident while Mitt was driving, George Romney makes a phone call to Sargent Shriver, then serving as U.S. ambassador to France, who is the first family friend to get to Mitt Romney after the accident.

Sargent Shriver behind Robert and Jacqueline Kennedy at JFK's funeral

Who is Sargent Shriver? A favorite of Papa Joe Kennedy, he was brought inside the Kennedy clan since soon after WWII, and in 1953 married Eunice Kennedy, sister of John F., Robert and Ted Kennedy. You probably have heard of his daughter, Maria Shriver who was married to Arnold Schwarzenegger. Sargent Shriver is also portrayed by David DeBeck in the newly released film “Chappaquiddick” as one of the Kennedy Clan Fixers who gather in 1969 to take control of Ted Kennedy’s tragic accident by preventing a proper police investigation, avoiding normal court procedure, and manipulating the narrative of the accident to create public sympathy for Ted.

It is after Mitt’s meeting with this highly experienced Kennedy scandal fixer that descriptions of the accident by Romney and his team just don’t match the facts about the accident, and these many discrepancies always serve two purposes: to lay blame on the other driver, and to draw sympathy for Mitt.

Here are the inconsistencies I have been able to corroborate. - I left out many more damning inconsistencies, than I put in this article because I could not confirm them true from original or reliable sources - other researchers into this incident have complained that many original sources were scrubbed from the internet as soon as they were cited, and I couldn’t find any original sources after Mitt Romney’s decision to run for President in 2007.
Mitt Romney's wikipedia page, which is closely monitored and corrected by the Romney campaign, states about the accident "he was in southern France and driving an automobile that was hit by another vehicle". Well that sounds like Mitt’s car was hit from the side or back, but in reality it was a direct head on collision, so they hit each other, and exactly who was at fault is very much in contention. No one in the Citroen DS that day blames Mitt. But Ann Romney on ABC’s “The View” said “He went on a mission for two and a half years years… and during that time I was of course dating other people, and having fun… and I think that really kind of hurt him a lot, nearly put him, I think it really did put him in the hospital when he was in France.” The only time Mitt is known to have been hospitalized in France is after the tragic car accident, and Ann seems to think it had to do with him being distracted over her dating others.

The Romney team have sometimes told the press that the accident took place on a curving “mountain road”, but it did not. It took place on the relatively flat farmland, of Bordeaux. The Romney team also fails to mention the accident took place on an extremely tricky section of N254, Le Grand Route, that suddenly changes character as this highway passes through the tiny village called Beaulac. There were two tight curves at either end of the village to slow down traffic - the french often use obstacles instead of posted speed reductions to slow traffic. Between the two curves the road expands from two lanes to three to accommodate a southbound left turn lane for the intersection of La Rue Postal - When I use the word “lanes” you should know that in the 1960’s the French rarely painted lines on the roads to clearly define the lanes. The point being the Romney team never includes in it’s narrative how particularly challenging the section of road was where the accident occured, because in a head on collision someone has got to be in the wrong lane, going the wrong way, at the wrong time. Which driver was it likely to be?

Driver A: is a young missionary with limited driving experience in America and less on French roads. It's the end of a long day, trying to diffuse big trouble in a little church branch in Pau. He is driving a goofy Citroen DS designed to entirely eliminate any road feel, with a super weird steering wheel, and a brake button instead of pedal, (Citroen advised this car was so unique, it was unsafe to drive in traffic without at least 50 hours of practice). There are three adults sharing the two front bucket seats, so he is not even seated properly, or comfortably, in front of the controls. He has never been on this road, seen or negotiated this particularly tricky section before, or even knows this challenge is coming up. In most accounts there is also a truck in front of him obscuring his vision just before the head on collision. The six people jammed in the car are chatting away about how dangerous french roads are, "Literally as we were having that conversation, boom, we were hit. It happened so quickly (that) there was no braking and no honking.” (Boston Globe 2007)
Driver B: is a 46 year old revered Catholic bishop. He has been driving on french roads long before Mitt Romney was born. He is comfortably seated in his parish Mercedes which he has been driving for years. He has his elderly mother next to him and another parishioner in the back seat. They are returning from a short trip where he officiated at the sacrament. He knows this road like the back of his hand, and is particularly aware of the challenging intersection in Beaulac because he has successfully negotiated it many, many times.

My point isn’t that because driver A is so much more likely to be at fault, he must be. My point is if driver A wasn’t at fault, why the all the lies about driver B to make it seem like he was?

Mitt Romney is recorded in a 2007 campaign piece “The Making of Mitt Romney” (which I have transcribed with it's original halting speech patterns) “My recollection was, that he was going approximately 70 miles an hour, and a, uh, and a, came into our lane, um, um, unanticipated, un, unseen, I don’t think there were any skidmarks, um meaning we saw each other so last minute there was no time to break, it was just an immediate head on collision” Whenever Mitt goes on record about the accident, he always uses wiggle room qualifiers like “My recollection was”, as well he should, for it is extremely difficult to accurately judge the speed of an oncoming car, especially when you are not sure of your own speed and you claim to have seen it only an instant before you collided head on.

Mitt has said he was driving the citroen about 50 MPH, which although under the speed limit for La Grand Route, would have been zooming through the S turns meant to slow you down through this little village. However, in Mitt’s own words “I was probably going less than the speed limit, as far as I know”, (New York Times 2007) By using both “probably”, and “as far as I know” in a statement of fact, I’m fairly certain means he is not sure whether he was driving
the speed limit in Beaulac, or not.

However, there is a way to tell how fast the cars were not going. Local police familiar with those cars are sure if they really had hit head on with a combined speed anywhere near 120 MPH no one would have survived, particularly in the Citroen DS which was infamous for self destructing in any accident. The joke was - “what would scratch another car, will total a DS”. Citroen enthusiasts have made an amusing youtube video of it happening over and over again. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/Q7ggwKkEpPA](https://www.youtube.com/embed/Q7ggwKkEpPA)

If, as Mitt stated, he was going 50 mph, then the less than fatal damage to everyone in seat belts in the DS indicates the heavier Mercedes 180 was going considerably slower, as would be consistent with preparing to make a left turn across oncoming traffic.

The Romney team also claimed that several witnesses (unnamed) observed the priest to be obviously drunk, and they “believed” criminal DUI charges were filed against “Albert Marie”, the driver of the Mercedes. They claim you can’t check the records because the small town Bazas police destroy their records every 10 years. However, since there was a death involved, any charge of a homicidal DUI would have gone up to the French national police, whose records are kept permanently in Paris. There were no charges of any kind found filed against the other driver, a priest named “Albert Marie”, or under Albert Marie’s true name that was discovered in 2007.

Whenever the Romney team has told the story of the car crash they always referred to the driver of the Mercedes as “a priest” named “Albert Marie”. In reality the driver of the Mercedes was the highly esteemed Bishop Jean-Félix-Albert-Marie Vilnet, commonly known as “Bishop Jean Vilnet”, who from 1981 to 1987 served as President of the Council of Bishops of France. This was only recently discovered when someone recognized the bishop from a photo the Romney team had claimed to be President Anderson in the Bazas Hospital. This was later confirmed by the photographer and friend of Mitt Romney, Andre Salarnier, who has since been asked by the Romney team not to speak to the press.
So why use only the third and forth middle names of Bishop Jean Vilnet’s full name when making statements to the press? It makes sense while fabricating an unlikely and libelous narrative not to use this highly esteemed Bishop recognizable name, after all, you don’t want this saintly character, who was awarded the French Legion of Honor, to be given a chance to rebut the accusations of drunken reckless speeding. But why use the his actual third and forth middle names, to refer to him like a breadcrumbs to the truth? I don’t think Mitt is comfortable with an all out lie. Every self-serving and misleading statement Mitt and his team have made about this accident it is always based on an element of truth turned into a fiction, and couched in the language of deniability: “My understanding was”, “as I recall”, “the (unnamed) truck driver said”.

The previous misrepresentations all attempted to put the blame squarely on the other driver, but then there is the second half of the what I suspect is Sargent Shriver’s public relations strategy - increase Sympathy for Mitt. Should we believe the Romney team’s various assertions in many news articles and authorized biographies that the accident left him in a coma for 2, 3 or 4 days. Or had he really just “suffered minor head injuries, and torn ligaments in one elbow” as was printed in Leola Anderson’s obituary?
Which is description is supported by this photo of Mitt Romney in the Bazas hospital that the photographer, Andre Salarnier, notes was taken the morning after the accident June 17, 1968.

Was he thrown out of the car? as some accounts have some unnamed witnesses claiming, and then “declared dead” by the policeman who found him by the side of the road, as reported to the Atlantic magazine. Or was he found “pinned between the steering column and the driver’s door”? As is recounted in his Biography “The Real Romney” - which is consistent with his driving while pressed against the door with three people crammed in the two front seats.

What makes these deliberately false, misleading, and incomplete, and always self serving narratives about Mitt’s tragic accident relevant today, are the similarly duplicitous tactics the Romney campaign is using in their attempt to steal the
Utah Senate seat and resurrect his political viability. Mitt’s whole “Bring Utah’s values to Washington” campaign is deliberately nebulous. What are Mitt’s Utah Values? They are whatever you think they should be, and he tries harder than heck, not to reveal any facts that might contradict that, as he mesmerizes you with the brilliant image of him and his family. He refuses to debate the other candidates, or answer questions in open online forums. If you do get a chance to question him at one of his micro managed political events, and dare press him about a particularly disturbing political act in his past, he’ll deflect the question by saying “I look forward” and change the subject. His campaign is counting on Utah voters being so focused on his perfect Mormon Ken doll image that they don’t even think to look at the real political concerns behind that image.

In the Youtube video “The Real Romney?” composed of selected answers in his 1994 debate with Ted Kennedy titled https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9IJJkYUbvl there are many shocking revelations about his true Massachusetts Values (pro abortion, gay scouts, affirmative action) but what riled me most was personal. Both Mitt and I served full time LDS missions in France, and he misrepresented the experience for political purposes; saying “I spent two and a half years, at the early part of my life, living with the poor, and serving with poor”. First of all, his was a proselytizing mission, not a service mission, and second, there are a lot of missions, such as the one my son served in Bolivia (South America's poorest county), that could rightfully be characterized as “living with the poor” but France isn’t one of them. It is ranked the 14th richest country in the world by average income - Higher than the UK, Sweden and Japan! They are wealthy enough to take 8 weeks of paid vacation every year! Almost all the Elders in my French mission, myself included, bought new hand made suits in the Arab quarter because we had to accommodate our expanding waistlines from not being able to avoid the temptation of the worlds best pastries being sold dirt cheap on nearly every block. “Let them eat cake”, indeed! Not to mention that much of Mitt’s mission was spent in the Palatial Paris mission home, eating meals prepared by a private chef, private baths attached to each room, in a building so opulent it was later sold to the United Emirates to use for their embassy.

Poor me, on right, in my bold custom suit I had made after too many patisseries.

Last week the Romney campaign rented the new Hale Center Theater in Sandy for a soft campaign event, “A Conversation with Mitt and Ann” where, Mitt and Ann coyly suggested the only reason that Mitt occasionally gets into political races is because Ann pushes him into it. Really? Mitt was fully engaged in his father’s campaign for Governor,
he took a leave of absence his senior year at BYU to help his mom campaign for the U.S. Senate in Michigan, he stepped down from Bain Capital at the apex of his career to challenge Ted Kennedy for his senate seat, he ran and finally won for governor of Massachusetts, and then he ran twice for the US presidency, before inserting himself in the last election, mocking and vilifying Donald Trump, before and after his nomination as the Republican candidate for President. How much more obvious could it be that Mitt Romney is himself a political animal. That at 71 years old he is desperate to use the people of Utah to turn his political image from Presidential loser to Senate seat winner. So he can challenge Donald Trump for the Presidency in 2020, and tear the Republican party apart once again, in his quest to fulfill his father’s unrealized dream.

The irony is, like other Utahahns, I believe Mitt’s image as an Ideal Mormon husband, father, and grandfather is genuine. But if you love Mitt, you’ll keep him out of politics - before he does more damage than creating the model for Obamacare; enabling Obama to serve a second term by treating the Tea Party Patriots, Fox News, and conservative talk radio hosts like they had cooties throughout his 2012 campaign; and almost succeeding in getting Hillary Clinton elected President by trying harder than Harry Reed to convince America to never vote for Donald Trump.

For more information, or to contact Jeremy Friedbaum, email jeremyfriedbaum@gmail.com