

# FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

## STICKY REUNION SITUATION

### STEP-SIBLINGS REUNION

May 2018

---

#### The Situation:

When my father passed away nearly a year ago, me, my mom, two brothers, and sister found out that he had another family—in addition to the two other kids that we knew of. My father's family (his mom, dad, and siblings) knew about this other family which strained our relationship with them. For us kids it wasn't just the not knowing that hurt, it was the secrecy of it all. And we were also curious. We have siblings that we don't know but should. My oldest brother is suggesting that all my dad's kids (and just the kids) get together on the anniversary of my father's passing. And we're all kinda receptive to this but want to know how to go about it so that it ends up being something good and positive. Also, my dad's immediate family want to attend but we don't want them to. Is this wrong?

---

#### The Fix:



**Doug and Myrna Harris**

We think your idea is a good one—particularly the part about having only the siblings meet. There will be enough baggage and issues with just the siblings. Allowing other family members to be part of it runs the risk of more drama and re-visiting old hurts. Send an invitation to the siblings only, emphasizing:

- Only siblings are to attend the meeting. Make this an ultimatum, not a request!
- The purpose of the meeting is to get to know each other, not to point blame or relive old hurts.
- No one (child or adult) is responsible for the decisions and actions of parents.
- Siblings are asked to come prepared to answer questions and discuss topics such as:
  - What hobbies you enjoy.
  - What makes you laugh?
  - What you do for a living? What do you like and dislike about your job? How did you wind up doing what you do?
  - Favorite movie of all time and favorite movie now.
  - Favorite recording artist(s).
  - Your biggest challenges and victories.
  - Something about you most people don't know.
- Choose an even-tempered, level-headed person to lead the discussion.
- Make it clear that politics and religion are off the table, and that whenever anyone says, "I'd rather not talk about that," everyone must honor that request and change the subject.
- At the end of the meeting discuss whether the meeting was positive and beneficial; if you and your siblings want to meet again; and whether to plan a reunion as the next step.

---

#### The Fix:



**Sylvia Ford-George**

I love Doug and Myrna's response. And want to add just a few things.

- Since this will be your first meeting and you don't know each other well, the brother who suggested the meeting should take the lead. Once you've had a chance to meet and get to know one another better—and have decided to meet again—you can think through which sibling would be the best moderator the next time around.
- Make a pact to not discuss who your dad was a better father to.
- Make a pact to not discuss your dad's relationship with your moms.
- Make a pact to get to know and grow as siblings. Share birthdates, talk about other milestones you've each had, share pictures.
- Don't dwell on your dad and what he did or did not do. No one can answer to the "why" questions about him, so don't try. Work instead on getting to know one another and grow as siblings. Do your best to support one another.
- Should you decide to get together again, consider having it around upcoming birthdays.
- After you've had an opportunity to get to know one another, you can make a decision to invite his family in. Ask them to share old photos and stories about your dad growing up to help all of you get to know him better, and so you can see what you have in common with him, etc. However, make sure they follow the same ground rules that you have with one another.
- Identify everyone's birthdates so you can continue celebrating and getting to know one another through the year.
- Decide at the beginning that you are not going to bash your dad for what he did; and that you're not going to talk about your moms. Instead discuss how you'd like to get to know, support and grow with one another.
- And remember, good things can come out of not so good situations. It's good that all of the siblings want to come together. You should get to know one another—after all, you are more than just brothers and sisters—you are family!