

**“Essay written by Mr. E.L. Hicks, Principal of the Jackson School.” Manuscript
contributed by Anthony Sorrentino, ca. 1920’s.**

The ditties of the principalship of the Jackson School were taken over by me on the first of February, 1927. I was by no means unaware of the fact that a difficult task lay before me. My experiences from the moment of my arrival were not at all reassuring. About two hundred of the tattered and unwashed followed me into the building and down through the corridors to the office where they stood about gawking and jabbering while I while I made disposition of my topcoat and hat.

As it was still about forty-five minutes until time for the bell which would call them to their duties it seemed to me that my immediate duty was to clear the building of the mob for the time being. This I finally succeeded in doing with the assistance of a few teachers, who had arrived upon the scene

This was only the first experience of a hectic day, and week, and month, and year.

When we had gotten the sixteen hundred or more pupils into their class rooms there was some semblance or peace on the premises, but I was soon to learn that there were several individuals who had not chosen to go to their appointed places, but rather to spend the day in darting hither and yon through the corridors of the building and in and out of the building at will. This would not have been so annoying, but a part of the game was to appear at the door of the office or of

some classroom and emit the Neapolito-Calabrial-Sicilian yell, practiced and used by them in a utilitarian way in connection with their vending of newspapers.

As the week more on, I began to learn who some or the individual tormentors were, and with this introduction to my narrative completed, I shall proceed to introduce my reader, as I was introduced to the individuals whose early careers it is my purpose to trace.

One of the most persistent annoyers was Patsy Domico. Patsy had recently had a brush with the police during which he had been shot in the arm while fleeing from them in a stolen automobile. Thus, at this time he was enjoying to the fullest extent his place in the limelight and making the most of it. We never did succeed in getting Patsy back into school in the regular way but while he continued to make himself exceedingly annoying from the outside for a time, his career was short-lived. Only two or three months after my arrival at the Jackson, Patsy, while attempting to make away with someone's automobile one evening, lit a match to see if there was any gas in the tank, and there was.

Another boy whom I very soon learned to know as one of our truant tormentors was Ralph Caliendo. I also found out that Ralph had recently been paroled from the Parental School. I think it was about the second week of my sojourn at the Jackson when I succeeded in corralling young Ralph in the office one day. I stepped to the telephone and reported to the Parental school regarding Ralph's conduct. I was informed that a Parental officer was at the moment in a neighboring school, and that he would be requested to call upon me immediately. In about ten minutes the officer came in. I gave him an account of Ralph's behavior and requested that Ralph be taken back at once. After some brief parleying the officer agreed, and in less than half an hour after I had succeeded in getting my hands on Master Ralph, he was on his way.

I did not hesitate to bring to the attention of some of the worst miscreants with whom I had to deal, my ability to bring swift justice upon them--citing, Ralph's case as an example of my power.

In the course of two or three weeks I became conscious of the fact that a goodly portion of the time that I was devoting to office discipline was being consumed by individuals of two families in particular -- Taccios and Pizzellos. There were two boys from each family- Bennie and Frank ("Felix") (Taccio), and Andrew and Cosney ("Cotzi") ("Pizzello.") I remember that after citing to them my rapid disposition of Ralph Caliendo, they were extremely curious to know how I could send boys to the Parental School so quickly when other principals had to take their cases into the Juvenile Court and spend several months in getting, a boy to the Parental School.

Andrew, the older Pizzello, was during the course of the spring months sent to the Parental School. He was kept there for a month or so, and then returned on parole. The experience seemed to have quite a sobering effect upon him, as he gave no further very serious trouble in school, and was graduated from the eighth grade about a year later. He appeared to have a very wholesome fear and dread of being, sent back to the Parental School.

Frank Taccio also sent away during the spring months. He was only about eleven years old at the time, being two or three years younger than his brother, Bennie. Frank was wholly incorrigible and was transferred to the Dante Truant Center. This transfer did not relieve us of his annoyance, however, as he was constantly truant, and spent much of his time hanging around the Jackson and annoying us. He picked up a companion by the name of "Nicky" Williams. Nicky was under

the jurisdiction of one of our neighboring schools, but apparently spent little time there. He and Frank loitered around continuously, carving up the doors to our basement entrances sneaking through the corridors of the building and annoying us in every conceivable manner. They finally began *to* annoy one of our teachers on her way to and from school and became so persistent and bold that she finally had Nicky arrested and prosecuted him. He was sent to the Cook County School for Boys for a short time but was soon back with us, and continued to be a nuisance around the school for another year or more before he finally disappeared from our observation, presumably in search of more lucrative game.

I think it was during the Christmas Holidays of 1928 that the school had one of its periodic raids by marauders. A considerable amount of damage was done and a large amount of material carried away from the cooking room, woodshop, and other classrooms. Shortly thereafter we began to get trace of some of the plunder. Some of it was being used in the Pizzello home, some in the Garelli home, next door to the Pizzello's and more of it in a boys' club in a barnloft near these homes. The police raided the club and the Taccios and Coaney Pizzello and a young desperado and member of the gang, Thomas Messina, were placed in the patrol wagon and taken to the Detention Home. Several others were involved in this difficulty. Two were members of the Gorrelli family, Olga, a girl about fifteen at the time and Chesnow, a small boy. Joe Gorelli, a boy about thirteen or fourteen at the time, and hard rough boy in school, was declared by all to be innocent of any participation in the burglary. In all of the burglaries which -were to follow by this Sholto Gang, Joe was always likewise exonerated by the gang of any complicity. Others who were linkers with this particular party were Tony Stampanata, Christ Marasco, and Mike Plastina.

On the Sunday following this raid by the police, and while some of these lads were sojourning in the Detention Home, a telephone call came to my home. Mrs. Hicks answered the phone was met by a terrific tirade of blackguarding and awful threats against my life from what she thought was a man and woman. My family was considerably terror stricken and I felt some uneasiness myself. I went on for a few days trying to find some clew [sic] to the source of the phone call, and not associating it directly with the boys. On Thursday afternoon when I arrived home from school I received another phone call and answered myself. Immediately I recognized the voices of boys and suspected that one was the voice of Andrew Pizzello, who had not been captured by the police and was at liberty.

I immediately began to try to find out the truth of the origin of the calls, and after several days was successful, mainly through confessions and information obtained from Christ Marasco and Chesnow Gorelli. The Sunday call had come from the home of Gorelli's, with Olga and Tony Stampanata doing the talking,, and Mike Plastina present. The Thursday call had come from a public booth with Andrew Pizzello doing the talking and Mike Plastina present. Apparently the plot was the work of silent, sly Mike, who had never given any great amount of trouble in school.

My indignation and my sense of duty in trying to teach these people to be Americans both prompted me to come back at this bunch of bold young upstarts, who were attempting to use the contemptible methods of their race to intimidate me. I appealed to the compulsory education department and to the legal department of the Board of Education for assistance. Mr. Keith and

an attorney from the Board spent a half day in the school getting confessions and signed statements and evidence which if corroborated in court would have convicted the whole bunch.

But when the mob was taken into court the: next day, every confession was repudiated and everything denied point blank. Judge Bartelme excoriated the whole bunch for being the worst bunch of liars to whom she had ever listened, but could not find them guilty under the evidence. However, Stampanata was on parole from the Cook County School at the time and was returned there for violation of parole. Plastina was sent to the Parental School a few days later on an additional charge of truancy, but was released in a very few days and given a working certificate. I understand that he is now considered to be an outstanding leader in directing affairs of the Valley Gang. Stampanata applied for readmission into the Jackson after being released from Cook County, but was refused. All of the others were, I believe released without punishment. .Andrew Pizzello was not a pupil in the Jackson at this time, as he had graduated from the eighth grade in June, 1928.

Thomas Messina, who was referred to above as one of the boys captured in the police raid on the club, was said to have surrendered himself voluntarily at the time by jumping into the patrol wagon when he saw his companions being taken sway. Thomas had been in the Jackson School a comparatively short time, and I did not know him very well. My first acquaintance with him was when he arrived at the Jackson as transfer from the Parental School where he had been sent by one of our neighboring schools, I think. It was not long until I had complaints of his conduct among the complaints was a report that he was guilty of breaking some window panes. I threatened to return him to the Parental School and shortly thereafter he disappeared. We could

get no trace of him for a couple of weeks. Finally we learned that he was back the Parental school. The principal of that school reported that he had found him asleep on the porch one morning, and had taken him in, neglecting to notify us at the time.

I do not remember that Thomas ever attended the Jackson after that, but his name was connected with that of the Sholto Gang in several destructive raids upon the school. His career of crime final finally landed him in the Cook County School, and later in St. Charles, and resulted finally in his death. He was killed while attempting to rob a drug store. It is said that his loyalty to his gang companions was demonstrated in his last act when he jumped in front of one of them to take the bullet fired by the proprietor of the store.

My recollection of what happened to the boys who were caught in *the* club house (barnloft) raid is not very clear. Frank Taccio had, after nearly a year of delay, been sent to the Parental School from the Dante School on a truancy charge. He was sent from the Parental School back to us, and it was after his return to us that the above mentioned episode occurred. I think he was returned to the Parental School at this time, because he had. also continued his habits of truancy. Bennie Taccio and Thomas Messina were, I believe, sent to the Cook County School for their connections with the affair, and Coaney Pizzello was returned to our school without punishment.

Coaney, however, became very difficult to manage in school after this incident and before the end of the school year he was transferred to the Dante Truant Room. All of the pupils of that division in the Dante were transferred to the Montefiore when it opened in the fall of 1929 and

that included, of course, Coaney, who was graduated from that school at the end of the first semester and released to continue his crime in a more vicious manner.

Two other boys who were also associated with the Sholto Gang, but who up to the time had escaped the police, were sent from the Jackson to the Montefiore in the autumn of 1929. One was Philip ("Cat-eyes") Cortellassi a pupil in our adolescent subnormal division, sent for truancy; and the other James DeGeatano, sent for incorrigibility and truancy. Philip had been there a only a few days when he was picked up by the police for stealing automobiles or something sent to the took County School.

DeGestano Degestano graduated also with the first class from the Montefiore in January 1930 with Coaney Pizzello and became one of Coaney's companions in idleness and crime, Another companion of theirs was Toney Sciarra, Sciarra, also from the Montefiore Tony had formerly been a pupil, in the Jackson, but had transferred to a neighboring school some time in the year 1928, I think; and had been sent to the Montefiore from the school to which he had transferred.

This bunch from the Montefiore hung about and caused us very great deal of annoyance. One day a teacher's pocketbook containing twenty dollars and a fountain pen was stolen. The teacher was a young woman working on a beginner's salary and trying to support a sick mother and other relatives. The loss was tragic for her. Our investigation finally led to the information that James DeGeatano and Tony Sciarra were the guilty parties and warrants were obtained for their arrest. James was taken into court, confessed his guilt, and released on probation when he promised to make restitution. Tony Sciarra was never apprehended by the police for this offense. James

DeGeatano was picked up a few days later by the police for some offense and was sent to the Cook County School. No restitution was ever made to the poor teacher.

There were two other member of our school who were associated with the Sholto Gang and were connected with one of the raids on the school early in the spring of 1930. One was Angelo De Metro (“The King of the Birds”), and the other was Felix. Both were in the 8A class at the time, and both were given graduation certificates in June of that year.

Angelo DeMetro was a particularly sneaking lying, treacherous fellow with a hang dog look that made his appellation “King of the Birds,” seem particularly fitting. He is said to have been guilty of pickpocketing in the classroom. Felix was of a different type and I do not know of his having been involved, in any other difficulties.

During one of the raids in the year 1929-30 our office typewriter and our radio set were stolen. Several months after the happening we got hold of the information that James DeGeatano Philip Cortellassi and his older brother, John, and Coaney Pizzello were members of the gang that committed this theft. Some of them confessed and told the whole story. The radio set had been purchased by the proprietor of a meat market at the corner of Sholto and Taylor Streets, one-half block from the school and the typewriter had been kept for the boys by the proprietor of a candy store (Mary Scafuri) located just three doors from the school. Mrs. Scafuri had two boys in school at the time. She claimed that someone later stole the typewriter from her, and the boys say that they received no proceeds from the theft of the typewriter. An attempt was made to have the custodian of school property prosecute these adults who received the stolen property. The

man sent to take charge of the affair said the police refused to cooperate and the affair was dropped. There were strong indications that the police squad sent to investigate this affair were interested only in warning the guilty parties of the impending danger of arrest.

Another young lad sent to the Montefiore School early in the spring of 1930 was James Marchese. His offense consisted of both truancy and misbehavior not long thereafter he was involved in a raid on the school by the old gang. This time they poured gasoline over the office floor and set fire to it. Marchese's clothes were said to have given him away its a member of the Gang as he was saturated with the smell of gasoline.

The rest of the members of his raid, all of whom miraculously escaped without being burned to death, were found out a few weeks later when they were caught in a raid on the McKinely High School and confessed to the Jackson raid also.

There were four or five of these boys, all members of the old Sholto Gang who have been mentioned heretofore except one. This one was a member of our June, 1930 graduating class, and their rapture was just a few days before graduation time. This boy (I do not recall his name) was released because he had no previous court record and was permitted to graduate. Bennie Taccio was one of the guilty party at this time. I do not recall who the others were, but I know they were old member of the gang. They were all given sentences, I think, some to St. Charles, Charles, some to Cook County.

There was one particularly vicious fellow associated with this gang whom I have not yet mentioned. This was Sestino Stringini.

Our difficulties with Sestino began about the spring of 1929. He was extremely impudent and defiant at times in the classroom and, was also repeatedly truant. Finally a petition was filed for his transfer to the Dante Truant Center. When the transfer was attempted, he and an older brother set up strong and defiant objections to his going. Nevertheless he was taken, but the brother, not to be thwarted, presumably sent him immediately to live with a relative in a western suburb of the city.

Soon after school opened in September, Sestino presented himself at the Jackson with a transfer slip from a suburban school. I had learned in the meantime that Sestino and his younger brother, John, had broken nearly all the window panes out of the woodshop in our school -- the woodshop teacher was one of these these against whom Sestino was resentful. I refused to take him in, insisting that he properly belonged in the Dante, and another violent scene was put on by Sestino and brother William. Finally he went to the principal of the Goodrich School, using his transfer slip from the County School, and a misrepresentation of address to gain admittance there. He was admitted there and was carried through the year and graduated. It appears that he got along very well in that school, which he was perfectly capable of doing when he so desired.

But while at the Goodrich, he battered and annoyed us. Early in the year 1930, he was the leader in a particularly vicious raid on our school, when, according to reports I later received he went about with a hammer smashing doors and locks at random.

When the story at last came out he was arrested but denied everything categorically in court and offered an alibi. He was an extremely clever and effective liar, and impressed the court with his probable innocence. His case was continued for a week to check up on his alibi which was to the effect that he was singing in the choir of Rev. Mantone's Church at the corner of Poll and Sholte Streets at the time in question.

During the week he apparently realized that his case was hopeless and he came to me in sack cloth and ashes to confess and throw himself on my mercy. He said he had also confessed to his mother, his brother, and his priest that he had belonged to the gang and had joined in their thieving from time to time for two years but wished to be given chance to reform and go straight.

We all went into court I told the judge what Sestino had said and recommended his release on probation which was granted .

A few weeks later I received word that he had again been involved in breaking window panes in our school. After being convinced that the story was correct, I called up his principal at the Goodrich. She confronted him, and he immediately came over to see me, coming in a very belligerent attitude and of course, denying everything. I was certain he was guilty and putting up his customary bluff, so ordered him out. He refused to go and I jumped up and gave [sic] him

good strong kick in the seat of the trousers. As he ran out he picked up a heavy oak chair, swung it and slid it across the floor. A sharp edge struck me on the shin and broke a large blood vessel. I not only had an extremely sore limb for several weeks, but still have a blue spot on my shin half as large as your hand.

I wrote the facts to Judge Bartelme and asked her to have Sestino's probation annulled She called us-into court, but my case was prejudiced because I had kicked Sestino, and he was again released.

We were again raided in a particularly vicious manner in September,1930. All the earmarks or Sestino's work were there. The haunts of the gang were finally located in a rented room on Sangamon Street near Lake Street. Some of the plunder from our school and some R.O.T.C. rifles from McKinley were found.

Among those found in the place was Sestino, along with two or three others of the old gang. However, Sestino's clever lying succeeded in gaining for himself a very light sentence to Cook County. I think he ran away from there after two or three days and got away with it. Nothing has been done to try to get him back.