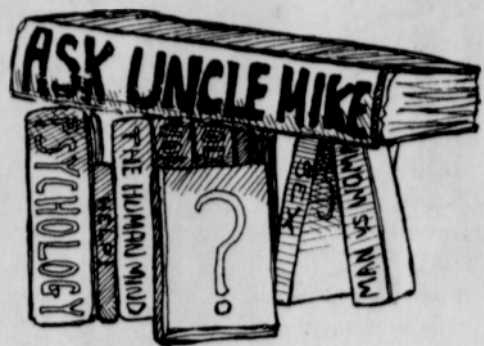


Dear Uncle Mike,
 Unlike many of those who write you, my life isn't riddled with difficulties. My love life is fine, my job is satisfying, I have no problem pets, and I'm not obsessed with the implications of quantum theory. My problem is remembering names. My work involves a good deal of socializing and I'm constantly embarrassed by being unable to recall the names of people I've known, on a casual basis, for some time. I was just wondering if, in your travels, you'd come across some simple way of remembering names. Other people must suffer the same syndrome. Thanks for your time.
 B.T., Portland, Oregon



THE THERAPY PAGE

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Dear B.T.,
 Being obsessed with the implications of quantum theory, Uncle Mike regards time as an illusion of the senses, a figment of our measured observation of a seamless everywhere and everywhen. For this reason, and others he'll not go into, Uncle Mike ignores time whenever possible and would open a vein before wearing a personal clock, unless it weighed forty or fifty pounds and was shackled to his neck. He could get behind that as a form of meditation. But you're welcome anyway. Uncle Mike is happy as a bunny to hear your life is going well, aside from your brain's inability to store important information, which is probably nothing to worry about. Uncle Mike has trouble remembering names too. Of course, Uncle Mike has trouble remembering many things. Try this. Since your love life is so grand, try never to go anywhere socially without your partner. Ask her, as a favor, to introduce herself if you don't do so immediately upon meeting another mysterious someone. Done smoothly, they'll never catch on that your neural software has classified them as forgettable. Uncle Mike skated by on this one for years. One small word of warning. It's important that you not have quarreled with your accomplice on the way to the gathering. You don't want to see the way she'll smile and cock an eyebrow as the painful silence falls.

Dear Uncle Mike,
 The other day I was standing outside of a shop, having a smoke while my friend finished his business. A woman walked by on the sidewalk with her daughter, who looked to be about seven. As I usually do, I smiled and nodded. The woman looked at me like I was carrying an ax and told her daughter to hold her breath. I regard myself as a considerate smoker and have no quarrel with rules banning smoking in enclosed public places, but I don't enjoy or believe I deserve being treated like a pariah for engaging in what is, when I last looked, a legal activity. I'm a long time reader and know that you smoke, or at least did, and would appreciate it if you'd answer this in your column. Not so I can see my gripes in print but that it might encourage nonsmokers to loosen the screws a little. Am I expecting too much?
 Angela W., Elko, Nevada

Dear Angela,
 In a word, yes. The health and fitness enlightenment that's somehow generated the most overweight American population in history may sanction dosing their emotionally neglected children with Prozac but they'll never stop flogging you for smoking tobacco anywhere near them. It does no good to remind them that the cars driving past them on the sidewalk belch, annually, their curb weight in known carcinogens and toxic gases vile and various. You will still be, in their mind, a filthy addict whose habit is the greatest threat they face in the pursuit of their bliss. You must remind yourself often that this is their problem. As Socrates probably said, prigs are prigs. As others are born to dance, prigs are born to wretch at the sight of any behavior other than their own. Allow Uncle Mike to share his favorite smoking story. It comes from the late Father Abbot, founder of William Temple House in Portland, and the finest practicing Christian Uncle Mike's ever met. Father Abbot was a Falstaffian figure, full of laughter and life, much loved and respected by everyone who so much as met him, a man who loved good food only slightly more than he loved shopping for it. In the days when smoking was allowed in supermarkets, Father Abbot was standing at the end of the aisle, studying his want list and carefully flicking his ashes into the ashtray provided when an angry dowager stomped to within eight inches of his face. She demanded to know how he, a man of the cloth, could indulge such a filthy habit in public. Father Abbot thought for a moment and answered, "It helps me to mind my own business." That was, of course, then and this is an increasingly ugly and self righteous now. Good luck. See you on the reservation.

Dear Uncle Mike,
 Why is it that people assume a) their voice is good enough to perform in public, and b) that you want to listen to them sing while you're standing in line at the grocery store? Short of asking them to shut up, what do you do?
 D. L., Lincoln City, Oregon

Dear D.L.,
 You didn't mention the option of striking their forehead with a small mallet. Uncle Mike respects your restraint. You might try handing them a dollar and telling them you hope their career is more successful than appears likely.

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

I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it. Harry S Truman

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