

Carmen Scarpino, Pioneering Wise Guy, Dead at 78

by Con Chapman

BROOKLYN, New York. Carmen Scarpino, an innovative smart aleck who is credited with many of America's most treasured comebacks, one-liners and wise cracks, died of lung cancer at the Sons of Italy Convalescent Home here yesterday. He was 78.



Potential target of Scarpino's wit.

Scarpino came of age as World War II came to an end, freeing the nation's youth from the burden of conscription and creating enormous amounts of free time for adolescent males as returning servicemen re-entered the job market.



Scarpino as a boy.

"Carmen was at the forefront as America's youth left their homes at night and began to hang out on city streets," said Armand St.

Available online at [«http://fictionaut.com/stories/con-chapman/carmen-scarpino-pioneering-wise-guy-dead-at-78»](http://fictionaut.com/stories/con-chapman/carmen-scarpino-pioneering-wise-guy-dead-at-78)
Copyright © 2011 Con Chapman. All rights reserved.

James, a professor of American Studies at Yale University. “When Carmen arrived on the scene the common response when a hot young women walked past was the ‘wolf whistle,’ but his way with words literally raised kids to a new level of linguistic accomplishment.”



“Kowa-bunga!”

Breasts were developed as World War II came to an end, the result of improved nutrition and the additional muscle mass that “Rosie the Riveter”-type women acquired through manual labor in jobs that males abandoned to join the war effort. The flat-chested “flapper” style of female physique declined in popularity, and the foundation undergarment industry experienced a period of dramatic growth.



Rosie, riveting.

Scarpino's first success as a smart-aleck came when his sister Angelina received a report card that included three A's while Carmen failed two subjects. As Angelina walked past him after bragging about her marks to their mother, Carmen said “Whadda ya want—a medal or a chest to pin it on?” His father, a self-described “goombah” who worked as a stonemason, broke out laughing, and Carmen never looked back.

Carmen's turf.

Scarpino and his wife Theresa had one daughter, Julia, but no sons to whom he could pass on his store of slightly off-color cracks. Julia was estranged from her father for years because of a remark he made when she was in her late 20's and still unmarried—"Flat as a board and never been nailed." As he lay on his death bed he made two requests; that he be allowed to smoke one last Lucky Strike cigarette, and that Julia and his grandson, Gianfreddo, come to see him.



Julia and her son were summoned, and after a tearful reconciliation with his daughter, Scarpino set to work transferring his store of oral culture to his grandson.

"You know what you say when a girl with big bazoombahs passes by?" Scarpino asked the boy.

"No, grandpa, what?" Gianfreddo asked.



"She's got a balcony you could do Shakespeare from!" Scarpino said with a laugh before he began to cough. When he recovered, he showed the boy the bottom of his cigarette pack, where the letters "L.S.M.F.T", which stand for "Lucky Strike means fine tobacco," have appeared for years.

"You know what those letters mean?" Scarpino asked.

The boy shook his head from side to side, and Scarpino began weakly to explain. "Loose . . . sweaters . . . mean" he said before again falling victim to a coughing spasm.

"Loose sweaters mean—floppy," Scarpino whispered as the coughing subsided, but before he could utter the word symbolized by the letter "T," he expired.

"Loose . . . sweaters . . . mean . . . floppy . . ."

In lieu of flowers, Scarpino's family requested that donations be made to the American Institute of Impertinent Remarks, where his papers will be stored.

Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "Fauxbituaries."

