

Girlfriend throws cold water on his time with friends



ASK ELLIE | She criticizes him for drinking and demands to leave, and later nags him

DEAR ELLIE: *Whenever I relax with friends, my girlfriend says I drank too much, said something that disrespected her, acted the fool, etc. She ruins my time with her constant "let's go," and nags me the next day for things I don't even remember doing!*

Unfair Girlfriend

DEAR UNFAIR GIRLFRIEND: Get a grip on what's really happening here: You drink too much and handle it poorly. You'll eventually ruin this relationship and many more unless you recognize that your alcohol excess is a problem — for you and others.

If the health risks and emotional fallout caused by alcohol abuse don't cause you to control your drinking, get support by joining Alcoholics Anonymous, a proven program for living sober.

DEAR ELLIE: *I'm 37 divorced, living on my own, but have a hyper-critical, meddling mother. While unemployed last year, my mother was wonderfully helpful. Now I owe her money which gave her huge leverage: She calls 15 times daily — sometimes at my new job — saying I should be thinner, more ambitious or wearing different eye shadow.*

She says she loves me and I won't find a husband unless I improve. She's also warm and loving and constantly says nice things too, always with a "but" — "You're beautiful but would be more so if you lost weight." Then the guilt trip — you're so ungrateful, I helped you out, you'll miss me when I die.

I love her and am an only child; my father left her several years ago. She's now obsessively focused on me. Do I deserve all this because she helped me out financially?

At the Brink

DEAR AT THE BRINK: You deserve a loving, caring, mother,

which you (mostly) have. She deserves an appreciative, thoughtful daughter, which she (mostly) has.

Be aware, before you next want help, that you open a wider door into concern for your welfare.

She needs to know her limits — "helping" doesn't mean she can annoy, intrude, harp. This is a mutual problem you both need to resolve through expressing your love and your boundaries. Once the lines are clearly drawn, don't answer the phone when her calls are repeated. Then call to see how she is doing sometimes.

DEAR ELLIE: *After we graduated, my friend helped me get a contract job with her company, and my contract keeps getting renewed; she was hired full time. I felt grateful and we became closer friends.*

She wanted me to go to a convention with her but I refused, as I have other plans for when the contract ends. She kept telling me to move on, saying that if the company intended to hire me, they'd have done so. That hurt my feelings because I'm still happy on contract. Then she got promoted and asked if I'd want her full-time job.

Finally I said to stop asking me to move on. Now she won't talk to me. I feel torn because her harassment made me abrupt with her. I know deep inside there's no friendship left once I leave that company.

Disappointed

DEAR DISAPPOINTED: The friendship has never been equal — she felt she helped you and enjoyed acting the superior part of adviser. You have not conveyed your strength and convictions to her. If you hope to start a new friendship on equal footing, speak up.

Ellie's column runs Monday through Friday. Send e-mail to askellie@suntimes.com.

CHICAGO'S ORIGINAL CITY GUIDE

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In the Know: Mark Sparacino

BY MICHAEL NAGRANT

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Most Italian joints are run on the mythology of the grandmother who slaved over the stove to make a red sauce. They usually get by on mediocre overcooked pasta and desiccated chicken Vesuvio, because surely it would be heartless to ding your grandma. Few are the places that actually hit the Italian haute cuisine mark. But at River North's Prosecco, 710 N. Wells, chef Mark Sparacino combines gourmet talent with the heart and soul of a first-class nonna to create a rare culinary gem.



Prosecco chef Mark Sparacino means business when it comes to Italian cuisine. | CLIFTON HENRI-FOR THE SUN-TIMES

Q. What's the best Chicago-related advice you've ever heard?

A. I'd have to say it came from my mother, Darlene, and my late father, Steve Sparacino, who moved my sisters and I to Chicago when I was 14. They always said to be nice, to be yourself and to work hard at everything you do. If I've had any success in my career, it's because of those simple words.

Q. What's your favorite hidden gem in Chicago?

A. I love Sai Cafe [2010 N. Sheffield] for sushi, Avec [615 W. Randolph] for casual dining with friends and La Pasadita — northwest store [1140 N. Ashland] — for late-night or early morning dining.

Q. If I were to come to your neighborhood, where would you insist I visit?

Q. What's with not having a sign out front (at Prosecco)?

A. It's a mistake! Our original sign company failed us and a new one is being fabricated. People think we're trying to be sly, since my business partner Kathryn's place Narcisse was without a sign for years, but ours is being installed in a week or two!

Q. You've got a restaurant in Galewood. Are there things you can do downtown that you can't on the Far West Side? How does operating the two restaurants compare?

A. My sister Stefania and I are business partners in Sparacino in Galewood [6966 W. North] and Prosecco in River North. The biggest difference is the national and international audience that we have downtown that doesn't make it out to Galewood. The Prosecco menu features new takes on many of my classic dishes from Sparacino. We're thrilled with how many of our friends from Galewood have visited us in River North.

Q. What should we know about Prosecco that we probably don't?

A. Besides the fact that it's a grape, a wine and a region? That it's great for cooking as well as drinking! We have a Prosecco vanilla sauce over scallops that's very popular. I just got back from two weeks in Tuscany and have many new recipes for incorporating Prosecco into dishes that we'll be rolling out later this season.

bigdeal

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FAR NORTH SIDE

Broadway Cellars, 5900 N.

Broadway: half-price wine

Driftwood, 1021 W. Montrose: \$2

Budweiser; free darts

Holiday Club, 4000 N. Sheridan:
\$3.50 frozen PBR schooners; \$5
burgers

SOUTH SIDE

Blarney Stone Pub, 15400 S. Cicero,
Oak Forest: \$10 buckets of Miller
products, \$1.50 pints of Miller Lite
and MGD, \$2 pints of Blue Moon,
Leinenkugel's and Sam Adams

Bluebird Lanes, 3900 W. Colum-

bus: \$14 buckets of domestics

Cork & Kerry, 10614 S. Western: \$2

bottles of domestics
NEAR NORTH SIDE

10pin Bowling Lounge, 330 N.

State: \$3.50 UV Vodka cocktails,
\$3 bottles of Miller Lite; complimentary buffet from 4-6 p.m.;
bowl for the price of a gallon of
regular gas; free shoe rental

Green Door Tavern, 678 N. Orleans:
half-price appetizers, 4-7 p.m.

Le Lan, 749 N. Clark: \$38 prix-fixe
menu

TV TALK TODAY

"Live With Regis And Kelly" (9 a.m., Channel 9): Journalist Anderson Cooper; actor Luke Wilson; actress Blake Lively.

"The View" (10 a.m., Channel 7): Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). (R)

"The Ellen DeGeneres Show" (3 p.m., Channel 5): Actor Jerry O'Connell; actress Malin Akter-

man; singer Gretchen Wilson. (R)

"Larry King Live" (8 p.m., CNN): Journalists Katie Couric, Brian Williams and Charlie Gibson.

"The Daily Show With Jon Stewart" (10 p.m., Comedy Central): Actor Seth Rogen.

"Late Show With David Letter-

man" (10:35 p.m., Channel 2): TV host Kelly Ripa; actor Steve Coogan; music group Spiritualized.

"The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" (10:35 p.m., Channel 5): Actor Robert Downey Jr.; actress Anna Farris; musician Toby Keith.

"Charlie Rose" (11 p.m., Channel 20) Journalist Bob Woodruff.

"Tavis Smiley" (11:30 p.m., Channel 11): Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter; historian Thurston Clarke.

"Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson" (11:35 p.m., Channel 2): TV host Regis Philbin; actress Paula Patton.

"Late Night With Conan O'Brien" (11:35 p.m., Channel 5): "America's Got Talent" judge Sharon Osbourne; music group N.E.R.D.

"Jimmy Kimmel Live" (12:05 a.m., Channel 7): Actress Rosie Perez; actor Brandon T. Jackson; rapper Tyga.