

**It happened again last night. I was tardy by 30 seconds. I thought of a snappy smart ass comeback just half a minute too late. I was out for a couple of beers when a yuppie woman, surrounded by her self-important boring friends, said to me, "you're so loud, I can hear your whole conversation." You know what my answer was? My lame, can you believe this guy is a comedian, answer. I said, "yeah?"**

That's it. Just, "yeah." And 30 seconds later, a perfectly smug response came to me. *"Good for you. I'm sure my conversation is a lot more interesting than yours."* I choked. What other judgement can I make? It's not the end of the world. Magic Johnson once threw away a pass to lose the NBA Finals and he went on to have a moderately successful career. But, I'm a professional communicator. I'm supposed to be better than that. I may not be able to work a lathe, but I can usually work a room.

My powers failed me. What can we rely on in this world? I could tell you I was tired and that I'd just gotten out of bed but that's no excuse. We'll ignore the fact that I got out of bed to go drinking. That's a topic for another A Dog's Lunch. Or maybe for a court ordered after-care program.

A few years ago, I worked part-time in Rothman's Men's Store in New York City. Because I'm the type of jerk who craves arguments and perceives the slightest insults, I got into a pretty salty discussion with a customer. Two grown men, staring at each other, saying, *"you got a problem with something?"* *"No. You got a problem with something?"* Over ties!

My maturity took over at that point and I walked away. It sounds good that way, but actually my co-worker Ralph separated us, and after hearing the other guy mumble something, I fired off this grand parting shot: *"you better just relax--and shop!"* Fortunately I caught myself before I embarrassed myself even further. *"Don't make me come from behind the fragrance counter, because I will kick your ass back to men's hosiery!"*

In Passenger 57 Wesley Snipes defiantly said, *"always bet on black,"* and in a pinch, I came up with, *"relax and shop!"* And the whole time I was trying to look cool. Trying to look cool while accidentally coming up with the perfect slogan for working mothers on the weekend. Actually the guy said to me before my weak parting comment, *"you better take it easy cause I'm half-Italian."* That's wussier than what I said. I should have told the guy to go complain to his local mob capo that the clerk at the men's store wasn't being nice to him.

I'd be fine. He'd be the one getting whacked.

That's one of the things I love about stand up comedy. It's the do-over 2nd chance of the monologist. You think of something after a show on Wednesday, you insert it on Thursday, and you're a hero. No one needs to know that the great line wasn't born on stage, but in your car, at the late night Wendy's drive-through.

In writing, you don't really get a second chance. You're supposed to have edited all the second and third and fourth chances into the final draft. You can put it down, have a knish, and come up with something better later. Perfect. When you hear Pat Buchanon speak and you find his speech well written but really insulting. He meant it that way. Of course, I don't know if Pat ever took a knish break.

The publishing industry is trying to capitalize on the success of dead authors by putting out what they call "working notes" of these writers. Words that the writer was noodling around with, and never intended for

people to see, are being sold. Here's a message to my sister. If something dreadful happens to me, make sure you get to my apartment. Don't worry about the pornography. Just get rid of all the bad jokes you find lying around.