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Dear Uncle Mike,
I'm a 26 year old woman -- single, intelligent, warm, caring, reasonably attractive, sensual and often charming. Here's my question.

Where are all the good men? All I get is whiners, slackers, and aging adolescents without a car, gas money, ambition or a clue. I don't think I'm all that picky, but I'm not desperate enough to caretake cynics whose cup is always half empty, put bandaids on the knees of skateboarders old enough to shave, or support lovers who sleep around. Any suggestions, Answer Man?

Selective Shopper in Seattle

Dear Shopper,

Uncle Mike always has suggestions. His first is that you change your metaphor before he gags. One shops for clothing, fresh produce, and the perfect Spanish Coffee. The idea of shopping for a human being ended, ostensibly at least, with the Civil War.

Since you describe yourself as intelligent, Uncle Mike hesitates to suggest the obvious. You may be shopping in the wrong boutiques. Or, in a kinder and gentler metaphor, fishing in the wrong holes. Lacking knowledge of what you consider a 'good man', Uncle Mike is hard pressed to whip out a list of likely venues. His first suggestion is that you stop looking altogether. Unlike finding the ideal cellular phone service, finding love is more often a wonderful accident than the climax of consumer research.

Some of the male traits you describe with loathing and disdain are, Uncle Mike can't help but notice, age specific. Poor baby. Having been a younger man himself once, Uncle Mike has nothing but sympathy for young women hell bent to make something of them. Pet rocks are often easier to train. On the other hand, Uncle Mike is ceaselessly unamused by the snivelling of women young and old who, in their search for the perfect man they so obviously deserve, price themselves out of the market.

Dear Uncle Mike,

You're a guy, maybe you can answer me this. Why is it if a guy says he's going to call and doesn't, that's okay. But if you don't call him, he lays a guilt trip on you? Is this a guy thing? Is there a cure?

Erika in Portland

Dear Erika,

Many facets of the human comedy are gender specific. In Uncle Mike's experience, the laying on of guilt is not one of them. Uncle Mike learned guilt on his mother's knee and still regards it as one of the great motivators in life, second only to fear. This is, by the way, a philosophy shared by many of the women who have bunnyhopped into his life and mangled his self esteem.

But we were talking about you.

Regardless of gender, the guilt trip is one of the cheaper shots in all of behavioral psychology (see Pavlov's dogs and the plays of Eugene O'Neill). This is in itself no mean feat. The idea behind guilt is simple. Convince someone who cares that they've wronged and hurt you (in some nebulous way which, if they really loved you, they'd understand) and they spend the time it takes you to forgive them (generally the rest of their natural life) playing catch up and feeding you bonbons.

Is there a cure? Only if there's a willing patient. People into guilt trips fall into two categories: those who know what they're doing and those who don't. Those who don't, while often more responsive to reasoning and naked threats, are usually so oblivious to life in general as to make them scarcely worth the effort involved in retraining them. Those who know guilt when they're shovelling it are, for the most part, not about to stop. Why should they, given schmucks like yourself who are willing to roll over and put their paws in the air?

As with most of the hopeless messes people make of their lives, the solution only seems to involve someone else. Repeat after Uncle Mike: Disengagement is always an option. That you not wallow in guilt, worrying you might be throwing the baby out with the swamp water, do this. Tell the mindless jerk as sweetly as possible you're up to here with this neurotic crap and, if he wants to play the victim he'll have to find a new sandbox. Then walk your talk.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My 10 year old daughter has developed an interest in spiders. It started as a school project. Now she wants a tarantula. Is this normal?

Squeamish in Astoria

Dear Squeamish,

In a word, no. Spiders are the nightmares of the wild kingdom and those who do anything but avoid them are, in Uncle Mike's humble opinion, one click this side of irretrievable.

Under no circumstance should you buy your little munchkin a tarantula. Have you seen these things? Good grief, nitwit, use your head.

Your daughter will promise you she'll keep it in a terrarium with a brick on the lid. She'll be lying. Eventually she'll confuse her large-mandibled arachnid with a pet who knows which side its bread is buttered on. Or cares.

Trust me, the morning will come when, before you've had your coffee, your eight-legged woolly horror will scurry out from under the refrigerator and leap onto your face. At this point squashing it will be out of the question.

Every since our love for machines replaced the love we used to have for our fellow man, catastrophes proceed to increase. Man Ray

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