



# ASK UNCLE MIKE

Dear Uncle Mike,

My aunt and uncle, whom I hardly know, are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary next month. They live an hour's drive away and our relationship is limited to Christmas and birthday cards. The few times I've seen them as an adult, they've been aloof to both me and my husband. Are we obliged to go? Do we have to take a gift? My husband says we should but I say why be phony? What do you think?

Mary R., Portland

Dear Mary,

The first thing you should do is stop confusing Uncle Mike with Ann Landers. At the risk of startling you, Mary, there are real problems in the world, to say nothing of interesting questions. To say your concerns fall short of the mark is to hilariously understate the case. This said, we press on.

Should you honor your aunt and uncle on their 50th wedding anniversary? To answer this, Uncle Mike must first know if you were raised by weasels. If not, your dilemma disappears. Uncle Mike refuses even to discuss whether you should bring a gift.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I've got a guy problem. You're a guy so maybe you can help. I'm 28, single, and have a great boyfriend. Neither of us has much money, but every time we go out, Peter insists on paying. It's not some lame paternal trip. In every other way, he treats me like an equal. He even let me push the car once when the battery was dead. Why can't I pick up a beer tab? Any ideas?

Jill W., Lincoln City

Dear Jill,

Uncle Mike's first idea is that you and he should drink beer soon. Uncle Mike's second idea is that you might be confusing cash flow with sexual politics. This can be a nasty mistake.

Uncle Mike loves to hear of young swains bearing gifts of food, entertainment, and beer to the women they love. As long as they don't imagine they're buying or leasing something, it is when you stop to think about it, a nice thing for them to do. What true friend would discourage acts of generosity?

Uncle Mike applauds your sense of fairness and recognizes the importance of your partner learning to receive beer as well as give it. But, as anyone in the barter economy or a successful relationship will tell you, giving takes many forms. Judging from what you cite as the only problem in the relationship, Uncle Mike would bet that you give as much as you get—perhaps without knowing. Men are funny. If yours wants to pick up the check, practice your thank-yous. Pick the right moment, look him in the eye, and tell him how glad you are he's your friend.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My problem is my husband. After 16 years of marriage, suddenly he wants to spend time with the boys. Playing poker, shooting pool, and drinking beer. He says he deserves it. I say his place is home with his family. We have a 15 year old daughter. Being a man, you'll probably take his side.

Donna T., McMinnville

Dear Donna,

Perhaps without meaning to, you've hurt Uncle Mike's feelings. Being nearly seven in dog years, Uncle Mike has seen enough of both sexes to shatter whatever loyalties or biases he might have suffered as a youth. He would do volunteer work for the OCA before siding against anyone on the basis of gender, even you. Sadly, at least in your case, the sword of fairness cuts both ways.

Your problem stems from your being a neurotic control freak getting even with the universe for not giving you a life. Rather than confront your own tawdry insecurities and grudges, you choose to make your husband's life as miserable as your own by what amounts to "grounding" him. Such spousal abuse has nothing to do with gender. The world is filled with men stupid enough to believe all the little woman needs is them, the kids, and the big screen.

Let the poor wretch out to play. What's the worst that can happen? He has fun? From the sound of things, you could use a night out yourself. Why not go to your mother's and whine about things. Tell your husband Uncle Mike advises he either drink beer or shoot pool. The only sight more pathetic than a pool player with impaired vision is a poker player drunk enough to raise on a pair.

**A woman needs a man, like a fish needs a bicycle.**



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Two Poems by Robert Cohen

The Critical Theory of Mr. Cat

Mr. Cat didn't come home last night, or the night before. I know -- anarchists believe in autonomy -- and I, abstractly, believe in anything at all. But Mr. Cat is more than an abstraction: he's family, and family moves me to fear for the frailty of fealty to belief. It's an atheoretical world, every event an exception of the will to order experience into faith. Love is an outlyer on the normal curve of nature and history, and I too an outlyer, leave the door open, in case I have been deceived.

Mr. Cat Gets Vetted

Mr. Cat came back with two things missing... and I too am at a loss -- for legitimizing concepts and just causes. We sit by the place where the fireplace would be if we had any fire, and as he rambles in dream, reviewing the orbit of ambitious youth, I cast for words that would make the world over, and whisper consolations for us both.

John M. Gogol

BIRD BOY  
(for Danny)

My Indian boy watches the geese, the swans, the cranes, the herons fly overhead each spring, every fall; turns his ear skyward and gets depressed, longs to join them. A strange boy, he imitates the birds, always whistling, always trying to take off with flapping of wings. Spring after spring, fall after fall, he stuns skyward and his arms ache with desire. He flaps his arms, swinging in desperation as if the world were coming to an end, till that final morning, when with no human word of farewell, only the whistle of outstretched wings, with the help of a Smith & Wesson 38 he rides a fast fierce bullet, gliding effortlessly through the sky trying to catch the last flock flying north in the spring migration, heading home.

### Answers to this Month's Quiz

- 1) Fred "Bonehead" Merkle
- 2) Ernie Lombardi
- 3) Billy Buckner
- 4) Lyman Bostock
- 5) a) Harmon Killebrew  
b) Zoilo Veralles
- 6) Chuck Klein

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mary anne  
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This People

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the salmon  
can never return

will ignore  
the stories  
written by cave fire

will say  
your name  
is not your name