

Letterman and flaming underwear

Today's consumer topic

If you want to know what real pressure is, just try using a Barbie doll to set underwear on fire on national television. I did this on Dec. 21, on the David Letterman show. Technically, I was on this show to promote a book, but unless you're an extremely deep thinker such as Madonna, the Letterman people don't like you to just sit there and talk. They want you to have what is known in the TV business as a Strong Visual Element, to keep things moving along. To give you an idea of what I mean, here's how the Letterman show would rate two hypothetical guest spots:

WEAK GUEST SPOT: Nobel Prize-winning research scientist explains revolutionary new and easy way to prevent cancer.

STRONG GUEST SPOT: Nobel Prize-winning research scientist plays badminton against a cow.

So when a Letterman show producer named Dan Kellison called me up to find out if I had any visual elements, I told him about my Rollerblade Barbie experiment. Rollerblade Barbie is a type of Barbie doll-no longer available in stores, for reasons that will soon become apparent-that comes with little booties equipped with cigarette-lighter-type flint wheels; when you roll Rollerblade Barbie along a flat surface, her booties shoot out sparks. A while back, after reading a newspaper account of an accident involving a Rollerblade Barbie and some kids who were playing "beauty shop," I conducted a scientific experiment in my driveway. This experiment proved that if you spray hair spray on a set of underwear, then roll Barbie across it, the underwear will burst into flames.

Dan instantly realized that this experiment would have great visual potential as a way to educate the Letterman audience concerning the importance of not applying hair spray to their underwear and then running sparking doll booties over it. But he wanted to make sure it would work, so on the day of my scheduled TV appearance, I went to the theater several hours early for a rehearsal.

Backstage, besides Dan, were maybe a dozen Letterman show personnel, as well as a representative of the New York City Fire Department. The ambience was a lot less casual than it had been in my driveway. Everybody was concerned about the fire danger; everybody was also VERY concerned about how Letterman would react. One guy kept saying things like, "Is this OK with Dave? Maybe we should run this by Dave again."

Many eyes were watching me closely as I spread a pair of men's cotton briefs on a table, then sprayed them with hair spray. Then I picked up a Rollerblade Barbie, put her on

the briefs and scooted her forward, sparks flying, and suddenly...

...and suddenly nothing happened. "Ha ha!" I said, to add levity to the moment. But it was not a light moment. It was moment only hours before the taping of a hit national show that was supposed to feature flaming underpants, and here we had a set of what is known in the TV business as Stone Cold Briefs.

So I sprayed more hair spray and tried again. Nothing. I tried a different kind of hair spray. Nothing. I tried a different set of briefs. Nothing. I tried a Rollerblade Ken (which we had on hand as a backup). Nothing.

Pretty soon all the observers had changed from being-concerned-about-too-much-fire mode to being-concerned-that-there-would-not-be-any fire mode.



As I furiously swiped Barbie and Ken across various sets of underwear, people crowded around, offering helpful suggestions, including: "Maybe we should PREHEAT the underwear." At one point, the Fire Department representative, on hand to insure the public safety, said to me (I swear): "You should use Ken. You're getting more sparks with Ken."

Finally, just as we were about to give up, we got it to work (the secret, discovered by Dan, was to use an ENORMOUS amount of hair spray). As the blue flames flickered on the underwear, Dan and I gave each other triumphant high-fives. I was elated, until suddenly the thought hit me: What if it didn't work on the show?

So I was a nervous wreck when, two hours later, I found myself in front to TV cameras and a live studio audience, placing underwear on David Letterman's desk, spraying it with hair spray, and picking up Rollerblade Barbie. In my entire life, except for during a couple of crucial free throws in the 1983 NBA playoffs, I have never asked for the help of a Higher Power, but I was definitely thinking in those terms as, with Letterman watching me closely, I positioned Barbie on the briefs, and rolled her forward, and...

...and once again nothing happened.

Fortunately this turned out to be just a little Higher Power prank, because when I quickly rolled Barbie a second time, the briefs burst into flames. I don't remember much after that. Letterman picked up a fire extinguisher and blasted the briefs, then the camera person, then the audience, which was thrilled. So it turned out to be a highly educational guest spot after all, and I'm sure that you, the viewing public, learned a lot.

You don't have to thank me. I'm just trying to avoid getting a real job.

by Dave Barry
syndicated columnist

Gun control is not the answer to this country's problems

Imagine, for a moment, if Congress and the President were to stop the printing of The New York Times because a writer spoke out against government waste.

It is not hard to figure out that this is a violation of the First Amendment; specifically the freedom of the press. Why was it possible for the Federal Government to ban the sale and manufacture of 19 semi-automatic firearms and ammunition magazines that hold ten or more rounds?

This number "19" is actually deceiving because it does not include "copy cat" versions of the banned guns. When these models are added in, the total number of banned firearms exceeds 184. This is a direct violation of the Second Amendment which states; "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

This ban was part of the Democrat's Crime Bill which past last summer in Congress and was signed by President Clinton. One can assume that the purpose of this ban is to reduce crime.

President Clinton, in his drawn-out State of the Union Address last month, said something to the effect that banning these weapons will reduce crime and stop police officers from being killed in the line of duty.

Will this piece of legislation reduce crime? Statistics show that one-half of one percent of all firearms used in violent crimes fall under the guns banned in the crime bill. Is this any reason to forbid the manufacture and sale of these guns, just because a very small percentage of them are being misused?

The fact of the matter is that most criminals committing crimes involving weapons do not use assault weapons. They generally use handguns such as .38's and .357 magnum revolvers. Most

is apparent, citizens whose businesses are being attacked have used military style assault rifles to protect themselves and their merchandise.

There are hundreds of sanctioned high-power tournaments each year in which assault rifles are used in shooting competitions.

President Clinton was wrong when he said that the only purpose of these guns is to kill people. My greatest fear is that this ban on assault weapons will be a "stepping stone" to the future ban on other firearms.

The act of denying firearms to citizens has had disastrous effects in the past. In 1938, Adolf Hitler announced his "Weapons Law." It stated that a license to manufacture guns "must not be issued if the applicant - or if one of the persons proposed for the commercial or technical management of the business - is a Jew."

There were a few rebellions by the Jews during the years of the Holocaust, but denying their rights to firearms left them virtually defenseless against the Nazis.

Gun control was effectively used in the Soviet Union under Stalin, where 20,000,000 lives were killed, without a means of defense.

I'm not insinuating that this fate is in store for the United States. I think it is worth mentioning, however, that those who advocate gun control join the ranks of Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung.

The Republicans have promised to overturn the assault weapon ban portion of the crime bill. I feel that it is imperative that they do this, but it would be impractical to do it now because President Clinton would veto the repeal. I feel that the real solution to crime lies in tougher punishments.

If someone is convicted of killing another person, that person should be made to pay with his or her life.

The key here is to punish people, not guns.

criminals don't obtain their guns legally, so what is the purpose of denying the sale of firearms to law-abiding citizens who want to protect themselves?

In 1989 a survey by the National Association of Chiefs of Police of command officers revealed that 90 percent of them agreed that criminals obtain their "weapons from illegal sources."

An argument used by gun control advocates against semi-automatic assault weapons is that nobody needs one, and they have no sporting purpose. These weapons can be used for protection.

In a riot situation, when looting and destruction of private property

Tougher sentences should be placed on the individuals who commit crimes with guns.

The key here is to punish people, not guns. Guns are only objects. They do not kill people. People kill people.

The Crime Bill and other gun control schemes are no more than proposals that make liberals and moderates "feel good" about what their doing, without solving any of the problems at hand.

by Brad Park
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