“There also sometimes seems to be a disconnect between the censors for SNL and the writers. Over the years, have there been many instances in which you’ve written sketches that you’ve loved but were ultimately not allowed to air?

I can think of two: One was a commercial parody written by me, Jack Handey, Al Franken, Robert Smigel, and probably some others. It was one of the few times all of us have worked on the same piece, one that was gang-written. It was for a car called the DWI, the only car built expressly for driving drunk. We wanted to get James Earl Jones to do the voice-over: “It. Is. A. Drunk. Driving. Machine.” One of the jokes was that the car keys would be gigantic. I don’t remember the rest. But I do remember the network saying “Absolutely not!” And I honestly did not understand. There was nothing dirty in this piece. This was not making light of drunk driving. It was making fun of people who drive drunk. It was holding them up to ridicule; it was fighting the good fight as far as that goes. But their attitude was, Nope, we don’t want any letters along the lines of “I wish I could laugh, but, you see, I lost my fifteen-year-old daughter to a drunk driver.” So it’s that defensive thing.

The other piece [in 1990] was called “Pussywhipped.” Jan Hooks was playing the host of a talk show and there were a few male guests, one of whom was Tom Hanks, and they had to keep excusing themselves to go call their girlfriends. The piece did run, but the censors absolutely would not let us use the title “Pussywhipped.” And I kept saying, “C’mon, it doesn’t mean vagina. It means female-dominated.” But that’s where the NBC standards lady says, “Well, as a woman...” Which was her way of reminding me that her sense of humor had been removed at birth.

And so I lost that one, and we called it “P-Whipped” or something. I always hate it when you have to do a lame euphemism that no normal person would ever use.

Overall, though, I never really chafed under the restrictions, even when sometimes they got really crazy. One of the points I pride myself on is that I avoid anything I feel is a cheap laugh based on shock or just being dirty. You can always get a laugh, but you don’t want it to come at the price of your dignity.”