

*Old Italian Neighborhood Values*

really did feel that he was falling in love, and his sincerity was sensed and accepted by the ladies. The mind is a fuckin' funny thing, and women love sincerity. Whatever the case, it worked.

I'll never forget the time when all the boys were together discussing the miracle technique of Pussey Rapper. One of the boys, Set-a-Hare, decided to use the Rapper technique at a nightclub. The bars in Philadelphia closed about midnight in those days, so we all decided to cross the Ben Franklin bridge and go to a fancy spot in New Jersey. At the bar sat a few unaccompanied ladies, each waiting for a man, but also ready to reject him unless they didn't want to. It's like they're sending out a message that says, "Here I am, but you can't have me, but I may be interested in meeting you," all at the same time. Set-a-Hare decided to go for the best-looking one.

I advised him to approach one of the less attractive ones where the probability of success would be much higher than with the most sought-after one. This ersatz Pussey Rapper took my advice and approached a pretty but not sensual gal. We all observed that the initial approach went well. She smiled and seemed to relax. Set-a-Hare, being an impatient guy, delivered the "I love you" line about fifteen minutes after the conversation began. She smiled and they held hands. He ordered a drink for both of them and then they danced. After the dance they left the club. And the rest is history.

Then Pussey Rapper went to New York City for a week to visit his cousin. When he came back he was a changed guy. I'm no Sigmund Freud, but I observed that something had snapped in his mind. Like Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, he became a

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more serious and moral man. Though he always professed to be a Democrat, he never had the fire in his belly to change things. Now he passionately embraced the spirit of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and even wanted to enlarge the distribution of wealth to the poor over and above what had been radically proposed by Johnson. What the Rapper didn't know was that I had a close friend who was a close friend of his accountant. He told my friend that Pussey Rapper told him to do everything he could to help him avoid paying taxes. In other words, he wanted others to pay for the distribution of wealth that he advocated. Such was the nature of an old Italian neighborhood liberal.

The boys' annual dinner was set for a Friday night. After all, who can fully let loose on the night before a working day? There are three ground rules that govern the annual evenings. First, everyone must arrive on time, at 6 PM, come hell or high water. We call this "Pignachi's rule."

Many years ago, before we had our very first dinner at La Strega, Pignachi recommended we establish fixed rules for our dinners. He believed that, since we only met once a year, there must be an established rhythm that all of us must honor to make it easier for the gang to get into the flow of the evening. He believed that it was critical for everyone to arrive at just about the same time. We all agreed. None of us was or is a night owl. We are all in bed well before midnight, and up early in the morning. As it worked out, everyone was almost always there on time. In fact, they were usually

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a little bit early, but waited outside the restaurant until the others came. This simple act elevated the importance of the evening. It made it a special event. It is an example of the power of the ritual. Milton, the poet, once said something about how the mind creates its own destiny—it can make a heaven out of hell, or a hell out of heaven. All the boys preferred heaven.

The second ground rule (I forget who brought it up), is that we must answer the questions asked of us unless there is a very good reason not to. In order to remove undue pressure, the person to whom the question is asked has the right to decide whether to respond or not. He need not explain the reason for refusing. The rule worked well. I would estimate that, over the years, about ninety percent of the questions asked were answered.

The third ground rule is that an executive summary of the dinner's discussions and conclusions must be written within seven days after the dinner and immediately mailed to all the boys. Some of the boys are into e-mail but the summary has to be sent by regular registered mail to everyone. These guys are suspicious of modern technology when it comes to something confidential and close to their hearts. They don't feel there is privacy in personal messages sent through e-mail. If young kids can enter the computers of the Pentagon, anyone could surely intercept one's personal correspondence. For dinner in the year 2001, the assignment to write the executive summary was given to Mo and Pussey Rapper.

History pleasantly repeated itself this night. Everyone showed up on time, including the newcomer, Genella. As she walked through

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the door and moved toward us, we almost shit our pants. We expected to see a worn-out lady in mourning with a sad look upon her face, but what we saw was a just-right fleshy, well-shaped sensuous woman in her late fifties or early sixties. What I noticed, and I am absolutely sure that the boys noticed too, was the rarity of her type of rear end, or *culo*, as we used to say in the old neighborhood. It formed about a twenty degree angle with the base of her lumbar spinal column. In other words, it jutted out perfectly. She had the perfect *culo* by the sexual standards of the old neighborhood. The net effect was extremely sensual. As we used to say and still do when observing a woman with the right credentials, “She’s got it baby, she’s got it.”

I know the other guys noticed her rear end because at dinner the previous year we discussed the rear ends and the nature of the sensuality of four famous women: Betty Grable, Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner, and Rita Hayworth. The guys felt that Grable and Monroe would never have turned on the men in the way that they did if it wasn’t for those sensuous derrières. It was a matter of basic biological geometry.

We also compared the figures of Gardner and Hayworth to the other two. There is no comparison. They were beat out by a mile. But there was another quality about Gardner and Hayworth that turned us on: the way they looked at you and the way they held themselves. It was more a psychological hormone hit than a physical one. These types of women are the true “man-izers”—the female version of the womanizer—and love to play the mental sex game.