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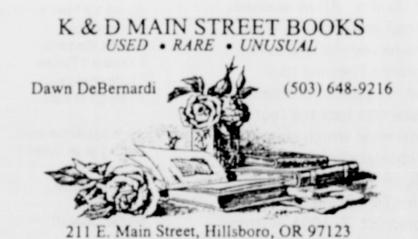
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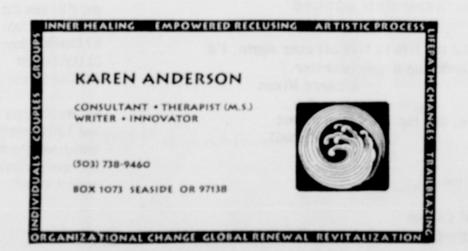
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Dear Uncle Mike,

My name is Kevin. I am ten years old. My mom and dad told me to write to you so I am. They make me go to bed at ten o'clock even on weekends. My friends don't have to. Do you think this is fair? They said they'd listen to you.

Kevin M. Portland



P.S. Are you a real person?

Dear Kevin,

Is Uncle Mike real? Think for a moment, Kevin. If he weren't, would a clever lad like yourself be writing to him?

So you go to bed at ten o'clock. Good for you. Humans your age need lots of rest because, as a teenage mutant ninja sloth, you'll be up all night joy-riding with your hormones and worrying about pimples.

Are your parents fascist swine for setting an early bedtime? No. They're just bigger and smarter than you.

Dear Uncle Mike,

What exactly are your credentials for dispensing free advice?

Allison D., Newport

Dear Allison.

Uncle Mike has, small surprise, been asked this question before. And in much the same tone of irate distrust.

Your suspicions are right on the mark. Uncle Mike is happily bereft of any credential(s) in counseling. Centuries ago, when he was in school, Uncle Mike observed that the study of psychology attracts those most urgently in need of its services. He opted instead to study literature, where the abberant is at least elevated to art.

You should not confuse this confession with an apology. Being empathetic, sharp as a tack, and more than seven in dog years, Uncle Mike feels every bit as qualified as Ann Landers to comment on the idiot behaviors he shares with his fellow humans.

He is, however, deeply wounded by your reference to 'free advice'. Uncle Mike is paid for his services, thank you very much. It helps defray the cost of his visiting nurse.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My girlfriend and I moved in together a few months ago. Things were great until she got a cat. Suddenly, I'm chopped liver. She pays more attention to 'Kissy' than she does to me. Is it crazy to be jealous of a cat? Isn't it way weird to be more affectionate to an animal than you are to your lover?

Spurned in Tillamook

Dear Spurned,

Before addressing your burning problem, Uncle Mike must plead insufficient data. Knowing neither you nor 'Kissy', it would be difficult to judge which one of you your friend should put out at night.

Is it crazy to be jealous of a cat? Interesting word, crazy. Jealousy (like many accepted forms of love) is, owing to its roots in misplaced notions of ownership, several clicks short of rational behavior. Being no stranger to psychotic breaks, Uncle Mike can only suggest that being jealous of a cat is (hopefully) beneath you.

One thing is certain. It's time for you and your sweet babboo to have a substantive chat. Explain to her, very calmly, that you're feeling displaced, that you think she loves 'Kissy' more than you.

She will, of course, laugh and deny it. She will also, if Uncle Mike is any judge of character, tell you you're acting like a moron. She will never, never give up her cat and asking her to choose between you will be one of the most humbling experiences of your life.

Uncle Mike heartily recommends you get a dog. Not only will 'Sparky' love you and your neuroses with an embarrassing lack of reservation, your paranoid plots against 'Kissy' will only deepen his devotion.



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