

If You've Got it, Flaunt it!

A Tribute to Uncle Chuck from his niece, Kathy McAfee

As I hover in the suspended state of the final goodbye, I reflect fondly on the sage advice and kindness bestowed to me by my Uncle Chuck Fontana.

- Did he know what a profound difference that he made in my life?
- Was he aware of how he guided my life with his encouraging words?
- Did he really know how much I loved him and how grateful I was?

What made his role in my life so important? Why do the memories of him stand out like a series of sepia-tone photographs, elegantly framed and proudly hung on the walls of my life?

Uncle Chuck shored up my self-esteem when I was a fledgling teenager, and helped set me on a path of confident self-expression for the rest of my life.

Growing up I spent my summer vacations visiting the amazing Fontana family in Southern California. For just 1-2 weeks a year, I received the kind of special treatment that helped me develop into the person that I am.

Unencumbered with the responsibilities of a parent, as an uncle, Chuck could spoil me as, treating me like the grown-up that I would soon become.

Uncle Chuck allowed me to taste my first sip of coffee – that forbidden adult beverage. He invited me to sit with him at the adult's table for dinner– marking the important transition from child to young lady.

He created a festive environment where frivolity was not only tolerated, but openly encouraged. I have a favorite photographic memory of dancing with him, while I wore a lampshade on my head. No, I was not drunk – for I did not have an alcoholic beverage until I was legally 21 years of age (that is the truth). But I was intoxicated with the spirited moments of that

day in the Fontana household. Free to express myself without correction, criticism or constraint. I danced openly – full of delight.

Did you know that Uncle Chuck arranged my very first “date” with a boy? I was 14 years old and he set me up with his nephew, Michael Fontana – the son of his brother, Joe. Michael was one or two years older than me and I had a serious crush on him. He took me to dinner and then to the movies. It was a Mel Brooks film starring Bernadette Peters as the “secret weapon.” During one scene in the film, the entire audience burst out in laughter. I was lost and confused as to what was so funny. The adult humor was beyond my naiveté.

When I returned back to the Fontana house, I was able to ask Uncle Chuck about this movie scene. He explained to me in a way that did not embarrass, but rather, informed me. I can’t remember exactly what he said; I only remember how much I trusted him with this grown up moment of learning.

Uncle Chuck had made me a promise that when I turned sixteen years old, he would take me out to a lobster dinner. This was such an incredible offer, as going out to a fancy restaurant was not a regular part of my family’s lifestyle. Age 16 came and went and we never seemed to find the right time for that lobster dinner. But we joked about it for several years. It was like a special bond between us. Honestly, I was happy to postpone that promise forever, as it meant we would be connected at a deep and personal level. Finally, the day came when he honored his dinner date promise when I was 18 years old. Along with his beautiful wife and my role model, Aunt Rose Marie, he treated me to a special lobster dinner at a fancy restaurant in Laguna Beach. All dressed up, we dined on fresh broiled lobster while looking over the magnificent Pacific Coast. I had finally arrived!

Uncle Chuck always referred to me as Katherine – my full Christian name. He never shortened to the casual, common nickname of Kathy that most everyone else called me. When he said my full name, it got my attention. He never used that tone of voice that parents use when they mean business. Rather, his voice had a special announcement quality about it – as if he was introducing me on stage. “Katherine – how the heck are you?” he would say.

Once I reached my 21st year, he would add the following question whenever I entered his home: “Katherine – how the heck are you? Can I get you a drink?”

Generous, hospitable, jovial, Uncle Chuck would pour me a glass of fine wine (never the cheap stuff). Even the wine glass was special – with a cut crystal globe on the stem. It was such a special presentation that once again, I felt special and welcomed by him in his loving home, his personal kingdom.

I can see him in my mind’s eye opening the front door. No matter the weather, he would be dressed in dark blue shorts (snug fitting, never baggy), a white Oxford shirt with the sleeves rolled up, white crew socks and brown leather loafers. Clean shaven with a style all his own, Uncle Chuck was dressed and ready to entertain, be the grill master or engage in what appeared to be his second favorite hobby after fishing – puttering around the house. He had that down to an art form.

But most of all, I will remember the famous expression he would share with me more than once; Words that I would carry with me for the rest of my life; A message that at face value might seem trite, cliché or simple flattery. But for me, Uncle Chuck’s words would embed themselves in the foundation of my soul – the very lining of my self-esteem. His words would encourage and liberate me, allowing me to believe in myself enough to realize my full potential.

Uncle Chuck said to me: “Katherine, if you’ve got it, flaunt it.”

If you’ve got it, flaunt it. What could this possibly mean? More specifically, why did Uncle Chuck give me this particular piece of instruction?

Was he suggesting that I cast off modesty? Was he giving me permission to show off? Was this a subtle suggestion that I should pursue a performance career, perhaps in acting, dancing, singing, speaking or modeling? What was Uncle Chuck’s intent with this provocative piece of advice?

What I did understand immediately was that Uncle Chuck knew that “I had it.” For how else could I flaunt it? He felt I had the talent and the potential to be someone special – to do something great with my life. He recognized something special in me that I could not see

for myself. Like most teenagers, I was riddled with self-doubt and struggling with my identity. Uncle Chuck, along with his wonderful wife and soul mate, Rose Marie, was one of those special influences in my life who confirmed me.

I imagine that they have done that for many other people. And what an incredible gift to give.

If you've got it, flaunt it. So, what does it mean to “flaunt it??” In my life and career, I have translated the “flaunt it” part as “put yourself out there.” Be bold and courageous enough to share your ideas, gifts and talents with the world.

Uncle Chuck and Aunt Rosi lived that way. They role modeled this philosophy that is akin to the mantra: “Carpe Diem” – seize the day.

Uncle Chuck and Aunt Rosi shored up my back bone and built my resilience, knowing that when you put yourself out there and “flaunt it,” there will be many people who are going to criticize you and judge you harshly. Some people would rather tear you down, than build you up. It's these sad folks that lack what Uncle Chuck possessed: healthy self-worth and an abundance mentality. Perhaps these people were not lucky enough to have an Uncle Chuck or Aunt Rosi in their lives during their young formative years.

But it's not too late. You can be an Uncle Chuck in someone else's life. You can be the great encourager to someone who needs a boost – someone who hasn't yet discovered how truly remarkable they are; how deeply they are loved; and that they indeed “have it” and can “flaunt it.”

“If you've got it, flaunt it.” That was and will always be the greatest gift that Uncle Chuck gave to me. He loved me. He saw my inner beauty. He believed in me and my potential. And he gave me the permission to fully express it.

Uncle Chuck, I say to you now, as you embark on your next great adventure: You've got it. You shared it. You lived it. And Yes! You flaunted it...in loving style!

Goodbye my dear, sweet Uncle Chuck Fontana. Thank you for being a guiding light in my life.

Your loving niece, Kathy

If You've Got it, Flaunt it!

A Motivating Poem by Kathy McAfee

If you've got it, flaunt it.

Embrace your uniqueness. See and value your own gifts.
Put them out in the world so that they can grow and inspire others.
Cast off self-doubt and hesitation, so that you can live a fully expressed life;

If you've got it, share it.

We live in an abundant world that is shrouded with scarcity and fear.
Trust that when you share all that you have, you will be richly rewarded. It matters not how you share it – through philanthropy, small acts of kindness, or encouraging words - only that you do share what you have with others;

If you've got it, celebrate it.

Cast off the guilt and obligation that keeps you consumed in the busyness of your daily life. Invest your time in treasuring all that you are and all that you have. Be fully present in the moments that make up your life;

If you've got it, live it.

Find your passion. Define your purpose and start living your personal mission. You can meet your needs and satisfy your soul, while also being an instrument that motivates others to live more meaningful and joyful lives;

If you've got it, let it go.

And when your time has reached its end, trust that you have done what you came here to do. Your love and light has changed the lives of others that you cared about. And what could be more meaningful?