

FEBRUARY 24, 2020

Hey Elderly Aunt, how do I keep my spirits up while waiting for a diagnosis?

By **The Elderly Aunt, Contributor**
Posted in **Elderly Aunt advice**

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How do I deal with medically-induced limbo? In my case, I'm waiting for what could be a potentially devastating diagnosis or something more benign. For three weeks now, I've been waiting for test results, call backs, and appointments to be made. Everything is moving with incredible slowness. Meanwhile, I feel awful, both physically and mentally. How do I keep my spirits up?



The Elderly Aunt assumes that a "potentially devastating diagnosis" is code for a "potentially horrible illness followed by death."

One thought specific to your particular situation, dear reader: If you're concerned you might be seriously ill and your doctors appear to be dragging their diagnostic feet, it might be time to seek a second opinion. The Elderly Aunt sees no reason at all for you to tolerate any further stay in Limbo Land.

That said, while mulling over how to best keep your spirits up, dear reader, the Elderly Aunt was reminded of a recent hospital elevator interaction she had with a cheerful fellow on his way to Oncology. As the Elderly Aunt loves to listen, she heard all about his complicated and rather hopeless medical situation. And frankly, his prognosis sounded ominous enough to knock the cheer out of a bottle of Cheerwine. But no! When my new friend reached his destination and the elevator door slid open, he treated me to a happy grin and a quick point skyward and said, "But hey, I don't worry about it none, 'cause I know where I'm going!"

I immediately clocked this cheerful fellow as a Biblical literalist—a strict constructionist of whichever much-edited *version of the Bible* his congregation espouses. I'm willing to bet he has God's Will as his go-to explanation of life's whumps—including the final Big Whump of his own death. And I'm happy for him to have any comfort he can get as long as he doesn't use God's Will as an excuse to break bad on other people who don't believe as he does. As John Lennon put it, "*Whatever gets you though the night.....*"

However, if you, like the Elderly Aunt, are not blessed with Biblical certainty, then you are left to accept the self-evident truth that whumps happen. She feels strongly it's up to each of us to decide whether or not we will allow the whumped part of our lives to take over the part that's still humming along. Over the course of her own whump-riddled life, the Elderly Aunt has developed a very simple strategy for containing their power. It works well for her, and she is pleased to offer it to you, dear reader, with the hope that you will take what you can use and leave the rest.

The first thing the Elderly Aunt does is acknowledge that she's freaked out — sometimes more, sometimes less. But it is complete poppycock to tell herself she isn't freaked out *at all*. Whumps reminds us how little control we have over anything in life. Powerlessness is something we don't like to think about, much less experience.

Keeping in mind that feelings aren't facts, the Elderly Aunt distinguishes between what is *actually* happening and what she's worried *might* happen. The former she faces. The latter she saves for calm consideration down the road—if, and when, it's needed. The Elderly Aunt does not believe in worrying. Planning, yes. But not worrying. She's a big fan of **Reinhold Niebuhr's** plea to be granted the serenity to accept the things she cannot change, courage to change the things she can, and enough wisdom to know the difference.

The whole time she's doing whatever she needs to do to straighten her head out, the Elderly Aunt practices rigorous self-care. Whether she's in the mood to or not, she does everything normal that she is able to do. She eats well, exercises as best she can, and keeps her days as productive as possible. And then she rewards herself with an extra Godiva truffle or two. The Elderly Aunt feels strongly that a little self-indulgence is essential in her times of crisis and confusion.

Last, and possibly most difficult to pull off, the Elderly Aunt acknowledges that it will take time for her life to settle down again. And whenever that happens, some parts of her life may very well be different. But it will still be her life, her adventure, and she is the only one who gets to live it. And she is damned if she's not going to claim every possible shred of joy, satisfaction and knowledge from every day.

Here's looking at you, dear reader! Yes, you and I might be powerless over a lot of the whumps that happen to us. The things to remember, however, is that we are *not* powerless over how we respond to them. And therein lies the key to keeping our spirits up!

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Hey Elderly Aunt, how do I respond to being re-invited to a Zoom wedding I initially wasn't invited to?

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DECEMBER 14, 2020
Hey Elderly Aunt, my friend was accused of a crime, and it's affecting our friendship

Hello Elderly Aunt, I do have a situation, sort of. We weren't invited to a wedding, and now we are. And I want to say something, but I'm trying not to. Back in December of 2019, my younger cousin accepted a proposal from someone she had been living with for a while, and they started planning a wedding in October. My parents and my other cousins received paper invitations by mail, but I did not and my only brother did not. I wouldn't have been upset if it was my whole generation that was excluded, but it was only my brother and myself, and it isn't as if we had had any falling out with my cousin. It is not an exceptionally large family where she forgot about us in some way. So, then comes COVID and all of a sudden she has to shift her wedding plans from a standard wedding to a "watch online, drive-by, and stop-for-pictures-and gifts" format — and now I'm magically invited again. And I want to say something. Is there anything that can reasonably be said? Or is it better to just ignore it entirely and move on? Thank you for any thoughts.



At first blush, the Elderly Aunt is tempted to call your cousin's failure to invite you to her standard wedding followed by a (non-paper) invitation to her online wedding for what it appears to be— a greedy attempt to score another fondue pot or toaster oven without having to pay to the additional cost of your in-person attendance. If that is indeed what's going on, then shame, shame, *shame* on your cousin!

However...

At second blush, the Elderly Aunt feels compelled to point out that entirely one-way bad behavior is extremely rare and perpetrated almost exclusively by [sociopaths](#). The old adage "it takes two to quarrel..." didn't become an old adage by being an inaccurate observation.

For your own peace of mind, dear reader, the Elderly Aunt encourages you to reexamine the history of your relationship with your cousin and to calmly own whatever your part is (however trivial) in a family feud in which your cousin's tacky present grab is the latest manifestation.

The point is not to place blame but to gain a deeper understanding of yourself as well as your cousin. The Elderly Aunt is a firm believer that the road to inner contentment is paved with self-honesty. Shoulder chips can be such terribly corrosive loads to tote. It's almost impossible to carry one around without souring one's own soul. And who really wants to be condemned to life with a soured soul?

As to what you should do in this particular situation, that depends entirely on whether you're looking for short-term retribution in the face of your cousin's venal present grab or long-term, serenity-inducing, realistic acceptance of both yourself and her as you really are—warts and all.

If you're after the former, by all means send your cousin a snippy note. But before you do, imagine how you will feel about yourself after you hit that send button. Only you can know who sending that note will damage more.

If you decide against the snippy note, the Elderly Aunt suggests two possible courses of action. The first is to call your cousin and ask directly (without snippiness) why you didn't get the first paper invitation? There is always a chance it was an oversight.

The second, which would probably be the Elderly Aunt's choice, stems from her belief that the only behavior she controls is her own and that she enjoys her own company more when she operates out in the world with a generous heart. This would lead her to accept the e-vite, send the bride a suitable present, attend the wedding, wish her and her new husband well, brush that particular chip off your shoulder, and get on with your own life.

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OCTOBER 5, 2020

Hey Elderly Aunt, How do I reach my brother who's fallen down the QAnon rabbit hole?

By **The Elderly Aunt, Contributor**
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Hey Elderly Aunt, my friend was accused of a crime, and it's affecting our friendship

Dear Elderly Aunt: Much to my horror and dismay, my brother began sharing QAnon BS on Facebook a couple weeks back. Rather than responding on Facebook to what he's put up there, I tried talking with him. It did not go well. He's buying into all these looney tall tales about a deep state and the coronavirus being a hoax. I don't think he's into believing there are outerspace aliens among us, but who knows? He believes news sites are lying, and anything that contradicts what the conspiracies say only confirms his belief that there's a cabal of media and shadow figures out to destroy the country. What can I do to try to bring him back to reality and help him see the difference between facts and fiction? Or should I accept that he's been sucked into an alternative reality?



The Elderly Aunt is so sorry, dear reader, that your brother is **drinking from the cup of this particularly dangerous and nonsensical political Kool Aid** sexually weird ignorance, paranoia, fear and anger.

Sadly, the Elderly Aunt thinks there's not a damn thing you can do directly to bring your brother back from the abyss. She's a firm believer that you cannot reason with political lunatics. As you so cogently stated, your brother has been sucked into an alternative

reality in which his apples are different from your apples and, well, from actual apples, so any sort of *real* reality is irrelevant. In the Elderly Aunt's opinion, the more you try to reason with your brother, the more entrenched he's likely to become in.

If the Elderly had a loved one suddenly go politically looney-tunes, she would first of all worry about his mental health—has he lost touch with reality in other ways as well as political? If he's mentally ill, he needs treatment not advice. It's the Elderly Aunt's observation that people usually leave reality behind by choice only when it becomes too confusing, overwhelming and/or frightening to inhabit. So assuming that your brother's lunacy is confined to the political, she suggests you attempt to identify whatever hole in your brother's heart or life he's trying to fill by buying into a **fact-free theory** that the world is run by a bunch of Satan-worshiping pedophiles (and might include **extraterrestrial reptilians as well**) who also happen to operate a global child sex-trafficking ring while also plotting against President Donald Trump. According to many of the baseless conspiracies pushed by QAnon supporters is that we're hurtling toward a **'day of reckoning' involving the mass arrest of journalists and politicians**. Stopping its spread of falsehoods has **flummoxed social media giants and community church pastors** and religious leaders alike.

The Elderly Aunt is no Zen Mama, but she's been around enough Buddhists to see other people's dysfunctional behaviors as screams of pain. To her, dear reader, your brother's buying into QAnon's nonsense means that he's in so much existential pain that he's started screaming at the top of his lungs.

With this in mind, she suggests the most constructive thing you can do is identify the source of his pain. Not to confront him with it, but to perhaps understand him better than he's able to understand himself.

- Is he desperate for attention? Is QAnon his way of getting it?
- Does he feel in some way dissed — or isolated — by family or by the people he works with?
- Does he have money troubles? Romantic troubles? Does he hate his job?
- Is he frightened of his financial and professional future in our current rapidly evolving economy?
- As QAnon—with its weird sexual motif—is his scream of choice, does your brother have some kind of repressed sexual conflict?
- Does he feel powerless to act in his own best interests?

The goal is not to fix your brother, but to comprehend him better and to understand his QAnon nonsense for what it is—a symptom of something really sad or scary going on with him personally. This understanding will help you offer truly useful help or comfort or advice about the troubles in his life. *If* he asks for it, of course.

As much as possible, don't let your brother's political nonsense get to you. Rev up your interest in the other aspects of his life. Resist the impulse to have your relationship with him controlled by inflammatory nonsense.

In a word, strengthen your connection with the healthy parts of him and love him mightily as your brother.

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