

AU NATUREL

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ALWAYS GIVING THANKS

As I reflect on 15 years of service to the Triangle community through word (Au Naturel) and deed (Schatzi's), I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all of our friends, seen and unseen, who have supported us over the years. In all honesty, the journey feels like it's passed within the blink of an eye. I remember every minute of the sojourn. It has been challenging, exciting, painful, captivating, arduous, mystifying but mostly rewarding. I have learned much! I have much left to learn! But God willing, I will chronicle every leg of this journey for as long as he leads me onward. And will he tells me to stop, I'll say thank you. All along the way, I will give thanks and embrace the beauty of you. Amen.



PERSONAL AND SALON UPDATES

Greetings and well wishes to all! I am writing this newsletter on my birthday when it was my intent to have it finalized and posted by that day. But alas, I shampooed my hair, had a last-minute request for a salon service immediately followed by a pre-birthday dinner invitation. Then I rod-set my hair...life happens. It's a little later than intended but God knew it would be later than I thought. So there. It's all good. Since my last missive, I have been doing what I always do: rise, go for a 3 mile walk (1 hr), do some floor exercises (when I'm not being lazy), get ready for the day, work in my home office until 5 or 6pm, dinner with Lloyd (Thank God he has had an office in Raleigh for a while now! And when he travels, I mostly go with him, and work remotely--COVID perks. *There's always a silver lining.*), watch the news and television. Repeat. I once met a young Taekwondo instructor whose email address was ...again. I thought, "Wow! He is so young to have so much wisdom." The routine of it all could almost seem boring. But, each day has it's own unique signature that seasons the pot of existence. My Mom has come for an extended stay for a few times which has also been a treat. I have come to savor boring and predictable.

Within the salon, we are rolling merrily along with God's grace. There was some mini-excitement in our office condo complex after I left the salon late one Saturday (@ 6pm) bound to drop my client off at Crabtree Valley Mall. On the way to the dumpster, I saw what I was sure was a drug exchange in close proximity to another salon studio business that opened up a few years ago. Well, I lost it! I slowed my car up next to the guy that made the exchange and looked him squarely in his eyes. He could have been my own child. Then, I parked the car and to follow him inside the unit. My client was absolutely beside herself. She's Zambian and thought I was going to be shot on the spot. "Ms. Schatzi!! Please don't go in there. I don't know about drugs or anything like this. Is it safe?" I said, "I'll be fine. And rest assured. God knew EXACTLY how I'm going to leave this Earth the day I was born. I will NOT be dodging the inevitable." And with that, I went inside to find anyone who could share with me the number of the condo unit owner. I

found a barber upstairs, which was the same place where the young man making the exchange was now seated, and I asked him for the number. Barber: "Why do you need it?" Me: "I know someone who needs to rent some space." I knew it was a lie, but I had ZERO trouble telling it. Barber: "Oh, they don't have any free space right now." One lie begets another lie. And so, the dance begins. But now, he's potentially costing the unit owner revenues, so I KNEW he was outside of his comfort zone. He ducked and dodged and tried not to give it to me. I waited while consistently painting a picture to help him understand that if he failed to give it to me, he might be in trouble with the unit owner. So, he handed it over. I returned to my car noting that there were about five cars parked in the parking lot but there was only one man working. So, I wondered about that too. I called her and she acted immediately by going in person to speak with him as

she had suspected such activity on the premises in the past. She said, "I bought property in this zip code for a reason! This is NOT cool!" She had installed cameras inside and facing the parking lot a while back. So, I explained that the exchange took place on the back side of her unit, near the dumpster. We deduced that the young man was making the exchange there to dodge the cameras. A few days later, I phoned the association president and asked that the cameras near the dumpster be kept on. He chided me for being too brave. Because he was a White man, I did not tell him what I was thinking which was: "I had a Black grand-daddy and a Black daddy. I have Black uncles and cousins. I am married to a Black man. I have Black brothers. I raised two Black men. ONE THING I AM NOT AFRAID OF IS A BLACK MAN!!! REALLY?!" My response was "No worries. Some problems need to be dealt with before they get out of hand. So, I'm just doing my part." He then proceeded to tell me about how he has been in this office park for 40 years. (He arrived at 24 years and is now 64.) He said, "I have served so long as president because I have seen office condo ghettos. It doesn't take much to create one. Everything I do is to protect property values. He then told me how a new owner (lawyer) recently "GOT UP IN HIS GRILL" because he told her to have her car detailed across the street at the church parking lot which has given permission for us to use their lot for this purpose." After further outlining the toxic exchange he had with her, he followed by saying, "When I'm gone, I hope others keep things up." *Note to self: Damn! I might have to get on the association board.* I then felt deeply for this man. He carries the weight of his responsibility and receives NO thanks or compensation for it. That's a shame. When that lawyer who believed herself so self-righteous asked him to quote the covenants to him (to which he roundly responded, "go read them for yourself. You should have done that before you purchased."), she felt her power as landowner. "Who are YOU to tell ME what to do? I don't owe you anything! I OWN my unit!" Well, the truth of the matter is this: If it wasn't for the efforts of that same man (whose grill she was all up in!), she would never have wanted to purchase on this block in the first place, because the property would not be as prime as it

"The power of a management company to impact future business uses in the Raleigh is as powerful as the city's zoning ordinance."

is. Sad commentary. But true to form, 'BROTHER HANDLED BUSINESS!!' His words to me were, "I don't have a problem asking Raleigh PD to do regular patrols over here in a New York minute! Thanks for letting me know. I'll bring this to the board meeting later this month." My question to my husband when I got home was: "We can ask the RPD to do regular patrols whenever we want?!" Who knew?! Well the next time I was in the salon, I saw RPD all over that section of the parking lot like white on rice...parking...walking around, driving out, driving back in, etc. Several clients in MY salon commented on the police presence at the opposite end of the complex. Well, last time, I dropped trash at the dumpster on a Saturday late afternoon, I saw two cars in the parking and no one hanging outside (which had become a regular thing). It's really sad to think that I wore the mantle of "Karen" and ratted out my brother. But he ain't my brother if he's threatening my business. One of my clients who saw the police wondered why and I told her. She then said, "Schatzi these young people are crazy! You can't put yourself at risk like that. If these guys feel like you're threatening their livelihood, they can be ruthless." My response was this: "He is in MY neighborhood. I was here first, and I'm not going anywhere. Those people are tenants. They can rent anywhere in the city. If this complex runs down, they'll just pick up and go somewhere else. Well, I have nowhere else to go. And it would take just one person getting shot in the parking lot for my clients to register concern and possibility consider another location. Therefore, he is a threat to MY livelihood. GAME ON!!" I further explained that the association took steps a few years back to ban any future salon from coming into this complex. NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY! Sadly, the property management company for our complex (which also manages my HOA) said that they would be encouraging other associations to adopt the same restrictive covenants in agreements that they manage throughout the city! DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY PROPERTIES TOWNE PROPERTIES (formerly Talis Management) MANAGES?!! A LOT!! And as a result, the power of a management company to impact future business uses in Raleigh is AS POWERFUL AS THE CITY'S ZONING ORDINANCE. When this Black owned salon came into the complex, I knew their density was too high and was contrary to the covenants. Now, they were threatening the ability of any other Black business to use the model that I did to support my business. This is how Black people get messed over. Are you still wondering why? Indulge me to break it down a bit more for you.

Firstly, when I was looking for locations to set up my business, my mother INSISTED that I purchase and not rent the property as I would be subject to the whims and demands of someone else. Likewise, after installing thousands of dollars

of electrical, plumbing and HVAC upgrades, they would own these upgrades and could evict me at the end of my lease. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I listened and prioritized purchasing. I stopped looking in plazas and started looking in office condo complexes, because my review of the zoning ordinance showed that salons were a permitted use in office buildings in the City of Raleigh. Plazas are almost exclusively rental contracts. I found our location while driving along Millbrook Rd. I almost NEVER came this far down Millbrook but my analysis of zip codes, incomes, employment status and other demographics (when writing my business plan) showed me that I needed to look in this area. I called the number on the sign in the upstairs window and spoke to Mr. Young who owned two units and only needed one. He asked if I wanted to lease or purchase, and I said the latter. He said, "Fine, it's a deal. I would like to close after the New Year so just let me know if you need anything from me in the interim." I said I was going to contact my bank, and I'd be back with him as soon as possible. I submitted all of the relevant paperwork to my bank as requested and waited...and waited...and waited. I kept checking in to ask what else they needed. Nothing. They were doing a review. ...and awaited. I got nervous because I was powerless to do anything without bank financing. I was cashing in my and my husband's 401Ks for the down payment but that was ALL I had. Lloyd later told me, "I had NO IDEA how you were going to buy a building, so I just decided to throw in my hat, sit back and watch." I had prayed about this (because I told God I did NOT want to waste my family's resources) and knew that I saw a clear message, but this part had me baffled. Then, Mr. Young came back to me and said, "Are you going to buy the unit or what?!" I said, "I'm sorry. I'm waiting for my bank. They've had my paperwork for months and haven't budged and haven't told me "no" either. It's very frustrating." He then said, "Okay. Let me make a phone call. I'll call you back tomorrow." True to his word, he phoned the next day and said, "Go to North State Bank in the North Hills Mall. Ask for Mr. _____ the Vice President. Tell him who you are. He has your paperwork there ready for your signature." I thought, "Don't they need to do all of the checks that my bank said they were doing?" But I dared not ask. I simply followed instructions. I walked in, met the man, he gave me a package of prepared documents to take home and sign with my husband. I returned the next day with proof of funds for the down payment and the signed documents. The deal was done, and the closing took place in the new year. I didn't like the terms of the agreement (it had a five-year balloon payment) but beggars can't be choosy. I figured I'd refinance at the 5-year mark. (Incidentally, when I went back to the same banker towards the end of the period to request a refinance as I had an excellent payment history, he looked me straight in my eyes and said, "No, we won't be doing that. Is there anything else?" He was helping me understand: The favor we did was for Mr. Young ONLY. You WILL pay us the balance at the end of the five-year period or lose the building.) Well by this time, we had built up some commercial credit. I had no choice but to go back to my bank because they know my history. A young Hispanic woman who I asked for the refinance loan approved it WITHOUT HESITATION. After all, now they're stealing a loan from another banking institution so it's kind of a no-brainer. Funny enough, my bank called me earlier this week to ask me if I have any loan needs that they could accommodate for the foreseeable future. I told her I'd get back to her. I thought: "Wow! Ain't that a blip!"

I share this story to emphasize this: Firstly, it was DAMN NEAR IMPOSSIBLE for us to acquire this property in the first place. It was done through divine intervention and the grace of a connected White man who needed to unload what had become a burden for him. **PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IS THE UNKNOWN SECRET INGREDIENT FOR SUCCESSFUL SMALL BUSINESS OWNERSHIP!!** Without it, you may own your business but you're ultimately working for your landlord. For this reason, I could NEVER sit idly by and watch someone who has NO SKIN IN THE GAME engage in activity that undermines all that I've worked to build. Secondly, the reason that restrictive covenants like the one mentioned above are problematic is that they limit the types of businesses that can legitimately own their commercial office space. So, small businesses like tailor shops, salons/barbers, massage & tattoos parlors, shoe repair shops, dry-cleaning businesses, books stores, cigar and coffee shops, etc. (some of which are businesses that have a high rate of ownership by ethnic or minority populations) are relegated to plazas (where a business or partnership typically owns the entire complex). Office condos are thus reserved for "white collar" businesses – lawyers, doctors, psychologists, accountants, real estate agents, etc. If I were just starting my business today, I would likely have to renovate a home located in a district transitioning to commercial use in order to own my space. That would SIGNIFICANTLY limit my options. So, I am blessed that my timing occurred when it did. But those coming behind me are surely singing the rental blues. And so, the wealth of these businesses will be indirectly filtered to large commercial landowners for the foreseeable future. It's a vicious cycle of wealth transfer. But as they say, knowing is half the battle. I share the information for what's worth to anyone who may need it. *Amandla awetu (power is ours).*

“Property ownership is the unknown secret ingredient for successful small business ownership.”

EMBRACE THE HEALER IN YOU

The unstated hallmark of being a stylist is having the ability to listen, to empathize and to elevate the spirit towards light. The tools in our arsenal are our hands, our heads and our hearts. If we are successful, a soul that may have been feeling burdened upon entry into our sanctuary will re-emerge lighter, temporarily stronger, more confident in his/her inner light. I often reflect on the fact that my salon should have been named “The Beautiful Gate”, for I believe it is a place of healing. All the same, I recall a conversation with a reknowned psychic acquaintance of mine who has an office that used to be right down the hall from me when I was working with a faith-based non-profit in Durham. She once told me that I am a healer. I reflected on her words and said, “No. I am not.” She insisted, “You ARE. I see you healing people with your hands.” I snickered and let the comment pass. My thought was, *since you are a psychic, you should see that I style hair but then I also thought, how do you argue with a psychic?* I know nothing about healing in the most traditional sense of the word, but when people are hurting, I know how to listen. It is for that reason that I am very careful of the energy that emanates from our sacred space. Because “natural hair salon” is not in our salon name, we have never been terribly easy to find. I spent years racking my brain to figure out how to change that. I was even scammed by someone who offered to help me with that and DID NOTHING. Then, I accepted God’s plan rather than my own. When people self-select out of this space, I am NEVER concerned about the loss of revenues. It’s God’s will. Likewise, when people appear and express great relief after having found our website and feeling the essence of the message therein, I am grateful. “Your salon popped up on my phone.” I have heard a handful of people say that to me over the years (one quite recently), and I am never surprised. I don’t know how it “popped up” but I am thankful that it did. And I do my best to honor their spiritual calling. We welcome the poor in spirit, because this is one place where they can lay their burdens down. Those who mourn will find an ear to listen. And those who have righteous indignation about the state of the world will find kindred souls herein. We do not engage in gossip, but strive instead to be a home for the persecuted. Over the years, I have heard many stories, and many tears have fallen from eyelids in our sacred space. Since the advent of Fall, I have seen a fair amount of spiritual struggle. I am always amazed at the pain that Black women are carrying with the grace of a gazelle. They grapple in silence while presenting their fantabulous selves to the world as positive, radiant agents of light. As I reflected on things that have transpired among my sisters since my last newsletter publication, [this song came to mind](#). I think it accurately reflects how I believe we all must be....transformative agents of light. I have never perceived myself as a healer but, I will carry the mantle if God believes it fitting. For in truth, we all have a calling to heal the world that we touch and influence. That is the essence of life. It was Jesus’ mission, it is our mission. God willing, we press on. Amen.

EDGELESS IN ATLANTA

Alopecia is a condition that has reached epic proportions in the African-American community. While the condition has traditionally been biological and hereditary, it has become a matter of bad hair practice at the level of individuals and within the hair care industry in general! An Instagram video popped up on my phone on Oct. 27th that made my heart hurt. I saw a young woman in her 20s or 30s whose hairline went past the top of her head. She was having a hair weave installed but her head was so bald that I wondered if she shaved her head to make the hair weave lie down flatter. Of course, her hair weave install was flawless, and she looked absolutely gorgeous after the procedure was complete. But at what cost? It’s true that she may legitimately have androgenic alopecia—hereditary. But, my concern is that thousands of women are unknowingly creating the condition for themselves. What we are witnessing is AS OUTRAGEOUS AS the harsh chemicals that were doing damage for decades. It has not gone unnoticed by me that the media tends to associate the most successful images of Black women with straight hair. If the woman has a natural look, she drives a Ford. If she drives a Lincoln or other luxury car, that hair has GOT to be straight. Let me be very clear: I have no problem with straight hair. Natural black hair has the beauty of being multi-faceted and malleable. Kinky hair can mold it into WHATEVER you want it to be with just a little time and creativity. The problem that I have is with the message that is being delivered to

our souls. It's true that the media tells us what to think BUT PRIMARILY it tells us what we want to believe and/or reflects to us what we already perceive. When that message disrupts our sense of self, I have a fundamental problem with it. The irony of it all is that the message is grounded in the pursuit of vanity which thrives on the destruction of the self. THAT is why I would have loved to be a co-producer of the film "[Bad Hair](#)." The double-edged nature of this phenomenon is brilliantly captured in this film as the true horror that it is! Ultimately, the message was created and delivered. So, I am grateful for that. Yet, I fear that many have missed the message while striving to fix a reality that was never broken. If we were to quantify the wealth that is transferred directly from the African and African-American communities to Asia, it would be mind-blowing. And sadly, it would likely change nothing.

It is for this reason that I love [this woman](#)! Stephanie Lanier is a sister who had a need and decided to do something about it on her own terms. That is the very definition of an ENTREPRENEUR. I ain't mad at her! In fact, I celebrate her. She is as real as it gets. She is passionate about her craft, committed and ever-humble. She presents her videos with levity and a congenial nature that draws you in. While clients are in my chair, I have started her hour long videos to show them an example of how Black women are taking control of their hair destiny in a myriad of ways. Invariably, THE CLIENTS WATCH THE ENTIRE VIDEO! That is power!! That is charisma. That is grace. She has gone on Shark Tank only to be rejected by them. But as she says herself, "we done gone past Shark Tank." She's marching ever forward. So, I want to express my appreciation for the spirit within her that shines SO BRIGHTLY! While it is my mission to prevent women from being *Edgeless in Atlanta* to the extent possible, she will catch those sisters who proverbially *fall through the cracks* and embrace them with loving kindness and REAL TALK! For an EXTREMELY ENTERTAINING walk through the world of alopecia solutions, check out [this video](#)! My youngest son watched snippets of it and howled with laughter because the girl is a natural comedian who cracks her OWN SELF up! So, to my sisters who find yourself struggling with traction alopecia, check out [Stephanie's website](#) and *embrace the innovation that is her*.

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