

Dear Uncle Mike,
 I hope you don't take offense, but are you gay? My girlfriend bet me five dollars you are. She says you don't sound like a straight guy, you're too sensitive and compassionate. I told her you talk about women in your life but she still thinks you're homosexual. I hope not, I'll lose my five dollars.
 Dos Chicks, Boulder, Colorado

Dear Dos,
 Your curiosity confirms Uncle Mike's worst fears about how boring it must be in Boulder. Uncle Mike is, for better or worse, a staunch heterosexual. Even more amazing, he knows several sensitive and compassionate men who at least seem heterosexual to their wives and girlfriends. Perhaps there'd be many more if being sensitive and compassionate weren't identified by women (who, we must suppose, are sensitive and compassionate by nature) as well as idiot homophobic men as traits of the gay male. Maybe just maybe, if sensitivity and compassion were advertised as *human* traits, more humans of both genders would exhibit them. Then you wouldn't have to wonder if every insensitive and vicious woman you meet is a lesbian. No offense taken.

Dear Uncle Mike,
 I have a friend who is always put off by people who, without thinking, make racist remarks in public. He lacks the understanding that not all people understand mixed relationships and that all generations don't understand the changes in society making it safe for gays or different cultured people to become partners. Each time this happens he goes for the throat and doesn't let up. I now find it difficult to be around him in public for fear such an occasion might come up. I have tried to explain that he should back off and try to understand but he continues on. I no longer want to be in his presence in public. I really enjoy his company otherwise. Do you have any ideas how we could work something out?
 Beth, Kingman, Arizona

Dear Beth,
 Not really. The two of you confront ignorance and bad manners differently and there are good reasons to support both approaches. A cop of Uncle Mike's acquaintance once told him that the reason he occasionally slammed miscreants into masonry walls was that, "With some people, that's the only way to get their attention." Uncle Mike has met too many citizens who fit this description to disagree. All situations are, by definition, situational and some of them simply cry out for tough love; although, unless your friend is a large person with a badge and a club, Uncle Mike would encourage him to hone his verbal abilities. It's not always bad form to publicly confront racism, sexism or any other form of fundamental stupidity. A time to learn, a time to teach. The goal is always understanding and who knows whether pointing out to someone that they're acting like a racist pig or a gender fascist is just the flash they need to trigger a state more closely resembling mental health? Since they might also slam you into a masonry wall, it's important to deliver the teaching without being rude. "What a wonderful imitation of a mindless bigot! Could you possibly do it again?" "It's amazing to find a full grown man who knows as little as you about women." "Have you always hated men or did you just recently become poisonously embittered?" "As a homophobe, what exactly frightens you about other people's sex lives?" You might also tell your friend for Uncle Mike that few pronouncements are as effective as a well delivered withering stare.

Dear Uncle Mike,
 There's this woman who works at my local tavern. She's worked there a few months and we've spent a lot of time talking, a lot about her boyfriend who has been a real pain. She is finally telling him to move out. We've gotten to know each other real well and I know she likes me, I just don't know how much. Sometimes I think she flirts with me for real, other times I think she's just being a bartender. I used to make a point of shaking her hand good night but for the last couple of weeks, she's come around the bar to give me a hug. Mostly the 'A' hug with pats on the back, but once or twice it's seemed like more. I'm confused. I don't want to make a fool of myself. I suggested having coffee or a drink sometime and she said she'd like to but every time I ask, it's not a good time for her. Do I keep on or stop?

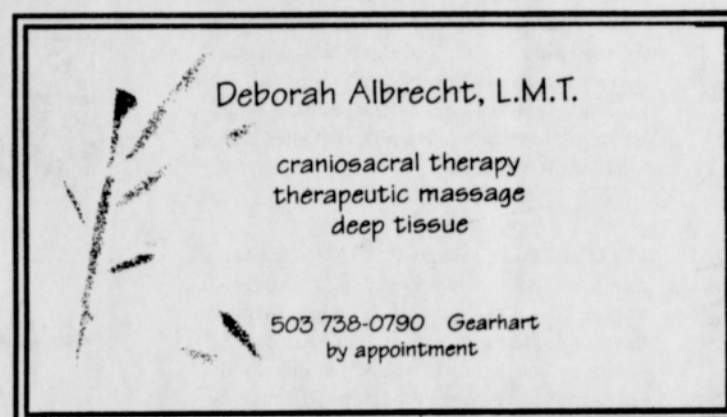
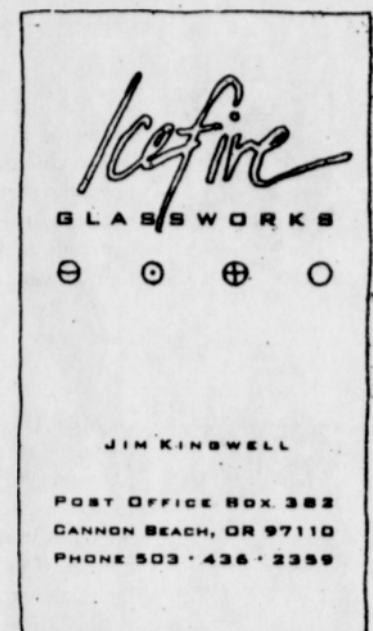
Jeff, On the Coast

Dear Jeff,
 Uncle Mike recommends you do both. What the woman needs most is a male she can talk to and, if for no other reason than that we're all in this together, you could make many worse decisions than to continue filling this role. Should you stop obsessing over her and trying to decipher each gesture in terms of what you want? Absolutely. There are few things Uncle Mike can tell you that are more true than this: if a woman wants you, she'll find a way to let you know. Until then, why not try being her friend? In the end, that's what matters most.

Dear Uncle Mike,
 Okay, are you ready? Male. Two dogs. Embarrassed. Wearing my greatest smile, walking my owners, I was bending over with their 'pooper scooper' and plastic bag when the most beautiful lady I had ever seen walked by saying good morning. At which time, Pat (male dog) nudged me in the crotch, knocking me over. She jogged off laughing. All I can think of is the beautiful face I saw. So, finally, here is the question. . . If and when I should run into this woman of my dreams again, do you have a cute 'quip' that might help me get past my embarrassment, which might lead me into inviting her for coffee? You always seem to know what to say, so I await your words of humor.
 D. D., Portland Oregon

Dear D. D.,
 Ask if she'd like to see another amusing dog trick.

THE RARY PAGE



People only think a thing's worth believing in if it's hard to believe. Armiger Barclay



I can't figure out where I leave off and everyone else begins. George McCabee



Art doesn't die when the artist dies, it dies when you die.

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If we wish to make a new world we have the material ready. The first one, too, was made out of chaos. Robert Quillen