

“UNCLE HATCH TO THE RESCUE”

Do we actually miss the many things that we all knew about growing up in the Old Neighborhood? Or is it just that time has a way of making even some of our worst yesterdays seem better than many aspects of our lives today? Whatever the attraction is in reminiscing about the old days, the older I get the more I seem to try to remember. I do it with the help of many of you, the readers, who write those beautiful letters about our life back in “Swampoodle”. Sometimes I reflect upon things that are buried in the deep crevices of my mind. One of the most wonderful aspects about living in a close-knit neighborhood was the fact that everyone knew you by first name or what family you belonged to. Many of you have said that growing up in this “fish bowl existence” was something that you were not fond of. You also say that you realize it stopped you from making many bad decisions. A very funny story about how little went unnoticed is the one about the guy who innocently gave Black Bottom Lena a ride. He drove her only two city blocks from 22nd and Toronto Streets to 22nd and Allegheny Avenue. When he arrived at his house not five minutes later his wife wanted to know why Black Bottom Lena was in his car. A concerned family member who had seen Lena in his car telephoned her. One of the things that went along with this watchful concern was the solicited and unsolicited advice that we all rendered to each other. The story that you are about to read is about advice that was given to me and as I reflect on it today, it has changed my life.

Spring, 1965: Pat and I are married with one child, Debbie, and living over Sam Silnutzer’s Haberdashery next to Basile’s Pizzeria. I am working part time delivering pizza for John Basile, but longing for a job in what I have gone to school for Medical Technology. (The pre-Medicare days in this field were without many job opportunities.)

Making matters worse, I am looking for a paying internship and they are few and far between. I finally give up looking and with some connections of my Uncle Hatch Vassallo and advice from many family members, I interview with VIZ Manufacturing. With the recommendation of their employee and neighborhood friend Jim Citro, they offer me a job.

It has been a week since I accepted the job, but I am not sure about taking the position and it has been bothering me. Thursday night is not a very busy night for pizza delivery so with a lot of time in between deliveries I eventually get up the nerve and walk over to Uncle Hatch who is sitting on his porch. “Aron, what do you know pal?” “Uncle Hatch there is something about taking my new job!” Unlike Uncle Hatch he is quick to answer, “Pat has already told Aunt Pansy that you don’t want the job. She told me yesterday.” He has a way of sounding stern at times, but his tone is very understanding and by the end of the conversation and with his advice I am going to delay starting the job for one more week.

The week passes very quickly and on Thursday afternoon I am standing on the corner at 22nd and Toronto, and a Western Union car parks in front of me. This guy gets out and walks to my apartment door. I stop him and ask what he wants. He is looking for me and has a telegram addressed to me. With a confused look on my face I sign for the telegram. It reads, “We have been trying to get in touch with you for two weeks, but your telephone is disconnected. We have a paying internship that we would like to offer you. Please call the Children’s Hospital Clinical Laboratory and ask for Arthur Hopkins!” “Halleluia!” I shout and run up to Sam & Nate’s candy store. I make the call within minutes, I accept the job and I start tomorrow morning. I run out of the store shouting, “I got the job at Children’s

Hospital” and as I pass Mrs. Coleman she smiles and looks at me and says, “Good Luck”. Danny DiGiacomo the lawyer is talking to Louie DiGiacomo the undertaker and both offer me their well wishes. Ann Tomassi is admiring her window display and smiles from across the street.

The next morning I am off by 6:00 am even though I don’t report for work until 9:00am. I am not sure about my 57 Plymouth and its push button gears making the trip, but I thought I would give it a try. Getting off of the Schuylkill Expressway at the South Street exit I proceed east on South Street. Approaching the intersection of 25th and South a dog runs out and I hit it. I quickly come to a stop and get out of the car to find this little kid crying over his little dog. What a heart breaker! I think fast since the dog is still breathing and pick it up very gently and drive the kid and the dog to U of P Veterinary Hospital. They say the dog can be saved, so I drive the kid home and promise him I’ll get his dog back to him when he is better. What a big shot I am to make this promise, since I barely have enough money for gas and lunch. Two weeks pass as fast as lightning and I call the Veterinary Hospital and the dog is ready to be released. The very nice woman assures me that he is going to be okay! Then the bombshell drops when she says, “The bill is \$145!” I am speechless, as the operator breaks in and says, “Ten cents for the next three minutes! I just hang the phone up and walk away in a daze. That night after I tell Pat the story she suggests that I talk to Uncle Hatch. Once again Uncle Hatch has all the answers. He works for the city and through his connections in a few days he finds out that the unclaimed dogs from the Veterinary Hospital are sent to the Women’s S.P.C.A. There they are put up for adoption. We show up at the S.P.C.A. two weeks later, adopt the dog for \$5 and return it to a very happy little boy!