



Ask Mrs. Riches: Siblings and Money

The Motley Fool

By *Elizabeth Brokamp*

Dear Mrs. Riches:

My brother and I have never gotten along, and now, after the recent deaths of our parents, we're even more at each other's throats. Unfortunately, rather than spelling out specific bequests, our parents' will just left us the whole kit and caboodle, to be split 50/50. My brother wants to immediately auction off the house and its contents, but I strongly disagree. It was our family home, and I'm not ready to say goodbye to their belongings so soon after losing them. It would break Mom and Dad's hearts to know that this is just another big fight. Any ideas what to do at this point?

— *Heartbroken in Hoboken*

Dear Heartbroken,

I am so sorry to hear about the loss of your parents. My sympathy for you also extends to this situation with your brother, a rift that must be very stressful and painful for you both.

I can't pretend to know all of the history with you and your brother, nor do I feel equipped to "take sides." I can say that people handle death and grieving very differently. For some, reminders of a loved one are just too painful, and they're driven to eliminate these as much as possible. Perhaps that's what is happening in your brother's case. However, it is equally valid to want to hold on to precious items, reminders, and memories of those who have passed away, as you are inclined to do. There's the impasse.

May I suggest that you and he consider consulting a professional mediator, someone who won't take sides (like other relatives might) and is trained in finding peaceful resolutions? Given that you don't seem to have a history of being able to work out conflict among yourselves in the best of times, the worst of times (in the wake of your parents' deaths) is certainly a challenging period in which to try and make decisions of this magnitude. A calm and reasonable voice that speaks from outside the fray may be just the ticket.

Worried about how to bring up mediation? Remain focused on the problem, rather than on the person. For example, rather than saying, "I want to go to a mediator because you're totally unreasonable, and maybe someone will talk some sense into you," say, "We've both been through a horrible loss, and rather than rehashing old issues, let's work with someone to reach a decision we each feel comfortable with." In addition to offering neutrality, mediation typically costs much less than retaining a lawyer, another plus.



Need to find a mediator? Organizations such as [The Professional Mediation Association](#) and the [American Arbitration Association](#) offer lists of mediators by state. Best of luck, Heartbroken.

Dear Mrs. Riches:

My three siblings are all better off financially than I am. My problem is that, whenever someone has the idea for a family gathering, it's always a big splashy occasion, involving travel, expensive accommodations, and entertainment fit for the rich and famous. As a teacher, I really don't make enough money to afford those kinds of expenses, especially not two to three times a year. They repeatedly have offered to pay my way, but I just don't feel comfortable with that. Should I just opt myself out?

— *Out of My League*

Dear Out of My League:

Remember the proverbial "rock and a hard place"? You're in between it. The choices seem to be:

It sounds like you have declined offers for your siblings to pay your way, which leaves you with scenarios one and three to consider. Scenario one, turning down the invitations, means you miss time with family, but with the hope that they will catch the hint after a while. I wouldn't count on that, though.

Personally, I think your best bet is to go with compromise and communication. Start by figuring out what you can reasonably afford, then explain to your siblings that your budget will allow for only one trip a year (or whatever you decide). Apart from that trip, you can extend an invitation for a gathering at your house, so that you can all be together. If they decline for shallow reasons, shame on them. Your credit card balance will thank you, even if your siblings don't.

Want more advice from Mrs. Riches? Try:

[Home Sweet Home](#) [Little Green Lies](#) [Money Issues With Kids](#)

Fool contributor [Elizabeth Brokamp](#) is a licensed professional counselor who regularly talks money with her honey, Robert Brokamp, editor of [The Motley Fool's Rule Your Retirement](#) newsletter. To get your money and relationship questions answered, send her an [email](#).

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