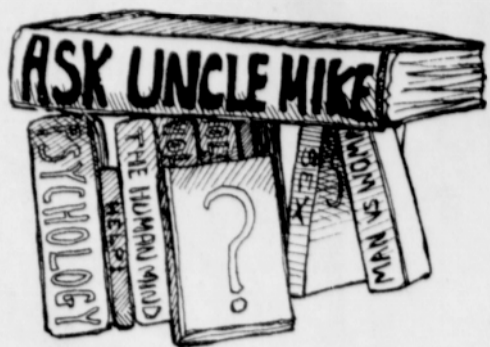


# Therapy Page

Dear Uncle Mike,

The other night, my husband & I went out for dinner. Nothing fancy, just a nice place. The couple two tables over brought their seven year old and we spent the whole meal listening to the child whining and her parents cajoling and threatening her. My husband says I shouldn't have let it ruin my meal, that kids will be kids. I say the management should have done something. What do you think?



Furious in Astoria

Dear Furious,

Uncle Mike thinks the world is going to hell in a handbasket and your night out does nothing to lessen his suspicions.

When Uncle Mike was a child, his parents took him to pizza parlors and Chinese restaurants. Although it might have occurred to him to behave badly, he didn't; not because he was a young saint, but because he had been taught, through lessons mild and harsh, to mind his manners. By today's standards, or lack of them, Uncle Mike would be horribly repressed.

Uncle Mike was further repressed by media images of children who showed respect to their elders. He did not imagine that the world revolved around him and that all adults, including his parents, were stupid and oppressive louts given to him to shape up. Then again, Uncle Mike was blessed to grow up in a time when adults were easier to respect.

This brings us to your dinner. The issue is not one of restaurant management. The issue is parenting and the lack thereof. Here are Uncle Mike's rules for dining out with your child. The first whine is free. The second whine gets a warning. The third whine and the kid's out of there. No alibis, no excuses, no plea bargains. Big dogs do not roll over for pups. Nor should they.

Should you have let the little whelp's floor show ruin your meal? Short of asking your server for earplugs or changing your order to takeout, Uncle Mike sees no way it couldn't. Should the management have done something? If they didn't expect the occasional childish outburst, they would draw a line five feet up the wall and post a sign saying, 'If you're not this big, you can't eat here'.

The question you didn't ask was, 'Should I have done something?' This makes you part of the problem. Next time, approach the offending table politely. Ask if there's anything you can possibly do to lighten the family mood. They will be offended and say no. Then, address the child. Explain to her or him that she or he is ruining your meal and it's making you very cranky. Ask if they'd like to eat their napkin now or later. Mean it and they'll get the message.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Do you think marijuana should be legal?

Sheila W., Eugene

Dear Sheila,

In a word, yes. Uncle Mike believes all drugs should be legal and dirt cheap, and that the tax from their regulated sales could help finance the sort of society in which 12 year olds with Uzis don't sell crack on bicycles. Uncle Mike believes the most dangerous drug is money. After that comes gasoline.

If we're speaking in terms of social disease, drug abuse (and here Uncle Mike thinks of alcohol, cocaine and heroin) is most correctly considered a symptom. Genetic disposition aside, humans with reason to hope don't smoke crack, shoot heroin, or drink themselves into a stupor on a regular basis. Those who 'abuse' drugs are medicating themselves against a toxic reality. With seventy percent of federal prison inmates incarcerated for drug related crime, Uncle Mike wonders if the war on drugs might be better waged on poverty and despair.

Uncle Mike also wonders if, even in common parlance, marijuana can be called a danerous drug. Cannabis may sap smokers of the energy and drive necessary to become a stock broker but, as many have pointed out, potheads don't mug people for a joint. They giggle and eat Milk Duds. Unlike the beer or martini afflicted, potheads can touch their noses with their fingers (often doing it for a lark) and don't drive cars into solid objects at high speeds.

As for marijuana being a social problem, Uncle Mike must snort. In his experience, smokers of hemp are far more interesting conversationalists than drunks, crackheads or heroin freaks. When it comes to good citizenship, marijuana devotees are, if anything, too considerate and thoughtful, displaying an appreciation for the subtle wonders of the here and now that borders on the sacred. These are, Uncle Mike confesses, qualities he enjoys in his fellow humans.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Last month you said that spanking should be limited to consenting adults. I think sadomasochism is sick and so are you.

Normal in Portland

Dear Normal,

Uncle Mike is glad you took time from your busy day of obsessing over the affairs of others to write. Since you seem a little overwrought, let Uncle Mike rephrase your question.

Does Uncle Mike stand behind the rights of adult humas to spank each other? Absolutely, although he's not sure he'd die to defend it.

Is sadomasochism sick? Like most things, the more Uncle Mike thinks about it, the less sure he is of his answer. People are funny, so are the things they do with and to themselves and each other in the name of fun. Some people hurt others on purpose. Sick is when they do it without being asked.

Is Uncle Mike sick? Yes, but Nurse thinks he's better and may be able to go on field trips soon. Thanks for asking.

Is Uncle Mike into S & M? It's not your concern, but no. Uncle Mike hates pain and scrupulously avoids either giving or receiving it. Lack of pain means a great deal to Uncle Mike and he has never once confused it with pleasure, not even during his marriage.

Because of this prejudice, Uncle Mike has never been able to throw himself into sadomasochism with anything resembling the proper spirit. Try as he might, when Uncle Mike thinks of fun, leather underwear and bull whips just never pop into his head. Uncle Mike has a bunnysuit and a squirt gun, thank you very much.



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