



## **A Very Real Family Problem: A Political Allegory**

The parents had passed away many years ago. They had left detailed arrangements for the children (two sisters, a brother and twins) and for a long time the youngsters had got on tolerably well. Big sister tended to make decisions and lead the way in the family's contacts with the neighbours and relatives abroad. Every now and then, the family would fall out with some of the close neighbours. This brought out the best in the family and each of the children would play major roles in re-establishing the family's position in the community.

Some time ago, one of the twins became so upset with what he saw as big sister's interference in how he wanted to live his life that he broke contact with the family and went his own way. That was very painful at the time and had left the other twin, always somewhat diminutive in stature, relying ever more on big sister and in a very uneasy relationship with bigger twin who still lived next door. In recent years, the twins had managed to achieve some reconciliation. They cut down the tall hedge between them and could come and go with each other fairly easily, often just nipping through each other's gardens.

Of the two other children, one had always been a bit headstrong, usually going his own way before mum and dad had put firmer arrangements in place. The other child, less assertive, was closer to big sister and was often treated as if she and big sister were at one.

In recent years, the more headstrong child had begun to rebel a bit, wanting more control over his life. Big sister had, as she saw it, given up a lot of decision-making to her headstrong brother already but it never seemed enough. Headstrong brother always seemed to want more. To big sister, it was fairly obvious that headstrong brother could not make it on his own and would always need her help. From her perspective, he just didn't have the wherewithal to survive on his own.

Headstrong brother was a bit ambivalent. Part of him yearned for complete freedom, to get on with life, make his own mistakes and establish a separate identity. And another part of him really wanted to stay within the family but with a more mature understanding of their relationships. It was all a bit confusing. At times, it seemed to be tearing him apart.

Things had come to a head recently. Rather carelessly, some thought, big sister and her close sister had decided to leave the neighbourhood community association. Big sister had never really been comfortable with the neighbours and her independent streak had prevailed over her desire to continue to be part of the group. Even some of the overseas relatives were a bit concerned about big sister, but the decision had been made. Big sister was in a bit of turmoil and not really sure about what to do now.

All of this had created real problems for the twins. Bigger twin had good relationships with the neighbours and remained a firmly committed member of the community association. The trouble for the other twin was that the association's rules meant that it wouldn't be so easy to come and go with larger twin in the future. Adding to the difficulty, smaller twin had been behaving less well and big sister had felt it necessary to curb her activities and take some decisions for her. This whole situation was confusing for smaller twin and there were fears amongst those who knew her that she would just blow up one day. It had happened before. She had a track record of self-destruction. It wasn't clear how much this concerned big sister, some of whose actions appeared disdainful of both twins.

Headstrong brother had always had good relations with the neighbours. He saw himself as part of a larger community than just the family. He was determined to stay in close touch with the neighbours. He might even join the association himself but that would mean a significant split with big sister. He'd tried to achieve such a split amicably a few years ago but just hadn't wanted to go that far. The trouble was that big sister would always be next door, his closest neighbour, his oldest sibling, and the family ties were close.

But things had changed now. To that freedom-seeking part of headstrong brother, big sister's rejection of the neighbours was bringing out the worst in her. Indeed, big sister seemed to want to take back some of the control that she had given to headstrong brother. She had said she would consult with him but that she had to take decisions for them all. But he wanted a relationship of equals and for them to work together consensually.

As a result of these differences, their dealings with each other had become strained and the situation was becoming serious, with a growing impasse between them. The sad thing was that there were many more important concerns in the wider community and further afield. To those on the outside, the family's inward-looking conflicts seemed rather insignificant. Somehow, they all needed to work together if they were to survive and flourish.

***Mediators have been called in to help. The "pop-up" mediation will take place on **Thursday 14 June in the Grassmarket Centre, Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh, commencing at 1745.*****

***The format will be that each family member will participate as a group of delegates. The process will be managed like a conventional mediation with pauses to discuss the learning arising from the experience.***

***All are welcome. Food will be served (a donation of £20 to cover the cost of food and hire will be welcome). Interested? Notify [Miriam.Kennedy@core-solutions.com](mailto:Miriam.Kennedy@core-solutions.com) by **Monday 4 June 2018.*****