

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My mother discovered that my father had been cheating on her for years and they went through a horrible divorce when I was ten years old. After that, my father just disappeared. I haven't seen him since, and I'm almost twenty-two. My mother's second marriage also failed after three years and I haven't seen my stepfather since they broke up. About a year ago, I fell in love with Jonathan and we want to be married in the fall. My mother says she will have nothing to do with the wedding, and that I'm a fool to trust any man. She will barely spend time with Jonathan, so she doesn't know what a sweet and wonderful person he is. We don't want a huge wedding and we're not asking her to pay for it – we're prepared to do that. But it makes me sad that my mother says that she will not even attend.**

**-- Alicia**

Dear Alicia,

It's a shame that your mother is living her life with such bitterness, and encouraging you, also, to close down your heart to the possibility of love. I'm glad you realize that you don't have to follow Mom down this sour path in your own life.

Let your mother know that you love her, and that it would make you happy if she would get to know Jonathan. Tell her that you appreciate her wanting to keep you from having your heart broken as hers was, but that this is not the way you want to live. Just because two men broke your mother's heart, doesn't mean that Jonathan will break yours. That's the worst part of stereotyping – assuming that you can predict what someone will do because of a bad experience you've had with someone else of the same gender, race, age, religion, ethnicity or a thousand other human qualities. What such thinking does is divide people into categories of "them" and "us." Your mother lives her life with the mantra: "All men are untrustworthy cads and will break your heart."

This is simply not true.

Encourage your mother to open her mind and heart, and let her know that you very much want her to participate in your wedding. And that's all you can do. The rest is up to your mother. If she chooses not to attend your wedding, grieve this loss and then go forward and plan a fantastic celebration with other family members and good friends.

The rest of my response is really directed to your mother. So, I say to Alicia's mom (and anyone else reading this who has closed down their life after a devastating loss) Get Over It! Do what you must to grieve and then to heal. Talk with friends or a minister/priest/rabbi. Get professional help from a therapist or counselor. Do whatever you must to heal your wounds and then get on with the business of living a rich and joyful life.

I once read about a wise teacher who was trying to help a woman who also had shut down to love after her heart was broken. The teacher suggested that the woman take a potato for everyone she had refused to forgive in her life, write the name of that person on it, and put it in a plastic bag. Before too long, the sack of potatoes became quite heavy. Then the wise teacher told the woman to carry this bag full of potatoes with

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her everywhere for one month. The woman had to carry this sack everywhere – placed next to her desk at work, walking to her car in the parking lot, climbing the stairs to her apartment. This, the teacher said, is the weight you are carrying with you every day. Before too long, the woman realized just how psychologically and spiritually overwhelmed she was by the resentments that she carried. Of course, if you carry those potatoes longer than a month, you can expect them to deteriorate and begin to rot. Forgiveness is not a gift we give to others; it's a gift we give to ourselves. Mom, get a bag of potatoes and try this little experiment. It could change your life. And Alicia, Mazal Tov -- best wishes for a happy and fulfilling marriage.

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.) All of the "Your Personal Coach" columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).