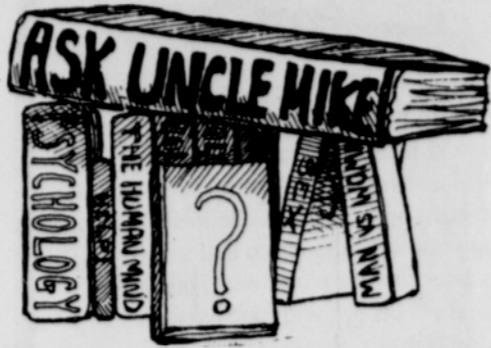


# THE THERAPY PAGE

Dear Uncle Mike,

Perhaps your readers, who seem to mistake you for a lantern of rationality, would be interested in hearing why you don't eat shrimp or crab. You're as neurotic and dysfunctional as the rest of us, you big phony.

A Friend in Cannon Beach



Dear Acquaintance,

Uncle Mike has never denied being neurotic and dysfunctional. Anyone who can be paralyzed by the sight of mayonnaise can lay few claims on normalcy. He can certainly relate to your scorn. It shocks him as much as you that people, many of them adults, not only ask his advice but listen without laughing. To think they might act on it only makes Uncle Mike more wary when moving among them. Still, as grandma said when we loaded her into the van, life's what it is and a person's got to make the best of it. Since, for reasons Uncle Mike is happy not to know, you confuse his affairs for your own, you're probably aware his avoidance of shell fish (ha, there's a joke) is a recently acquired distaste. For most of his life, a life riddled with questionable habits, Uncle Mike ate crab and shrimp, at times with abandon. He stopped eating them ten years ago, along with lobster and crayfish, the moment he realized what they are.

'Shell fish', for anyone with eyes to see and the brains God gave a shell fish, are underwater insects. In a word, bugs. Aberrant behavior can be fun, heaven knows, but Uncle Mike draws the line at eating bugs. In terms of what Uncle Mike would eat out of desperation, large underwater insects come several clicks after bark. Call it silly, but a man must stand for something. Uncle Mike stands for never putting anything that ugly into your mouth.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My question today is this: Why don't children these days say 'thank you'? For a while I thought my irritation with this was mostly my overdeveloped need for appreciation, but as time goes by, I am becoming more discouraged daily. There are many children in my life, my own, my nieces, nephews, and friends, etc. In the past several years I've only received two written thank you's from a young person after hosting them at my house or giving a gift. Rarely do I hear, "Can I help with dinner?" or "Thanks for the great meal." I don't think I've ever heard, "Now what can I do for you?" This is turning me into a Scrooge. Whose problem are we talking about, mine or the kids'?

Unappreciated on the North Coast

Dear Unappreciated,

Perhaps the greatest political wisdom is that we get the government we deserve. The same can be said for children. It takes a whole village to raise a rude and thoughtless child. What's to be done about it? A revival of good parenting pops to mind. Like you, Uncle Mike was taught to say please, thank you, and excuse me. Like you, he learned that work is shared and help is always offered. Like you, he was encouraged to think of others at least part of the time. Like you, Uncle Mike often feels like a dinosaur. Somewhere between Dr. Spock, primal therapy, and EST, the American village, and most of the parents in it, embraced the nitwit notion that teaching manners to children is a subtle form of social oppression that stunts their will to be. Or not be, or whatever. Uncle Mike feels what manners stunt is the child's will to be a pint sized barbarian. Without what used to be called social graces, there is no civilization. There is only a lifestyle, and a boorish one at that. Because parents are busy looking for themselves and pursuing the sort of fulfillment only time saving devices and the home shopping network can bring, they scarcely have the energy to say please and thank you themselves. The village has, by default, subcontracted the socialization of apprentice humans to television. History will view this as a nasty mistake. There are no manners on popular television, there are only motives. You ask whose problem this is. Uncle Mike would suppose anyone who notices there's a problem. Certainly, parents are intimately responsible for the social behavior of their children. Imitation is the most sincere form of childhood and one of the most charming, and frightening, things about children is the way they mirror their environment, all of it. The adults of the village must, one by one, accept that being an adult implies a responsibility to all children. Part of that responsibility lies in teaching the little whelps some manners. In his dealings with children, Uncle Mike gives respect and courtesy and insists it be returned. When it's not, he assumes his role as village elder and delivers a gentle but firm teaching, called Little Dog, Big Dog. Unless, of course, the child is over eleven and could be packing a gun.

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