



A Natural Attitude

A Naturalista's Hair Journal Spoken from a Salon Owner's Perspective

By Schatzi Hawthorne McCarthy

A publication of Schatzi's Design Gallery & Day Spa, LLC

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Embrace the beauty of you.

This book is dedicated to God, the Creator, for Your grace, mercy and omniscience:

“Oh lord, though hast searched me and known me...”

(Psalm 139)

Thank you for guiding me, naturally and super-naturally, to this path of self-discovery that was your vision for my life.

To the beautiful women in my life who have loved me unconditionally and have inspired me to be a natural woman:

Grandma Mabel McMillan

Aunt Joyce McCullom Woodbury

Dear Mother Greta Lois McCullom Hawthorne

At the footstool of this matriarchy, my natural attitude was nurtured and grown. Prayerfully, the world can learn from your rich and wise example.

To my Dad, the late Retired Maj. Arthur Earl Hawthorne. You were always proud of me. Without your unconditional love, I would never have had the confidence to be the natural woman that I am.

My love for you is beyond all understanding!

To my beautiful family--Lloyd, Jela-ni, Jamar, who have supported me in all of my lifetime endeavors. I am privileged to walk this journey of life with you and pray that we continue to grow and learn together with hearts full of love and understanding.



Acknowledgements

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Shaundrelle Todd was truly the wind beneath my wings when I first started. I would go so far as to say that had I not met her during the developmental years of our salon's opening, we would not still be here today. She is an inspiration and a gift to the world. As I write this missive, she is somewhere in Thailand, grasping the essence of life with the passion of a thousand love songs. She is a lion and a lamb—all at once. I love you, Shaundrelle. But you know that already. Godspeed.

Yoneka Trent is my longtime friend and confidant. She is the person who knows all of my deepest, brightest secrets and loves me anyway. She is an integral part of this book because she was the first person to transition to natural hair in our salon in 2006. I feel so privileged to have made your acquaintance so many years ago. Thank you for loving me and trusting me to lead you to and through your natural hair journey. You have now become an expert in your own right and an inspiration to others. May you continue to grow and learn and model natural beauty. But most importantly, thank you for being a wonderful friend who sees me with all of my faults and foibles and asks that I be nothing other than me. Somehow, I know that when my final breath comes in this life, it will be you who sits at my bedside and prays for my soul's transition to peace. A person could not ask for a better friend.

Jaumeiko Coleman and Denise Mbani are two natural sisters who I have come to know and love. They both bring special and unique gifts that have enriched my life immeasurably. Denise is a beautiful woman of humble countenance and perhaps the funniest person that I know!! She keeps me grounded. She is also my walking partner, my regular sounding board and the voice of reason. We have cried and comforted each other through a very challenging period in both of our lives. We were brought together at a very critical juncture. Through our prayer walks, we have grown spiritually and emotionally. Thank you for laughing me off the ledge on many occasions. My love for you has only grown. Meiko, what would I have done if I did not meet you at a conference some years ago? You bring so much joy to my day, whenever I talk to you. It was your hair that first drew me to you. It's your spirit that binds me to you now and always. Thank you for sharing your light and modeling grace, brilliance, inquisitiveness and openness so effortlessly. What a refreshing gift you are to all who are privileged to know you!

Jaime Mitchell, Etheopea Balogun, Tamioka Vick and Mikea Spencer are other women of the salon who have inspired me through their willingness to learn. Ladies, it was not easy to carve a niche on a landscape that had no formal, professional direction or guidance. The natural hair field is only just being recognized by our State! You have trusted me to be the lighthouse in the dark and I thank you for being willing to take a chance on me.

I would like to make special mention of Marianne Williamson for granting permission to cite her beautiful and inspired poem "A Return to Love" (Reference: July 19, 2010 email). Your poem has inspired me in so many ways. It is a universal cry of love that I believe the world should read and reflect on. Thank you for allowing me to cite your work. More importantly, thank you for writing.

I could go on and on mentioning beautiful people who have inspired me over the years. But this book is really about the business that modeled a natural attitude in many others. So, I choose to focus on those people who made that business possible. With that said, I would surely be nothing without the love and support of my family. To my husband, Lloyd, my sons Jela-ni and Jamar, my sister Jasmine, my brother Earl and my brother Jason: you have listened to me and encouraged me so much through the years. Seeing a vision of the future that others question can sometimes be a very lonely place. Thank you for supporting and loving me. To mom, Greta M. Hawthorne and dad, Arthur Earl Hawthorne, for nurturing within me a profound self-love that was the greatest gift you could ever have given me. What does it mean to a girl to look in her mother's tear-stained eyes and hear her say, "You were never a day's trouble. Not one." Or to look in her father's eyes and hear, "I'm proud of you. And I love you." Those

moments were fleeting moments of time but they are eternally etched on my consciousness. I will and can never forget them. Because of you, I have always known that I am well loved. As a result, the views of the wider world have ALWAYS been insignificant to me. Thank you for teaching me that greatest love of all. I pray that I can help others see that light of self-love that you shone for me so many years ago.



Forward

What is a natural attitude? It is a philosophy, a way of thinking which embraces natural beauty as the ideal image of beauty. For instance, a child is born perfect. At no time in life, does that perfection alter or dissipate. Perfection is coded at birth and it endures. It is only the wider social "programming" which seeks to label the perfect child and create an imperfect being. This is true in the physical, intellectual, social, economic and spiritual arenas. We reject the notion of imperfection. So, a natural attitude is grounded in a strong appreciation for God's gifts, a profound love of self, an ever-inquisitive knowledge of history, an admiration for diversity and an unequivocal willingness to speak truth. It is likewise a belief system grounded in great empathy for the intolerance of others but which seeks to cull and destroy the weakness and intolerance within the self. In short, a "natural attitude" seeks soul perfection--a state of being which better aligns with the corresponding image of natural beauty.

All the same, this book is not about a natural attitude as a topic for writing or discovery. Rather, it is a collection of works on varying topics, all of which reflect the light of a natural attitude. This book was fourteen years in the making. It began in August 2006 when I opened Schatzi's Design Gallery & Day Spa, LLC, a natural hair salon & spa located in Raleigh, NC. When I consider the professional direction of my life, I would never have predicted that I would own a salon... of any kind. I did not pursue the Cosmetic Arts profession while in school and I've never been a "girly girl." So, this was definitely a stretch outside of the expected career path of my life. But in truth, it was such a natural outgrowth and extension of myself, that the flow in this direction was natural, logical and inevitable. Here's why.

I've been a natural woman for over 30 years, which includes all of my adult life. I've been a natural enthusiast for my entire life. Throughout this process, I've seen what embracing a natural image of self can do for the mind, the body and the spirit. And as for the hair...beauty is truly in the eyes of the beholder. And there is much beauty to behold on the natural side of life.

I've witnessed transformations that can be described as nothing less than poetic. Like a butterfly emerging from the caterpillar's cocoon, a transitioning woman is one who is transforming her very essence to re-emerge in the society as a woman who lacks confusion and embodies self-confidence. Understanding the grace and confidence of the butterfly, I opened *Schatzi's* as a personal mission to assist those ladies who see the future and know that their soul's journey requires a break from the beaten path. I felt inspired to add massage therapy and aesthetic services to encourage natural women to pamper and take care of their whole selves, as we so often fail to nurture self for the sake of others.

One encouraging development that I've observed of late is that there is a lot of information available on the Internet and in books on the care and maintenance of natural hair. There's surely much more information than I had back in the 80s when I transitioned. We give thanks for progress and change. It has empowered thousands of women to liberate themselves to become the person that they want to be. That is beautiful. All the same, what I've learned is that it is not always enough to sit in the comfort of home and to embrace a new philosophy of self. Sometimes, we need help--a base of support, a model of our future goal and a deeper source of inspiration. That is what the staff of *Schatzi's* aim to be, today and every day. I know that we cannot reach all women who have transitioning and natural hair care questions and concerns. We are one salon located in one city in one State in one country on Mother Earth. Our reach is constrained. But I have a vision of impacting far beyond the *limitation of oneness*. It is for this reason, that I began creating *Au Naturel* newsletter in September 2006.

Au Naturel is a French phrase which colloquially means "but of course"; literally, it means "to the natural." It is the perfect title for our news delivery system. The title embodies what we are about at *Schatzi's*. For with all the information on natural hair that is now available, many of the articles in our newsletter provide a totally unique perspective. Our aim is to narrow the natural hair care discussion and shine the light on the root cause of the problem which creates the discomfort and angst that exists around natural hair in the 21st century. In my view, it is high time to remove the shackles of a legacy that has undermined the self-esteem of past, current and future generations of our children. While physical emancipation has occurred, the emancipated mind remains an attainable goal yet to be

realized. I am unapologetic in speaking to the truth of our rich, yet tarnished legacy which undermines the integrity of our future. We believe we are impacting our community in a positive way with *Au Naturel*, and the power of this medium continues.

So why write a book at all? Why not just use *Au Naturel* to spread the gospel? Well over the years, I have spoken with women, inside and outside the salon, who have posed interesting questions that provoked intriguing ideas and forced me to go deep in my personal thoughts and analyses. *Au Naturel* is where I record my reflections. But what I have found over time is when meeting new people and hearing new ideas, I am often placed in the position of stating, "I wrote a newsletter article about that some time ago." I never quite remember which *Au Naturel* issue to refer the person to and don't often remember even the title of the piece. So needless to say, I wind up explaining my thoughts in summation and encouraging them to visit the website to review archived issues of the newsletter. It was not until I presented at the North Carolina Natural Hair Care Expo in June 2010 that I realized I had to compile the best of *Au Naturel* into one body of work that would allow the *limitation of oneness* to become a greater opportunity for spreading the good news of self-love to a wider audience in a focused way.

I have carefully combed through the pages of *Au Naturel* editions and I have pulled the pieces that I believe were inspired and capture the vision of our salon's motto "Embrace the Beauty of You." Some of the essays are direct in their messaging, others are indirect. But it is my hope that they will all be seen as creative and relevant to the purpose of inspiring others who are walking a natural journey of life and adopting a natural attitude.

The format of the newsletter is typically an introductory greeting, followed by articles of interest to our readers. The newsletter is also often peppered with inspirational quotes, poems and prose which celebrate love, life and beauty. When defining a format for this book, pieces that I wanted to include fell into two categories: 1) essays or commentary on a natural way of life and 2) hair care truths. (The poems have been extracted from this 3rd edition of the book. They may reappear at a later date as a separate publication...Time will tell.) It is for this reason that the book is divided into these two corresponding segments: Natural Hair Chronicles and Natural Hair Truths. The term "chronicles" is an important one because this book truly represents almost ten years of thought on topics of interest to the natural hair care community, as seen through the lens of a "*Natural Attitude*." But the book is in no way exhaustive of all the material contained in *Au Naturel*. So, I encourage readers to reference the pages of *Au Naturel* on our website for more information and inspiration. This book only captures those pieces which were written by me and which attempt to dive deeper to the root of our societal challenges in the arena of self-love.

In summation, the goal of this book is to inspire others adopting a "*natural attitude*" to feel empowered to press on and model perfection for others who are still "taking the blue pill." I envision the essays in this book being read among women's natural hair care discussion forums and peer groups as well as privately and individually wherever women are challenged to be and think differently from the mainstream. We must learn to love the Self. And I hope that the hair truths will serve as a visual reminder that righteousness has a reward which totally nullifies the notion that "beauty is only skin deep." The beauty that we seek to inspire in the pages of this book is all about a profound agape love that can only be transformational in its nature. It is a love which transcends the cellular level to reach that which is eternal. And thus, we at *Schatzi's*, through the medium of *Au Naturel* and with the message of "Embrace the Beauty of You", will have transcended the *limitation of oneness* to spread love beyond the confines of four walls. So I give to you [Natural Attitude: A Naturalista's Hair Journal Spoken from a Salon Owner's Perspective.](#)



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Natural Hair Chronicles:

Essays inspired by a Natural Attitude





A Natural Hair Philosophy

Context: This essay was written for the first New Year's edition of An Naturel in January 2007. I wrote this piece because I wanted the general public to understand our salon's mission to promote a more natural way of life through enlightened nurturance of the mind, body and soul thereby fostering self-love and acceptance. Our motto is "Embrace the Beauty of You." From the outset, there were some who simply could not understand the need for a stand-alone natural hair salon, let alone "Day Spa." The common thread was 'Why not embrace all hair possibilities?' So, this article was a personal testimonial and the first of many subsequent calls for a common understanding of one of the most fundamental and essential challenges facing African-American peoples throughout the world--self-acceptance, as coded by the Creator.

At *Schatzi's Design Gallery & Day Spa*, we're very excited at the prospects of the New Year as we move forward in this quest to revolutionize the hair and beauty care industry with an emphasis on "naturalization." Why are we so motivated and passionate about this endeavor? We are motivated because we believe in the beauty of all people as they are, created by the Creator. We do not believe that perfection can be improved upon, so we embrace a natural self-image and a natural way of life. With that said, we at *Schatzi's* will share our knowledge of the beauty and versatility of natural hair and will endeavor to develop an image of natural hair that is enviable and embraced by all. We intend to achieve this natural revolution through quality service and a portfolio of natural hairstyles that begs the question, "when and how can I convert (or transition)?"

I personally have been wearing natural hair for about 25 years. I began wearing natural hair in the early 80s when few others wore naturals except Whoopi Goldberg and Tracy Chapman. What can I say...it was the Jheri Curl era. My own grandfather called me "Whoopi!" At school, I was called "Aunt Jemima." I was ridiculed, teased, pointed at, imitated and downright cursed out...openly...to my face! My hair was an abomination to many!

As a child of 13, I asked my mother, "Why do Black people hate themselves so much?" At that tender age, I couldn't explain any other reason for the vehemence, malice and self-righteous indignation with which I was treated. It was way too impassioned! Trust! The thing I found most disconcerting however was that it was NEVER Whites who ridiculed me. In fact, my greatest compliments came from White women who saw the similarity between my two-strand twist and the Shirley Temple curl and lamented that their hair could not do the same as mine. Momma had some explaining to do.

In 10th grade, one 'brother' that I remember well asked me "Are you a Rasta?" Though I have since lived in Jamaica and consider it my second home, at that time, I honestly had no clue what the guy was talking about. When he saw my confusion, he asked, "Do you wear your hair like that because of your religion?" I replied, "No." He quickly rebutted, "Oh, so you stupid then," and walked away. I was confused and hurt but I went on and tried to ignore the comment. Interestingly, I've never forgotten it.

All the same, those early years taught me more than most 13 years old would ever want to know about people. In some ways, I matured to the realities of life very soon. However in other ways, my hair defaulted me to a 'late bloomer/wall flower' category, I believe to my good fortune. I can summarize the experience today by saying that Momma was right when she said, "The experience will make you stronger." At that time, I thought, 'who said I need strengthening?' I certainly didn't think I did, but 'Momma knows best.' Well, today, I can unequivocally say that I wouldn't have wanted any other experience, and I wouldn't change one thing about it. Like Popeye the sailor of old, I learned that 'I am what I am and that's all that I am, 'cause I am what I am, what I am, what I am, what I am!'.... Yet, as India Arie states in her popular single "I am not my hair," I am always cognizant that the hair is merely an external covering of the body. So:

*"I am not my hair.
I am not this skin.*

*I am not your expectations (no).
I am not my hair.
I am not this skin.
I am the soul that lives within.”*

I believe and embrace that ideology. Wear what you want to wear and be who you want to be. I am.

With that said, some have asked, “Why do you exclude relaxed hair services from your portfolio?” In short, “conflict of interest.” These styles represent the antithesis of what we are trying to achieve at *Schatzi’s* – a perfect self-image, free of additives and preservatives, *so to speak*. In addition, a client with relaxed hair has the universe of options to choose from in finding a stylist. The natural client has slim pickin’s. So, we identify our niche and focus. That is not to say that we are exclusionary or discriminatory to clients. Relaxed clients can have their hair shampooed, conditioned and styled, but should not expect that we will “touch-up” their relaxer for them. Likewise, we have clients who wear braided and twisted hair extensions. In serving these clients, our primary aim is to facilitate the transition to a natural, healthy head of hair with professional styles that allow the hair to “come into its own” without daily abuse and harassment. At the end of the transition process, the resulting crown of glory requires ‘no additives or preservatives.’ So in short, our objective is the celebration of that which represents beauty in its purest and simplest form, as genetically coded by God Himself. Amen.

In closing, I might say that one noticeable difference between me and other natural enthusiasts is that I don't spend time trying to convince people to go natural. Likewise, I do not wear t-shirts expounding the beauty of natural hair. I've embraced this journey for far too long to believe that I need to convince anyone that I'm on the right road or that I'm happy with the decision. I understand mantras like "Happily Nappy" and strongly support their message. But for me personally, I see such references as a statement of the obvious and thus irrelevant to state at all. I don't feel the need to tell the world I'm happy with natural hair anymore than a Caucasian sister feels the need to tout “White is Beautiful.” She believes that statement to be a no-brainer. I believe similarly regarding the beauty of natural hair. I AM a walking billboard. Words are irrelevant. See and believe!

As a result, I am not on a mission to PROVE that natural hair is beautiful. I simply tell the truth; and this truth is found in the psyche, not the roots of the hair. So when clients enter our salon, they choose for themselves because, this journey is one that you must be ready for--mentally and spiritually. Why should I try to prove to the world that the sun is hot or that the sea is vast or that a baby is precious? I believe those things with my heart and soul and really do not wish to argue these points with anyone. If you don't believe, then maybe you're not ready for us. But, you are welcome to come and look and learn. Only you can see the sun's rays, feel its heat and know the truth. Come to *Schatzi's* to feel and know the truth.

Embrace the Beauty of You.



¹Arie, India. “I Am Not My Hair.” Testimony: Vol. 1, Life and Relationship, Motown, 2006.



What is Beauty?

Context: As a child growing up in the 70s, I recall very vividly wondering what it was to have straight hair and White, or very light, skin. Somehow from a child's perspective, it just seemed that life would be richer on the lighter side. With these ponderings, I naturally undervalued the beauty of my own hair and skin. I was surely NOT the only one. It was not until I was a teenager of about 15 that I received a rather abrupt awakening as I stood face-to-face with the "girl in the mirror." While that was years ago, I later realized that the beauty of our children, young girls in particular, is not often valued into their teen years unless that beauty is stereotypically mainstream: light skin, light eyes, long hair. Well one day, I met a young lady who was the antithesis of this mainstream image. Here's a brief account of our history together as presented in the February 2007 issue of Au Naturel.

Here at *Schatzi's*, I see beauty in all shapes and sizes. As someone who is most interested in impacting budding minds in a positive way, I'm particularly interested in our young people. I regularly see young ladies come in our salon with eyes full of innocence and shyness. They are beautiful young ladies with wonderful futures ahead of them, but not one of them seems to know their inner beauty. I am not referring to a level of knowledge that would breed vanity. I'm speaking of a knowledge that allows and encourages self-acceptance.

A few weeks back, I met one such young lady who came in with my girlfriend and her mother. If the eyes are windows to the soul, her soul is humble and pure. I smiled upon sight of her. She was considering transitioning to natural hair so my girlfriend encouraged her to stop by. I spoke with her briefly and then began to discuss the logistics of transitioning. 'In the transition process, old chemically treated ends must be released at some point to liberate the newly defined image of beauty. It is inevitable. It can be gradual, or it can be immediate; but, it must be.' So, like many others who hear that news, she squirmed in her seat and became unsettled. "I don't want short hair," she protested. I understand, I said. I felt the same way you do when I was transitioning. I responded, "The timeframe is really up to you. But with a face as beautiful as yours, you could wear any style you want." Then I saw the very confused look on her face; looking at the ground, her eyebrows furrowed with a puzzled look bordering on distrust or anger. I understood the origin of that look. I was looking at myself about twenty years in the past. I followed through "Do you not see your beauty?" She now made eye contact with me. I had hit home. I understood.

In my mind's eye, I had a flashback to a time when I was about 15 years old. I was visiting an Iranian friend's home along with my mother. I was in another part of the house watching television when my mother said, "Schatzi come here. I want you to meet someone." When I arrived in their living room, Momma said 'Schatzi, this is _____ (Sorry, I can't remember the name). You knew him when we lived in Iran (about 4 years earlier – just prior to the revolution). I didn't remember him at all and was surprised that I didn't as he was a very handsome man. Of course at 11 years old, I wouldn't have noticed a teenage boy anyway so why should I have remembered him. He would have looked much like all Iranian men looked to me at that time: dark hair, olive complexion...lots of mustaches. At any rate when I turned to meet his glance and shake his hand, he said, "Oh Schatzi! You have grown into such a beautiful young lady." Immediately I thought, 'He said that to be polite and make conversation. He can't possibly mean that. I mean LOOK AT HIM! HE'S BEAUTIFUL! With his chiseled features, he personified the European image of "Tall, dark and handsome" – A Persian Adonis. (Aside: Thank God for the expanded appreciation of 'tall, dark and handsome' now embraced by all the world.) And look at his girlfriend seated to his right--an East Asian beauty, possibly of Chinese origin. She was beautiful! That was a nice thing to say though.' We spoke briefly, and I was excused from the room to return to my earlier activities. I made a beeline to the bathroom to engage the first available mirror that I could find. I looked...and looked...and looked...and concluded, 'He was just being nice.' I remember that incident like it was yesterday. He was the first man that ever told me I was beautiful, and I thought he was lying.

A little later, I reflected on the incident and thought, 'Maybe he really meant it.' In the romantic mind of a teenager, I really wanted to believe he did. I mean when we lived in Iran, my mother told me of an Iranian love story (Romeo and Juliet style) in which the male protagonist was Persian and the female was African. At that time, I thought 'How curious! I would like to know that story.' But, I didn't dare ask anyone to tell me lest I learn that no such story exists. All the same, a part of me believed the story was real because I had lived in Iran. Though the stay was for only 4 months, I returned to the US a changed person. I

was changed because I could never judge people that I had never seen or met. I could never believe myself knowledgeable of their lives and struggles or believe that I understood what they needed or wanted in life.

At the tender age of 11 returning to a country which now hated Iranians, I knew that I could never accept the propaganda that told me hatred was okay. I had lived and communed with these people. Their smiles were as genuine as anyone else's, and their hearts actually appeared to me to be more pure. Why? Because upon arriving in the country (Mom, Dad, my two brothers and me), people stopped when passing us and smiled. They stopped what they were doing and came over to give us great big hugs. They took pictures with us. They held my baby brother (then 1 year old) up to the sky, pulled him back to their bosom to embrace him and kissed him. None of these people could communicate with us in our language. Not one. But their smiles spoke volumes. I thought, 'Why? These people do not know us.' Upon living among the people, I quickly learned and appreciated their perspective on life through a child's eyes. Here I was half way around the world and I finally saw, felt and appreciated unconditional love. No one in America ever greeted me in such a way as this. No one. How can I hate someone who loves me unconditionally? I learned much in those four months in Iran and know that I have been forever changed because of that experience.

When my mind returned to the young lady in the present context, I smiled inwardly, met her eyes and repeated, "You have beautiful features. You are a beautiful young lady." My eyes did not falter. I met her glance head-on. She was seeking out my sincerity. I lie not. She then sheepishly smiled, and I had to smile myself.

She came into the salon the following week. Her hair was cut in a very short style and was relaxed. Her eyes were beaming and she looked confident. I said, "Your style fits your face very well. I like it very much. Your hair is now much healthier. You look great! What have your friends said?" "They like it," she responded. I smiled. We chatted a bit more and shortly thereafter, we parted.

So, what is beauty?..... In my world, it's unconditional love.

Embrace the Beauty of You.





A HAIRY Transition...or Not

Context: This piece is a little ditty that I wrote in the March 2007 issue of Au Naturel with an intentional pun on the word "hairy." At that time, I felt the need to share my angst about my eldest teen son learning to drive. Perhaps I was so nervous because of shell shock from my own first driving experience some twenty-seven years prior. It was a dark and quiet night and I was returning home from the hair dresser where I had just had a "press and curl." Dad was feeling in an experimental mood and decided to let me take the helm on the open road. In the end, it was history in the making. Thankfully, no one was hurt but it did make for an interesting commentary on the cycle of life. Take a look.

March has arrived. With the spring fast approaching, I have the unenviable task of teaching my eldest son (now 14 1/2) how to drive. Aaaaaaargh!! The process has begun but, I can truly say I would be quite happy to wait another three or four years to transition into this new phase of life. A few weeks back when returning from an evening Taekwon-do class, he urged me to allow him to try. Well.....my dad gave me the wheel at the tender age of 12 and actually let me drive all the way home from the hair dresser. I can do this, I thought. So, I drove to the nearby vacant K-Mart parking lot and moved over.

Now, the car is a stick-shift, so I went back over the basics with him. But he's been watching the concept for his whole life so he understood the theory perfectly. Practice was of little concern to him. He was completely undaunted! *Rinnnnnnggggg* goes the cell phone. I said something to this effect: "Hello! I'm very sorry but I can't talk right now! I'm teaching my son to drive and need to concentrate! I'll call you back a little later!" I quickly closed the phone, with my heart racing and continued my driving instructions (while gripping the dashboard). I was expecting the car to move forward at any moment, but I soon realized that the car was not moving. I looked at Jela-ni to see what was the problem. He then calmly turned to look at me with very innocent and sincere eyes and said, "Mommy, why are you so nervous?" He really didn't get it! So, I responded with equal sincerity and truth, "Jela-ni, I've known you since you couldn't do *one thing* for yourself. Now, you have my life in your hands. It's cause for concern!" He nodded affirmation, smiled and said, "I got this Mommy." He proceeded to put the car in gear and off we went. I was truly surprised! He did great!! The car didn't even bounce and rattle as he took off. Round and round the parking lot we went. It was a triumph! When he parked, I was honestly and embarrassingly relieved. "Wow! I said. That was great! Next time, we'll change gears." Okay, I'm a wuss!!

Now, you can only imagine my consternation to hear my younger son Jamar in the rear add, "It's my turn to try now Mommy." "Sorry son," I replied. "Not this time. You'll have to wait your turn and that will be when you're 14." He objected, "But granddaddy let YOU drive at 12! Why not me?" (He remembers EVERY BLASTED THING you ever tell him EXCEPT to clean up his room!! ☺) I replied, "Because granddaddy is braver than me and could afford to pay for that shed I destroyed in the process of learning at age 12." (Incidentally, he's also been known to drink to calm his nerves.☺ I guess I'll have to rely on nerve pills or something to that effect.) Hmmm, now that I think about it, that trip to the hairdresser was the last time I recall going to the beauty salon while living with both parents. By age 13, I was completely "au naturel." Well, I guess some *transitions* in life are just more dramatic than others.....

Trip to the hairdresser.... \$25
 Bottle of nerve pills..... \$45
 Destroyed utility shed \$250
 Chance to bond with your child....priceless!





Whose hair-story is it anyway?

Context: I was inspired to write this article as a result of the truth of the Black hair care industry: product distribution and sales have been totally taken over by Asian merchants. It was something that I have only faintly observed over the years because as a natural sister, I was not a regular patron of beauty supply stores. Most of my purchases occurred in mainstream department store health and beauty care isles, in local farmer's markets and the grocery store. But once I had the challenge of managing a burgeoning business, I became a regular in the local beauty supply stores. The magnitude of this lost opportunity for the African-American community really hit home for me and caused me to reflect. The article below is a glimpse into my thoughts about this subject as reported in the April 2007 issue of Au Nature! newsletter.

As those who know me will attest, I'm a lover of *things Asian*. I love Asian art, Asian movies and Asian food. Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese...it's all good!! In fact, many will be surprised to know that I was in a Korean dance troupe for four years and performed traditional Korean folk dance annually at the international festival in the Dorton Arena from 2002-2005. I'm a student of taekwondo, my backyard has an Asian-style fish pond and Asian screens accentuate the décor in my home. I've told my husband on several occasions that if there were such a thing as reincarnation, I was surely Asian in my previous life. It's that bad!! As for Asian hair...well, my view is that it looks best on Asian women. Give me my *textured tresses* any day!

Anyway, because of my involvement with taekwondo, I have come to interact with the Raleigh Korean community about as much as with the African-American community. One day, while speaking casually with a Korean friend, I spoke of my interest in starting *Schatzi's*. At that time, it was just a dream. I then proceeded to explain to her the vision of a natural hair salon and to "educate" her about Black hair, or so I thought. She listened attentively and nodded affirmation regularly. When I took a pause to reflect, she interjected, 'Black hair is very good business. African-Americans spend over \$1.2 billion on hair care products annually' (or something to that effect). She then continued to tout statistics like she was reading a book! These figures were a part of her. She could recite them off the top of her head. No hesitation. No pause. And to think that I thought I was educating her!! I then grew somewhat suspicious and wondered, "How does she know so much? Who's studying us and WHO'S HAIR-STORY IS IT ANYWAY?!" Well, it was an informative conversation to say the least.

The next day while surfing the Net, I decided to Google search "Black hair" and "Korea." Why not?! Well, there were so many links that popped up that I was dumbstruck. I mean, I know that most of the beauty supply stores are owned by Asians, mostly Koreans, but this was too eerie! I then clicked on a few links, many of which were written in Korean. Having studied "한국말" (Korean) for one year at the Korean School on Duraleigh Road, I attempted to take a stab at the text..... Sorry Charlie!! No dice. One year of studying was certainly not long enough to tackle THAT text! While it was true that I could "read" everything on the screen, it was much like a first grader sounding out the text of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. I could say the words but don't ask me what in the world it meant!! I didn't know from Adam. So, I decided to forget that idea and focus on English sources.

What I quickly learned was that the principles of nature hold equally true for business: 'Nature (and business for that matter) does not like a vacuum.' Where a vacuum exists, the forces of nature will move quickly to fill the gap and restore balance. Where peoples of African descent fail to meet their own personal appetites and demands, others will gladly fill the void. So, my encouragement to all: Strive to be entrepreneurs and work to fill the voids that exist within the African-American and wider communities. Many have strong entrepreneurial ideas but lack the confidence or means to follow through. As Gandhi once so eloquently stated, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Within the Raleigh community in particular, the time for action is now! With the moral of this story now realized, I would like to encourage my brothers and sisters with the attached poem. Over the past few weeks, this poem has given me much encouragement and helped to restore a sense of inner peace. Many of you will recall the lines of this poem which were so eloquently recited by the protagonist in the recent blockbuster hit "Akeelah and the Bee." Keke Palmer did more than justice to

that role!! If you haven't seen it, check it out!! It was fabulous!! No doubt. All the same, the poem, which was truly awe-inspiring upon recitation, was written by Marianne Williamson. Read and know.... And as I seek to free myself, may I likewise inspire you to be free. Amen.

A Return to Love

By: Marianne Williamson

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,
gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We are all meant to shine, as children do.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously
give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.





Why I Love Don Imus

Context: In May 2007, there was a grand controversy that originated with a radio personality named Don Imus. Some of you will recall it well. During his show, he for whatever reason decided to refer to a group of talented female basketball players as “nappy-headed hos.” There was immediate outrage within the African-American community. I personally was not as enraged as many because I grew up being abused by ignorant minds who didn’t understand me OR my hair. So his words were just more jibber jabber, much like Charlie Brown’s school teacher. For me, the incident would have almost gone unnoticed except for the sheer outrage expressed by the wider community. People were deeply offended. Here is where I differ from most. If a person looks me in my face and calls me an obscenity or the most derogatory of terms, I can’t possibly be offended unless I somehow associate myself with the image that they have conjured up. I don’t very easily own others perceptions of me so; it’s with this spirit that I wrote the attached article. Some will get my drift...others may think I’m a b---h. And the beat goes on. ☺

Love Don Imus? Okay! I know what you’re thinking. THAT SISTA’S **GOT TO BE CRAZY!!** She must be joking!! Well, I’m not. Read on.... You may actually agree with me. Okay, maybe you won’t love Imus but hopefully you’ll come to understand my perspective. It’s likely different from the others you’ve heard.

Well, I wrote this article last month but refrained from including it in May’s issue because of a surprise contribution from a reader. I couldn’t resist using it this month because the hair debate is surely not over--just dormant. It’s healthy debate for the AA community however. Here’s why.

First, with all the debate and anger and name calling and apologies that took place, I can safely say that it’s been a very long time since I have heard Black men stand up and defend Black women as a group in such a long time. There is rarely need to do so but it was refreshing all the same. Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, Tom Joyner, Michael Baisden, Russ Parr, and the beat goes on. These brothers had team defense **on lock** FOR REAL!! Respect!

But, the deepest issue and reason why I love Don Imus and his *faux-pas* was probably the most controversial one. Don Imus reminds me that I’m living 40 years post-apartheid USA. If you’re wondering what post-apartheid South Africa will look like 30 years in the future, you can probably make a pretty close guess by looking around right here at home. I personally appreciate the reminder.

All the same here at *Schatzi’s*, there were some interesting discussions and debates about the Imus issue. Some were purely comical, others heated but mostly sisters were disturbed by the comments. I’m disturbed not because the statements were made but because we were SO upset about them! From my non-scientific poll of women across the spectrum, they expressed more concern that Imus called our Rutgers sistren “nappy-headed” than that he called them “Hos!!” Should I repeat that!! I will say again that sisters seemed much more concerned that Imus called us nappy-headed than that he called us “hos!!” Yes, I said “Us” because the struggle of one is the struggle of us all. So, I embrace the struggle.

I found this passion around nappy hair very disturbing because that was the statement that I found almost irrelevant. I mean, if someone turned to the UVA female lacrosse team and called them a bunch of straight-haired b----s, everyone would be up in arms that anyone would dare call these talented athletes b----s. The hair texture would be a moot point, **whether or not** all of the team members had straight hair. You know it’s true!!! So.....why are we so obsessed with nappy-ness, or should I say the lack thereof. Why is nappy tantamount to being called a bad word!! Right here in our salon, I have counseled mothers who want their daughters to be natural but “just don’t want their hair to be nappy!!”

What is the nappy-less obsession about? Why do sisters feel the need to wear locks and twists but “texturize” (e.g. civilize) their edges and their “kitchen?” Why do women need a support group in order to transition to natural hair because of the public and private discontent that they anticipate will be meted out to them?! Why do sisters express that they must have shiny hair because mainstream society associates shiny with

healthy hair? I am absolutely livid about such a conception. Why do clients express that when they wear their teeny-weeny afro, it is their “straight-haired” African American sisters who are MOST CRITICAL of their transformation? I mean, we have enough hang-ups and issues without needing to feel alienated by our own! What the heck is THAT about?!

You know what?! I have been working in mainstream society all of my professional life and I’ve been natural the whole time. Do you know what I’ve concluded? Ladies, as long as your hair is neat and clean and reasonably conservative, mainstream society doesn’t care WHAT you do with your hair. For that reason, I wear my two-strand twist in a lot of buns, ponytails and up-dos. I’ve worn Nubian knots, cornrows, braids, you name it. But, I’ve never worn a full Mohawk, pink hair or elaborate shiny hair adornments synonymous with belly-dancing. That’s what I mean by conservative. My definition is very liberal. My hair is often commented on but mostly complimented by the wider society.

Do you know what I believe is the main reason that we abhor Don Imus’ comments about our hair so much? I believe it’s because he revealed a truth that we as a people refuse to face: *My sisters, relax, straighten, tighten and bind your hair all you want, curl it, twist it, wax it... heck, cut it all off if you want, it don’t matter one iota.* Some STILL see you as the nappy-headed Black woman that you are genetically coded to be, whether or not your genetic code is straight, wavy, curly or kinky. You are coded Black and that don’t change. The truth hurts sometimes. As for me, I embrace this truth today and everyday! I encourage you to embrace it too. Call me nappy and I say “Thank you.” I wouldn’t have it any other way because it is here that diversity abounds. And as I sport my *mane of many coifs*, don’t be jealous now. I mean with even *anti-gravity* styles in my arsenal, I MUST be richly blessed!

Yes, I for one ain’t mad at Don. Sometimes, it’s nice to know what people really think of you. It gives you an advantage. The beauty however is that when you don’t care what they think, you are the absolute victor. Hands down! At that time, silence is pure **GOLD**.





Why I Love My Gray Hair

Context: The June 2007 issue of Au Naturel was "all about love." So, this newsletter article title seemed a fitting one for the subject of gray hair. Afterall, most ladies are trying to be rid of these "age spots" by any means necessary. I ain't mad because they do tell a tale of their own; and I'm not always inclined to be so easily categorized into any age grouping in particular as you'll see in this article. All the same, I haven't yet reached the point of disdain for my gray hair that I feel the need to change it from what it is. Perhaps my day will come at some point but for now, it's all good.

Several weeks ago, I traveled to Virginia to stand at my father's bedside during his first major surgery procedure ever – knee replacement surgery. As I walked into the house wearing my oh-so-chic Nubian knots (as styled by Ms. Keely), my father pointed to the front of my hair and said "What is that?!" He was referring to a small patch of gray hair at the left front of my hair. I smiled. "That's my gray hair?! I'm no spring chicken ya' know," I retorted while giving him a great big ole' hug.

Now, I must keep this article away from my sons because to this day, they have absolutely no definitive information about Mom's age. In my house, there are several things about language that you must know:

- Don't say "Ugly." It's a four letter word, not to be used, EVER;
- Don't say "Shut up." It's too rude a phrase to be used among family or anyone else; and
- Don't tell lies, ever...unless of course the lie is about Mommy's age!

..... I'm not kidding.

*My sons have seen the number 30 on my birthday cake so many times that they are now thoroughly confused. In guessing my age, they've come pretty close but they've NEVER heard any definitive **anything** from me. I just laugh when they ask. "Why do you need to know my age? Are you tired of people calling me your sister? Ha!! Ha!! When you reach 35, I'll be your younger sister!! Ha!! Ha!!" Needless to say with the endless cajoling, they've stopped asking. But, I must admit that I was in a quandary last year when my grandmother found an old family picture in some forgotten boxes. She proudly held up the picture and announced that it was 32 years old. Her memory is like a trap! She had the timing of that photo down to a T!! My kids then shyly smiled amongst themselves and said "Grandma, how old is Mommy in this picture?" She looked at the photo and proudly said, "She's about 6." Right again. They then laughed and said "Ha!! We know your age! We know your age!" I was trapped, but only for a moment. I then very quietly responded, "Are you sure? Is it really 32 years? You know, Grandma's memory is not as sharp as it used to be. It's not acceptable to correct old people. Shhhh!!" Then the confused look returned to their faces. Ha!! I had won!! Yes!! Think you can school me son!! Don't you know my name is Momma!! Shoot! Then I thought, "Did I really just say such a thing?! About my GRANDMOTHER!!!!!!!!!!" Vanity of vanities, what a tangled web we weave.... You may ask, did I correct my error?Of course, NOT!!*

Besides, I didn't really lie. [That's my guilt trip talking.] And too, they know better than to ask me about my age. With that question, there are "no holds barred!!" It's on!! They know this!! My sons need only know my age when it's time to place my birth date on my epitaph. Really, they don't even need to know then because I don't want an epitaph. There was no monument to me before I came to this Earth and I don't need any after I'm gone. Dust!! That's all. Dust in the wind....

Well, back to the original score. Basically, despite my effort to hide my age, I am very happy with my gray hair. Seems kind of contradictory hunh? Well, if the truth be told, gray hair represents my battle scars. The battle of life is waged primarily within the confines of one's own skin. The battle is constant. Yet, surely you have seen people who look completely unaffected by the trials and struggles of life. They are ageless. I certainly don't fall in that category. But, when I look in the mirror and see my gray, I smile because it reminds me that I have lived some life. I'm no spring chicken! I earned every gray hair on my head and they were hard come by. I once thought I would dye my hair at this age but now, I wouldn't dare. Of course, I may change my mind about that in another 10 years, so don't hold me to it. But for now, I'm lovin' it!

Another reality strikes me as relevant, as well. I work in an office environment of highly trained people. I've learned that when you look too young, people think you don't know what you're talking about. It doesn't matter how sound your reasoning is, they need to see tangible evidence of wisdom. *Alas, would it were that wisdom be synonymous with aging..... (Sigh).*

Well, my views about my gray hair are surely not to be imposed on others. Gray hair, in my view, is an acquired taste. It's kind of like a comfortable old sweater that shows its years but that you can't part company with because of all the memories that it conjures up. If that's where you are, like me, then love it unabashedly. It's all beautiful. All the same, one day you may just get the urge to throw caution to the wind and let go of the past. Whatever you decide, know that with natural hair, you have less stress and concerns to worry about regarding the drying effects of color than you would have with relaxed or permed hair; so indulge and be free!





To Revert or Not to Revert...That is the Question

Context: This article first appeared in the August 2007 issue of Au Naturel newsletter. I thought it important to write this article because of a phenomenon that is little talked about but is real: non-reversion of natural hair. What this means is that natural hair which has been straightened, though not chemically-treated with perms or relaxer products, fails to revert to its natural coily or curly state when water is added. For some people, this is a dream come true. But for most sisters wanting a natural look, it's an absolute disaster and cause for deep distress and angst. With so little discussion about this phenomenon, I felt it appropriate to set the record straight so that people understand the potential hazards of seemingly harmless temporary hair straightening methods. Check it out.

On Tuesday, June 13th after a long day and feeling in need of *relaxation* (touché), I crashed in front of the tube. I rarely watch TV, but I was waiting for my show “So You Think You Can Dance?” If that ain’t the show, I don’t have time for it. Really. Anyway in anticipation of the show, I was just reclining into the sofa. It was heavenly. The droning sound of the TV was almost comforting. Then, the phone rang.

It reminded me of the time when our family lived in Jamaica. Our first four years there were without a telephone because there were not enough phone lines in the area to accommodate our request for one. I recall the first time we were relaxing at home and the phone rang. Lloyd and I both jumped sky high! It was alarming and disconcerting! I hated it. I thought, ‘why would ANYONE want **and** pay for such a thing!’ We regretfully got accustomed to the abuse very quickly.

On June 13th, I was wishing for simpler days. Anyway, Jela-ni says, “Mommy, phone. It’s _____.” Too tired to get up and not ashamed enough to do what I always told myself I wouldn’t do when growing up, I said, “Please run and bring me the cordless. Thank you.” Jela-ni darts off and returns rather quickly. “Thanks. Hello. Hey, how are you doing?” Yes, I have a minute. Come on over.”

My girlfriend then comes from her house to mine and makes a bee-line to the side of the sofa where I’m reclined. “LOOK AT MY HAIR!!” she says while removing a small straw hat pulled over a plastic conditioning cap. I looked and looked. I was in a bit of a fog from the day’s activity, so I was noticeably delayed in “catching on.” Then she says again, “Look at my hair!! I don’t know what to do!” Then, I realized the predicament. I was a bit stunned but said nothing right away. She was showing me her “oh-so-natural” locks that were suddenly “not-so-natural.” In fact, the hair on the left side of her head was bone straight...WET!!! I looked again to be sure I was looking at what I was looking at. “Your hair is wet and it looks like this?!” I said. “YES!!!” she protested.

I then proceeded to the logical next question, “What happened?” “I flat ironed it with a ceramic flat iron,” she jettisons. Again, I was dumbstruck. I touched the hair to be sure. It was indeed wet and STRAIGHT!! I had always heard of hair pressing causing damage and breakage due to excessive heat but I had never heard of instant relaxed hair, care of the ceramic wand. I was shocked and saddened. Her natural locks were FABULOUS!! And gone. I then reflected on another client who came into the salon for a style a few months back. She indicated that she would likely return in a few months to get a trim. In her words, “I know my hair is uneven and needs a trim. I took the scissors to it a little while back out of frustration.” “Why,” I asked. She responded, “I got it straightened for my wedding and it wouldn’t revert when I washed it. I had no idea that would happen. I didn’t know what to do so I just cut it off.” I listened and empathized with the horror that she must have felt. However, TO SEE IT WITH MY OWN EYES was truly a surprise!! My girlfriend would have NEVER put a relaxer in her hair. It was indeed a shock.

Some will think if a woman flat irons her hair, why should she care if it stays straight. Well, the reality is that most women who flat iron rather than relax their hair do so to maintain the health, vitality and *naturality* of their hair. If they wanted it permanently straight, they’d get the perm. It is a shock to have your natural hair fail to revert after applying water, when you KNOW you didn’t have a chemical treatment added to your hair.

In an attempt to research the issue, I Googled “flat iron hair won’t revert.” I found an interesting discussion on the “curly journal” for NaturallyCurly.com. There were quite a few sisters lamenting the perils of hair pressing with the ceramic flat iron. Incidentally, this “chattalk” was under the heading “Don’t Press.”

More intrigued than ever, I began to think logically about how this could possibly occur. From my own hair research over the years, I know that hair straightening is possible due to the rearrangement of broken hydrogen bonds in the hair’s cortex. When we wet, heat or even pull our hair, we place pressure on these very fragile hydrogen bonds. They break very easily. When the hair dries (or reaches room temperature), it takes on the shape that it last held before drying. So, if we wet our natural hair, it stretches and when it dries, it regains normalcy. When we pull our hair and allow it to dry while maintaining the pull, it will be straighter than before the pull. If we roller set wet hair and sit under a dryer, the hair takes on the shape of the roller. Fairly easily understood.

So, when we flat iron, we are applying two of the processes referenced above, pulling and heating the hair simultaneously. This is consistent with most straightening procedures, and is seen by many in the hair care industry as fairly harmless to the integrity of the hair. Yet, there is something unique about the ceramic flat iron may be different from the hot comb and other straightening techniques. Back in the day, when we would hot comb our hair, the hair would revert back when wet. Period. It just did (unless it was damaged through long periods of excessive heat). So what is it about the high heat of the ceramic iron that can prevent reversion in a single instance? I mean, let’s face it. A pressing comb can only get so hot before it will scorch your hair straight off of your head. If you’ve ever experienced this scorching, it will quickly turn you against straightening. Maybe that’s why I have no desire to do so; it once happened to me. Yet, there must be something about the ability of the hair to get so hot WITHOUT burning (due to its ceramic enclosure) that in effect recodes and thus permanently straightens the hair. Fascinating!!

I suddenly became very interested in the Japanese Thermal Restructuring process, known to be as much as \$1000 at some beauty salons. What I learned is this process runs hot irons over the hair twice AND applies a chemical straightener before the process is complete. The result is bone straight hair that will not kink, coil, curl or bend when water is applied. This hair has been effectively reprogrammed. The roots however are another story because: That which God has coded, let NO MAN reprogram! Can I get an “Amen.” With that thought, I ended my search.

I don’t have all of the answers to the numerous questions that have been circulating in my head about “why” the ceramic flat iron reprograms the hair strands. All that I can surmise is that due to the high heat tolerance of ceramic, the net effect on the hair can be a **chemical** reaction that is catalyzed by the introduction of extreme heat rather than reacting chemical compounds (e.g. Relaxer products). This extreme heat therefore breaks not only the hydrogen bonds, but also the disulfide bonds of the hair which are the same bonds broken by chemical relaxer systems. These bonds are strong and make up a large part of the strength of the hair strand. When broken, the change is permanent and the bond cannot be reformed. Who knew?

So, in the spirit of sharing, I issue a word of caution to the ladies:

1. Exercise extreme caution when using ceramic flat irons. If you must flat iron, use low heat settings only. You may even want to test the heat setting on a section of your hair in the back of your hair to test reversion tendency.
2. Never flat iron hair more than once between shampoos. It is important to allow your hair to revert and remember its name (so to speak) before telling it to sing another song again. I would recommend flat ironing only on occasion rather than regularly.

3. Flat iron your hair yourself or have someone do it who appreciates the naturality journey that you are on. Those who understand your walk will be more inclined to care for the strength and vitality of your hair long after the individual style is gone.

4. Be careful when purchasing ceramic flat irons. These products appear to be getting hotter and hotter. However, these products were largely designed for European hair. Europeans and Africans often straighten their hair for very different reasons. A sister who hates her wavy locks and always wanted straight hair down her back won't care that her red curls or now permanently auburn rods. However, the natural sister that wants natural locks and presses her hair for a job interview to take away the "x" factor in the interview won't be pleased to discover that her twist out 'fro is now a wavy bob. The manufacturers of these products aren't telling the whole story.

And in the immortal words of Paul Harvey, "Now you know...the *rest* of the story."





The 40 Year Twitch

Context: Well, October 2007-my 40th birthday was indeed a major milestone for me. While I can't remember precisely what I did on the day, the month was a glorious one! My dear friend, Shaundrelle, orchestrated a surprise birthday party that was the first in my life! She also gave me a bangin' hairstyle AND a pedicure! I was in hog heaven for a minute. I thoroughly enjoyed myself!

*But my 40th birthday was momentous not just for what happened but for how I have changed. I've heard many women say that the 40th is a major milestone but now I know why. It has very little to do with the actual numbers 4 and 0. It's much more about a spiritual change within—an awakening. It didn't occur all at once but was well established during the course of my 40th year. As a result, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that I am not the same woman that I was just 10 short years ago, not to mention 20 years ago. My husband, who is probably least equipped of all my contacts to accept the change, in fact stated one day, "You've changed." My response was, "Of course I have. You didn't marry a 40 year old woman!" I then proceeded to laugh heartily at his puzzled and confused look. What can I say? I really don't see many things the way I used to. So with that, I thought I'd share this piece that was included in the October 2007 issue of *Au Naturel*. In short, I think it's a gentle reminder not to take ourselves quite so seriously.*

It's October—my favorite month of the year, for obvious reasons. This year, I turn the big 40!! I'm actually willing to admit it! It's because my son Jamar got a hold of his birth certificate while registering for high school and now the 'cat's out of the bag.' His comment: "Mummy (*pregnant pause*) I saw my birth certificate. And well... let's just say, I know your secret. It's safe with me" (as he dons a Cheshire cat grin). My response: "Yeah, yeah, whatever!" The curious thing is that since his brother asked me my age (for the ka-zillionth time) just two weeks ago, it seems that Jamar is a young man of his word. (Update: My eldest Jela-ni phoned me on August 22, 2012 to say that he was completing a form for college registration and needed my birthday. He REALLY didn't tell!!!) So I can now proudly state that I'm 40 years young without letting the cat out of the bag. But what does that mean?

Well, it means that: 1) I still have a lot of growing up to do. That was evident just last month. One day, I came home from the office *cursing like a sailor*, literally!! I didn't even stop by the salon. I was on a tirade! My husband had to listen to it all. He just nodded, as he always does, with his very serious expression that says, 'Don't say a word. Just listen and nod. Say the wrong thing, and she might be yelling AT YOU instead of TO YOU.' Poor Lloyd! I was relieved the kids weren't home but that wouldn't have tempered MY wrath. They're good kids but they know Mom's got issues and can be "*mad crazy*" when she wants to be. The day was so bad that I called my mother. Thank God for mothers. Mine is patience and resolve personified. But I do remember her in her *hey-day*. (I guess you can say that's when I was taking notes Mom.) At any rate, Mom responded by singing me a lullaby. "*This is the day that the Lord has made...*" Imagine me in a tub full of water, *RANTING* and my mother singing me a lullaby. It did in fact sooth the savage beast. I started to smile and then thought, "I'm 40 years old and my mother is still singing me lullabies!" Thanks for the reminder to always give thanks Mom. Needless to say, I can use a good dose of maturity.

2) I have a lot of living to do. When I reflect on the past 40 years, I realize it's been good but I still have a lot I want to do. Visiting France has been on my "to do" list for a while but somehow the Ivory Coast is far more appealing to me of late. I also haven't written the novel that I started while in Jamaica. My computer crashing didn't help matters! But, I've re-written the lost material and expanded upon it considerably. But finishing will take concentrated time. Which begs the question, what about my soul? When do I take time for that? I would argue, everyday that I pray, write, create and be. But, when is the down time. My life is very busy!! That's a good thing, right? I mean, *idle hands...* But truth told, I don't really take enough "me-time." I have a massage therapist who can attest to that fact. Just imagine. I own a day spa designed for relaxation and I don't take enough me-time. It's pretty understandable really. YOU relax and see a beautiful carpet. I see a need to get the carpet cleaning scheduled. *You catch my drift*. But, it's all good. Somebody's got to pay attention

to the details. All the same, I better start logging some me-hours soon, or my poor soul will perish. Case in point...item #1. I would like to mature gracefully, so I'll work on item #1 even harder!

3) I have a lot to be thankful for and a lot to give. When your mind is in *create mode*, you often forget the shoulders that you're standing on to reach that mark. I pray that I will always remember and know that the backs that I stand on are much broader than my own. When I look at the resolve and grace that was employed by my grandmothers and the trials they endured... Well, I am humbled. They were cut from a different cloth—a rich, beautiful silk—timeless, durable, graceful and unyielding. Well... call me *spandex*—modern, easily worn and yielding but only willing to stretch so far—in a nutshell, impatient. For what? Hmmm. (Sounds like achieving growth in items 1 and 2 will require a delicate balancing act.) One thing I know: If I am to become a gift for which others feel thankful, it will require more giving and surely more back and shoulder strengthening on my part. This next generation looks like a hefty lot!

Forty years, it's an awakening. Not a rude one; more of a gentle shudder. A time of reflection and planning. I'm thankful that I have the opportunity to see the day. When I consider the fact that the majority of clients at *Schatzi's* are younger than I am, I know that I am at an appropriate place in life. So, this edition of *Au Naturel* is dedicated to, what else—aging gracefully in a world of beauty. Enjoy and Embrace the Beauty of You.





“I Wanna Go to Beautiful” aka The Sixth Dimension

Context: Out of all the articles that I wrote in 2007, this was one of my favorites. I was totally in the zone when I wrote it so I had loads of fun doing so. I'm sure that had a lot to do with the fact that I was listening to India Arie a lot that month so I was just in a general good mood. India's music always takes me there... without fail. Anyone who frequents our salon will note that she is a regular on the sound system. Part of the title was borrowed from one of India's songs that I have come to love "Beautiful." As for the sixth dimension, you'll just have to read on to fully understand the depth of meaning here. This essay originally appeared in the October 2007 issue of Au Naturel newsletter.

This missive was inspired by the Arts. You'll know more about what I mean later. But first, let me say that beauty abounds. I see it in the most interesting places, the most curious of faces. It's everywhere. Years ago, I told my sons not to use the word “ugly” to describe the universe. Sure, war is ugly. Poverty is ugly. But not people! George Bush...well.... He's beautiful too though perhaps a bit misguided....a LOT bit!!!! But that's just my opinion...

Anyhow, I honestly believe that I've been given beauty-colored glasses. I honestly don't believe I've ever seen an “ugly” person. My husband would not agree. But, I honestly feel like the protagonist in the movie *"The Sixth Sense"*: I see beautiful people all around me. On the surface, it sounds kind of strange but if others felt my heart, they'd know how cool it is. Because the sixth sense connotes extra-sensory perception, I think of it as a realm of heightened awareness. So I call it the “sixth dimension.” Everyone can't sense or vibe with it. But it's real.

Case in point: A few weeks back, I saw a young lady in our consultation room with one of the stylists and her mother. When they came out of the room to join me in the reception area, the young lady said “Oh, Hi Schatz! Do you remember me? You talked me into cutting off all my hair.” (blink, blink) Now, understand me. I was shocked by the reality of her words because of my history. I remember growing up and always hearing stylists tell people to cut off their hair. My thought was always: “She's got issues!! She has hair and doesn't want anyone else to have it. The @%/%\$&!!” So to hear someone else describe me in such a context was an immediate assault to my ears.

But then, I studied her face. I recognized the facial features. When she described how her hair looked before cutting it, I combed through my mind's eye and found no memory...no recorded data whatsoever. I couldn't find her former locks anywhere. I decided to stop looking. Refocusing on the image in front of me, I studied her again. Her aura was absolute poetry. I responded by saying ‘I honestly can't remember what your hair looked like before, but as you look right now, I WILL NOT FORGET YOU! Truly! You look like you stepped off of a magazine cover.’ The girl was all THAT...AND a bag of chips! I then thought: If I told her to cut off her hair (and I probably did, I just don't remember), she truly gained for the advice because she is flawless. Trust me, you would think so too.

The stylist and I were both in absolute agreement that she was rocking the ‘fro. ROCKIN!! Her mother registered some noticeable reticence about her daughter's new-found look, but was she seeing the same face that I was seeing!!! I mean!! What I see makes my heart smile. It's inspiring. But, maybe I'm just trippin'.

Then, there is the young lady who came by the poetry reading in September. I was seated at the receptionist desk waiting for fellow poet laureates. As this young lady entered, my eyes were drawn to her immediately. She looked like an ancient African princess, though dressed in jeans and a shy, winning smile. When I approached her to introduce myself, I noticed that she registered a height of about 6'1". Her skin was the color of milk chocolate. She was not thin. She was perfect. Her tresses were breathtaking: beautiful locks, delicately tendrilled and flowing to the middle of her back. Coal BLACK!!! I thought: “This sister does not

need OUR services because she's got it goin' on ALL BY HER SELF! Work IT! I then proceeded to compliment her on her beautiful locks, as did everyone in the salon that saw them.

After the poetry reading, she prepared to leave and I just had to tell her, 'You really should consider modeling. You look great.' She shyly received the compliment, and soon departed. All I could think was: What man would not fall at her feet if she gave him her attention? Does she even know how she looks? She showed no sign of vanity or even awareness of her magnetic beauty. That's a good thing. I thought of how awesome God is to create beauty in such an infinite variety of ways.

Then, there was the sister who came in just this past week-end. She had the Erykah Badu vibe goin' on, for real!! She had her own unique style of dress, crowned with a beautiful head wrap that said: "I AM because I KNOW!" We connected immediately. While Martina styled her hair (with me interjecting intermittently), she and I vibed for several hours about everything on Earth and in Heaven. I was SUPPOSED to be finishing this newsletter during those 3-4 hours. (Ahem.) But, I could not deny the power of her spirit. We had words to share. It was a beautiful experience. When her session was complete, we embraced. It was the most natural thing to do. She's just real. So, why do I share all of this?

Well, I share this information to say to my beautiful sisters that you have been dealt an unfair hand. In a Eurocentric society, you have come to embrace a standard of beauty that is antithetical to your entire genetic makeup. As such, you feel it necessary to aspire to the lower rung of a ladder that was not designed for you. We have no reason to get mad at brothers for wanting the original, when we ourselves seek to emulate it. (Touché! But, deal with it!) If brothers were bleaching and relaxing and I wanted that, a nice bronze Italian would do me JUST FINE.

I have long rejected the American social norm of beauty. I threw away the hand I was dealt years ago. I play with the hand God gave me. I have long shifted the paradigm for myself, and I walk in another plane completely. As I see more and more sisters, walking in this sixth dimension, I am awe-struck by their grace and power and beauty. When I see how awe-inspiring they are, I know why the unfair hand had to be dealt. My sisters are simply too fabulous! So in movies and television, European women are repeatedly reminded of their beauty (as are all users of the program being viewed) and Black women are relegated to second best.

Yes, things ARE changing, but slowly. Don't believe me. Go back to rent the movie "Cat Woman." The stars of this movie are Halle Berry and Sharon Stone. Now, no one would deny the unmistakable beauty of these two Hollywood queens. However, listen very closely to the words used to describe the beauty of both women. You'll be surprised. I won't tell you because it will ruin it for you. Just go back, rent it and listen carefully. When I watched the film at the movie theatre with my family and my sons looked at me upon noticing the obvious additions and omissions, I knew they were now empowered to rise above and reject the programming.

Needless to say, I don't watch much TV or movies these days. If it ain't Jet Li, I ain't goin'! A well placed turning back kick discriminates solely based on good vs. evil. So, I vibe with the Asian brothers kickin' rumpus and leave the love stories to the lovelorn...unless of course they're Asian love stories. I'm fascinated by these. If you can actually get to the end of the story without the lovers dying some tragic death, it's unusual. Asian films rarely have the touchy-feely endings. I don't mind the tragedy in them however, because somehow it feels rather bitter-sweet--more real to life.

As I reflect on this missive, I must confess that it was inspired almost completely by the incomparable India Arie. Many know her from her recent hit "I Am Not My Hair" which I have come to see as the mantra of *Schatzi's*. But the CD that I've been listening to of late is her *Acositic Soul* CD. You may recall the hit "Video." And of course, there is the sensuous masterpiece "Brown Skin." Um um um. That song!! But, have you listened to "Ready for Love," "Simple" and "Always in My Head"? Suffice it say, my girl's got skills!! The serene piece "(I Wanna Go to) Beautiful" has become my favorite on the CD. It speaks to my soul. I listen to

CDs a lot while working. When I'm in the zone, I need inspiration, so I call on India, many a time. She never lets me down. If you haven't listened lately, give her an ear. The CD is full of soul, like the soul train of old.

So in concluding, I must say that I have come to enjoy life in the sixth dimension. It's really not all about hair and skin. It's more about awareness and the celebration of life: like the beautiful natural sister who had a full scholarship to Duke's Divinity School. Then there's the 12 yr old I saw walking on Blount St. with his book bag. I wish you could have seen this kid. He was what every Black man should be. His hair was in a Mohawk with locks that fell down in his face and down his neck. His stride was measured. He walked with the confidence of the ancients. He looked like he was going to the library. He looked like he WAS the library! His aura was undeniably regal. As we passed him, I had to turn and look back to be sure I saw the truth. I almost beckoned my husband to stop the car! I wanted to say, "Hey, little brother. Who are you? Who are your parents? They have served you and society well." It was THAT obvious! But I couldn't accost the little kid on the street so I just sat back and smiled once he was out of my view. All I could think was: This next generation is 'gonna turn this mother out! Hope I'm around to see it. But if not, that's cool too.

So family: Welcome to the sixth dimension. It's good to see so many of you on this side of the cosmos. Here is where beauty abounds. ROCK ON!!





What Happened to My Hair?!

Context: This article was written in the November 2007 issue of Au Naturel newsletter. It was inspired by my personal observations of common issues raised during salon consultation sessions. It has occurred to me that many sisters are absolutely uninformed about why their hair is broken off and damaged. They often realize the damaging effects of the chemical services that they're using but they typically fail to see the true origins of the problem. Mostly, they feel that the problem has occurred in recent times. I often escort them back in time to take a more critical look, much like a regression analysis. For the most part, the dialogue proves informative.

I decided to put this article to concrete words when I reflected on the question "What happened to my hair?!"--as raised by many sisters since the dawn of Eurocentric styling techniques. When I probed my own mind and the phenomenon in general, therein I found the "evolution of bad hair." And so, below is a glimpse into my mind's eye from which I have come to clearly understand where "good" and "bad" hair came from.

Preface: Before opening Schatzzi's, I envisioned a place that would have a positive impact on the lives of young girls within the sphere of our influence. I believed that to be our raison d'être. In a recent conversation with our stylist Shaundrelle, I noted that most of our clients are young to middle-aged women, not young girls. I said, "Well, let's hope that we are inspiring our clients to make a positive "au naturel" impact on the children that they raise." In typical Shaundrelle style, she countered with words to this effect: "Schatzzi's IS here for little girls! What about the little girl in me who never heard the things that you're telling people! What about the little girl in me who did not have a mother as knowledgeable as yours to teach her how to love herself! There's a little girl in all of our clients who has not been nurtured. Schatzzi's is here for them."

I almost cried at the power of her words. I am moved even in reflecting upon her conviction in stating them. So, it is in the spirit of staying true to our mission that I present this article of raw and unadulterated truth. I apologize for the offence that may be caused to those who may take offence. But as they say, the truth is an offence. If we can't face the naked truth, how can we hope to recapture the grace and beauty of the little girl within us all who longs for social acceptance and self-love?

As many of our readers know, we introduce our client's to our salon experience through a consultation process. At that time, we're really just trying to get to know you and your specific hair care and/or massage therapy needs. Through the hair consultation exercise, we find out about your current hair care needs and your goals. Invariably, clients want healthier, stronger, sometimes longer hair. Clients often ask me, "When will MY hair get to be long?" My response is naturally very guarded when proffering a response. The first thing that I explain is that hair growth is determined mostly by genetics. I explain how hair growth occurs and how hair is shed naturally and healthily from the body. Typical hair growth is anywhere from 1/4 to 1/2 inch per month. This growth rate, coupled with the life cycle of the hair follicle (which varies considerably across and within ethnic groups) determines how long a person's hair will become. This explanation is usually sufficient to help the person understand that it's impossible for me to tell them when or if their hair will become "long", whatever that means. All the same, they are typically appreciative of the increased awareness of how hair grows. Always curious about the client's individual hair journey and eager to help her find the elusive answer that she seeks, my next approach is typically to ask a series of questions. Through this probing exercise, the most important thing that I want clients to realize is *what changed* to alter the health and vitality that their hair once had. Questions that I've often used are:

- 1) To your recollection, when was your hair the healthiest?
- 2) When did your hair stop being healthy?
- 3) What do you perceive as the steps that were taken between your hair being healthy and less than healthy?

The typical interview response unfolds as follows: "Well, when I was a little girl, my hair was very healthy. It fell below my shoulders, etc. When I was in high school or college, I noticed that my hair was not

in such good condition anymore.’ Clients are often in denial about the specific action step(s) that led to the demise of their once enviable mane of hair so my next prompt is to ask: Did you ever chemically treat your hair to achieve straightness, and if so, when? This is typically the “EUREKA” moment for people! At this point, many of them realize that when they left their hair alone and cared for it as it presented itself, it was in its best condition. When they started to chemically treat it, they became chained to the stylists’ chair with the threat of losing their hair completely if they did not return for regular touch ups every six weeks, or thereabouts. I don’t blame anyone for wanting to chemically treat their hair. When I was a teenager, I was not equipped to care for my own hair. I had insufficient knowledge to do so. With my mother in grad school, I demanded to get a relaxer! It was an imperative if I was to maintain my sanity. It was that or the scissors! I truly understand why these series of events occur. However, I lost my own enviable mane within one year’s time. After learning how to properly care for my hair, I reclaimed my lost locks. So, I often close this leg of the discussion by stating, ‘You can have the hair that you once had as long as the damage to your hair follicles is not irreparable.’ Then, the treatment program begins.

Black Hair Psychology 101: The Evolution of BAD HAIR

It’s not rocket science. It’s just a little biology, some chemistry and a good deal of psychology! Lots of psychology!! Many women never get over the psychological hurdle to realize the goal that they seek. It’s sad but true. Others sail over this hurdle with minimal effort. It reminds me of a conversation I had with my girlfriend. Her teen-aged daughter came home in tears because the kids made fun of her two-strand twists. “They look like you have worms coming out of your head,” they said. She felt horrible. It took me back 25 years. I empathized deeply. All the same, I did not feel sorry for her because I know that she loves her natural hair. My response to my friend: ‘Now, she will see if her character can withstand the test of peer pressure. It’s not easy. But in the end, she will either be who she wants to be or who others want her to be. The decision is ultimately hers. I can only provide encouragement. She’s doing the best thing for her hair though. She should remember that foremost.’

The young girls that I see in our salon have beautiful, healthy hair and bright shiny faces. They embody grace and innocence, and they take great pride in the natural beauty of their hair. So what happens to this healthy hair as the girls mature? Typically, it’s the “hairdresser” that happens. From a professional standpoint, the “hairdresser” is most interested in stylishly coiffed hair. From a business standpoint, she’s interested in maximizing profits. Afterall, she’s an entrepreneur! So am I, though perhaps atypical. Anyway if the “hairdresser” can style 8 heads of hair in one Saturday at \$60 per head, why would he/she EVER want to settle for styling only 4 heads of hair per day at the same rate? It would be considered an unwise investment.

Natural hair takes TIME...unapologetically so. The faster it can be styled, the more clients that can be served in a day. The result is that the “hairdresser” seeks to convert natural hair to chemically treated hair to ensure that the styling process can be completed in the minimal amount of time possible. But for this conversion to take place, the first thing that must occur is that you must *believe* in the need for conversion. So, you’re inclined to hear: “Boy, you got bad hair! You need a relaxer. Whoo, it’s going to take all day with this stuff! A mild texturizer would be perfect for you.” So on and so forth. Or, one of my personal favorites, “Your hair is too thick! Do you want me to thin it out for you?” My thought was always: Wouldn’t that mean cutting plugs of my hair out AT THE SCALP and throwing them in the trash? WHAT?!!!! ‘No baby, you just need a relaxer.’ At the end of the day, the result is a deflated self-image and “belief in the hype.” The tragedy occurs when young girls internalize this negative energy and believe that their hair IS bad—or said another way, *in need of correction*.

So what to do about this newly deflated self image? Enter stage left, the hero who has come to save the day: the chemical “TREATMENT.”

Hero: “Hi Ma’am. You don’t have to suffer with your hair any longer. I’m here to relieve you.”

Damsel: “My hero!”

So after enduring a few minutes of nerve tingling, toe curling PAIN (No lye does NOT always mean no pain! But ‘no pain, no gain.’) ...Voila!! Tamed and corrected locks--now, freshly shocked into submission. The stylist says: “Now, you look great.” The stylist thinks: ‘Now, I can style your hair in about one hour. And, you have to come back to me within two months for another treatment. More profits, more smiling faces.’ No harm done, so it’s all good. Right? Except for one unfortunate reality: Black women are *GOING BALD AT ALARMING RATES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!* What the Hell!! (That was ME talking.)

There are two primary reasons for this baldness: braids that are too tight and chemical treatments. Braids that are worn too tightly often exacerbate the tension on already over-processed, chemically damaged hair. The result is hair loss around the edges of the hair—traction alopecia. This is an easy fix if the stylist is sensitized to this issue and actually cares enough about your hair to safeguard against this eventuality. On the issue of relaxed hair, stylists say: “Clients experience baldness because they don’t come back like they should for their regular *treatments*. The stylist says, “If they came back on time, their hair wouldn’t fall out or break off.” With this argument, I concur. This is true IF (and that’s a big “if”) your “hairstylist” is good. Thousands of women have beautiful, relaxed hair because they’re meticulous in observing their regular trips to the salon. If you can afford that, have at it. But, I still ask the question: So why does MY hair need so much “TREATMENT”?

The Cambridge online dictionary defines *treatment* as: “the way you deal with or behave towards someone or something.” It goes on to provide one definition of *to treat* as follows: “to use drugs, exercises, etc. to cure a person of a disease or heal an injury.”²

Hmmm...A DISEASE!! HEAL AN INJURY!! What’s implicit in the usage of the terminology is that something’s wrong with my hair because it needs so much treatment. Thus, the evolution of the term “BAD HAIR!” Bad hair needs regular treatment. True, there are other types of treatments: hot oil treatments, protein treatments. But these treatments are designed for transient conditions and thus are called conditioning treatments. Chemical treatments are called *permanents*. But this term is a misnomer because there can never be anything permanent about a treatment for hair. The hair is always growing!! So, the *permanent* reference applies only to the segment of the hair strand that has been introduced to the chemical change agent. My hair thus needs regular *treatment* because it’s always growing. That means REGULAR and timely visits to the stylist’s chair.

What is implicit in the use of all of this technical jargon is that if the hair that comes out of my scalp needs treatment at the moment that it presents itself, then it must really be bad! It needs immediate **correction!** I often hear ladies refer to the urgent need to get to the salon to prevent the kink from seeing the light of day. Good people and “good hair” don’t need *permanent treatment*. They just need a *good conditioning*. These are the subliminal messages that we send to our children when we engage in these practices, whether we want to accept it or not. So what about the issue of balding?

When I’ve spoken with some clients about their hair care woes, I hear “I’m balding a bit but that’s because I’m aging.” While some of this may be true, not all of it is. Firstly, we’re all aging!! I haven’t met one living soul on Earth who isn’t. Have you? Yes, some women are genetically coded for baldness. But, I do NOT believe all of the women that I see with baldness are coded for baldness. Case in point: my own family. Since opening *Schatzji’s*, one of my relatives confessed that she was experiencing baldness at the crown of her head for the first time in her life. Yes, she’s aging as are her brothers. She was deeply concerned and wondered

² Cambridge Online Dictionary. Cambridge University Press, 2007, Web. 1 Nov. 2007

if she was coded for baldness. She asked me what she should do. Well, seeing as her brothers have lost not one fiber of hair to baldness in all the years I've known them, I assured her that this was unlikely. She decided to try going natural. She now sports a beautiful natural, and the baldness at the crown of her head has disappeared. Call her hair loss genetics? I call that one a lie—hype—a mask to distort reality.

In the race for African-American capital, the prize goes to those who can convince the consumer that what is normal and natural is less than optimal. The place to start is logically within the mind of the consumer. That's Marketing 101: Make the customer believe that they can't live without the product that you provide. So with all of this natural hair and the lack of permanent "treatments," where does that leave the natural hair stylist in the arena of profitability?

The Natural Hair Niche: Is It Profitable?

Good question. In light of the billions of dollars being made in the Black hair care industry, many people wonder why we even bother to try to *convert* people to natural hair. I say, "We're not converting. We're resurrecting, redeeming, reclaiming, reiterating. And in many respects, we're redefining!!

One locked brother that I considered recruiting into the salon a while back said, "Why focus only on natural hair? You can't make everyone like YOU." I thought, "Is this brother really wearing locks!!!" Then, I put myself in his shoes and I understood. As a licensed cosmetologist and a barber, he is taught how to cut and/or chemically treat natural Black hair. That is all! Caring for natural Black hair was not part of the licensing curriculum that he followed. Truly. So, to only care for natural hair means that he cannot use the vast majority of the skills that he has developed through his years of training. In his words, "You're saying goodbye to good money when you ignore services for relaxed hair." Implicit in his argument is the idea that people who wear natural hair can opt out of the salon completely. Natural hair care is something they can do completely on their own with no assistance from anyone. I quickly realized that this brother and I would not work well together. We were antithetical to each other. But, I wish him well...sort of.

So, where's the profitability? Isn't this venture a shaky investment? Surely, there's a reason that *Schatzi's* is the first natural hair salon in Raleigh, NC. In short, it is true that we are limiting our profit margin by focusing on natural hair. Yes, we are leveling our growth curve when we provide natural services that do not chain clients to the stylists' chair because they have the freedom to stay home (like millions of Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic women around the world). So, why gamble against the odds? In a word: because the next generation demands it of us. That's all. And that's enough. Pure and simple.

On a personal note, my whole life, I've played it safe. Playing the game with my cards close to my chest, hedging my bets, gambling to always minimize my losses. Then one day, I decided to make a change. Why? Because I knew the need existed and because I knew that the cause was/is worthy. Sure, I've hedged by bets in this venture to. That's what I do! *Momma didn't raise no fool!* But all the same, I am excited daily at the prospects of this communal venture of which I cannot predict the outcome. It's exhilarating! Yes, it's scary too, at times! But, whenever I go there, I just pray and let go. I don't have time for the negative energy. There's much too much to be done. Profitability is something I don't obsess about. I let the "hairdressers" worry about that. Because as long as they're relaxing and chemically treating, there will always be clients coming to *Schatzi's* for repair work. In fact, hairdressers create my core base of clientele. They support our very existence.

Do I worry about them competing with us? Well, not really because natural hair requires discipline, patience and nurturing above and beyond the love of money. So much for entrepreneurship. Additionally, the fact is that when a new client leaves our salon, we don't always know when or IF we will ever see them again. In my view, that's how it should be. We don't tie our client's purse strings to our appointment book. Man is born free and should remain so! We don't fear the unknown because where there is natural hair, there is always

a woman who would occasionally like to be pampered and have someone else appreciate her beauty for her. For a nominal fee, it's not a bad trade off. We price our services at a reasonable rate because it's the right thing to do. I've heard many stories of highly priced natural hair care services. We endeavor to create an environment that you want to return to again and again.

So in the area of profitability, perhaps *Schatzi's* is playing against the odds. It's really too soon to say. I wouldn't say that we've arrived by any means. We have a ways to go. But, my fellow business associates have assured me, that if I'm not prepared to hang in for 3-5 years of uncertainty, I'm wasting my time. Well, I've never been a quitter. And based on current trends, I would say that we will beat that 3-5 year time horizon with the grace of a gazelle!!

There are surely perils and pitfalls in the road ahead, but I'm undaunted. God has blessed us with an exceptional team of people, all of whom are equally committed to the dream. Somehow, talent finds us at the right time. These small miracles have occurred so frequently over the past year and a half, that I know that our continued existence has very little to do with what I've done right and much more to do with the blessings of our Creator. So, I play my role and hold on for the ride! Sometimes, it's a thrill ride! But aren't those the best kinds?! After all on the winding road of life, the real excitement lies in the journey itself, now doesn't it? Taken one step at a time.





The Challenges of Black Entrepreneurship: Is our struggle unique?

Context: Okay, I wrote this article when I was totally in a mood to vent. The longer I stay in business, the more I realize how naïve and sheltered an existence I've lived prior to now. I've taken the lessons and attempted to learn from them, but there are times that the pill is a bit bitter. The events leading up to the writing of this article made me deeply reflect on why there are not more African-American businesses in our community. In a nutshell, everything comes down to risk. You'll see what I mean a little more by reading the story below which highlights a very real challenge to our community--short-sightedness. This article was originally printed in the December 2007 issue of Au Naturel.

This current article is one that I've pondered on for quite a while now. I wasn't sure that I could write it without sounding gossipy. I run a hair salon but gossip ain't our thing--AT ALL!! I finally concluded that the story had to be told because it affects all of us. There is a moral to the story; it just takes a minute to get to it. I've discovered through this newsletter that I love telling stories, so I'll recount events as they occurred. I'll leave out some details to keep from boring you to death but I'll keep just enough to add the flavor. *(The exclamation points are my passion. That is all. Take them with a grain of salt.)*

A few weeks back, about eight to be exact, I received a call from a client who had visited our salon on one prior occasion. On that day, she received a complimentary service because I was observing the skills of a new stylist. On this day, she asked to speak to one of our locitians for social reasons. I obliged by proffering her cell phone number and that was the end of our brief encounter. A few minutes later, I received a call from Shaundrelle with a very blunt question: "Did you just receive a call from "Ms. X"?" "Yes, ma'am, I did," I affirmed. She followed with, "What did she say to you?" I explained that she requested her cell number to advise her of a social event to take place soon. Well, Shaundrelle quickly countered, "She lied! She asked me for Martina's cell phone number." I said, "Really? Why didn't she just ask me for it?" Shaundrelle expressed equal confusion at the client's failure to do the obvious. She further explained how she encouraged the client to phone me for the information and received a consistent, "No. I don't want to do that." Well, needless to say, Shaundrelle was a bit perturbed by the encounter and wanted to alert me as an "FYI." I then expressed a strong feeling that I should call the client and give her the number because Shaundrelle did not have it. A few minutes later, the salon received an anonymous call from "Caller Y" requesting to speak to Martina. When I explained that she was not in the shop but I would be happy to take a message, the caller hung up. I then sat long and hard and reflected. I felt I understood what was going on.

For those less versed in the hair care field, natural stylists (that are good) are few and far between. Many people wearing natural styles do their own hair or receive services from friends, acquaintances, etc., oftentimes within the home setting. Services provided within the home are typically cheaper than inside the salon, so many braiders operating in salons will moonlight on the side to earn extra money. That's the prerogative of the person with the talent. I ain't mad. So, I called Martina to alert her of her newfound fame and got permission to give the client her number. After all if the client would go to such great lengths to conjure tales to receive something, by all means, she should have it! So, I went to the file, pulled the client's number, called her and offered the number. She rebutted that she didn't need it and ended with other small pleasantries. I was then puzzled because I couldn't see why she would now reject the number that she clearly wanted. I sat in my confusion for a few minutes only to receive a call from Shaundrelle. The client had phoned her back to *tell her off* for informing me of the true nature of her call. WHAT?!! Now, I was a little perturbed. Shaundrelle stated, "I just told her I'm sorry but Schatzi and I have an open line of communication. I don't know what else to tell you." I apologized to Shaundrelle for mixing her up in this mess by calling the lady back and she quickly chided by stating: "Why would she THINK that I would cover up her LIE?! Who does she think I am?!" I was humbled as I always am at her candidness. She then said, "Don't worry about this. I'm not worried. It's not worth it." She then ended in her usual bright spirits and that was that.

Well after alerting Martina of the encounter, she has since advised me that the client has approached her on several occasions requesting that she style her hair OUTSIDE of the salon setting. I reflected and felt saddened. I really don't care about the money that the client is trying to deprive the salon of. That is a minimal issue. What disturbs me most is that the client is trying to undervalue the stylist's service by *putting her on the street* (so to speak) to receive her services. What do I mean by that? Mainly, I mean that our stylists enjoy working in a professional environment. They value wearing uniforms which immediately alert new and existing clients that quality and attention to detail matters. They value being able to go to work and to leave work, rather than to live work. Why should anyone assume that a stylist doesn't deserve and/or desire to work in such an environment and thus be so bold as to pursue them to convince them that the alternative is somehow profitable to them as an individual? No one benefits from this modus operandi. I repeat "NO ONE." Let me explain why.

First, the stylist, who seems like the obvious beneficiary, does not benefit because oftentimes, the services that are offered are devalued when provided outside of a professional environment. This practice thus suppresses the value that current and future clients are willing to pay for the service, thus undermining the stylist's ability to earn a living wage off of their God given talent. Also, the stylist now has the burden of finding a venue for service provision which is suitable, while also procuring the products (shampoos, combs, oils, etc.) required for service provision. The venue selected is often the stylist's home or the home of the client. A girlfriend of mine shared the last "in home" encounter that she had with a stylist. Apparently, she visited the stylist's home for braiding services. The stylist received a disturbing phone call and proceeded to *curse her husband out* while styling my friend's hair. The argument continued throughout her hair care experience. My girlfriend never returned. Such personal and intimate settings for public service provision are unwise and inconsiderate of family, personal space and stylist-client comfort. Finally, but surely not exhaustively, the stylist is not able to effectively market her talents because she lacks a professional environment in which to provide the service. People on the street will surely see the bangin' style and ask, "Where did you get your hair done?" Once many prospective clients hear, "*So-and-so* came by my house to do it," the line of questioning is suddenly and unceremoniously terminated! So, the stylist loses even the marketing potential of her product.

Second, the client does not benefit, though she/he seems like a dead ringer for a "win" situation. The client does not benefit because they have no guarantee of quality service provision. Once a business hangs its shingle and says "We're OPEN," there is a natural expectation of quality and integrity that is implicit. You can expect that your interests are being protected, not only by the business itself, but by the local, state and federal entities that regulate business operations. There can be none of that expectation with "at-home" services. (Thus, the domestic mishap mentioned above.) In turn when the client approaches a professional salon stylist to solicit their services outside of the salon environment, the stylist has already labeled this client as "cheap." The stylist may service the client, but they may not always respect them. The client likewise has labeled the stylist as "easily bought." In this scenario, mutual respect and trustworthiness is a difficult commodity to garner and maintain.

Thirdly, the salon and by default, the community does not benefit. Operating a business is a costly endeavor. Period. It is not an exercise for the faint of heart or the financially strapped. Likewise, staying in business is as challenging as finding the elusive needle in a haystack. Thousands of businesses fail every year. So, when we as a community undermine the existence of the businesses that are here to serve us, we all lose. The stylists lose because they don't have a professional environment in which to offer their services and earn a living wage. The clients lose because they don't have an alternative to "in-home" services and thus have no guarantee of quality. And the community loses another model of business success to guide and inspire the actions of current and future generations. It's really very sad. Is saving a few bucks on the cost of a style really worth the price? Really?

When this discussion is turned on its head, I am forced to ask the question another way: Would this client have walked into *Paul Mitchell's* to recruit their stylists off the floor and into her home? In fact, would anyone, regardless of ethnicity, walk into *Mitchell's* to do such a thing? I honestly think not. So why try it at *Schatzji's*? Sure, it's natural for someone to try to recruit a talented stylist from one professional environment into another one but, to recruit someone into the streets?! Does that make sense? Is this phenomenon unique

to the Black community? If so, why? Said another way, why is a client like this one willing to pay Liz Claiborne or Tommy Hilfiger for *their* names? Liz and Tommy had to start somewhere. The greatest difference between them and me is that they started out with strong financial backing so they had the marketing prowess to convince you that you should pay a little more for the quality that you are receiving. When you enter into *Schatzi's*, you feel the quality. It is apparent upon first sight. My clients attest to this fact much better than me. So, in my mind, you don't really pay for my name. You pay for quality.

In the end, the intrigue outlined above is designed to deprive "me" when ultimately, it is the community that is being robbed. If *Schatzi's* was not here, the client would not have had a place to receive the quality service that she appreciated (as free as it was) and to meet a hot new stylist. Does this *undermining of our own best interests* make sense at all? In short, "No." But, it is happening everyday around the country. It is not unique to the natural hair care business. But, it's a serious issue for our community. Talk about "things that make you go hmmm."

In concluding, I won't venture to state what you, the reader, should do with this information. That is for you to decide. I simply offer this information to enlighten us all about the ways in which the seemingly most innocent of actions can serve a negative end. I don't fault the client because I truly believe she is unaware of the full effects of her actions. She's a beautiful, cheerful woman with a winning smile and an engaging spirit. I have no malice towards her whatsoever. She is a reflection of me and of all of us. So, today, I'm starting with the *woman in the mirror*. I ask myself, "What actions am I taking in life, innocently or otherwise, which may be seen to serve a negative end for our community?" I will endeavor to change, and with God's help, will learn wisdom and discernment.





Embrace the Beauty of You

(A Speech presented to the Gethsemane Seventh Day Adventist Church, on Saturday, January 19, 2008)

Context: One day while working in the salon, I was graced by the presence of a lady who seemed rather inquisitive but said very little at the outset. After general niceties and lots of looking around, she introduced herself as a member of Gethsemane Seventh Day Adventist Church. She indicated that many of the members of her church are natural and that she was interested in organizing a guest presentation on natural hair care. While living in Jamaica, I became very aware of the natural outlook of Adventists, so I was honored to be asked.

On January 19th as we prepared to make the trek to the church, we were greeted with a strong snowfall. Suddenly, we were all very confused about whether the event would proceed or who to call to ask. Feeling that we should commit to our word, we left in the snow and hoped for the best. Being equally true to their word, church members were present in full force. It was a fine turn-out and a wonderful day of fellowship and sharing. I have included this presentation because it provides the core foundation for why I'm a natural woman.

Embrace the Beauty of You. This is the motto of Schatzi's Design Gallery & Day Spa. What does it mean? First, it has very little to do with vanity and everything to do with self-acceptance. The origins of these words are found throughout the Bible, with particular reference to:

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

So we say, Embrace the Beauty of You, for you are the true image of God Himself. He lives in you. If you honor God's greatest commandment to:

Matthew 22:37-39: "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and love thy neighbour as thyself."

Then you must embrace the beauty of you and of us all.

I won't claim credit for discovering this motto. If the truth be told, "Embrace the Beauty of You" came to me in the wee hours of the morning—a message planted by the Spirit and delivered to me. So as I see it, I am simply the messenger of the word. I am humbled because I am such an unworthy messenger. We are unworthy. But, we press on. We, the staff of Schatzi's Design Gallery & Day Spa, thank you for inviting us to speak before you about natural hair and skin care. We pray that "the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts will be acceptable in His sight overall." Psalm 19:14 Amen.

Our aim is to answer the question that I've heard from many people over the past few years: "Why Natural Hair?" The question is, "Why Anything Less?" Our objectives are as follows:

- 1) To define the natural hair salon experience as we see and practice it.
- 2) To clarify why we believe natural hair to be the zenith to which all women should aspire.
- 3) To provide general tips for the care and maintenance of natural hair.
- 4) To address individual questions from the audience.

I will primarily use anecdotal experiences to make the case.

Defining Natural Hair Care Services

When I reflect upon the phrase “natural hair,” I must confess that it seems to cause confusion in meaning among some visitors to our salon. Some people believe that natural hair is any hair that is uniquely your own. So, we regularly hear from relaxed clients who seem offended that we do not provide chemical straightening treatments for clients. Our intention is not to discriminate but to honor that which honors our genetic make-up—that which is so roundly ignored by much of mainstream society. Natural hair has no particular texture or color or length. It just is.

Just for fun, I looked in the Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary and the following definitions for the term “natural” jumped out at me:

- “based on an inherent sense of right and wrong, like *natural* justice (Interesting!)
- being in accordance with or determined by nature
- having or constituting a classification based on features existing in nature
- closely resembling an original: true to nature
- marked by easy simplicity and freedom from artificiality, affectation, or constraint
- having a form or appearance found in nature.”³

For us, natural hair includes hair that is braided, locked, coiled, curled or loosened. All the same, our hair care services extend to the provision of braided extension hair services as well. Many clients seek to wear braided or twisted extensions while they nurture their own hair through the transition from relaxed to natural hair. We honor these clients’ need for realistic and professional options. Other clients simply love braided extensions styles. We celebrate the ethnicity of all people. And because braided hair is a part to the African cultural legacy that we have inherited, we honor it by embracing it.

For years, over 25 years to be exact, I did my own hair. Not because I inherently wanted to. Largely, because I did not want to be abused, verbally or physically, by my stylist. I didn’t want to be chided into wearing a relaxer. I didn’t want to have my hair raked and abused because it was just a little too thick and too long for speedy service. I didn’t want to spend the entire Saturday in the salon waiting for services that would last maybe two weeks. I wanted peace—inner and outer peace. So, I stayed home. Today, *Schatzi’s* provides an alternative to all of these negative experiences. We aim to create an environment of peace and serenity, where you feel empowered to embrace the beauty of you. All clients are introduced to our salon services through a consultation process that is free. From the consultation, we learn of your individual needs and desires and devise a plan of action to assist you in reaching your goal.

But our salon services are not for everyone. Someone who is not ready to see their natural hair, in its natural state, is not ready for *Schatzi’s*—pure and simple. One prospective client that called me about two weeks ago was one such person. She is a woman of 56 years, who is experiencing some hair thinning. She asked me what type of relaxer we could provide that would help her with breakage and thinning. I said, “We don’t provide relaxer services, Ma’am.” “Um,” she grunted. She then asked, “How can you press my hair out so that it doesn’t get so damaged?” I said, “We don’t press hair, Ma’am.” “Um,” she again moaned. “Feeling her frustration through the phone receiver, I dove into the heart of the matter.” I followed:

³ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc., 2008, Web., 1 Jan. 2008.

Ma'am, we believe in the inherent beauty of each individual as God created you to be. A mainstream stylist will place gloves over her hands to protect them from the same chemical that she places on your hair and scalp. A mainstream stylist will also place a burning hot comb on your hair to achieve straightness. We don't do anything to the hair that we would not do to our skin, Ma'am. In this way, we guarantee the long-term health and vitality of your natural hair.

Her response: "Um!"

After considerably more discussion on the matter, we concluded that this client was not ready for the natural journey. And that's cool. Every woman on our staff today has had her walk with chemical treatments. We've all chosen at different ages and stages, some more recently than others, to take the natural journey. We all reflect and celebrate inherent African beauty. And, we aim to be here when our sister decides to come home. We will welcome her with open arms.

Natural Hair: A Brief Personal History

I would now like to talk about why I believe natural hair to be the zenith to which all should aspire and why I want to foster it for the wider community. I'll begin with my personal history, as a young girl living in Alabama. Like many girls of that time, I wanted long flowing, silky straight hair like many girls today. I was enamored by it because it was so contrary to what I was. I wore a short afro. Despite inwardly desiring European hair, I was struck by the power, grace and beauty of my own mother, as all children are. My mother wore head wraps, indicative of many Afro-centric minded women of the 70s. Beautiful head wraps. She was the first black Director of Social Services in the South—Alabama (George Wallace's State), and she was regularly combating evil in high and low places. I believe her Afro-centrism was a badge of honor which said, "When you see me, expect something different." I recall one child in first grade seeing my mother at the classroom door and asking, "Does your mother have any hair?" "Yes," I retorted. I thought that child was SO IGNORANT! All that I saw was beauty and all he could see was a head wrap.

I also recall attending my aunt's (my mother's sister's) wedding. I saw my aunt wearing a beautiful Afro, accented by a beautiful African dress, with her husband donning a dashiki. They were married in my grandmother's home on MLK Jr. Drive in Greensboro, NC. I remember attending the wedding believing that my family was the most beautiful and most inspiring family in all the world. Such are the thoughts of a child. All the same, what strikes me most upon reflection is the power of these images and the long-lasting impact they made on my mind as a growing child. I believed in the inherent beauty of my people because it shone all around me. I wanted to be just like them. I had not learned to love European hair in my home. I had learned it from the wider society. Yet despite growing in a household with so much love and self-acceptance, I did not believe in the inherent beauty of my own African features.

While in high school and college, I wore my hair twisted as I do today. It is my style of choice. I recall being ridiculed and cursed at for reminding Black people how we look without the benefit of a Jheri Curl or relaxer. It was a troubling time. All the same, what truly struck and disturbed me was that despite all the abuse and name-calling, it ceased the minute I straightened my hair. So, it could not have been directed at me but at the image.

I recall deciding to run for student body president. It was a complete whim. When I told my mother, she insisted that I press and curl my hair, for Speech and Election Day. I couldn't understand why but I agreed. With straight tresses flowing past my shoulder and a classic Kelly Green suit, I recall the gentle hum that murmured through the gymnasium as I approached the podium in front of the bleachers. I imagined that people were saying, "That's the same girl that wears that crazy hair." I gave my speech and sat down. My opponent did the same. I really didn't expect to win because she was more popular than I. All the same, I won. That experience showed me the power of a European appearance. I was the same girl that they ridiculed and cursed at and ignored. Why did they suddenly accept me? It was mind-boggling. So with my new-found

popularity, I insisted on relaxing my hair to my mother's chagrin. After seeing my shoulder length locks gradually break off and lose their vitality, I realized my error. It was an important life lesson for me to learn.

By my first year of college, I was again *au naturel*. After seeing my hair's health and vitality return, I remember saying, "Thank you, God." And I distinctly heard the response, "Now, can you keep it the way I gave it to you?" I recall stopping and reflecting deeply on the words, wondering if they came from within myself or from God Himself. The power of choice was apparent and real in the question. Not wishing to contradict what was implied to be the correct path to take, I have sided with God's way every day of my life since that time...unapologetically so, and I have never looked back.

All the same, when you look on the covers of African-American magazines, it is still a very Europeanized look that prevails. We won't bother to mention the covers of mainstream magazines. Within our society today, it is European hair which is most synonymous with beautiful, healthy hair. It is true that things are changing. But, we are far from accepting natural hair as the dominant image of African-American beauty. When I visit local pools and see young African-American girls looking longingly at the hair of their White counterparts, inwardly wishing to have their lot, my heart is broken. It happens every time I go. So, I aim to show young girls that they do not need to aspire to anything because excellence is coded into their very DNA. But how do we convince them. What has happened?

First, we have come to embrace a Europeanized image of beauty as superior to our own. Don't underestimate the impact of movies like *King Kong* and *Beauty and the Beast* in glorifying Eurocentric features—beauty that can sooth the savage beast! Don't underestimate the power of Tarzan beating whole tribes of Africans to protect Jane—his queen. Don't underestimate the impact of Miss America pageants which consistently celebrate a standardized image of female beauty. Don't underestimate the impact of today's hair commercial which dazzles the eyes of our young people with long flowing tresses that shine like silk and move like water—with particular emphasis on the movement. Natural hair moves and shines. But, the beauty about it is sometimes, it don't! It all depends on the style and the condition. And that's okay.

Natural Hair Care Tips

Second, we have forgotten how to care for our natural hair. That is probably the single greatest culprit in maintaining the status quo. Many women, who come into our salon to transition to natural hair, enter with no idea of what their natural hair looks like, let alone how it behaves. They simply want a change. When some of them start to appreciate how natural hair behaves to water, humidity, sweat, the comb: some quickly exit stage left and abruptly conclude their natural hair journey. As we say, the ride is not for everyone. But those who love it, never want to get off.

Some of the qualitative differences in hair care techniques that you will observe at *Schatzi's* are as follows:

1. When combing the hair, we use a wide tooth comb or a pick. These tools work in tandem with the natural curl of our hair, allowing for give and take. Rigid, narrow-tooth combs with short teeth are best suited for straight hair.
2. We comb the hair when it is wet, not when it's dry. This ensures that the hair is not being stressed unnecessarily. The water helps to soften the hair, making it more elastic and malleable.
3. We comb the hair by starting at the ends of the hair and working our way up the shaft of the hair to ensure that tangles are worked through in an orderly manner, consistent with logic and reason. Starting at the root and working to the end only creates larger knots and tangles, creating pain and frustration.
4. When blow-drying the hair, we anoint the hair with oil first to prevent dryness. The oil acts as a lubricant and retards the loss of moisture. At *Schatzi's*, we use *Nature's Blessings* which is an all natural pomade. Please avoid all products with beeswax and petrolatum as they have a tendency to clog pores and attract dirt.

5. When styling the hair, our primary concern is the health and vitality of your established or emerging natural locks. So, braided services honor the need for less tension around the edges to maintain attractive hair lines. Lock services emphasize the avoidance of re-twisting locks in between services, to avoid excess tension and possibly breakage. Twist and coil services emphasize the avoidance of shampooing the hair between styles to minimize locking.
6. Last but not least, natural hair takes time. When styling your own hair, be sure to earmark the necessary time to complete the task. If you try to rush, you only create tangles and frustration. At *Schatzi's*, we have a no-waiting policy which honors the time of the client and the stylist. As such, we operate by appointment and schedule clients based upon the amount of time the stylist needs to complete her work. Our aim is to ensure minimal, if any, wait-time. On this note, our clients are deeply satisfied.

For ladies interested in transitioning to natural hair, the number one piece of advice that I can give you is to be patient and committed. The transitioning process will likely be the most frustrating part of your natural hair journey. It was for me. This is due largely to the difficulties created in managing two antithetical hair textures on each hair strand. For this reason, some ladies opt for extension braids or kinky twists while others simply choose the “Big Chop.” Whatever your choice, know that at *Schatzi's*, you will be supported and encouraged as you make this journey of self discovery.





What is Vanity?: Who Decides?

(Commentary on an article titled “In Iraq, stylists go underground” published in the Dec. 27, 2007 issue of *The News and Observer* by Dīaa Hadid of the Associated Press)

*Context: With the war still raging in Iraq some seven years after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue and declared victory by President George Bush, I felt it appropriate to include this write up about salons in wartime Iraq. The article is a testimony to the human will to resist but is also a powerful indication that everything is not always as it seems. Vanity is often shunned by religious fundamentalist thinkers but this article begs the question, "What is Vanity and who decides?" It was printed in the January 2008 issue of *An Naturel*.*

*Preface: A regular client of ours brought an N&O article titled “In Iraq, stylists go underground” into the salon the day after it was printed, for our review. After reading it, I felt compelled to include it in *An Naturel*. After phoning the N&O to get permission to reprint the article, I was advised that I could not do so, as it is an Associated Press article. The attendant suggested that I paraphrase the article as a “book report.” So, here’s my version of the piece. If you want to reference the original article, you’ll find it on the Net.*

In a nutshell, the article described how several beauty salons in Iraq (near Baghdad) have been bombed. Two primary reasons for the bombings were cited: 1) the bombers didn’t want a salon in the location where it was previously housed; and 2) the bombers didn’t like to see women engaged in such vain behavior, despite the fact that they are conservatively covered while on the street (as consistent with their religious practices).

Because the demand for beauty care services remains in Iraq despite the obvious adversity to engaging in such practices, stylists in Iraq open a segment of their homes to accommodate the needs of women seeking the services. One stylist explained that she only works with people that she knows, for obvious safety reasons. She also focuses only on brides who she perceives to have the highest need. Because she provides a complete package of services for brides, she maximizes earnings while minimizing the number of visits to her home. Another stylist explained that despite the negative perception that some have towards salon services, her home has never been short of clients to serve, throughout the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War and the current conflict. The article further explains that women are aware of the inherent risk in frequenting these salons for services yet, the demand remains and stylists meet it to supplement income. On that note, I will conclude my summation of the article because for me, the fact that there is consistent demand is truly noteworthy and therefore is the basis for my commentary. Let me explain why.

First in reasoning with my mind and heart, it seems obvious that these extreme views of “vanity” are not unanimously held by the wider society. If so, wouldn’t the men be upset to see their women return home with chic haircuts and styles? These are not looks that you can hide from male family members. If these *anti-vanity* views were widely held, the “buck” would stop right at the threshold of the home, because the men undeniably would arrest the practices on sight. Because the men obviously appreciate and condone the practices, the demand for services continues. So, the true perspective of the majority of Iraqi people remains...debatable. As such, it begs the question: Do Iraqi people *en masse* define beauty care practices as vain at all?

Second as a salon owner, I do not know if I could muster the courage to defy such rigid, war-time social mores which have such final consequences. Yet as a woman and a mother, I know within my soul that I would move earth and mountain to ensure that my children are fed...unapologetically so. The women in the article engage in these practices for survival primarily. They are simply employing the use of their God-given talents. I cannot blame them. Ultimately, the maternal instinct is great. It has maintained life on earth for many millennia and will not end as long as there is life and breath. So, I say to my fellow Iraqi sisters “*alutta continua*.”

In concluding, I must say that I have endeavored to remain neutral in my analysis of this article to the extent possible, despite the obvious political undertones. I try not to judge societies or religions regarding long established cultural mores which are different from my own. But I believe that while the message of this article rises far above politics, it cannot be wrested from the realm of religion. Why? Because when I read this article, I ask myself “What is vanity?” Who defines what vanity is or should be? Is it vanity to wear deodorant or bathe? Is it vanity to comb your hair and wash your face? Is it vanity to love your husband and want to be beautiful for him? Who defines vanity and where is the line drawn? I don’t know and won’t venture to answer.

I can only say that when I see articles like this, I think that we as human beings have a lot to learn about compassion and humanity. In fact, I think we could learn a fair amount from animals that inherently understand the need to protect the weaker among them. *[See Ecclesiastes. 3:18-20]*

Anyway, I am a person who hates war. I see no reason for it, though I know there is a time and a season for all things. I’ve seen and lived the after effects of war and believe that an enlightened race of people can find a better way to resolve conflict. War is vanity. Yet within the realm of my own existence, I am powerless to change it. My only solace is prayer and faith (Romans 8:28) and diligence in the continuous quest to find the highest meaning in my own life—which also ultimately...is vanity.





The Legacy of Sarah Breedlove

Context: This article appeared in the February 2008 issue of Au Naturel and celebrates the life and legacy of Sarah Breedlove. I intentionally used this heroine's birth name because as a business entrepreneur, I've come to see her best as the person she was before all the money and the fame. I believe fundamentally that it is that same person that she was upon her death. Read on to learn more about this pioneering and visionary woman who made a lasting impact on the African-American hair care industry, for many years to come.

Well, with February being Black History month, I thought it an appropriate time to complete the article I started a few months back about a famous African-American historical figure, Sarah Breedlove, better known as Madam CJ Walker. Don't get me wrong, I certainly don't let February dictate my choices about when to discuss historical figures. But since I had started the discussion and had yet to finish, it was as good a time as any. All things ripen with the fullness of time, and this article is no exception. When I first began penning this article some months back, I imagined making an all-out frontal attack on Madam CJ Walker's legacy by providing a critique of a by-gone era. I envisioned an article that would scream controversy...with reason. I proposed an article that would say:

With all due respect to Madam C.J. Walker and the role that she played in the history of our people, I believe that it is now time to retire her consistent reference in Black History. As many of you know, she was the inventor of many hair care products and the first Black female millionaire in American history—an original.

From there, the assault would begin. In short, I perceived her as a woman who made millions of dollars teaching Black women how to be more "mainstream"—how to fit in or "pass"; how to devalue their blessings. So, I further wanted to state:

I believe that when we continue to herald her as one of the greats of Black History, we send the subliminal message to young people to "make that money BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY."

That's what I wanted to write. But, alas, it is far too easy to criticize the dead, particularly when we have not taken the time to understand them AND most particularly when they can't defend themselves. So, I thought of taking another approach. Who was this woman? I mean, let's be real. To make a million dollars in the time that she lived was a great feat!! It is not surprising that she died from hypertension complications at the age of 52—although at that time, 52 was not an age to thumb your nose at. She was clearly a shrewd businesswoman and an exceptionally hard worker who transformed herself from maid to millionaire. One online bio writes:

Her prescription for success was perseverance, hard work, faith in herself and in God, "honest business dealings" and of course, quality products. "There is no royal flower-strewn path to success," she once observed. "And if there is, I have not found it - for if I have accomplished anything in life it is because I have been willing to work hard."⁴

I can't argue with her on any of those points. She speaks with absolute truth! So after reading these words, I'm now empathetic with Ms. Walker. Another online source on women in history states:

⁴ Bellis, Mary. "Madam C.J. Walker (1867-1919)." *About.com*. Web., 1 Feb. 2008.
<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blwalker.htm>

Madam Walker was an entrepreneur who built her empire developing hair products for black women. She claims to have built her company on an actual dream where a large black man appeared to her and gave her a formula for curing baldness. When confronted with the idea that she was trying to conform black women's hair to that of whites, she stressed that her products were simply an attempt to help black women take proper care of their hair and promote its growth.⁵

After reading these words, I again understood and empathized with her. Sarah Breedlove's vision "to help black women take proper care of their hair and promote its growth" was and is very similar to my own. I embrace her vision. In addition, my own dreams have guided the vision that today is *Schatzi's*, so I'm now really connecting with this woman. As a result, I could not write the article that I originally envisioned. I have come to have an abiding respect for her. All the same, there is a clear disconnect between she and me.

For me, that disconnect comes from the fact that I believe her vision was railroaded by opportunists and profiteers who nurtured and built an image of proper black hair care that became synonymous with straightening. I believe that vision was clouded by a fundamental self-hate (or dislike of blackness), quite consistent with the times. We are, after all, products of our society. If the mainstream society uses the comb every day, we should all endeavor to do so, right? NOT!!! I wouldn't comb my hair everyday if you paid me to do so! That's why I believe I still have it on my head! Truly! Anyway, Sarah Breedlove was simply a woman who was stressed out and sought a remedy to her own hair loss problem. When she realized the remedy worked, she sought to promote it to the world to benefit other women—one door-step at a time. THAT is perseverance! What could possibly be wrong with that?

Another difference between Sarah and myself is that my vision does not start and end with hair. Hair after all is merely "an external covering of the body." It is not the heart and soul of the individual. In addition, my vision promotes true respect for the inherent ethnic traits that were devalued by society during her lifetime, thus inspiring self-appreciation and self-love. This type of love is very deep because, when I can love myself, I can love you too.

This is so important to psychological, familial, social, national and global peace. For example, my eldest son told me last week that a guy passing him in the hallway, looked him square in his face and said "You ugly!" My son said his response was: "What?! Whoa! What?! (*with a jolt of his body as if punched in the chest.*) He said, "Mommy I was **so** surprised. I just kept saying "What?! (*jolt*) What?!" (*jolt*). (He's kind of dramatic at times.) What I quickly discerned from my son's demeanor, outside of being shocked, was that he in no way internalized the words because he thinks too highly of himself to really believe the guy (thus his ENORMOUS surprise). In fact, "ugly" has always been off-limits in our home. I don't think he's ever heard the word uttered there. At the same time at the core of his heart was the question "Why?!" I think he knows. In short, it is only someone who believes himself *ugly* that can look a stranger in the face and call him so. That's very sad. A person with a good dose of self-love would not do such a thing.

So, my vision transcends beyond the physical to the spiritual: Embrace the Beauty of You—All of you, as designed by the Creator. I believe that the two spheres (physical and spiritual) are integrally linked. With this more holistic vision of beauty, I believe that the truth cannot be easily clouded or compromised. How do you capitalize upon perfection that you had NOTHING to do with? Ultimately, you can't! At the end of the day, women who love themselves feel much happier about themselves. As the nurturers of men and of future generations, that's ultimately a very good thing. I regularly see the positive results in my own friends and colleagues. My husband just this past Super Bowl Sunday looked at my girlfriend's hair and had to compliment her on it. He told me, "Wow, Schatzi! Are you impacting women so much that they look more confident and seem so much happier with themselves? I didn't answer the question, because I don't take credit for anything.

⁵ *Living Vignettes of Women from the Past*. Women in History, Web., 1 Feb. 2008. <http://www.lkwedpl.org/WIHOHIO/walk-mad.htm>

I can't possibly. I'm simply pointing women to the obvious: 'Look in the mirror and see you—the real you. Isn't she wonderful?!"

You are discovering yourself. How could I possibly take credit for that? The beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And when the beholder accepts the **obvious**, the world will too. He then followed, "I admire you for sharing your knowledge with others. You are teaching even middle-aged women to recapture their lost beauty. From the looks of things, her hair will soon be even longer than yours." My response after a brief moment of reflection: "Good."

To me, long hair is not synonymous with beauty. In fact, hair is not synonymous with beauty. If lupus or alopecia are hereditary traits for you, then let's help you get to the point of being comfortable with thin hair or a bald head. Beauty resides there too. Attitude is everything...everyday. I have to regularly remind myself of that fact. I am still learning. But if a woman is insecure because she has no hair, how can we help her to realize that her lack of hair MAY be her current hair care practices (if indeed the case) and NOT a curse meted out to the descendants of Ham. Such a belief system can only foster anxiety, self-hatred, bitterness and resentment.

I believe it is for this reason that some sisters can't stand the fact that many brothers have White wives. What is the anger about??! If that's what he wants and that's what she wants, be happy for the happy couple!! They have found each other! But if we are harboring feelings of anger and resentment about our own selves, how can we feel happy for others. We can only feel rejected because we feel that HIS choice proves that WE are somehow less than SHE. Let go of that!! Hush... and let it go. When you inherently believe in your own self-worth and value yourself, you can never feel dejected or angry about the choices that others make. What is this idea that, THEY are stealing OUR men! Let that go too! We are all children of God, humanity and the world. PERIOD! There is NO us and them. Sure, there's us and them at the Super Bowl, the tennis court or wherever there is a competitive playing field. But in the world of love, there is only ONE LOVE. Sometimes, love and tolerance are the same thing.

So, it is in this framework that I reflect on the legacy of Madam CJ Walker with some bitter-sweet thoughts. Yes, she is an icon; a model of business success; an inspiration to millions; an example of the power of the human spirit. In fact if she had not lived, I honestly would likely NOT be the business entrepreneur that I am today. I look to the past to inform the future. So, I must respect her.

All the same, human passion needs a regular reality check. Because when passion is unbridled, it can compromise even the loftiest of goals and create an outcome that has destructive tendencies. Sound motives and morality must lie at the forefront of all endeavors, business and otherwise. I do not believe that Sarah Breedlove lacked morality in any way. But when I consider that she was twice divorced with her last husband leaving because of disagreement about the extent to which the business should expand,⁶ it makes me feel that perhaps her passion was a bit unbridled and that perhaps her core teaching vision was losing its prominence. All the same, she was a phenomenal woman who was also a great philanthropist and a social activist until the end of her days.

So, Madam CJ Walker, you are a queen among women. As Sarah Breedlove, I believe that you were well named. I live in the wake of the legacy that you created. I honor you. But honestly, I will endeavor NOT to be like you, the Madam and millionaire beauty mogul, but more like you, Sarah Breedlove the servant. Because for me, beauty is synonymous with love. I seek to *breed love* every day. Love can NEVER be found in a bottle (hair care or cosmetic). It is found in the human heart. It lives on when there is no profit to be made,

⁶ *The Black Inventor Online Museum*. Adscape International, LLC. Web. 1 Feb. 2008.
<http://www.blackinventor.com/pages/madamewalker.html>

no benefit to be gained. It expects nothing in return. And in seeking to spread love: I pray that God will help me to maintain godly motives; that He will temper my passion for excellence when the price is too great and the glass darkly has clouded my eyes; that He will challenge me sufficiently that I will always remember to nurture and protect the heart of others in my stewardship; that He will keep me humble through pain and sacrifice; that I will maintain faith in his omniscience and omnipotence to strengthen my resolve through the trials and pain; and that I will strive always to be a reflection of His perfect love. Though I am truly an unworthy vessel. Amen.





Remembering a Natural Beauty...



*Context: This piece is dedicated to my beautiful, natural mother-in-law Ms. Sheila White of St. Elizabeth Parish, Jamaica. It was included in the March 2008 issue of *An Naturel*, shortly after her death. I believe it is a beautiful testimony to the cycle of life. For that reason, I've attached a photo of my youngest son Jamar who gets all of his good looks from Ms. Sheila. (You'll better understand why I included his photo when you get to the end of this tribute.) May she eternally rest in peace.*

Years ago while preparing a meal with my South African girlfriend, Nomonde, I learned of a South African proverb. While cutting the onions for our meal, I began crying profusely. I could hardly finish the task at hand. Nomonde looked at me smiling and said, "Your mother-in-law is going to love you very much!" Rubbing my eyes and straining to see through the tears, I said, how could you possibly know that Nomonde? She said, "Because you cry A LOT when cutting onions. She's really going to love you." I thought, I'm crying because it stings so. But, what's the point of arguing with a proverb.

Shift forward in time to 1990. My husband Lloyd and I traveled to Jamaica, the land of his birth, to do some research with a professor and to introduce me to his family. (Lloyd is a believer in getting some work done while playing.) The only family member that I met on that trip was his mother. All that I knew about her was that she was a Christian woman. That was literally all that Lloyd said about her. I recall driving in the taxi and stopping in front of a Kingston home. Lloyd entered the gate and knocked on the door. He soon returned with Ms. Sheila.

A woman of small stature, I immediately noticed the natural texture of her hair. I heard that a Christian woman in Jamaica is most quickly identified by her attire (dresses only), her grace and poise and the natural texture of her hair. Ms Sheila was true to the description. I was a bit nervous as I descended from the taxi, wearing twisted locks of my own. As I rose to full height, I recall meeting her eyes. Immediately, a huge smile emerged from her face and she greeted me with the warmth of the Jamaican sun. I will never forget that first encounter because I was immediately put at ease.

Through time, I came to know Mother Sheila as a hard worker and a lover of life. She had one of the heartiest laughs that I have ever heard. It emerged from the depths of her soul and lingered like graceful chords played on a summer breeze. She was grace and independence. Though always of meager means, I will never forget the trips that she made from rural Jamaica to visit me in Kingston immediately following the births of my sons. She was the only visitor that came to see me on both occasions. I will never forget her for that. It meant a lot, as my family was in the US. She never stayed very long, but I understood the depth of the sacrifice that she made to take those trips.

Mother Sheila was a beautiful woman who struggled her whole life. She battled with breast cancer in the 80s and won. In the months preceding March 2008, she battled with ovarian cancer and gained eternal life. She reigns victorious even today. Having never had the luxury of a paid vacation or even health insurance, she remained a lover of life until the end of her days. I love you, Mother Sheila. I am thankful that you have found rest.

As I reflect on the cycle of life, I think of my own son Jamar who was making dinner for the family a few months back. While cutting the onions, he began crying profusely, rubbing his eyes feverishly with his sleeves and trying not to cut his fingers through his blindness. I looked at him and smiled...





Reflections on This Thing Called Life

Context: The start of 2009 found me in a reflective mood, pondering the whys and wherefores of life. I believe that everyone has wondered at some point if they are following the path that God would have them to walk or stated differently, if they are fulfilling their life's purpose. I don't question the course of my journey often but when I do, I tend to go deeply, turning-over even the most basic assumptions to try to understand truth. Of course, I don't ever find the answer but that doesn't stop me from looking in a lot of places for thoughts and ideas. This article represents my thoughts about a recent sojourn into the direction of my spiritual journey. It was published in the February 2009 issue of Au Naturel.

With the turning of the hands of time, we come yet again to the close of a winter season and the promise of spring and all of its glory! And yet again, I'm ruminating on life. Some things never change. Thankfully, spring is a wonderful season! Not only is the first day of spring my grandmother's date of birth (a most fitting birthday for the sunshine in *my* life!), it is also a day for re-birth. So ask yourself, while the birds and trees and flowers are renewing, am I? If the answer is a resounding "No!" that ain't good, my sister! But honestly, I understand it. So often as mothers, workers, wives and daughters, we lose ourselves in our ever-changing roles without taking the time for self. I can truly relate to Ms. Alfre Woodard's words at the end of "The Family that Preys." They struck a chord for me. (I won't ruin it for you. If you haven't seen the movie, it's a must see.)

I'm amazed at how I'm starting to view myself and life of late. In short, I have truly come to believe that my soul has a higher purpose that is so readily clouded by the routine machinations of life. In my quest to find this deeper meaning, I've begun to read as if I were a person starved of literacy for the course of my life. I suddenly want to hear everyone's perspective.

The shadowy side of this newfound love of self-discovery and my personal quest to see all sides of the coin is that I openly contemplated the idea of robbing a bank just last week!! I'm not kidding! I almost scared myself! But, I honestly didn't want the money. I just wanted to get caught...to experience a different life--life inside of prison, as a statistic inside the system. Sounds crazy I know. But, let's face it. Right now, many of us are statistics outside of the system! Look at it this way: While our lives surely have more degrees of freedom within the construct of the day than a prisoner's, in truth and in fact, we can be relied upon to wake in the morning, report to our societal duties, execute those duties to the best of our abilities (or face the consequences), return home, seek some modicum of entertainment for the sake of self and go to sleep to repeat the process all over again. Is a prisoner's life much different from that? Don't get me wrong, I'm not unappreciative of the gift of freedom and personal choice and all that goes with it but, when you reflect on the lives that Jesus and the disciples led, they separated themselves from the routine to experience the divine! That is an exciting idea! All the same, I know that the world is full of routine, as exemplified when they continued to fish and herd and attend weddings and eat and sleep. Routine is part and parcel of life!

So, the challenge for me, and many others on a path of spiritual growth, is how to reach the divine within the confines of the routine? Yes, I can hear some say, "Impossible! You cannot put new wine into an old wineskin." I agree. But my response is that we're ultimately still talking about WINE, aren't we? The major qualities that define the thing called "wine" do not change whether it is new or old. What changes with the aging is how that wine responds to its environment when placed in a pressurized condition—its quality and character. New wine represents unbridled passion! Power, tenacity, youth! It is literally bursting forth with promise...yet is not quite palatable to the consumer (i.e. the society). Old wine, on the other hand, has found peace in its environment and has in fact altered that environment while being altered by the environment. The two have grown together for the sake of unity. With these thoughts in mind I ask, how does one become a renewed and enlightened being? And how does a renewed being (new wine) stay renewed... how does it respond when tested by routine environmental conditions (old wineskin)? Does it burst free and destroy its environs for the sake of liberation? To what end? Waste? Self-awareness? Or does it, change itself and thus

change its environs, losing all the qualities of newness? To what end? To be palatable to society? To gain wisdom? Indeed, this question is a conundrum. I believe it lies at the core of why Jesus and his disciples were so persecuted by the wider society. Perhaps I'm losing you...

I surely have no ready answers...just lots of questions. But in reflecting on these ideas, it occurs to me that my thoughts have been heavily influenced by my recent read of Jack Kornfield's work After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path. In writing this book, Jack Kornfield interviewed spiritual leaders of all major religions: Christianity (including Protestantism and Catholicism), Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, to learn how they wrestle with this issue of finding the path of spiritual growth and enlightenment while fulfilling the more mundane tasks of life...*thus the laundry*. It is a powerful concept that I believe lies at the core of much of the misery and dissatisfaction in the world, particularly for those beings who have been blessed to rise above Maslow's fourth level in the hierarchy of need.

All the same, I agree with the book when it suggests that the path to true liberation is found in the routine aspects of life. I once had a Korean taekwondo teacher who was much younger than myself and very well liked by all. His email address was "...again." I remembered thinking it peculiar to choose such a name for an email address. But of late, I realize that he is wise beyond his years. Either that or he is seeking to reinforce what he has been told. Either way, he is well informed, in my estimation. I will leave you with a quote from this book that ends the opening chapter and is representative of why I believe it to be a powerful work. As a student of the martial arts, I relate to this quote on many levels:

*"It is the spirit of bowing that informs this book. The true task of spiritual life is not found in faraway places or unusual states of consciousness: It is here in the present. It asks of us a welcoming spirit to greet all that life presents to us with a wise, respectful and kindly heart. We can bow to both beauty and suffering, to our entanglements and confusion, to our fears and to the injustices of the world. Honoring the truth in this way is the path to freedom. To bow to what **is** rather than to some ideal is not necessarily easy, but however difficult, it is one of the most useful and honorable practices.*

To bow to the fact of our life's sorrows and betrayals is to accept them; and from this deep gesture we realize that all of life is workable. As we learn to bow, we learn that the heart holds more freedom and compassion than we could imagine.

The Persian poet Rumi speaks of it this way:

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.*

*Still treat each guest honorably,
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

Be grateful for whoever comes

*because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.” (Kornfield, pp. x-xi)⁷*

The spiritual journey is a continuous one as long as there is breath and life. So, I journey onward, ever mindful that the journey itself is as important as the destination that I seek. For through the journey, the soul gains wisdom and communion with God.

So I give thanks for you, the reader, who molds and shapes my life, though unseen, through your communion with this spirit, through these words, on this day. Travel well. Amen.



⁷ Kornfield, Jack., *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*. New York: Batham, 2001.



Feeling the Vibes of India...

Context: India Arie is my favorite recording artist, hands down. I attended her Mother's Day concert at the Durham Performing Arts Center and left deeply inspired. My husband was with me but I was truly in a zone with the music; so much so that you would truly think that I was alone. That's how spiritual an experience it was for me. Wanting to share the power of this experience, I wrote this review for inclusion in the May 2009 newsletter. The poetic interlude section also has a poem that I wrote as I continued to float on the wake of the positive energy that she ignited that evening...

I intentionally held this issue of Au Naturel to be able to provide my personal review on the India Arie concert which took place at the Durham Performing Arts Center on Sunday, May 10th (Mother's Day). It was my treat to myself and was probably the best Mother's gift that I can recall receiving. The artists leading up to India were quite good; Kem was even exceptional! But, India is just my girl. Her hit "I Am Not My Hair" is the unofficial theme song for *Schatzi's*. I feel her totally. So, she's the only one I'll spend time on for this issue. No disrespect but with limited space, I'm sure you understand.

First, I must briefly describe my lead up to the concert. The week before the show, I was still waffling about whether I would attend! Honestly, I wasn't sure I was ready for India! You see of all artists on the market right now, she's the one who consistently moves me. I knew she'd have me crying like a baby. Truly! When I describe her gift, I say that when spirits were standing in line to receive their gifts, "God kissed her...twice!" She is a favored child by the Creator in my mind because she is a little too efficient at conveying a depth of life and love and passion and spirituality with so few words. Her voice, her music, her passion, her lyrics, her delivery, her energy all merge to create a synergistic whole truth and honesty that can only be described as divine. Can you tell she's my favorite artist? Sure, Chrisette's got game! Don't get me wrong. I'd never deny her her props. But my vibe with Chrisette is totally on an artist plane. I love Ella Fitzgerald and Billy Holliday. So, to see a Chrisette emerge with a new age twist is like icing on a beautiful cake! But for me, that vibe is purely about the music. With India...it's about the spirit. You can't go deeper than that. It's about the whole, the connectedness, the oneness. So, I bit the bullet and bought a ticket in the center orchestra--seat, N 111...front and center. I had nothing to do with that location. It was divinely ordered as she so eloquently referenced in her opening prayer.

She began with "Grains" and "In Remembrance," and as predicted the tears began to flow (for me)... as I knew they would. Her voice was hoarse that night so it was not the purest rendition of some of the songs that she sang. But with India, it is truly about the spirit. She didn't apologize for her voice and she honestly didn't need to. Because she delivered!! Following the opening prayer and the introduction, she expressed her own spiritual state. In short, she was already on a spiritual high. In her words "I don't usually get to this place until much later in the show." I can only say that it was surely in large part due to the enormous amount of love and connectedness in that room. (As an aside, there were so many natural hairstyles that I gave up on even trying to hand out cards. There were just too many people and I was there to see India.)

She continued with songs from her newest CD *Testimony Vol 2: Love & Politics*. In the salon, we've been vibing with that CD for months. The songs deliver a clear message that is powerful, graceful and true. Two of my favorite songs on the CD (also performed) are "Therapy" and "He Heals Me." But it was during her rendition of "River Rise" that the tears came tumbling down...mine and later hers. (She took a brief hiatus off-stage to pull herself together afterwards.) She sang "Yellow" which has a definite Stevie Wonder vibe to it. She then brought her own Mom on stage to share her vocal gifts and to let the world know that "India got it honest." She neatly closed with the timeless classic "Brown Skin" and ended with a prayer wrapped in the words of "I Am Ready for Love."

In a word, I enjoyed Mother's Day immensely!! I encourage all reading this segment to purchase the CD. It is truly inspirational! Closing words to India: "You remind me that self actualization is found in life

and love and truth and a belief in our higher calling and a will to follow it...to a place where power and passion reign in abundance. Sing on, soulbird! You are blessed.” Amen.





A Tribute to Life and to a Beautiful Man (Michael Joseph Jackson)

Context: This tribute was written on July 2, 2009 and was included in the July issue of Au Naturel newsletter. I believe its context needs no explanation...

This tribute began during the wee hours of July 1st. It began in sadness, mellowed into thoughtful reflection, was stoked into a burning anger and has concluded with a silent peace. I had to say what is written here. The story is long and protracted. The message is a controversial one but is primarily one of deliverance. "Embrace the Beauty of You." Read and know your own truth.

On Life

Over the past week, I must confess that I have lived in a type of funk that I can't seem to shake. It comes no doubt as a result of the untimely death of the greatest Pop genius ever to grace the airwaves, Michael Joseph Jackson. I had absolutely refused to cry over his death as I believe that in death, he has been released from a lifetime of suffering. But during the wee hours of July 1st, the dam broke and I broke that pledge. I have grappled with the need to understand why I should place so much importance on a single human being. Since his death, I have dreamt of him and I have prayed for his soul. I have cried out of a sense of helplessness as I believe that love is the greatest gift known to Man. It is a gift that he shared freely with the world only to be chastised and abused for his innocence and his trusting nature. It is a testimony to the nature of human beings to take for granted that which is gifted to us...until it is no more. It's a rather humbling commentary on our state of being.

The past week has been very humbling to me particularly in defining the extent to which life is precarious and fragile. A friend always outlined that truth to me but since June 21st, I have felt it more deeply than at any other time in life that I can recall. On Father's Day 2009, I traveled to Maryland to attend a four-day conference for early intervention programs. I caught the plane in RDU at about 6:10pm. While on the plane, I reviewed the in-flight magazine and observed an article on infomercial king Billy Mays. I passed the article and continued on. But, something compelled me to turn back and I read the article. Interesting. When I arrived at Reagan National Airport, I decided to take the DC Metro into Bethesda to better feel the heartbeat of the city. I asked directions, took the yellow line and then transferred to the red line to be deposited practically at the doorsteps of my hotel. It was an enjoyable ride. All the same, I couldn't shake the feeling "What if we crash?" I dismissed the thought as having any real meaning as I had seen a television series a few days before in which two trains collided due largely to human error. I guessed that the visual images of destruction were planted in my mind for that reason so I focused on arrival at my destination. I departed the Metro at about 8:25pm an avid fan of the DC commuter rail system.

On Monday, June 22nd, after a day of conference sessions, I touched base with my husband about meeting with him at my aunt's home in DC. (He was working in DC on a short-term project and was staying with her.) I said, "I can take the Red line and transfer to the appropriate train near Sue's house." He dismissed the idea and said he'd pick me up. Imagine the shock I experienced upon reaching Sue's home later that evening to learn that there had been a terrible accident just that evening on the inward bound Red Line. I was a little disturbed as I imagined that there could have been people on that train whose family members were totally unaware that they were on that train. I thought about the haunting thoughts "What if we crash?" that I had throughout yesterday's ride. It was a little too ironic for my liking. We watched the news the remainder of the evening and surprisingly, my mother called my aunt's home to be sure that she was okay. Little did she realize that I was much more likely to have been affected by that accident than my aunt as she does not use the Metro. That night I slept fitfully.

Tuesday evening, after another day of conferences, I turned on the television to learn more about the accident and to hope that the casualties were limited. By Wednesday morning, they had the faces of the victims

on the television. I promptly changed the channel. I then recall hearing a vague reference to Ed McMahon and again I turned the channel. I then proceeded to the day's conference sessions. By lunchtime, I had met a colleague who was a joy and treat to be around. We shared lunch and I felt very happy to have made her acquaintance. She expressed a fascination with my name and said she'd tell her daughter about it as a future name for a grandchild. I felt honored. By the evening, I had linked up with a second wonderful colleague who I believe I was destined to meet. I had seen her at a past conference and decided it was time to introduce myself. We began talking at about 5pm and finished after 10pm, having enjoyed a vegetarian dinner and endless stories. She is indeed a kindred spirit! By Thursday morning, I was eager to link up with my two new friends and to hear what else I needed to learn from the Feds. I made introductions between the two ladies and we enjoyed lunch and more pleasantries. By the afternoon, we had a date to meet up on Columbus Day week-end in Oklahoma at the ranch-home of the first. I felt very excited about the newness and blessings of life. It is indeed a river. In reflecting on our future date to meet in Oklahoma City, I thought how spontaneous and rich a decision it was. I thought of the days of America's youth when people traveled westward on the harsh frontier and solicited aid, food and lodging from complete strangers with no thought of the appropriateness of it all. It was essential to life. But as we become more technologically advanced, we become more socially bankrupt...choosing to chat with invisible strangers on the other side of the world rather than to visit with our next door neighbors. So in expounding on life, I say that our current way of life is too guarded. Life is short and precarious. We should feel free to share laughter and love with a stranger as much as we share it with our loved ones who we see every day. For:

"We are the world.

We are the children.

We are the ones who make a brighter day [by giving]."

And in making this choice to love freely "We save our own lives" and salvage all of humanity.⁸

I left my two friends at about 2:30pm preparing to take the shuttle back to the airport. I honestly didn't have the spirit to ride the Metro, though I had been advised it was operational and safe. I was glad for the solitude and the directness of the shuttle. I could take some time to read the book that the locked sister had placed in my hand that same day "The Alchemist." When I arrived at the airport during the 4 o'clock hour, I cleared check-in and walked to my gate. While passing television monitors, I vaguely heard reference to "Farrah Fawcett loses her battle with cancer." I didn't want to feel the spirit of mourning, so I went to the far side of the airport and sat in front of a window looking out on the runway. It was secluded and peaceful. I then dived into "The Alchemist" and began to appreciate the power of Paulo Coelho's storytelling. At about 6:00pm on the money, I landed at RDU airport. I walked to my car, put in my bags, started the car and headed out. I heard a Michael Jackson song playing on the radio. I paid my parking fee and heard another MJ song begin. "Hmm. They're playing Michael Jackson songs today." I then heard the DJ say "What song would you like for me to play in memory of Michael Jackson." I thought "Hmm. Why would they say *in memory* about a person that's living? That's weird!!!" The song played. Another caller. "In memory of Michael Jackson, I'd like you to play ____." I then became concerned and disturbed. I honestly don't remember driving home. I was enraptured in the moment. I thought "Schatzi, you haven't seen the news for a few hours....Call somebody." I picked up the phone and called my husband Lloyd. "Hey, I've arrived in Raleigh. I'm on the way home." "Good! Have you heard that Michael Jackson died?" And there it was. What I didn't want to hear but surely knew. I got home, checked in with my kids, had dinner and watched the news.

Friday, I worked in a type of depression and was truly relieved when the day was over. Saturday was more news and more tributes as was Sunday. Only Sunday greeted me with a visit from my sister Jasmine. She came up to my room, sat on the bed and said "Did you hear that Billy Mays died?" I then thought, "You've got to be kidding." She said "No, and recited the circumstances surrounding his death." I thought "Why did I read that article that I wasn't really interested in while on the plane?" That's weird. We talked and I reflected

⁸ Jackson, Michael and Lionel Ritchie. "We Are the World." Polygram Records, 2006.

on the fact that the law of threes had now been broken. I also then concluded that television is not always a good thing. We bring celebrities into our homes and our lives and experience their joys and pains as if they were our own. So when they die, we feel as though we've lost a friend when in truth, we've never known these people. As a result, we are eternally in a state of mourning. This cannot be good. At least, that's my opinion. But as earlier stated, life is a river; it brings blessings and pain. It brings people into and out of our lives. Ed McMahon, Farrah Fawcett, Billy Mays and Michael Jackson came into the river's current at different times but transitioned into the ocean of the universe (Heaven) together. On June 24th, my dear friend Andrea Perry gave birth to a beautiful baby girl in Kingston, Jamaica. And the circle of life continues.

On the Man

Of the four celebrities, Michael Jackson is the one that influenced my life most. I am a product of my generation. He influenced us all. In reflection, I think that Michael Jackson was appropriately named after an archangel because he was like an angel. Through his work, Michael Jackson delivered a message of healing with "Heal the World," love with "You are not alone," stewardship with "Earth Song," power with "Bad," honesty with "Billie Jean," reconciliation with "Beat It," acceptance with "Black or White," wonder with "Human Nature" and innocence with "Childhood." He delivered this message with banging guitar licks, a resounding bass, timeless melodies and indelible visual images that will make it impossible for us to forget that message for many decades to come. But like the universal yin and yang symbol, all goodness has a shadowy side much like a "double-edged sword." Like an avenging angel, Michael had another message to deliver that was equally provocative and telling. To understand the message, we need to understand the heart of the man. In short, I saw in Michael Jackson a man who truly had the heart and innocence of a child. Generally speaking, children do not lie and they do not scheme. They reflect truth and honesty in word and deed. So, in Michael Jackson, I saw a man who dared to show all of the world what Black America really thinks of itself. He was a reflection of our collective will and desire—to emulate Whiteness. In reflecting on the recent interviews and tributes that I have seen, I ask myself why did Quincy Jones speak of chastising Michael's chemical peels (if that's what they were) when he himself has been married (and divorced) three times but never to a woman of color? Why should we reprimand his choice to burn or bleach his skin blond when we do the same thing with our hair on a daily basis? Why should we criticize his nose when we joke on wide nostrils as if they are a judgment of damnation from God Himself? Why should we condemn the straightening of his hair when we burn our own children's hair for the sake of "convenience?" Who are we to judge and criticize the choices Michael Jackson made? It is often said that "Children say that damndest things." Well like a child, Michael spoke the truth about how we feel about ourselves more effectively and more publicly than anyone ever could. We were embarrassed by his message. But he spoke loudly and clearly as any child does when our very soul begs them to "Be quiet!" His message was no less true because we chose to separate it from us. We were strongly opposed to his message because we saw the mirror reflection of our own thoughts and idiosyncrasies. I recall as a child living in Alabama during the 70s, looking in the mirror and wanting to be White. MJ had the self-awareness, the strength of purpose and the money to "Make it so!" I've long outgrown that desire but how many of us still have this emulation buried deep within our psyche? Instead of hearing the message for the truth that it was, we disassociated ourselves from the message and the messenger by saying "Hmmm, he got issues." Yes, he had issues. But if you truly believe that we collectively don't have very deep issues about skin color, hair texture and Afrocentric features, you are living in the "Outer Limits." I encourage you to "come back to the middle" as my girl India would say. You will find the center much more balanced and truthful.

How utterly poetic that he in turn should be named Joseph as Biblically, Joseph was a man who had a coat (ie, skin/covering) of many colors. In all the history of Mankind, what man has had a "coat" with more colorings than Michael Joseph Jackson? Biblically, Joseph was a man who was sold into slavery. Who would deny that despite the lure and glory of fame and fortune, Michael Joseph Jackson was a man enslaved within the confines of his own home...condemned to remain isolated from an adoring and ever-growing fan base...denied the freedom to live as common people...trapped by the shackles of contracts, lawsuits and green-eyed monsters? Yet, despite Joseph's condition, he used his God-given talents to deliver the same family which enslaved him. He was their hero. And by delivering them, he worked also to "heal the world." How absolutely poetic was the very selection of his name—Michael Joseph Jackson—a name fashioned especially for him, setting in motion a legacy so unique and powerful that it appears to have been written in the stars.

Yes, Michael Joseph Jackson was that angel with the double-edged sword who committed his heart to healing the world while inside his own heart was breaking. And in the end, it did. When the truth of these thoughts connected with my spirit, I cried. That's what it took for me to lose my battle with sobriety and cry for this gentle soul from the depths of my own. My heart is still in mourning over his personal sacrifice. On Sunday afternoon, I dreamed that I gave Michael Jackson the hug and the love that I could not give him in life. All I remember was holding him tightly. I saw only his back as I caressed him. His face and color were irrelevant and unseen by me. I woke with some peace in my spirit. But in retrospect, I think that it was Michael's spirit that came to console me because he is now free and at peace. It is my soul that continues on this human plane with all of the joys and foibles of human existence, grappling with the mysteries of life which are irrelevant to the angels and the souls of our ancestors.

In summary, I feel that in his own way, Michael Jackson has highlighted more than anyone else could the importance of the statement "Embrace the Beauty of You." It is fundamental. It is life and joy and peace and happiness. On Saturday morning while watching *The Early Show*, I saw a little 5th grader singing a song written, played and choreographed by her teacher. I then said to my husband "She is why Michael Jackson had to die. Why I must die. She is life and renewal and a fresh start." Her sound was captivating and belied the 11-12 years of her existence (much as Michael's did some 40 years ago). She sang with command and passion. Michael's legacy was complete and now the baton has passed to the youth. We pray that their pain and struggles are not as deep as his (and ours) have been.

So, I salute you Michael Joseph Jackson...in my own way. And our August 29th Hair Show will be a wonderful reminder to "Embrace the Beauty of You." We will usher the night in and usher it out with the soulful lyrics and music of the man named after an archangel, Michael Joseph Jackson. May he forever rest in the peace that he did not have in life. We celebrate his life and his legacy. Thank you for bringing so much joy to so many. Thank you for holding up the "mirror" and reminding us to look at ourselves first. I accept you Michael. All of you. The Black and the White; the troubled and the self-assured. You are a reflection of my own soul. Thank you for reminding me to be gentle with myself and with all of the world. Somehow, I know that you hear me.





My Preliminary Thoughts on Chris Rock's "Good Hair"

Context: In the natural hair care world, the release of Chris Rock's movie "Good Hair" was a much anticipated event. I, for one, however was not so anxious to see his take on the subject. First, I couldn't understand how he was qualified to give the subject fair justice. Sorry for thinking it, but I did. African-American hair is a cash cow right now, and in my heart of hearts, I felt that Chris was cashing in. I mean, it's not like I've seen him on the red carpet with a Badu-like sister on his arm so where could the fervor to dabble in this arena honestly originate? Second, I just had general concerns about how a comedian would address a matter that lies at the core of a lot of self-hate within the African-American community. So the attached article, written in the September 2009 issue of Au Naturel, is my initial thoughts on the movie, prior to its release date on October 9, 2009. Since writing this initial piece, I have seen the movie and naturally have very strong opinions about it. So, this article is followed with my afterthoughts about the movie.

Since hearing about Chris Rock's film "Good Hair," I've been a bit reticent about what he'll do with the topic. I'm honestly not brimming over with excitement to see it. I mean let's face it: 1) Chris Rock is a comedian; and 2) Have you seen "Pootie Tang"? Need I say more?! All the same, the film has made its debut and is already receiving accolades so I will undoubtedly be in line to view the film at some point in time. To edify myself about his take on the film, I viewed the write-up presented on the Sundance Film Festival website. After reading it, I personally registered even more concern.

The primary nature of my concern comes from his impetus to make the movie: 'his daughter's tears at not having "good hair"' and 'his own deep-seated wonderment at how such an idea could be put into her innocent little head.' (*Blink, blink*). [*Enter stage left, Schatzzi's own stupor.*] Is he for real? Do you feel like you're living in the twilight zone when you read that one or is it just me? Let's be real here! You can't be African American and have lived in this country for at least 10 years without understanding the deep-seated issues surrounding black hair. Why does he seem so baffled? Does he not reflect on his own inherent biases? They are taught in the home. They are reinforced outside the home. I know because my mind was never programmed to believe that my hair was bad. I had a mother who demanded nothing less. Sure, I had hairstylists tell me to the contrary of what my mother told me, but I never internalized what they said because I saw the truth in the eyes of my own family. Sure, I wondered what it would be to have silky flowing locks but when my own natural hair fell to the middle of my back and I pressed it out, I didn't like how it looked OR felt? I had been successfully programmed to love myself. That programming required a critical pre-requisite--the unconditional love of my mother and father. With this solid grounding, one can be in the midst of a tempest of scorn and abuse and you will remain untouched, undaunted and whole. I know because I lived it.

Because of the disdain for Black hair that has emerged through the ages, it has become a billion dollar industry built primarily on taming and ruling the "savage beast." So I ask, is Chris honestly approaching the topic sincerely or is he attempting to make profit off of an industry that is rapidly being taken over by non-Black peoples? I must give him the benefit of the doubt but honestly, the stupor with which Chris seems to approach this topic only suggests to me that he's *cashing in*. It just rings insincere for me. But, that's me. I hope I'm wrong because we don't really have time for foolishness (reference: Pootie Tang) when it comes to this important topic.

So to Chris, I say: My brother, you needn't comb the ends of the Earth to find the seeds of discontent that lie in your dear daughter's heart; for the tree surely grows in (y)our own backyard. Know this and be free. May we all see this truth!

Afterthoughts on Chris Rock's Good Hair

Well, I must admit that I didn't go to the movie theater to see "Good Hair." October was a busy month in the salon and then there were the holidays. By the time I looked around, the movie was already

on DVD. Then one day, one of the stylists rented the movie and put it in my hand saying, "You've got to see this. It's on me." I took it home and I watched.

In general terms, the movie was informative and provided a lot of useful information that would not have been highlighted otherwise. For example, discussions with the chemist and the dermatologist shone useful light on the destructive nature of some of the chemical processes used for relaxer systems. I believe that this information hit home for some sisters, as I've heard them express within the salon. Also, the movie highlighted the frenzied nature of the industry which relies upon the destruction of someone else's crowning glory (Indian women) for the temporary glorification of our own. Seems kind of exploitative to me but it surely won't stop any time soon.

So for these points, I commend Chris Rock. It was important information to share. But if I were to rate the movie overall, I would only give it a C+ at best. The primary reason is that I believe for a movie with the title "Good Hair" to be inspired and truly meaningful to the community, it must speak to the inherent psychological damage that is caused by the usage of strong chemical processes and the store bought hair used by the current and future mothers of our community. He never spoke to the psyche in a direct way. And when it was dealt with indirectly, it was improperly handled. As a result in my view, he never dealt with the entire theme and premise that is anticipated in a movie titled "Good Hair." In short, the movie was therefore misleading about its intention and objective.

With this grand omission, I felt that the movie was scattered and lacked focus. Sure, it was broken into segments around themes like: the weave hair Mecca - India, the chemist's perspective, the stylist's perspective, the dermatologist's perspective, etc. But fundamentally, what is the purpose of all of these perspectives. It surely should have been larger than stating, as Chris did towards the end of the movie, (paraphrasing) 'Don't put a kiddie perm in your daughter's hair.' I thought, if this is all this brother got out of his own film after all of that research, he has **TOTALLY** missed the boat!

By default, he has sorely failed the daughter whom he purported to be serving in creating the movie. How is she now inspired and empowered to foster self-love within her own soul based on the conclusions that he's drawn? How has he helped her to see that her hair IS "good hair?" If he's not done this, I believe that he's missed his sole objective. Which fundamentally takes me back to my original thought: Maybe he's just cashing in. Because if his only recommendation to this daughter would be, 'Honey, wait until you're an adult and you can have an adult perm that won't damage your sensitive young scalp. Then, you'll have "good hair."' Well, again, he's totally off the mark.

He may argue that these are my words, not his. But, the truth is that he spoke these words loudly though he never uttered them as plainly as I have. The focus of the movie and the orientation of the dialogue said it all. When he told the Indian sister with the beautiful hair to (paraphrasing) 'Run if you see a sister coming, (because she'll want to cut your hair off and take it for herself)' he said to his daughter 'You'll never have "good hair."' When he walked through the hair salons and beauty supply stores trying to sell kinky hair, only to be told that it's "no **good**" and he failed to rebut these arguments, he told his daughter 'you don't have "good hair."' (Incidentally, kinky hair sells **VERY WELL!** Packaging and presentation are everything. But, what can I say: he's a comedian first.) When he spoke to the high school seniors who said that they would not hire a sister with a natural afro because it's just not professional, and he failed to counter this argument, he told his daughter, 'You don't have "good hair."' When he highlighted popular personalities like Nia Long, Raven Simone and Rev. Al Sharpton over Erykah Badu, Jill Scott, Ledisi and India Arie, he said, 'Your hair is not what people want to see or talk about. You don't have "good hair."'

So in summary, you better perm to get it or you better buy it, because the fact remains, you don't have "good hair." That was the take-home message that I got from the film. I'm just calling it like I see it. I

honestly have no personal problems with Chris Rock. But my brother, when you step in my playing field and play the game "half-cocked," know that I'm going to tell you about yourself. I'm just keeping in real.

So to Chris I say, "Do your daughter a favor. Buy her this book or many others which will teach her the self-love that your movie obviously failed miserably at doing." And be honest in expressing your sheer inadequacy in dealing appropriately with a topic that cuts her soul in ways that you sadly still fail to understand. Only then, would you have served her well concerning the topic of "Good Hair."





A Word on Black Women and Relationships

Context: This article was written for the August 2011 issue of Au Naturel. Because I understand the challenges that many women are facing to find a meaningful and lasting relationship, I decided to proffer some insights from a discussion with one of our clients on just this topic. My effort was to encourage a natural, loving and somewhat challenging way to look at the issue. Feedback from readers indicated that the message was well-received and appreciated.

I'm inspired to write this article on relationships because back in June while in the salon, a sister openly shared with me her frustration at being a 40 year old woman who has yet to find the man that she can share and commit her life to. I appreciate that there are way too many sisters out there who feel this way. We vibed and shared thoughts of her quest for a love uniquely her own. As we talked, I realized that her mind had already formed an image of who that man should be. So, my best advice to her was: "Let him go" meaning the image of an ideal. I'll never forget the very innocent and unsure way in which she said, "Let him go?" When I considered that her happiness was at stake, I dived in to present an alternative. After all, she's free to choose for herself, right? I said, "Yes, girl. Let him go!"

I then elaborated: 'Expand your horizons and open your heart, your mind and your spirit to all possibilities. After all, male energy is not confined to one cohort of men, or one continent!' She listened, considered and honestly remained hesitant of the advice. I continued, "There are Hispanic men, Asian men, Indian men, Caucasian men, African men (for those women who see them as different due to culture), etc." She repeated, "Let him go?" You can tell she won't havin' that! I feel her completely! That's much better said than done. I get it! But when my mind is in solution-mode, it's all about the world of possibilities. "There are many men in the world. Don't limit yourself." My mother gave me this advice as a teen, and I appreciate her for opening my mind.

I stated these words because what I appreciate and well understand about this client is that she is in love with the idea of the perfect man for her life. But, let's be honest: that image is not real? Life challenges will ensure that such a notion gets beaten and buried out of your mind if you were ever naïve enough to have it at all. In addition, the state of Black Manhood in America is nothing to consider lightly. My college friend Louis Anderson used to say: There are 4Ms for Black men in America: McDonalds, Maximum Security, Military and the Morgue. While two of those aren't undesirable, the picture it paints is one of limitations. (Aside: I don't embrace this view personally but know that it shapes the way many women weigh the options available to them. I choose instead to see bounty in all things. In my view, there is no scarcity—not of food, money, love, anything. All scarcity is man-made.) A more recent statistic that my husband shared with me is that the life expectancy of Black men in prison is higher than that of Black men in the wider society! With that very disconcerting reality facing us, coupled with the fact that many brothers would rather love each other than any woman, what's a girl to do? "Let him go." Again, that's better said than done. But this is what Hollywood movies are made of. We can all appreciate Idris Elba but ultimately, there's only one of him! And he could never live up to the image that women hold in their minds about him. But, he IS nice to look at! Sister-girl would likewise fall short of his expectations as the human condition requires a shortfall...by definition. So, why bother to dream at all? In a word, that's what "let him go" means, right? Don't dream. Instead, let's all be brutally realistic and serious and passionless and scripted and measured.....and BORING!!!!!!!!!!!! Yada, yada, yada. (That's the equivalent of covering my ears, shutting my eyes and singing "la, la, la, la, la.") That's what I think sister-girl wanted to do to me when I gave that advice, though I couldn't appreciate it at the time. Such an approach takes life way too seriously! Now that I consider the issue with a wider lens and increased understanding, I say: If a dream inspires, it's surely worth having! Period! Sister-girl will likely never "have" her ideal because possession is an illusion. But if he inspires her to aim high in her life (however she defines "aiming high") then he's a welcome blessing to her life. Who defines what motivates and inspires another person? Only God knows that. I surely don't purport to understand such a thing. It's far too deep and complex for me. BUT my intended take-home message was really in the meantime, live your life! Let's face it: A dream doesn't keep you warm at night or make you hot soup when you have a cold. But, it inspires. It is joyful, and it is life! Fair enough. Dream on, my sister! Don't let him go but, live your life in the meantime. Pain, discontent and confusion come from the deep longing and desire for him and the absence of him. Release the

longing, free your spirit and live. We are not meant to live as shadows or reflections but fully and completely. “All we are is dust in the wind.”

I followed, “Girl, you know the Hispanic men are looking!” She replied, “Yeah, they be looking.” I said “I KNOW they be looking. So, why not?” She’s a beautiful woman. I then said, “And there are Asian men.” Okay if her face were a computer screen, it would have been the “blue screen of death.” CRASH!! Her words were “No, she didn’t go there.” I said, “Yes, I did. Asian men need love too and many of their women prefer Caucasian men. What’s a guy to do?” (If you haven’t considered the idea of an Asian beau, indulge me for a minute: Tell me which of the main characters of the movie “Red Cliff” would you ignore if he was trying to talk to you? Check out the trailer. Incidentally, it’s a great epic drama!! Quick tip ladies: Guys love this type of movie without exception as the men in my life will attest, so invite your man over for an evening soiree. “The Divine Weapon” is also an excellent choice!) Love is color blind. People flock to your inner light, not the surface coating. I told her that I know Asian men appreciate Black women. I then said that Asians, especially Koreans, have the same facial shape and features of Black people. People are REALLY NOT that different! So, why highlight differences? All the same, we should learn to appreciate our differences and respect them for what they are.

On the topic of sameness, I recall dancing with the “Imperial Jewel” Korean dance troupe at the Raleigh Dorton Arena’s International Festival some years back. After our group performed, an older Korean woman came up to me and just stared. She looked a bit incredulous so I smiled and said, “Hello.” She replied, “You look like a Korean girl!” I smiled and she repeated, “You look just like a Korean girl!” I smiled again and moved on. I don’t know if I said thank you because I really didn’t know how to take the comment. But she was sincere, so I was fine. After all, my face surely wasn’t painted, my hair was still in my signature two-strand twist style (though rolled into an Asian Chignon) and my skin was as Black as it always has been. I just wore Asian clothes and danced hopefully with the grace of a Korean dancer. Hopefully. But, she made me conscious of the fact that Korean features are very similar to African features, minus the skin tone and the hair texture (collectively speaking). That’s what this woman was speaking to without realizing it. The surface coating was really not relevant—she saw similarity.

I had a similar experience with an Indian man back in college. I had my hair pressed out for some reason that day and I was pumping gas at a gas station. I walked into the station to pay and he greeted me with the biggest smile. I smiled, said a greeting and pulled out my money. He said, “I thought you were an Indian girl.” I considered his words and the idea of sameness. We then had a nice conversation about his country and I left. Again, appreciating sameness brought us together for a moment. In truth and in fact, I’ve never looked like anything but a Black woman. But then, how different is a Black woman from any other woman?

On the side of respecting differences, just last week while conversing with a colleague from one of our field offices—a Caucasian man, I sat with him and shared some personal Beale Street photos and spoke of the sights and sounds of Memphis, Tennessee. He was interested as he was reared in Memphis. He asked, “Why were you in Memphis?” I said, “I was speaking at a hair expo.” He replied, “I’m not surprised. Your hair is always beautiful.” I thanked him and continued the photo gallery. Some may say “why should he say anything at all if he’s married (as am I)?” Honestly, I think he ventured across that threshold because he knows that Black women don’t hear comments like that very often, and it was his own way of tipping the balance just a tad in the direction of truth. He appreciated our differences. In fact, a sister at the Memphis Expo expounded on how just a few hours before coming to my session, an elderly White woman recounted an unusual story: The elderly woman commented to another White person on how beautiful another Black woman was. The elderly woman was surprised when the third party responded rather insistently: “Black women aren’t beautiful!” The sister recounting the story was shocked! I’m not—it’s called language and programming. But, you’d have to come to my lectures to get the full score on that topic. Honestly, it takes great effort to respect differences and come out of the dark but, some are there. The elderly woman sure was! Are you? It requires an open mind, heart and spirit.

We are ALL CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH! God made ALL humanity in His image. So, what’s there to avoid in another human being?! I believe my own outlook has made me an open person. It brings me great joy to be that way. It is the jewel that God has nurtured within me to lighten my heart and bring joy to my spirit, as only He knew why I would need it to face this life journey. I connect through eye contact, a smile, a head nod, and the spirit. Why connect? In short, because I know that everyone feels alone. I connect to remind people, in the smallest of ways

that they are not. While God is surely always with us, He uses people to show us the power, the grace, the beauty and the bounty of His creation. I believe we are connected. All of humanity is connected. Let's learn to live freely and peacefully that way. To feel that you are not alone in this life journey, for even a moment, is a wonderful thing. Free your mind and liberate your spirit to give and receive love. The things that separate us are negligible. The things that separate us are only in our minds.

Black women (I'm going to offend a few people here but I have to speak my truth): Black women (collectively), I believe, are so accustomed to devaluing our gifts (our hair being one of them) and inwardly being ashamed of who we are that we subconsciously believe the Black man is the only man that will love and cherish us for who we are. (Ladies, please reflect on these words long and hard.) Anyone else's love is viewed with a jaundiced eye. "You don't really love me?" is the thought process. I say, "Why NOT?! Are you not worthy to be loved?!" Others value in us what we don't see in ourselves. Open your eyes and see your light! It is radiant and magnificent! Open your mind and your heart. In my view, if you want an Adonis who looks like Thor (Where'd they GET that brother, anyway!) and is as gentle as Mr. Rogers, then radiate light!! He WILL find you!! Some are just too insecure to imagine that such a man would love them. Wake UP!! Others would argue, "I don't want to settle." But, why are you settling for solitude?! It just doesn't make sense. Love is far too important an experience to never be felt. Experience it...with passion!! Love.

I speak to this topic a bit in my hair expo lectures because I believe that we must start within ourselves to transform our relationships and our collective life experiences. Everyone talks about "The Angry Black Woman." Well if society were constantly holding up an image of beauty that is the antithesis of your genetic make-up and telling you, now compete in this beauty contest, "you'd be mad too!" Did you see that Pepsi Max Super Bowl commercial "Love Hurts" that highlighted this theme wonderfully?⁹ Or should I say horribly? I was surprised it made it off of the design floor! A Pepsi soda has not crossed my lips since I saw this commercial on Super Bowl Sunday 2011. But I appreciate it for analysis purposes. Basically, a Black woman treats her husband or boyfriend very rudely denying him all of the indulgent pleasures of life, like the rich foods he wants. At the end of the clip, they both sit on a park bench and a young White female jogger comes by and sits at the end of the bench. She smiles in the direction of the couple and waves. The Black woman sees her man grinning at the young woman and throws her Pepsi can at him, missing and hitting the girl instead. The couple looks at each other shocked, and runs off leaving the White girl on the ground cringing in pain.

My point with the video is that, there is no competition. Only love. Scarcity breeds competition. Know that. Why couldn't the Black sister see that the White sister was smiling and waving at her too? Why wasn't she open to see and feel that love? Why do we choose to judge circumstances on the side of negativity, thus always seeing the glass as half-empty? I say, come out of the matrix and come out of your comfort zone. In truth and in fact, it's not a comfort to you at all. It's a freezer. It makes you cold and distant...and maybe even angry. Love is larger than individuals. There is no competition in love. And there should NEVER be fear in love either. One day, maybe we can all see that truth a little more clearly. Hopefully. As I see it, any sister, Caucasian or otherwise, who can love and nurture a Black man and build his self-image deserves respect because she's helping the wider society—through love. I honor her for being his strength and his support; his helper and his comforter; the bearer of his children and the source of his joy. I appreciate her and respect her because she ultimately is who he chose and who was chosen for him. Likewise, I would bet money that she's doing a very good job of things. My own German step-mother is no exception. Did she and my Mom compete for my Dad? I say no. In truth, my parents had released each other years before. It was just not official.

⁹ *Love Hurts*. Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, Online video clip. YouTube. Accessed on 1 Aug. 2011.

Today, my parents clearly still love each other. They've just found different ways to express that love. They don't need to "possess" each other to share that love. That is beautiful!

So in the words of *En Vogue*: "Free your mind, and the rest will follow." When we love ourselves and the world unconditionally, we don't need to worry about the rest. Love will flow from all corners of the universe like a raging river. And yes, even the Black man will be compelled to stand up and take notice. But, he may just have to stand in line because when a woman is cherished and nurtured, she will love freely. And when she experiences Asian, Caucasian or Hispanic love, she may just never go back. Ultimately, love is blind to condition, circumstance, adversity and doubt. It just is. It is timeless and inspiring. Without it, what would life be? In my view, it would not be worth living...AT ALL! Experience it! Believe, and restrain the desire to judge the love that others have to offer you. See all of Creation and be open to give and receive love. Love will find you, and when it does, love freely and unapologetically. You deserve it.





(Re)Discovering the Pleasures of a (Mineral) Bath



*Context: This article appeared in the October 2011 issue of *An Nature*, following a girls' week-end retreat in the NC Mountains. It was just karmic alignment that we were all natural women. You can't tell from this photo but it was raining when it was taken. Luckily for us, that was a non-issue. I included this article in this collection as a reminder that sometimes we need to commune with kindred spirits and have the group support that is needed to go forth and support others. Hopefully from this read, you'll be inspired to schedule your own ladies' retreat.*

When I reflect on the simple pleasures of life, I think the one that has had the most profound impact on my own spiritual well-being, outside of prayer and sleep, is a long, hot bath. It is something that many women take for granted but which is sorely missed when it is not available. I know because when I lived in Jamaica during the 90s, I was deprived of this simple pleasure for 7 long years! Sure, Jamaica's got plenty of water but a water heater is a rare commodity. So, you learn to take cold showers and feel satisfied. It was in Jamaica that I first discovered a mineral spring. The town where it is located, ironically enough is called Bath, St. Thomas. There, I experienced the wonder of steaming hot water rising out of the ground full of nourishing minerals and nutrients. I recall putting my feet in the water and having to extract them because of the intensity of the heat. I always thought I had a great tolerance for heat but that water was rising up out of the Earth! It was intense. I observed a few Rasta men closer to the source of the stream bathing and splashing their bodies as if the water were lukewarm. Someone cautioned me not to go closer to the source because the water only gets hotter from where I was standing. That was a novel and enlightening experience that I enjoyed and will always remember because I knew that Nature is perfect in every way. Sometimes, we just have to take time to appreciate it.

The funny thing about my Jamaican experience was that I didn't realize how much the luxury of a hot bath meant to me until I walked into my current home. The real estate agent showed me different rooms, and I smiled and nodded. But when I saw the garden bathtub with the large picture window framing it, I was sold. I really didn't need to see much more of the house but, I did still like other features about it. Through it all, my bathtub is still my favorite part of the house. It is uniquely my own. My sons don't use it, my husband doesn't use it. It's all mine. And I'm cool with that.

Our girl's group experienced the luxury of a spa mineral bath while retreating in Hot Springs, NC. (I guess they always name the town after these nourishing water sources. Palm Springs, Florida is another example.) Meiko was a wonderful retreat coordinator who scheduled us for a group session on the Saturday afternoon of our stay. We had no idea what to expect. Thankfully, it rained before our session started. With water temperatures well over 100 degrees, it would've been excessive heat to bathe outdoors with the sun beaming down on top of us. Instead, there was a gentle breeze that blew through our outhouse while the rain pattered

on the tin roof. It was divine! We bathed for about an hour. I really don't remember much conversation because I was just too present in the experience of it all. Afterwards, I had the most restful sleep that I remember in a long time. In fact, the next morning, someone in the group announced that more than half of our group was snoring in deep slumber. I said "Really? Who? Imagine my shock to see my roommate look at me with raised eyebrows as if to say, "Look no further than the mirror, my sister." "What? Me? Do I snore?" Yes, girl! You were on your stomach knocked out! I thought, "That's crazy. Lloyd has never said anything about me snoring." (Incidentally as soon as I got home, Lloyd and I exchanged greetings and then I dove into the primary thought in my mind: "Why didn't you tell me I snore?" His response was, "Oh Gosh! You must have been REALLY tired!" And that was that. Twenty years of marriage and this man has NEVER even commented on the fact that I SNORE!! That's crazy! But, he is a gentleman so he takes the whole package "as is" without a complaint. Amazing 'cause I would have said something LONG AGO!! Who could resist! ☺) Well, in a word, that's the power of a wonderful spa mineral bath. It takes out the toxins, the anxiety and the stress leaving you relaxed and whole! The photo above is not of our spa bath but of our creation of an equally wonderful experience the next morning in our cabin Jacuzzi. Since it was raining in this photo and the water was a steady 100 degrees, we bathed, laughed and enjoyed the experience of it all for about two hours before emerging from the bath, wrinkled and content.

So, what's a restful retreat got to do with you? In a word: Everything. Women are workers, nurturers and supports. Too often, we burn the candle at both ends and wonder why we feel drained and weary. I'm guilty as charged at times but I honestly don't know if I'd have it any other way. I guess I'm kind of weird like that but I honestly enjoy my life. All the same, rest is essential to the mind, body and soul. When I talk with other ladies about stresses and life challenges, I say "You should go home and take a nice, hot bath. They often seem indifferent to the notion, leaving me compelled to wonder if they're really present when they take one. So to anyone reading this article, I say, treat yourself. Go out and purchase some Dead Sea Salt, Dr. Bronner's (for bubbles), lavender oil and candles. Run the water to your preferred temperature, play your favorite CD and sink into the luxury of your own personal spa experience. Relax and enjoy. You deserve it. And if you're ever in Hot Springs, NC, be sure to have a mineral bath while in town. If you're traveling with friends, Tub #14 is the group tub so be sure to ask for it when you schedule your appointment. Some guests advise that wine and cheese is permitted at your discretion so you be the judge of that. But in all, you'll be glad you did.





Pondering the Depths of a Vapor

Context: I wrote this essay immediately following a wonderful stroll in nature that I took on July 20, 2012. For this moment in time, I felt an abiding peace and fulfillment with life. I knew that I would have to record the moment, to the extent possible. Because I know that many sisters have never taken a leisurely stroll in the rain, it was most appropriate that this moment demanded to be immortalized through prose. Words came at me in a frenzied race to be selected to tell the story. I had to quell them to enjoy the moment, knowing that the right words would come at the appointed time. When I got to a computer, they poured out like water from a gourd. You may ask: What's the title about? Well, read the essay and you decide...

On Tuesday, July 10th, I don my walking clothes and go for my much anticipated stroll with nature. Thunderstorms are in the forecast; the sky is overcast. I know it will rain but the thought of an umbrella feels just a little inauthentic. So, I zip up my light exercise jacket and stretch my legs into heaven. The air is pregnant with moisture and the prospects of a downpour. I smile at the perfection of the moment. And then she arrives. Light droplets of rain commit suicide on hot pavement. My mind considers: "There's still time to go back for your umbrella. See, that lady has hers." I smile and *walk on by*. I turn into the neighborhood that warms my heart every time I greet it. With six-story high oaks and maples, I trace my familiar path with my head looking up in awe and wonder. What an interesting perspective to walk my usual path while looking up. Things look a lot different: more peaceful, more graceful. So beautiful...or just different. I notice a tree that I would love to climb if there were just a few lower branches upon which to hoist my weight. And next to it, another climber's dream. My sons would find a way up. As for me, I remain grounded. I smile at the cycle of life, and vaguely notice that the birds are becoming a bit more talkative.

And then she arrives. A quickening. Dutiful droplets with a more frenzied cadence batter the hot pavement sending up the smell of relief. I walk under the trees and give thanks that they are so plentiful. I, for the most part, remain dry. Ahhh, the smell of pine from the fresh, newly moistened needles and cones. I inhale with abandon and close my eyes to indulge the fragrance. Exhale. Has anyone ever made pine-scented perfume? There's one for Chanel! The squirrels are happily frolicking and hardly paying any attention to me. I prefer it that way. Somehow, I feel connected when they remain in the zone, as am I. I walk on and listen. What is that sound? It's *the sound of silence*...though the rain symphony drones all around me.

And then she arrives. Bands of celestial tidal waves drench the earthline as sheets of inspiration. Like a painter splattering power and ingenuity on canvas, I bow my head to creation's majesty and I *float on*. The trees are no longer a source of refuge so I succumb to the inevitable truth of my existence. I walk openly in the torrential downpour...for a time, not even remotely deterred from my usual path. And then as if to say, "Just testing you," Mother Nature subsides for a spell and settles into a steady drum roll that is gentle, relaxed and ready for the long haul. I too settle into her rhythm, a little relieved that she has granted temporary mercies. I hear no thunder and see no flashes of lightning. Good to go. There's only Nature's tears of joy, and all of the foliage of University Drive expresses their appreciation like giant fern trees in a rain forest. Just yesterday, those little purple-hued plants creeping along the edge of the sidewalk were contemplating the thought of their demise. Today, they are radiant in their full plumage. I too am thankful. I marvel at the beauty and balance of nature. In this perfect moment, Nature and I are lovers reunited after a long separation. I am pleased that she is so welcoming of this prodigal child. She is enamored with the warmth of my breath.

As I continue on in the silence and majesty of the moment, I notice drops of rain dew accumulating at the tips of my twisted tresses and then leaping into space with the rhythm of my stride. Water has dripped down my face and into my mouth and I'm aware of the flavor of sweetness on my lips. What in the world does Oraje put in his Banana Cream Leave-in Conditioner anyway?! The smell conjures memories of Southern baked banana pudding; it looks about the same. Who knew it would taste as wonderful! I smile. The birds are silent now. All is still and quiet, except for the sounds of my rubber soles on pavement. The front of my pants is drenched, while the sides and backs

of my legs are almost dry. *Imagine*. After all that rain, how could I still feel comfortable within my soaked clothes? Mystery solved: they aren't soaked. (Things that make you go hmm.)

Humidity lingers along the earthline. The air is as full of intensity as *midnight at the oasis*. Yet, I feel relieved to have this jacket. Then, I'm conscious of a peculiar smell. I search my database to find a close match only to discover that it is most omni-present. It is the smell of nothingness. No smell in particular stands out and lingers on the wind. I search evermore to discern whether my mind is deceived. How can nothingness have a smell? And then, it comes to me. I smell the fragrance of everything blended into oneness. It is the smell of everything and nothing at the same time. I reflect on this new discovery and suddenly smile to myself. Now, the mystery of black and white seems to make perfect sense. Black and white is the same phenomenon. Yet, humankind in a flash of "brilliance" looks at this divine simplicity, labels it as hues on polar opposite sides of the color spectrum and calls the hypothesis enlightenment. I snicker with empathy for the human condition. It is my condition. It is somewhat comical indeed.

As I awaken to full ignorance of myself as separate from Nature, I notice that my clothes are drying. It could only be the heat that's drying them, as the rain has not totally subsided and the sun remains aloof. I contemplate the possibilities of actually returning to the office dry. A smile shadows the corners of my lips and Mother Nature says "check mate." A final torrential downpour alights seemingly from out of nowhere. Had I not been unplugged at that critical moment, I would have better noticed her mood. I smile at the folly of Man and mind and trek along in the beauty of showering bounty. As I turn the final corner leading to my office, the sun peeps from behind a cloud and seems to be cajoling, "*Hello, it's me.*" The entire duration of my journey was blessed by Lady Rain. Now, Ra seems to be saying, "If I had come out sooner, you would not have forgotten yourself and therefore would not have enjoyed yourself quite as deliciously." I acknowledge this truth and contemplate this parable: Since the human body is 79% water, does that explain why I feel dry though I'm soaking wet. Am I wet or dry? I conclude that the square root of wet multiplied by the inverse of the square root of dry equals one peace and contentment. And that, I AM. I give thanks. God is good!





All-Natural: How Practical Is It?

Context: This article appeared in the March 2013 issue of Au Naturel and is an attempt to bring balance to the question of whether women with natural hair should be using only 100% all-natural products. I've heard differing opinions on the issue, and naturally, I have my own. So, take a read and form your own opinion. But hopefully, this will expand your thoughts on the subject.

Understanding the Question

As more and more women become conscious of their natural beauty and the absolute power and poetry of a natural look, there are the inevitable questions about products and whether they're all-natural. It's usually about the second or third question that I get when people discover that I'm in the natural hair care business. What types of products do you use and are they all-natural? These days, I think the question is like a rite of passage, kind of like club membership: If you don't answer this question correctly, then you're not really *down*. It's all about what you know and is it good enough. There's a hint of conspiracy that goes with the question as well because if you know something I don't, I WANT to be in the know! BUT, if you don't know as much as me,...WELL... So often, I smile inwardly at the question but I answer it honestly—which is often where the one-two punch comes in. You see, my Momma didn't raise no fool. One of the first things I learned about argumentation and debate (and don't get it twisted: this question IS a debate, as innocent as it seems) is that you can best kill an argument by attacking the fundamental assumptions upon which the question rests. The inherent assumption upon which the question "Which products do you use?" lies is that products are somehow the answer to the natural hair care question. So, I kill the assumption. And I play dirty...meaning, I play to WIN! What can I say: I'm a Western woman.

My course of response is typically something like this: Well, I'll have to be honest with you. I'm not on the product bandwagon. You won't ever hear me tell anyone that they should or should not use any product. I can tell you what we use in our salon but the products that we use are not 100% all-natural. Why? Well firstly, I'm a realist and I have to be true to myself. When I started wearing my two-strand twists about 30 years ago (**Note:** *This is where I establish my superior authority and vast experience with natural hair without sounding pompous or arrogant.—Don't you feel my humility?... Yes, that's a joke! ☺*), there were no natural hair salons, no YouTube videos, few if any books (and surely no Google or Internet on which to find them if they existed), and no natural hair care product lines. There was simply me and my Mom grappling with the realities of African-American hair care. We did what made sense and we used what was available. When I got to college as a poor student and had to expand my own knowledge base in the absence of Momma and a steady cash flow, "available" usually translated to Suave (because it was cheap) or Crème of Nature shampoo and Queen Helen Cholesterol conditioner. In other words, I used what was available to me because that's simply all there was. My hair grew because I cared for it as it presented. I worked with it rather than against it. So in our salon, we emphasize the care that is essential to a beautiful mane of hair and not the products which are simply tools of the trade—not magic bullets. If I were to tell you that you should use any particular product, I would be dishonest because that's simply a lie that I don't believe. Needless to say, I never get a follow-up question about products. The assumption has been effectively kilt!

What's the Natural Hair Care Solution?

So where does that leave the person struggling with choices: Again I say, understand motivations. What are you looking for? You don't need to fix what is not broken. Natural hair is not broken metaphorically speaking—though, we all know that poor hair care, mind care and spirit care can lead to breakage and a whole lot more. So if you feel urgency and angst about ANYTHING, step back and think: What is that energy about? Answer that question for yourself honestly and prepare to be fully liberated. For example if it's about the *shine*, come out of the Matrix, my sister. It's not that deep. Of course I could spin an argument on just how deep THAT rabbit hole **really** is.☺ But if your concerns are about conditioning and general maintenance, do your research and choose what works for you. If you have allergies which require you to be selective, by all means,

do your research and choose wisely once you have all the facts. Check out my article on Products, products everywhere: Which one's right for me? for more information on this topic.

Nature rules; but, how practical is all-natural?

But then, there's the legitimate argument about how and why organic, holistic and all-natural products are just better for you all the way around. I won't argue with that fact. It's true. Public health statistics prove that the move towards whole foods, organic produce and non-GMO products is a legitimate need. God made nature so anything natural has got to be better. Humans are the ones who thought to "improve" upon nature to create the alternative. Surely, we've had legitimate reasons to do so. I won't ever argue with any technology which provides *beat*—natural or artificial. That is just too much of a luxury to give up. But, not all departures from nature have been productive. *Did you know that killer bees were created when scientists got together and decided to "create" a more efficient honey bee? (Note: I heard this history back in the 80s when my grandmother was an active bee-keeper. Today's sources don't quite describe the reason for the problem in quite the same way as this one did.) Kind of like Frankenstein, they wanted the bee to be a more efficient producer of honey (as if 'busy as a bee, is just not enough for them) and wound up creating a bee that is more aggressive, procreates more rapidly and spends less time making honey. As Momma always quotes: God is not mocked. You get what you put out into the universe: You want productivity? Well, these bees procreate! With that said, they labeled the bee Africanized when they realized how "wild and crazy" it was. But, it was first produced in South America. The African bee species was cross-bred with European bee varieties to create this hybrid. Why wasn't it called a Europeanized bee, seeing how it was bred and created? It's kind of sad how twisted the mind can be, but surely no surprise. But, I digress. Natural will always be better.*

But with that said, I have to be honest about the realities of 21st century life. There's nothing natural about the way we live. Read the book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan or a truly eye-opening excursion down the agricultural pathways to our plates. As a vegetarian, I was gravely disappointed with my own food choices after reading the book, but am honestly just too comfortable with the *status quo* to choose to do anything about it. In short, if you knew half as much about what went into the chicken or beef you ate for dinner last night, you would realize the hypocrisy of your own insistence on *all-natural* hair care products. Some of us are truly informed about the holistic choices we make but most of us simply don't do the math required to extend the "natural" argument to all aspects of our lives. Does it make sense that the products that we put in our hair should be more natural than what goes into our bodies? Said another way: Did you know that if I'm truly to be all-natural hair service salon, I could shampoo your hair with baking soda and vinegar and condition it with a home-made mayonnaise? ... The question is: Would you want me too? Yeah, that's what I thought. The truth of the matter is that *all-natural* doesn't consistently jibe with our lifestyle or our desires. Practicality trumps idealism daily.

But have we gone too far?

I attended an exceptional lecture a few years back by a medical doctor who expounded brilliantly on the impact of a technological lifestyle on human development. Did you know that pregnant women should not sleep under electric blankets due to increased risk of miscarriage? He further elaborated that as a society, our standards for the introduction of new products into the marketplace is predicated on the extent to which the products are carcinogenic. We, however have NO MEANS whatsoever to assess the impact of new products and technologies on human development in utero or otherwise! HOW DEEP IS THAT??!!! The standards of carcinogenicity vs. fetal development are on the same plane but at opposite ends of the spectrum. It's all about the reprogramming of human cells, but one is about the end game and the other is about the beginning. (*There's the alpha and the omega again.*) So when we wear or carry our cell phones everywhere we go, what is the long-term impact of those electro-magnetic waves passing through our bodies on a constant basis? Kind of scary really. I mean, people RUN from lightning for a legitimate reason! Yet, we surround ourselves with electricity in all that we do. Is it healthy? It's surely not "natural" to do so though electricity is a factor of nature. He then noted an astounding statistic: In the 1980's autism prevalence was reported as 1 in 10,000. In the nineties, prevalence was 1 in 2500 and later 1 in 1000. As of 2012, the CDC reported prevalence as 1 in 88 children. He capped things off with the absolutely detrimental effects of something as seemingly harmless as bottled water. His fundamental argument was that we have NO IDEA of the effects of our so called advancements on human evolution. In short, *natural* is definitely better but where does it fit in a Western society? I find it absolutely fascinating and ironic that one of the characteristic traits of an autistic child is anti-social

behavior. Have we not created an anti-social way of life through all of our advancements in technology? With all the talk of a global village, people are more alone and depressed than ever. Are the fruits of our labor making their way into the very DNA of our offspring? Are we effectively reprogramming humanity? Perhaps to survive *happily* in the future that we're creating, our children will NEED to be autistic? Talk about things that make you go hmm.

So I say all of that to say, if you're going to be adamant about 100% all-natural hair care products, that's fine. But for the sake of consistency, consider your food choices, the car you drive (and whether you should even drive) and the materials you wear on your body; and consider reducing your use of electronics. I'm not trying to sound flippant but, I AM a realist and a Westerner woman--a product of my society. All-natural, while *king* is in some ways contrary to our social reality in a modern day world; so inconsistency reigns. Let's find the balance...individually and collectively. Love and light.





Speaking My Own Truth: Lessons Learned

Context: This article appeared in the April 2014 issue of Au Naturel newsletter. It's just some thoughtful reflections on my permanent residence somewhere left of center and my innate desire to influence others to be true to self above all else.

A few things that speaking on the lecture circuit has taught me over the years is this: 1) I dance on the radical side of life; 2) Not everyone is ready for the message I have to share; and 3) I can't predict who will be most impacted by what I have to share. It's a reality that always propels me into the depths of my own psyche to ponder who and where would I be if I had a different beginning, a different experience, a different life. Each time I ask myself the question, I'm forced to give thanks for my people: the predecessors who raised and nurtured me into the natural woman that I am today.

My family has always questioned...well, everything! At seven years of age, my Mom told me about the Tuskegee studies long before the rest of the world knew about them. She taught me very early to ask questions and to "always know what people are capable of." Being young people during the Civil Rights era, my family viewed the status quo and mainstream ANYTHING with a jaundiced eye. If it can't stand up to the test of reason, logic or Divinity, then something's wrong and you should consider the source...always. One day, when I came home from my girlfriend's house rather early, my Mom asked why. I said, "They're all going to tan in the sun so, I came home." Momma simply demanded: "Get your swim suit and go tan too!" I thought she was crazy but there was a lesson therein. She said, "The sun was made for you. Your skin knows what to do with sun rays. You don't have to hide from the sun. Join in the fun!" And so, I did. And at the end of the day, I was a healthy deep mahogany and my friends were all sporting sunburns. That simple lesson forced me to reconsider how I perceive dark skin despite the programming of the wider society. At that time, I did not need to learn to see the beauty of light or white skin. That program was well entrenched. But now, I was empowered to see a deeper truth. And I've been questioning the programming ever since. If my Mom had been less confident in her own beauty, she could never have conveyed that message.

With that said, I do not purport to suggest that questioning established beliefs or the status quo is somehow inherently righteous or even appropriate. But for me, it undergirds my willingness to speak a truth that cuts, sometimes deeply. I am a black woman so I know the black experience. I feel no shame or embarrassment to speak our truth in mixed company and to shine the microscope on our deepest insecurities and fears. Sometimes, I see the discomfort that's created by my words and I empathize with the angst and sometimes the confusion. But, I don't alter the message because it is a universal truth.

Embrace the beauty of you is a message from God that is etched on the eternal conscience of the universe. It will stand the test of time and will live long after I'm dead and buried. It is a message for everyone because we all have some inherent insecurities that make us inclined to deny our self-worth—to pale in comparison. I truly feel honored to be one of the many voices delivering this message for the ages and I pray for all who hear the message that they may apply it to their own life in a way that makes sense to them.

With that said, the message inherently means to adopt and be your own truth—not anyone else's. If straight hair is your thing, have at it? But if you believe that your texture is somehow *less than* because it's not straight or wavy, then I challenge you to look deeply and understand more broadly. Understand me: I am not suggesting that any woman should be cool with alopecia and just "get over it." But if there's a way to avoid or delay its onset, there's room for guidance. All the same, I personally pray that if alopecia comes to greet me, no matter the cause, I am able to carry it with the grace and dignity of Sandra Dubose—2011 Mrs. Black North Carolina. Chic is phenomenall! I likewise confess that I am unapologetic in my disdain for descriptions of black hair which suggest that it is anything less than a beautiful gift from God. I regularly hear women describe their hair texture as "not good." I don't always correct them because correction requires more than a few minutes of edification for the message to truly be appreciated. If there's not ample time to deliver the full message, why engage? But, I note the error all the same, offer our assistance in whatever way possible and move on. I'm not here to change the world or to change your mind. As

I stated many years ago in one of my articles: *“I am not on a mission to PROVE that natural hair is beautiful. Why should I try to convince the world that the sun is hot or that the sea is vast or that a baby is precious? I believe those things with my heart and soul and really do not wish to argue these points with anyone. If you don’t believe, then maybe you’re not ready for us. But, you are welcome to come and look and learn. Only you can see the sun’s rays, feel its heat and know the truth.”* So, I WILL speak the truth. And as we know, sometimes the truth is an offense. Sometimes, the sting is too uncomfortable for some to entertain. And for others, it’s just the jolt they needed to wake up. At the recent sojourn with the students of Mary E. Phillips High School, one young woman turned her body at a complete right angle so that she would not have to look at me anymore as I spoke hair truths. On the other hand, a teacher wearing a very blond hair weave which frankly hid the beauty of her natural olive complexion came up to me, thanked me and confessed that she learned a lot. And still another very handsome, well dressed young man named Josh said he attended the session because he may have a daughter or son in the future and he wants to know what to tell them. He looked like a football jock—minus any arrogance, so I really didn’t expect his words of appreciation afterwards. I was really glad I came. I will never know who or how my words impacted the attendants. But, I was there, and they listened. That is enough. As the parable of the sower implies, I do not expect all to hear and understand. Such is the plight of any teacher. We can only pray for the best. In all, I press on, and give thanks for yet another opportunity to shine the light on the seed of discontent that lies in our own hearts. And to encourage all to “embrace the beauty of you.” I do.





Army Grooming Standards Challenge the Natural Life

Context: In May of 2014, there were some pretty hot debates going on concerning Black women and Army grooming standards. The standards were recently re-issued and it appeared to many that some very targeted critiques were being made of African American hairstyles. The Army clearly has its reasoning for defining what standards are acceptable and what are not. I won't venture to know the ins and outs of military combat. But all the same, the nature of the debate piqued my interest, so this May 2014 issue of Au Naturel had some food for thought.

Okay, ladies. Here's one for the history books. Some of you may have heard of a recent decision by the military to revise their grooming standards (US Army Grooming Standards, March 2014), which naturally includes guidance for hairstyling. Well based on the recent revisions, the women of the Congressional Black Caucus banded together to oppose the new guidelines and to ask that they be reviewed.

This news came out a day before my presentation at the NUSOL Natural Hair and Beauty Expo so naturally, I was back to the drawing board to incorporate this example into my arsenal of metaphors on natural hair as the Phoenix rising. It blended masterfully if I may say so myself. The night before, we had a very interesting debate in the salon about the whole affair. My client happened to be ex-military so she acknowledged the need for clearer guidance while the rest of us listened. She recounted how her own sergeant was often seen with her Kevlar (helmet) wobbling atop her braids as she held her rifle ready for battle. In her words, "You can get killed that way, OR get someone else killed." So with that, the debate was largely concluded. After all, is it not, as Kat Williams stated, "a uniformed service"? I get it. But, some things are truly more rational and justifiable than others. Check out the next four pages of guidelines to understand the depth and breadth of my argument:

FEMALE UNAUTHORIZED HAIRSTYLES

3 Braids

- ❑ Multiple braiding (more than 2 braids) must be small (~1/4") in diameter
- ❑ Headband is not plain
- ❑ Twists are not authorized

FEMALE UNAUTHORIZED HAIRSTYLES

- ❑ Unauthorized device (claw clip)
- ❑ Loose, unsecured hair
- ❑ Bulk of hair exceeds more than 2" from scalp

FEMALE BRAIDS

- ❑ Multiple braiding (more than 2 braids) is authorized.
- ❑ Must be of uniform dimension, small in diameter (approximately 1/4"), show no more than 1/8" of scalp between the braids
- ❑ Must be tightly interwoven to present a neat, professional, well-groomed appearance
- ❑ Foreign material (beads or decorative items) will not be braided into the hair
- ❑ Can be worn loose per medium hair length guidelines or secured to the head in the same manner as described for medium or long length hair styles
- ❑ Ends must be secured only with inconspicuous rubber bands
- ❑ Multiple braids must encompass the whole head
- ❑ When braids are not worn loosely, but braided close to the scalp, the braids must start at the front of the head

FEMALE TWISTS & DREADLOCKS

- ❑ Twists
 - ❑ Defined as twisting two distinct strands of hair around one another to create a twisted rope-like appearance
 - ❑ Although some twists may be temporary (can be easily untwisted), they are unauthorized
 - ❑ This includes twists formed against the scalp or worn in a free-hanging style
- ❑ Dreadlocks
 - ❑ Defined as any matted or locked coils or ropes of hair (or extensions)
 - ❑ Any style of dreadlock (against the scalp or free-hanging) are not authorized
 - ❑ Any unkempt or matted braids or cornrows are considered dreadlocks and are not authorized

When I first read these guidelines, I got hot around the collar and had to readjust my posture in my seat. In short, these guidelines oppose every aspect of a natural Black woman. First, why are twists not authorized? In my mind, that's insane and not easily justified by anyone who knows anything about hair. Why? Because braids ARE authorized. How can braids be authorized and twists are NOT? Twists are defined as two strands rotating around one another to create a twisted rope-like appearance. Why are three strands braided seen as "more acceptable" than two-strands, and thus authorized? If I were a woman in the military right now, I would intentionally three-strand twist my hair—creating the same rope-like appearance but using three strands instead of two, and challenge ANYONE to define it as a twist rather than a braid! In my view, twists are superior to braids because: they can be more quickly completed; more easily loosened; and are less damaging to the hair when small. I would defy anyone telling me I have to braid rather than twist my hair. And that explains why I kept MY b--- a-- OUT of the military!!!—among other things... Non-conformist to the core, though surprisingly conservative. Go figure! Still, I grappled in my mind to understand the logic of this reasoning and could only conclude that White or other non-Black ethnicities CANNOT by definition twist their hair (without it unraveling and generally looking unkempt); but they can braid it. So, the guidance is directed squarely at the Black women. Call me paranoid? WELL, CRAZY BEGETS PARANOIA! So, I'm in good company.

Slide 2 says the "bulk of hair exceeds more than 2 inches from the scalp." Well, that's what natural black hair does BY DEFINITION. We were born that way. So in short, the guidance is saying, "Don't be what you are." Don't get me wrong. I understand the need to secure a Kevlar but the guidance should be more about the hows and wherefores of doing that than the texture and nature of the hair itself. My lectures often talk about the technical differences between barbering and cosmetology within the beauty care industry. This illustration squarely says, "Chic, go to the barber." And many do.

As far as dreadlocks are concerned, I would argue that the guidance should speak to the size of the locks and the ability to secure them much more than it should speak to the entirety of the style technique. The range of style capabilities with dreadlocks is multi-dimensional. If I wear small sisterlocks and keep them braided and secured, would anyone even know that I have locks? Insane! It's hard to imagine that this is the Army's best guidance in March 2014.

Based on the firestorm that ensued, word is that the Army is now reviewing its new hair rules. It just goes to show, you can arrest our men, you can kill our children and you can abuse us in the workforce, but DONT TALK ABOUT OUR HAIR!!!!!! Cause we'll take you down with a quick-ness! Yes, I said it. But then, I'm conflicted about it all. Yes, I'm glad sisters took a stand and are seeing action arise accordingly. But then, it's kind of bittersweet in my mind because there are so many other things in life that have not garnered the quick response of the Congressional Black Caucus—though surely worthy. So ultimately, I see this action as a back-door maintenance of the "status quo." After all, the military can't afford to have Black women silently opting out of military service. That would amount to a loss of 31% of all females serving, though Black women make up only about 16% of the female population in general. So, I'm compelled to ask about the motives of these CBC women. In the end, I keep this all in perspective by reminding myself that the military IS about killing people. So ultimately, I summarize the whole affair as a: "Render unto Caesar..." and keep it moving.





What is the color of love?

Context: This essay is a beautiful reflective piece that was honestly inspired by some of the beautiful people I have met of late who have the presence of mind to step outside of their comfort zones and define love in a kaleidoscope of possibilities that is truly color blind in its brilliance. It appeared in June-July 2014 issue of Au Naturel.

I've been moved of late by the large number of White women that I've recently met who have adopted Black children, daughters in particular. Invariably, a ready topic of conversation becomes hair care. I find it amusing because I will never forget in the 80s, leaving the movie theater after watching "School Daze" in Richmond with some close girlfriends, and hearing one of the White sisters in the crowd complaining upon exit from the theater. "I didn't understand that movie AT ALL!! What's the big deal about hair anyway?!" A Black sister in the crowd who overheard her then said, "Well, Black women DO talk about hair!" The White sister quickly retorted, "Is that ALL they talk about?!" Well, those were fighting words in light of the tone of delivery and the nature of the movie we'd just seen, so my girlfriends and I raised our eyebrows, looked at chic, looked at each other and quickly hastened our exit to the car. I don't really know how that whole affair ended. But, I'm left with a passive amusement when I reflect on those words "What's the big deal about hair anyway?!" and I think of all of the Caucasians currently involved in Black hair care. In a word you could say that now, "They get it!*" At least, many of them do.

When it comes to the care of their Black daughter's hair, they are as enraptured and consumed as we have been. They spend hours styling, sending pictures, seeking advice and demanding to know "What products should I be using?" My close colleague and friend has a teenage daughter who is drop-dead gorgeous and VERY NATURAL!! Her Mom would have it no other way. She confessed to me that when her daughter started styling her own hair, "She was blissfully relieved." Likewise, she has confessed that she can't wait until her rebellious daughter has a daughter of her own and she has to care for her hair. In my friend's words, "Then she'll better understand all I've done for her!!" I laughed because I empathize. Black hair is a cultural anomaly that must be embraced and fully integrated in order to raise a healthy child. Another woman with two beautiful Haitian twin daughters recently came to the salon and said, "I have to learn more. I don't want my daughters walking around with everyone saying, 'Yeah, those girls have got a White Momma!'" I was truly impressed by her desire to learn. She is doing expertly well because she vehemently wants to know more. As I took her twists alose to style her daughters' hair, I said, these are Senegalese twists that you've done. IMPRESSIVE!!!! Most Black women don't know how to do them. And let me be the first to tell you, many of us don't know how to care for our hair either. Don't ever let anyone lay a guilt trip on you." She then told me of a website (Chocolate Hair Vanilla Care) that she has consulted for styling tips—created by a White woman raising Black daughters.

I bring this issue to the attention of Au Naturel readers because we somehow believe that we are alone in our understanding of Black hair care. The reality is that I KNOW that part of the reason that natural Black hair is now so widely embraced is that so many White people are raising Black children. I'm sorry to place the impetus for change largely in the hands of mainstream society; but, I know what I'm talking about. When I opened *Schatzi's*, I told my husband that natural hair is not a fad. This time (meaning after the 60s), it's here to stay. When I see a White brother so meticulously working on his Black daughter's hair without pulling and yanking, I feel inspired and so thankful for change. When I see images like this, I know that absolute acceptance is inevitable. After all, it was a White man that created the Sesame Street video: I love my hair as some of you regular readers may recall.

In some ways, I know that the tide of change may make the current way of thinking and being a thing of the past. *Schatzi's* serves primarily a clientele of African heritage. But when Paul Mitchell's, Great Clips and JCPenney start offering the same services that we offer, can we compete?! I think not. It won't happen tomorrow, but I truly believe it's inevitable. That is how many soul food and other black restaurants went under. McDonald's, Woolworth and Burger King desegregated and the effect was murder on the Black restaurant business. Honestly, many sisters would love to have their hair styled by an Asian chic who is just as competent as Shenequa and who may even charge less. Yes, I hear the train coming. I see the future. Am I mad about it? Not one bit! I got into this business to be an impetus of change. But one thing about change: It cannot stagnate, by definition! It continues to morph. As for us here at *Schatzi's*, we're not worried. Our prices can't be beat and the quality of our hair care services are par

excellence. So to Paul Mitchell and JCPenney, I say “BRING IT!!” But, you better do your research. This game is not for the faint of heart or for the purely profit-driven. That’s why I don’t worry.

And to all of those White Moms and Dads out there who are on a mission to safeguard their child’s self-esteem and beauty: I salute you. The beautiful Black girls with White parents that I’ve recently met came into the world as malnourished children--seemingly forgotten by the wider society. And then, God spoke to a White woman and turned her into a Black Momma. How divinely beautiful is that?! I have not raised Black daughters myself so, these women will have experiences rearing black daughters that I can only imagine. I thank God for them. No Black person was in line to adopt these children. To their credit, they have opened their homes and their hearts to beautiful children in need of love. An entire generation of multi-ethnic households is coming of age and those of us who have lived in monochromatic realities are being challenged to see the beauty and depth of contrast. The world is a beautiful place. Thank God for change and for love.

So with all of that, what then is the color of love? Well, if you have to ask, I guess you just weren’t paying attention. But if you must know, it’s the color of God. Embrace the beauty of you.





Belief, balance and blessings: An exposition on “reality” from my humble perspective

Context: This essay was a serious expository piece that I crafted for Au Naturel on “life” written in August 2014. For context, consider these words:

Keep your mind ever on the Star, but let your eyes watch over your footsteps, lest you fall into the mire by reason of your upward gaze. Remember the Divine Paradox, that while the Universe IS NOT, still IT IS. Remember ever the Two Poles of Truth the Absolute and the Relative. Beware of Half-Truths. The Kybalion

As a young girl of about 7-10 years (I don’t recall exactly), I remember talking with my mother and saying “This is not real.” Her natural response was to ask: “What is not real?” I said, “THIS! LIFE. What we see.” Being naturally concerned about my mental well-being, she barked, “YES, IT IS!! And don’t you forget it!” I laugh upon reflection because; I totally understand why she said that. The natural reflex of a Mom is to protect her child. And in Mom’s eyes, *I was slipping*. It was time to snap me back to reality, and place me on “firm ground.” I get it. But, I’ve always been an abstract thinker. The net effect of this exchange however was that I avoided knowing much other than what I was told. It just didn’t seem healthy to be or act otherwise. For this reason, I guess I never really thought of belief as an evolutionary process. For me, it was really kind of black and white. Either you believe, or you don’t. But, the core essence of belief or the lack thereof is fundamentally grounded in “What”? Is it God, is it Heaven, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, Krishna or a myriad of other belief systems. I have never been one to be fundamentally concerned about what other people believe. Ultimately, people embrace what makes sense to them. So, I respectfully accept that AS LONG AS it does no harm to any other person, namely ME. Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul AND your neighbor as yourself. So if my neighbor doesn’t believe in or doubts the existence of God, as my own husband does not, I love him ANYWAY. It is really quite easy to, though honestly maddening at times. (Sorry Hon’ ☺). But when it’s difficult, I have to weigh and measure my own heart. Not his. Ultimately, it’s all good. Over the years, I have tried to influence his belief. He is one of the most learned people I know but also, one of the most stubborn. The one book that I gave him and asked him to read, he lost. I’ve never seen it since. And it was not widely published so I can’t even find it on Amazon. In short, it was a book on the scientific evidence of life after death—very compelling for the materialist-minded like my husband. I think that was the passive-aggressive part of him coming out because he doesn’t easily lose books. But accepting a different view requires a paradigm shift. And he’s vested. I get it. Yet, what attachment to my husband has given ME is a greater self-realization, a greater “remembrance” and a greater faith than I believe I would have likely known without this gentle tension; because, he has challenged me to rationalize what I’ve been told. “Make it make sense to me.” **Consider this:**

On Sunday, August 10th, just home from a week-long sojourn in Haiti, I burrowed under my covers with a bowl crate of popcorn and diet coke in hand and prepared to watch “Heaven is for real.” Now, I had heard of the book before and honestly thought it a waste of my time to read. It may sound arrogant, but I didn’t think there was anything a four-year old could say to me to shake or shape my belief. As far as I’m concerned, I’m standing on a rock and I cannot be moved. I don’t need convincing or more evidence. But in fact, I have **pursued** my current belief system for the sake of my own rational mind, my heart and yes, my husband. I wanted whatever I believe to make sense with science and nature and spirit and to him. Because frankly over the years, he has challenged me to have a rational answer that I can explain without feeling like I’m bound by: “Well, just because” (which in his mind is “superstition”). No, I don’t have all the answers to his questions; but then, neither does science. But the wonderful world of quantum physics has opened a doorway to a significant enough paradigm shift that Newtonian physics is compelled to listen. The field therefore has only helped to firm up my own spiritual beliefs and bridge the gap that existed in my own logical mind. So, watching the movie was not about being convinced for me. It was mainly entertainment, as well as being an unexpected inspiration for this article. The inspiration came from the fact that events in the movie challenged atheists AND Christians to face their core belief system and decide whether they **actually believe** what they profess. That was the most compelling and intriguing part of the movie, in my view. And yes, my husband obliged and watched it with me at my request—while reading a book the whole time. ☺ It didn’t matter though. I had the remote control and exercised rewind enough times to frustrate most people. (Hmmm...Now when does sharing becoming badgering? ☺)

Well while it seems that his own spiritual belief system has not changed fundamentally over the years, life has been challenging me of late in ways that are still morphing and shaping my core belief system. It's a bit unnerving because I'm honestly not sure I want to be shaped and morphed anymore. I'm pretty comfortable with where I am and where I've been. But again if I'm honest, the lessons have only served to firm and solidify my belief system and my faith. You see for many years, I *honestly* struggled with the concept of Jesus and God being one and the same. **Let's face it:** We live grounded to the Earth—a 3D reality, and are bound by the laws of Newtonian physics and logic. If you are here, you cannot be there. In fact, millions of people have been acquitted of crimes for the simple fact that they had an alibi. No one disputes that principle. So, the concept of a triune God just didn't make logical sense to me. So, I just went along with what others told me but in my heart of hearts, I wondered HOW? But being married to my materialist-minded husband propelled me to delve into quantum physics. Did you know an electron can be in two separate parts of the universe at the same time and respond as one—being therefore of one unified body? Likewise, electrons appear to move by chance or free will. So if an atomic particle as small as an electron can be in two places at the same time, respond the same when acted upon; yet, exercise autonomy or free will, of course the author of the universe can apply the principle to "Self". No brainer. **But you may ask:** So, why would science be more convincing to you than pure faith? Well, I guess you could say for me, it wasn't. I just wanted a "leg to stand on" that was NOT grounded in faith or religion. When talking to an agnostic or an atheist, faith means standing on "no ground" at all. They don't and won't hear you. But since quantum physics is in fact proving to the materialist-minded that "We know in part and we prophesy in part" (which is tantamount to knowing NOTHING), it's a most delightful springboard from which to debate with the "scientific realists." Now, I have an explanation for core principles of my faith built on a frame of reference that is grounded in this material plane of existence, which is only refining the picture of faith that lies within my own heart. **If I can provide a metaphor to illustrate:** Imagine being born with an image of God that is drawn in abstract. And with each life lesson and each chapter of existence, God erases more of the distorting brushstrokes, revealing an image of greater clarity, depth and context, with my own life as the canvas on which it is drawn. AMAZING!!!!!! I have always believed in God. But, I didn't know why I knew or why I knew so vehemently. I couldn't easily explain why. It's just fascinating to me that today, I KNOW even more profoundly than I ever have. And I've always been curious to KNOW more. So, it should be no surprise that the lessons keep coming. But, quantum physics affirms at the sub-atomic level that we don't even begin to understand the nature of reality. As such, what we thought we knew requires a different script—and ultimately a new Scripture—a paradigm shift: A New Testament. Natural laws are now grappling to describe super-natural phenomena. We don't even fully understand the material plane. So for these reasons, I am excited at the possibilities that can be "responsibly" harnessed by humanity—which is made in the image and likeness of God.

But with that said, what I've also been compelled to consider is the concept of balance and opposites—yin-yang. Ultimately while I observe this principle in nature, I guess I don't fully embrace that there should always be balance. You see, Man is made in God's likeness, and God is love. So, I believe Man's core essence is goodness and light. In other words within each individual, there should NOT be a balance. Good should prevail. But, Man has an ego and ambition. So, I do accept the presence of negative traits. Likewise, I do somewhat cringe at the possibilities of what future Man is capable of realizing to the opposing and complementary nature of "goodness" and "righteousness." But overall, I've always seen life and the universe from the vantage point of light and good—not a **balance** of good and evil. I guess you could say I embraced $E=mc^2$ in all aspects of life, without knowing why. In other words, energy is ultimately an equation that is squared, so energy by definition "**CANNOT**" be negative. Seeming to live my life unknowingly grounded in this way of thinking, I don't give evil or dark forces much thought or consideration. I just don't have time or interest or energy for those things. In my mind, the Father of Lights has enough luminance, radiance and knowledge to teach that I will surely fill an entire lifetime trying to follow "The Way" that I don't need to concern myself with anything else. But, I guess I was like a soldier "with ungirded loins." In fact, the Bible is very clear about being conscious of evil. A girlfriend of mine once told me with all seriousness, "You are a being of light. You will attract a lot of darkness." I remembered the statement but didn't imbibe it. But life is showing me that I'm extremely naïve—which is a type of blindness. I think I understand better. But, I give thanks for Psalm 34 and so many other scriptures which illustrate that we have not been promised a smooth road. We just won't be left alone on our journey. The stronger your light shines, the more likely you are to attract moths. Jesus attracted many. And I see beautiful people every day doing beautiful work for mankind and their lives are rife with struggle, turmoil and pain. So, I embrace that truth. Does it therefore not make sense that the "wicked would prosper"—as they say.

Frankly, they need some good in their lives!! Don't they?! But, thank God they're not the only ones who do. And by the grace of God, there's plenty of goodness to spread around to all. I consider myself richly blessed. Amen.

So with this acknowledgement of the very 3D, physical laws of balance, I acknowledge that God created ALL, so then ultimately, it really is ALL good--whatever it is. If we can learn to embrace the light of God as we sit in the even the darkest tunnel, we will know that God's will prevails. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the lesson is to embrace the darkness with Divine guidance and divine love. Then, we emerge from the dark as more spiritually developed beings, with a faith "that can move mountains." This is when we prosper, despite our physical, material or financial limitations or states of being; this is when our mental, emotional and spiritual states will reign supreme. And ultimately, these ***spiritual points are the ones that count*** as true "reality." So, you see Mom, I guess I was pretty well-informed even at that tender young age somewhere between 7-10 years. It's just taken me about 40 years to more fully discover how and why I believe: "***THIS IS NOT REAL.***" But, it's all good if you believe it is. My husband sure does. Embrace the beauty of you.





The Big Chop: Round Two...The Last and Final

Over the years, I've written about the "big chop" many times. It's the haircut that comes after a client has decided to stop relaxing and allow her hair to be. It heralds the end of relaxed hair and the beginning of a new natural look. In many respects, it is a rite of passage. I've seen client's responses to the "big chop" can range from joy to sorrow. It all depends on her frame of mind at the time of the service and what she's seeing. If she sees an opportunity to appreciate her hair as it presents and learn more about herself, the perspective is positive. If all she can see is the hair on the floor which has been released, she will be inclined to be negative. I can almost predict what the outcome will be based on the conversation that occurs prior to and during the service. It's all good. We're all in different places in life and in our natural hair journey. But what prompted me to write this article was a recent client who came to our opening celebration in 2006 but whom I have not seen since. She never came in because she was relaxed at the time and decided to stay that way. After some difficulties, she decided to transition to natural hair. She was natural for 5 years and had grown a beautiful mane of hair. Now quite comfortable with her shoulder length hair, she decided to relax it to make haircare all the easier. One year later, she enters our salon for the "big chop" round two. The service was a difficult one for her. But, it is as much a rite of passage as the first time.

The reason I say this is that I went through this process over 30 years ago. After taking the time to grow my shoulder length hair, I was strongly lamenting hair care and begged my mother to let me relax my hair. Despite her strong objection, she allowed me to make my own decision. So, I followed my heart. I had never relaxed, and I was ready for long, smooth, flowing locks. Well, my hair was only relaxed for one year. After seeing how lifeless and weak it had become, as it was breaking off rather easily, I decided to go back to my natural hair. So, I did the big chop during my first year of college. It was liberating. It was my first "big chop"; but after the long period of natural hair growth that I had gone through and the rather short period of destruction that ensued, it felt like my second service. So when my client came in reluctant to cut but knowing that it was inevitable, I was full of empathy. In some places, her hair had started to break off and was only natural. In others, weak relaxed strands told the story of exactly how much damage had been done. She was going to be cutting off up to six inches of relaxed hair, leaving only about 4 inches of natural hair. I felt her pain. But as I was there before, I felt confident that she would never walk down this road again. She went through relaxer damage in the past and grew her hair to a beautiful length and thickness. Feeling confident in her hair's strength and vitality, she went back to what she knew was not ideal for her hair but which she was willing to take a chance on for the sake of ease. Now, she was faced with the reality that all of her time and effort were lost. But in my view, they were not in vain. When you learn a lesson the hard way, you aren't typically inclined to repeat it. So, I think this will be her last walk down "big chop" way. She realizes that there are no real short cuts that are worth having. And so, she will do the needful to maintain healthy hair first and foremost. And for this reason, I call the "big chop round 2", the last and final round. If you never have to take this second pass down a rather challenging road, feel blessed. But if you do take this second journey, feel equally blessed. I am a firm believer that it's better to know for sure what's best for you. If you want to revert back to relaxed hair and it is the desire of your heart, do it. It's your prerogative as a woman to choose. The second time might be the charm. But if you encounter hardship as in your first encounter, the lesson will only serve to strengthen your resolve to walk the naturalista journey fully committed to stay the path. This is the reality for the majority of regular natural hair care clients that we have. We give thanks for all journey along naturalista way.





Lazy ways and bad hair days: A Commentary on our Collective Conscience

Context: This essay was written for the January-March 2015 issue of Au Natural newsletter. It reflects my own sadness at the extent to which many women will damage their beautiful natural hair to wear extensions. I've grappled to understand why we feel the need to do so... I know we don't seek to damage our own hair. But all the same, perceived "perfection" is as crippling to the psyche as chemicals. Sorry for saying so. But that's what I do.

The natural hair movement has taken our nation by storm. I for one believe it is long over-due. It's a beautiful thing. But if I can be real, I am baffled at the same time when I reflect on our collective conscience. I meet women with beautiful natural hair who are destroying their edges and/or covering up their manes completely to have a "perfect" hairstyle. **SOME OF US HAVE NEVER WORN OUR NATURAL HAIR IN A STLYE.** I styled the tresses of two such women a few weeks back. They were both surprised at just how nice their hair looked, with no added adornments. So, why tout "natural" if we never wear it?! I'm baffled. If you have alopecia, I understand. But, why do some of us have it? Is the cost of covering our manes and dishonoring God's gift too high? When braids and weaves become the order of the day for a "naturalista," I ask myself "Why?" Is it because we don't have the patience to grow and care for our natural hair as it presents? Is it because of style and fashion and the desire to be "in" with the look that's trending—even when it's a natural weave? Is it because we have limited funds and want our style to last as long as possible so that we never have a bad hair day? Is it because we're not satisfied unless we're buying some product to upgrade our hair—namely someone else's? I find it's a little bit of all of these things. Sadly, it's a cultural phenomenon that non-black owned companies are capitalizing on in droves. But, I ask simply: At what cost? And, is it worth it? Embrace the beauty... *(you know the rest).*





The Privilege of Blindness

Context: This essay was prepared for the April 2015 issue of Au Naturel newsletter. It was the first of three articles written to highlight the subtle ironies of life that give one pause for reflection. At the time, there was a racial firestorm brewing across the country as a direct result of videotaped evidence of unarmed Black men being killed by police officers for rather benign offenses. During the same period, Native American and Black female activists mysteriously died while in police custody with the official cause of death being listed as “suicide.” It has been cause for much debate about Race in America. With that backdrop in mind, this essay was penned...

On Monday, May 25th (Memorial Day), my husband and I went for a walk on the downtown walking trail that we have enjoyed for about 15 years. We trained our kids to run for their black belt exams on that trail. Many memories lie in the silhouettes of those trees. Well, I didn't really want to go for a walk on the said day, because I preferred to read. But, he was going to take his book so I realized that yes, I can walk and read. PERFECT! So, we started the five mile trail with book in hand and faces buried therein. Many people passed but we said very little to them or each other, unless it was to comment on a passage read and continue on. Well as we were on the return leg of the 2.5 mile one-way journey, I had gotten ahead of Lloyd. He fell deeper into his material and his pace slowed to reflect the depth of his concentration. I was about 15 paces ahead of him...though I didn't realize it at the time. All I heard was his angry protest, “Did you hear what that woman said about us?!” I was surprised by the sudden disturbance in his tone and looked up. I then recalled that three ladies around 50 years of age had just passed us on their bicycles. When one of them believed they were out of ear shot, she made a statement to the others. Lloyd hears like a bat so he picked up her words before she was fully out of hearing range: “At least they're reading and not walking around barefoot...” Lloyd was livid. He repeated her words and looked more incredulous than ever. I laughed. He couldn't understand why I was laughing. So, I explained. I said: “I'm laughing because she feels so exalted and so worthy to judge when in truth, she's a fool.” He wasn't buying it. So, I went deeper. “Her concern should not be with the barefoot person as much as the person with the book in their hand. If she knew WHAT we are reading, she wouldn't make such arrogant and uninformed statements. We both are reading revolutionary ideas! If she understood that, she would not feel so exalted. If she passes back by, I just might tell her.” In short, my husband was reading Stokely: A Life, to prepare a book review and to inform his class. I was reading The Gnostic Gospels—to edify my own mind in light of the re-education program that I've found myself on. I don't recommend the latter to anyone who's grounded only in faith. You need to be standing on a bedrock of *knowing* to engage this piece. I'm very curious to know why the male dominated church hierarchy so vociferously and thoroughly destroyed these manuscripts. As a woman and as a Black person, I am compelled to ask. Two fundamental principles guide my own reading of these ancient gospels discovered in 1945: 1) Who God has set free is free indeed. 2) By their fruits, you shall know them. As for the dear lady biker who feels that the world is a better place because two Black people were reading, I say “Ride on, my blind sister. Ride!”





Vanity's Twin Sister Folly

Context: This essay was the second article written on the subtle ironies of life. I didn't really know that there would be a follow-up to the first. But after the events recounted in this essay, there was no other conclusion to be drawn. This article was written for the July 2015 issue of Au Naturel.

On June 5, 2015, I rose as late as possible (7:05am) as I knew it would be a long day. I was traveling back to the US after a brief sojourn away and would be arriving in RDU after 11pm. I dressed in the chicest outfit that I had—my travel attire: a black sleeveless, form-fitting tunic that terminates just below my hips, denim washed boot cut jeans that hug my legs and then flare at the bottom riding over the tops of my open toe heels. My hair was riding over my shoulders. I looked in the mirror and opted out of make-up—not even lip gloss. It could accentuate but I really don't care that much. I AM a natural woman, and I was ready to go! I packed my bags and left my very humble abode at Matthew 25 guesthouse. As I maneuvered my carry-on bag over the threshold of my room, a lady and gentleman both turned to look. The gentleman said, "Leaving us already." I responded, "Yes, my flight leaves later today. I have a few meetings to attend this morning though." He followed. "Safe travels." I said, "Thank you." And continued on. As I passed to the top of the rather steep, concrete and metal stairway, I thought, "Schatzi, you're carrying too much. Ask the guy to take your bag downstairs for you." But then I thought: 'He's having a conversation. Why should I expect that he should carry my bag downstairs because he's a man and I'm a woman? You will have to maneuver this bag all day long. CARRY YOUR OWN STUFF!!' So, I pushed down the pull handle, picked up the bag and started downwards with my linen in one hand and my bag in the other. Ever so gingerly, I navigated each step with my three inch heels demanding caution. Step, step, step, landing. As I looked to the doorway I'm about to enter, my heel did not clear the mat at the bottom of the landing. I promptly fell and scattered the possessions that I had so gingerly tried to hold onto. The thump was loud; my left ankle twisted and my right knee crashed! The cook saw me fall, exclaimed and came running with another employee at the home. I saw the pain in their faces upon rising from my lowered status. The man grabbed my bag, the cook my linen. In my effort to explain what happened and try to lessen the pain in their eyes, I said, "My heel just got caught in the hole in the mat." But, I didn't say it in French so, they didn't likely understand me anyway. (Amazing how we default to our mother tongue when in a crisis.) The gentleman then announced that my driver was outside, so I thanked them both, said my "au revoirs" and quickly left. When I got to the car, I brushed off all of the dirt that was now riding my jeans and lifted the cuff of the left leg to add saliva to the white scrape that had now formed on my left shin. It was a marvel that there was no hole in my jeans. I made light conversation with the driver and the other two gentlemen seated in the car who would be attending one of the meetings with me; but, my mind was far, far away.

When I got out of the car later to announce my arrival for the first meeting, suddenly I realized the gravity of my condition. Every 10th or so step, my knee felt like it was going to give way. I needed to limp to lessen the pressure on it but that simply would not do—not in the attire that I was wearing today! **Lame and battered simply DOES NOT accessorize chic and sassy!!** *Am I right?* So, I resolved that I would walk on this leg until it gives way completely or bust!! NO ONE would detect my pain. NO ONE! So, I got through the days meetings and was delivered at the airport.

Upon arrival at the American Airlines gate, the lady looked at me and said, "Business Class?" I said, "No." And she referred me to the line for Economy class. I waited and checked in. "I can do this," I said. "I got this." But after having my legs cramped and unable to stretch out on the journey to Miami, the pain intensified. Then, I faced the ultimate test: the Miami airport!! As I pulled my bag from the overhead compartment, I thought, "Schatzi, Immigration Is FAR from the gangplank, and customs is even farther. Maybe you should ask for a handicapped accessible car to drive you. But when I saw the elderly people with truly legitimate claims to wheelchairs, I thought, "You've got to be kidding! I have two legs and I can walk." Vanity said: Besides, this outfit simply CAN'T be seen on a trolley cart. No! Mush, dear sister! Mush!" Well, every soul on that plane barreled past me as I walked at a sophisticated casual, seemingly-unperturbed-but-screaming-in-pain pace—even the toddlers!! Okay, that's an exaggeration; but in truth, no one sees what the person finishing a race in last place is wearing or what they look like!! So what was the point of that?! CRAZY!! As well as prideful and vain!!

So, I walked through the entire Miami airport at a snail's pace. Ordinarily, I admire the brass animal shapes that are transfixing in the large tiles and wonder how they were laid and molded. But this day, I saw none of them. The gate for my connection was announced in the plane but I checked the monitor to be sure, as I was concerned about the distance. I confirmed the gate and walked a considerable stretch. But as I arrived at the gate, I did not see the RDU reference. I checked another arrival/departure monitor nearby and my flight had been moved to another gate further on. Now, a 2nd RDU flight had been added to the monitor that was closer to where I was coming from and was leaving about the same time as my flight. The 2nd gate was so far that I thought I would cry. My heart sank, and the universe laughed at my folly. I said, "Dear God, when I check this boarding pass, please let me be at the closer of the two gates." And I was. I grabbed my pull handle and slowly walked to the terminus for boarding. And true to form, we arrived at an RDU gate at one of the further points from baggage claim imaginable!! (In Miami, they announced that we would have a full flight so Group 4 people—namely ME, would have to check their bags. As such, I was compelled to walk all the way to baggage claim to pick up my carry-on.) In all, I estimated that I walked about 2 ½ miles in that condition.

As I waited at the carousel, Lloyd walked up, and I announced my injured condition which I had already briefed him about. He pulled my bag from the carousel. We were walking to the parking lot at minutes to midnight. Now for the first time, I didn't need to *wear a mask* so I allowed myself to limp slightly to illicit some empathy. But Lloyd was talking a mile a minute as it was a memorable week for the McCarthy clan. He didn't notice my limp at all! **Irony of ironies!!** Isn't that what I wanted--for my condition to go unnoticed?! ***The subtle irony of it all was absolutely poetic!!*** I smiled at my own vanity--all because I didn't want to ask someone to help me with my bag. Pride does indeed go before the fall...and humility is not far thereafter. But when you're as incorrigible as I am...folly mocks and jeers you all day into full submission. So, I submit. Next time, I'll ask for help!





Aunt Jemima was a Naturalista under that head-tie!

Context: In August of 2015, when this article was published in Au Naturel Newsletter, I was actively engaged as a natural hair care instructor at Wake Technical Community College. While teaching the course, I learned some pretty interesting factoids and therefore wanted to share one of the more interesting one. Did you know?

One of the fun things for me about teaching natural hair care to students is that I get to learn new and interesting historical facts that I myself was unfamiliar with. For instance, we often remember the image of Aunt Jemima and her characteristic head tie which covered her tresses and emphasized her social status of servitude. Well, did you know that the [tignon](#)—the head scarf that she wore, was established and enforced through sumptuary laws designed to restrain and restrict the natural beauty of Black women? First instituted in Louisiana, these laws targeted Black women as their tresses were often admired by Whites, particularly of the male gender. White women became jealous and angry concerning the natural desire that these men of power had for women of subordinate status. So, the head tie was created to cover up these beautiful natural tresses and thereby dampen the beauty of Black women. When you see the natural locks of sisters like [this](#), [this](#), [this](#), or [this](#)—leading natural hair care bloggers, you can surely understand the phenomenon. This hair fact called to mind an occasion in my own life while a college student.



In those days, I always wore my hair in wet-set twists (as I do now) so most people never noticed me much. Well, one day, two of my girlfriends and I decided to drive to Richmond to see “[School Daze](#).” It was rare to see a movie by a Black director in those days (at it is now) so we were dressed to the nines. Both of my girls were of lighter hue than me, so I had frankly grown quite accustomed to walking next to them and being invisible. One of them was “drop-dead gorgeous”. Some Black guys at UVA used to say her name with obvious desire that upon reflection was quite comical to witness because they had NO SHAME!! With my darker hue, guys simply didn’t even look at me when I walked next to light-skinned friends. I was not jealous or particularly concerned about it though. There were all hues in my household growing up. So tone was a moot point. Besides, I was way too shy to care. In fact when I did press my hair out, the “green eyes” of envy that I received from some women made me very uncomfortable. So, I was always happy to wash my natural curls back in, twist my hair up and disappear in plain sight. Well, on the day in question sometime around 1988, my girls and I decided to go to McDonald’s to grab some food after the movie. I was wearing an off-white sweater and an off-white knit skirt. It was the fall. My hair was press- and-curled that day and was cascading around my shoulders in ringlets. We walked into the McDonald’s entrance and the entire place, which had a good number of people in it, grew silent. All eyes were on the door where we had just entered. I thought, “Wow, I guess we made an impression.” But next to these ladies, my girl B- in particular, that was really nothing new. We walked up to the counter, ordered our food and then went to the restroom for a bathroom check while the food was being prepared. When we got in the bathroom, B- quickly accosted me by stating, “I’m so jealous!” I said, “Why?” She said, “Because when we walked into the McDonald’s, everyone was staring at us—AND THEY WERE ALL LOOKING AT YOU!!” I said, “Girl, you’re delusional. They’re always looking at YOU!” She said, “Not this time! I’m jealous!!” Even today, I still think she was delusional. But on the said occasion, I developed an even greater love and respect for my friend as she had the humility, honesty and trust to express to me her friend, a sentiment that was neither becoming nor desirable. I love her even today because she’s a real as they come. But that story just goes to show the grace and power of Black beauty. All three of us were confident Black women...and the world noticed.

Well with that said, it’s nice to know that not all Black women feel compelled to blend into the maddening crowd, as the blogger naturalistas referenced earlier are revealing. When I reflect on the history of Black women collectively, it’s rather bittersweet to imagine God’s probable anger in knowing how affectionately he kissed us, and how we have attempted to wipe that kiss away...or call it a curse. Thank God we are finally awakening. He knows we were sleep as he allowed the injustices. But, it’s equally divine to know that sisters back in the day simply embraced

the law and TURNED THE TIGNON OUT!! – meaning they turned it into a fashion statement in its own right. THAT’S HOW WE ROLL! Check out the full [Wikipedia link](#) for more information. It’s pretty empowering.





What is the Value of Love?

Context: This article was the third in the subtle ironies series published in the September-October 2015 issue of Au Naturel newsletter. The disclaimer below speaks for itself regarding context. (Please note that the photos in this article are NOT my own. I found them online. But, they were much too beautiful and too appropriate to leave out. Prayerfully, the owners of these photos will grant me grace as this is a free publication.)

Disclaimer: *This article may make some people uncomfortable. First, let me say that I've revised context and players for the sake of...confidentiality. But, the core message is unadulterated truth. The tone of this article is a reflection of a discomfort that I recently felt regarding a hair care service that I witnessed. I am not sharing this story to spread the dis-ease. Rather, I believe that shedding a light on a germ that grows in darkness will in fact kill it. And I am all about killing this particular germ. In fact, the circumstance has given me serious pause to reflect upon my own actions, beliefs and motivations. The intended purpose of this sharing is introspective; and if a seed is planted, prayerfully growth and balance will be restored. Naturally, the context is not universal, meaning "if the shoe don't fit, don't wear it." And so I begin...*



Recently, I had the pleasure of assisting a beautiful young lady with the styling of her long, thick, natural hair. She was brought to the shop by her Mom. She had an exceptional quantity and length of hair with a very kinky texture. Hands-down, it is beautiful!! Ordinarily, a service such as this one would go off without a hitch. But, Mom came into the salon with a clear attitude as she believed she had been misquoted about the price of the hair care service. She wanted small, individual braids for her daughter's natural hair and was "told" it was \$25. Sorry. For the length and volume of hair, that service is about \$80, even for a child. My first thought was that Mom must have been quoted that price at another salon and confused us with them. Based on how we operate internally, I KNEW she was mistaken as the price was too ridiculous to consider. Yet, she was adamant that she was NOT mistaken. I asked how long it usually takes to do this style on her daughter's hair and Mom said 2-4 hours. I knew 2 hours was totally unrealistic. Four+ hours was about right, though still rather modest based on the amount of hair the daughter has and the service requested. Since Mom was agitated, the daughter was nervous, and negative energy was spilling out

into the salon, we conceded, primarily because the appointment was on the books and the stylist's time was blocked out. She would not have another client as we don't double-book. All I can say was that I don't think Mom expected to be accommodated quite so easily and without a fuss because she continued to wear a negative tone and attitude for quite a while afterwards, though the stylist working on her daughter's hair was cheerful and engaging. Eventually, she caught up to the present moment. I marveled at the stylists' ease and composure because she was working with hair that had not been properly detangled prior to the service. Yet, she was patient, respectful and gentle. The little girl did not cringe even once to my knowledge throughout the detangling and styling process of this voluminous mane of hair. In all, it took between 5-6 man hours to complete the daughter's hair. The service was practically free.

Mom thanked us and quickly apologized for being unable to offer a tip. It's surely not a necessity or a requirement so, that was no problem. But my surprise came when Mom signed her name. At the end of her signature, she wrote in two advanced, professional degrees. She had told us where she is gainfully employed during the numerous hours of conversation while working on her daughter's hair, so I knew she had a great job. But in truth, does ANYONE sign their degrees as part of their signature ordinarily? Maybe they do, what do I know? It just felt

WEIRD!! The obvious message felt like she wanted us to know, “I’m an educated and important person. Know that!” Yes, respect is due. In fact, we respect all of our clients, regardless of status or condition. But, I can honestly say that to see the professional “caliber” of this woman was a let-down and disappointment for me personally, particularly as she had never graced the inside of the establishment prior to that day. In short, I realized that she believed herself to be more important than the people doing her daughter’s hair. At first, I felt sad at her ignorance. Then, I was annoyed. Does that seem like a stretch or an overly strong statement? When you do the math, it isn’t really. You see, the daughter’s hair took 5-6 man-hours to style and she paid only \$25 for it. That translates to less than \$5/hr. She had the nerve in fact, to tell me that a prominent neighboring natural stylist used to do her daughter’s hair; but, Mom left when the stylist started to “*arbitrarily*” raise prices. All I could think was if *my girl* raised the price on you, it needed to be raised. In fact, I thought: If the child’s hair grew to this length and depth of vitality under *my girl’s* tutelage; well, she should be praised. But, I said nothing.

The service bothered me for the remainder of the night. Upon further reflection, I concluded that this woman should just relax her daughter’s hair and be done with it. I told my students about this case and the recommendation that Mom should relax her daughter’s hair. They all grew completely silent after I made this pronouncement as they were shocked to hear these words come from me. I’m an avid proponent of natural hair! So why do I say this? Because ultimately, Mom does not love the texture that she is seemingly trying to preserve. In truth, she despises it. That sounds like a harsh word. But, we nurture and lavish upon the things we love. We begrudge the things we find to be annoying or resentful. Strangely, Mom confessed to me that her daughter has a very Eurocentric view of her hair. She announced, “I just don’t know where she got that thinking from.” I followed, “Surely, not from home.” She responded, “Exactly!”... (Things that make you go hmmm.)

In truth, we spend money for and on the things we care about, even when it’s inconvenient: child’s education, food, shelter, entertainment. I believe Mom would likely spend double that amount of money on an hour long steak dinner with a significant other and think nothing of it. If we value our children’s hair, why not pay for the care of it. I say this because we have always under-valued Black hair. That’s a fact!

Okay...if times are hard, why not do your own child’s hair? Isn’t that what people do when they’re trying to save money? Mom was able bodied and capable and quite willing to stand an arm’s length from the stylist the entire time she was styling the child’s hair to ensure it was done correctly. She never sat down once....?? I ask: Why not style your own child’s hair? I don’t think brothers would dare bring their daughters’ into a salon to ask for such a heavy subsidy. Many are willing to do the needful on their own (as evidenced by numerous online photos of men of all races doing their Black daughters’ hair). If they ask for a favor, it’s from a friend...not a business. Okay...assume Mom has NO skills in hair care: Why not ask for cornrows which take a fraction of the time that was employed to style the daughter’s hair and would have been a more appropriate service for the price offered? With these thoughts in mind, I’m compelled to ask: Does Mom really “love” her daughter’s hair when she doesn’t want to pay for it, even though the style requested will last 4-6 weeks? Does she love this hair when she is not eager to style it herself though clearly in want or need of subsidy? Or is the desire to “get over” so strong, that we will exploit even the people whose eyes into which we can look? Do we love the soul staring back at us? Do we love ourselves? Or are we blind consumers enamored with a saved pound sterling which quickly transforms into an extracted pound of flesh from the hide of our own neighbors. **THOUGH A BUSINESS OWNER, I AM NOT A CAPITALIST BECAUSE I HATE EXPLOITATION!!!!** How can we love our neighbors when we don’t love ourselves?? That is why “Embrace the beauty of you” is foundational.

When I reflected on how Mom witnessed the full breadth of man hours that went into the completion of the job and felt that time was not worthy of compensation, I felt...angry!! Yes, that’s what I felt. I thought, “How dare you **NOT** want to do your own daughter’s hair and then want a stranger to care for it at less than minimum wage compensation!! Collectively, we under-value Black things and Black people? Do Black people fully imbibe the slogan “Black lives matter”? **Food for thought:** If they were competent to do the job, would Mom argue with White women at Paul Mitchell’s styling academy about why she should only pay them \$25 to style her daughter’s hair? Or would she be so honored that White women are doing her natural hair that she would accept the price they quoted?... GET

YOUR RELAXER AND DONE!” That is my message to those who don’t want to compensate the people who care for natural hair. The relaxer was designed to make home maintenance easy and inexpensive. Embrace the modern era: You have options. Exercise them. There’s no judgment. You are free. To get the relaxer out of the head, you must first extract it from the heart. If you’re still wearing it in your heart, why not proceed with the logical foregone conclusion? It’s really not that deep. No one CARES if you do. But, please don’t expect me or my kind (i.e. working class women) to subsidize the inner loathing that you mask as awareness and enlightenment for the sake of fad, fashion or convenience. To my eyes, you look like a fool! And yes, I too have been a fool. But the difference is, I know it and am doing something about it. Why do I know I’ve been a fool? Because, I had to feel it at the cellular level. Hopefully, you won’t need to experience the depth of this knowing in order to make a change.

So, the take home message is this:

Let’s learn to see the things produced by people that look like us as inherently valuable and worthy of investment as those produced by others. It seems like I’m making a mountain out of a mole hill. Ordinarily, I see things and say nothing. But something about this case required a bit more than “turning a blind eye.” I think it’s because I saw myself in a behavior that I despised. And that reflection in the mirror required a response. If this missive makes you angry, rather than react, introspect. Because IF it riles you, I would wager that there’s something buried deep inside of you that you haven’t taken the time to look at. Ask why you’re upset and then look within your own heart and your own motivations. I’ve had to look within my own self before writing this message. I am as guilty at *discount shopping at the expense of my neighbor* as Mom. I will endeavor to do better. For the sake of our community and our planet, we all must endeavor to do better.



Collectively, we MUST stop nickel and diming African-American businesses and institutions. We simply do not have the wealth, the historical legacy or the institutional muscle power to sustain these practices. **Discount shopping is not a sustainable practice even in mainstream America.** It’s why American jobs are leaving American shores. Ultimately, a fast buck saved can have rather slow, protracted consequences over the long run. And it’s typically our Black communities and Black people that are hit the hardest. If you must nickel and dime, then do that to Wal-Mart, MicroSoft, McDonald’s and Starbucks. They have the cash flow, the demand volume and the financial muscle to sustain the weight of it. But, please don’t do it to Black owned ANYTHING—businesses, schools, churches or entertainment. And if I’m honest, we must seek out opportunities to spend our dollars with Mom and Pop shops rather than the corporate giants of the world which disempower our communities. Where are Black-owned restaurants? Integrated out of existence; because, we can’t compete... I’ve said enough.

So, what is the value of love? It’s priceless!

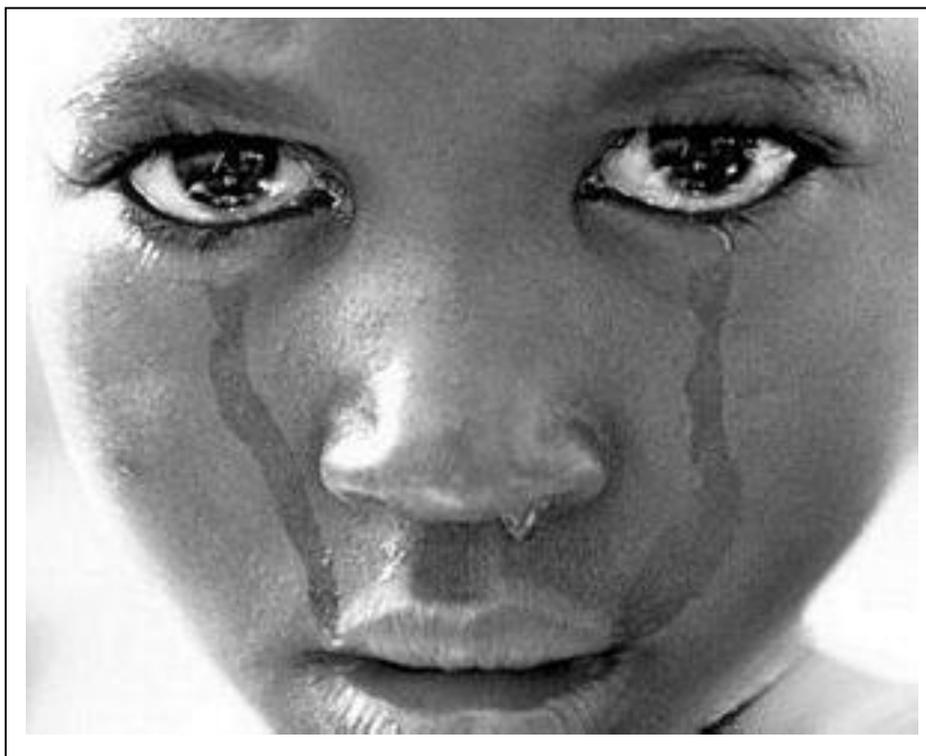




Tender-headedness: Is it truly a condition of the head or of the heart?

Context: This article was included in the April 2016 Issue of Au Naturel. This story is inspired by a beautiful young lady who is a regular visitor to our salon. For a while, she's been in the care of other stylists primarily, as her Mom typically scheduled her after school. Over time, I have seen this young girl growing into a beautiful young lady. But a consistent part of her salon experience has been tears due to extreme tender-headedness. So, I have recently taken over the care of this young woman's hair exclusively. The first day I met with her as her stylist, I looked her eyes and said, "Today, my whole, entire life has one purpose. That purpose is to get you through a haircare service without tears. I have blocked out 4 hours for you. We will have no interruptions. I will do whatever I need to do to ensure that you are comfortable. Are you ready to begin?" She was. So, I employed the strategies outlined in this article, with some modification based on the condition and circumstances. We have had no tears since that day.

I have since used these techniques over and over again. More recently while assisting one of my students at Wake Tech, I met another young woman who has an extreme tender-headedness condition. I employed similar strategies to the care of my client's hair to this young girl. It worked like a charm. And so, I'm inspired to write and share. Hopefully, you too will learn to heal the heart through the skill of your hands and the compassion of your soul.



Since opening a natural hair salon, I have been privileged to style the hair of numerous ladies who are seeking to better understand the ways in which they can serve their own personal needs and those of their families. Invariably, young children are shaped and molded by the environment in which they find themselves. However, when their mothers or caregivers are young and somewhat in need of guidance about how to care for hair, ignorance can easily transform into frustration. When the hair is seen as more of a bother or nuisance than a *crowning glory*, it is often mistreated though intentions are mostly good. As such, some young girls (in my opinion) develop the condition called **tender-headedness**. The Urban Dictionary defines tender-headed as:

“having a sensitive scalp that is easily irritated during hair-styling procedures. Chiefly used among African-Americans, the term has existed for at least a century.”

But, I do not believe this description is an accurate representation of the condition that these young girls are facing. On the contrary, I believe that tender-headedness is a condition of the heart, first and foremost. Why do I believe so? Because in my experience, a girl who is tender-headed will often cry regardless of the style and procedure used to care for her hair. In other words, she will protest the process and the fact that she has to endure it as much as the actual pain suffered in service delivery. For this reason, the tears are often independent of the pain and vice versa. Don't get me wrong: There are numerous instances when these children are in fact protesting pain suffered as a “price for beauty”; but, I've noted that the tears soon become learned behavior that is difficult to transcend even when the pain is absent.

For example, I would say that I've faced the condition called extreme tender-headedness in several instances and in all situations; I found that tears began independent of a painful experience. Firstly, I know how to comb a child's hair to keep them comfortable. (Click [here](#) and reference pages 102 and 103 for tips on hair care.) So when a tender-headed child sits in my chair and the tears begin, I'm suspicious. Being a natural researcher, I run an experiment to see what I'm working with.

After the tears have begun (for new clients), my first tack is to turn the child away from the mirror. I want to test and see if they are truly crying because their hair is being pulled and they have a hyper-sensitivity to that pulling or if the child is merely crying out of habit. In all cases, I have discovered that the child is crying out of habit. When the child's face is away from the mirror and I resume combing, I invariably see tears. When I pretend to continue combing but in actually am not touching the child's hair in any way that is abrasive, I watch to see if the crying continues. Invariably, it does. Then, I bring the child's attention to the fact that I am not combing their hair at all. When they observe that I am merely pretending to comb the hair, the tears begin to subside and their own suspicion is piqued. Then, I turn the child around to face the mirror, and I actually start to comb the hair. (*Note: I have learned and know the techniques for combing and caring for natural, thick hair in its varying textures. So when the child is observing with her attention on the fact that I am testing her, I am fully confident in my ability to command the child's hair without hurting her. At this point, your technique has to be impeccable because she's looking for a reason to justify her tears.*) As I resume combing, residual twitches from the child indicate a response to learned behavior because I know I'm not hurting her. I look at her eyes in the mirror, and we both know that she's not feeling pain. All the same, I stop combing to acknowledge her twitching but I look confused and concerned as if I don't understand how this can be hurting. With us both witnessing this dance in front of the mirror, the twitching subsides. I then ask, “Okay (*child's name*). Now, I need you to please tell me when I'm *really* hurting you. I need you to speak to me with words and tell me that I'm hurting you. I will then change what I'm doing to make it better. Is that okay?” Because we're building trust and she has already witnessed me honoring her feedback through twitches, the response is invariably “yes.” So, we continue in this way. When I pull a little too much due to hidden tangles or knots, the child openly expresses “That hurts.” Or “You're hurting me.” Or she raises her hand. I acknowledge her compliance with my request by saying, “Thank you _____. That's very good. I appreciate that you told me that. Is this better?” I will change to accommodate her feedback, and she will respond accordingly. When I reach a section of the head that is particularly tangled, I alert the child ahead of time that, “This section seems to be really tangled so you may feel this a little bit more; but, I'll do my best. Okay? Let me know if you are uncomfortable.” And they do.

In this way, we progress through the entire service with *no more tears*. I have seen this technique work effectively with several children now. So, I have concluded that tender-headedness is not a condition of the head but is one of the heart. Why? Because in short, the child felt that her opinion and feelings did not matter. So to be heard and acknowledged, she self-expressed through tears. Once she knew that she has a voice and will be acknowledged and respected, she rose to match the level of respect given to her by speaking with her words and acknowledging her say.

In the beginning was the word,...and the word was God (John 1:1) ...and God is love. Amen.

That is the essence of communication. Communication or the lack thereof, is one of the leading causes of hurt feelings. Quotable quotes note that:

“Communication is depositing a part of yourself in another person.” Unknown

“Some think that love is all flowers and good times, but I think love is more than just that. Love is the bad, as well as the better, not lived alone, but a journey together.”

Something that only the closest can share, with communication, respect.” Unknown

So, it is that through the word, the heart is healed. The prevailing challenge for me is to convince the young person in my chair that the process of caring for her hair is not harmful, hurtful or offensive. I do so by spending the required time to care for her natural hair with full honor and reverence to the gift and to the spirit being endowed with it. And so, tender-headedness becomes a thing of the past. Yes, the condition is likely to re-surface when the child is in the care of someone who does not have the skills needed to prevent a painful experience. But, she now knows that she has a voice. And so, she can speak life and truth through the word by demanding better service; because, she knows that better is possible. And now, you too are empowered to heal tender-headedness in your own right. We give thanks.

Embrace the beauty of you.





Sporting Tracks and Track Athletes

Context: This article, written following the Summer 2016 Olympics, was included in the September issue of An Naturel Newsletter. I was inspired to write this article do the more than obvious prevalence of hair weaves among track and field athletes. I thought maybe I was overly sensitive. But, several clients noted the same thing. This article speaks from my heart about this issue.

I'm sure many of you, like me, watched the Rio 2016 Olympics with bated breath. I absolutely lost my mind when Simone Manuel took the gold for the 100m freestyle. As NBC had already biased my mind to prepare for the Australian twins to both take a place on the podium, I was frankly watching them most astutely. And then, surprise, surprise. I said to my son: "Wait! What's happening?" He said: "The US is pulling ahead!" I suddenly leaped out of my seat and starting jumping up and down screaming: "Go, go, go!!" My heart was racing. I'm surprised I didn't give myself a heart attack. I was lost in the moment. My girl Missy says she starts swimming against the air with the athletes. I'm sure there would be some pretty funny scenes around the world if people recorded the behind the scenes views like JFK being shut down because Jamaicans lost their mind at Bolt's 100m win. I howled because Jamaicans always imitate the sound of gunshots when they are celebrating a victory. So, this one really came down to a clash of cultures. The same night, Simone Biles was competing for the gold medal in the all-around gymnastics competition. My heart was beating so fast you would have thought it was MY child competing. I had to really breathe and try to control my anxiety. When she won, my son Jamar with his usual quick wit said: "Ten thousand African-American couples across the country just decided to name their baby Simone." I howled. I bet he's right.

Turn now to the track and field events. They are one of my favorites, although I love all Summer Olympic sports. Well, I must confess that I was markedly disturbed by all the hair weaves plying down the track at the human equivalent of light speed. This year, it frankly seemed way more than usual, or was it just me? I was visiting a Jamaican friend at her Dad's house in Stone Mountain, GA which was a great place to be with Jamaicans dominating the track. At one point, the show of fake tresses was so excessive, I said to my girl: "One day, somebody is going to sprint straight out her tracks (another description for hair weaves)." I imagine we'll all see the mayhem as a Brazilian hair track escapes from its bondage and gracefully alights across the face of another athlete who was simply outclassed in this qualifier (meaning she was gettin' beat). In her blindness, she stumbles into the adjacent lane tagging the back heel of the athlete therein, and they both tumble to the ground." The international camera will then zero in on the hair track lying across two lanes with ensuing headlines reading: "The Tumble-weave that Tumbled Teams" or "The Tracked-out Track Star *Over-shadows* Competition In More Ways Than One" or how about "Trackless Trini Triumphs when Tumble-weave Topples Contenders." I've got a million of 'em! ☺ Needless to say, the IAAF and the Olympic Committee would then find it necessary to ban hair weaves from international competition. You know it's not so unlikely. It would be a joy for some as there is often a great desire to ban whatever Black athletes engage in for the sake of uniformity. I'm waiting to see it happen. But, all the same, I'm compelled to ask: Why are weaves so dominant in track and field events?

I can surmise. Many of us can remember the images of Flojo racing down the track in the 80s and leaving everyone in her wake. It's an image that's etched in the memory if you witnessed it. The most indelible part of that imagery was that her tresses were flying behind her, demonstrating the natural effect of what hair does when attached to a freight train. That was back in the day when weaves weren't so prevalent. So, you KNEW it was her hair. All female sprinters were surely inspired by Flojo in some way, and I imagine that many long to be like her. Since they know they can't beat her time (and no one has), they might as well channel her energy through their hair. I get it.

Sporting tracks on the track is also considered by some to be as fashionable as it is chic. But you know me: I'm not a great fan of the false. Sure, there are many women with alopecia who would love to wear their own hair, if afforded the opportunity. These women are doing what they have to in order to fit in with society and move on with life. It is what it is. I get it and God bless them all. But, that's not what I saw on the track in Rio. Instead, I saw women who have hair, covering it up. I guess they feel they are now on the biggest stage in track and field and thus want to look their "best." I'm not sure. While male swimmers shaves their heads to erase milliseconds from

their time, female track athletes add hair (and time?) to look fashionable. Interesting. But when I see how much damage is being wreaked on women's divinely appointed and naturally perfect manes for the sake of "fashion", how could I be a fan? As a natural stylist, I've seen A LOT of human damage. A sister recently told me her husband's baby-mother always had hair down her back in high school. Now, she has no edges and finally cut her hair short. She only wears long weaves. WHAT?! So what she was seeking in wearing a weave is not length; because, she had that. Its ease and texture--the absence of a bad hair day.

Well, when God gives you a gift/talent, He doesn't mind taking it away if you don't appreciate it. I've been there, done that. When my shoulder length hair was damaged in the 80s by a bad relaxer treatment, I promised God that if my hair ever grew back, I would NEVER chemically treat it again. I haven't looked back. (Lot's wife is not who I aspire to be.) But, God bless you if your experience with chemicals has been all positive. The natural journey was simply not a necessity for you.

The best way I can sum up my very strong bias against weaves is to explain it this way: ***If you look in the mirror and believe you see God's reflection staring back at you, would you put a wig on it?*** Think about it for real. I laugh at the thought. We laugh collectively, as the memes to the left show. And I'm sure many in mainstream laugh as well. My message is: Embrace the beauty of you. It's not a slogan for me. It's a belief system. Couple that with the knowledge that most sisters would be angry to see a White woman walking down the street with an Afro wig, and would go so far as to believe she looked like a clown. You know I'm speaking truth. Others wouldn't mind telling her to take it off and might even venture so far as to assist her with the needful. But, what if she REALLY AND TRULY loves Afros so much that she wants to wear one? Isn't that how we feel about weaves? Yet, we would judge the White sister unjustly. Why have a negative view of her and not of ourselves?

The irony in all of this is that our salon provides weave services--not because I like them. It's because I would rather that someone who actually cares about the hair underneath the weave install it rather than someone who doesn't. That's all.

In the end, it's all good. I aint mad, and I pray I'm not judging other unjustly. But when I see that people don't love themselves as divinely created, I'm not going to pretend that I'm blind. Likewise when I see brothers walking like a penguin down the street as they hold up your pants, I'M GOING TO LAUGH! 'Cause that sh!# is funny to me!! I can't help it. Is pity and shaking my head a better response? God, guard my soul from self-righteousness... What a tangled web is this thing called existence. Help us, Lord. WE ALL FALL SHORT!

With that said, the sister that captured my heart at the Olympics was none other than Tori Bowie. (Sister girl can definitely lose the weave. She's divinely beautiful as crafted.) I listened to an interview of her story, and I was rooting for her immediately. She has a statuesque beauty bar none and has talent to match. Her body is perfection. God kissed her two times...at least. I heard on Tom Joyner this week that the modeling industry has already tagged her for a second career. I wish her much success! Yes, Elaine Thompson schooled her in the 100m race; but, Jamaicans have track and field down to a science. Do you want to know why Jamaica is, as one newscaster put it, "the sprint capitol of the world"? Because, they start their children running straight out of the womb--as soon as they can walk. My sons were running as early as age 2 in sports day competitions in their pre-school. From that early stage, you start to see who has God-given talent; because their balance and coordination is so developmental, those with natural talent win. And so, these athletes are observed very early and encouraged all along the way. When you find a track star in Jamaica, it is unlikely that there are many in the country that can outclass them. Because the cream truly rises. In the US, there are many country boys who never had training that might be exceptional athletes with the proper training. But since they may never have gone to college, we'll never know.





Why I love my gray hair: The Re-mix

Context: This article was published in the April 2017 Issue of Au Naturel Newsletter. At that time, I was grappling with the truth that is gray hair. I have weighed my options many times over the years and have consistently concluded that I'm not down with color. So, this article was my personal testimony of acceptance.

In June of 2007 (almost 10 years ago!!), I wrote an article titled “Why I love my gray hair.” At that time, gray hairs were just beginning to don the periphery of my face. It looked something like the first picture below. I was 41 years of age in this photo. (I couldn’t find a confirmed 2007 photo, so I used this one.)

In the age 41 photo, my grays are so faint that it’s laughable to think that I was remotely concerned about them at that time. But I was. All things are truly relative. Well, fast forward 8 years. At 49 years of age, my hair now looks like the photos at the bottom of the page. There’s been an explosion of gray!! I have more gray hair than my husband Lloyd whose name just happens to mean “gray-haired!” Go figure! CRAZY!!



Sometimes I find a strand that has shed through the natural life cycle of the hair follicle. It starts out black and beautiful, morphs gradually into a chocolate hue and ends then its life completely gray at the root. The cycle of life plays out on the human body every moment. Who needs the constant reminder of the inevitable?! Can I be real? I’m not loving my grays so much these days. I’ve thought about dying so much; that I’ve had dreams about it! I figure one swoop of the dye brush and I can erase about 10 years rather effortlessly. That sure beats plastic surgery!! (No, I’m not a candidate.) But when I wake up, I know that’s not what I’m going to do. I don’t have the stamina for hair dye. It requires commitment over the long haul to make sure growing tresses are always masked. I’m not the one. But sometimes, I wish I was. When my husband (who is 6 years my senior) starts to look younger than me though, that will be the deal breaker for me. Mark my words. That article title will be called “Why my grays have gone the way of the Dodo bird.” ☺ *(I rather incongruously pray that day never comes.)*



In short, my grays now make me look like someone’s GRANDMA!! I’m no one’s grandma, thank the Lord! Not yet, anyway. So, I most certainly DO NOT want to look the part. (All respect due to my Mom and my Grandmother who are beautiful women! But, I’m 29 years and 52 years their junior respectively. I aint ready to go down like that. But such is life. I won’t likely turn the tide. It’s a losing battle. *Sigh.*) In fact when I was teaching at Wake Tech, one of the students had the gall to ask if younger people would be teaching us. *(Okay, that group was crazy! All the same, I suddenly knew what age discrimination feels like.)* I didn’t let the comment faze me

though because I knew I had more to teach them than they could ever hope to learn from a younger, less-experienced person. A basic course in natural hair care has a curriculum that is mandated by legislation and corresponding regulations. You are not free to improvise in a 300 hour course of study. But, I surely gave them more than they paid for. *(Incidentally, I think God delivered me from that place for good reason. Something about pearls and swine. Yes, I said it! That’s not arrogance. That’s how much I value my time and my knowledge!)*

Anyhoo... I give thanks for grace. My hair is on my head, so I count the great blessing that I know this to be! All the same when people you would consider peers start calling you Ms. Schatzi and ma'am, you know the truth as it is!! I guess it'd be crazy if I said: *"Who are you talking to?! Do I have Medicare written across my face?"* ☺ In reality, I haven't even reached the AARP milestone, although I KNOW they're clockin' me with just six months to go...tick, tick, tick...the blasted stalkers! ☹ But as the sister in [this video](#) (referenced in the intro) rightly states, "everyone doesn't get to age." So after listening to her message and knowing my own truth, I felt re-inspired to embrace my gray tresses. The video sister's hair is gorgeous...hands-down! But, I see gorgeous hair every day in my salon. You work with what you're given, and nurture it for maximum performance. So, I will continue to nurture and care for my own. When my hair fell out over 30 years ago from a relaxer treatment, I promised God that if my hair ever grew back, I would never mistreat it again. So, my fate is sealed. I will love my gray strands despite my latent desire for them to be less prolific than they are. And wonder of wonders, they are NOT silver like my Dad's were.☹ They're snow white. But like Celie's soliloquy from the rear of Suge Avery's car as she left Mister's house, my gray hairs loudly proclaim "[I'm coarse, white, I may even be unattractive, but dear god I'm here! I'm here.](#)" Amen!! I give thanks unequivocally and unapologetically.☺





Releasing Locks: The Whys and Hows of Liberation

Context: In the May-June 2017 Issue of Au Naturel Newsletter, I published this article on “releasing locks.” In this particular instance, a new client appeared and asked me to cut off her locks. Despite having never worn locks myself, I know that the lock journey is a spiritual one for many people. So, I am cautious about cutting someone’s locks until I’m absolutely sure that they will do so whether or not I assist with the process. This article discusses why someone may be ready for this bold step and how to properly go about doing so.

I decided to write this article recently when a client called me to ask that I cut off her locks. Well, I’m a stylist who is generally averse to scissors. I don’t cut hair unless it’s absolutely necessary; and most times, it’s not. I was not trained as a cosmetologist. Any traditionally trained stylist knows that hair cutting is the bread and butter of the hair care industry. Without it, there would be no industry because it could not sustain itself. This is why your stylist growing up always wanted to cut your hair and invariably took off too much. It’s all good. I’m not mad. Its life and proper grooming is part and parcel of the journey. But as a natural stylist and a naturalista, I recommend cutting ONLY when I know it will enhance the beauty of the client and the hair style. Holding onto split ends is never desirable nor is holding onto dead, lifeless ends which are damaged from straightening. I’m quick to release these detractors. But when a client with a mane full of beautiful hair says “cut”, I’m going to ask “why?” It’s in my nature. I will not change. It is what it is. So when a client recently called and asked me to cut her locks, I naturally asked: “You want me to trim them?” She said, “No. I want to cut them off.”

And so, the probing began: “What’s going on? Are they damaged? Are you experiencing breakage?” Response: “No.” “What is the length of your locks?” Response: “They come to the middle of my back. They’re pretty long. I’ve had them for a while.” So, I consider. People often want a change after years of doing one thing, so I’m starting to understand the motivation. But as a stylist whose been around for more than a minute, I also know of people who’ve made the decision to change their hair with a major cut, or with a new relaxer service on natural hair only to tell me later that they regretted the decision. I never want to contribute to remorse. So, I come towards the end of my consultative investigation: “I see. So, why do you want to cut your hair AT THIS TIME?” Response: “I’ve been wearing locks for a while. I want a change. I’ve worn locks before. This is my second set. I know I can restart them if I want to. But, I realized that I’ve worn locks but I’ve never worn natural hair. I don’t know anything about my natural texture...what it will do, what it won’t do. I want to learn more about my hair.” And with that response, I’m sold. My response: “Come on in. I’ll cut them off for you. When is good for you?” You see, she was knowledgeable and experienced in releasing locks but knew nothing of free, natural hair. This was a wonderful learning opportunity. And I felt it my honor to be the person to set her on a new pathway that prayerfully would be fruitful and satisfying.



When cutting locks, the approach to take depends on the client being served. Some sisters are fly all the time. So, they want the finished look to be bold and provocative. If they want to wear it loose, I may recommend that they visit a barber for a precision cut after I’ve removed the locks and shampooed and shaped the hair. Precision cutting is not my bag, and I won’t pretend it is. Otherwise, I will focus my energy very carefully on maintaining as much length as possible while releasing the locks. I do so by identifying the defining line between where the hair is locking

and where the hair is still “free.” The logical next step is to cut directly on this line or slightly above it. I may do so. But, I often cut lower down the hair strand into the region where the hair is locked. There are a couple of reasons why:

- 1) Clients who are accustomed to having a lot of hair on their head will typically be shocked to suddenly have little or “no hair”—even though they have made up their mind and demanded the service. So, I try to soften the shock to their eyes and to their psyche by maintaining all of the salvageable length possible.
- 2) The hair has different textures throughout the head. So, hair in the rear of the head may lock more quickly or more slowly than hair in other parts of the head. As a result, the “defining line” between locked and free strands will not be in the same place throughout the hair. In some areas, you may have two inches of “free” hair to work with. In others, you may have only one inch. So, I look for the region of the hair that has the longest free strands and I cut. When I have a natural feel for how much length this region of the hair will be, I cut the remaining hair to match this section. If the “long section” is somewhat of an anomaly for the rest of the client’s hair, I will find a happy median point for the client’s hair length.

When cutting into the locked section of the hair, the result is that the ends of the hair strands will be joined. I separate them with my fingers, to the extent possible and rely on the shampoo, conditioning and combing process to deal with stubborn strands that are reluctant to embrace their new found freedom. While shampooing, there will be a lot of shedding; but, that’s normal. The strands that would have been shed through the natural process are now no longer locked so they are falling away. This observation should be no cause for concern.

Next, I trim the hair down to give it an overall evenness. Some sections will need more trim than others based on how the locks were cut. After the hair is evened up, the client may want a coil or twist style to get an early orientation to how their natural hair texture behaves. I often discount this initial service as a gift to the client’s new self- perception. That’s naturally up to you. But, many women will leave it with it free so that they can go home and play. And that is how it should be.

Once the service is complete, I give the locks back to the client. I do not throw away a client’s locks. Yes, I throw away loose hair but not locks. It probably has a lot to do with my Jamaican connection and my reverence for locks and the lock journey. For this reason, I will gather the locks in a bag and will give them to the client to dispose of in the way that they feel is appropriate. That’s my own quirk; but, I’ll surely not change it. You will surely develop your own style. But make sure that the client is truly ready for the transition. It’s takes years to grow locks that the length that I cut off. It will likewise take years to grow back the hair. You NEVER want to be seen as putting short-term profits ahead of the long-term needs of your client. So, ask questions to be sure. And then, release the locks. Liberation also has its natural advantages! ☺





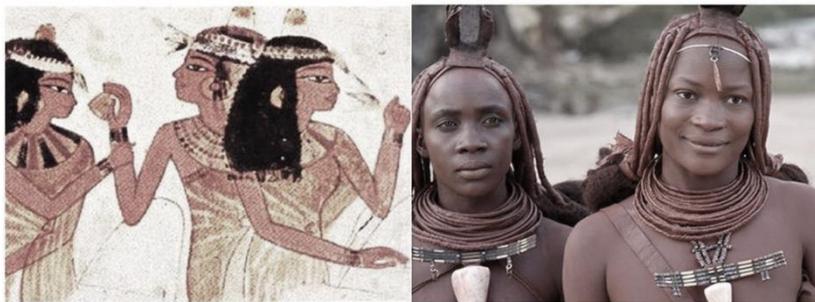
Kemetic Reflections: Hair Prints are Historic Clues

Context: In August 2017, my husband and I took the vacation of a lifetime. The notion of visiting Egypt was interested to me by a naturalista and was reinforced by another. So after considerable research and diligent saving, Lloyd and I attended the summer 2017 Browder Study Tour with 60 other seeking something about more inspiring than a vacation. This article is a component of a much larger series of articles on that study tour. It was published in the September-October 2017 Issue of Au Naturel Newsletter.

I recently posted several images on my Facebook page of peoples who I believe could be the descendants of the Ancient Kemetic people. A few of these images are enclosed in this section. This newsletter issue opened with an image of a young Ramses II that I photographed on the wall of one of the temples that we toured. Many are familiar with this hairstyle donned by Ramses, as it was popularized by Yul Brenner in the movie "The Ten Commandments." Well, the children and youth of the Himba people in Namibia still wear this hairstyle to this day! The girls wear two braids and the boys wear one. Ramses II also wore neck jewelry which was an important part of his image. With this evidence alone, some would say, "I can see that." It makes logical sense that they could be the modern day descendants of the Ancient Kemetic people. Who else in the world wears this hairstyle as a matter of course?



Well, these people live in very dry arid regions of Namibia that have a scarcity of water. The challenge of living in regions such as this, I believe, is similar to the living conditions in Egypt. While there, I had to oil my hair morning and night to keep it from becoming "crunchy" and overly dry. The weather conditions simply sapped all moisture from my hair and skin instantly. I had renewed appreciation for why women in this part of the world keep their hair covered up. It's honestly the vain thing to do! And it's a large part of the reason it's so important to be hydrated.



Well, the Himba women are known for wearing red clay on their skin. When piecing together my FB post, I knew that some people would be uncomfortable associating these women with the images of Ancient Kemetic women who were dressed regally, were the inventors of perfumes and cosmetics and were thus very conscious of their appearance. African descendants

have been taught to shun nudity and embrace "civilization." In fact when I wore my two-strand twists in the 80s, a girl who despised me for doing said: "I don't know why that girl has that Aunt Jemima SHIT on her head!! THIS IS THE 80s. WE ARE CIVILIZED!!" I will never forget those words as long as I live. Not because I was hurt by them; but, because they told me volumes about the African mind that is fully Westernized and thus ASLEEP!!! Likewise today, many African peoples will believe that the wearing of clay on your skin is a sign of backwardness and ignorance. Well, let's think about this.

People viewing the post did not know that the children above were the offspring of these women. I didn't bother to explain that fact. But it stands to reason that if these children represent a modern image of Ramses II, the mothers MUST by default have the same origin. In my own research, I found the images of the children first, and then worked backwards in my logic by noting the neck and hair adornments of the mothers as well as the red skin tone of many temple paintings and seeing certain parallels. But after considering which photos received likes and which ones noticeably did not, I knew why viewers did not want to associate these women with Ancient Kemet.



Firstly, my inclusion of these women came from their beauty, their adornments and their apparent self-assuredness. Likewise, their hair is a similar length to the Kemetic women who many would argue couldn't have been African because their hair is too long. Well, that is a myth. In fact, I style the hair of two Haitian girls whose very kinky hair was approximately 1 ½ inches when they arrived in the US about 3 years ago. It never used to grow!! Now, one of the sister's hair is so long that when I pull it down her back, it comes to her elbows!! The other's comes to the middle of her back. That is the power of good nutrition and proper hair care. Some of these Himba women may be wearing hair extensions. But if they are, it's because they are accustomed (*i.e. historically*) to having long hair. Time and climactic conditions may have altered factors impacting the health and vitality of their natural hair. These are all conditional suppositions, but consider this quote from the Himba Wikipedia page:

Himba women...are remarkably famous for covering themselves with otjize paste, a cosmetic mixture of butterfat and ochre pigment, to cleanse the skin over long periods due to water scarcity and protect themselves from the extremely hot and dry climate of the Kaokoland as well as against mosquito insect bites. The cosmetic mixture, often perfumed with the aromatic resin of the omuzumba shrub, gives their skin and hair plaits a distinctive orange or red-tinge characteristic, as well as texture and style. Otjize is considered foremost a highly desirable aesthetic beauty cosmetic, symbolizing earth's rich red color and blood the essence of life, and is consistent with the OvaHimba ideal of beauty.



This description is of an ingenious solution to the ever day problem of excess heat, water scarcity, dryness of skin and hair as well as mosquitos. With a Western mind, we rely on air-conditioning, drink bottled water and bathe daily even when there's a water shortage, coat our skin in sunscreen while coating our hair with every conditioner or oil product known to man and spray with insecticides. **All of these actions require using products which are produced by people other than ourselves!** And so, the African mind and body is enslaved to civilized "necessities" which are luxury items but non-essential to life. These women have the intelligence and the wherewithal to find solutions to the daily challenges of life in their surrounding environment.

I wonder how many Western minds could survive and thrive in the life circumstances of these women. I wonder how many Western minds whose lives and pocketbooks are enslaved to creature comforts believe themselves better off than the Himba people. Indeed, it is a compelling state of affairs. My husband did not want to travel to Egypt when I originally invited him. He said "I am not a civilizationist." By saying this, he meant "I could give a flying flip whether our people built the pyramids. I don't need to prove that we were once the authors of civilization. I am concerned with the politics, the economics and

the social realities of today.” In that regard, I too am not a civilizationist. Because when I look at the Himba women, I admire them greatly and I honor their ingenuity, their freedom and their dignity. These women are as vain and beautiful as their ancient ancestors, even though war, greed and avarice have left them only with the gifts of Eden. Yet, they have the intelligence of mind and the peacefulness of spirit to be content with God’s gifts, neither raping the Earth nor craving the gifts of others to increase their own comfort. In my estimation, they are richly blessed, highly enlightened beings!





A relaxer by any other name would smell as...

A commentary on relaxers, natural-laxers and everything in-between

Context: This article was published in the February 2018 issue of Au Naturel Newsletter. It was a reaction to a sudden surge in requests for mild relaxer services. These services haven't been requested from our salon since our early years between 2006-2008. So, this article was an attempt to achieve clarity about what "softening curls" really is.

Within the salon, I've had a recent spate of requests from prospective clients (Black and White) who have asked me to help them "soften their curls." In their words, "I don't want a relaxer." But, the spirit of their words is undeniable. I can "soften their curl" by blow-drying their hair straight, but that's not what they're asking for. They want a "softening" that will outlast the shampoo bowl. My response is and ever will be the same: We don't provide relaxer services. They then probe further, concluding that I don't know the specific procedure that they are requesting, because it's not a relaxer. But, a hair softener, is a texturizer, is a relaxer, is a conk. It doesn't matter what era of history you're referring to, the chemicals concocted or the nomenclature used. Softening the curl of African (or any other) hair is a chemical process and we don't provide this service. While we have reached a point in American history where we are acknowledging that Black women and White women have similar style challenges (i.e. the desire for bone straight hair), our philosophy remains unchanged. Relaxers smell horrible and are damaging to the hair and the psyche. I don't want them in my salon. All the same, companies are working overtime to address this desire with as minimal damaging effects as possible. There are products that you can comb into the hair and leave on for a short time that will loosen the curl. A Caucasian sister who is a stylist recently told me about one. Our discussion began with her asking me to put tracks in her hair for length in the back. I acknowledged that her hair was thick enough in the back to cover the tracks, so it is definitely do-able for a temporary style change. The biggest challenge would be matching her color and texture. Well when I approached the subject of hair texture, she expounded on a new product that she had purchased to soften her curl pattern. She followed, "I'd love for you to put that in first and then the tracks." Suddenly, I was faced with a dilemma because while we provide extension services, which are temporary, we do not provide permanent relaxer services, no matter how benign they may appear. Women like change, so we like to be flexible. But, if you're hating on your hair, I'm not going to help you with that! There are many other sisters in the game who will happily oblige you. So, I gracefully exited the hair discussion with an explanation of our salon philosophy and changed the subject. So to all the forces in the universe bringing this energy of compromise to my doorstep, know this: I'm not the one. Embrace the beauty of you.





The Cutting Edge and Cutting Edges

Context: This article was published in the July-August 2018 issue of An Naturel Newsletter. It was statement on the state of Black hair trend setters and the cost of fashion.

From my recent travels to Africa, as well as my experience living in the Caribbean some years ago, I have come to realize that African-Americans set the pace for hair, fashion and image throughout the world. What we do, others copy. The negative effects of that emulation is that in Senegal, women are practically addicted to wigs and hair weaves. When I see some AA television shows, I understand where the strong influence comes from. But, it's honestly disappointing. Senegal is the Paris of West Africa--the women dress EVERYDAY!!! But when I see so many of them wearing three foot long wigs as the crowning glory of their ensemble, I feel a bit sad. I wonder what type of psychological conclusions would be drawn from a visit to Europe wherein 80% of the women were wearing Afro wigs. People



would think that there was something absolutely absurd going on within that society. That's how I feel when I visit Senegal. Yes, many women are Muslim and therefore wear their hair covered. And others wear braids or cornrows, usually with extensions like in the photo. *The artist here has some real skills!* And an even smaller number wear their own hair; but, the standard is a wig for hair worn loosely. And often when the hair is covered, it's a weave that is being covered! I've even wondered if women wear wigs as a proxy for covering their hair consistent with the Muslim faith. But, this is not the case. In fact, I was so concerned about it that I asked a coworker about it, one day. She said,

"It's so bad that if you line up 10 women in a room, they will all be wearing a wig. These same women look at me with my natural hair and look down on me because they think I'm not trying. It's gotten to the point that even girls in school are now wearing weaves and wigs. They are starting them as early as 16."

It's cause for concern; because, weaves are known to erase a woman's edges and leave her with serious alopecia problems along her hairline. If women are introducing their young daughters to hair weaves, the scenario does not bode well for their long-term hair health. I feel like the 80s adornment of relaxed hair is repeating itself in West Africa with the same negative psychological effects! While it's true that the weave trend first emerged in the US, in Senegal, it has been perfected. I think it would definitely make an interesting research exercise to analyze the behavioral and psychological dynamics of it all. I wonder how these women engage with their men: Can he touch her hair? Do they just take the wig off before going to bed or do they sleep in it? What about during a night of intimacy? Does he feel proud of his woman because her wig is expensive and looks natural? How does she feel about the hair that she's hiding underneath the wig? It makes me feel like I need to translate my book to French and distribute it WIDELY!! I just really don't have the time for that. But if it's my destiny, I know the Spirit will lead me to it.

I do see natural styles in Senegal, though they are few and far between. But, I have faith in destiny. In the end, I don't worry about it as I know that this trend is temporary and will end. They will re-awaken to the beauty of natural hair in the same way as African-American women have been doing here in the US. In the same way that

they have followed African-American women to the wig shop, they will follow us to the naturalista aisle in the supermarket. Truth crushed to the ground will rise again. Change will come. And when it does, I for one will cheer loudly and say "Thank you God!"





Bad hair days don't mean you have "bad hair"

A commentary on why Black women are so enamored with wigs and weaves

Context: The longer I stay in the natural hair care business, the more I am perplexed by the extent to which we pay Asian faux hair producers to give us a hairstyle that will minimize our "bad hair days" at all cost. The article, published in the October 2019 issue of Au Naturel Newsletter, attempts to draw the reader to the understanding that the desire for hair "perfection" is grounded in an unattainable standard.

In the last issue of Au Naturel, I spoke a bit about the phenomenon of missing edges, how it occurs and what to do to reverse the trend. At that time, I advised that this month, I would expound a bit on how we have gotten to the place of seeing lost edges as a norm. It is tied integrally to our obsession with weaves, extensions and wigs. We emphasize the style and fashion that fake hair affords us but it cuts much deeper than that. When people used to make fun of my natural twists only to pay Asians to purchase fake hair that gave them the exact same look as my hair, I was confused to say the least. It absolutely made no sense to me! My sister and I would discuss the matter perplexed. It's something I've contemplated for some time (often without even being aware that I am). Why will Black women pay someone to sell them hair that looks like their own? I'm speaking collectively of course as motivations differ based on the individual; but, en masse it's what we do. In fact, Asians have perfected techniques to match the look of Black hair in all of its varying textures. So fundamentally, it's not necessarily the texture of hair that we hate, now is it?

Through years of observation and consideration, I've concluded that our obsession comes from our absolute and complete disdain for a "bad hair day". Black women simply don't want one because it is seen as an indictment on the quality and value of our hair. When Black women see a mixed race child whose mother is being challenged by the Black hair care regimen, we are quick to criticize thinking, "How dare she make us look bad. We know how to care for our hair. She better recognize and learn. If not, take the child to the stylist." But God forbid do NOT allow the child to have wild and free hair. A bad hair day is any day that your hair is not on point, to perfection. With natural hair, as with relaxed hair, these days are bound to occur. So, enter the wig or the weave, and voila! The hair is molded and shaped perfectly so that we can face the world.

Women of other cultures, particularly European culture, have accepted the fact that bad hair days are a reality of life. That's what a chic ponytail is for. I've worn MANY!!! You simply find a quick solution, accept that today is a hair challenge day and keep it moving. There's no judgment of the hair's inherent "good"ness, its quality or its beauty. There's simply acceptance. But, we have a ways to go to get to this place. Many women embracing locks and natural hair styles are coming to accept this reality. But strangely, the more things change, the more they stay the same. When we can boast (like Beyoncé and Rihanna) that our hair is natural but it's natural texture is hidden under mounds of wigs and weaves, WHAT'S THE POINT?! Many brag about keeping their natural hair; but, when the world can't see the truth of that natural hair, you have simply jumped onto a bandwagon without even knowing why you're on it or where it's going. It's a rather sad state of affairs.

This past week-end, I was in the salon with the twins whose hair I've been styling since they were young children. One of the stylists was playing a video of a woman installing a crochet weave on her hair without a cornrowed foundation. The stylist wanted to see how it was done. Well, the video was quite informative; but, what it told me was not the intent of the video. After approximately two hours of detailed explanation of how to install "Jamaica Bounce" crochet weave hair into her own hair, I looked at the girls and said: "Imagine. She spent two whole hours coaxing, caressing and singing the praises of fake hair to get a natural curly look that you girls get with a mere twist out hairstyle. Imagine if she spent as much time caring for her own hair as she spent on the "Jamaica bounce" hair, her hair would probably be quite beautiful." The stylist then advised that the woman in the video has shoulder length, relaxed hair. That means that she could have a killer head full of natural hair with time and attention.

After shaking my head over this video, it was followed up by a YouTube video with a woman wearing a long ponytail that extended all the way down past her waist. At the start of the video, she is dancing, twirling her head and bouncing with her hair as if she has been kissed by the gods and has the most beautiful hair in the world. The

look was very cute and natural. Then, the video showed the process of straightening the client's full head of hair to a "fair thee well" and then gingerly installing the three foot long ponytail. When the ponytail was installed, the client's personality seemed to change. The twins observed the transformation as one exclaimed, "OMG, she just stuck out her tongue!" And indeed, she stuck out her tongue, started sipping through a straw in her mouth and starting bouncing her upper bound in a gesture of sheer delight. It reminded me of when I would get my hair straighten in the salon back in the 80s and 90s. When the stylist finished my hair, it's like the salon would get silent out of reverence to this thing that was a divine gift. You could imagine the heavens opening up and the angels singing "[Ahhhh](#)". It's part of the reason that I stopped straightening my hair. I didn't like the process OR the homage paid to the illusion (as my hair is not naturally straight and straight hair was synonymous with "good hair"). A co-worker once told me, your hair would be so pretty if it were straightened out. I told her, "My hair IS pretty as it is."

My clients bounce like the girl in the video when looking at their own hair in its natural state! She bounced at an illusion. I wondered if she bounced so joyfully when the ponytail is removed because it's time is done and it's time to go back to the hair store for a re-install. The girls looked at me with some measure of confusion. I sighed and said, "As you consider the professions that you will pursue in the future, please know that psychology and psychiatry are very viable options as services needed within the black community."

As a natural hair stylist, I know that a large part of my job is to help my clients have as few bad hair days as possible. And I believe we are succeeding. At that same time, Black women like style and fashion. And yes, the right to change your hair style is a woman's prerogative. But, I caution the reader to consider: If you are wearing your own natural hair covered up more than wearing it out, what does being natural mean to you? Do you even like natural hair, and if not, why be natural? I recently talked a potential client out of coming into our salon for services because I could tell from the way that she spoke that she is much happier with her self-installed crochet weaves than she would be with anything I did to her hair. I conceded: "I can make an appointment, give you a style and take your money. But you won't be happy with it or me, because I'm not sure you're ready to wear your natural hair. The style will be pretty; but, it won't last very long based on the texture and length of your hair. When you consider what you paid for it, you will be dissatisfied as you are accustomed to paying nothing (excluding the cost of the weave hair which is minimal.) I don't want to take your money. I want you to introspect and decide what you really want from your hair." Maybe she only wants it to serve as a strong foundation for her crochet weaves. It's hard to know for sure. So, I gave her tips for styling and wearing her natural hair between crochet weaves services so that she can start to adjust her eye to the truth that is her hair. And I assured her that when she's truly ready to wear her natural hair, I'll be delighted to assist her along the journey.

In short, we must realize that "bad hair days" do NOT mean that you have "bad hair". It simply means that the hair is exercising its autonomous right to do other than what you want it to do at the moment. Typically, a good shampoo and style will fix all bad hair days. But if you don't have the time to do so, find "stop-gap" styles that allow you to coast through the day effortlessly. A Mexican friend in high school once told me (paraphrasing): "My mother always says, when your hair is not behaving, put on make-up and keep it moving." Other women have learned the secret of managing "bad hair days", it's time that we as Black women stop throwing out the baby with the bath water and embrace our hair with all of its personalities. And the next time you see me sporting a ponytail without athletic gear, smile and nod. I'll understand. Happy styling! 😊





Grey tresses gone wild: Tips to Accentuate and Tame the Untimely

Context: This article was published in the November-December 2020 issue of Au Natural Newsletter. It is part of my ongoing saga of contemplation and acceptance of my grey hair. It is what it is.

Years ago, I told my sons that I would never age. Specifically, I said, “Today, I look like your mother. Tomorrow, I’ll be your aunt. After that, I’ll be your sister. And then, I’ll be your child.” They laughed as did I because well, I can make up some -ISH when I’m feeling myself like that. So, it was a good story that they didn’t buy one bit. Then one day while we were picking up some last minute items for my eldest son’s college trip to France in Wal-mart, a man passed by, stopped and said to my eldest, “Is that your mother?!” My son’s entire expression changed as he said, “YES!” Then, the man said, “No disrespect. She just don’t look like your mother. That’s all.” Then he walked away. Both sons looked at me and said, “You said you wouldn’t age. I guess you were right.” I laughed. Well, what I didn’t factor in was grey hair. Because let’s face it, you don’t think about it until you have to. And then,well. You have to! It kept it’s distance up until 40 and then BAM!! It’s multiplied exponentially. The photos are of my recent detailed tress-examination. My roots are really trying to be all White. My mother says it’s inevitable as she greyed earlier than her counterparts. But she dyed for years. Because my hair is long, the elder black strands will take a while to be fully replaced so I give thanks for small blessings. But, it’s pretty wild to observe the process taking place.

Well, you know me. My whole aim is to age as gracefully as [Nancy Wilson](#)...natural and unadulterated. May her soul rest as beautifully as she lived. Besides, my salon motto is “Embrace the beauty of you.” So, I feel I should walk the walk otherwise, I’m a hypocrite. So, I’m walking the walk. But can I be honest. I intend to remain youthful into the future. And it won’t be because I have Alzheimer’s and have literally regressed in mental years to infancy. It’s because I intend to take care of myself until God calls me home. I think I’m doing a pretty decent job of it, and I pray my sons follow my example. But the grey hairs tell a story that can’t be denied. My husband is 6 years older than me and I have waaayyyy more grey hair on my head than he does! His beard is fully grey now, but he just cuts it off and keeps it moving. (Goodness, is that man vain! He even plucks his grey eyebrows. INSANE!) So sometimes, I think, maybe I should embrace hair dye...afterall, it isn’t really a change. It’s just returning myself



to the self that everyone has known and remember most. I would easily erase about 10 years with the swipe of a brush. Some days, I'm so enticed by the notion that I dream about it. Then, I wake up, look in the mirror and say, "Naw. God thinks I should look like this now. So, that's good enough for me." And then I don't. But the clients whose hair I dye look absolutely fabulous. The color accentuates their beauty and youthfulness. But I am a very low maintenance type of girl. Most days, I don't wear make-up at all. When I do, it's mascara, an eyebrow pencil and lip gloss. NEVER FOUNDATION...unless I'm doing a photo shoot which is almost never. My hair is as low maintenance as the rest of me. So, the thought of being bound to a box of hair color at the *every six week* interval is inconsistent with my lifestyle. I know that won't change. So if I dye, it would just mean that I'd wind up regretting it later when the routine of it all gets played. So, I'm trying to discover the beauty secrets of grey hair. You know the #1 secret: **It looks best on a youthful face.** Nancy Wilson had it right. So, that's what I'll endeavor to become and maintain. It won't be easy. Menopause has not found me yet. And while most women are quite happy to enter this stage of life, I'm quite content to have my body still regulated by estrogen and progesterone. I'm curious what I'll possibly look like when these natural youth elixirs stop coursing through my veins. Again, I'm low maintenance. I don't do daily pills, so I won't be down with hormone replacement. So, I'll just have to cross that bridge when the time comes. But I can't help but think that my rigid naturalista (i.e. minimalist) standards will have me looking 20 years older than all of my friends at some appointed future date. Time will tell. In the interim, I'll keep doing me.

For others working with their grey (male & female alike), tips to enhance your look are as follows:

- Consider giving your grey more of a silver hue with [Shimmering Lights](#). This purple shampoo is enriched with an active violet dye that gives white hair a richer silver tone that provides a bit more depth to the hair color. But be careful. If you hair is overly porous, dry or damaged, you may find yourself exhibiting a bit more violet than anticipated. So, it should be used no more than a few times per month. I haven't tried it myself as yet. Despite my fickle nature concerning my grey, I occasionally receive compliments on it. So I'm curious to observe the process unfold with minimal interference. But, this product is a known beauty secret for people over 50.
- Be very careful with heat styling. Grey hair is known to sometimes develop a yellow hue which is rather unflattering. It can be caused by heat damage, yellow pigment in your shampoo or conditioner, sun exposure or chemicals from pools, etc. So, err on the side of clear hair cleansing products and avoid excessive use of curling irons or flat irons. Shimmering Lights is a useful tool in your arsenal if you're developing a yellow tint. But prevention is worth a pound of cure.
- Style matters now more than ever and looks that frame the face are very flattering. The myth that grey hair needs to be short is gone. But, the hair should have a manicured look, indicating that everything about your look is intentional. I tend to favor the free flowing, disheveled look to my hair when wearing a longer style. But, I'm also a sucker for ponytails. My hair is not quite as long as it used to be. So, I do more short styling of my natural hair by using less heat when blow drying before styling. The great beauty of naturally coily/kinky hair is that you can wear short hair WITHOUT using the scissors. When you want a long look again, you just employ the blow dryer. And voila!
- Finally, grey hair performs best with dark solid colors. Maroons, navy blues, black, dark grey, even mustard and forest green look great! Grey hair can make you look ashen. So, the focus on solid dark colors will bring out the richness of your skin tone and the wonderful contrast of your hair against the dark backdrop that you've created. Avoid florals, plaids, stripes or checkers. These clothes are doable, but they DO NOTHING to make you drop dead gorgeous. Trust me on this one. Watch the compliments pour in!

Until next time, embrace the beauty of you. 😊





**Natural Hair Care Truths:
Styling Tips and Transformations**





The Greatest Challenge of Going Natural...

Is by far, staying natural. Over the years, I have come in contact with many women who embark on the natural hair journey with eagerness and excitement. For many, that journey is a joyful one. For others, it is not. As their hair grows and they see the “truth unadulterated,” many women experience disappointment, frustration, anger, misgivings and helplessness. Kinky and extremely curly hair is active hair. It’s not easily slapped down or pulled into a style. Therefore, it is advisable to craft a strategy to combat negative emotions that may arise BEFORE they occur.

Disappointment typically arises when we realize just how thick and kinky our natural hair is. It may be surprising to learn that your hair will never hang to your shoulders without the coaxing of a blow-dryer or that the curl is tighter or looser than you anticipated. Combat disappointment with creativity. Seek out and research innovative styles that fit your hair type, texture and lifestyle. Inter-change them consistently with your personal needs. If your hair does not yet reach the length of your desired look, set a hair health goal. It will help you stay focused on those “sub-optimal” hair days.

Frustration comes from using inappropriate hair care and management techniques on your hair. Most ladies that I have spoken with who didn’t stay natural decided to chemically treat their hair during a moment of frustration on a “sub-optimal” hair day. Many regretted it afterwards, particularly when they had worked more than a year to grow out their natural hair. A general rule of thumb: Never try to comb and style your hair in a hurry.

Always leave ample time for stress-less management of your hair. If you simply must have a new look quickly, choose a head wrap or a hat. Both choices can be dressed up or down based on your needs. Then, return to the care of your hair when you have time to work on it without time constraints. This approach will relieve undue stress and anxiety.

Anger and **misgivings** emerge from feelings of betrayal. Some may feel that they have somehow been wronged for having this hair and/or they may feel that they have been duped into believing that natural hair is for everyone. Know this: Natural hair is “natural” for everyone, but is not everyone’s preference. For example, some people would never let their gray strands show but gray hair is as natural as black hair. It’s about preference. If you don’t like it, you can always choose something else. But also know that anger about your hair is a factor of dysfunction. Ask yourself: What am I mad at? The answer will come to you. When it does, take the next steps to address this anger consistent with the response that you receive, the lessons you learn about yourself and your personal life journey.

Helplessness is common and is caused by insufficient knowledge of natural hair management techniques. Don’t try to manage what you don’t understand. Most people would never do their first relaxer themselves. Yet, they feel that the absence of chemicals means the absence of the need for skills to maintain and care for their hair. Nothing is further from the truth. Natural hair care is not complex but it does require orientation. We have served many women over the years who attended the salon just long enough to learn what they should do on their own. Now, they apply those same techniques at home. In short, they sought help until they could stand on their own. Seek out help through your local natural hair salon, girlfriends, books and numerous internet resources.

Natural hair is beautiful hair. But, it requires a goal to aim towards, patience to get there, understanding regarding your own personal motivations and self-image and support to stay the course. With this information, you will be empowered to walk into the natural hair world with knowledge and awareness. With these strengths in your arsenal, you will likely stay “happily natural.”





Should I Texturize My Natural Hair?

As women start to wear natural hair, seeing its true character and attributes, the mind can be over-whelmed with uncertainty and indecision. What am I going to do now? What hairstyle complements my personality? Would the “wash and go” work on me? How does my hair texture and curl pattern compare to other ladies wearing my preferred style? How do I make sure that my hair always looks good? What products are out there to assist me with the task? The questions are a natural part of the change process, so please be gentle with yourself during this process. Ask the questions, and think through meaningful responses that make sense to you. If you need help deciding about something, contact a natural hair care professional for advice. And most importantly, take your time.

Invariably as the product question emerges, some clients consider the possible benefits of a texturizer. For those who don't know, a texturizer is a hair care product which uses a chemical formulation designed to relax the natural curl pattern of the hair. Many of you will recall the “S” curl that guys wore *back in the day*, for ease of reference. The intent of the texturizer is to make the hair more manageable by swapping a kinky or extremely curly texture for a more “relaxed curly” one. With that said, I want to preface my discussion of this topic by saying that everyone should truly do what makes sense for you and your lifestyle. There is no judgment about that choice. Life is good. But since you're making a choice that you will have to live with for some time, be informed before doing so.

There are four key points that I want to raise about texturizers to inform your decision-making. First, texturizers are defined as and function much like relaxers. As stated above, they are used to transform the hair's natural curl pattern to a texture that is “more manageable” for the wearer. This function is the same as the chemical relaxer which is defined by the Free Dictionary as: “One that relaxes, as a chemical solution used on tightly curled hair to soften or loosen the curls.” If the intention of the relaxer is to “soften the curl, this is precisely what the texturizer accomplishes.

Second, the texturizer has some of the same active ingredients as chemical relaxers. The active agent in relaxers is typically a strong alkali (chemical agent). Examples of alkali salts are calcium hydroxide and sodium hydroxide. A review of the ingredients list for some of the more popular texturizer products on the market show them to include either calcium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide. Many relaxer products may include both. Calcium hydroxide is better known as lime and sodium hydroxide is better known as lye. Both chemical compounds function in an industrial capacity to break down the chemical bonds in natural agents, i.e. the processing of wood chips into paper. Sodium hydroxide breaks down the natural chemical bonds in the wood chips to make them more porous, i.e., less dense. Within the hair, these chemicals function in the same way.

So thirdly, texturizers like relaxers break the natural bonds of the hair. All natural hair, regardless of genetics, consists of three bonds: the hydrogen bond, the salt bond and the disulfide bond. These three bonds make up the strength of the hair. Hydrogen bonds are easily broken whenever the hair is wet or heated. For example when you shampoo your hair, the hydrogen bonds break and re-form through the introduction of H₂O. As your hair air dries, the hair “re-sets” to its natural curl pattern. If you place your hair on rollers while it is wet, the hydrogen bonds that have broken will “set” to whatever pattern it adopts temporarily through curling. Because this process is natural and temporary, it is seen as in no way detrimental to the structure, the strength or the integrity of the hair. The salt bond and the disulfide bonds, however, are more difficult to break. Once these bonds break, the change is permanent. The chemical relaxer is known to break the disulfide bond of the hair. (In my view, this scientific fact would definitely explain why the process of relaxing the hair smells so horrible. Sulfur is not sweet smelling, and a broken disulfide bond would logically entail the release of this naturally occurring agent.) So through breaking this bond, the disulfide bond is replaced with a weaker, unnaturally occurring chemical bond called a lanthionine bond. This weaker bond is what allows the hair strand to stretch into a more relaxed curl pattern. This change is permanent for the hair that has been treated.

With all of this information to consider, it reminds me of an old proverb which says: “if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, looks like a duck, it must be a duck.” So if by logical deduction, we conclude that texturizers are defined as, formulated as, and function as relaxers, then I come to my fourth point: Texturizers are relaxers. Likewise

through the application of the transitive law of reasoning, if relaxed hair is not natural, then texturized hair CAN NOT be called natural hair either. As such, the answer to the opening question ‘Should I texturize my natural hair?’ is: “No. Not if you want to remain natural.” Simply put, there is no *in-between*.

So to conclude, I want to encourage you to choose what’s right for you; but please, know the facts. When you’re armed with truth, you can make an informed decision. And likewise, you are better equipped to discern false teaching like the tutorial videos and seemingly informed advisories on the Net which suggest that texturized hair IS natural hair. Happy Styling, my sisters!





Styling Tips: Transitioning Styles



Stylist: Martina Jackson; Photographer: Varick Taylor



Stylists: Jamie Mitchell (left) and Martina Jackson (right); Photographer: Varick Taylor

The lead photo is of someone who has just decided to transition to natural hair. The client has very little new growth and therefore needs a style which camouflages new growth around the edges of the hair. Here, the hair is flat-twisted in the front and tied in small Nubian knots. The rest of the hair is blow-dried and curled, working with the relaxed texture. Once the hair grows beyond one inch of new growth, it is no longer advisable to maintain a loose hair style that needs daily combing as it can stress the hair strands. Therefore, a more protective style is needed.

The two lower photos are of styles which can more readily accommodate two or more inches of new growth. The first photo is of a flat twisted extension style. This style can be easily wrapped at night and can last up to two months though for best results, it should be worn for only one. The second photo is of a cornrowed style that has a side weave added for flair and volume. Style maintenance primarily involves oiling the scalp and curling the loose hair.





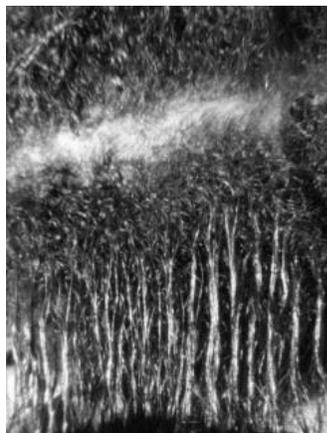
The Whys and Wherefores of the Big Chop

The big chop is a style that everyone has heard about but few people know the inter-workings of how it's done. I performed one in the salon recently so I thought I'd share the experience. Firstly for the sake of common understanding: The big chop is a haircut heralding the end of a client's journey to natural hair. The client typically enters the salon as a person transitioning (to natural hair) and leaves the salon fully natural. It represents a rebirth and an awakening. The awakening is to one's pure, unadulterated natural beauty. Women choose to have the big chop done when it's been anywhere from 3-8 months since their last relaxer service. Because the hair grows on average $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch per month, they typically do not initiate this salon service until they are sure that they'll have at least an inch of hair remaining on their heads. So, three months tends to be the narrowest window of time from their last relaxer service to wearing a fully natural style. This service is unique because of the peculiarities of having two different hair textures on each strand of hair. The hair at the root extending upwards from the scalp is natural and the relaxed hair towards the middle and ends of hair strand is straight. The aim and objective of the procedure is to cut off the relaxed hair at the *line of demarcation* between the textures, leaving only the client's natural hair. Typically, the finished look is what is affectionately known as the teeny weeny afro.

As a service, the big chop is not one that is requested in the salon on a daily basis. Some women have the big chop done only one time in their life (like yours truly back in the day). Other's may have it done a few times, as they rally between deciding whether relaxed or natural hair is more suitable for their current whims and fancies. Whatever the case, some choose to DIY at home, while others get professional assistance. For these varying reasons, the frequency of providing this service within a salon is much less than that of a regular trim service which many clients receive a few times a year, depending on the individual. But when the service is requested, it's pretty important to know what to do.

Step One: Shampoo the client's hair. This service is NEVER done on dry hair. The reason for this is that the water helps you see where the natural hair texture ends and the relaxed hair begins. So, the first photo (next page) is of the client's hair immediately following a thorough shampoo and conditioning service. You will note when looking at the client's hair en masse, it's difficult to see where this distinction lies but the second photo (next page) shows the two textures much more clearly.

Step Two: Ensure that you have very clear visibility while working. Firstly, make sure you have ample lighting. I have a standing lamp next to my station which I often use to direct the light to the exact area where I'm working. Also, I always place a white towel around the client's neck and shoulders while cutting. The reason is not just because the client's hair may be dripping. It is to create contrast to improve visibility. The black cape, coupled with black or dark brown hair means that your depth perception and visibility will be lessened. By adding the white towel, you create the contrast that is needed to more clearly see your work area for optimal results.



Step Three: Section the hair in small sections while working. This step is the core foundation to all hair cutting techniques and is an absolute imperative whenever dealing with a large quantity of natural hair. You will be amazed to see how length, thickness, coarseness or knottiness of the hair is made completely irrelevant simply by ensuring that you work in sections while servicing a client. The more challenging the work space, the smaller you must make the section to comfortably get through it. The second photo shows how the hair has been sectioned off to facilitate the cutting process. In this photo, you can clearly see how the hair towards the scalp is curly or puffy, while the relaxed hair hangs straight. The light helps you to understand the point that I've made several times over the years: Shine is a factor of light, not of hair health! When light dances on a smooth surface, it reflects and creates a shine, much like sunlight on a calm, serene lake. When light shines on a non-smooth surface (i.e. rough ocean waves), its broken up and the result is a much duller finish. As you can see, the client's hair that is relaxed is shining while the natural hair is not. But in truth, the natural hair is healthier than the relaxed hair. By definition, it is perfect; because, it is the true genetic code of the individual. People call this natural hair "virgin hair" because it has not yet been abused or mistreated. *(Note: Some people believe the term "virgin hair" only applies to hair that has never been relaxed...EVER! But, this concept is inconsistent with a complete knowledge of hair and how it grows. So, I believe that virgin hair is an appropriate reference for hair in its most natural state. Virginity, as a state of being, is something that cannot be recaptured. But virgin hair can be.)*

Step Four: Cut the hair along the line of demarcation. Working with the section that you have cordoned off, pull the hair taut to lengthen it and to more clearly define where the straight hair begins (i.e. the line of demarcation). See picture three. **(Please note:** In this photo, the line is curved to mirror the curve of the client's head. However, the right side of the photo is much less distinct. This is because it is very difficult to hold a camera and take a picture while holding hair and a comb simultaneously. So the right side of the hair section is less taut than the left. Focus on the left side to see where the line of demarcation is most clearly.) When cutting the hair, I cut slightly above this line (i.e. closer to the scalp) to ensure that there are no straight ends remaining on the finished look. Drop the straight hair on the floor and continue working throughout the client's hair.



Step Five: Check for evenness and consistency throughout. After you have cut away all of the relaxed hair, comb the hair all over. You can follow-up with clippers to guarantee an even, polished look. This is the approach that most barbers will take. But, I find that most newly transitioned natural clients want to maintain as much length as possible, so they will opt for possible unevenness over a "tailored look" most times. Do whatever your client is most comfortable with. If not using clippers, look at the silhouette of the hair against a white backdrop to ensure that straight hairs do not remain. You can use a comb with a ruler to measure sections of the hair and ensure that they are even all over.

Step Six: Client affirmation. This step may be the single most important step in the process. At this point, the client now has a short afro that is rather chic and can be dressed up or down by earrings and accessories. Give them advice about how to be fashionable while growing their hair. If the client's hair is a bit longer after the big chop, you can coil or two-strand twist it into a style. If your client specifically does not favor the afro, I would recommend providing a free or deeply discounted twist service. This is to get them comfortable with their natural hair. I have seen women look in the mirror and cry after a big chop. So, I twisted their hair for free to give them some flavor and a slight boost in esteem. Releasing relaxed hair means accepting what we look like without artificial straighteners. Some people have trouble handling the truth when they look in the mirror. Invariably, I see beauty. But, I'm kind of biased and have 30 years of loving and appreciating a natural look. Since the client is the person who needs convincing, I simply tell them of my own experience. The first time I wore twists (in the 80s), I didn't like it. The last time I straightened my hair (1999), I hated it. My eye has adjusted to a completely natural view of myself. So, your client's eye will adjust...in time and with patience. Where necessary, I refer people to the article "The Greatest Challenge of Going Natural..." for words of encouragement. It provides additional advice and prepares clients for the days, weeks and months to come.

In conclusion, while the big chop is a procedure that is not inherently difficult, it does require enormous attention to detail and patience. So, take your time and enjoy caring for and talking with your client. That is the stylist's greatest non-monetary reward in the hair care service industry. Enjoy!





Afro Dreamin': Divine Perfection



Out of all of the natural hairstyles that I've always wanted to wear, that I've never worn, a big, full afro is at the top of the list. Of course, I wore a really short afro when I was in elementary school and my mom didn't know what to do with my hair. She cut my hair and then got my ears pierced. (The order may be reversed.) That was that! She was freed up and so was I. I was really too young to care. And the childhood photos that I do remember from that era showed a smiling, beaming kid who was much more interested in digging up worms in the backyard to go fishing rather than styling hair. You might think that it'd be fairly easy for me to wear an afro now if I choose to. However, my hair on the top of my head is decidedly straighter than the hair in the back. My son's hair is exactly the same way. When I locked his hair, I had to perform natural gymnastics to coax his hair into locking on top. It's just a much straighter texture. You wouldn't know looking at his hair today as all of the locks look the same; but, when the hair is not bound, it tells a different story. So, my hair at the front droops rather than stands-up and that is the signature beauty of the afro—gravity defying, coily perfection!! The sister in the photos to the right came by the shop in January for a trim. After the trim, her hair was a natural 'fro all on it's own! When I offered to French braid her hair afterwards, she exercised her right to rock divine perfection and walked out of the salon "as is"... poetry in motion. 😊





Transitioning Taboos: Spotlight on Weaves and Extensions

As more and more sisters out there are inspired to transition to their naturally curly locks, there are the inevitable horror stories associated with bad transitioning practice. If hell is paved with good intentions then so is the road to natural hair. Many people are happy to help us transition but without sufficient knowledge and experience regarding the process of transitioning, they may be inclined to lead you down the garden path.

The first rule of thumb is: everyone's hair texture is not the same so there is no **"one size fits all"** plan of action for transitioning to natural hair. What works for one person will surely not work for someone else. It's important to have a proper consultation with a professional natural stylist to understand what to expect for your hair texture.

Secondly, don't believe that **transitioning is easy**. It can be rife with struggle and heartache without a clear strategy for transitioning. While you won't need to plan out the entire process from beginning to end, you will need to have a style strategy that targets a specific look that will last 2 weeks to 2 months in duration, depending on your lifestyle and your style preferences. Be sure that the strategy makes provision for special events for which you need your hair to perform in a way consistent with the demands of the occasion. Having a clear style strategy will prevent the inevitable frustration, anger and possible defeat (i.e. re-perming) that arises when we invariably have a wedding or conference to attend and no time in which to style our hair in a way that is desirable.

Where there is a pronounced difference in texture between the natural hair and the permed hair, some ladies choose to transition with extension styles or with weaves. Many ladies believe that **braids or weaves are the easiest way to transition**. This approach is seen as "care-free" and allows one to avoid cutting the hair while the natural hair establishes itself. It can be very popular during the summer months. There are three primary problems that we see with this approach:

Style longevity - One problem arises when these styles are worn for too long, resulting in a buildup of dirt and oil on the scalp. Hair *debris*, for lack of a better word, then accumulates at the point where extended braids or foundation braids begin. When the hair is loosened, this debris must be combed or brushed out of the hair BEFORE the hair is shampooed. Otherwise, the debris can create a bonding effect like glue that makes it very difficult to remove from the permed hair. The more the hair was shampooed prior to the style being taken out, the more likely it is that one will encounter challenges during loosening. Interestingly enough, this bonding effect is not so pronounced for hair that is all natural. For this reason, it is not recommended that you go beyond two months for braided extension and weave styles.

Style Loosening – Many women would not dare to weave or braid their own hair but they choose to loosen the same styles while tired, in a hurry and generally in the wrong frame of mind. The damaging effects are often as follows:

- 1) They cut too high up on the extension braid to shorten the loosing process, only to unintentionally cut their own hair.
- 2) They miscalculate the thread alignment for a sew-in weave and wind up cutting their hair.
- 3) They fail to purchase the proper supplies to remove the bonding agent in quick weaves, resulting in their own hair being pulled out, sometimes from the roots.

The best way to avoid these occurrences is to have your braided and weave styles removed professionally. If this option is cost prohibitive for you, then have someone assist you that understands your hair care goals and is supportive. Make the process an event by blocking out ample time for the task, renting videos, cooking comfort food, having a glass of wine and enjoying the camaraderie. The experience will then be rewarding in more ways than one.

Unprofessional practices – No matter how adept the stylist at braiding or weaving, if the result for your hair is traction alopecia (balding along the hairline), the style is surely NOT worth your investment. Weave and braided extension styles can range from \$100-\$250. This is no small “drop in the bucket.” Many ladies choose to cut corners by getting the service as cheaply as possible thinking that they are saving money. But if your hairline is receding, you are losing rather tragically. At *Schatzi's*, our mantra is “we’re more concerned about the hair underneath the extension or weave styles, than the hair that is most visible.” Our aim is that you will be able to sport your own mane of healthy, all-natural hair with pride and confidence. If your edges are gone, you’re locked into weaves and/or wigs perhaps indefinitely. Traction alopecia is a serious problem for Black women. It is traumatizing and 100% avoidable! However when left unchecked, the condition can become irreversible. Look at the results of your stylist’s work. Look at your stylist’s hair. If you see a plethora of traction alopecia cases, don’t buy! Just walk away. You’ll find a suitable alternative with proper research and investment.

In all, these are surely not all of the taboos that can arise when transitioning, but these are the ones with the most fatal consequences. Please consider them carefully when making decisions about your transitioning process. Transitioning is a rewarding time of self-discovery and inner transformation. The process is not challenging for everyone, but when it is, it can be a real bear. So, we don’t discourage any type of transitioning technique, just know that thought and preparation are needed to make the process as smooth as possible. These tips are offered in the spirit of good will. We want to see your hair healthy and your spirit positive and open to the new changes that you are making. We wish you all the best!





What's Hot? What's Not!: A Brief Update on Transitional Styles

In the ever-changing world of natural hair care, you really have to stay abreast of trends to know what's up. It occurred to me recently that while I may intuitively know what's hot and what's not, the average reader of this newsletter may not. So, I'm taking a few lines to highlight what's going on just to keep you in "the know." If you track hair, this ain't nothing new to you!

What's Hot? Crochet Weave - It's all the rage. This style is done by creating a cornrow foundation, like a sew-in weave, and latch hooking (not crocheting) synthetic or natural hair on top of the cornrows. For this style, spacing is critical and you really have to work to create a natural look. (See Photo.) With this style, the hair that you purchase will totally determine the flow of the finished look. If you want a look of long straight hair, use Kanekalon braid hair. If you want a wash-n-go look, use any range of wavy hair textures that look naturally curly. How the hair looks in the bag will determine how it looks on your head. Don't expect much different. But if you watch the many Youtube videos that are out there and decide to curl the hair while it's on your head, I would advise against it. It's a hazard because of the need to dip the hair, and it takes an enormous amount of time. I recommend buying the hair pre-curled. In the salon, this style is about \$140 which is largely a factor of time. Depending on the size of the hair inserts, the style can take anywhere from 3-5 hours. Happy weaving! ☺



What's Not! Micro-Braids - This is the box-braided style in which a thousand micro-tiny braids are extended onto the client's hair. Okay, we don't do and NEVER have done this style at our salon. It's very damaging to the client's hair and so, I omitted it from our portfolio of services from Day 1. Well, the memo/text/email has gotten out and NO ONE (that knows better) even asks for this service anymore. Growth does come through time. We give thanks.

What's Hot? Nubian and Havana Twists - This is the noticeable alternative to the micro-braid and mini-braid styles. Women are turning to this style because it's adding synthetic hair using a twist instead of a braid. Buy Nubian twist hair for the Nubian look, purchase Marley braid hair for a Havana twist and buy Kanekalon hair for the Senegalese twist. The style takes much less time to put in and to take out. It's why I've worn my hair twisted for YEARS...without extensions. It's a natural look, very becoming, super-professional, versatile, and it doesn't damage the hair while going in or coming out. I wet-twist for the Nubian look and blow-dry straighten my hair for the Senegalese look. Over the years, people often asked me where I got my braids done. I always said, "They're twists." The next logical question was, "how do they stay?" No one asks that question anymore. The hair just do what it do...even the synthetic hair! But then, they 'science the hell out of it' to get it to do that. God already scienced my tresses so BOOYAH!!! ☺

What's Not! Kinky Twists - Some of you may be surprised to see this style on this "out" list; but, it's a factor of flavor rather than practicality. The Kinky twist style uses Marley braid hair but the difference is that the twists are smaller and they are generally curled tightly at the end. That signature "curl on the end" is what's *out*. Sisters want whatever style they wear to look as natural as possible and the curly-q is a dead give-away. So, sisters have pretty much thrown this style away...for the time being.

What's Hot? Color - Any color. INCLUDING GREY!! But not the random, self-generated type of grey, like what I wear. The whole head grey is the rage. I saw a chic at a favorite restaurant of ours with it and had to compliment her. It was HOT!! For myself, I'm a big fan of GREEN!!! I really am tempted to go there but can't abide the thought of not matching my hair when I walk out the door wearing burgundy or a checkered print without

green undertones. That's so 80s right?! I AM a child of my generation. (*Sigh.*) Conservatism is my foundation, whether I want to accept it or not. I DO wonder if I should color my grey; but if vanity is the sole motivator, I'll NEVER do it. One of the beautiful little girls I serve saw me the other day and asked: "Did you paint your hair grey?" I howled!!! From the mouth of babes. Of course, I'm inclined to see the glass half empty with a statement like that. So I thought, "Wow, I must really look old." But when I repeated the joke to my friend, she said: "That's so sweet. She thinks you look too young to have grey hair!!" (*Blink, blink.*) Not how I thought about it AT ALL. Life is all about perception, isn't it! ☺ Embrace the beauty of you.





Products, products everywhere: Which one's right for me?

A frequent question that we get in the salon is about the best hair care products. Once clients are in pursuit of a more natural hair style, it sometimes translates into a more natural lifestyle. I can totally relate as I myself am a vegetarian and have been for over 12 years. I'm not always the most meticulous about what I put in my body but some things just don't fly with me at all. I figure, I have a lot of years, God willing, to inhabit this vessel so I intend for it to be as functional and healthy as possible. I've always been a sucker for doing things the easy way so good health seems like a *no-brainer*. From the standpoint of hair care however, the sky really is the limit!! There are so many products on the market that it would be impossible to critique them all. So, I think it's important to start with a few basic questions to narrow things down:

What do you want the product to do for you? This question is important and needs to be considered very honestly. Because if the answer to that question is somehow that you want the product to make natural hair look like something other than natural hair, then I think you should reconsider what you're doing and why? For instance, I often get questions like, what product will make my hair shiny. My response is: hair rollers. The look I get is often one of confusion so I explain the concept of light reflection off of a flat or smooth surface vs. light diffusion, defined as the scattering of incident light by reflection from a rough or irregular surface (American Heritage Dictionary). When you flat iron or rod set your hair, you coax hair growing in a thousand different directions to move on the same plane. The result is the creation of a smooth, flat surface vs. the pre-existing irregular surface that natural hair presents. From years of *shampoo commercial* conditioning, we have come to believe that shiny hair is synonymous with healthy hair. In reality, it's simply the play of light against the strands of hair. The darker and flatter the surface for light reflection, the deeper the shine. Hair health doesn't really have a whole lot to do with it because natural, healthy, extremely curly hair does not reflect light at all when it hasn't been coaxed into a twisted, curly or straight condition. That one is usually a big surprise for people but they understand the logic behind my reasoning so that's ultimately what counts. Once you understand your hair goal, choose products that target your specific hair care needs. Once you find the products that work for you: STICK WITH THEM! Your hair will love you for it!

What is your personal philosophy for the care of your hair and your body? This question is important because I often hear people tout the evils of products containing synthetic or man-made additives but the same people would never bother to ask what pesticides were used to grow the food they ate for breakfast. They would likewise go even less far to ask what was fed to the animals that they are ingesting. I personally think that kind of logic contradictory so I don't really suggest to anyone that they should ONLY use all natural products. Yes, all natural, organic products are healthier for the body! So if you're able, SPLURGE. Your body will love you for it! All the same in this modern world, genetically modified organisms, synthetic compounds and derivatives are almost unavoidable. So, be selective and informed in your decision-making.

How much are you willing/able to spend? Because there is such an abundance of products on the market, cost can quickly narrow down the playing field even more. Determine the target price range for what you're looking for and stay within your budget. If you are a poor college student, you may need to work really hard to find cheaper organic products or create your own. With that said, higher cost does not always mean better quality. Research and ask questions BEFORE purchasing. Your wallet will thank you for it!





The Anointing

"...thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." (Psalm 23:5)

Here at *Schatzi's*, all new clients are introduced to our facility and provided with a free consultation to acclimate our staff to individual hair care needs. During this consultation process, one of the questions that we ask is "Do you oil your hair?" And "if so, how frequently?" The interesting thing I find is that I often see people squirm a bit with this question. I'm not really sure about the nature of the discomfort. But it conjures up images of Mom asking, "Did you put your hand in the cookie jar?" Or something to that effect. First let me say (in case it needs to be said), there is no shame in oiling your hair. Oil is a blessing to the hair and the body. [Now, I didn't say anything about "grease." Avoid grease like the plague! It's good for neither your arteries or your hair. Trust me. If it's got petrolatum, it's grease!] With that said, years ago, I recall watching the Oprah show and seeing Oprah's personal stylist prepare her hair for a show. The stylist pointed out that he does NOT put oil on Oprah's hair. Oprah then proceeded to profess and explain why Black hair can be washed everyday and that it does not need oil (as she followed up with a healthy shake of her head to show the movement of her locks.) Well, Oprah's hair is cared for by a professional stylist paid to tend to her personal hair care needs primarily. Sorry, but most of us don't have it like that. If I did, I might wash my hair everyday too.....Nahhh! Sorry, I just wouldn't. It's not necessary. Not for me. I try to treat my hair like a fine silk blouse. I'd never wash it every day.

All the same, the most important thing that hair needs is moisture. If you are conditioning your hair daily (which some of our clients do), you may not need to oil your hair. However, a weekly hot oil treatment would still serve you well in providing a deep conditioning treatment for your hair. Or, you could just apply the oil to your dry hair between styling. But, it's important to remember that oil and water aren't the same. Water provides moisture, which is essential to hair elasticity and vitality. Oil lubricates the hair. Moisturize your hair with leave-in conditioners when it feels dry and unmanageable. However if your hair is in a style that want to last for a while, oil is your best option. It conditions the hair without reshaping it. It's very important to pick the right type of oil to meet this need, however. Here at *Schatzi's*, we style with (and sell) "Nature's Blessings" which is an all-natural pomade that uses no petrolatum-based products. It's great for the hair and is surprisingly light. However if you like homemade recipes, try Jojoba oil mixed with your favorite essential oils. Your hair will love it!! By the way, it's also great for the feet. Another personal favorite is Hot Six Oil by Royale African Pride. It smells wonderful and keeps the hair light and manageable. I use it when my hair feels a little dry and needs a boost. In short, oil is a good thing! Why not even treat yourself to wonderful fragrances? Jinsa Fragrances line of scented oils are a good choice. Your hair will love you for it. And your significant other will love you even more.

Embrace the Beauty of You.





Styling Tips: Nubian Knots



Stylist: Schatzi H. McCarthy; Photographer: Varick Taylor

These photos are of one style that has been transitioned into two different looks. The first style is the classic Nubian knot which involves taking a section of hair, twisting it until it doubles back on itself and wrapping it around the base. This style is very good for transitioning or all natural hair. Care must be taken however to ensure that the knots are not too tight or they can damage the hair line and/or be difficult to sleep on.

The second style is the same Nubian knot look with knots that have been loosened around the edges of the hair and pulled into a crown. This style has a bend tied around the knots to keep them in place and serves as a border for the crown of knots. It's one of my all-time favorites!





Amazing Transformation: Finding Natural Solutions to Hair Loss in Women

Our featured client in this Amazing Transformation focus is Jasmine. {Please note: The client's true name has been changed for confidentiality reasons.} She is a client in her mid-to-late 50s who has experienced some hair loss. Jasmine came by our salon in November 2007 seeking relief from this problem. From our consultation, we learned that Jasmine had been relaxing and color treating her hair for a number of years.

Because Jasmine's former stylist was primarily caring for her hair, it took some time for her to realize the extent of the damage that had been created by the dual effect of these chemical processes. In light of the extent of the damage, we counseled Jasmine to embrace her beauty and to accept her graying locks with all of their crowing glory. We also asked that she no longer place any chemical relaxer products in her hair. She agreed to both conditions prior to initiation of our hair care services.



Photo of Jasmine in November 2007 when we began our treatment to arrest her baldness.

Considering the extent of the damage to Jasmine's hair, our solution was braided extensions which we skillfully crafted to cover the balding section of her hair without placing undue stress on the edges or the few weak strands in the top of her head. We decided to take this approach to see if there would be noticeable re-growth during this phase of hair recovery and monitoring.



Jasmine in December 2007. It is apparent from this photo that hair re-growth has already begun.

After only one month, noticeable improvement was apparent in Jasmine's hair. This progress was encouraging as we were uncertain as to whether the damage was irreparable. This December photo was a sign that it was not. During the monthly visits, shampooing and deep tissue massage therapy to the balding sections of her hair were integral treatment procedures.



Jasmine in January 2007. Additional hair re-growth is evident though she is only two months into the treatment process.

More signs of progress were evident as of January so we maintained our treatment regimen. Jasmine wore these braided extensions for seven months, having the braids redone on a monthly basis.



Photo of Jasmine in June 2008 after the relaxed and color treated hair has been cut off, leaving only her natural locks. You GO My Sister!! Rock it!!

From the photos, you can see that Jasmine's hair simply did what it was programmed to do, once the negative effects of the continual chemical treatments was arrested. Our main objective was to care for and nurture Jasmine's hair and keep it looking professional during this transition period, while her hair re-established itself.

We are delighted that Jasmine was compliant with our requests to stop chemically treating her hair. This request required that she change her mindset from a vision of chemically treated hair as the optimal image of professionalism to embrace a more comprehensive definition of beauty. Jasmine trusted our advice to assist her through this re-growth process. We feel honored to have her trust.

All clients will not have results as dramatic as Jasmine, due largely to the primary cause of her alopecia. However, we encourage everyone to stop by for a free consultation or visit your neighborhood natural stylist. Trying never hurt anyone and the potential rewards can be great.

Embrace the Beauty of You.





Alopecia and Hair Breakage Woes and Wonders

As I reflect on the close of another year, it occurred to me that we are now in our 10th year of operation!! I think we're supposed to be celebrating or something!! But isn't every day a celebration?! Actually, the days before Thanksgiving were the most blessed for me of the year. I served many of my most regular clients and we tripped to soulful music, essential conversation and good vibes. That's how we roll! But as I considered what message to deliver to close-out the year, it was really all about finding our comfort zone. Everyone seems to be doing that in the best ways they know how. So to translate that message to hair, I decided to highlight some of the year's transformations with a focus on alopecia and hair breakage. These are issues that no woman likes to encounter. But, I believe that we are finding meaningful solutions. I don't want to paint a picture that we're able to solve every type of problem however. That's just not realistic. Yes, sisters are realizing the awesome power of releasing the chemicals and embracing the curl with some pretty amazing results. But, there's no one-remedy-fits-all solution to alopecia. I think that's why most stylists simply see hair weaves as the most logical solution. Well, here at Schatzi's, we try to work with clients' unique challenges and desires in whatever way possible. Some sisters are grappling with some real challenges! The client pictured on the next page is an example of someone who I counseled after bad relaxer services murdered her beautiful tresses.

She was hurt because she visited her stylist like clockwork to ensure that this type of thing would never happen to her. Imagine her shock and horror to see the truth unfolding despite all of her sizeable investment of time and resources!! I felt sick but facing truth is the beginning of the end of disease. For this sister, I recommended the discontinuation of ALL chemical services, time, massage therapy and prayer. Thankfully, she can pull her hair into a ponytail and doesn't have to wear wigs. Like a Bonsai that is trained to miniaturization through confinement of its roots, I believe wigs confine and choke the hair follicles, which need breath and sunlight. There was really nothing else we could do for this client. Time will tell if she is able to re-establish her previous crown of glory. I'm VERY hopeful!!



The cases that I'll highlight here are facing different challenges. I began working intensively with the first two of these clients this year. I highlight them for this issue to show women that there are meaningful solutions to alopecia. Sometimes that solution is embracing baldness. Other times, there are different options to consider. For many women, alopecia or hair loss feels like a death sentence. I only encourage the mind to consider possibilities with an eye to the future. For me, alopecia is a challenge!! So I say, let's work. We can find solutions. But time and patience are integral tools of the trade. Let's begin.

The first client is a sister who was experiencing alopecia areata which is characterized by the hair falling out in round patches or by baldness in spots on the scalp or other parts of the body. (See top of next page. Sorry that the photo is a bit blurry.) It is unpredictable and rather frequent. For this client, it arose as a result of stress. Trust me: If I was facing what she was dealing with, I'm not sure my own hair would hold up! In this before photo, the client's thick waist-length locks had fallen off completely or were very weak at the base. The hair was starting to re-grow after some time at the scalp but the short "afro bursts" were

a stark contrast to the client's longer locks. She was dealing with a lot in her life and just was not ready or willing to cut all of her hair off and start from scratch. So, we opted for lock extensions.

In the second photo, I used standard methods to extend the client's hair. While we had agreed on the type of human hair the client would purchase, the hair sales business is NOT regulated. So, you never know what you're going to get unless you're paying A LOT of money. So, I

had to work with what we had as she had an important function the very next day!! Because human hair is typically much shorter than this client's own hair, I had to innovate a technique to extend the human hair beyond 12 inches to as much as 28 inches to match the length of her hair. While it worked, I just wasn't delighted with the result mainly because the hair was too shiny. Locks don't shine.



For her next appointment, we changed to another type of hair

and decided to add a little flavor. I color her grey hair with a beautiful red wine tone so we decided to add human hair extensions in this color just for fun. Using the same innovated technique, I extended the shorter human hair to a length to match her waist-length locks. I opted out of the prescribed "wrapping" step for lock extensions because it just made them look too heavy. In all, it added nothing to the final look; so, I threw it out. The result was a rather natural look that is light, very strong at the base and throughout the lock, and overall very beautiful. While one would guess that the colored locks are added in, they complement the client's strengthened black locks and look a lot like highlights. Upon close inspection, you really don't know what's going on. The extensions are made of human hair, and the client's locks, which are reinforced at the base, look like her own—and they are. If we had stuck with black hair throughout, the transition would be seamless. But the client is really not concerned about the opinions of others. She just wants strong, healthy locks. She now has that!! This final photo was taken after several shampoo and maintenance services, thus confirming the



durability of the style. Her husband and sons LOVE IT!! That's always the proof of the pudding. So I'm happy with the result!

The next set of photos is of a client who is experiencing androgenic alopecia which is the result of genetics, age and hormonal changes that causes hair strands to thin much like baby hair and eventually fall away. Accordingly to Milady's Cosmetology, "By age 35, almost 40 percent of both men and women show some degree of hair loss." I have this condition along the edges of my hairline above my eyebrows. It's



typically where men's hairlines start to recede. I've noticed it since about age 40. So, I treat the hair in this area with kid gloves to ensure that the edges don't recede any further. Most people who know me would not notice. But, I do. That's what I do. At any rate, the client is in her 60s and has very fine, soft hair. She originally wanted extensions. I advised against it, as it would only add undue pressure on her already weakened hair follicles. With her fine, soft texture, she is not a good candidate for extensions, unlike the client mentioned earlier. Because I realize that this condition is a factor of age, I advised that the condition is likely not reversible. So, my strategy was/is to safeguard the hair that is remaining and to grow her hair



to facilitate hair styling that can add volume to camouflage thin areas. My method of choice for this client has been interwoven mini-locks due to the softness and thinness of

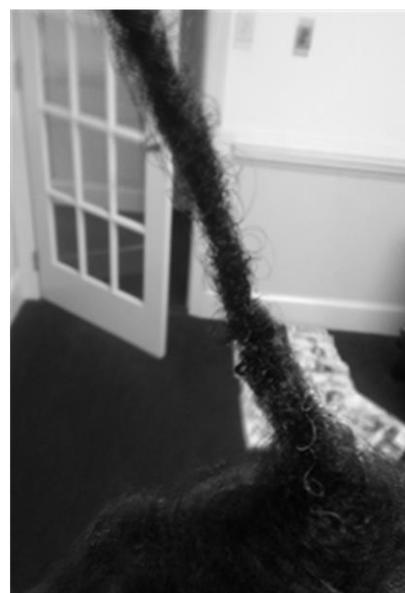


her hair. In the second set of photos, I have styled the client's locks into an updo, which adds character and grace while the client's hair is growing out.

In the later photos above, the client is about 7 months from when we began. While she still has alopecia, she has much more hair to work with. She recently noted that a man stopped her on the street to compliment her on her Sisterlocks. She didn't even know what Sisterlocks are, but said "thank you." I assured her that she doesn't have Sisterlocks because I am not a certified Sisterlocktician. But, I do what I do. So, I was glad the compliments are now rolling in. This client has embraced her alopecia, and we've made some banging lemonade!!! Her growth process is naturally ongoing so inside of another year, I expect her to be receiving compliments DAILY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



The final photos are of a client who has been experiencing some hair breakage with her locks. She has a stressful job and admits that she sometimes pulls her locks out when they start to show signs of weakening. This sister has a husband and daughter and is not fussy at all. Because she comes into the salon when she can, she admits that she sometimes does damage to her hair when she's been away. It's no problem. The second photo (on the next page) is about five minutes after the first. I simply reconnected the lock, and the final product is as strong, if not stronger than her original lock!! This solution does however require some preparation as the client has to hold onto locks that have fallen away. But, it's definitely a more affordable option to purchasing human hair for extensions.



Overall, I can say that alopecia is a challenging condition to work around but it's definitely doable. I don't always know which strategy I'll take or know how the final result will turn out; but, I trust my instinct. And that's what makes natural hair care an art form. I don't consider myself a master designer though. Some designs are frankly stressful to the hair follicles, which is why I NEVER put pressure on my own. My gift is growing healthy hair. My sister works on canvas. I work on heads. But the result is an artistic gallery of beauty. Come to Schatzi's and embrace the beauty of you! :-)





Lost Edges: The Road to Prevention and Recovery

In the world of black hair care, the loss of edges is a truth that is not restricted solely to naturalistas. In fact, it is a common reality for women who are relaxed as well as women who wear weaves, braids and extension styles. So much so, that a recent client told me about her boyfriend's astonishment at the fact that she has edges at all. In her paraphrased recitation of their discussion, he said: "You got your edges! You got your edges! You're a black girl and you got your edges! Are you Spanish?" I howled when I heard this as she was sporting a short afro. But I acknowledged that it is a sad state of affairs when our own men believe that lost edges are a genetic trait rather than a factor of poor hair care—which is the true basis for this condition.

In previous articles, I spoke about traction alopecia, which is the technical name for hair loss caused by excessive pulling of the hair follicle along the hairline. It is often the result of wearing braids that are too tight, lace front weaves that use glue to hold the wig in place and other hair styles that pull the hair taut like with sleek ponytail extension styles. For this reason, I have told clients many times over the years the following tips to avoid the condition when wearing braided or twisted extension styles:

Prevention Tips

- 1) Avoid any and all styles which put excess pressure along any area of your hairline. Small, painful bumps that often develop immediately after a tight hair service are signs that the pressure point has been surpassed and thus the hair should be loosened at the point of tension.
- 2) Avoid pulling the hair in a ponytail or away from the face, particularly when the hair has been freshly styled. This is when the hairline is most sensitive and prone to breakage from common manipulation.
- 3) Be more interested in the condition of the hair underneath a weave or extension service than in the final polished look of the extended style. For example, I will not try to grab every strand of short hair along the hairline to create a "perfect" extended hairstyle because the hair along the hairline does not want or need to be confined.
- 4) Avoid lace front or quick weaves that use glue along the hairline to keep the wig or cap in place. In my world, glue plus small strands of hair is a formula for disaster but somehow, people happily walk down the road only regret the after effects, often when it is too late to reverse the trend.

If by chance, you discover that your hairline has receded for reasons that are not genetic or medical, please use the following recommendations to regrow your hair.

Recovery Tips

- 1) Discontinue whatever hair service, style or procedure that is the likely culprit for the problem immediately. The quicker you observe the problem and move to remedy it, the better outcomes you will achieve.
- 2) Allow the hair to rest in styles that place no pressure on the hairline at all for at least six months. This method of styling should become your standard if you have experienced traction alopecia; but, it is essential to reverse the process.
- 3) Seek the advice of a dermatologist to assist with the rapid reversal of hair loss. A hairline can be destroyed after one bad hair service, but it's going to take many months to recover. Ensure that you have the best advice possible. I have referred many clients to Dr. Jeff Scales at the NC Center for Dermatology. He is an African-American physician who is well versed about the causes of cures of the condition.
- 4) Take the advice of your dermatologist. One of my dear clients/friends says that Dr. Scales suggested corticosteroid injections for her to reverse the effects of a receding hairline. Another client told me this procedure was recommended to her by a different physician; but, she didn't want to take this route. In truth, the procedure may not work for everyone as it stops inflammation below the hairline to improve the condition. If there is an absence of inflammation, the results may not be impressive. All the same, the condition has persisted longer than 6 months with no improvement, medical counsel is a must.

Overall, I applaud the great advancements that black women have made in celebrating their natural hair. It was a long-time coming and the reward is divine beauty. But at the same time, it often feels like we move one step forwards and two steps back. Traction alopecia is a growing trend, and it is only through knowledge and awareness that it can be combatted. My article next month will be about the aesthetic and psychological biases which lay the foundation for this hair loss journey. Until then, Happy Styling!





Creative Solutions to Thinning Hair

Our salon has been advising women about hair thinning issues for well over a decade. These women's issues vary by hair texture, type, life challenges, lifestyle etc.; but, everyone ultimately wants the same thing: a beautiful, voluminous mane of hair. How this goal is achieved is the work of the stylist. Recently, I began working with a new client who has nice, long locks that fall between her shoulder blades. But as she's aged, her hair has become a lot thinner than in her earlier years. Because she is a true naturalista, she wants to work with her hair as it presents and find creative ways to a more voluminous look. So after coloring her hair, I rod set her locks with spiral

rods.
(See



photo above. Note: I didn't realize that I was going to write an article at the time of the service, so I failed to capture before pictures. But the photo with rods shows how "spacey" her locks can be.)

After her hair dried, I then styled her hair with spiral loops across the top of her head and twisted the sides of her hair up and away from her face so that the curly ends of her locks would add more volume to the top and rear sections of her hair. I then styled the locks in the rear to fall like a cascading waterfall. Overall, she was quite pleased with the outcome. For some, this type of solution seems like an obvious one; but to others, these may be new ideas. My aim and intention was to use the client's length to her advantage by creating volume. As the base of the locks unravel and thicken up over the week, the style fills out and looks even more attractive as the scalp is camouflaged. Variations on this theme are solely a matter of style preference and the directional flow of the final look. Happy Styling!





Styling Tips: The Wash & Go



Stylist: Meiko Brown; Photographer: Dawnd El

This style is the preferred look of many “naturalists” today. Here, you simply shampoo and/or condition the hair as usual. While the hair is still wet, a gel, conditioner or styling lotion is used on the hair, or you may simply allow your hair to dry naturally with natural oils like Jojoba or coconut. Because everyone’s hair is different, it’s important to experiment with the product or process that works for you. When using a gel or conditioner, the produce is allowed to dry on the hair naturally or one can use a diffuser to speed up the drying process. Everyone should try this look once in a while. It’s important to ensure that the hair is protected with a satin pillow case or scarf while sleeping to ensure that ends do not become dry or damaged.





Wash & Go Tips and Tricks

I'm seeing sisters all over rocking the wash & go. It's now all the rage! It's a wonderful sight to see for me personally. It makes me wonder why we were ever duped into believing that anything else was better. Sisters are rocking 'fros and textured styles and the world is simply having to adjust to the —new world order. We give thanks. Through it all, many have asked my opinions about products to use for the ideal wash & go look. The truth is that within the salon, we don't do a lot of wash & go styles because they're quite easy to do at-home. When people come into the salon, they're typically looking for a protective style that will last—thus justifying the money spent on the service. But, the wash & go is the epitome of at-home hair care.

My girlfriend Meiko is an avid *wash & go* wearer. The look is beautiful on her. As far as products that she uses and recommends from personal experience, *Kinky Curly* was a past favorite. But, she's now pretty excited about the *Eco-styler Gel*. I've watched a Youtube video link demonstrating its use and must admit that it looks like a winner, if your hair texture tends towards a looser curl pattern. The objective is really all about an anti-frizz look. The only reason I'm not a wash & go gal myself is that I don't have the patience to drip dry for hours and I don't use a diffuser much. I especially don't have the energy to do it all again in a few days. But, the look is truly *to die for*, so if you have the time, make it! I'm more inclined to capture the essence of this look with a twist-out because: 1) it better suits my lifestyle; 2) it is preceded by a protective style; 3) drying and touching my hair is not an issue. In effect, it's a textured look as compared to an actual *wash & go*. Everyone's got to choose what's right for them. My caution through it all is to be sure that you aren't over-wearing the look to the detriment of your ends.

The wash & go is very convenient and very easy. But “easy” should not translate to maintenance-free. You really should take some important steps towards protecting your ends, particularly at night. I have seen some clients of late who are wearing the style rather frequently to the detriment of their ends. The result is tangled hair, breakage in the back or side of the hair (typically wherever the hair hits the pillow) and considerable dryness. I cannot over-emphasize the need to braid or twist and/or wrap the hair at night if you are going to wear this style regularly. Otherwise, the ends may become over-exposed and damaged. Back in the day, one of the nightly routines of Afro wearers was to braid the hair up before sleeping. Somewhere in the new dispensation, this message has been lost. It needs to be retrieved urgently. If you are trying not to have to re-set and re-shape your hair by skipping the braids, there is an alternative. Try using a satin bonnet which allows you to lift your hair towards the crown of your head. The Wollylock is an excellent option for those looking for the right type of covering and fit. Then, use a light oil to freshen up the look. This should allow you to leave the house without a wet head but with a fresher look. If you opt for braids or twists, mist the hair, braid/twist and diffuse to dry. Sleep and loosen the braids/twists in the morning. Separate and style the braids according to your preference. It's not technically a wash & go but gets the same effect, as noted above. Finally, when you wear loose styles, you will need to trim your ends more frequently than when you wear protective styles. So if your aim is hair growth, please factor that truth into your hair care regimen.





Should I Color My Hair? Thoughts Considerations for those Considering

Well, as more ladies embrace their natural hair, many are wondering whether they should color their hair. Some want to add a bit of “spice” to life while others want to look as carefree and natural as possible. Whatever your reason for coloring, there are several careful considerations that you will want to weigh before making your final decision. Below are just a few of the main points.

What are your primary reasons for coloring?

If you’re coloring to hide gray hair, then your primary question is really: how long do you want the color to last? This question requires deciding whether you want your color to be permanent or temporary. First, it’s important to note that there is no “permanent” color because you will always have to touch-up new growth that emerges from the roots. The term “permanent” is more of a reference to how long the color lasts for hair that has been treated. Permanent color cannot be reversed. Semi- or demi-permanent color last from 6-24 shampoos (with demi-permanent color lasting longer) and a rinse lasts from 1-2 shampoos. As a general rule, I tell women who seek advance in our salon to get permanent shampoo. Anything less on dark hair is almost a waste of time. Why? Because your lifestyle often means that you shampoo your hair more frequently than when you were relaxed AND you may be apt to be caught in the rain or to go swimming. If either of these situations prevails, you will most definitely be roundly embarrassed by a rinse. And a demi- or semi-permanent color will be short-lived. So, embrace your decision and go for the gusto. But know that once your new growth comes in, it’s almost like having a relaxer: **YOU MUST GO BACK FOR A TOUCH-UP REGULARLY.** So, if you’re cool with that, do you.

If you’re coloring for more pizzazz or to have a different look, you will need to decide whether you want to go darker or lighter. For most women with dark hair, the easy answer is “go lighter.” If lighter hair is your intention, then you will be limited to permanent or spray-in hair colors. Firstly, I have never seen light rinses used effectively on dark hair. Some products claim differently. While the technology is changing constantly, I remain skeptical about semi- or demi-permanent colors effectively lightening dark, natural hair. As much as I love and use, Bigen permanent hair color in our salon, this video is false advertisement in my opinion. I would assure you that the photo that pops up at the end of the video is not the model’s hair that was video-taped AT ALL!! It’s very misleading, and I think totally fraudulent as the model’s final results are not shown. But, I’m not the one to try to sue over the matter. So, I’ll just say: let the buyer beware! Jazzing is a rinse that is commonly used but proves most effective on hair that has already been bleached. Bold one-time colors, like spray-in colors, are more for costume parties or special events and may wreak havoc with your wardrobe as they merely coat the hair. So, use these with caution. As for my personal recommendation, I would again suggest permanent color if you want a bold look that requires lightening.

Once you’re clear about why you would like to color, you’ll want to consider your lifestyle. Many women who wear natural hair have also adopted a more natural or holistic way of life. They use sulfate-free, paraben free products, some are very physically active and many are vegetarian, vegan or some variation therein. Your philosophy of life will help to elucidate those most pressing concerns that you may have about hair color. So think carefully about your personal philosophy coupled with what you hope to achieve from color.

What are your primary concerns about coloring?

If your concerns about color are grounded in a general angst about exposing your body to more chemicals, you may want to seriously consider whether coloring is right for you. First, I want to say that I am not opposed to hair color. People like change and because the hair is much like the nails, it can be colored, cut and coiffed into many different looks to complete your personal sense of style. Be as bold and daring as you want. But in all honesty, I know of only two truly all-natural methods to add highlights to hair: for reddish to burgundy tints on dark hair, treat your hair with all natural henna; or for golden to light brown highlights on dark hair, treat your hair with lemon juice. With the lemon juice method, you will want to give yourself a deep-condition each time you shampoo to avoid dryness and the process may require several applications. This method strips the hair and can be a bit harsh

but is not as invasive as hair color. If you've seen how locks can lighten over time from sun and salt water exposure, you will have a perspective about how lemon juice works.

Hair color, particularly where lightening is considered, has much to do with chemicals. Lemon juice is a chemical. It just happens to be all-natural and therefore, more easily tolerated by the body. So, the question is: what does a chemical mean to you? If you fundamentally do not want the health and integrity of your hair altered, you will want to stick with henna and lemon highlights. If you want lighter, bolder hues, you're likely want to consider permanent color and relinquish the commitment to "chemical-free" color. There are many companies now marketing new, natural hair care products, but I haven't see one product that does cause a heat-reactive process to take place when color is applied for lightening purposes. When your hair heats up during the coloring process, **a chemical reaction is taking place**. So understand the science and embrace it, if you choose to make the color decision.

If your concerns emanate from a fear of damaging your hair, know that natural hair is much stronger than relaxed or permed hair. As a result, the long-term effects and possible damage of adding hair dye is significantly less than it would be if your hair were not natural. However, you will want to consider the type of hair dye that you are using before making your final decision. But know this: effective hair color for dark hair REQUIRES lifting the current hair color and possibly bleaching the hair to achieve lighter hues.

Procedurally, lightening hair color products work by: 1) lifting the cuticle layer—the scaly outer layer of the hair strand, to expose the hair cortex; 2) neutralizing the melanin which defines the current hair color in the cortex; 3) depositing the new color into the cortex; and 4) re-closing the cuticle layer of the hair. As this process is invasive, the cuticle layer NEVER closes as tightly as before the hair was treated. As a result, the hair is more likely to become dry when colored due to moisture escaping through the "almost" sealed cuticle. When I explain this process to people, many opt out of coloring but again, that's a personal choice. Some change we're willing to live with. Others we are not. I just like for people to make informed decisions.

What this process means from a product perspective is that while your hair color may NOT have ammonia or hydrogen peroxide, there is some other chemical that is being used to achieve the effect of hair lightening. Melanin is no joke. It is coded into the DNA strand of the hair as well as the skin. When you attempt to alter its effect, it doesn't go without a fuss. Thus, the heat-reactive process that I mentioned above is an imperative. The sole exception is henna, which does not effectively color dark hair. It is most effective at transforming light hues to dark, providing red highlights to dark hair or coloring gray hair. So, carefully consider these concerns when making your decision. It is for this reason that a color consultation is always advised before the service is actually rendered. If you take months and sometimes years to grow out your natural locks, take the necessary time to make an informed decision about color. You can't go wrong there.





Styling Tips: Impressions or the Twist-Out



Stylist: Tonya Barbee; Photographer: Varick Taylor

This style, which I call “impressions,” is a favorite for just about everyone. Incidentally, this style is best achieved and maintained with a kinkier texture of hair! Basically, the beauty of the style is the imprint or *impression* that is made and held by the hair, using its natural curl pattern. To achieve this look, the hair is shampooed, conditioned and styled all over with a two-strand twist. To deepen the *impression*, the hair should be wet while twisted, air drying naturally. Also, the hair should be allowed to set into the rope pattern of the two-strand twist for at least one week before *twisting out* or loosening the hair. When un-twisting the hair, start at the root and twist the strand counter to the direction of the twist. Where the two-strands separate, place your finger in between and carefully separate the two strands from each other. Do not comb through the hair. Voila! C’est si chic!! For those with longer hair, it’s a great style when you want the look of shorter hair without the scissors!





Cornrows: The Resurgence



Stylist: Martina Jackson

Whether you pronounce them as cornrows or cornrolls, the fact remains: They are back, with a vengeance! The style has become synonymous with youth, vitality, energy, self-confidence, self-expression and artistic prowess. Some styles are purely a wonder to behold! With the hair and scalp as the canvas, the possibilities are limitless. Interestingly enough since opening *Schatzi's*, I've been fascinated to hear people call this traditional African braiding technique cornrolls. I thought, what is that? Where did ROLLS come from? I reflected on our history to find the solution. When I was growing up as a young girl, I regularly traveled to the country (rural Alabama and North Carolina) to visit relatives. Rows of corn were everywhere, as far as the eye could see. Therefore, the reference to cornrows, as the name for the style, was a logical one that made sense to me. Cornrows, agriculturally speaking, are always very precise neat and symmetrical lines which separate the rows of corn and facilitate cross-pollination. Then, enter, the 21st century. Many young people will live their entire lives without ever seeing a real, live corn field! Can you imagine? So, how would it occur to them that the reference to a cornrow actually had practical application to the daily lives of our ancestors? In today's urban society, you're quicker to see rolls of all types in your local bakery: jelly, chocolate, crème-filled, cinnamon, you name it. Um, um, um. Rows, on the other hand, are more synonymous with classroom desks, stadium seating and the like, making them more applicable to the organization of large numbers of people. Since the reference to "corn" has remained a constant, I've deduced that since it references food, young people decide to call it a "roll." At least that's MY story and I'm sticking to it. Either reference applied, it's all good! It works. But all the same, I'm kind of partial to tradition so for me, the "row" prevails. Anyway, I digress.

Cornrows are back and here to stay. Guys and gals alike are partial to this style; the more outrageous the styles, the better! Youth demands to be heard in varying ways. The above photos are of beautiful Miss Antoinette who was a bit reticent about getting cornrows when her mother brought her into the salon. "I want single braids like the last time," she said. Mom countered, "Let's try something different." Reluctantly, she conceded. Martina's only instructions from mom were, "I want the style to sweep up towards the top of her head." Martina nodded and began to create. On the surface, there appeared to be no set order or structure to the style. When I saw her parting the rows, I can only describe the process as "chaotic." I was undaunted though; I know Martina's work. I didn't look back. When this precious child re-emerged from the styling chair, she was beside herself with excitement, beaming with pride at the result. Mom says, "I guess cornrows aren't so bad afterall, hunh?" She eagerly nodded affirmation and they left shortly thereafter. I reaffirmed my own confidence in Martina's artistic prowess. To create order from

perceived chaos is a wonder to behold and can only be defined as “a gift.” Braid on, my sister! That one came from the depths of your soul.





Styling Tips: The Helix or Comb-curl



Stylist: Schatzi McCarthy; Photographer: Varick Taylor

Many of you *Au Naturel* reader's were first introduced to this handsome style on the likes of Blair Underwood or Eddie Murphy. They both popularized this style in the 90s, using much smaller sections of hair as the foundation for this look. Yet despite all of the publicity that this style has received in recent years (including our *Schatzi's Ads*), I have come to realize that there are still many clients who simply don't understand how this look is accomplished. Likewise, they are inclined to believe that it is only suitable for men. Nothing could be farther from the truth! In fact, it is the foundation for starting locks, if the curl permits.

After shampooing, condition the hair and gently comb through any tangles working from the ends of the hair to the roots. Rinse thoroughly, towel dry and oil the hair. Using a comb with tapered ends, section the hair to the desired size. Then, grasp the roots of hair with smallest end of the comb. Gently turn the comb in a clockwise direction while pulling the comb downward through the strands of hair. (For ease and comfort of the client, it is very important to have combed through the hair prior to styling to ensure that there are no tangles remaining in the hair.) Continue turning until you have reached the end of the section of hair. You have now achieved a "comb-curl" as popularly dubbed. Continue sectioning and styling until the entire head has been completed.

I lovingly call this style "the helix" because it's shape mimics that of a DNA strand. It embraces the natural coil pattern of curly/kinky hair and thus is one of the simplest styles to create. Next time you want a change of pace, try it out! It's a winner!





Techniques for Combing & Detangling Long, Thick, Very Kinky Natural Hair

At *Schatzi's*, it is our aim that all women who aspire for long, healthy natural hair should have it. It is an attainable goal, within the limits of individual circumstances. What we have found is that some natural clients transition to natural hair, like what they see and decide that they don't need the salon anymore. It's all good. Others decide to stick with full-time professional hair care services and then a third group opts for home care and maintenance, only to have their natural hair grow so thick and long that they eventually return to the salon for greater ease in the care and maintenance of their new crowning glory. So, I decided to put this piece together for those who need a little bit of advice regarding the care and maintenance of long, thick and very kinky natural hair.

First, when working with long, thick natural hair, always work in sections. The longer the hair, the more important it is to section it off. I generally make a cross in my scalp and work in four sections. Depending on the thickness of your hair, you may want to work in more or fewer sections. Experiment to see what works best for you.

For manageability in combing the hair, it is always advisable to use a wide-tooth comb or pick. Never use fine rattail combs with short teeth. This is only going to create frustration. Also as a general rule, I never comb dry hair. It is advisable to always wet the hair (either with water or leave-in conditioner) before combing it. I personally only comb my hair in the shower while it is being conditioned. This important step increases elasticity so that the hair is less likely to break during the combing process. What this in turn means for me is that I also must shampoo and condition my hair in sections in order to maintain manageability while working with my hair in the shower.

When combing, the key point to remember is that the hair should always be combed starting at the ends. Once the hair at the ends is detangled, you move towards the roots of the hair a few inches at a time and detangle as you go up. You continue this process until all of the hair segment has been successfully detangled. In this way, you are able to detangle the ends without stressing the entire length of the hair shaft. Now, braid the hair up and repeat the process on another section until your entire head has been detangled.

When you come to a difficult piece of hair that is knotted, isolate it and give it specialized attention until the knot has been released. Sometimes, the hair will loosen with the fingers but that doesn't happen very often for my hair. That's when I get a push pin or a straight pin to work out the knot. I haven't met a knot yet that couldn't be coaxed a loose with these beauty aids. Many people will not want to bother for just a simple knot but my mother told me years ago: "Your hair won't grow if you don't protect your ends." This is the oldest part of the hair and therefore should be treated as the elder it is. I recommend taking these extra steps to release knots and tangles while in the shower. The flow of the water on the hair and the effect of gravity do wonders for detangling hair, along with a good shampoo. We use "Crème of Nature" for detangling here at the salon but there are lots of alternatives on the market that can meet your individual needs. Experiment!

Most people don't feel they have the time to spend taking these extra steps, but your hair will love you for it and will reward you with radiance. One thing that I've learned in caring for my long, very kinky hair is that I don't bother to start working on my hair unless I have time in abundance to do so. If I'm in a hurry, I don't even start on my hair. It will only create confusion and stress. This very small principle is one of the core tools in my personal hair care arsenal that has made a world of difference in the beauty and vitality of my hair. Hopefully this advice will serve you too in your own hair care journey.

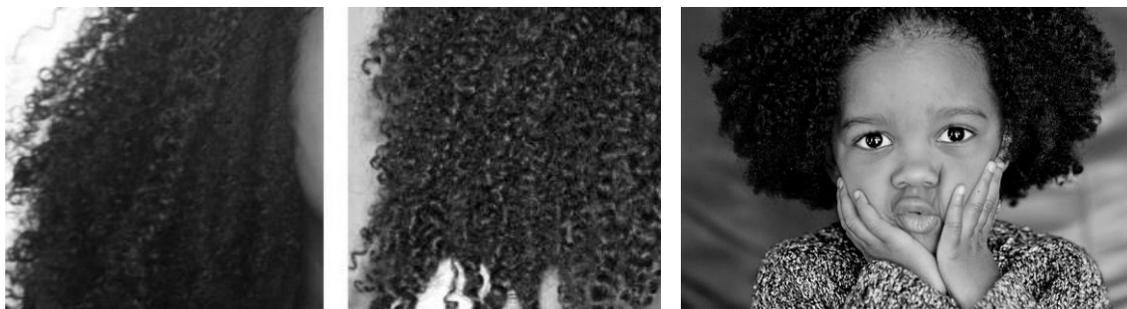




Tips for Toddler Tresses

Note: *This article is inspired by a sweet child that I had the honor to serve in my salon recently. Mom is a beautiful sister possibly of mixed heritage with a very straight hair texture of her own. Her daughter has a beautiful coily texture that is a sharp departure from what Mom is accustomed to. So, she brought her beautiful baby in for a consultation and for some lessons. So in the spirit of sharing, I thought I'd spread the love.*

Examples of Coily Hair Textures



Creative Cleansing: Firstly, I must confess that I don't have a lot of experience working with toddler girls. I birthed boys so their hair was always a breeze to work with: I just got out the clippers, went to work, and done. The youngest children that we see in the salon are typically about 4-5 years of age. So, working with a 2-year old was a new experience. Upon sight of me, she let out one piece of bawling because I imagine, she sensed that I was going to do something to her and she didn't want any parts of it. But, Mom was mentally prepared, as was I. (We began at 10am--a time convenient for the child.) Mom held her and observed while I worked on loosening her afro puffs. Then, it was time to shampoo. Because of her general discontent and the fact that the shampoo bowl is not designed for so small a frame, I decided to "towel shampoo" her hair. In essence, what I did was to: 1) saturate a towel and ring out the excess water, 2) dampen the child's hair with the towel, 3) work a small quantity of conditioner into her hair, and 4) rinse (i.e. rub out) the conditioner from her hair with the towel. This process represents a co-wash (cleansing with conditioner) rather than a "shampoo." In light of the child's age, shampoo is not necessary.

Careful Comb-out: Next while her hair was still damp from the "rinse/rub out" step, I used a wide tooth comb to detangle her hair. But before I could reach this step, she was boldly expressing her dissatisfaction with the process up 'til this point. So, I gave her a head massage. I felt all the love and empathy that I could muster for her, and began to use my hands to communicate my message. Inside of a few minutes, Mom announced, "She's going to sleep." Mission accomplished. But, I didn't want her to sleep so within my spirit, I prepared her for the end of this step in the process. After this, she had no problem with the comb-out process whatsoever, and regularly turned her head to try to look at the comb while I was working. Brother Siddiq calls my massage technique Reiki when it accomplishes peaceful slumber inside of a few minutes. I call it love, though I confess I can't always get into the zone to deliver this message. It depends upon my mood and circumstances. And honestly, not everyone is comfortable with the notion. So I sense my way through deciding where this touch is needed.

Comfy Conclusion: After returning to the styling chair, Mom held baby beauty and I twisted her hair--as per Mom's request. In all, the process took about 1 hour. I worked as quickly as possible because toddlers are not patient and will not easily bend. Every experience will be unique, so find out what works for you. Happy Styling!!





Tips to Care for Your Young Daughter's Hair



Have you ever wondered why things that should be easy never are? We often have young girls come by our salon to have their hair done. The experience can be anything from entertaining to heart-wrenching. The outcome largely depends on the state of mind and disposition of the child. Because of the observations that I have noted over the years, I thought I'd share a few pointers that hopefully will make your next hair care experience a smooth one. These tips can be applied to at-home or in-salon care.

Preparation Tips

- First, it is important to begin hours before the service. Let your child know ahead of time that you will be working on her hair so that she can prepare her mind for the experience. Tell her what to expect from the service: shampoo, blow-dry, styling, and emphasize how beautiful the final outcome will be. ‘
- On the day of styling, select a time for hair care when your daughter is likely to be well rested and preferably has already eaten. In this way, she will not be overly tired and prone to irritation.
- Also, it is important to ensure that you have reserved ample time for the service. If you're rushing, she will feel it and discomfort will manifest.
- In the same way that you must prepare your daughter for the experience, you must prepare your own mind as well. If you're styling your daughter's hair, you must guard your thoughts. If you dread the experience, she'll know it and it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Finally, ensure that you have plenty of age-appropriate entertainment on hand for your daughter to distract her mind from the actual process of hair styling.

Hair Care Tips

I cannot over-emphasize the need to use proper tools and techniques for actual hair care. Please refer to the previous article titled “Techniques for Combing and Detangling Long, Thick, Very Kinky Natural Hair” for hair care advice. All the best for a joyful and rewarding experience!





Styling Tips: Rod-set Twists for Transitioning or Forever



Stylist: Schatzji McCarthy; Photographer: Varick Taylor

This style is without a doubt one of my personal favorites. It was not surprising to me that it has become a favorite among clients in the salon as well. I think the success of this style can be attributed to the fact that: 1) It works wonderfully with natural hair, whether transitioning or fully natural; 2) It is stylish and ultra-professional—a point that does not go unnoticed by those transitioning clients who are still influenced by the thoughts and opinions of others; and 3) It looks good on all face shapes and hair lengths. All around, it's A+! If you haven't tried it out, you're way over-due! Here's how...

The Style Technique

Always start with clean, conditioned hair. Once your hair has been fully conditioned (and oiled, if you like), apply an oil-based mousse to assist with hold and longevity of the style. At this point, you can take one of two approaches, depending on the tools available to you, your hair and your personal preference. You can dry your hair before or after twisting it. When drying first, you should use a blow-dryer with a comb attachment and avoid temperatures above 1800 watts. (*I personally prefer not to exceed 1600. All of this excess heat simply is not needed.*) Blow-dry the hair while combing it through. Once you have finished with drying, two-strand twist the hair all over.

Twisting is done by sectioning the hair into small segments which represent the size twist that you would like to wear. Once you have the size twist that you want, divide the section into two equal parts and twist the strands around each other all the way to the end of the hair. (Note: If you're interested in a rope pattern, turn the strands counter clockwise to each other. If you want a look that mimics the look of yarn strands, twist the hair in the clockwise direction. If you're locking your hair, twist clockwise.)

Then, select the size rod you want and using end wraps, rod set your twists starting at the ends and working up towards the roots. The twists should be rolled on the size rods to suit the style that you want. (For example: spiral curls should be rolled vertically; diagonal curls are rolled forward to frame the face and backward for the reverse effect.) To avoid excess heat, sleep on the rods overnight and take them out in the morning. If you don't want to hand blow-dry your hair at all, you can two-strand twist it all over and then rod set the twist. You will definitely want to allow this style to dry a bit before sleeping on the rods. Otherwise, you can sit under a bonnet-dryer for 20-90 minutes, depending on the length and thickness of your hair and the heat setting of your dryer. When you think you're done drying, test a few sections at the rear and the thickest parts of your hair to be sure they are dry. When you're sure they are dry, take out the rods. Separate the curls based on your individual preference. You are now ready to go!



Versatility Has *Natural* Advantages: Variations on a Two-Strand Twist

This section is dedicated to highlighting the numerous styles that can be easily achieved with natural tresses. My personal style of choice is the two-strand twist, as referenced in the previous section. In these photos, the only products in my hair are shampoo, conditioner and natural oils. To the nay sayers, I thought I better start with a picture of my hair before it's styled. In the first two photos, my hair has been loosened, and I'm all set for the shampoo bowl.



After shampooing and conditioning, I decide whether I want to blow-dry my hair for a longer look, or two strand twist it naturally, for a shorter look. In this instance, I blow-dried it and twisted it up. The bone-strait look that so many people adore can in fact be achieved with perfectly natural hair as shown in the third photo. I don't like the bone strait look very much though so I twist my twists into Nubian knots and rock that style for a while, usually the week-ends. Sometimes, I just sleep on them. I learned that trick from a Jamaican Rastafarian.



The next four photos are different angles of the Nubian knots style, away from the face, with and without a scarf adornment.



I've sometimes worn this style within the office environment. It makes for very interesting conversation. If you're on the shy side though, you may want to leave this one alone. When heading to the office, I typically loosen the knots in the morning (often while driving in the car—oops!) and I'm ready for the water cooler (see below).



If I want an up-do, it's fairly easy to achieve with just a few pins (see top of next page). The curls will last throughout the day.



Sometimes, I can't bother with the hair in my face or the up-do, so I go for the conservative variation on a ponytail (see below). I often wear a simple ponytail when exercising, as it's a convenient option when active.



The final three photos are different angles of the side sweep and another up do style. Here, I use oriental mei fa sticks to hold the hair in place. I love these sticks. They're the absolute coolest!!



In summary, the above styles are easy to achieve and all were created within a few minutes with the two-strand twist and Nubian knots as the foundation. There are numerous other options with or without Nubians, like buns, flat-twist variations, etc. Okay, I know what you're saying, 'I don't have your hair.' Well, my hair wasn't always this healthy or this long. In fact, I thought my hair couldn't grow when I was a little girl. After I learned how to work with my hair as it presents itself, it took on a life of its own. I just work with its natural tendencies rather than forcing it into to being what it's not.

In closing, I often hear considerable frustration at the time and attention required to transition to natural hair. Well, I can safely say that anything worth having is worth working for. It's not a cake-walk but in my view, it's worth the journey. As a result of this journey, I don't mind walking in the rain or swimming in the summertime because I **allow** my hair to "snap-back." *It does what it do!* Of course, you have to be very careful with water and the two-strand twist because, if you're not diligent, you'll find that you're sporting locks before you know it. Kinky hair is active hair. The strands like to dance...a lot! So, take care to loosen your twists weekly if you're swimming or engaging in other water sports. Just an FYI. Embrace the Beauty of You.





Styling Tips: The Natural Blow-out



Stylist: Jamie Mitchell; Photographer: Varick Taylor

This style is simplicity at its finest. Here, the model's hair has been shampooed, conditioned, re-conditions with a leave-in product like *Cantu*, oiled (with *Nature's Blessings*), blow-dried and Voila! The canvas is ready for creativity. For this style, the hair was corn-rowed (two rows deep) around the edges to frame the face. Perfect and simple. The beauty of this style is its health reliance on a health mane of hair that is well-conditioned and evenly trimmed. The result is truly dynamite!





Thoughts on the Dominican Blowout

During 2012, I'd heard more rave reviews about the Dominican blow-out than I had ever heard before. So being the natural enthusiast that I am, I did some research because I wanted to learn more. Philosophically, I don't really have a problem with this straightening technique because it doesn't use chemicals to alter the structure of the hair. It basically blow-dries the hair straight. Blow-dryer usage is not really abusive to the hair because it only breaks the hydrogen bonds of the hair which are easily broken with water and heat anyway.

If you wet set your hair and air dry it, you're re-arranging the hydrogen bonds of your hair. Or if you blow-dry your hair on a light heat setting, you're re-arranging the hydrogen bonds of your hair. So, my view of this method of styling is "I'm cool with that." It's minimally invasive to the hair shaft so it sounds to me like a keeper. With so many women wanting the versatility of their natural hair to extend to straight styles, I applaud any technique that achieves this result using a blow-drier as the primary change agent.

With that said, I haven't tried the technique for myself because I'm not really down with bone straight hair...but that's just me. As much as I love *An Naturel* readers, I'm not really willing to experiment with something that I don't really want or like to gain the personal experience of it. The last time I had my hair straight was in 1999 and I felt that I had abused my hair horribly for the sake of a style that at the end of the day, I didn't even feel looked good. I felt like the masses. And I wasted an entire Saturday to achieve the final result. I got to the salon at 10am and was out at around 6pm. "Never again" was what I said then and I haven't wavered on that point. Not even the allure of the *Dominican sway* implemented with a more modern "no-wait" policy can budge me from that decision. Why? Because in a nutshell, I know my hair better than anyone else ever could. I know what works and what doesn't.

So, I studied the Dominican technique on numerous Youtube videos with a mind to trying it on my own hair. In summary, the technique begins with conditioning and roller-setting the hair to encourage straightness while drying. Once dry, the rollers are removed. The hair is again conditioned and sectioned. Working with the smaller section, a brush is used to grab the section and pull to straightness while the blow-dryer heat is directed at the targeted area. If necessary, smaller sections are created and smaller brushes are used to isolate the areas for straightening. This process is continued until the entire head has been completed. Overall, it appears that it would be much less damaging than the hot comb and relaxer systems. But after conducting the research and reflecting on the process, I concluded that I wouldn't try it for several reasons:

1) **Roller-set techniques that are biased towards thinner, straighter hair textures** - Looking at the roller set procedure, I question the effectiveness of this step on all hair types and textures. My hair is very dense, long and kinky. I appreciate the sound logic of using the hair's wetness and elasticity to encourage straightness by holding it fast with large rollers. That is really novel and quite astute. But knowing my own hair, I questioned whether the desired result would be achieved for my own hair. I don't think it's impossible, but I doubt the skill of the individual stylist working with hair like mine. From personal experience, the considerable time and attention that would need to be paid to the tautness of the rod, the size of the roller and the amount of hair included in the section would require no less than a grand mathematical equation coupled with considerable insight and hair savvy (*squared*).

Interestingly enough, I had a client in the salon while writing this article who had been receiving regular blow-outs. She decided to take a break from so much heat. I asked about the roller set step because her hair is even thicker than mine, though much shorter. She acknowledged that the roller set "doesn't work so well" on her hair and that as a result, a flat iron is ultimately used after brushing because her hair just doesn't get straight enough. So, I posed a question and the universe brought me an answer. Ultimately with this revised style regimen for thick, coarse hair, we're really back to the straightening comb. So much for progress.

2) **Heavy reliance on the brush** - I stopped brushing my hair YEARS ago. You might catch me brushing my hair at the ends to detangle them once in a while (AFTER it's been detangled with a comb and DURING styling) but generally, it's done only rarely. At home, I don't even own a brush. Why? Because I have found that FOR MY HAIR, the hairbrush is more abusive to the hair than the comb often with little positive benefit realized from the exercise.

This however is not the case for all hair textures. But because my hair is inclined to double back on itself, the brush demands optimal straightness from every individual strand during the grooming process, thus creating considerable friction on the cuticles. The more friction that is placed on the hair, the more inclined the hair is to become damaged and to dry out, resulting in an increased need for trims and deep conditioning treatments. I try to avoid hair care techniques that will stress out the ends of my hair. As Momma said "Protect your ends, and your hair will grow." A comb doesn't really rape and plunder the individual hair strand as does the hairbrush. Hairs that feel like being a bit *rebellious* are allowed to non-conform without being singled out for submission, unless of course, a knot needs to be undone. Because I'm not so dictatorial about forcing my hair to *lay down*, I stick to the comb for all of my styling needs. With the Dominican method's heavy reliance on the brush through repeated grabbing and pulling to coax the hair into submission while blasting it with turbo steam heat, I really think that I'd rather not. I can see that this technique will have damaging effects over time. For a straighter hair texture than mine, this damage may not be as eminent because the brush is not working with so much resistance due to the hair's curl pattern. As a result, the Dominican method may not be as abusive as a relaxer in the minds of many. I won't really hold a position on either side of that argument but I only caution that each individual understand their personal hair care needs and goals before pursuing this option.

3) **Constant replay over the same section of hair** - The straightening procedures that I observed required going over the same section of hair repeatedly until the desired straightness is achieved. The hair is pull-brushed and pull-re-brushed and pull-re-brushed with intense heat applied at the point of contact with the hair. With the level of intensity and attention that the hair receives, section by section, I question the integrity and condition of the hair shaft once the process is completed. In my eyes, the process looks abusive but others may differ. But one thing I know is that this styling technique relies heavily on one essential pre-requisite: healthy, well conditioned hair with strong elasticity. The more elastic the hair strand, the less inclined it is to break. Relaxer systems rob the hair of elasticity, so the roller setting method becomes a critical tool for hair-drying chemically treated tresses to minimize damage to the hair from the later application of the brushing and intense straightening technique. Since relaxed hair is already somewhat straight, starting with a roller-set is a reasonable approach.

4) **Over-drying the hair** - This blow-out technique starts with hair that is roller-set and placed under a hooded dryer. So in a nutshell, the hair is dry (or very close). It is then dried, re-dried and re-dried to achieve straightness. **The constant application of heat and drying methods to hair that is already dry seems excessive.** This additional heat now serves only to isolate any kink or coil in the hair and to break whatever hydrogen bonds that have not yet been temporarily re-arranged to achieve straightness. The only difference between this method and the hot comb is the amount of time it takes for the hair to be forced into submission. One process is gradual, the other is immediate. This intensive brush usage may be as stressful to the cuticle layer of the hair as the hot comb so I would not argue any other difference for the hair, exempting the fact that the hair is not at risk of being singed or burned permanently. I guess that could be called progress? But if not completed with great caution, the over-drying could create long-term damage that is often gradual and therefore not easily identified until well established.

5) **Style Longevity and Humidity** - Probably the single most practical reason that I don't indulge in the blow-out myself is that my hair is natural and ALIVE!! It responds to humidity as readily as a child flocks to a candy store. I love that about my hair. It reminds me that it's healthy and natural. With North Carolina heat and humidity, I prefer to wear styles that allow me to be free in the elements. So much like the straightening comb or flat iron, the blow-out style requires constant protection and therefore is inclined to have a short-life in my world. One drive to the corner store with the top-down and I'm out \$40 bucks!! So when I consider the amount of heat and stress that is applied to the hair for a style that requires cool weather or constant AC, I conclude that in this North Carolina weather, it may just not be the most practical option for me.

So in conclusion, I want to reiterate that I don't have a philosophical problem with the Dominican blow-dry. My main concern is hair health and condition. Because hair is born perfect, I shy away from services that chemically alter the hair in anyway that is permanent and non-reversible, as these techniques create weakness and therefore WORK! Since the Dominican blow-out is not an overly invasive process (at the level of the hair's chemical structure), I find it a reasonable alternative for those sisters who simply have to rock the bone strait look. It works. However, I would encourage caution in the frequency of applying this method for the reasons outlined above.

Tips for Protecting the Dominican Blow-out:

If you do choose to wear this style, be sure to keep your hair oiled, paying special attention to the ends. Note: Oil doesn't have to weigh the hair down as this look is exactly what you don't want. I'd encourage natural oils like coconut or jojoba oil. Also, please wrap your hair at night and keep the ends tucked under for added protection. It is also useful to cover the hair when out in the elements to preserve style longevity. Keep daily combing to a minimum. I would also encourage you to avoid knit sweaters during this time, opting for something that won't grab and entangle your ends. Silk, polyester and rayon are all reasonable alternatives. If you simply must wear straight hair 24/7, I would encourage you to research all options available to you, and consider the pros and cons of each for your hair type and condition. It's possible that the natural look may truly not be your calling. And if that's the case, that's cool too. Just know thyself and be free.





Finding the Right Temperature Setting for Your Flat Ironed Look

Momma always says: “Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” I never really appreciated what this statement meant as a child but it sounded good. Now that I have a few years (and experiences) on which to reflect, I feel the full depth and breadth of this proverb. In short, it means: why complain about the things you can’t change. Better to improve the condition in whatever small way possible and move on. With that thought in mind, I decided to write this article because of the plethora of women that I have seen over the years who swear that they’re “natural” but who have been flat ironing regularly, often to the detriment of their natural tresses. The result is often hair ends that are straight and incapable of reversion until the sister “transitions” all over again. Most people don’t want to believe that flat ironing can be this harsh but it’s the truth. As a result, my strongest and best advice is “Don’t flat iron.” With that said, there are invariably people who will argue that there’s “no harm done.” While that may be true, the conditions for damage to be minimal vary from individual to individual and from hair type to hair type. As a result, I have devised a scientific experiment that will provide a sure-fire way for you to avoid ever damaging your hair with a flat iron. Preparation for this experiment may take up to six months as you will need to collect the hairs that you shed during regular shampooing for up to six months. It’s good to have at least one good hand full of shed hair strands in order to begin this experiment. It only takes me one month to shed that much hair but everyone’s different.

Materials

Flat Iron with adjustable temperature settings
 Handful (or more) of Shed Hair Strands
 Anti-frizz Serum
 Spray bottle w/water
 Flat board or surface
 Tape, Pen and Labels

Goal: to find the optimal temperature setting that will give your hair the straightness that you want without “reprogramming” (ie, damaging) your hair so that consistent reversion becomes impossible. This experiment is a bit clumsy so you may want to ask a friend to assist you.

Flat iron temperatures settings range anywhere from 120 to 450 degrees. That is an enormous difference in the highest setting is almost four times the initial setting. Many women just go for the hottest temperature to get the bone strait look. While that might work for some, it won’t work for everyone. So what we aim to do with this experiment is to test hair strand groups using different temp settings. Start wherever you like. I would suggest 200 degrees. Take a small group of your hair strands and line them up next to each other as much as possible. If your hair is as curly as mine, this is where a friend is useful. They can hold one end of the aligned hair strands, you hold the other. Then, using the 200 degree setting, flat iron the group of hair strands as you would your hair. For tips on flat ironing, please follow the process recommendations outlined in the link embedded in the October 2011 article. Once this hair strand group is straight, stop flat ironing and smooth a thin layer of anti-frizz serum over the hairs. Then, set them on your flat board, tape one end to the board and label the strand section 200 degrees.

Now using another group of aligned hair strands, flat iron the hair using a temperature setting increase of 25 (or 50) degrees. Follow the same procedure and label this group 225/250 degrees. Continue on up until you have reached the highest setting for your flat iron. Make sure to keep one group of hair strands that is not flat ironed as your control group.

Now that all of the hairs are laid out on your flat board, place the board in your bathroom where it will not be disturbed and leave it for about one week. Placing it in the bathroom allows the hair to be exposed to some degree of shower humidity and moisture which mimics outside environmental conditions that your hair will be exposed to. When the week is up, take the board and carefully examine the hair groups. Which hair groups have frizzed, and which groups are straight? How much frizz is too much for the look that you want? Most certainly, the strands with the highest temperature settings will be the straightest after a week. Your aim is to find the hair group(s) with the straightest

look to meet your individual needs. Mark these labels with a check mark. Labels for temperatures that are too frizzy should be labeled with a zero. (If all of the hair is frizzy, try the experiment again without the bathroom humidity.)

Now, that you have a feel for what the hair looks like after a week of exposure to the elements, spray each group of hair with water and wait a few minutes. Which strands have reverted? Are there any groups that have not reverted at all? How quickly did the reversion occur? If some hair groups did not revert, they represent the temperature settings that you want to avoid at all cost. Did some groups have partial reversion – with sections of the hair strands reverting and others staying straight? Compare the hair groups to your control group to be sure that you are accurately representing what your reverted hair should look like. Any hair groups that do not look like your original control group have been altered so it's important to maintain the control group for this part of the analysis.

Once you have identified the hair groups that don't match with the original control group after the strands have been wet and left to revert, mark an X on top of the original *zero* or *check marks* from the earlier task. All labels with an X represent temperature settings that will spell damage for your hair.

Now, review your labels. Which labels have check marks and no Xs? These are the settings that should work for you. My recommendation is that you employ the lowest temperature setting with only a check mark to meet your hair straightening needs, because this experiment **does not** help you to understand the impact of straightening your hair over time. Some types of heat damage are gradual so using your lowest heat setting with a heat protectant is simply the equivalent to buying insurance. There are no guarantees of *no damage* whenever you're employing intense enclosed heat directly to the hair. But, you are more likely to fare well with this approach.

Once you know your optimal heat number, use it every time you flat iron. That means that you should also take it with you to the hair salon for flat ironing services. If the stylist won't honor your recommendation, LEAVE! You've already —done the math, so you know what the outcome will be otherwise. Happy hair straightening and good luck!

Provisory comment: Please know that I do NOT flat iron my hair—ever. I choose not to do so because I love my hair as it is. I don't like the feeling that my hair is screaming “bloody murder” whenever a hot comb/flat iron is run over it. The most heat that I apply to my hair is blow-dryer heat. That is my preference. I therefore do not recommend flat ironing. All the same, I want to provide this experiment as an option for those ladies who feel they must have the bone strait look at times. I honestly and truly don't ever wish for anyone to regret the decision that they made for the sake of diversity. So, this article is written in the spirit of love and care. Do with it what you will.





Styling Tips: The Mohawk



Stylist: Jamie Mitchell; Photographer: Varick Taylor

This style is a favorite among clients in our salon. It's stylish, edgy and just plain HOT!! Need I say more! There are a multitude of variations that a stylist can use to create this style. But for this hair show style, Jamie went for "flow" appeal. After regular shampoo and conditioning treatment, Jamie blow-dried the client's hair on a low setting, with minimal drying on the top where the hair is loose. She then sectioned the hair into three canvases for creative expression. Using an upward arch as the style's foundation at the sides, she carefully crafted each small cornrow to terminate the "head-hugging" process at the top of the client's head. She then switched from braids to two strand twists to complete each individual section. She continued this process on both sides, creating her own unique flow pattern. She then put styling lotion on the top section of the hair, and created small two strand twists throughout the middle and top portion of the hair. The client was then placed under the dryer to set the style. Once out of the dryer, the two strand twists were loosened and Voila!! Chic-dom personified!





Summer Fun for the Natural One



During the summer months, I see sisters and brothers alike making their way to the beaches and to swimming pools. If you've ever experienced heat waves in the South, you appreciate why even the "water shy" may decide to give swimming another try. I personally prefer the late afternoon to evening or the early morning when swimming in a pool. Heat-of-the-day swimming just isn't my thing unless I'm on a beach with the full cast of characters: hot sand, breaking waves, seagulls, beach towels, a cool beverage (or five!) and of course, my boogie board. I'm now all set to go!

So with the wind, water, sun and fun, what should be done with those glorious tresses to facilitate a beautiful bathing experience? Well, I may be in the minority here but I'm a minimalist—a naturalist in the truest sense of the word. I wear my hair in two strand twists the majority of the time. When I want to go swimming, I dive right in!! And enjoy myself. Sure, there is lots of advice out there which suggests that we should muss and fuss with our locks prior to enjoying nature's bounty but I for one am just not down with all that. Here's why:

- 1) There is nothing wrong with my hair. My hair is natural and healthy from proper care and maintenance. I work year-round to keep it that way. So why should a few days in the summer sun lying on the ocean's currents change that? The truth is that it won't. Water (liquid water) is the single most important chemical catalyst for life in the universe. (Cosmologist and physicist Stephen Hawking's words, not mine.) So, why should I fear that it will hurt my hair? It won't!
- 2) Moisturizing prior to swimming should be done with caution. I once took this advice to heart and followed the recommendation to coat my hair with conditioner before swimming. I jumped in the water and for the next ten minutes, fought conditioner dripping into my eyes. It was a most punitive experience. Sure, I could have coated my hair and rinsed it out prior to swimming. That would have made a lot more sense. But in my view, it makes much more sense to oil the hair before swimming. Oil will coat, lubricate and protect the hair while swimming and won't be undone by the water quite so quickly as conditioner.
- 3) Wear a swim cap to minimize abuse to the hair. Okay, this recommendation is very logical and sensible but is totally NOT sexy!! So, I don't embrace it. Sorry but that's just me. When I swim, I want to feel free. The swim cap just don't do it for me. But if the spirit so moves you to wear one, by all means...DO!

So now that I've expressed my own biases against traditional swimming hair care regimens, I think it appropriate to share what I do believe.

Here's what I consider to be the most essential swim care tips:

- 1) Water is a natural tangling agent. If you swim every day for a week with two strand twists, you may be surprised to find that you have locks by the end of the week! I found this out the hard way about 26 years ago while training as a lifeguard. I share this knowledge with you so you don't have to learn the hard way like I did. If you swim with loose hair, be sure to detangle and condition the hair upon exiting the pool. I would caution anyone with hair longer than six inches when swimming with loose hair. You may potentially be creating a massive detangling job for yourself. But being a naturalist, I'm totally not opposed to loose hair swimming. Just know what you're getting yourself into.
-

- 2) Chlorine and salt left in the hair are drying agents. Therefore, they should be meticulously rinsed from the hair following a swim.
- 3) Moisturize to restore pH balance and elasticity. After rinsing the hair, conditioning is much more important than shampoo. The reason is that some cleansing shampoos tend to strip the hair of natural sebum. If your hair was clean when you went swimming, I'd recommend skipping the shampoo and going straight to conditioning. If you must shampoo your hair, use a moisturizing shampoo instead of a cleansing shampoo. This is to avoid further stripping the hair's protective oils. Now is also a good time for a nice hot oil treatment or a deep condition. Your hair will thank you for it and will be much easier to detangle with the added lubrication of oil and/or conditioner products.
- 4) Natural hair likes to dance—the longer the hair, the more passionate the tango. So to avoid stressing and tangling long hair, try styling it for the swim. I personally opt for large twists when swimming or braids pulled into an updo with a scrunchy. It keeps the hair from moving and tangling excessively and makes life really easy when it comes to rinsing, conditioning and re-twisting for tomorrow's swim-fest. If I want to feel my hair move and bend with the water, then I wear my regular size twists and just jump in. I can get away with this freestyle for about two days. Based on my hair texture however, I better be trying to redo the style by day three or just go ahead and embrace locks. ☺ If you already wear locks, then sister, you're all set to go!
- 5) Transitioning clients should seriously consider braided styles if you love swimming during the summer season. The two co-existing hair textures per strand (the trademark of transitioning locks) are already going to be subject to much friction and abuse from any combing and styling they are enduring at this time. Therefore, the added threats of tangling and chlorine (or salt) will only serve to frustrate your naturalization journey. With that in mind, taking away one of the points of contention (namely regular combing and styling) can only make life easier. Your hair length and general condition will determine whether braided extensions are needed or whether you can style your own hair. Whichever option you choose, remember to apply the same rinsing and conditioning regimen to your braids that you would to your loose hair or locks.

What if I'm a daily swimmer?

If you're a daily swimmer, my guess is that you live in California, you're swimming competitively or swimming is your preferred fitness routine. If any of these apply, then you would be an ideal candidate for the swim cap. Your greatest challenge may be finding one that fits. Natural hair can tend to be big hair so it may take a bit of searching to find the right one. But, it will be worth the investment in order to minimize the tangling and dryness that swimming can cause.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, a lot of the fuss around protecting Black hair from water has emerged because of our history and our tendency to shy away from anything that will mess up an expensive hairstyle. I totally understand that. But, I personally wear an expensive style for an event. I wear a hairstyle for my lifestyle, meaning I choose a style that fits my life. Once I've made that choice, the hair should never limit my LIVING. So, I encourage you to embrace a style that best matches your life. You'll be a lot less frustrated in the end. With hair that matches your life, you're free to be who you are...and all the musing and fussing becomes "much ado about nothing."





What Can I Do about Breakage?

The most effective strategy to understand and combat hair breakage is to identify the source of the problem. Once the source is positively identified, you can devise a workable solution that speaks to the nature of your unique concerns. Here are some questions to consider and recommended solutions to diagnose your own concerns and combat this vexing problem:

1) Is it truly breakage that you're experiencing or is it natural shedding? Take a few hairs that are in your comb or brush and line them up on a plain counter top. Carefully look at the hair strands. Hair strands that are consistent with your hair length are likely the effect of normal hair shedding (35-100 strands per day for the average person). [Note: Unnatural shedding is alopecia, which is not subject to the recommendations provided in this article. Seek medical advice for this condition to determine cause and solutions.] If the hairs are much shorter than your hair, take note. Now, carefully hold a strand between the thumb and index fingers of both hands and pull your hands apart. Does the hair strand stretch like a rubber band before breaking or does it break easily, showing signs of inelasticity? If the hairs are short, compared to those on your head, and are inelastic, you are definitely experiencing breakage.

For those with locks, consider the following: Are you newly locked? Do you have thicker hair buds at the ends of your hair? Does the hair pull away from the lock as groups of strands released from the end of the lock with impacting the integrity, length or thickness of the lock? If you answered yes to all of these questions, your hair is most likely experiencing natural shedding. If your breakage is blunted or even in appearance and impacts the length of the hair in a way that is inconsistent with the remainder of your locks, you are experiencing breakage.

2) Where is the breakage occurring—all over or in sections? If the breakage is not easily located, it may be universal. This occurs most often when clients are transitioning to natural hair or have experienced heat damage. Because of the varying textures, the hair may break near the root where the natural texture begins.

If the breakage is in the back or around the edges of the hair, ask yourself the following questions:

- a) Am I wearing head bands, braids or extensions that are too tight?
- b) Am I over-twisting my locks during lock maintenance?
- c) Do I comb, tease or manipulate the damaged area of my hair more than others?

If the breakage is in the crown of your head, do you more frequently work with your hair when you are in a rush? (Not intuitive right?) Well, what I've discovered is that when some women are shampooing and styling their own hair, they are more likely to experience difficulty at the crown of the head because of the need to elevate the arms for an extended period of time. Because many women don't have great upper body strength, they get frustrated, drop the arms and RAKE the hair rather than to caress it. The result is damage that may not be easily seen until it is rather extensive. If you wear locks, the same situation can prevail but more often, this crown breakage may occur due to over-manipulating the hair, perhaps while reading a good book, watching television or pondering life. I have however seen rare instances where hair in certain regions of the hair simply fail to grow. This is not breakage and is best addressed through consultation with a dermatologist.

Once you have determined the general nature and source of your problem, change your hair care regimen to counter the ill effects of current practice. *General rules of thumb are:* Keep your hair conditioned and moisturized. Comb the hair when it is moistened and wear protective styles. Sleep on satin rather than cotton and monitor your results. If none of these measures work, seek professional assistance from a licensed natural stylist. Good luck!





Blow-drying Blews: Is Blow-drying Bad for My Hair?

I thought about writing this article after touching base with a sister who will be one of my models for the NUSOL Natural Hair and Beauty Expo. This sister came into the salon with a head full of long, thick natural hair and a question: What do I do? Her texture is very curly so she mostly pulls it back into a braided pony tail. NOT sexy! But, it does the job. Understanding that her hair is prone to tangle and will be highly responsive to humidity, I asked her if she ever tried a two-strand twist. She hadn't!!! I was floored and excited at the same time!! I basically said, "Let me work. Come!" As I worked, I smiled. We talked about UNC (she's a student), life, relationships, etc. Well when chic left the salon, I thought: "She doesn't have a boyfriend currently but, it won't be long. She WAS SMOKIN' HOT!!!" She flung her hair naturally, and it was poetry in motion. So what's the parallel with this article? Well, sister acknowledged that she doesn't blow-dry her hair EVER. She just washes, braids and goes. Well, I love the natural as much as anyone else but sometimes, the blow-dryer just adds length and versatility that can't be easily appreciated without *stretching* to reach it. We live in a world that prizes beauty. Flowing tresses are just one manifestation of that beauty. So, I say: If you got it, flaunt it! She wondered, "Will it damage my hair?" The truth is: No, it won't. Natural hair is typically ultra-healthy hair. What that means is that it can be manipulated without breaking. We have had such a sketchy history of relaxation horror stories that "once bitten twice shy." Now that our hair is growing and is healthy again, we have gone to the other extreme to maintain it, meaning NO heat. That's fine if it's your preference. But, it's not an imperative. ***Blow-drying your hair won't prevent it from reverting.*** I have about 30 years of personal testimony to add to that fact. ***It also won't cause excess split ends or breakage when the hair is styled into protective styles***—meaning a style that protects the ends of the hair rather than having them freely exposed to the elements. Protective styles are often maintained anywhere from one to several weeks, so the resulting infrequency of blow-drying means the hair is not be abused or over-manipulated. Now if you're blow-drying your hair daily for some reason, then we need to talk. I would not recommend this practice as it is excessive treatment. Natural hair flourishes best when you ***leave it alone***. Some other quick tips to consider are:

- Leave ample time for blow-drying. Rushing never gets good results and only leads to over-stressing the hair.
- Use a leave-in conditioner before blow-drying. This step infuses the hair with moisture prior to be blow-drying for added protection.
- Section the hair when blow-drying to be sure that you are getting good coverage for all segments of your hair.
- Blow-dry on a lower heat setting to avoid over-drying the hair.

So in summary, whether your hair blow-dried or not, protect your ends, minimize styling, maintain good hair care methods, and you'll see positive results for many years to come. Take these steps, and the blow-dryer will have no noticeable effect other than to complement a winning toss of the head! Happy Styling!





Spiral Rod Set Curls



Stylist: Schatzji McCarthy

Okay, I don't really wear my hair out very much. The two-strand twist is my signature style--unapologetically so. But, I really wanted to dedicate this feature to natural hair diversity, so I went ahead with the flexi-rod set. To create this style of Feb. 6th 2011, Super Bowl Sunday, I shampooed and conditioned my hair after twisting out. I then oiled my hair with natural oils (coconut, jojoba or Nature's Blessings are fine options). I then sectioned my hair starting at the ends and rolled up bending the ends of the flexi-rods to hold them in place. I then wore the rods all day to air dry. The next morning, Voila! Shirley Temple curls for days. Okay, I didn't like the look at all. It reminded me too much of Nellie from Little House on the Prairie. You remember the girl who looked waaaay too big to be wearing Shirley Temple curls. Yeah, that one!! Anyhoo, I'm making a point. Work with me. So, the look came out as expected. My hair has a natural shine to it, and it moves gracefully and falls nicely back into place. No chemicals. No heat, even--just oil and water.



The next set of pictures show the progression of the style over time. For this look, I simply separated the ST curls. I was going for volume here; and the last photo is week 2. At NO TIME have I combed my hair! That point is very important to note as it would only weaken the curl pattern that I worked meticulously to get.

I estimate that this style will last about 3 weeks solid, provided that it's wrapped at night. I wear a satin cap with my curls pulled to the top of my head so I'm not sleeping on top of the curls. That's why they're not flattened and out of shape. When I'm exercising, I'm doing mostly yoga and walking so I don't really sweat much. The down side of this style is that it's much like a "press and curl." It doesn't like much moisture. But it's all good for a change of pace. When I consider I didn't go through stress, pain or discomfort to get this look, I'm pleased with the result.





Decisions, decisions, decisions: Is locking for me?

In a natural hair salon, one of the most consistent questions that we get from clients who have successfully made the transition to natural hair is: "Should I lock my hair?" It's no surprise really as I too have posed the question at different points of time throughout my years as a naturalist. Many of you natural readers have posed the question to yourselves as well. You've either made a conscious decision that you're currently living with or you're on the fence. Because I appreciate the challenges of this decision-making process, I wanted to say a few words to help to inform your decision. First, I'll provide a brief anecdotal discussion based on my own personal experience. I'll then follow-up with issues to consider when making your own decision. While I have made a formal decision for myself, I have no bias for or against freeform natural vs. locked natural hair. But one beautiful thing about hair decisions, they can always be undone--no matter how permanent they may seem.

A Personal Reflection on My Lock Decision-making Process

It was in the early 90s while living in Jamaica that I decided: "I'm going to do it! I'm going to lock my hair." I had been living in Jamaica for a few years and felt the beauty and love for natural hair. It was a beautiful time--a time of discovery and appreciation. I walked the streets of Kingston, Jamaica and saw lock diversity that I would never have experienced in NC or VA. I found that the hottest styles were often worn by women who were entertainers within the Reggae community. I recall seeing one woman with thick locked tendrils that cascaded around her shoulders and down her back in curly cues reminiscent of a pig's tail. I said, "How did you get that look?!" She said, "I wet my hair, Chiny bumped it and slept on it. When it was dry, I took it alose." I said "Chiny bump?" She then described "Nubian knots" and I knew what she was talking about. (Aside: I later concluded that Chiny Bump came about as a reference to some images of the Buddha. In Jamaican Patois, Chiny means Chinese. If you look at the head of the Buddha, there are "Nubian knots" all over his head. With so many Chinese people living in Jamaica, I figured that the locals could best describe the style by referencing the Buddha head and there would be no ambiguity about what you were describing. But then, that's just my supposition. Check out the photos below and tell me what you'd conclude.)



Anyway at the time, my natural hair was past shoulder length and very thick. I kept it in a two strand twist style. Because it always took about 4-5 hours to shampoo and re-style my hair, I was seeking a style that would offer a quicker solution. I had two young sons and had to fit my monthly hair maintenance routine in between all of the other responsibilities of work, wifedom and motherhood. I decided that locking was low maintenance and easy. I had a rather simplistic view of the true reality of locked hair. But, that's where I was at the time.

My husband, who is Jamaican, felt that I should really think about it a lot more before taking that decision. In his mind, locked hair is a lifestyle--a religious and political statement, and he wasn't sure that I was committed to the social image/biases that I would project by wearing locks. Because I had already worn natural hair throughout the 80s--a time when it was rather unpopular in the US, I was unperturbed by public opinion. I could give a flying flip what other people might *think* they knew about me. I still feel that way about most things. But, I did carefully consider the full reality of locking my hair before making a final decision. My dear friend Tynsi, God rest her soul, had beautiful thigh length locks that swayed when she walked and were absolutely divine. I asked her about how she cared for her locks and learned that she didn't do much. She mainly shampooed as she felt the need and tightened the locks when

they needed more definition. The tightening routine was news to me so I began to look and observe locked sisters much more.

At the time, I spent a lot of days at Mutabaruka's vegetarian restaurant, where Tynsi worked, so I watched his wife and daughters and looked at how they maintained their hair. I was fascinated by the fact that the girls wore their hair in elegant ponytails that from the front looked like loose natural hair until you saw the point where the hair was knotted into a tail. There, the individual locks cascaded down their backs, revealing a locked beauty therein. I thought, if the roots/front of their hair is "free" (*for want of a better word*) while the rear is locked, then they have not bothered with lock tightening for at least a year. That fascinated me because the look really was very regal and elegant. So, I then considered the whole reality of maintenance and realized that the style is not really carefree unless you're into the freeform look. I knew that wouldn't be my approach for the long haul so I then reflected on the reality of maintaining locks: the process, the time and the look.

Core Questions to Consider When Deciding

At the end of the day, I came full circle and had to ask myself the most important question that anyone should carefully consider before locking their hair: "What is my goal?" In other words, what future do I envision for my hair? And how will my hair fit into my life and my lifestyle? After coming to this core vision, I had to ask the next logical set of questions:

- What hairstyles appeal to me most? Are they locked or loose?
- Do I want long hair (which I already had) or really long hair (which locks would surely provide)?
- How much time do I want to spend monthly with hair care and maintenance and what do I ideally want that process to look like? Will I maintain it myself and how prepared am I to do so once I've made my decision?
- What styles are unique to locked hair, what styles are unique to natural hair? Of the styles noted, which do I most want to wear and which will I most regret being unable to wear?
- How does my exercise and fitness routine impact my hair care and maintenance program?
- How much do I value the freedom of living without a comb or a brush?
- Am I comfortable with the notion that I won't be actively shedding my hair as long as I'm wearing mature, established locks? (*Note: Hair has three phases of growth, the telogen phase of development below the scalp, the anagen phase--characterized by growth above the scalp, and the catagen phase--the final phase of hair shedding or release from the hair root to make way for a new strand of hair. For mature locks, hair strands that have reached the catagen phase are inter-twined with other hairs which are still in the anagen phase of growth. These shedding strands help to make the locking process "permanent".*)
- If I lock and decide I want to change back to loose, natural hair, will I be comfortable with cutting my locks and starting over with short hair? (*Note: This issue may or may not be relevant depending on the individual. I'll explain why I say this a bit more in the next section called "Unlocking Locked Tresses."*)

Once all of these questions have been addressed, each individual should be at a good place to determine what option is most appropriate for your lifestyle. What I have found within the salon is that once people decide to lock, they love the freedom, the flexibility and the beauty of the look! Most will never go back to any other way of being! EVER!! But whatever YOU decide, it's nice to know that at the end of the day, no decision is permanent. We ARE talking about hair which will most definitely grow back as long as health, nutrition and a proper care and maintenance program are a part of your normal routine.

Unlocking Locked Tresses

The inspiration for this segment of this article is my dear friend Meiko (photo below)-a tall, willowy and brilliant young woman who I met at a conference for professionals serving children and families with developmental delays. She's a speech pathologist and an avid researcher. When I met her at the conference in 2009, she was a locked beauty, whose hair fell to her lower back. As a naturalist, I was immediately drawn to her and we hit it off famously. In her own words when we met at the time, she said "I'm transitioning." I was confused as she was wearing locks. When she saw my puzzled look, she further explained. I was fascinated as I had never heard the term *transitioning* used

to describe going from locks to natural hair. The photo to the bottom left is how Meiko's hair looks today--absolutely gorgeous and ultra-healthy.



Photo courtesy of Dauwd El of
9eyesience@gmail.com

Her transition process took some months but was doable. In her words 'I wanted a change in my life but I didn't want to cut my locks and go back to short hair.' So, Meiko methodically loosened each one of her locks and released the resulting beautiful mane of hair.

Needless to say, the process required considerable patience and a strong dose of will power. She has an abundance of both. The process that she used to release her 2+ foot long locks is outlined below for those who may be interested in considering this approach. Just know: It ain't for the faint of heart. I personally would have opted for the scissors but when I saw the final result, I was SO GLAD she didn't.

Meiko's Process for De-locking Palm Rolled Locks

Meiko wore locks for approximately 10 years. Her locks were therefore mature and well established. Because she had locked and maintained them herself, she was well aware of the process used to care for them. So, she knew that loosening them was a possibility that could be successful. It is important to understand the locking technique used because the process outlined below is only effective with palm-rolled or free-form locks. It WILL NOT work with inter-locked tresses. There is absolutely no way to effectively and efficiently loosen interlocked hair. It simply must be cut off in order to start over. So with that understanding, let's look at how the process works.

Provisory statement: It's important to note that palm rolled (and free form) locks are held together primarily through tangling caused by the kinetic dance of individual hair strands merging together over considerable time and tide. Some stylists use beeswax and other gels to coerce the hair into locking sooner rather than later. While this is an acceptable practice for some within the natural hair care arena, it is not always the advisable method as products often weigh the hair down prematurely and tend to remain in the lock indefinitely. Ideally, no product should remain in the hair indefinitely. For this reason, we don't favor the beeswax method of locking. The extent to which heavy gels were used to form your locks may impact your success with this approach.

The most important step in the process is to be methodical. It will be impossible, YES IMPOSSIBLE...to loosen long, mature locks in a few hours or even a few days. So, because it is a start and stop process, it is important to plan your loosening process to ensure that you're able to wear a professional look at all times throughout the process. For Meiko, she started in the front and worked around the periphery of her hair working gradually towards the middle. When individual locks were loosened, she braided or twisted them and wore them mingled in with the rest of her loose locks or pulled them all into a large, thick ponytail.

Tools:

- Moisturizing Conditioner
- Scrunchies
- Metal Pick or Rattail Comb
- Several Metal Tooth Combs
- Safety Pin or Push Pin
- Scissors
- Hot Tea
- Television or Music for Distraction

Select the first lock to begin with. Moisturize the lock with a generous amount of conditioner. Using the metal pick or rattail comb, punch holes in the lock being sure to cover the full length of the lock. This process allows air to enter the interior of the lock and begins the process of dissociation. Massage the conditioner into the spaces created by the holes. Take the metal tooth comb and starting at the end of the lock, begin picking the hair out from the base working your way up the lock shaft. As shedded strands are released, pulled them away from the others, but avoid retangling them at the root. If there is any resistance while pulling strands to release them, STOP! Don't force them alose as you will only tighten a knot that you have yet to reach. Continue working methodically and patiently. Use a safety pin or push pin to detangle knots that are too small for a comb. It's important to value the hair by taking the time to be as meticulous as possible.

Once you have several locks in a section loosened and you can assess the full length of your anagen phase hair strands (those still connected at the scalp), you now have a decision to make: You can decide to cut the remaining locks **IN THAT SECTION ONLY**, approximately 4-6 inches below the longest strands or maintain your progress without the use of scissors. The scissors serve only to expedite the process by cutting away hair that is ultimately going to be shed through the loosening process. However, there is a risk of cutting anagen hair strands so be cautious when cutting and ensure that you leave ample room for uncertainty. When you reach another section of the hair (front, rear, side, top and back), take the time to loosen several locks from the tip to the root to determine the natural length of that given section before you decide to cut below the hair growth line. Hair grows at different rates at different points on the head; therefore, it is important to assess each section of the hair independently before "taking the short cut." Once all of your hair has been loosened, you'll then be in a better position to decide on a length or cut that suits your personal needs. Or you may simply work with whatever the process brings. The experience is your own; there is no right or wrong approach.

What to expect?

The amount of time that de-locking takes is a factor of your hair length, texture, efficiency and available time to commit to the process. So, how long it will take will vary from person to person. But, there are some realities that are universal to all:

Lots and lots of hair shedding. These shedded strands were released by the root at varying points in time throughout the years but have remained woven within the lock. Since the average head sheds between 35-100 strands of hair per day, then you can anticipate that your head would have lost anywhere between 12,775 and 36,500 strands of hair per year. These strands are now intertwined with anagen phase hair strands that remain connected at the scalp and must be released. So, do not be at alarmed by the volume of hair lost? It's natural and expected.

Very slow progress. Meiko says that her first lock took 8 hours to loosen. By the time she had streamlined the process, she was taking 20 minutes per lock. Anything worth having is worth waiting for, so be patient and take your time. When you find yourself getting frustrated. Stop the process, style your hair until the next "go-round" and find something else fun and entertaining to do.

Tired arms and possibly stiff neck muscles. Any repetitive motion that is new and different from your normal routine places stress and strain on muscles. Holding the head in place to facilitate the work that you are undertaking may be challenging. As a result, muscle stiffening and tightness can be anticipated and is also expected. Adjust your position as frequently and as comfortably as necessary to assist you with your final goal. With time, the muscles will become more conditioned and tolerant of the process.

Overall, the experience is yours. Be patient and kind to your hair. If you find the process to difficult, get a friend to help. Your reward will be a healthy and beautiful mane of loosened hair that will be fun for experimenting with and styling! Good luck!!





Loc-connaissance: Interlocking vs. Palm Rolling

This brief article came to me after a consultation with a new client. She started her locks a few months before and wanted to get a lock maintenance service. She's been advised that she should inter-lock her hair and wanted to know the pros and cons. I gave her the following pointers which hopefully will help you with your decision.

First to explain what these techniques are: inter-locking and palm-rolling are both terms used to describe lock maintenance or tightening services. These techniques **are not** typically used to start the locking process. The starting lock process is typically initiated with a two-strand twist, coil twist, braid or free-form. When the hair is ready to be shampooed and retightened at the roots, the interlocking or palm-rolling process is initiated. **Interlocking** is a tightening process whereby the segment or lock of loose hair at the root is woven using a four-point method to foster balance and continuity in the finished lock. Some people use a latch hook or other tool to facilitate the process but a tool is not necessary, depending on the size of the lock. **Palm-rolling** is a process of tightening the hair by holding the lock between your two hands and pulling the right hand downwards as the left-hand moves upwards. This movement rotates the hair naturally in a clockwise direction to facilitate lock tightening. A clip is often used to hold the tightened palm-rolled hair until it is dried. After starting locks, it is advisable to choose one method and stick with it for greater consistency in your locks. You can initiate palm-rolled locks and switch to interlocking, and vice versa; but, the density of your locks will vary, though perhaps not noticeably. Interlocked locks are denser and tighter than palm-rolled locks. So, do your research first to decide what fits best with your lifestyle.

Interlocking Pros/Palm-Rolling Cons:

- Interlocking is a technique used to get tight, neat results with a minimal amount of *wait* time. Interlocked hair is “locked” almost instantly so you can swim, play and frolic freely without worrying about frayed roots. Palm rolled hair, on the other hand, is locked more naturally so it will be inclined to fray at the roots over the days and weeks following styling. It can take about 7 months for palm-rolled locks to fully establish themselves—meaning they can be shampooed without coming loose. Typically hair in the nape of the head locks before hair in the crown due to varying hair textures on the head.
- Interlocked hair tightening can be done less frequently as the hair at the roots will stay neater longer than palm rolled hair. This can mean an early cost savings if that is a concern for you. However, interlocking is not done well by everyone and can be more costly as it is more time consuming than palm-rolling. So, this issue can quickly become a con depending on your concerns and your experiences.

Palm-Rolling Pros/Interlocking Cons:

- Palm-Rolling is a more natural and organic way to lock the hair. Conversely, interlocked hair is, in essence, knotted to achieve this look and therefore cannot be easily loosened or undone. While this may not be a concern from the outset, it can be a problem should you ever decide to loosen your locks. If you should make this move, it can only be successfully achieved with palm-rolled locks. See my article “Unlocking locked tresses” for more information.
- Palm-Rolling is easily done at home. It's always difficult to know when you'll be in a pinch and will need to work your own magic in the comfort of your own home. With palm-rolled hair, you can easily tighten your own locks without requiring the services of a stylist or a friend. Interlocking can be done at home as well but it is more difficult to do in order to maintain balance throughout the interlocked strand. You will require considerably more time and patience than with palm-rolling.
- These are just a few thoughts that quickly come to mind regarding interlocking and palm-rolling. I'm sure others can think up some ideas that I have not mentioned. But, hopefully these ideas with help you to make a final decision that you can happily live with. Happy Locking!





Loc-connaissance: How Type and Texture Determine Hair Texture

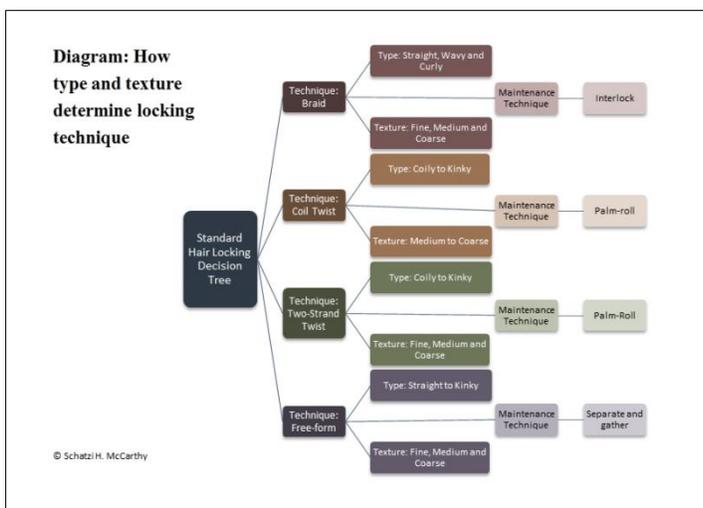
Inspiration is a fickle compatriot. She is elusive when we wish her to be apparent and prolific when brevity would suffice. I have greatly delayed this month's issue of *Au Naturel* because I just didn't know what inspiring new tidbits on natural hair care I should share. But, ask and it shall be given. While interlocking a teen's hair on Saturday, December 17th, I suddenly knew what I would write about this month. You see, I started this young woman's locks a little over a year ago. I used the standard two-strand twist technique to do so. Lock maintenance services are then typically conducted using the palm roll technique. (Read the article titled "Loc-connaissance: Interlocking vs. Palm-rolling" for an explanation of interlocking and palm rolling techniques.) After some months however, it was apparent that I needed to alter my technique to facilitate a more polished look for the client. What dictated this change was that when she returned for maintenance services, her roots were really puffy and thick. There's nothing inherently wrong with this hair reality, as it is a part of the locking process. But, this client is a high schooler. I'm always cognizant that peer acceptance is a major concern for young people at this phase of life. So, I was concerned about her overall appearance between services. Also, her habit is that she typically shampoos her hair before returning to the salon. And when palm rolled hair meets shampoo, the result is an organic one! Depending on the hair type and texture, any number can play. Natural hair do what it do! ☺

This client's hair type is considered kinky; but, the strands are rather fine. (Note: I am using the terms *type* and *texture* consistent with Milady's Standard Cosmetology's use of *wave pattern* and *texture* respectively.) Because I started her hair with a two-strand twist and have been palm-rolling during maintenance services, I switched to the interlocking technique to reduce frizz and to keep her roots as tight as possible between services and shampoos. The net effect is that when she returns for services, her locks are clearly defined down to the roots where the new growth has occurred. But to correct for starting out with the two-strand twist rather than the braid, I've since had to implement some grooming modifications to smooth out her locks. These modifications become rather obvious with time and experience; so, I won't elaborate on them here. Suffice it to say: I don't regret starting with the two-strand twist; because, braided locks are flat locks. They will become cylindrical over time; but, part of the true beauty of locks is their shape. So, I really prefer using the two-strand twist to initiate locks on a kinkier hair type over the braided technique. All the same, I don't hesitate to employ the braided technique when I need a stronger hold.

So inspired by this case example of lock decision-making, I created a standard hair locking decision tree to inform readers about how and when to use certain techniques. (See next page.) I call the tree a "standard" one because hair locking is as much an art form as a technique. There is no right answer that must be employed in all circumstances, as my own case example above illustrates. As a result, the decision tree is primarily for beginners. Other factors outside of type and texture (i.e. density, length, client age, personal style, etc.) factor into the techniques that may be used. So, be willing to make modifications as you see fit. You will often encounter clients

whose locks you did not initiate; therefore, flexibility in the selection of lock techniques to employ is paramount.

Finally, I would like to note that within the salon setting, grooming and neatness are always of primary importance. For this reason, I have not spoken much of the free form locking technique as it is rarely used in the salon. This method is how lock wearers like Bob Marley started their locks. In short if you shampoo your hair and opt out of combing or styling, locks will form naturally as strands bond with those around them. Many people will then separate the strands with their hands to define the size locks that they favor. Over



time, they may employ the palm roll technique once the locks are formed. This method is primarily used by DIY naturalistas, as it does not require a specialist's time and expertise. All the same, it is included in the decision tree as an acknowledgement of its legitimacy as a hair locking technique.





Thoughtful Considerations on Sisterlocking and You

Disclaimer: *I'm writing this article from the perspective of a girlfriend, not a salon owner. The primary reason is that I am honestly not a great capitalist. As a result, I tend to see life from a very practical perspective, whether or not practicality translates into profits. Because I have clear, strong opinions about most things regarding black hair, the contents of this article may leave one a bit flat. That is not my intention. I seek only to state the case without whitewashing it to make a sale. The issues that I pose are real and worthy of due consideration. But, please know that there is no judgment in my opinions. I simply seek to illustrate the facts from the perspective of a naturalista. You can then decide what works for you.*

As sisters take the plunge into the natural world, the inevitable question comes: should I lock my hair? It is a natural progression in thought. I myself considered doing so in the 90s. My husband however didn't like the idea at all. "You're not Rasta." "Locks are a hairstyle, not a religion," was my response. Well, let's just say his influence prevailed. For me personally, I'm not a lock girl; I love a twist-out just a little too much to give it up. I KNOW many of you can feel me. But, I style locks beautifully and find them to be absolute poetry at times. Well, your standard fare questions about locking pivot around care/maintenance and lifestyle. Check out our past article: Decisions, decisions, decision: Is locking for me for careful considerations about making that step. These are considerations that every lock girl should pose and honestly answer. So, what about sisterlocks? For this article, I'll define sisterlocks, discuss care and maintenance and address key issues that will have to be considered when making a final decision. It is usually a very long-term commitment.

Defining the Look: Sisterlocks is the term used to describe the end product created by a hair styling technique which binds strand of hair. Sections are made symmetrically and uniformly in small fine groupings which are considerably smaller than regular locks and which can sometimes create the illusion that the hair is not locked at all. The finished "locks" almost look like strands of hair strands and can function in much the same way. Once your hair is sisterlocked, it is essentially made more carefree. As a result, you can swim, shampoo, walk in the rain and everything in between without your hair shrinking or transforming so easily to the elements. In my opinion, sisterlocks were designed to address a real demand that sisters have had for a very long time: it fulfills the desire to look like you have European hair, when you in fact have African hair, and to have all the *perceived* freedom to "shake and go" without the fuss of Africanized hair.

The Technique: Sisterlocks represent a trademarked technique for locking the hair using a patented tool invented by Dr. JoAnne Cornwell (Africana studies and French professor in California). I often hear people refer to the tool as a crochet hook. As an avid crocheter myself, I can imbibe what the tool must look like and how it would be used to complete the hair locking process; though, I have never seen the tool or the technique demonstrated. It's that secretive! And my understanding is that if you are using the tool without formal training and certification (about \$1,500 for a four-day class), you will be sued if found out. Needless to say, sisterlock stylists have to be sought out and are coveted when found. I have considered taking the coursework myself, but if I'm honest, I don't want to take 2-days of my life to style any ONE person's hair. Sorry ladies. I DO love you. I'm just being real about how I want to use my own time and how I choose to do so. Likewise, I'm hesitant about financing someone else's training only to have them leave as soon as their client base is established. Here is where utopian socialism, erring on the side of practicality, embraces capitalism with a passion! Sad though, as it does undermine the spirit. (**Note to self:** Reconsider this issue with less fear of consequences to learn what makes the most sense.) All the same, sisterlocks are the only natural hair care service that we don't provide in our salon.

Care, Maintenance and Cost: The process takes approximately 1-2 days to complete. If you know how to crochet, visualize someone sectioning the hair in very small strands (much like yarn) and putting in hundreds of chain stitches starting at the base and moving to the end. I feel the process must be very similar to this, though I haven't seen how they grip and hold the hair to start and finish the lock. That is the secret that I imagine is so coveted. Sisterlocking your hair costs anywhere between \$500-\$1,000. Maintenance every 2-3 months is about \$200-\$300.

Opinion: After your hair is locked, you naturally MUST go back to a sisterlock stylist to have your hair re-tightened at the roots; it is now virtually impossible for you to complete this process on your own hair without taking the

sisterlock training. You're essentially a captured audience. Why is that a problem? Well, fundamentally it isn't. As my husband says, "I don't want to box food out of anyone's mouth", especially not a sister in the spirit. It's meeting a demand. But I factor the reality of life into all that I do, or try to anyway. I saw a sister at the Raleigh Natural Hair Care Expo whose sisterlocks hung along her hips, and swayed when she strolled. Her locks were divine and so was she! I started to tell her but somehow, I could see that she already knew. Truth IS! ☺ Being a businesswoman, I did a quick mental calculation based on the rate of hair growth, and the number of years of styling that were involved based on the length of her hair. I realized that, unless she styles her own hair, she is wearing anywhere from \$12-\$15,000+ worth of hair! Well, it's worth the investment. It's a tough job but, SOMEONE has to be fabulous!! Yet something inside of me couldn't help but ask myself: What if she should ever have to undergo chemotherapy? How would she cope? At what price point does hair styling end and hair worship begin? This is a real thought for contemplation. (Sorry if it offends anyone.)

Likewise with such expensive hair, what happens if job lay-offs occur, as they invariably can? Styling your hair should not be a fierce competitor with food and utilities when it comes to managing the household budget. So, this issue is one to consider carefully BEFORE making the investment. There are sisters who will never worry about finances. I say, Rock ON! But there are many others who don't fall into that category. So consider carefully to make your decision. In turn, it is my humble opinion that sisterlocks are FAR more flattering and more consistent with "embracing your own beauty" than hair weaves. **Understand me:** Weaves are necessary for many women for many reasons. But if you are opting to hide your natural hair because you don't want to bother with the fuss of it all, consider sisterlocks and be liberated!

Benefits:

- Between maintenance styling that is manageable
- Beautiful, healthy, well-maintained hair.

Costs:

- Pricey. Pricey. Pricey.
- Time-consuming
- Creates hair attachment due to great investment
- Creates dependence on your stylist

Overall, sisterlocks are a beautiful option for ladies who may want a look a bit more conservative than traditional locks.





Coloring Locks: Is there ever a right way?

My eldest son recently announced that he wanted his lock tips colored red. It reminded me of when I started his locks about 10 years ago. After graduating from high school, he announced: That's my last haircut. *Who knew the child was hatin' on a fade?* He never said a mumbling word. He only took a decision and make it very clear that he wanted no opposition. So, being a natural salon owner, I trusted no one else to the task. Well, fast forward 10 years and this is what they look like. One woman in West Africa saw his hair and was shocked! My response was: He works at an architecture firm and is artistic in nature. In others, not my business. He's grown. He even decided to break away from me as his stylist a couple of years back. But after the stylist had his edges breaking off and tons of build-up in his locks after one service, he returned to *Schatzi's*. It takes me almost an hour to shampoo his locks. I do it because it's necessary. But many stylists don't want to take that much time. Such is life.

So, when he announced that he wanted me to color them, I woke up in the middle of the night to research. I didn't want the ends of his hair looking like, as he rightly deduced, "a paintbrush." Also, because his hair seems to grow in a natural V-shape, I wanted to match his natural style. His intention is to cut the tips off when he gets tired of the color, so this is his way of having a bit of fun before trimming his locks (for the first time).

I found tons of online resources with tips on coloring locks, but I was most interested in photos of style patterns. They were few and far between. So, I basically had to wing it. The biggest challenge came from the fact that I had to work so low to the bottom of my chair to apply the color to the tips WHILE MAKING CERTAIN NOT TO GET IT ON THE REMAINDER OF THE LOCKS OR THE SALON! The bowl would simply not work at all for this type of look. Overall, he was pleased, but I wasn't. I did achieve my goal of not creating the look of a paint brush, with a vertical color line across all locks. But, I wanted a more consistent V-shape. I think I missed the mark at the lowest point of the V. I needed to be a bit more generous covering the tips in this section. Honestly, I started in this section and didn't want to run short of color, so I know that why it's like that. I've considered a touch-up to finish the look; but, I think he frankly could care less. He has some pizazz; so, these types of details go unnoticed by him. But that's why we're stylists. The flavor is in the details every time.

If I can provide tips for coloring locks, my biggest suggestions are: map out the entire process ahead of time; consider the client's hair and desired look carefully to ensure that you devise an application method that achieves the

outcome desired and is done in a way that doesn't make a mess (you don't want to be looking at some funky color on your countertops for months to come); ensure that you have all of the resources on hand that you need (foil sheets were a must for this style!); and take your time. He was in my chair for 5 hours, including color, shampoo, re-twist and style. But, I was compensated well, so it's all in a day's work. Happy Styling!



Stylist: Schatzi McCarthy; Photographer: Schatzi McCarthy



Styling Tips: The Locked Updo



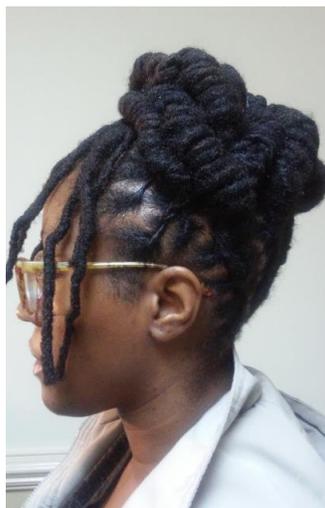
Stylist: Tamiaka Vick; Photographer: Varick Taylor

Updo styles are very versatile and creative and provide a very professional look for the evening or the office. The updo is a style that is as limitless in possibilities as there are heads to try the style on. Everyone's hair is unique and as a result, this style will take on the flavor of the wearer and of the stylist. In this instance, the hair was shampooed and locks were tightened as standard procedure for all lock services. The individual locks were then twisted into larger sections that are held together with a small rubber band. Once all of the individual locks are now grouped into a "parent" lock, the hair is creatively wrapped and tucked around the crown and the rear of the head to form a graceful bun. The hair is held in place with hairpins. This style screams grace and beauty at any age!





Styling Tips: Bangin' Updo



Stylist: Schatzji McCarthy; Photographer: Schatzji McCarthy

One of the most challenging and creative aspects of styling is “the unknown.” When a client come in only with a picture and says, “I want that.” You are challenged to make it happen with the tools at your disposal. The style below is of a client who had not been in the salon for quite a while as she was self-styling. But as she had a function to attend, she decided to get a professional style. The style was of a client with long locks who had an updo with blunted bangs in front. But, the front of the hair was NOT cut into bangs. The client didn’t want her hair cut at all. The hair was maneuvered in such a way that the bangs were created with the ends of the long hair which fell into the front of the client’s face. We conferred, and my client was okay with the idea that her bangs would not be blunt as her hair was layered. Everything else about the style, she loved. So, the photo to the left was my creative rendition of this look. Happy Styling!





Lock Care Tips: For Summer and Always

One thing that I find when talking with clients and the public at large is that lock-ettes (women who sport locks) fall primarily into two categories: those who only let their stylist touch their hair and those who are do-it-yourselfers. Because those sisters professionally visiting regular stylists are having their locks regularly conditioned and maintained, this article is primarily geared to those who do their own hair at home. All the same, the tips for beach-preparation are recommended for all.

First, it's important to realize that because locks are a long-term commitment, you get results based on the investment that you make. Some believe that locks are carefree hair. While that is true in many respects, there is considerable love and care that locks must routinely receive to remain strong. Because of intense heat and the drying effects of wind, summer presents a wonderful opportunity to go the extra mile for beauty's sake.

When maintaining your locks:

1) Make sure to cleanse the locks thoroughly before initiating any lock maintenance services. Because locks are dense, they can capture and hide product residue easily. For this reason, we use a water-based gel (Joie Natural's MyGel) in our salon to ensure that it can be easily rinsed from the hair during the next shampoo service. We do not advise using wax based products on locks as they are difficult to release from the locks during future shampoos and maintenance.

2) Consider shampooing your locks in two sections, with the top being one section and the nape area being another. Clients complain most about their scalps itching most in the crown region. (I believe this is because hair on the top and sides of the head grows slightly faster than other regions. Some hair experts wouldn't agree with me on that score but I think they're wrong. But, that's another article.) As a result, special attention is often given to the locks at the top and the front while the locks in the rear may not receive their fair share of cleansing care. By sectioning the hair, you ensure that you pay equal care to both regions.

3) Locked hair typically requires more time rinsing to ensure that the locks are clean. Be sure to lift the locks in the top section of your head up and away to expose the locks in the nape when rinsing this area. The reason to take this approach is that shampoo residue rinses downward. So if you are not careful to ensure that this area receives its share of direct water application, then you may find that the locks in this area are just plain dirtier than the rest of your hair. This issue may not be a noticeable concern early on but over time, it can lead to residue build-up, odor and/or breakage.

4) Condition the locks with natural oils when maintaining new growth and between services. As indicated in #1 above, we use an all-natural, water-based gel to maintain locks. Organic cold pressed coconut oil is a very good option for lock maintenance as well, though gels like MyGel tend to hold longer. If you're interested in a leave-in conditioning treatment, try Locliffe Store's "Coconut Crème Leave-in Conditioner," made with all organic ingredients. (It's important that this conditioner be allowed to air-dry on the hair.) If you're interested in intensive deep-conditioning, try mixing your own blend of coconut, jojoba and essential oils and wrapping your hair for a wonderful nighttime treatment. Please note however that night treatments for locks should avoid water-based products to ensure that excess moisture is not trapped in the lock, creating the perfect environment for mold growth. Oil-based products do not create this risk.

5) Make sure that you are not placing excess tension on the hair when palm rolling or inter-locking. That point cannot be over-emphasized as it is a primary culprit for break-age and damage to mature locks. As a general rule of thumb, you should not feel tension at the base of the lock when maintaining it. Once tension is felt, the hair is being pulled and should be loosened accordingly.

6) Perhaps the most important tip that I can provide is to make sure that your locks stay moisturized between lock maintenance services. Oraje Holistics has a wonderful Mango Moisture Mist that can be sprayed on your locks regularly and allowed to air dry. This product is good when you feel your locks are on the dry side and need a moisture

boost. Another approach is to shower without a cap. The steam does wonders for your locks and is in effect a daily moisturizing treatment. Please note however that with these steam treatments, your hair will be more inclined to frizz around the edges than if you cover your hair. The choice depends on your style preference.

Tips for the Beach

If you intend to visit the beach this summer, the added effect of salt water and sand can be challenging for maintaining a well-coiffed look. Strategies to consider are as follows:

1) Braid your locks into larger sections before swimming. In this way, the base of your locks remains “in place” while swimming, and therefore is less inclined to unravel. (If your hair is inter-locked, this issue is less of a concern for you.) When swim time is over, be sure to thoroughly rinse all salt-water from your hair (or chlorine if at the pool) while keeping the locks braided. Give each lock section special attention while rinsing. It’s also a good idea to oil your hair thoroughly at this time to counteract some of the dryness that will be nurtured by the sun and salt-water. When the braids dry (which may take a full day depending on the size of your sections), loosen them and you’re good to go!

2) Invest in a swim cap. Depending on the length of your locks, they may fit under some of the new swim caps that are available on the market. I met a brother at the NC Natural Hair Care Expo from New Jersey who makes swim caps especially designed for long locks. Unfortunately, I didn’t get his company name. But when I see him again, and I will, I’ll definitely update you all.

3) Plan your beach trip around the time that you will schedule your next lock maintenance service as your hair will surely require extra attention upon leaving the beach. Then, your hair can be properly shampooed and rinsed of all beach residues. It’s advisable to do a hot oil treatment at this time as well, for the same reasons outlined in #1 of this section.

Well, this list of “to dos” is certainly not exhaustive but hopefully, it will provide you with some useful tips to maintain those gorgeous locks as the summer temps climb. So as you go on your merry way, be blessed and stay beautiful.





Lock Repair Techniques: Effective Battles with Build-up

The photo that accompanies this article was borrowed from the Net. The sister displaying this photo is very proud to highlight her maintenance work on this male client whose locks are growing nicely. What I see however is an excess of oil and product build-up which ultimately is unsightly and undesirable. Many clients have locks that hold product residue by virtue of the locking process and what it entails. So, it's very easy to happen. But when someone is visiting a professional, they prefer not to have locks that look like this. Well, I had a new client recently come in whose locks had more build-up than this photo. After I completed her hair service, the locks were uniformly rich, black and beautiful. She was very pleased with the result. *(Note: I didn't take a photo of the client because we were so busy talking about political and world affairs that I forgot to archive the before and after. My apologies!)* While I have used [vodka shampoo treatments](#) on my son's locks to remove buildup that accrued while he was staying on campus, it is a process that can take several courses of treatment. As such, regular maintenance is the best combat strategy to prevent buildup in the locks. Here are a few tips to use to avoid the dreaded buildup dilemma:



How to prevent build-up in the locks

- 1) Shampoo Tips
 - a. Shampoo more rather than less frequently (at least once per month). Guys are notorious for allowing much longer periods between lock maintenance services.)
 - b. Use a clarifying shampoo. Most natural shampoos are not effective with cleaning locks. So, make sure you have a rich lather before completing the shampoo process.
 - c. Ensure that the locks are clean after every shampoo, especially in the rear.
 - d. Dry the locks with microfiber towels.
- 2) Style Tips
 - a. Avoid gels, bees wax and heavy products
 - b. If build-up is observed while tightening locks, arrest it immediately. Use Seabreeze antiseptic placed directly on the build-up. If your client uses only natural products, use apple cider vinegar, though it is much less effective than Seabreeze.
- 3) Care Tips
 - a. Cover the locks with a lock sock while sleeping or use Egyptian cotton or satin sheets.
 - b. Avoid clothing that is prone to gather fuzz balls after repeated wear. The textile residue will invariably wind up in your hair.

How to repair build-up issues

Now when servicing a client who has excess product build-up that cannot easily be treated with a shampoo service, there is one optimal solution: hair color. This is the option that I used with my client. Her locks were mature and well-established. In fact, they were started and maintained with a heavy gel. I assured her that these products are not necessary for her hair for any reason in the future. So with that said, we agreed upon the recommended solution and I colored her locks with a permanent color to match her regular hair color. The buildup magically disappeared leaving only a magnificent and rich luster that gave her locks a very clean and healthy look. Because she will not be using heavy products on her locks in the future, this color treatment is a one-time, cure-all solution. I highly recommend it. Happy loc-care servicing!! ☺





Styling Tips: Rod Set Locks in an Updo



Stylist: Etheopea Balogun; Photographer: Varick Taylor

Clients who choose to lock have made a clear and long-term commitment to natural hair. Their reward is a wealth of fun innovative style options that expand and morph as the hair grows and the locks mature. The above style is a favorite among clients in the salon. After shampooing and treating this client's blond locks, the hair is rolled onto rods in a spiral formation, covering the model's entire head. The model is then placed under the hair dryer for about 2 hours, or however much time is needed to dry the hair. The rods are then taken out and the hair is pulled into an updo with the help of a flexible barrette designed for thick hair. Tendril locks are left hanging in front to frame the face. Ooh-la-la!





Amazing Natural Transformations: From Relaxed to Natural Beauty

In my view, this write-up is a fitting end to five years of natural hair chronicles as recorded in this book. The piece highlights the hair-story of my friend Yoneka Trent and her daughter Yalyne. They were our first transitioning clients five years ago and have thus had the most dramatic results of all the clients that we have served. Luckily, we have meticulously chronicled their journey over the years. The photos speak volumes to the power of natural hair to reclaim the crowning glory that is the birth rite of all women who dare to “Embrace the Beauty of You.”

Yoneka Trent’s Hair-story

Yoneka came by the salon when we first opened back in August 2006. She decided to transition along with her daughter and had long been waiting for me to *open so that she could begin the transition process*. She figured if the natural has kept MY hair so healthy for all the years that she has known me (since 1998), then she’s going to give it a shot!!



In this photo, Yoneka has about 2 inches of new growth from her last relaxer. Because she was not comfortable with the idea of really short hair, we transitioned her with styles that would allow the two hair textures to co-exist in harmony.

August 2006

The August 2006 photo shows Yoneka’s hair when she first came to the salon in the initial stages of transitioning. In her words, her hair was just not growing and achieving the health and vitality goals that she felt it should be reaching. With her own mother being a hairdresser, she had been relaxed for many years. What I observed in her hair preceding 2006 was a continuing cycle of growth and breakage with consistent vitality being very limited. So, we decided to use different styles that would be professional and would not stress her hair out.



Here, Yoneka has between 3-4 inches of new growth. She was now comfortable with the idea of getting rid of the relaxer. After cutting it off, we blow-dried her hair so that it would not seem so short and then we did a rod-set two strand twist that I pinned up for a very professional look.

January 2007

The January 2007 photo shows Yoneka shortly after the relaxer was cut out of her hair. Her transitioning style of choice is the two strand twist. I tell my clients it is natural PERFECTION!! While it’s surely not everyone’s favorite, it provides a very viable styling alternative for diversity.



One year after cutting the relaxer out of her hair and about a year and half after initiating the process, Yoneka has a full head of hair that gently frames her face and begs the question: Why did I ever relax my hair in the first place?

January 2008

Since her transition, her own mother (who is a licensed cosmetologist) has received services at our salon as well. I figure, if we can even convert the people who are performing chemical treatments, then our message must be pretty convincing.



This book of hair chronicles could not be complete without properly documenting an extended cycle of transforming natural beauty. In my view, this final photo, juxtaposed against the August 2006 photo, best shows the power of natural beauty more than words can say. Here, Yoneka has about 12 inches of hair growth and we're still counting...

July 2010

Yoneka also dabbles in cornrows, flat twists and loose styles quite a bit. For the sake of consistency, we have maintained the two strand twist as the foundation style for comparison purposes.



This book of hair chronicles could not be complete without properly documenting an extended cycle of transforming natural beauty. In my view, this final photo, juxtaposed against the August 2006 photo, best shows the power of natural beauty more than words can say. Here, Yoneka has about 14 inches of hair growth and we're still counting...

February 2012

As you can see from the photos, Yoneka's hair is now very healthy; it moves with grace and style. Well, I guess the EYES have it. Ain't she beautiful! She always was! But, in my view, it's now more obvious than in 2006 to see JUST HOW MUCH!

Yalyne Trent's Hair-story

Yalyne came into the salon back in August 2006 with her mom (above). As you can see from the photo, her hair was damaged from the chemical treatments being used at that time. (Unfortunately, the front facing photos came out too blurry to use.) So, we planned a transitioning program similar to Yoneka's with a lot more cornrow styles for her youthful face.



August 2006

This photo shows that Yalyne had about one inch of new growth when she first came into the salon. Here, her hair is short from breakage and regular trimming of dead ends. It appears weak and lacks vitality.

Because of her beautiful face and her general openness to change, Yalyne was comfortable with us trimming her relaxed hair a lot sooner than was her mother. So, I took scissors to her mane in November 2006, leaving about two inches of new growth. She has never looked back since. (Yalyne has embraced the natural all along and has been very mature about the transitioning process, despite the negative energy received from some of her peers.)



November 2006

I felt that Yalyne would look very nice with a one strand twist, so I gave her this look which clearly matches her personality and was a significant improvement in highlighting her natural beauty and character. She seemed to prefer this style to the two-strand twist and wore it a fair amount during her transition, as shown in the April 2007 photos. All the same, Yalyne sported one and two-strand twists, twist outs, afros, cornrows and afro puffs. They all look great on her! She's a beautiful young lady.



April 2007

Yalyne is a very happy young lady whose birthday is in February! The February 2008 photos were taken of her birthday hair style!! That is part of the reason for the enormous smile. That and the fact that she was surprised by the extent to which her hair had grown. In these photos, it has been blow-dried and two strand twisted to show the length and to maintain an attractive look through the snow, the rain and whatever weather conditions may come.

Now, the words and chiding of her peers is a distant memory because Yalyne has now proven that “anything worth having is worth waiting for.” And imagine, the wait wasn’t even that long!



February 2008

Yalyne’s hair is now much stronger and healthier. She says, and her mother confirms, that her hair was NEVER this long during the many years of chemical treatments. She’s very eager to see how long it can become!! I am too! Some bangin’ styles await!

Everyone's hair is different so results will vary by person. But, I have not met a client yet who did not celebrate the power of the natural for fostering hair growth and vitality. If you're on the fence, these photos may inspire you to *embrace the beauty of you.*





Curlformers: The Good, the Bad and the Alluring

The Good: I haven't done any serious reviews of hairstyles in a while because I tend to stick to the tried and true—two-strand twists. But for the NUSOL Natural Hair Expo in August 2015, I decided to make a change. I'd heard a lot about Curlformers, so I decided to purchase them and see if they stood up to the hype. They are long spiral rods made of mesh plastic which has plenty of holes to facilitate rapid drying. In a nutshell, they are designed to curl your hair famously with NO HEAT applied whatsoever. I was pretty down with that. Flexi-rods do the same thing but, this curl is supposed to be more defined. So, I thought I'd investigate.

The Bad: I bought two packs of 40 Curlformers at about \$60 each. That's not a small investment. I could have worked with one pack of 40 but it would have meant that my hair sections would be bigger. Since I wanted to be sure my hair would dry, I opted for more. However, I was regretting that decision when it was time to install them. I had a friend help me and I can say that if she hadn't been there, I might I have canned the whole affair. They are not as simple to install as the orientation video makes out. You really need to pull them straight out, like at a 90 degree angle to your scalp. As the rods are long and my arms are only SO long, my angle was always slanted downwards. The net effect was that I often had to re-start the process which made for a lot of duplicated effort. With both of us working on wet hair, it took a little over 2 hours to put them in. That's significant in my mind.

You wear the rods until your hair dries, which is unique for every individual depending on your hair thickness, the amount of hair in the curls, whether your hair was saturated, etc. I planned on sleeping in mine. The only problem was that I was famished after installation, and I don't do fast food ordinarily. So, YES!!! I went to my favorite restaurant (Shaba Shabu) looking like the Predator Chic! It was pretty comical. The African maître d' smiled when I entered the restaurant and as if in on the joke, whispered discretely to me, "Nice hairdo!" I laughed because he appreciated the comedy of it all. Of course, our waitress didn't get the memo; so, she avoided making eye contact with me the whole time though lunch was my treat. I didn't blame her though. I honestly think she didn't want to stare and didn't know what to say. As a general rule, many White women aren't comfortable commenting on Black women's hair so she played it safe. I wouldn't have minded the laughs though. I honestly debated whether we should go to this spot. But, it was 4pm. **I thought:** If I'm a business that's open and ready to serve clients and it's the 4 o'clock hour (the slow period of the day), would I rather maintain the image of the establishment, or have a paying customer. With that logic in mind, we went in and dined. I still can't believe I did that but, have you ever had their seaweed salad and Sushi??? If you have, you feel me. I only saw two other parties of guests; so, I figured I made the right choice. After that, I had only to go to Wake Tech to teach my evening class. But, I had already alerted everyone to expect the unexpected. Besides, I'm among family there. So, the main point here is that you need to be at home when you put them in. I wasn't. In fact, it was a rather busy day for me. So if you choose to try them, hunker down for the day.



In all, I kept the rods in for 12 hours to be sure my hair was dry. My husband looked at me like I had stepped off of Mars when I came home. I tried sleeping on them but that didn't go well AT ALL! I got some kind of sleep but not restful. At minutes after 2am when I stirred feeling as if I had had NO SLEEP whatsoever. Lloyd then half-sleepily says, "Schatzi, you don't have to do all of that to be pretty. You're pretty already." I thought: How sweet! And with that, I got up to take the rods out.

The Alluring: Luckily, my hair was dry when I removed the Curlformers. Also, it took only about 30 minutes to take them out which was a significant improvement over the installation time. After removal, it was about 3am So, I put my hair up in a Woollylocks hair cover made by brother Glen, gathered my hair towards the crown of my head so as not to crush the curls and went back to sleep. The photo to the left was the result. I was rather pleased. The curls were beautifully defined down to my scalp!! The curls were bouncy, shiny and elastic. My hair looked really

healthy and beautiful. Note: I didn't comb or separate the curls AT ALL!! The result would have been much different if I had.

Overall, it looked like I had a press and curl with NO HEAT APPLICATION WHATSOEVER!! AWESOME!! Compliments at the hair expo were NON-STOP!! I should have been paid to do a commercial for the company because I had to explain the product and the process quite often throughout the day. Someone went so far as to ask if we would offer this service in the salon. Well...the Curlformers are very personalized. Even when you clean them, strands of your hair can be left inside the rods and may be difficult to remove. So, you don't really want to share your Curlformers. I wouldn't advise re-use within a salon setting. But if you have purchased them and would like help with installation, we'd be happy to oblige. The curls are rather divine.

The Unexpected: Now a few years back, I did a write up about a flexi-rod set that I did which lasted me about 3 weeks. (See Spiral Rod Set Curls write-up.) So naturally, I expected the Curlformers set to last about as long. Guess again, CHIC!! Firstly as humidity took hold of the curls, they puffed up and became fuller!! NICE!! By day 4, I was on cloud 9. By day 10, my beautiful curls were turning into beautiful locks. They had lost their bounce and elasticity and were starting to bond. In fact when I saw a beautiful Jamaican sister that I hadn't seen since our children were rather young, she complimented me on my locks. I'm totally NOT interested in locking my hair; so, it was time to wash these curls out of my hair. I believe



they began the locking process because the spiral rods that I used have the narrowest band width. Anyone who knows natural hair knows that a corkscrew curl or coil is the foundation of starting locks. So, my hair was doing what it is programmed to do. I would have needed to use large rods with larger curls to avoid this occurrence. Afterwards, I couldn't figure why I didn't guess that this is what would have happened. But, I honestly didn't think that far. My hair is VERY KINKY!! So, it has always been prone to lock up easily. I figure when I'm in my sixties, hopefully wearing a full head of silver hair, I will just bite the bullet and lock completely. By then, I'll be trying to hold onto every strand of hair I can in order for my hair to remain full and healthy. So, I believe locking is in my future. But to the beautiful, half-locked Day 10 look I say, I will see you again. But not yet, not yet.

If you're down for a press set look minus the heat, this style is a keeper. I pleasant surprise was the extent to which my hair was prepped and curled down to my scalp. Only a hot comb or a flat iron gets that close. I have never been able to replicate that level of tension at the scalp with flexi-rods so invariably, my hair is puffy at the roots when I use them. But, the advantage of the flexi-rods is a longer set IF YOU'RE USING THE narrow Curlformers. You may want to try the yellow and pink rods combo to avoid what I experienced. I think you'll be pleased for a change of pace. But if I'm honest, I'm a simple girl. I prefer EASY...ALL THE TIME!! So, I'd rather do a two-strand twist out and call it a day. The added cost is about \$0; though there's not a significant savings of time. But, you are surely able to sleep more restfully on a two-strand.

Well, I hope this review proves beneficial to those considering. There are tons of Youtube videos out there with people's personal reviews but NONE of them told me about what I experienced. So, I thought I'd chime in for a more comprehensive review. Happy Styling!! ☺





African Hair Threading for Straightening and Styling



Perhaps one day I'll have the patience to slow down long enough and try a cool style like this one. It's hot! Hands down. I work in a pretty chill environment. I love my co-workers. In fact, the executive director of our international organization has a Haitian daughter whose hair she used to twist and braid when she was a little girl. So, she's really well versed on Black hair and celebrates its diversity. People are really not as hung up as they used to be. But if there's any conservatism, it comes from me.

Not because I think the style is too radical. (Check out the photo below of my Nubian knot style quite a few years back. I've been in this game for a minute!) I'm down with funky! I flow rather effortlessly into it in fact. So, that's not it. The conservatism is primarily a factor of time. When I'm in the salon, I'm doing hair or I'm not there at all. And invariably when I'm doing hair, it's someone else's. I have so many irons on the fire that time spent on myself for purely creative pursuits is rather limited. Sometimes I think that's a shame. But mostly, I don't think about it at all. No time. 😊 But, I confess that I like the vibe of this style. And I really should try it before my gray becomes so much of a distraction that it would be more of an oddity than a fashion statement! ☹️ Is that an ageist statement? Sorry. I'm talking about myself though; so, it can't be all THAT bad! *One day, one day.*



Well while styling a client's hair the other day, she asked about African threading as an alternative to straightening. I understand the logic because I employ it all the time with my two-strand twists; but, I use satin scarves instead of thread to stretch and maintain my length. So, I get the concept. But, I thought I should research it a bit more. After doing a quick Net-surf, [this article on African threading](#) proved to be a fairly good summation of the process and the benefits. If you've got the inkling, I say "Go for it." My client asked how I straighten my hair and I honestly told her: "I haven't straightened my hair with an iron since 1999." We all busted out laughing because it sounded so CRAZY!! (*That's also the last time I ate meat. So, I guess you could say that my soul was preparing for a new millennium in more ways than one!*) 1999?! Damn! That's a Prince Album from waaayyyy back in the day! That's a whole 'nother epoch. Really?! It doesn't seem so long to me at all though. But, guess what? IT IS! 😊 Whew! Anyway, I told her I straighten my hair with a blow-dryer because it's "fast and furious." I've been doing it for years and I've never experienced negative effects from doing so. So, I'm not likely to opt for a two step-two day process to straightening my hair. Just keepin' it real! Some of the hair bloggers on the Net are sisters who have A LOT OF

TIME ON THEIR HANDS!! I appreciate that they're pushing the envelope and seeking alternatives. But, I would primarily sport the African threading style as a style in and of itself. And I would need to keep it for at least 2-3 weeks or it's not worth the investment of time. As a means of straightening for me personally, it's a "No." I would

much rather jam with some curlformers to have shine, sheen and bounce all at the same time. But if African threading is where your natural hair journey takes you, RIDE ON!

From my cursory review of the Net websites and articles, my main suggestion would be to avoid pulling the hair too tightly while wrapping it. If the hair is pulled too tautly to encourage straightness, tension will likely result at the roots which could encourage traction alopecia. Likewise if the thread is wrapped too tightly around the base of the hair section, it can encourage breakage where the thread meets the hair. Either result eventually would be undesirable. So, nurture your hair as you experiment. As my Mom always says, you should care for your hair like you care for a beautiful cashmere sweater. Treat it gently and lovingly, and it will reward you for many years to come. Happy Threading!!





Afterword

In closing, I want to state that this book is not the sum total of all of the writings that a natural attitude has inspired in me. This book, A Natural Attitude, is soulful food for thought. Through its publication, I hope to inspire all of those women on or considering a natural journey to have the tools necessary to “stay the course.” Those tools require a profound love of self, coupled with a deeper understanding of how and why we’ve gotten to where we are today in our vision of self. This book, in my view, is light reading designed for open discourse and personal soul reflection. I pray that it edifies, enlightens and uplifts.

God grant me the strength, the courage, the wisdom and the organizational savvy to do all that you would have me to do on this plane...at this time.

Amen.

Eternally your servant,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Selma H. McCull". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a prominent initial 'S' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'l'.



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