

Berns and Berns

By: Anke Keitel, Susan Allen
Place: Germany
Date: 1999
Topic: Career Decisions: Creative Solutions
Message: *One can follow one's heart in making career decisions, and still be practical. Creative solutions can be found for most problems through consultation.*
Characters: Father, mother, daughters Bret and Honey
Setting: Kitchen, at kitchen table

Bret and her mother are sitting at the kitchen table. Father enters.

Mother: Hi, welcome home!

Bret: Hi Dad!

Father: Bret, I was talking to Bill, the office manager at the law firm, and we were talking about your job duties for this summer. He's been giving a lot of thought to make sure you get a lot of practical experience as well as some real responsibilities. (*Looking from Mother to Bret questioningly*) Okay, something's up. What's going on with you two?

Bret: Listen Dad, how many times do I have to say it? Do I have to shout, do I have to scream, do I have to write you an official letter? I do not want to be a lawyer!

Father: Come on, Bret. I knew you were going through a passing **phase**, trying to figure out your own thoughts, get your own feelings together. I've been very patient with all this... We got to quit this piddling around, and you have to get serious about your career.

Bret: But can't you see that's what I've been trying to do? I've been trying to find myself, I've been trying to find the lawyer that you are so sure is inside of me—but it just isn't. It just isn't! I want to go to art school, and I've found just the right school.

Father: Art? You've got to be joking! I know the image of a starving artist is very romantic, but how are you going to support a family on art? So you like to paint pictures—that's fine! Do it in your spare time—but it's not a serious profession!

Bret: And if your dad told you to learn law in your spare time, how proficient would you be? It takes professional training, work, years of

experience to become an artist—do you think all the grand masterpieces were painted in someone’s spare time? Tell me, how serious are you about this?

Father: All I know is that for three generations our family has had someone to carry on the tradition. Your great-grandfather, your grandfather, your father have all built up this firm. Have you thought seriously about this? You are the eldest child; it is your responsibility to carry on this tradition!

Bret: Yes, that’s all you care about, that’s it! Your precious tradition, Berns, Berns and Berns, Incorporated—my happiness, my fulfillment as a human being doesn’t even come into the picture! All this has nothing to do with me—go find other ways to feed your ego and glorify your name! I’ll find the way to work and pay for school myself!

Father: I won’t allow this, Bret! It’s out of the question!

Bret: Then just try stopping me!

Bret rises to leave

Mother: Bret!

DISCUSSION

Mother: Wait! Sit down! And I suppose no one’s interested in what I think...? Bret, I agree that your life is your own and that you deserve a chance at happiness, and that we should support you in your decisions. But, don’t you think you can be just a little bit more sensitive about your father’s feelings? You see he is taking a whole lifetime to build up the reputation of this firm. And it’s not just his name, but it’s the whole family’s name. It’s his father’s name, and it’s our name, and it’s for the generations to come.

Bret: Mom, you both know, that it’s not that I don’t care... Dad, you know I care... I know how hard you’ve worked for this.

Mother: Now that we know that we all care about this, why don’t we start thinking about some creative solutions to this problem?

Father: Okay, go on...

Mother: No, both of you go on. Think! John, you yourself know that you can’t place all of your hopes and desires on Bret’s shoulders...

Father: But she has got the guts for it!

Bret: And yes, I have the strength to achieve my dream in art. Are we sure there is no other family members that might be interested in law?

Father: Well, I just never thought of it...

Mother: And Bret, why don't you explain to your father about the plans for your future?

Bret: Well, it's not just painting. It's art administration. It's like two professions. Mom actually gave me the idea.

Mother: I was actually trying to do some creative thinking, problem solving. I don't know of any art administrators who are starving... romantically or otherwise...

Father: Hmmm...

Honey enters.

Honey: Hi, family! Why **are** you guys are all so serious? Oh Mom, did you tell Dad about my decision? Well, I've decided to become a lawyer!

Father: What? More creative thinking?

Mother: I didn't have anything to do with this one...

Honey: No, Dad, I am serious, I saw this great movie about this lady lawyer. Oh, it was great! She was romantic... I want to be just like her... You know, I'll help the poor people in the village—and I won't even charge! I mean, I will have a husband that will support me...

Father: Yes... Maybe even he will be as rich as an art administrator?

Mother: On that note, let's eat!