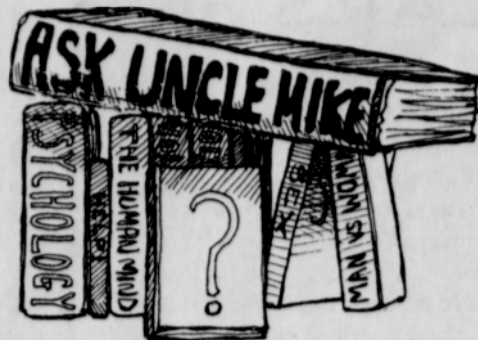


Dear Uncle Mike,

My buddy and I have a bet going. He thinks you're a conservative, I think you're a liberal. We both agree that if we haven't been able to figure you out yet, you're okay either way. Nosey question, right?  
Two Guys in Elko



# THERAPY PAGE

Dear Two Guys,

Nosey seems a bit tame. It's more polite to inquire after someone's intestinal tract than their philosophy of government. But, since you were gauche enough to ask, Uncle Mike is fool enough to answer. If you come upon someone collapsed on the roadside, there are two ways to get them up: lend them a hand or kick them repeatedly. While Uncle Mike is more disposed to the former, he would cheerfully open a major vein before calling himself a liberal; while there are individuals and institutions that cry out more for a boot to the backside than a monthly check, if Uncle Mike and Pat Buchanan were marooned in a cabin, only one would emerge in the spring. Like many of the thoughtful, Uncle Mike gags at a two party system that embodies the democratic principles of Microsoft, Nike, and AT&T but with fewer benefits and less chance for advancement. Politics in the corporate state boils down to a choice between several brands of corn flakes, all of them overpriced and drained of nutritional content. Is Uncle Mike a liberal or a conservative? Yes and no. Given the chance, he'd vote a straight reform ticket since, in his experience, there's precious little about government, and a society that would let it happen, that's not sorely in need of it. As for his religious affiliation, your logical next question, Uncle Mike is a Pythagorean with quantum/relativistic leanings and an abiding love for fairies.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My boyfriend and I have an ongoing argument about tipping. I say the current rule of fifteen percent is enough, less if the service is mediocre. He never tips less than twenty-five percent and I've seen him leave five dollars on the table to cover two cups of coffee. We both have active professional lives and eat out a great deal. Money's not the issue. Being in business, I just don't believe in paying more than the accepted price for goods and services. We both read your column and would like to know what you think.  
Kristin L., Seattle

Dear Kristin,

Uncle Mike thinks you and your boyfriend should find new partners. He could find someone able to distinguish between value and price and you could find someone who had a calculator implanted at birth. Uncle Mike is glad you have an active professional life and hopes it's more pleasant than that of the waiters and waitresses who serve food and beverages to the cheap. It's nice that you eat out a lot. Whenever Uncle Mike does, it's because he's either too lazy to cook or unable to make anything half as good. He tries not to forget that his dining experience involves the short term hiring of personal staff. Yes, your waiter or waitress is paid an hourly wage: one that would nearly cover slamming your plate on the table and ignoring you until you went away. Good service is an art and a vocation. Your tip is an expression of gratitude for being treated like a pasha and respect for anyone who could put up with you and still be gracious. On Uncle Mike's block there are two rules for tipping. If it doesn't fold, it's not a tip, and you could die before you had another chance to treat another human being the way you'd like to be treated. Perhaps your company will downsize and give you the chance to sing for your supper to an audience of the tone deaf. Bon appetit.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Everywhere I turn, someone is talking about living life "on the edge". I remain unclear why this should be a goal. I am in my midfifties, have been married to the same woman for more than thirty years, and together we have raised three successful children. Neither my wife nor I are dull people. We merely agreed long ago to not take chances whose repercussions would effect the quality of our lives and those of our children. Tell me if I'm wrong, but it seems that living on the edge is a selfish decision that flies in the face of civilization itself and ignores the rewards of a mature, responsible life. Standing on the edge of anything means living constantly in danger of falling. That this seems to be becoming a national spirit is not encouraging.  
Centered, Eugene, Oregon

Dear Centered,

Uncle Mike is pleased to hear that you and your wife aren't dull and have raised three successful children. Interesting word, success. While the sort of living on the edge portrayed in commercials for soft drinks and gourmet sneakers appeals to Uncle Mike even less than sliding down a bannister lined with broken glass, the idea and the path to fulfillment it represents are part of the human equation. To live on the edge means to be outside, to test the rules in order to see which are grounded in universal truth and which are part of society's shuck and jive machinery of control. All of art and science depend upon questioning what seems to be in light of what is. This includes the art of living a good life and the science of human relationships. Socrates, Einstein, Picasso, and Miles Davis, in showing us their view from the edge, changed the way we perceive the world. One hesitates to call them immature or irresponsible. As Bob Dylan, a child of the middle class, pointed out: to live outside the law you must be honest. To live inside the law, all you need to do is memorize the rules and behave, certain in the knowledge that if you smile and nod enough, master will give you a cookie. Your assumption that this decision is a magic charm against nasty repercussions prompts Uncle Mike to much needed laughter. As someone once suggested, hell is an eternity spent in comfort and certainty. Yes, life on the edge involves the certainty of falling. It also provides humans with their only opportunity to fly. Enjoy your coma.

Letters to Uncle Mike: PO Box 1242, Depoe Bay, OR 97341

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