

## A golden earring for a calling card

**T**HE MAN DETECTIVE August Maurina was talking about had an abiding interest in dentists, earrings, and possibly in guns. He also had a passing interest in the mentally retarded.

Maurina said that last September a dentist reported to headquarters of the Brooklyn robbery squad at the 67th Precinct that a man with a gun had robbed him and three of his patients of about \$1,500 in cash and jewelry. The dentist described the holdup man: six feet, about 170 pounds, early 30s, black, with a gold earring, shaped like a pearl, on his left ear lobe.

"After that we got a steady stream of reports from dentists who were held up by a gunman wearing a gold, pearl-shaped earring," Maurina said.

It was like a loud calling card.

Maurina said that if the dentist's office wasn't too crowded, the gold-earring bandit would pull his gun and complete the stickup. If it was crowded with patients, he would walk up to the receptionist, make a future appointment, using a fictitious name, and leave.

"A few dentists reported that the gold-earring bandit had another man with him," Maurina said. "Shorter, about 30, too, lighter skinned."

**MAURINA HAS BEEN** a police officer for 23 years, 18 of them as a detective. His wife, Sandra, has been on the force for 17 years. She is now with the sex crimes unit. Maurina is neither dismayed nor suprised at the folly, greed or even violence he encounters in his work. He goes about it calmly, deliberately, thoroughly. He was a patrolman in Bedford-Stuyvesant and a detective in Harlem. "When you could walk the streets and people would help you." He has earned a dozen commendations. "Nothing extraordinary. Nothing any other officer wouldn't do." He has enough time in to retire. "I won't. I love my work."

When the first reports of the gold-earring bandit came in, Maurina and his partner, William Berry, patiently ran down every lead, however flimsy. They went around to the N.Y. State Dental Society, with a newsletter they had composed carrying a description of the bandit and asked the Society to distribute it to all their members.

It produced the first break. A dentist reported that the gold-earring bandit had been in his office, made an appointment, and as soon as he left had him followed; he was seen getting into a car.

"The damn fool, was using his own car," Maurina said. "After that it wasn't any problem tracking him down. His name is William Bunche. He was out on parole. He owed four years. We arrested him on Staten Island, after a sort of wild chase. He was wearing his earring."

The detectives learned that his sometime accomplice was someone called Indio, which could mean In God. They went through their endless nickname file. Indio



**August Maurina: The bandit had an interest in dentists**

was Oscar Roman, who had an interest in real estate.

"We arrested Oscar before for holding up real estate offices," Maurina said.

They arrested him again for changing his interest to dentists. His bail was \$3,000. "Oscar is now on the wind," Maurina said. "He skipped. There's a warrant out on him."

Bunche's bail was \$1,500. Maurina thought maybe that's because he had roots in the community. "I presume that means he had relatives. He does have a four year old son. Bunche's mother is taking care of the kid."

**WHEN BUNCHE APPEARED** in court he was rearrested for 15 additional gun visits to dentists. His bail was raised to \$15,000 bond or \$5,000 cash. He couldn't make it.

In a matter of six months 28 dentists, a few doctors, and one podiatrist had been held up. Maurina and Berry figure that the holdup man had collected \$50,000 from them and their patients. "A conservative figure," Maurina said.

Bunche had three previous arrests: possession of stolen property, grand larceny for an auto theft, and armed robbery. For the last he got 2½ to 7 years, served two and was paroled. He got a job as an attendant at the Willowbrook Center for the mentally retarded. Which says a lot about the careful way the N.Y. State Department of Mental Retardation hires people. It has 26,474 employees.

"The Willowbrook people told us they make no exceptions in hiring people," Maurina said. "They hire ex-convicts."

Maurina said it seemed that the only time Bunche did not wear his gold earring was when he was working at Willowbrook. "He always took it off because some of the retarded would grab for it."

Apparently he is determined to keep his calling card.