

## Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy  
Tuesday, 18 November 2014 16:54

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### Hungry But Horrified

*Dear Aunt Bossy,*

*I just took an airplane flight and the man sitting next to me whipped out an enormous and smelly takeout plate of hamburger, fries, and ketchup. It smelled delicious, but very invasive. Is this considered acceptable behavior in such a confined space?*

*Jackie*

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Dear Jackie,

Unfortunately, far too many people consider it acceptable behavior. These are the same people who consider it acceptable to put their dirty flip-flopped feet up on the seat in front of them and expose their hairy arms and legs in shorts and sleeveless t-shirts. They also snap gum, let their kids kick the back of your seat, refuse to put anything under their own seats taking up needed storage space above, and don't understand that the arm rest is to be shared.

Aunt Bossy is old enough to remember when one did not eat anywhere except at a table unless one was picnicking. She also remembers when everyone dressed to travel (and attend church) and she still does.

While I am sitting here clucking my tongue in my long-in-the-tooth mouth, many of you are probably thinking "old fashioned, uptight crone!" Yes I am, and let me assure you the world was more pleasant in many ways for almost everyone when we dressed and behaved with dignity and consideration for those with whom we had to share space. For God's sake, even Ike Turner dressed like a gentleman in public!

Now, let's get real: Airplanes are no longer what they used to be and it is usually necessary to bring something to eat. Let me suggest you bring something neat and not smelly, a salad or a sandwich. You won't starve if you don't have ribs and biscuits with gravy for a few hours.

When it comes to dress, it is difficult to understand that people do not understand the impression they make with their clothing. In business we always say, "Dress for the Job you want, not the job you have." In life- - if we were allowed to acknowledge class without calling ourselves to the attention of the Federal Government - I would say, "Dress for the social class you aspire to." Unfortunately, that would encourage far too many people to aspire to Kim Kardashian heights of vulgarity, so I am admitting this is a lost cause.

When someone on an airplane or movie theater hits the back of my chair on a regular basis, I just say, "I know you aren't aware of it, but you (or your child) are kicking the back of my seat." I use a nice tone and smile. If I can hear the bass beat of your headphones, I will use the same approach, even on the subway or train. (Dangerous living, but I am willing to die

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promoting good behavior.)

If my neighbor tries to take over the armrest, I assess the neighbor and make a decision as to whether it is worth it or not to take over the second I get the chance.

When it comes to chewing gum, not to mention snapping it (or leaving it attached to the armrest in front of me, which happened on the last flight I took) you DON'T want to get me started.

Bottom line, our culture no longer has a sense of decorum. However, it is still possible to think about others and behave in such a way that you are not infringing on their sense of personal space, smell, vision, or hearing. And, for all of our sakes, train your children!

*Dear Aunt Bossy,*

*My daughter in law finds fault in everything I do or say. I have to walk on eggshells around her. This is very hurtful because she engages my beloved son and my three wonderful grandchildren in her campaign against me.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *If I described the things she does, lying, having her mother call and berate me, it would sound insane. It is, but not on my side.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *I am a successful businesswoman and executive coach. I am not greedy or narcissistic. My husband and I have helped my son and his wife financially and even bought them a house because he is in the process of becoming a doctor which takes time. I do not lord it over them, mention it, or rub it in.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *My daughter in law and her mother (she doesn't know her father, nor do her*

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*sisters) have respectable careers, but they are fixated on my success and the success of my husband. We grew up with little and have worked hard to have some stability and security. We share that whenever we can. They seem to resent this and will go to any lengths to turn my son and their children against me.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *What can I do?*

□□□□□□□□□□ *Sad and frustrated.*

Dear S and F.

This is difficult. I am assuming you have tried to talk to your son about the situation.

The only thing you can do is withdraw. Let them reach out to you, or let him and the children reach out to you.

Stop offering financial support. It obviously upsets them as much as they may love it.

Stop “trying” to befriend or appease her and her mother.

This is outrageously painful, but you have no choice. Hopefully, the children and your son will seek you out, but you really have no power in this situation. All you can do is keep loving them and wait.

I admit I am flummoxed by this one. If any of you dear readers have suggestions, please share them. This is such a horrible way to live.

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*Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at [bossymurph@mac.com](mailto:bossymurph@mac.com)*

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