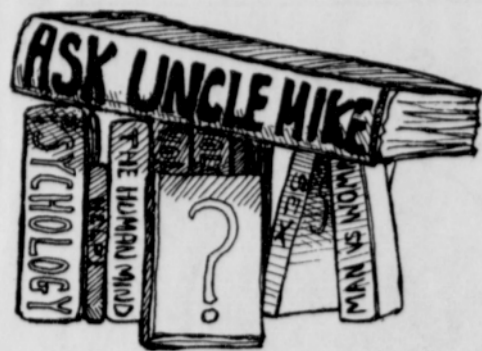


THE THERAPY PAGE



Dear Uncle Mike,
I am seventeen and in love for the first time. This boy is absolutely perfect and he loves me. The problem is my friend. She and him hung out for a month and she didn't want him. They're kind of friends and all but it was over. So when him and me got together I thought it was okay. Now she's all mad when I'm busy and we can't hang out. She says she's not jealous but I think she is, she kind of flirts with him sometimes.

He doesn't want her, he wants me. I think she should just grow up and get over it, my aunt says friends are important and her feelings are probably hurt. Is that my fault? No way am I going to stop seeing this boy because it bothers her. My aunt reads your column (sometimes I do too) and she said I should ask you about it. Thanks.

Samantha, Newport, Oregon

Dear Samantha,

Before he begins, allow Uncle Mike to congratulate you on having found the world's only perfect young man. No wonder you're willing to sacrifice a friendship to be with him. You might also consider notifying Oprah and the Smithsonian.

Uncle Mike is glad you're in love and wishes you nothing but joy and all manner of delights. No, your friend's hurt feelings are not your fault; your actions only triggered them. If those actions weren't directed at her, the feelings are hers to deal with. Responsible, yes; at fault, no. All of which sounds nice but hardly lets you or your young man off the hook. Uncle Mike trusts the fact you didn't mention sitting down with your friend to talk things through doesn't mean that you haven't. Most problems between humans boil down to a lack of understanding. If you had no idea she'd be hurt by your seeing someone she no longer wanted to see (you did, of course, run it by her, right?), tell her so. If her friendship is important to you, tell her that too. It's good you've found love; practicing it usually results in keeping friends, not losing them. Being perfect, your young man will certainly understand he's not the only significant inhabitant of your universe and that the feelings of others are as important as his own. Then again, the young woman may be a neurotic control freak who sees the freedom and happiness of others as a threat and isn't above malicious flirting to make her world even more hollow and frightening than it is. In this case, you should ask her to give you a call when she's better. Have fun, play nice and say hello to your aunt.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I'm a 23 year old woman with a problem I didn't think I'd ever have. My mom just moved in with her boyfriend. She's a really neat lady, 47 and looks 37, very pretty. Guys are always interested but she hasn't lived with anyone since she and dad divorced seven years ago. I've been away at school and hadn't met this man she raved about on the phone. Now I have. He's a nice enough person, mom's age, nice looking, good job, and he treats my mom really well. She's really happy. The problem is the way "Tom" looks at me sometimes. He's never come on to me but he checks me out all the time. Not all the time but enough to make me uncomfortable. I'm not a kid and I understand guys do this but I'm his girlfriend's daughter and that makes it not right. I've never done anything to encourage him, in fact I've started being more formal with him. Mom knows me and she's going to ask me why. What do I say?

Amy, Portland, Oregon

Dear Amy,

With luck, you won't need to say anything. At the moment, the problem doesn't involve your mother. It involves you and the illmannered and possibly unprincipled male primate she's living with. Wait for a time when the two of you are alone and gently put his ducks in a row. Explain in simple, friendly terms that his attention makes you uncomfortable, that it makes being around him unpleasant, and that you regard it as profoundly disrespectful to your mother who is, or should be, his best and closest friend. Tell him what you told Uncle Mike: that, sooner rather than later, your mother's going to ask you what's wrong and you have no intention of lying if she presses you for an answer. Tell him you're glad your mother is happy and that if he jerks her around you'll hunt him down and hurt him in ways he doesn't want to think about. Then smile sincerely and offer your hand to a man you may be dealing with for a long, long time. Consider yourself part of his training.

Dear Uncle Mike,

My husband and I recently moved from the city to acreage in the country. I'm a city girl and although I appreciate nature and animals, it's new territory for me. We have a dog and three cats and for me that's enough. My husband wants to get a breeding pair of llamas. I've read the brochures and magazine articles but no one we know has had any first hand experience. Can someone with no experience raising large animals just start doing it? Do you know anything about llamas?

Ellen, Raymond, Washington

Dear Ellen,

Before Uncle Mike tells you what he knows about llamas, let him remind you that history is filled with stories of people with no experience doing things that turned out badly. With llamas, the deck is badly stacked from the beginning. The llama (or 'spitting goat') is a close relative of the camel; a fact which, for the normal, is not a strong selling point. Llamas are raised, or allowed to get older, for two reasons: their wool is used to make silly hats and much too handcrafted sweaters and they make dandy pack animals. A week or two in the backcountry wearing a silly hat and dragging a small camel: there's the life. The novice llama wrangler soon learns why no one makes llama saddles. Somewhere in the brochures and articles, the subject of spitting must have come up. All descriptions pale before the reality. Llamas are often foisted off on the unwary as "wonderful pets". All things are relative, of course, but your new pet will be the size of a small horse. Unless it's especially gifted, it will also be dumb as a post and much faster with its hooves than you think. Should your husband persist in his madness, you'd do well to consider getting a few kangaroos to keep them distracted. He should also not plan to ride the kangaroos.

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