

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

In March, the cliff swallows descend on the old Mission of San Juan Capistrano in California. These tiny birds - having traveled 6,000 miles from winter nesting grounds in Argentina -- are so predictable that you can count on them to arrive on March 19, St. Joseph's Day. Like clockwork, their yearly arrival date -- graced by ringing church bells and hordes of visitors from around the world -- is so certain that newspaper editors leave space in their feature sections for the inevitable photo of the flock's grand entrance. Not to be outdone, Monarch butterflies migrate according to such an expected map and timeframe, that sixth grade science teachers in Kansas or Mexico can be spot on in scheduling their students' field trips to the precise meadows of milkweed where these graceful creatures will rest. Amazingly, they not only fly in masses to the same winter roosts, but often they hang out on the exact same trees. Cue the *Danaus plexippus*!

Here on the Outer Banks, we are gearing up for our own predictable migration on Memorial Day weekend. Not birds or butterflies, but tourists from Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and elsewhere. These folks will not arrive on wing, but rather, in fully-loaded SUV's toting bikes, surfboards, fishing rods, and beach chairs. They will choke our roads and have navigational challenges as they hunt for Cottage S-11 using only periodic and unfamiliar mileposts markers to guide them. They'll line up at our favorite restaurants while we're hiding out at home, eating Lean Cuisine until Labor Day. If we do venture out during the lazy, hazy days of summer, we may discover that -- unbelievably -- they've slurped up all of our favorite She Crab Soup. Some will drink too much and be rude, their children crabby with sand burns and too much sun. One young woman I know was so distressed by the oncoming onslaught that she stuck a "Tourists Go Home" bumper sticker on her car. But, I think that's nuts.

Like it or not, tourists fuel our economy. They stay in our hotels and cottages, eat at our restaurants, shop at our retail stores, and visit our historic landmarks. Everyone I know would be out of work if it weren't for this yearly migration of our northern brethren. The economic reality alone should have every one of us welcoming these strangers with fanfare and a fine "How de do!"

But economics alone don't show the whole picture. Those of us from here and those who have been transplanted here stayed or came for a reason. We love the pristine beauty of the area, the style of life, the welcoming culture of neighbors and friends. We elect to live in harm's way on these fragile barrier islands because the pluses far outweigh the minuses even in the face of natural dangers. Hurricane Isabel, anyone?

Wouldn't we be really creepy and selfish people if we wanted to hoard this beautiful area only for ourselves? When we were little, weren't we all encouraged to share? And isn't generosity a value that we want to honor in our lives and instill in our own children? With so many wonderful places to visit along the East Coast and in spite of gas costing as much as a second mortgage, shouldn't we be flattered and grateful that so many people choose the Outer Banks for their vacation?

I eagerly welcome tourists -- strangers who may become friends -- to swim in our beautiful ocean and sounds, to visit places that illuminate our incredible history, and to dine on the delicious seafood hauled from the waters by our hardworking people. Sure,

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5/24/06

some may be rude, but I've found lots of friendly faces in the crowd that will besiege us. I've seen mannerly children and quiet conversations at tables next to mine at my favorite restaurants. I think we see what we are looking for. If we're looking for meanness or rudeness, it's there. If, instead, we're open to seeing kindness and friendliness, that's there too.

There's a Japanese folktale that makes this point clearly and it goes like this: Long ago in a small, far away village, there was a place known as the House of 1000 Mirrors. A small, happy little dog learned of this place and decided to visit. When he arrived, he bounced happily up the stairs to the doorway of the house. He looked through the doorway with his ears lifted high and his tail wagging as fast as it could. To his great surprise, he found himself staring at 1000 other happy little dogs with their tails wagging just as fast as his. He smiled a great smile, and was answered with 1000 great smiles just as warm and friendly. As he left the House, he thought to himself, "This is a wonderful place. I will come back and visit it often."

In this same village, another little dog, who was not quite as happy as the first one, decided to visit the house. He slowly climbed the stairs and hung his head low as he looked into the door. When he saw the 1000 unfriendly looking dogs staring back at him, he growled at them and was horrified to see 1000 little dogs growling back at him. As he left, he thought to himself, "That is a horrible place, and I will never go back there again."

All the faces in the world are mirrors. What kind of reflections do you see in the faces of the people you meet and the visitors who grace our beaches? If you see what I see, you'll offer your most heartfelt hospitality and be sporting a new bumper sticker: Welcome Tourists! We're Glad You're Here!

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.