

Au Naturel

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Personal and Salon Updates

Greetings and well wishes to all. I would like to apologize to all regular readers for my absence over the past few months. Where have I been? I've been on an inward journey to ME. About five years ago, I had a spiritual awakening (aka. kundalini awakening, paschal mystery, ecstasy of Schatzi, etc.) that transformed my awareness of the spirit world and strengthened my knowledge that we do indeed live an Ephesians 6:12 reality. Well, my physical or secular reality is now aligning with my spiritual awareness. My antennae are up and I'm sensing energy in ways that eyes cannot see. So much so that I recently quit my "dream job." It was not difficult though sad, undesirable though necessary. I have been painting the rooms of my house to fill the hours that would have been spent grinding in front of the computer. I feel liberated and satisfied. My former co-workers were all shocked as they knew it was my dream job, and that I would not willfully leave it as I had waited 30 years to get it. Incidentally, it was the salary that I've also been working my whole life to command. But, I KNOW God rules my life so I don't want ANYTHING that He doesn't want for me.

And being ever faithful, God dropped another opportunity in my lap. Colleagues from UNC heard that I was available and shared my resume with strategic people. I was called into an informal meeting, and I start in October at the same pay rate as I earned before. I didn't even need to search for the opportunity. AMAZING!! The transition has been yet another confirmation for me that God wanted me elsewhere. I've already learned that when He aligns the universe to set me on a new course, I can go peacefully OR I can resist, bang my head against the wall trying to deny "the flow" of life and ultimately wind up leaving (as HE prescribed) but with a headache. I don't do headaches. So, life is good.

Within the salon, things have gone much as before. We have a quiet and intentional operation. I've seen my compatriots opening new salons in other locations around Raleigh. The city is growing so rapidly that it is only likely to reap great returns for them. But, I don't aspire for expansion. For that reason, I continue writing and sharing. If other stylists can grow and learn from my effort, then I have done my primary mission. The dream God showed me years ago was of a natural hair educator. The dream did not even show me styling...only teaching. But to know, you have to do. So, I'm down with His calling for my life.

This issue of Au Naturel has an article on strategies to regrow lost edges. I have also included a more detailed testimonial on the events of this past summer which serve as evidence of God's direction in my life. I once told someone, "When God wants to move me, He will use even Hell's demons to get me to the next level." What I learned from the experiences is that temptation has many faces, and I have developed such an awareness of the many faces of Mammon, that I am not easily fooled by a mission cloaked in the garb benevolence and righteousness. That revelation was painful to witness and is still difficult to accept. But if we are going to live in this world and adore the things of this world, we are going to have to pay homage to the ruler of this world order. I seek transcendence and light.

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!

“Embrace the beauty of you.”

Inward Summer Travels

As a follow-on to my personal and salon updates, this article explains in more detail about my spiritual and secular revelations over the past few months. The experience has been as eye-opening as it has been soul piercing. I know that we all have stories to tell of challenges overcome. And regular readers of Au Naturel surely have read some jaw dropping soliloquies from me. But it's all part and parcel of the game of life. I don't claim to have the most challenges stories, but they sure are colorful. Read with the full knowledge that I am more than fine. I'm a child of God, as are you. And so, we collectively pick up our cross and press on. Selah.

In March of 2018, I began work with an International non-profit to do what I always longed to do...international development. Every degree that I pursued at University, including a double major in French, was to facilitate my achievement of this goal of working in Haiti and West Africa. I worked in Haiti starting in 2013 and I began work in West Africa in 2018. I had a nine country portfolio and was super-excited at the opportunity. I worked hard and very long hours. In a dream that I had upon taking the job, I saw that I would face an uphill battle but that I would eventually summit the hill and would coast from there, knocking down barriers presented in front of me. But honestly, the dream did not show me coasting for very long. It simply ended and I woke up.

Well to make a long story short, I did whatever I needed to achieve success for my four projects. I went to Africa whenever I was needed there (which was quite often), and I worked as late and as intensively as was required. I gave my all, and I'm no slacker when it comes to work. So, I was producing much, much more than the standard work week accommodates. I received approximately 100 emails per day in French and in English which I regularly triaged through color coding to determine what required immediate action, what could be accomplished in the week and what was an fyi only. Immediate action items were things that I stayed at the office late to accomplish as my days were also jam packed with meetings. The culture of the organization is one in which your peers regularly place meetings on your calendar as they need you. So when you're in the office, you're in meetings. As such, I learned to read and respond to emails in meetings, respond to and send Skype messages for quick info or turn-around issues that couldn't wait for you to respond to email, and take deep dives to write or edit 10-30 page documents (mostly in French) during the rest of the day. I LOVED IT!!! I

realized what I was capable of producing and was very proud of myself for being bilingually competent, technically advanced, and managerially efficient. (Triaging emails gives you time to open emails once. You better know what needs to be done and do the needful because there is little time to go back. More work is coming!) My husband was surprised as he knows how fast I work and he gathered that if I was running, the work volume must be super-human. But, they were paying me like I was two people so I decided to rise to the occasion. Money is NOT my motivator. But, when you don't have to worry about it for the first time in your life, it really frees you up focus on the work exclusively.

I sensed that there was some organizational discontent around me; but, a colleague confessed to me (after my decision), "There's a lot of s#!@ that goes on here. But you were so much in the zone that I decided to leave you there." Well when the shit hit my fan, it was so foundational for me that I could not support the contradiction within my own spirit. So, I left without having another job lined it. The day I realized the moral anomaly was the day I resigned. I agreed to stay an additional six weeks SOLELY because I was actively mentoring a UNC graduate student through a research protocol that I designed and I didn't wish for my decision to have a negative impact on her academic studies.

What happened? It's so hard for me to say. It was a perfect storm of events that culminated in a revelation that was so crystal clear to me that I could see the spirit of negative forces working against me and demanding that I compromise my own values. It seemed to begin in February when our core donor representative returned from maternity leave (12 months). I had never met her and was introduced virtually. Within three weeks, she was reporting me to my supervisor for things that were petty and subjective. I had never been reported to my supervisor by anyone in my 30 years of employment so I took it seriously. I called colleagues to inquire as to whether I was performing consistent with expectations and they all agreed that the call to my supervisor was strange, unwarranted and excessively aggressive. Okay, I'm going to say it. The chic is White and from Seattle. Seattle is a city that had sunset laws which prevented Blacks from even purchasing land there; so, my antennae were way up. But, I put my head down and kept working.

In June, my supervisor told me that the same woman asked to speak with her and my President at an international conference to report on my inappropriate behavior at a recent series of meetings in West Africa. (The woman did not attend the meetings so she could only be speaking based on hearsay.) At these meetings, my supervisor instructed me to schmooze with donors but NOT to promote myself or the organization. So as instructed, I learned everything there was to know about the donors. I know how many children they have, the ethnicity of their spouses, their recent travels, etc. Well, the donor who did not attend "heard" that I was conducting myself as if I was a donor rather than engaging in administrative tasks like the rest of my team. (Note: My position was very senior, and I was at the meetings to listen, learn and inform. At the same time as these meetings, all of our organizations global leaders were meeting in NC but I was told to attend this meeting instead. So, I don't think someone at my level was sent all the way to Africa to do admin work when such an important meeting was happening in NC simultaneously.) Colleagues said, "She obviously wanted to 'put you in your place'." Where could she have errantly heard that I was behaving like a donor rather than a lackey? From none other than field and HQ staff from my own organization. I didn't realize that my own co-workers put the knife in my back. I thought the blow came from elsewhere. But, one of the donors who met me during these meetings who is Haitian by birth schooled me. She and I hit it off immediately and engaged for the duration of the 2-country meetings. So when I called her to let her know of my decision to

resign, she told me what she heard straight out of the mouths of my co-workers: the girl who reported to me, the acting field director who was upset that she was not selected for the director position and the consultant who is very close friends with the girl who reported to me. She concluded by saying, "Schatzi, they were a click that had formed exclusively to defame your character. I believe that the acting director blames you for her unsuccessful attempt to gain the directorship, and she used her influence with the donors to reposition you. A great violence has been done against you. You did nothing to warrant this type of criticism as I was with you the entire time and observed your behavior throughout the meetings. I'm very sorry this has happened to you."

When I stepped back and reflected on events objectively, I realized that they had to all be surprised because when I attended these meetings in April 2018, no one knew me. I was a fly on the proverbial wall. By April of 2019, ministry officials, agency directors and people of influence knew me as I entered the room in some instances and offered me a seat in close proximity to them. When I refused, they insisted. Culturally, I was taught not to offend my host and so, I sat down. My co-workers were obviously steaming with jealousy thinking that I was pushing myself forward. But in truth, I spent five full months out of my 16 months with the organization traveling throughout West Africa. People knew me now, so they were simply giving me the respect that they thought was due. My co-workers were nowhere around when I was making those connections. So, it had to look strange to them that I was so highly regarded. They simply rewrote the script and said that I was pushing my way in. It's all rather childish and silly when I reflect on it. But that alone was not where the line was drawn in the sand for me.

The spiritual chasm opened up for me when I returned to the office to have my supervisor suggest that I was engaging with donors of my own doing. WHAT?!! I had clear instructions from her, IN WRITING, which I did not fail to share with HR prior to my departure to make sure the record was set straight. She likewise prepared my performance evaluation to reflect the views of the donor rather than the reality of my performance. That was the clincher for me. I was suddenly in a triangulated vice grip with our donor representative on one side, my co-workers on the other and my supervisor on the third. As these people represent my professional base of operations, I felt that it was best for me to "exit stage left." When my supervisor realized that I was resigning rather than bowing to the donor and the pressure of the situation, throwing myself on the mercy of the court and trying desperately to hold onto this exceptional salary and benefits package (14% of salary was paid to retirement), she was surprised. She wanted to "manage the situation". I said, "There's nothing to manage. I'm out." I further explained, "You may not know who I am. But, I know who I am. And I will not walk around on eggshells trying to please a donor who has clearly decided that she has a problem with me, that has nothing to do with work or performance, simply to hold onto a pay check. I am NOT that woman. There are many who would do so. I am not one of them. I'm good [at my job]! And I deserve better than this. So, I'm out." The African project directors in the field (excluding the chic who was acting) were all very upset when I explained the reason for my decision; but, they all understand why I took the decision. Another colleague said, "Schatzi, I'm so sorry this is happening, especially to you." Why especially me, I said. I knew I was the only African-American functioning in this role but I didn't want to believe that this is why she was saying this. She responded, "Schatzi, there are eight STMs here. We all see you working. We all see you going out to the field whenever you're needed. You're the most engaged of us all. You don't deserve this." I responded, when God is ready to move me, He makes it manifestly clear what He wants me to do, and I move. She said, "But, this is fixable. Let's fix it." I said, "No." God is ready for me to go. I know this, and so it is done. My supervisor told me that my supervisee asked for my job immediately after

learning from me of my pending departure. The pain of this revelation was troubling. She has exactly five years' experience to my thirty.

The entire affair did take a toll on me. I lost about seven pounds. I simply had no appetite. The ways happened was just a shock to my spirit, and I felt wounded. I worked so hard, was so inspired by the work and was prepared to retire doing this work. In the blink of an eye, it was all gone. And then in the last week of my employment, I find out that I need a biopsy for a lump on my thyroid. My insurance would be ending on July 31st but my husband's insurance would kick in immediately thereafter. The strange thing was that I was under my fig tree picking figs when I would ordinarily have been attending meetings in West Africa. A mosquito bit me on my neck and when I scratched the bite, I felt the lump. After visiting urgent care and having tests done, they referred me to Rex for the biopsy. I couldn't help but wonder if the lump would have continued unnoticed if time had not taken me off of the hamster wheel and placed me under the fig tree for another type of revelation. I promptly bought the book, "Anatomy of the Spirit" which talks about how illness is linked to spiritual and emotional stressors that we fail to overcome. Thyroid issues are fifth chakra ailments which come about from "not speaking your truth." I also learned that it runs in my family. My second cousin had thyroid cancer so her thyroid and parathyroid were removed. When I consider that she married a White man and lived among Confederates for almost 40 years before his death, it's not inconsistent with Dr. Myss' hypothesis. Dr. Myss says, "Your biography is your biology." Of course, this is an over simplistic view that doesn't explain birth defects, childhood ailments or many other diseases; but, her book provides a detailed roadmap to a fuller understanding of the ways in which stress impacts our health. So, the information can only be insightful.

Well after the biopsy, the doctor reported that the cells of the lump were benign but that they will watch it. Since the biopsy, the lump has disappeared completely on its own. I like to believe that speaking my spiritual truth despite the hardships that may arise on the physical plane were instrumental in my rapid recovery. I was never worried about the consequences of my actions because I know God is in control. And to show me just to what extent He controls my destiny, a colleague reached out and asked for my resume some weeks back. She then followed up to say that the head of her organization would like to meet with me very informally to talk. I attended the meeting on September 18th. By the end of the meeting, she offered me a short-term consultancy to give the organization time to determine the best match of my skills for their needs so that a permanent position can be created. I was delighted and accepted the offer. The next day, she wrote to clarify my remuneration expectations by offering me the same pay rate I earned at the job I just left. She wanted to know if that was enough. It was and is. God is faithful.

So, this testimonial explains a bit about my recent absence from the bloggers world. I was in recovery from a spiritual battle that left me wounded but not defeated, and I frankly needed the time to process it all. I don't hold any animosity towards anyone for all that occurred. It could not have happened if God did not will it to be. But, I am ever amazed at the pettiness of humanity. I replayed events in my head quite a few times to try to understand where I went wrong. In the end, I acknowledged that the "perfect storm" is God's doing and takes no prisoners. It simply reveals the truth. And that is what I witnessed. Through it all, I recall saying to God, "Thank you. I now think I understand how our ancestors were sold into slavery better than I could ever have imagined." I now have a cellular knowing of the deep wound of betrayal by my White and African colleagues. People are people, and we're all fallible. We pray that we have the character and endurance to stand to the challenges of life as they arise. Amen.