

13. Toastmaster Disaster

Marcy (48), Richard (50), and Anne (52), are siblings. They have friendly relationships with each other, but they live in different parts of the country and they are not as close as they would like to be. Family reunions are pleasant enough but are also a bit stiff; phone calls are sporadic and awkward. Still, there is no bad blood between any of them, and they all love and care for each other, cherishing memories of their childhoods.

When Marcy gets engaged, she asks Richard and Anne to make speeches at her wedding, and they accept. But as the wedding draws near, Richard and Anne struggle with the task. Marcy is the most creative and sentimental of the three, and Richard and Anne, though they care about Marcy, feel less comfortable sharing their feelings and more jaded than their little sister about the state of the family.

Anne and Richard don't want to let Marcy down, though, so they decide to hire a professional toastwriter. After speaking with the two siblings for an hour about Marcy, the writer crafts a lighthearted toast. The rhyming 10-stanza tribute focuses on the things that make Marcy a good match for her new husband, Dale:

“... Two free spirits, you both love to dance,
we're so glad you've found romance.
Cooking, laughing, hiking, you're a perfect match,
Cherish her, Dale, she's really a catch....”

Anne and Richard deliver the toast at the wedding and it goes over well. The crowd finds their delivery charming and Marcy is heartened by their collaboration. They decide not to tell Marcy that they bought the toast.

But when another family member finds out that Anne and Richard bought the toast, she is horrified: “You paid someone to write a wedding toast? That's supposed to be personal,” she says. But Anne and Richard think that they did nothing wrong. After all, they gave the toastwriter all of the information about Marcy and they genuinely believed everything they said. There are no official rules about wedding toastwriting, they reason. Also people hire ghost writers in plenty of other contexts, for example when writing books or political speeches. Why, then, should it be wrong to hire a toastwriter in this case?

Study Questions:

1. How, if at all, does the content and quality of the purchased toast affect the morality of buying and delivering it? Explain your answer.
2. Suppose that Anne and Richard know that Marcy would be disappointed to learn that they purchased the toast. Should they tell her that they did so? Why or why not?
3. Is there a morally relevant difference between hiring a toastwriter to help with a wedding toast, on one hand, and hiring a ghost writer to help with a book or political speech, on the other hand?