



# THE THERAPY PAGE

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm a woman in my mid twenties. My boyfriend and I just moved in together. When we each had our own place, I was impressed that Rocky (not his real name of course) not only kept his own apartment clean, he also shared cooking and dish washing when he stayed over with me. My friends told me how lucky I was.

Now, I agree. Since we moved in together, he's become a different person. Somehow, it usually works out that I cook (he says my cooking is better than his and I can't argue) and do the bulk of the clean up. He's not a slob and picks up after himself but that's about it. When it comes to real house work (deep cleaning, the toilet), he dawdles and putters until I tell him to just get out of the way. We've talked about it, he knows I'm not happy with the arrangement and he keeps saying he'll try harder. So far, talk's been cheap. He says since I only work 30 hours a week and he works at least 40, it's only fair that I put more time into the house work. I bring in as much money as he does and I figure the extra time is mine to do what I want with. Who's not being fair here?

Being Had, Sausalito

Dear Ms. Had,

It's a close call, but you win. Which is to say, you're slightly more off base than your less than gallant lout. To be played well, the domestic comedy must be reduced to simplest terms. Beginning with our descent from trees, human society has been arranged around two kinds of work: that which is done inside the cave and that which is done outside. We may have prettier foreheads than our ancestors but we remain hunter gatherers, dragging home paychecks instead of antelope. For biological reasons too politically incorrect to mention, the lady hunter gatherers mostly stayed at home while the men of the house went out and killed something. This done, their work week was over. (Anthropologists recently decided that, in order to sustain the family unit, the average hunter gatherer labored about four hours a week, spending the rest of their time playing the flute, horsing around with the kids, and chatting. The industrial revolution rescued us from this.) So much for tradition. Recent changes in society--the take over of the planet by ruthless corporations, the institutionalization of greed, and the invention of the two wage earner family--has bulldozed the playing field. Gender equality has empowered us all to become professionals, defining ourselves by how well we do hunting and gathering dollars in the marketplace. Nobody's home, not even the kids. It's a pretty funny world.

But we were talking about you. You make the same money as your partner in less time. Good for you. Regardless of your sex, this means you have more time for inside work. No, you shouldn't spend all of your extra ten hours scrubbing out the bathtub, just as (nudge, nudge) you wouldn't expect your sweet baboo to. Neither should your shameless male imagine that whining is a substitute for sharing unpleasant chores. Remind him he's a big, strong man and can take it. Another possibility is for the two of you to drag back enough antelope to afford a house cleaning service.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Just one simple question. How old are you? My friend thinks you're over fifty, I think you're younger. We're both eighteen. Also, what do you look like? Why don't you have a picture with your column? I'll bet a lot of people are curious who you are.

Amy and Maria, Eugene, Oregon

Dear Amy and Maria,

Many people are curious who Uncle Mike really is, none of them more than Uncle Mike himself. As for age, you're both right. Depending on the day, Uncle Mike is either younger than springtime or older than dirt. What does Uncle Mike look like? Your basic male human, except for the feathers. The feathers explain why no photograph runs with the column.

Dear Uncle Mike,

Could you give your readers a sure fire, polite way to say no to invitations? I couldn't come up with a good one on the spur of the moment last week and spent one of the most miserable nights of my life eating bad home made Szechuan in the company of people I wish I hadn't met. Stop me before I say yes again.

Can't Say No, Seattle

Dear Can't,

Since the only thing worse than being invited too often is being invited rarely or not at all, the art of declining gracefully is a crucial stitch in the social fabric. Over the years, Uncle Mike has experimented with many excuses, his early failures including: "Darn, my aunt is dying that night", "I'd sooner be staked out in a crab pit", and "I've taken a vow of nudity." The important part of declining is that your reason, whatever it is, must contain at least a shred of truth. Uncle Mike's generic fade back position is that he'd love to, and would, if he weren't going out of town. Sometime on the appointed day, Uncle Mike goes to the city limits, stops at the first diner and has a cup of coffee and reads the New Yorker. It also works with cheap novels. Address letters to Uncle Mike: PO Box 1242, Depoe Bay, OR 97341

Dear Uncle Mike,

My boyfriend invited some of the people he works with to our apartment for cocktails. I'm a little new to this. The invitations say 'from six to eight'. My boyfriend says we don't have to feed them because it's not a dinner invitation. It seems to me they'll expect something to eat. Should I at least have some cheese and crackers? There's a rule for this somewhere, right?

New in Town, Portland

Dear New,

There's a rule for everything somewhere, dear. But, since the massive framework of etiquette (a French word meaning 'ritual fussiness') was bolted together by people Uncle Mike would never allow in his home, he can be of no help telling you which rule applies to your situation. In Uncle Mike's experience, much of it too grisly to go into, food of some sort is a good idea at 'affairs de cocktail', especially when you ask your guests to show up at supper time. It makes no difference whether you're supposed to feed them or not. An evening of chitchat with people drinking on empty stomachs is an experience worth planning to prevent.

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Dear Uncle Mike,

Does time really go faster when you're having fun?  
 Leah R., San Francisco

Dear Leah,

Strictly speaking, and we must, time doesn't go anywhere. Like space, time is a conceptual backdrop for perceived change. Or, more correctly, space/time is the fabric of creation, the warp and woof of observable reality. This doesn't, of course, mean that time is constant and unchanging. Space/time is related to velocity. As one's speed increases, one's wristwatch slows. At velocities approaching the speed of light, the time between clicks becomes, quite literally, half of forever. At the speed of light, space/time disappears, and with it, you and your clock. Does time go faster when you're having fun? This depends on what you mean by fun. Time goes fastest when you're sitting still. Unless you're watching television at the time.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm writing about a friend of mine. 'Joe' started seeing a woman about two months ago and his life's going down the toilet. She's a nice person and all, but she was dating another guy when she met Joe and she's still dating him. My friend's in love and having her go out with someone else is driving him nuts. All he can think about is how to win this woman. I'm afraid he's going to bump into the two of them some night and punch the guys lights out. On nights when she's out with 'friends', Joe drives by her apartment to see if the lights are on and waits till she comes home to see who she's with. I'm worried about him. He doesn't listen to a word I say and says I don't understand what real love is. If you were me, what would you do?

A Friend in Seattle

Dear Friend,

If Uncle Mike were you, he'd pour himself a tumbler of sour mash and ponder the idiot mysteries of human behavior. Your friend says you don't understand real love. Uncle Mike's not sure he does either, but he does have a pretty good handle on mental imbalance and obsession, which is the sort of 'love' your friend is exhibiting to an outside observer. If and when he starts listening to you again, tell him for Uncle Mike that he's coming unwrapped over a situation that's none of his business. And, depending on the young woman's game plan, possibly beneath his contempt. After looking and looking for many years, Uncle Mike has yet to witness anyone winning someone's love. Falling in love is the least rational of all human pastimes and, unless the love object is a card carrying whacko, she or he won't be keeping score. We don't fall in love with winners, we fall in love with those it's impossible to resist. The young lady in question (your friend's emotional mess has youth written all over it) is doing what she wants. If she wanted to make a commitment to someone, she would. People are like that and your friend needs to recognize what is. And, as importantly, what isn't. Tell the nitwit that short circuiting will get him nowhere; unless the young lady is one of those who enjoy causing short circuits, in which case he and everyone else should avoid her like the plague. Encourage him to back off a bit, emotionally disengage, lower the voltage. Offer to help by strapping him to a kitchen chair and giving him a towel to chew on. Explain that he's being a hopeless mope and needs to stiffen his spine. Tell him that with love, as with the rest of life, the only way to win is by deciding not to compete. And that driving by someone's apartment and parking there in the dead of night to see who she comes home with isn't just obsessive. It's a form of stalking. Letters to Uncle Mike may be addressed to PO Box 1242, Depoe Bay, OR 97341

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