

## OF BARBERS AND HAIRCUTS

Babies haven't any hair;  
Old men's heads are just as bare;  
Between the cradle and the grave  
Lies a haircut and a shave.

--Samuel Hoffenstein

Quick--what do Pat Conti, Martin Rocco, Carmen Rosamilia, Charlie Sabatini, and Johnny Mattioli have in common?

Howzat? They're all Italian tenors? Nah. Characters in a Rossini opera? Wrong again!

Each of them was my barber at one time or another as I was growing up. (Don't ask me how those sons of Italy came to hold a monopoly on the business of cutting hair in Renovo--they just did.)

Pat Conti, the barber of my crewcut years, had a shop on the side of a hill in South Renovo (yes, the borough of Renovo, population 2300, has a "suburb"). Other than that, there's not much to tell. I'd walk in, sit down, bzzzzip. "Thanks, Pat. See ya."

Martin Rocco, the dean of Renovo barbers, and Carmen "Hizzoner" Rosamilia, who doubled as the mayor of Renovo in his spare time, cut my hair during my pompadour period. Both of them took good care of the James Dean-type wave that I so meticulously fashioned from equal parts water, hair, and Brylcreem ("A little dab'll do ya") in front of the mirror each morning.

Charlie Sabatini and Johnny Mattioli--they of the steady hand and keen eye--were my guys for flattops, the haircuts that were de rigueur for schoolboy athletes in the '50s. (The flattop, by the way, is presently enjoying a comeback, owing in part to the popularity of flattopped NFL analyst Howie Long.) For those who aren't familiar with the flattop, it is a range of styles in which the hair is brushed so that it stands straight up and the top of the hair is then cut so that it forms a flat "surface" (i.e., the hair on the very top of the head is cropped shorter than it is in the front or on the upper sides).

Some notable flattop variations: the regular (or short) flattop (the hair on the very top of the head is short enough to allow a section of the scalp to be visible; this area is called the landing strip), the tall flattop (the hair that forms the flattop is slightly longer than it is in the short version), the flattop with fenders (the hair on the sides of the head is much longer than on the top and is slicked horizontally--i.e., toward the back of the head), the horseshoe flattop (an extremely short version in which the only hair left on top of the head is in the shape of a horseshoe that goes around the upper sides and across the front; the horseshoe flattop, as you can well imagine, has a mondo landing strip), and the flattop with white walls (the hair on the back and sides of the head is shaved completely off with a razor).

Regardless of the kind of flattop, one needed a generous dollop of gel,

pomade, or butch wax--not to mention an obsessive amount of brushing--to make the hair stand straight up and produce the desired flat-surface look. Ah, the things we did to be cool.

(Postscript: And my present barber here in Wheaton, Maryland--the guy who gives me a businessman's cut? That would be, um, Salvatore Bellafiore, a.k.a. Sal Scissorhands. He gives me a haircut I can't refuse.)