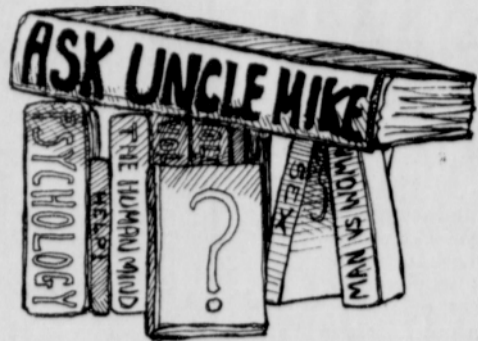


Dear Uncle Mike,

I'd be interested to read what kind of counsel you'd give to an intelligent young person regarding the decision to use drugs and alcohol, or not. I may be in a position to do just that one of these days, and so I find myself thinking about it.



I've had some experience with alcoholism, agree with the view that it is a disease, and tend to look at drugs the same way. For that reason, I see the decision as more of a health issue than a moral one. However, I also know that kids with a family history of alcoholism are at much greater risk. Especially for them, but also for anyone in their teens, the alcoholic progression doesn't take years, but just months. Which can lend more urgency to the discussion than might otherwise be helpful.

Of course, the law is clear on drug use and under-age drinking, but kids start making decisions before they come of age, so it makes no sense to me to postpone the discussion. Just because they're not of age doesn't mean they aren't making adult decisions. And "just saying no" to a teenager is often either provocative or unenforceable. So. What to say? And how?

Another Uncle

Dear Uncle Someone,

Before he begins, allow Uncle Mike to refer you to any of the thousands of tiresome books published on the subject, none of which Uncle Mike would read on a bet. Aside from sex with underage nuns, few topics arouse the gentle public's murderous wrath quite like drugs. Or, more accurately, DRUGS! While Uncle Mike is as fearless as the next person, he's not an idiot and so goes leagues out of his way to avoid talking about DRUGS! with anyone he hasn't known for at least twenty-five years. Today, he feels like playing the idiot.

First, Uncle Mike views with great suspicion the notion of 'controlled substances'. By whom and to what end? If the controlling body is a government consisting in large part of hypocritical, bible thumping, birkenstock wearing, gin swilling sleaze bags and toadies who'd sell their families for a whiff of what they mistakenly imagine to be power, logical inconsistencies are bound to arise. Uncle Mike suspects we all have a right to put whatever we want into our bodies. Unfortunately, many of us are stupid about it. Uncle Mike has heard two enlightened pronouncements on the subject. "We don't have a drug problem or a crime problem, we have a child abuse problem." And, "The drug problem consists of the wrong people taking the wrong drugs." Federal policy based on these two assumptions might savage the bond rating of the drug cartels and make possible the cultivation of hemp and, consequently, stop the rape and pillage of rainforests to make cheap siding, newsprint and toilet paper. But we digress.

Every drug has different characteristics, every dabbler in brain chemistry has a drug of choice. For those longing to be witty and clever and much too awake, there's cocaine. For those who are convinced there's more to reality than meets the eye, there are the hallucinogens: mushrooms, peyote and whatever passes for LSD these days. For those looking to round off the edges and read between the lines, there's marijuana and, whenever possible, hashish. For those with a love for blurring distinctions, there's alcohol. For those yearning to be master of the universe while robbing someone at gunpoint to get more, there's crack. For those who just want it all to go away, there's heroin; which is, to opium, what fortified wine is to a pleasing pinot gris. But we digress again.

What young people should know about all drugs is that they alter consciousness; this is, of course, why people use them. Before a person deliberately bends their mind, they should have a mind to bend. Had Uncle Mike ever taken DRUGS!, he would not have begun before reaching young manhood; which is to say, old enough to have some notion of reality and a psychological framework strong enough to hang unsettling experiences on. If Uncle Mike were giving counsel to a young person, he would encourage them to research the subject by talking with people of experience, not merely his or her peers. He would encourage them to vow never to put anything in a vein or to drink and drive. He would advise them to put down any substance, controlled or otherwise, that interferes with their work or personal relationships. He would encourage them to raise children who laugh more than they cry and who are able to dream without help.

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