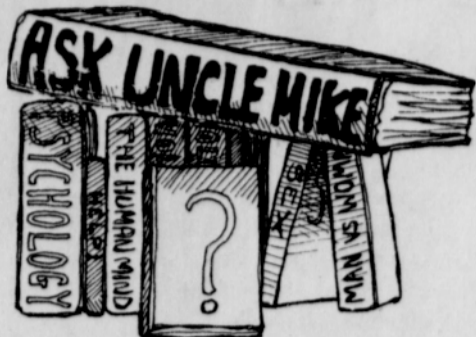


Dear Uncle Mike,

My older sister's kid is driving the family nuts. She's seven and has to be the center of attention. If I stop by for a visit, Tiffany (yes, that's her real name) plants herself between my sister and I and takes over the conversation. If that doesn't work, she stands in front of us, tap dances and expects applause. If her mother tries to ignore her (a real rarity), she tugs on her clothes and all but crawls into her lap. Forget about sharing a meal. The little subhuman treats her parents like hired help and the guests like people who've come to watch and praise her. Yes, she's smart and has a sweet side, but it's getting to where I don't even want to visit. The rest of the family feels the same. My sis says Tiffany's talented and precocious. We think she's spoiled rotten and her folks are headed for real trouble. I don't have children and so my opinion's not worth a lot, especially to an older sister, but we were raised to have manners and this kid's a tyrant in tap shoes. Any suggestions?



Fed Up in Portland

Dear Fed Up,

Assuming the family has ruled out signing your sister up for electroshock, Uncle Mike suggests you concentrate your energies on little Tiffany. It takes a whole village to raise an obnoxious child and, as her elders, you owe the little whelp your wisdom about the ways of the world. One of those ways is the relationship between adult and apprentice humans. (Referring to her as 'subhuman' seems harsh, but then Uncle Mike has the good fortune of not knowing her.) Pick a quiet moment when you and little Tiffany are alone. Look her dead in the eye and explain that if children were meant to rule the planet, the universe would have made them larger and more clever than they are. Tell her that, although you love the time you spend together, you wish she'd spend less time entertaining and more time playing quietly by herself. That, unlike her mother, but like everyone else in the world, your love for her isn't even close to unconditional. And that, if she's a good little girl and really tries to let others get a word in edgewise, you won't shove a sock in her mouth and duct tape her dancing feet together.

Dear Uncle Mike,

What are your thoughts on the McVeigh thing? Do you think the guy's being railroaded? Guilty or innocent?

E.P., Coos Bay, Oregon

Dear E.P.,

As in the case of O.J. Simpson, Uncle Mike doesn't know the young man, wasn't in Oklahoma City on the day in question, and avoided, with nearly complete success, the breathless reportage of the trial like the plague of press releases it continues to be. Never have so many imagined they knew so much about affairs that weren't their own. As for guilt and innocence, you've got the wrong legal system. In court, one is either guilty or not guilty; innocence is neither a consideration nor an acceptable plea. Whatever happened, Uncle Mike longs for anything that will bring 'closure': a process indistinguishable from the old fashioned 'getting on with your life' except that it takes much longer and is more vocal. The only bright side to the affair is that, since Mr. McVeigh was not good at running while carrying a ball and has starred in no television commercials, the number of civil suits will be smaller. After you strip his parents of their retirement, what have you got?

Dear Uncle Mike,

I will make this letter as pleasant as possible. As a practicing counselor, I'm curious: do you honestly feel you're up to the responsibility of dispensing advice to people you've never met? Do you have any formal training in psychology? I read your column infrequently. Even so, there have been several occasions when I felt your advice was more clever than therapeutic. If you were seeing me professionally, I'd explore with you the possibility that you're overcompensating for an inability to manage your own affairs and are merely seeking attention and ego fulfillment. Care to respond? Or, better yet, schedule an appointment?

A Mental Health Professional, Spokane

Dear Mental,

Because Uncle Mike senses in you a pressing need for order, he'll answer your questions in the sequence they were presented. Does Uncle Mike feel up to giving advice to strangers? You bet. Ann Landers and Dear Abby get away with it and they're writing from another century. Does Uncle Mike have any formal training in psychology? Absolutely not. He studied literature, a field in which abnormality is encouraged rather than medicated. Uncle Mike also studied psychology majors and found them alarmingly odd. Uncle Mike is happy to hear you read his column infrequently and would recommend, professionally, that you cut back even further. As a replacement, explore the Sunday funnies and, in severe cases, cartoons in the New Yorker. Uncle Mike is delighted that you found some of his advice more clever than therapeutic. Increasing your dosage will make much of this go away. Your theory about overcompensation, personal inadequacy, and a starved ego yearning to be listened to is, in Uncle Mike's professional opinion, a real dandy and he plans to give it all the thought it deserves. He regrets not being able to schedule an appointment with you. He's afraid it might be more therapeutic than clever. Have a normal day.

- Oaks' Principles of Lawmaking:**
1. Law expands in proportion to the resources available of its enforcer.
  2. Bad law is more likely to be supplemented than repealed.
  3. Social legislation cannot repeal physical laws.

# Therapy Page

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