

Dear Uncle Mike,

I just moved into my boyfriend's house and already we've got problems. I'm not Miss Popularity or anything, but I've got a lot of friends and they like to stop by. They don't always call first and this drives him crazy. He's more reclusive than me and he says he feels like he has no privacy, that he never knows who's going to knock on the door. I feel like I'm being separated from my friends who I think should be able to visit whenever they want to. Am I being unreasonable or is he?

Feeling Isolated in Beaverton

Dear Isolated,

First off, let Uncle Mike say that living in Beaverton is, by itself, enough to make the normal feel isolated. If the friends you're talking about live there by choice, you may be better off alone. This said, we press on. Uncle Mike doesn't see your little piece of the human comedy as an either/or proposition. You're both behaving as if you lived alone, which may be an arrangement you should, as a couple, re-explore.

Let's begin by attacking you. Uncle Mike shares your boyfriend's feelings for people who 'drop by'. Right after gravity and the velocity of light, the first rule in Uncle Mike's universe is that we all call first. This is partly explained by Uncle Mike's being a devout hermit and partly by his having manners. On those rare occasions he thinks it would be nice to see old so and so, it would never occur to him that his restless urge to visit was synchronized with his victim's unspoken urge to entertain.

Unlike you, Uncle Mike doesn't have lots of friends. Uncle Mike has very few friends. He does have lots of acquaintances, many of them warm ones and is, as a rule, delighted when they call and leave a message on his machine. If Uncle Mike loves them a great deal, or they owe him money, and if he feels like dealing with another human being for any reason short of preserving life, he picks up the phone. If he doesn't, he assumes they'll assume he's not, as the houseboy would say, 'at home'. Not even Uncle Mike's blood relations drop by unannounced. They stopped when he began greeting unexpected visitors in the nude, a practice Uncle Mike has found wonderfully effective in winnowing lightweights from his social network. If you and he moved in together, only one of you would come out in the spring.

Now on to your jerk boyfriend. Uncle Mike can only assume he knew your friends were a pack of mannerless louts before you began your little misadventure in cohabitation. This can only mean he expected the pleasure of his company would be enough for you, and that your domestic union would trigger a magical change in your social habits. On Uncle Mike's block, this makes him a drooling nitwit. Another of Uncle Mike's many first rules is that everyone gets to be who they are. Explain to him in very small words that, if living with him means giving up the rest of your human contacts, you'd be happy to call him from your new place before you drop by.

Make no mistake. Uncle Mike has great respect for the sacred institution of living together. He hopes with all his heart that, before the two of you bail on a situation from which you're both going to learn so much, you sit down together and look up 'compromise' in your Funk & Wagnall's. Uncle Mike did and was forced to reject the notion. He has since spent many happy years single-habiting out of love for the hapless women who, from time to time, wander through his life with lanterns, looking for just one man who measures up.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Do you think computers are going to take over the world?

Don C., Portland

Dear Don,

No, Uncle Mike thinks it's much worse than that. The world will be taken over by computer generated humans who imagine that virtual reality is the same as being there, that life can be programmed, and that the human experience is something that can be downloaded late. This is the error called, mistaking the tool for the work. In a history peppered with bouts of fuzzy thinking, this one promises to be a real pip.

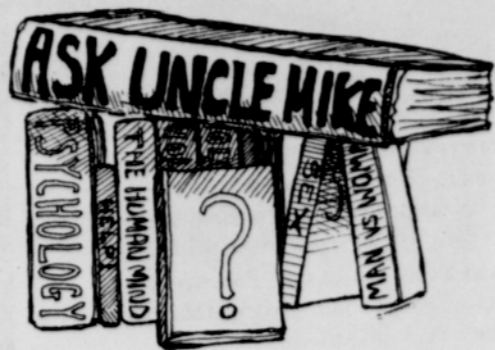
Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm thirteen. My father won't let me listen to rap music. Do you think this is fair?

Anonymous, Cannon Beach

Dear Anonymous,

Of course not. But then, it doesn't have to be. Putting things bluntly, your father's your father and that's that. Uncle Mike recommends you give the man some credit. He may be more than a clueless antique sent by a universe that hates you for the sole purpose of ruining your life. There's a chance your father actually loves you and doesn't want you growing up on diet of misogyny (look it up), a capella violence, and self-righteous nihilism masquerading as the art of social protest. Personally, Uncle Mike would gnaw off his own ears before listening to newly rich, recently paroled sociopaths snarling personal blank verse. Of course, he feels the same way about Kenny G. Everybody's a critic.



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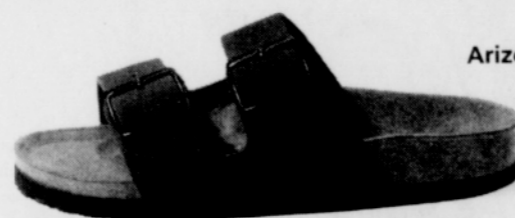
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