

Dear Uncle Mike,

When I was seventeen years old I met this great guy and we got engaged, he bought me a nice ring and we set the date. The next month I found out that I was pregnant. Well as you can imagine I had to make some decisions, I broke up with him and gave the baby up for adoption, I have always missed this little girl now twenty-one in April next year, and I want to know she is safe and happy, just a little background, I have been writing the adoption agency since 1981 with cards and letters and b-day cards and pictures of her three siblings and me.

How do I recapture this lost youth, is there any hope that someday I might see her or even just hear her voice, just once, not to bore you but my father was the reason I gave her up, she was a blemish on his perfect record in town, he was the president of the Knights of Columbus and the good guy at church ever Sunday, he convinced my mother that I had to go live with my uncle on the other side of the state and be a great secret in town ever since. I guess I will always hope that she forgives me for giving her up, but I never really wanted to, just sign me....

Waiting with open arms

Dear Waiting,

In rereading your saga, something Uncle Mike could manage only once, he found two phrases that qualify as questions: how do you recapture lost youth, and, is there any hope that you might someday see your daughter or hear her voice. As for recapturing lost youth, even you must realize this is a dead horse. Our 'youth' is, in large part, a scrapbook of memories carefully cobbled together into a backstory that helps people who haven't done much since high school justify having consumed large portions of food, oxygen, and fossil fuels. Given the rotten hands that came our way on the uneven poker table of life, it's only because of our superhuman efforts to be good people that, instead of going postal down at the mall, we carved out useful lives sitting around in our bathrobes feeling misty about roads not traveled and blaming others for our decision not to travel them.

Uncle Mike hates to sound unsympathetic dear, but this is just such awful horse pucky. In the beginning is the event. The event, your event, took place twenty-one years ago. You (not your father, the Knights of Columbus, or an itinerant band of Shriners), broke up with the young man who had, before biology might have turned his gesture of love to one of mere honor and decency, asked you to be his wife. So you'd already set the date, making the matter of your pregnancy nobody's business but your own, which phrase most people would understand to mean the two of you, not you and your father. Not surprisingly, you make no mention how the baby's father felt about his child being put up for adoption. The two of you still keep in touch do you? And so, because you decided life would be better if you broke your vow to a man who loved you and gave up to the kindness of strangers the child that your love had produced, you donned your maternal widow weeds and, Uncle Mike is willing to bet, have been bludgeoning the innocent with the near Biblical purity of your grief ever since.

In a kinder, gentler universe, you'd have something better to do with your time than track down a twenty-one year old guilt trip. Say this to yourself until you believe it: everyone involved did the best they could at the time. It's a real pity you don't have other children. But wait! You do! Slowly stop mentioning this other person to them. Too bad about the no father unit. Men: you just can't count on them. You might stop mentioning that to your children too.

Dear Uncle Mike,

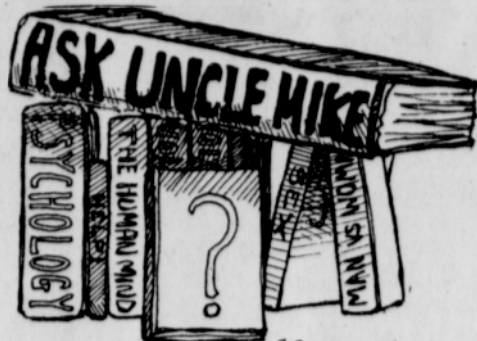
My five year old son Kevin is just at that age where everything interests him. His latest interest is pop-tab soft drink openers. I know what you're thinking. No, he doesn't run around the super market popping tabs on cans of soda I then have to buy. A lady in my mother's group told me that even the new tabs that say connected to the can can be dangerous, that it's still possible for a child to cut or badly pinch their fingers. She hasn't been able to find the article she read but I was wondering if you might know something about this? I really get a kick out of your column. You sure aren't Ann Landers!

Just a Mommy

Dear Just,

No, Uncle Mike sure isn't. She's the lady who would have read the article the other lady is rummaging through her file cabinet for. Uncle Mike predicts it appeared in Readers Digest. For a moment there, he was tempted to call someone in authority somewhere, kick buttocks, take names and get at the truth. Suddenly, he felt very tired and just lit a cigarette instead. In the first place, madam, if young Kevin is, at five, just now reaching that age where everything interests him, he could have serious disinterest problems. Chimpanzees half Kevin's age are able to wait tables without cutting their little fingers on the soup spoons. Unless, of course, someone is still cutting their soup for them. In the hands of those being stupid, many objects are dangerous: marbles and golf balls placed too far into the improper body orifice, pillows duct taped too tightly over little brother's breathing holes, bath water any deeper than four inches, television sets with the switch turned on, kitties not wearing muzzles and small boxing gloves. Because of your question, Uncle Mike opened a soft drink, poured the contents down the drain (with training, any child can learn to do this), and spent perhaps a minute of concentrated effort trying to hurt himself. He found that if he left the little tab standing straight up and jammed the can ferociously into his eye, or worked the tab slowly loose and swallowed it, or ran his little finger around inside the hole really, really fast, he could in fact inflict some damage. No chimpanzee has ever been observed doing any of these things more than once. They can, however, be taught to watch morning cartoons and drink chemically laced sugar water until they lose interest in most everything else.

"I will only shake my finger at him," he said, and placed it on the trigger. Stanislaw J. Lec



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