

The Peale, Baltimore

Out of the Blocks Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the Out of the Blocks website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>



Umberto Tunzi ([00:00](#)):

So we have different rods. You have flat rods and they give a different spiral. Spiral waves you need to have something like this, because it makes it a little bit firmer, a little bit springier.

Umberto Tunzi ([00:15](#)):

Humberto Kunzite, Humberto's Hair Salon, 7215 Hartford Road , Baltimore, Maryland, 21234. My specialty here is perms.

Speaker 2 ([00:24](#)):

He does beautiful work.

Umberto Tunzi ([00:26](#)):

This is Ms. Gloria. I've been doing her hair for a couple of years now, about 30.

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Speaker 2 ([00:34](#)):

He just has a way. Very talented.

Umberto Tunzi ([00:36](#)):

I'll give you five dollars later.

Umberto Tunzi ([00:40](#)):

One of the things that people don't understand about perms is, you're breaking down the bonds to the point you're destroying the hair. When you neutralize it, it bonds back together. But you already got damage in there. So it might look okay right there, and then a week later it looks like crap. And then it's like, if you have something that's over done, over processed, the S pattern of the curl is no longer ... it's just the frizz.

Umberto Tunzi ([01:02](#)):

And nobody wants to look like Phyllis Tiller. So you have to understand too and in anticipation, what do you do not to have that.

Adam Droneburg ([01:11](#)):

Before you get to be a master at your art, did you ever have an embarrassing mistake or-

Umberto Tunzi ([01:17](#)):

Oh yeah. I think my first wife left because of that embarrassing mistake. The mistake that I made was my first wife and I were doing my first attempt at doing a perm other than a mannequin head. When you do a perm on a mannequin head in school, you roll the hair but you don't put the chemical solution on there. Most of the times, back at that time the hair on the mannequin head was artificial. So when we used to do perms, we never put the solution on there. Nobody teaches you this stuff, as I was saying.

Umberto Tunzi ([01:48](#)):

So my very first perm on a person was her. She had naturally wavy hair. Did not know at the time, but naturally wavy hair will absorb the perm and make it twice as tight as what rod you put in. It was my mistake. It was the very beginning, we're talking about 1978 ... god it's been awhile.

Umberto Tunzi ([02:08](#)):

She had shorter hair, never seen her with longer hair. And when I did her hair, she looked like Art Garfunkel.

Umberto Tunzi ([02:16](#)):

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And I think she wanted to kill me that night.

Umberto Tunzi ([02:26](#)):

Got taper this underneath here. This was like majorly, bulky, and then moved up to here.

Speaker 4 ([02:30](#)):

What's the deal with this?

Umberto Tunzi ([02:32](#)):

Well, I don't want to straighten it out too much. I'm just going to let it be natural like that.

Speaker 4 ([02:36](#)):

Okay.

Umberto Tunzi ([02:36](#)):

And I also got a little bit of oil on there, so that way it's not going to stay as dry.

Speaker 4 ([02:42](#)):

Good.

Umberto Tunzi ([02:42](#)):

It smells-

Speaker 4 ([02:42](#)):

That's pretty.

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