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AU NATUREL

PERSONAL AND SALON UPDATES

Being blessed with a new sister at 58 years

To say that I took a summer hiatus is a bit of an understatement. I have been trying to write at least four issues per year, but time just seems to be going by so much faster than I recall. At any rate, life is life-ing and I'm grateful for all of it. 2026 has become one of the most memorable and consequential years of my life. In the last issue, I noted that I just discovered an Asian sister who was born in Vietnam. She is actually of Cambodian lineage on her mother's side. But, she is Hawthorne through and through. My brother/cousin Fred organized a family gathering (the first ever for our family) in Memphis, TN, and it was an absolute delight. The pièce de resistance was meeting our newest member of the family though now in her 50s. My husband and I arrived early to help my cousin and his wife with arrangements. Overall, it was masterfully organized and was executed without a hitch. My sister Dinh (pronounced Den) was so excited she said she could not sleep at all the night before. I picked her up at the airport along with my uncle Ted, my Dad's only living sibling, and Lloyd. She hugged him and would hardly let go. I know it must have felt like hugging our father. Uncle Ted has become like a surrogate father to me in the absence of my own. So, I truly empathized with where she was. When we got back

20 YEAR REFLECTION: HAIR TECHNOLOGY OVER TIME

As I reflect on our 20 years of service to the natural hair community, I think of how trends have changed over time. When we opened, hair weave and braid salons were IN. Those services are still around, but wigs have eclipsed the hair weave wave. My natural question in all things is "Why?" In a word, because we are studied, analyzed and catered for. Our dollar is so important to the global economy that manufacturing sectors are created by our demand. Some might be flattered. I call it manipulation. In the 60s, the Supremes set the wig trends along with the other Motown music legends. In the 70s, we were told to "relax"—at least our hair anyway. We were getting way too radical for mainstream. In the 80s, Diana Ross introduced hair weave technology, and we were delivered from the short hair matrix. In the 90s, Living Single celebrated our diversity with relaxed, locked, braided, wigged and natural hair highlighted. During this period, my sister and I were both horrified that women were paying good money for kinky twist hair to create the look that we wore every day and that they could get for free!! Then came Beyonce in the early 2000s. Enter stage left: the lace-front wig. I would argue that her impact on Black hair has been much more impactful than her music. Her image effectively brainwashed an entire generation into a fascination with wigs. Shows like Bring It reflected the standard that she set. I would argue that this show became prominent for this purpose--although the athleticism was mad crazy! And here we sit. Meantime, we don't manufacture wigs or weaves for the most part. And we are in the nascent stages of extension braid hair production. In other words, we are studied, analyzed and then directed to the new manufacturing trend that is being released into the population. In the early years of Schatzi's, my cousin, who is a cosmetologist, told me in no uncertain terms that I was going to miss out if I didn't offer lace front wig services. I never have. And here we are. By God's grace. We will NEVER elevate a manufactured product above God's creation. And so, technology may come and go. But rest assured. Here at Schatzi's, you are home. Embrace the beauty of you.

to the welcome reception at the hotel, she did not eat at all. Again, she was too excited. I was so happy for her though I did wish that we could have closed this loop before my father's passing in 2012. Incidentally, she told me that cried constantly in 2012 whenever she thought of her father. She didn't know why at the time.

Dinh and I did most of our communication at the B.B. King Blues Café on Beale St. though the entire weekend was much like speed dating. I had not seen two of my cousins since the 2nd grade in Tuskegee, AL (50 years ago!) so it was all love. Dinh told me many things that felt like our lives were lived in parallel though we did not know each other. She was born almost exactly 4 years after me: Oct. 19th while my birthday is Oct. 29th. Parallels which I observed were as follows: 1) Being of American descent while living in Vietnam was a formula for abuse. She was bullied in school A LOT and had to fight. Strangely of all my mother's children, I fought the most. From elementary school through high school, I was bullied and was always fighting. My last fist fight was in the 6th grade. Middle school was a quiet period. When I got to high school and started wearing my two strand twists, I was harassed and bullied all over again for daring to wear an "Aunt Jemima" hairstyle when the Jheri Curl was all the rage! 2) But my "curse" became my blessing. Today I own a natural hair salon, and my message to Black women is "Embrace the beauty of you." The foresight that my mother had in hoisting a natural hairstyle on me was a divine blessing. Likewise, Dinh's American lineage gave her a first-class ticket to US citizenship, and she brought her mother and siblings along for the ride. She said when she goes back to Vietnam now, people don't look down on her. They look up to her now. When my eldest sister lamented that Daddy was unfaithful in his actions, I said: "And look at the blessing that God brought out of it." 3) While school life was somewhat burdensome, she was very well cared for by her family. She told me that her Mom was two months pregnant when Daddy got orders to leave Vietnam. So, he bought girl clothes for the unborn baby and left money for her. Dinh said: 'I have three siblings. I'm the youngest. Daddy left so much money that it took care of all of us, from the time I was born until I was 18 years old. My Mom even bought land with the money. For that reason, my mother took me everywhere she went because she didn't want people messing with me.'[1] (Don't ask me how he knew she would have a girl but he did. I guess God told him. And I think the clothes were an indication of how he expected her to be dressed and cared for.) The photo shows that she was loved. 😊 In fact, she said that she tried to get a job to help out when she was growing up, but her Mom wouldn't let her. Likewise, I was well cared for and lived a privileged life as an "Army brat." Of course, there were no brats raised in the Hawthorne Clan. But I lacked NOTHING. 4) In 1991, Dinh emigrated to the US and began a new life. The same year, I emigrated to Jamaica and began a new life. 5) Dinh is a manicurist who works at a nail salon. She owned her own salon for 12 years. I am a natural hair stylist who owns a hair salon. 6) I asked Dinh when she first opened her nail salon. She said June of 2006. When did you open your salon? I said, "June/July of 2006". 7) While at the

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[1] Incidentally, several people have asked me how my Dad could have left money to care for her family for so long. Knowing Dad, he DID NOT leave a lump sum in cash, in kind or in a bank account. He would NEVER trust ANYONE with so much money at one time as he would not be sure how they would use it. Likewise, too large a lump sum would have made her Mom a walking target as bank tellers and the communist government would have her on their radar. I tell people that I was born with an abacus in my hand. It's one of my talents and it came from my Dad. I can state unequivocally that he opened a bank account in HIS name. He added Dinh's mother to the bank account to ensure that he could access it and she could make withdrawals. He monitored the account from a distance and deposited money to the account periodically over the years based on the balance and the exchange rate. Once Dinh was 18 years old, she was preparing to emigrate and did in her 19th year so support was no longer needed or expected.

family reunion, Fred had us create branches of our family free. So, I created the framework for Dinh to fill in the details for her family. Her husband is Vietnamese and they have two children. Strangely, they chose the name Henry for their son which is truly unusual for an Asian kid. But Dinh could not possibly have known that she had a great aunt name Henrietta—our grandmother's sister. Dinh's husband's name is Runh—pronounced "Ron". Eerily, I was always drawn to guys named Ron while growing up. I realized it very early on but could never explain why. When she said her husband's name and I made the connection, I honestly felt like I was "In the Matrix." I said to myself: "Am I being punk'd!" Aside from the fact that I have always felt drawn to Asian life, art, culture—so much so that I assumed I was a reincarnated Asian person, that's where the parallels that I know of end. As we come to know each other better, we will likely discover more.

Overall, it's truly fascinating. I now have three sisters when I thought I always had two. My eldest sister (born to our Dad's first wife and high school sweetheart) and I connected when Lloyd was relocated to Louisville, KY to work on a project in 2000. It was there that we spoke for the first time though I had known about her for years. At that time, I met her husband—a pastor, and their daughter who is close in age to my eldest. My husband, whose name means gray-haired but is not gray at all in comparison to my own, has shared a very interesting life with me. Many of my clients say: "Girl, you need to write a book!" When I told a recent client about my sister, her life and our reunion, she said, "Please write that book! It will be a best-seller." I'm not sure if that's what God wants me to do. So, I haven't budged on that score. But one thing I've come to know for sure: "The Creator is a poet and has got mad jokes." 🤣 My life has been an absolutely fascinating ride: NO DOUBT. I give thanks for every blessing and trial that I have endured. God is good. And I'm very grateful that God moved the machine and allowed Dinh to find us. She had been trying for a while. She was ghosted a couple of times. But it was Fred who did his DNA test last year and excitedly reported his findings to me regarding African ancestry. If he had not done the test, we would not have found Dinh. So, he is the star in the story who deserves much credit. Likewise, a cousin of ours who is a DNA historian took over Dinh's profile (as Vietnamese is her first language) and went to work. God gave her all that she needed to make it happen. When I spoke with Dinh during the family gathering, she said: "I'm so lucky. I have friends who found their family easily. They were acknowledged and then rejected or ignored. It was very hard for me to find my family. But I have been accepted and welcomed." I am grateful to God on her and our behalf.

Within the salon, all is well by God's grace. The kiddos that we have been serving have spread wings and are driving into the sunset. It's pretty cool to stand in one place and see the stages of people's lives unfold before your eyes. I guess that's how life has always been. But I'm pretty accustomed to be the person always on the move—the one that stationary people recall in the corners of their mind when they talk about those they used to know. I relocated quite often between birth and age 32 when I settled in Raleigh. So, stationary life was pretty new to me. After 20 years of business serving the Triangle community, I can say we are a foundational pillar of the natural hair care community. We're proud of that fact and endeavor to live up to the responsibility that this truth demands. Life is good. And by God's grace, we remain…eternally grateful. Embrace the beauty of you.

BIG HAIR IS ALL THE RAGE

Wash & Go, Afro and Twist-Out/Braid-Out Poetry

When I was coming of age, relaxers and Jheri curls were all the rage. And girls' tresses were showing the stress of it all. When I straightened my hair out and it cascaded down my shoulders, I saw the green eyes of envy and was often accused of wearing a weave. In fact, while crossing the street in Jamaica with straight hair one day, a man yelled at me "A weave dat!" His energy felt as if he was angry that I was perpetrating a fraud, and he wanted to

call me out publicly. One strange reaction that I had was to avoid straightening my hair so as not to make others uncomfortable. Yes, I know. Mariam Williamson's poem/book excerpt "A Return to Love" warns us: "There's 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." And a woman's hair has always been dubbed her crowning glory. But I believe God put that in me. He wanted me to see and understand that the greatest offense for people was NOT to see my hair straight and envy me. The heaping coals of fire for their spirit was to see my hair natural and realize that they too can be naturally beautiful. And DAMN!!! Sisters have gotten the message!! Hallelujah! Yes, there are those diehards who insist on the wigs, but for the most part, their hair is natural underneath. While they showcase the wig, they are still nurturing and protecting their natural hair. And if they're open to deliverance, they'll release the fakery for the real.

On our salon social medias sites as well as my own, I've been posting lovely videos of afros, wash & gos and twist outs/hraid outs. They're EVERWHERE!! I know my algorithm feeds these to me but the prevalence of their appearance in my feed is only a sign of their popularity in the wider community. I LOVE WATCHING THESE VIDEOS!! It represents a return to love for Black women. We are finally recognizing that God did not curse us by giving us these kinky tresses. In fact, it was an amazing blessing because we get to be everything all at the same time! We can be straight and coily without chemically altering ANYTHING!! We can be short and long without scissors! We can be big and small with braids and twists being the greatest tool in our arsenal! No other woman on the planet has that luxury! So, we truly have been divinely blessed. And finally, sisters are recognizing.

The braid-out has become my own go-to style of late. I still love my signature two-strand twist style, but my hair is just NOT as thick as it used to be. I hate to look at photos and see spaces between my twists. It used to never be like that. That is simply a side effect of aging. So, I've decided to go big. I wear braid outs at night and



when I don't have anywhere in particular to go, and I braid out in the morning or before an event. I haven't yet purchased a pick to add about 2-3 more inches of volume and lift to my hair. I just turn my head upside down and let gravity do the work. And yes, bigger is better!! Will I go back to wearing my signature style? Probably at some point. But for now, I'm loving the lion's mane. If you haven't yet tried a simple braid or twist out, the videos are literally everywhere. Consider it before defaulting to the wig for your next event. You may be surprised at just how many compliments you receive as a result. I believe that women default to wigs because of indoctrination and the desire for a polished look. But it my book, natural trumps polished EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK! Embrace the beauty of you

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