

Therapy Page

Love Letters from the Farm
(On the content of beliefs and
the nature of seeking answers.)
by Ginny Callahan

Dear Dad,
Thanks fro articulating your ideas on community and offering me a chance to voice mine. I appreciate the opportunity to further communication in our family. In discussing, I want to try to stay more personal than philosophical - to look at the bricks of our actual lives instead of the fascia of some hypothetical existence.
You've asked good questions, and I will try to answer:
Why I choose to live on a farm.
Why I find non-traditional employment rewarding.
What community means to me and why it's important.
But first I want to allay your fear that your "personal quirks and deficiencies" are distorting my perceptions and leading me down some "unrealistic paths". We have lived different experiences and are different people. It is natural that our beliefs and even the ways we go about finding them differ.
I respect your search for truth and a coherent life. You rise early daily to contemplate the Bible in the privacy of your study and your heart. You organize Bible Study groups to learn from other people and encourage them. You live what you're learning - by volunteering at Star of Hope Ministries, by recognizing that other people are soft in the middle like yourself, and by treating them with respect. All of this I love you for. And if I haven't come to the same realizations as you, at least I have inherited the need to seek.
Parents naturally try to present to their children a world that makes sense. However, kids have a propensity for finding holes in the picture. So we offspring build a model that seems to explain these holes and make more sense to us. Until we have kids....

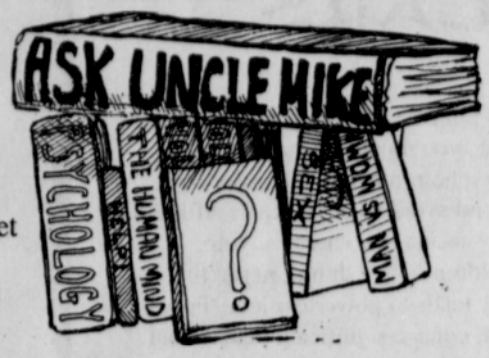
There will always be places where's ones belief system and one's world collide. I remember a lunch in Grandma's picnic grove shortly after she died during which the extended family was debating the world's problems and God's plan. One group of people receiving blame was homosexuals. You didn't know then that one of your nieces, a grown woman, whom you love, who also tries her best to be an honest Christian, is gay. When you learned that, you embraced her and reminded her and yourself that you do love her for who she is. It's times like these that make me especially glad you're my father and one of my best role models. I do wonder how you think of gayness now. How do you assimilate this confusing dissonance? Is Jen misguided and lost, or has your world view changed?

I know that the content of beliefs is critically important. It's not enough simply to have beliefs. One can vehemently believe that red is green and still get run over in an intersection. But how do I say this right? One's beliefs must also be organic to one's life. To a certain extent we create beliefs with the material at hand. Even other Bible-studying Christians come up with different persuasions and different ways of living them. Are they wrong? How do you account for the differences?

I don't want to argue. I don't want to be lectured. I don't want to break your heart by being "out of the fold". So mainly I've kept my mouth shut. This may be true of all offspring, but I often find myself justifying my choices to you, against your voice telling me why I'm wrong. Perhaps one must be wrong from time to time. Perhaps a dialog will open us both.

I search, too. I believe in the exercise, and the exorcise, of questioning. I believe we all need a truth to hold, to give us absolutes in a universe that has more dimensions than we can comprehend. I believe in cultivating an elastic mind; in principles that guide our interactions; in gathering with like-minded friends; in the humility to learn and change. And I believe children learn from watching their parents. Thank you.

Far from leading me astray, I think you have given me an admirable foundation. We have lived different experiences and are different people. It is natural that our conclusion (if there ever is such a concrete thing) and even they way we go about finding them differ.
I look forward to a conversation in letters.



Dear Uncle Mike,
I get down sometimes and have trouble getting back up. It's not like I need Prozac. I just need to be able to see out of the hole faster. Do you ever get down? What do you do?
Constant Reader, Newport, Oregon

Dear Constant Reader,
Yes, like most thoughtful people, Uncle Mike sometimes feels less than himself. For whatever reason, it seems to become shallower and more fleeting with age. Uncle Mike's great teacher on the subject was a gardener he worked with for a time planting bamboo in a Siberian tiger exhibit. One morning we were shoveling elephant manure in the rain and Mike was discussing his mother who was having a hard time. He suggested she stay busy. "It's hard to be down when you're doing something." Even shoveling elephant manure in the rain. Simply put, depression is inertia, the psychological equivalent of mass. In finer terms, depression is the lack of motion. The world becomes a bitter fudge you're swimming through. This state, whose causes may be imaginary but whose effect is as real as a stone wall, was one of the reasons the Chinese invented firecrackers. It breaks the spell. What makes depression so little fun is that it's a biochemical state. One's neural circuitry is flooded and damped by what good science call 'blue meanies'. Blue meanies may listen to reason but they are slow to respond. Thoughts are electromagnetic events, moods are their steady state background of chemical balances. Changing a mood involves washing psychoactive chemicals from your window on the world. It involves physical action; and increase or decrease in momentum. One either does something, or in the case of those experiencing mania, one stops doing it. How much of a surprise can it be that, when you're feeling down, you feel better when you get up? Take a voyage into the dark heart of your angst and discover the source of your fear and sadness. Ask yourself how little any of it will matter in a thousand years. Think positive thoughts, even when the feelings they induce don't last. Just as sure as the universe make little green apples, keep trying and they will. As more than one happy person has pointed out, it never hurts to look on the bright side. Find something to smile about, someone to smile at. Go to the park and watch dogs and children play. Meditate on just how blind and stupid it is to pull down the shades on a surprise party thrown in your honor by the forces of creation. Write a short essay on self pity explaining the advantages of wallowing in worst case scenarios and pretending you're powerless. If all else fails, sit down and seriously count your blessings, an ancient spiritual exercise only chuckled at by those who've not tried it. Uncle Mike who, in his time, has self induced some dandy dark states, has never got past three without feeling the sun peek through the dreck. It helps if he then remembers to make barnyard sounds. He generally begins with the cow, follows with the sheep, and closes with the duck. As my old gardener friend would agree, it's hard to take things seriously when you're quacking.

Dear Uncle Mike,
Do you think Monica Lewinsky had a 'relationship' with President Clinton?
Angela, Portland, Oregon

Dear Angela,
Like you, Uncle Mike would have no way of knowing. Unlike you, the special prosecutor, and a news media behaving as if it were on bad drugs, he doesn't concern himself with the personal affairs of people he doesn't know.

Dear Uncle Mike,
What is your opinion on gambling? I think it causes problems with the family because my mom told me that her friend spent their whole savings. It's an addiction that's hard to stop. I'm concerned on your answer.
Dean O., Elko, Nevada

Dear Dean,
The gambler's addiction is to action and risk. Add the flashing lights and beeps of a video poker machine, and you've got a dangerous drug. Life is a gamble, filled with action and risk, and Uncle Mike has no problem with those who thrive on it. Unless it gets in the way of their lives. Taking food and security from those you love is not the path of right action. More dangerous that the addiction of the gambler is the addiction of the dealer, in these times, federal and state governments who twitch at the thought of giving up their cut of the profits. There's a big difference between allowing citizens to gamble and advertising the lottery on television, and no society thinking clearly would encourage drunks to match wits with a video poker machine.