Dear Uncle Mike,

My little brother moved into town a few months ago so my wife and I agreed between us to offer him a place to stay while he got settled in. He's 29 and I'm 34, he's making a transition between banking and a stock brokerage. He's a good house guest, my wife likes him, and I love him like a brother.



Now I remember he can be a little cheap. He got on with a brokerage two months ago making a thousand a month plus commissions. Not a lot of money. But that was two months ago and he's not mentioning moving out. I think it's about time but my wife gets all maternal and says we should let him build up his cash a little before throwing him to the wolves. If this were your brother, what would you do?

Ed in Portland, Oregon

Dear Ed,

Uncle Mike would put him up for adoption. You say his visit has reminded you that your brother can be a little cheap. You make no mention of his paying rent or buying groceries. If not, he's a usurious tightwad. Regardless, he's an insensitive lout who's stretched the social envelope about far enough. As his older brother, you must help him learn the lesson called 'no fair sponging'. Help the lad pack, tell him you're always good for a loan, and express eagerness to have dinner at his new apartment.

Dear Uncle Mike,

The other night, my boyfriend and I went to what's supposed to be the best restaurant in town. It was sure as hell expensive enough. And very nice really. Midway through the meal, I looked over and this woman at the next table is eating her asparagus with her fingers. I almost choked on my wine. Nobody else seemed to notice except my boyfriend who couldn't believe it either. We're country bumpkins, right? This is legal, cuisine-wise?

Lisa O., Seattle, Washington

Dear Lisa,

Uncle Mike is wonderfully amused by your assumption he knows anything of the rules of fine dining, or as it's called on his block, haute eating. To Uncle Mike, the right fork is the one big enough to hold down his cheese burger. He does, however, have friends who collect and store bits of etiquette to use whenever they're feeling superior.

Your question gave Uncle Mike a reason to speak to them. He was surprised and delighted to hear that asparagus is one of those foods which, like chicken legs, has been given the nod by the unseen masters of complicated eating. One must, of course, resist the urge to dangle and wave it while speaking.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Lately I've heard that obesity is a genetically determined imbalance. Does this make it a disease? It sure seems there are a lot of overweight people out there. A change in the gene pool?

Slim, San Francisco

Dear Slim,

Uncle Mike has no doubt that a metabolic tendency to heaviness can be an inherited trait. The term disease would, however, be no more appropriate than it is when applied to those who biochemically lean toward strong drink. We all have crosses to bear, the idea being to bear them. Your observation about an increase in corpulence among the citizens matches Uncle Mike's. Rather than a sudden evolution in the gene pool, Uncle Mike suspects a rise in overeating and boredom coupled with a surge in indolence and sloth. When you eat more than you need to and don't do diddley squat, you pork out. End of story. In closely related news, a person watching television burns fewer calories than a person doing absolutely nothing. Small surprise, researchers recently found a correlation between the amount of television a child watches and their belt size. Uncle Mike would bet his remote control the same holds true for adults. That overweight runs in families doesn't necessarily make it a genetic trait. It could be nothing more than dysfunction and child abuse. Since obesity is a leading cause of heart disease, a case could be made that over eaters are, aside from self indulgent, a drain on the health care system and an inflationary factor in insurance rates. Being a devout smoker, Uncle Mike would never suggest we hunt them down with pitchforks and deny them access to public areas.

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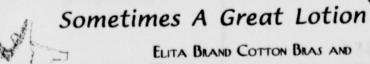
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I would rather have my ignorance than another man's knowledge, because I have got so much more of it. -- Mark Twain

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