

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**My father is turning ninety this winter, and I thought it would be wonderful to have a surprise birthday party with family and old friends. When I suggested this to my brother, he became enraged. He told me I was “grandstanding” and just trying to be special in my father’s eyes. He said I was selfish because – knowing how fractured our family has been – a party would only make my father feel bad since some of my other brothers and sisters would not be likely to come. “Why stick it in his face?!” he yelled. Do you have any advice? What would you do?**

**-- Laura**

Dear Laura,

Let me begin by telling you one of the many reasons why I love living in the South. Here we have a wonderful custom of being able to say whatever we want about someone, and still keep our karma squeaky clean just by adding three simple words to the end of our opinion: “Bless his heart.” Using this unpretentious linguistic device, we can tear into the very fabric of another’s character, but still remain pleasant and smiling. You get it? Here’s an example: I think your brother is a creep, bless his heart.

Your brother’s overreaction (enraged and yelling!?) suggests to me that he might benefit from working with a therapist (or two, or three). This guy’s got problems. It sounds like he has many unresolved issues about who gets more love and attention from dear old dad. If this is the case, it’s my bet that this is nothing new. But unless your elderly father is Tony Randall or Larry King and your brother is a toddler, he’s had many years to get over his anger and heal his wounds. I’m sorry that he hasn’t done that.

The fact that some of your siblings would not attend your father’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party is a testament to the ‘fractured family’ theory. Geez, has no one in your family (save you) done anything to heal the wounds of the past? But how do fractures ever mend without moving toward each other, instead of away from or against each other? It’s a sad state of affairs that your brothers and sisters can’t move on and find a way to forgive whatever needs to be forgiven. American journalist and member of the Algonquin Wits Franklin P. Adams seems to have been right, unfortunately, when he observed, “To err is human, to forgive, infrequent.” It seems like some members of your family have adapted this notion as a mantra.

Still, you can’t make decisions for your siblings. And I don’t think they would be moved to consider how they are likely to feel when your dad is no longer there to celebrate birthdays. Though you could mention this if you feel up to it. I wonder exactly how many more birthdays they expect him to celebrate at ninety years of age?

Do what you set out to do. Follow your heart and your intuition. Arrange a wonderful gathering of friends and family who want to attend. If it were my call, I would send invitations to all your siblings – even those who will tear up the invitation and curse your very soul. That’s not your problem – it’s theirs. I’m certain that there are other extended family members and friends of the moment and from years gone by who will join you with goodwill and enthusiasm. You have a good idea to want to do something

special for your father so I would get on with the planning post-haste. Have a great party!

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).