

No Time for You

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“I just don’t have time for you any more,” she said when she answered the phone one Saturday night. Huh? “You mean you are breaking up with me?” I asked, shocked, not believing what I heard. “Yes, I just don’t have time for this relationship.”

No time for me? We’d been together for over four years, lived together, traveled extensively together, shared family events together. We were spouses in every sense, but not officially married. I had been widowed a few years earlier after an almost 50-year marriage. I had asked her to marry me, but she demurred—she had had a 30-plus year marriage with three adult children, but it had ended when her husband had to relocate for his job and she didn’t want to move to the new city, preferring instead to stay with her beautiful, custom-built house, her friends, her familiar surroundings.

No time for me? I told her that her breaking up with me was worse than my wife’s death from breast and brain cancer in which I was her primary caregiver for many years. “How could that be,” she asked? “Ruth didn’t want to die, she wanted to be with me, never to leave me, but you, you *want* to leave me.” The outright rejection was far worse.

No time for me? Well, one of her daughters had just had a baby and moved 3000 miles away across the country and she was going to be there with her for a month; her other daughter had also just had a baby and was moving into her house for an indefinite period to get her mother’s help with childcare. I could understand that her primary focus had to be on her daughters and their new babies; but why did that mean cutting me out of her life? We had lived 1000 miles apart for years with frequent trips and lots of phone/email/text communication. Couldn’t that continue?

No time for me? The real difficulty, I believe, was that her daughters were not happy with her having a relationship with me at all: I believe more generally that children of divorced couples always harbor a hope, dim and perhaps deeply buried, that their parents will reunite and they will again be an ideal “Leave It to Beaver” family—even if they never were before.

No time for me? There was discomfort on everybody’s part when her children and I were in the house together. My role was unclear—was I a spouse, a resident, a guest, or just an

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interloper? Consequently, I often spent those hours/days with my adult children who live nearby; but this made the awkward situation even more awkward because she felt that I was rejecting her and her family in favor of my family—she wasn't happy, and I was torn between wanting to be with her (despite the discomfort), but also wanting to spend time with my children and grandchildren.

No time for me? Even with my four daughters, four sons-in-law, and 14 grandchildren, I never felt that I didn't have time for her. I loved *all* of them and had no problem integrating the two sides of my life. "No time for you" was a phony excuse, a cover up for something else that left no room for argument and was (perhaps) an attempt to spare my feelings. "I still love you," she said, "I just don't have time for you in my life." That saved her from confronting me because we *always make time* for the things that matter in our lives. Clearly, I no longer mattered.

No time for me? I am resigned never to understand why things deteriorated, but she now had no time for me and ended the relationship with a snap of her fingers. I returned to my home 1000 miles away, imposing on my son-in-law to collect all my possessions from her house and ship them to me, 14 large cartons of things I didn't need, but which had to be removed from her house. I never went back to her house, and on my frequent visits to my nearby children I carefully avoid driving by it for fear that I'll see her while I am rebuilding my life.