

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My friend Jeannie is crazy. She's getting ready to marry Stewart, who lives in New Jersey. Jeannie lives in North Carolina. The crazy part is that they plan to each stay in their present jobs, and have a commuter marriage. I told her she is nuts! This will never work out. But she says she loves him, and feels ready to take this on, and is hurt that I keep telling her to get out of it before it's too late. I've gotten to know Stewart, and he's nice. He loves her a lot, but I can't even imagine that this marriage will work out, because they will only see each other on weekends and vacations. I'm worried. Can you talk some sense into her?

-- Jeannie's good friend

Dear Friend of Jeannie,

At first I thought that you were saying that Jeannie is nuts for marrying a guy from New Jersey. Being originally from New Jersey myself, I was going to take exception and tell you to *Fuggetaboutit* and mind your own beeswax. Now that I realize that you're focusing on the long-distance aspect of this new marriage, I'm afraid I am still going to tell you to take care of your own business, and let your friend take care of hers.

I suspect that you mean well, but Jeannie has to make her own decisions. You would be well advised to celebrate this new direction in her life, instead of second-guessing her future, and criticizing her decision to marry Stewart.

Marriage is always a complex relationship, and being physically apart may present additional challenges, but it is quite possible to have a deep, meaningful, and successful marriage while separated by hundreds of miles. The keys are communication, mutual understanding, trust, and commitment.

Did you know that more than two-and-a-half million American couples have long distance marriages? Add to that number couples who have one partner in the military, and others who travel a great deal to earn their living, and you will quickly see that Jeannie and Stewart's marriage will not be unique.

I have a good friend who decided to go to an Episcopal Seminary to realize his dream of becoming a priest. Rather than move the whole family (they have kids in high school), he and his wife chose to spend the next three years living apart. They spend lots of weekends making the 300-mile drive to spend time together, but they are happy, and their relationship is thriving.

Another good friend is a Naval officer on a submarine. He's gone for six months at a time, and when his boat is underway, he can't even phone or e-mail his wife and kids. In spite of these regular and lengthy separations, his marriage is solid and happy, and has been so for many years.

Since neither Jeannie nor Stewart will be underwater, and they will have modern technology at their fingertips, they will only be a mouse click or a long distance call away from each other. Daily communication is a must.

Jeannie and Stewart should make special time for each other. They should plan trips and fun activities, and make those a high priority in their lives. Letters, small

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soulful gifts, phone calls, e-mails and instant messaging give many opportunities to stay in touch. Who's to say that this arrangement is less romantic, conscious, or sustainable than the couple that lives together, but takes each other for granted, spending endless hours glued to the TV without talking or interacting in any meaningful way?

Admittedly, long distance marriages become even more complicated when children are involved. But – call me a romantic – if they love, trust, and communicate with each other, they will be able to deal successfully with this issue if and when the time comes. As Jeannie's good friend, I'm sure you'll join me in wishing them good luck and Godspeed!

Send your personal coaching questions to 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.