

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**I have been happily married for the past three years to Richard but about six months ago my old high school boyfriend, Barry, moved back to town. I've had lunch with him a few times and have told my husband that I was out with my girlfriend. Barry and I exchange daily emails that I delete from the computer that both my husband and I use. I have kept all this from my husband. I really care about Barry. He was there for me during the most difficult time in my life when my mother died from cancer. But I only want Barry to be a friend. I have no intention of having an affair with Barry. In fact, he has a girlfriend he says he wants to marry and I love my husband deeply. But I'm feeling guilty – almost like I'm cheating on Richard. What should I do?**

**-- Mary Elizabeth**

Dear Mary Elizabeth,

I suspect you are feeling guilty because you should. You are being dishonest with your husband. You've outright lied to him about your lunch companion and you are "withholding important information" by deleting your emails with your old beau.

"Cheating" doesn't always require a sexual relationship with someone other than your spouse/partner. And you are cheating Richard out of your full honesty and attention. Your present course is not a good one for your marriage or for your own feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. The guilt feelings are alerting you to that fact and telling you to stop what you are doing.

I think you have two choices here: One choice is to cut off your contact with Barry and explain that you feel that surreptitious email and clandestine lunches are not good for your marriage (they're not). Then cut off all contact with him.

A second choice is the more enlightened and mature one though it will require honest communication and the conscious participation of all four of you to make it work. If you truly want a friendship with Barry then he will have to accept that you are now married and respect your relationship with your husband. Is he aware that you've lied to Richard about your lunch dates and that you delete his emails? If he is knows that, he is being disrespectful of Richard and your marriage. Does his girlfriend know he's had lunch with you and that the two of you exchange email? The answers to these questions will tell a great deal about Barry's character.

This second choice means no more lunches on the sly and no email that Richard or Barry's girlfriend could not read if they chose to. If you select this option, you will have to be honest with Richard and bring him into the loop. You'll need to stop lying and hiding information.

You'll need to explain to Richard that Barry has moved back to town and that you would like Barry and his girlfriend to be part of BOTH your lives. Explain that Barry was there for you during a very hard time in your life and that he's a good person. Make it clear that you love Richard and that he's the one you want to spend the rest of your life

with. Let your husband talk about his concerns, jealousies, or fears. Then come up with a plan.

Is it possible to include Barry and his girlfriend in gatherings with other friends? These kinds of events will let everyone get to know each other and establish new forms of relationship between all four of you. Then you will need to let nature take its course. Will Richard like Barry and vice versa? Will your two couples enjoy spending time together? Will Richard and Barry's girlfriend be able to keep jealousy in check – are they mature and healthy people -- as all of you evolve into friends? Those questions can only be answered in time.

Personally, I believe that there is great value in maintaining relationships with people we have loved and care about even if the form of the relationship has changed. But this requires compelling honesty and the willing participation of *all* the players.

In her book, *The Pregnant Virgin*, Jungian analyst and writer Marion Woodman spoke about the importance of keeping love even when relationships change. Here's what she wrote, "It seems to me the most important thing in surrendering a close bond is sacrificing the relationship without sacrificing the love. If life is an "opening out like the rose that can no longer keep closed, " then everything we love is an opening of a petal. When the thorns are accepted love abides. The profound relationships in our lives, whatever their outcome, have given us the riches of loving and that wealth is the only wealth that means anything in the end."

Let me assure you that there are many people in the world who have forged new, vibrant, and healthy relationships with their "exes." I wish all four of you luck in making it work.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949 *Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D. is a writer, personal coach, motivational speaker, clinical psychologist and producer/host of the "HeartWaves" radio program (WVOD-FM, 99.1 at 12:40 weekdays).*

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