The conversation was like so many others, as casual as your typical NFL water cooler speak with well-rounded fans should be. Then, the topic of chatter turned to the Baltimore Ravens, and casual left the room. You see, there is generally a mutual respect for opinions with that particular group, even those that may be viewed as totally off-base, but rarely is anyone considered to be dead wrong.

Referring to the Baltimore Ravens, indicating they were my second "least favorite" team in the NFL (if not all of sports), I was called to the carpet for having them too low on the list. They believed there should be more animosity, more anger, and dare I say hatred boiling in the heart of a Browns fan because of The Move. I was proud to realize that my blood had stopped boiling, but suddenly I'm not angry enough after sixteen years. This was coming from a Minnesota Vikings fan, who just couldn't co-sign on the Steelers being a bigger adversary. I turned to the cavalry, and reached out for help, but the Houston fan cut off my hand.

Surely, being put in a similar predicament as a fan when the Oilers moved to a place where there is no oil, he couldn't still hold a grudge against the re-branded Titans of Tennessee. Sure enough, he hates the Titans, those were his exact words. So, fair enough, an abandoned fan should never forget the object of their discontent, especially when they end up in Super Bowls mere minutes after leaving town. Of course, the Oilers never really had a Yang to their Ying as the Browns had with Pittsburgh, so it's easy to say there's a solid line between what outsiders believe a Browns fan should be, versus what we actually are. By the way, who the hell are they to tell me what the pecking order should be on such matters?

Regardless of whether or not they top the list, I have no love for the team that left Cleveland. They left after the 1995 season without a name to the open arms of a hypocritical fan base in

Baltimore, a city wronged by Robert Irsay's middle of the night exodous to Indiana after the 1983 season. It was the nameless team, not the Browns, that gave Bill Belichick his walking papers. They didn't have a name because, unlike Houston, Cleveland wouldn't let them take the Browns brand with them, ditto for the team colors and the record books; the NFL returned to Maryland with a clean slate and none of the headaches of expansion. I recall speculation that Ford was going to get in bed with them, and the artists formerly known as the Cleveland Browns would be the Mustangs.

The team would eventually settle on an identity that tied them to a Bostonian poet who, like everything that was wonderful about the NFL in Cleveland, went to Baltimore to die. The Raven depicts our loss, our own "Nevermore" wears the #52 and certainly did nothing to prolong the life of two Ohioans twelve years ago. However vague the details of what took place may be, there is no question a murder took place near the Super Bowl, and Ray Lewis was there. A year later, he was back at the location of the Super Bowl, but this time as a participant, and sadly, a winner. For Lewis and his team, despite our biggest fears, will be specators for this year's chapter of the Bowl that is Super.

In many circles, we refer to them as the "Ratbirds" these days, though many of us have eased up our ill will since the King Rat, Art Modell, ceased to exist as the majority owner of the organization. My personal preference was the nomencalture of the late, great Hal Lebovitz, who simply referred to the Baltimore franchise as "Ugh!". Lebovitz, a Hall of Fame writer from Cleveland was a man of such wisdom and so many words, but that three letter non-word really says so much.

When I expected the Ravens to waltz into the Super Bowl before this year's playoffs began, I prepared for the worst. The Steelers were their kryptonite, and as thrilled as I was with Saint Timmy dispensing of that group of deviants, I had a fear of whatever the opposite of a silver lining is. Sure, anything beats those stupid towels on the big stage in early February, but the most humiliating alternative for Browns was still in play. Ugh!

So, three cheers for the coach they pink slipped before the purple and black, before they took that linebacker/alleged murderer from the U, and before the team was named after a poem. Anger for how he handled Bernie Kosar and the infamous "Metcalf Up The Middle" game-planning may still reside in the hearts of Browns fans, but however it happened (I say luck), the Patriots prevented us from having to re-live that dreadful day in 2001 with another Ravens-Giants Super Bowl. I resented the possibility of Modell getting a ring so much that I went shopping with my girlfriend that day, and didn't know the horrific result until Monday morning. Ignorance is bliss, but still, Ugh!

Believe me, I'm glad we aren't writing about the Ravens quest for number two, even without the old Brooklyn-born bastard in the driver's seat. Nothing makes a Super Bowl easier for Cleveland to watch than the absence of the Steelers and Ravens in the big game. That might speak to a greater issue that has been looming over Cleveland like a dark cloud for a long while now. How are we so bitter? Why does our joy only exist vicarously through the misery of others?

I think that's just the kibitzing of outsiders, someone or some media monster, that can't really open their mind up enough to get inside of ours. We may revel in the moment, but we aren't so petty that we cherish the crushed dreams of others, even when the "others" wave stupid yellow towels, decided to be basketball fans in July of 2010, or rally for dirtbag owners to be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. We never want to see them succeed, but their failure isn't our main objective as fans.

I prefer forward thinking, and that was the silver lining that, thanks to our temporarily beloved Patriots and newly annointed folk hero Billy Cundiff, I don't have to rely on this year. The thinking was, and not to take on the contrarian point of view, it would be better for the Ravens to win for the sake of the Browns. Perhaps a Super Bowl Hangover in 2012, and an omen for Ray Lewis and another living legend from The U to ride off into the sunset is needed to open the door for an AFC North title on the shores of Lake Erie.

Maybe I'll get the best of both worlds, where they don't win the Super Bowl, but they still get the hangover symptoms, where they try to do too much to tweak things. Maybe Ray and Ed Reed decide it's time to ride off into the sunset anyways, having never won a Super Bowl together and spending their remaining years admiring the one ring Lewis acquired a lifetime ago. The reality check wakes me up from that dream to realize how close we came, and thank you to Lee Evans for the "no cigar" here, to the worst of both worlds. Isn't it much more likely that the Ravens would have won it all, which only generated a hunger for more success and prolonged careers for Lewis and Reed? Ugh!

What if, what if, what if, right? Let's stick to the facts, and the very fact is that the Ravens will not be World Champions on Sunday night. And that alone is deserving of a term that, to my knowledge, does not yet exist.

Tell me, what is the opposite of "Ugh!"?