

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**I've had a run of bad luck lately. Last year, I had to place my beloved mother in a nursing home. She has Alzheimer's disease. Last month, my boyfriend (of six years) broke up with me, saying he needed "space." It wasn't a great relationship, and he could never make a real commitment to me, but at least I had someone. Last week, I was laid off from my job. I didn't like my job, but it did pay the bills. During the recent hurricanes, my apartment flooded and the water ruined a lot of my things. My renter's insurance will only cover part of the replacement costs. Meanwhile, I'm living out of a suitcase at a friend's house. I'm feeling low and in despair. I wish none of this had happened.**

**-- Shirley**

Dear Shirley,

I'm so sorry to hear about all your losses, but I am confident that you can rise above them. The human spirit is an amazing thing. It is often during our darkest hours that we experience the greatest growth. Through adversity, we learn about our strengths, and through suffering we become wise about the true nature of reality. I'm not trying to be overly simplistic, nor am I suggesting that you should not mourn for your losses. In other words, I'm not offering the old use lemons to make lemonade advice. But the truth about life is that it is filled with losses. And it is precisely through these savage experiences, through these dark nights of the soul, that we build character and strength.

Shirley, let yourself grieve. You've been through a great deal of adversity in a short time and anyone in your situation would feel the sharp pain of those losses. At the same time, though, remember that while you cannot control all the events of your life, you can control your reaction to them. Will you meet these challenges with courage or with fear, honesty or denial? Will you become a better person, or a bitter person as a result of this pain? This is what you can control.

Think about the good things in your life. You, obviously, have at least one good friend who is helping you out. What other blessings do you enjoy? Are you healthy? Do you have food to eat? Are there people who love and care about you? Keep a journal and pour out your heart. Let your sadness flow, but also notice these good things in your life. What are you grateful for, in spite of all the loss swirling around you right now? Remember, no pressure, no diamonds. Life's hard times are the impetus to higher levels of compassion, character, and wisdom. A Greek proverb reminds us, "It is not good for all our wishes to be filled; through sickness we recognize the value of health; through evil, the value of good; through hunger, the value of food; through exertion, the value of rest."

Get comfort from your friends. Talk to a therapist, counselor, priest, minister, or rabbi. Get involved with a support group for Alzheimer's. I'll bet the social worker at your mother's nursing home will be a good source of information about resources. Become active in your community. Meet new people. Volunteer.

It sounds like you have been settling for a boyfriend who can't commit, and a job that only pays the bills. If you use your suffering to grow and change, the odds are

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony

10/13/04

excellent that you will meet a new boyfriend who wants, as you do, a long-lasting relationship where commitment is part of the deal. Don't settle for a job that just pays the bills. Refuse to be satisfied until you find one that fills you with passion. A job that makes you think, "Thank God it's Monday." Life is too short to not enjoy the process. It may very well be that these losses are setting the stage for new decisions, and new opportunities in your professional and love life. Be optimistic!

This can be a time of unprecedented growth for you as a person. American poet Theodore Roethke once wrote, "In a dark time, the eye begins to see." What new things will you see about yourself and your courage as a result of this refiner's fire? Good luck to you, Shirley.

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. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).