

AU NATUREL

Salon and Personal Updates

I wrote an end of year reflection that I never posted. I had intended to publish it but for a while now, I tend to hibernate in the winter and things just don't go out as planned. As I looked at the language of reflection, I saw the following statement: "2025 will have challenges of its own, but I pray that I have the strength to bless others, endure and remain ever grateful for God's grace. Amen." Well clearly, I had no idea how true those words were. I'm drained and March just started. Why? My project is funded by the Department of Education and Trump has sworn to eradicate DOE. So, there is DAILY dialogue about how to navigate in shark infested waters. Some of our colleagues who are typically on monthly calls with us are already gone. Some of our partners in DC have been placed on administrative leave. And that's not even the tip of the iceberg. As a member of the leadership team, I have a responsibility to stay abreast of what is happening so as to take measures to mitigate impact on our staff as appropriate. In one instance, our project director and I almost came to blows. We have NEVER interacted in that way before. But I said what I said. In short, I was adamant that certain changes to our website needed to be made. She was being conservative in her position. I was demanding full compliance with the current administration. It got ugly. Feelings were hurt, tears were shed but, in the end, we wound up respecting each other all the more. My words to her were: "You must know that I love and trust you. Because I have never spoken to anyone who controls my performance review in that way before. I typically just smile and nod and exit stage left." She saw my point, the team agreed, and we followed suit. For the moment, we are still here. But God only knows how long. I believe that our chancellor, who got rid of all DEI positions the moment he was appointed last year, is the reason that we have survived to date. He expressed the need for compliance with the current administration shortly after the executive orders began. I was demanding our compliance with his directive. I have since encouraged our Institute leadership to solicit the chancellor's aid in protecting our programs as he is clearly an insider. This is politics at its most self-serving. UNC-Chapel Hill ranked in the top 20 of research institutions last year with a budget of over \$1B. My question to our Institute Director was: "Do you think our chancellor wants to see the UNC budget gutted on his watch? At this moment in history, he is our greatest ally. We need to be soliciting his support." I can honestly say he surprised me by saying it hadn't occurred to him. This is where people are short-sighted in emotionally stating "not my chancellor"! HE IS our chancellor!! Put him to work!!

I could go on and on. There's so much that has happened over the past two months. It's draining because of the mental toll of spiritual warfare. But I can honestly say that I have a peace which surpasses all understanding. When I realized that Trump was taking over the country, I resolved that we are taking our trip to China this year. I have wanted to go for almost a decade. But other destinations were more pressing for varying reasons. As I expect US-China relations to decline under the current regime, I figured its time. And despite the employment uncertainty that we face, I booked the flight and the tour.

My words to my husband were: "When we finally reach the travel date, I may be unemployed. But the trip will be fully paid for and we'll surely enjoy the mental break from the political and cultural onslaught." I have worked hard my entire life. In my mother's words, "You hit it from age 4 and you've never stopped." (I started first grade at 4, because my parents wanted to put me in school early. Since my Dad would buy and deliver alcohol to the nuns of the school, my age was overlooked. No, I'm not joking. I could write a book!) Vacations are not a luxury for me. They are my gift to myself. One in which I unapologetically indulge although I confess that with air traffic being what it is these days, I'm less than enthusiastic right now.

Within the salon, things are rolling merrily along. I would say there is no news which is good news. I am ever grateful for the wonderful facelift that the salon received back in 2023. I get a spiritual lift every time I pass the threshold. And I'm cognizant that next year will be our 20th year of operation. That is completely mindboggling to me. Yes, we have been in business for 19 years. I'm not sure what I thought the nineteenth year would look like. I didn't dare to imagine. I was too busy trying to survive the next year, so I never ventured too far in the distance. But while walking down the stairs last week, I reflected on how much slower a process it is for me. I used to run up and down those stairs. Now, I hold the railing and take my time. As Momma says, "Youth is fleeting. Enjoy it." So, we are grateful for the blessings of life and longevity as we strive to maintain a standard of quality and commitment to nurture and empower the beauty within.

01 Salon & Personal Updates

They don't like us!

02 They don't like us!

Commentary on carcinogenic synthetic hair products

Last week, a friend from Zambia and a former client shared this [news segment](#) with me. Being ever curious, I went to the [source document](#) to learn more. Since reading the report, the topic has been a regular point of conversation within the salon. It's frankly draining to even think about. For the life of me, I can't imagine why ANYONE needs to place lead in a product that is worn on the body.

03 Spring Reflections

When I attempt to understand how this state of affairs has come about, I'm inclined to recognize that new carcinogens are being discovered all the time. So perhaps, the inclusion of these products in synthetic hair are just an unfortunate reality whose awareness has come about through the evolution of science. But, LEAD!!! We have known of the dangers of lead since the 70s when we took it out of paint and gasoline. That represents 50+ years of knowledge!! Lead is a chemical element with a symbol and an atomic number on the periodic table. You don't mix two different chemicals and accidentally produce lead! Lead is a metal that had to be intentionally sought out and incorporated into the ingredients for this product in order for it to be there. As a result, I can only conclude that it's inclusion in these products is by design. And when I reflect on that truth, I can only conclude "They don't like us!" And this is the underlying reason why I don't purchase or use products created by mainstream suppliers that are specifically designed for Black people. PERIOD! Never have and never will.

As for synthetic hair products, I have sent text messages to all of our core clients. And I have shared the links on the salon Facebook pages. If clients want synthetic hair styles from us going forward, we will again educate them of the potential dangers of the product that they seek to install, and allow them to make an informed decision. Thankfully, the product that we use most often for extension twist services is not on this list, but I don't trust any of them! For our own protection, we will be wearing gloves for all future installation services. I am truly grateful that the lion's share of services that we provide are natural hair services. And so, again, I'm compelled to repeat: Embrace the beauty of you.

Spring Reflections

As we approach the dawning of spring 2025, I am reminded that my dear grandmother Mabel is not with me. Her birthday was the first full day of spring (March 21st), and this marks the second spring season that I will experience in her absence. Perhaps when I was left with her gardening talent upon her departure, she asked God to extend this ability to me so that I wouldn't miss her so much. I am enjoying watching my Japanese maples' first spring season at the McCarthy abode. I have 36 of them now. Most of them are in pots. All of them, excluding the one in the front yard that Grandma gave me years ago, were purchased in 2024. I plan NOT to purchase anymore, at least until these grow out and I have an opportunity to see how they are faring with the current spacing. And of course if anyone dies, they will be replaced. But so far, everyone fared the winter rather favorably. I can't say the same for all of my pots! My Mikawa Yatsubusa family collection is arrayed in a variety of blue pots. Well, one of the pots is peeling horribly after a rather blistery winter for these parts. I was truly surprised to see the paint peeling with the red clay underneath. These pots were a mini-fortune all by themselves because I needed varieties that can weather the winter. The pot held up wonderfully. The paint...not so much! Needless to say, that pot will be going right back to the store for replacement. I kept all of my receipts so I want to see them deny me my due. Considering the amount of money that I spent with that store last year, I'm not even remotely worried. Otherwise, the pots and the specimens are doing famously!! Last week, I pruned and fertilized in anticipation of this weekend's storm which gave them a good soaking. Now, I'll just observe, adjust care according to individual or collective needs and hope for the best. I'm eager to see what the five-year mark will be. But, the process is the journey. So, I'll appreciate every step of the way.

As I walked among my budding garden, I was thankful for the gift of mobility. Just prior to Thanksgiving, I fell on my stairs and was confined to indoors and a walker. I was incredulous to say the least. I fractured my tibia plateau and narrowly avoided surgery. The hospital told me it could heal on its own, but the orthopedic surgeon recommended surgery to correct the existing arthritis on my knee. The pain was so excruciating at one point that I almost fainted. I did collapse on the shoulder of the nurse trying to hold me up. With that kind of pain, I was willing to go with the surgery. But when I realized the pain was all caused by muscle spasms, it was oh so bearable once I got a muscle relaxer. So, I decided to wait and see what my body would do. Dr. Qi, my gifted acupuncturist, did house calls just for me, because I have been his patient for so long. He came to my home weekly to provide a service. In his words, "Let's try to avoid surgery. The arthritis was already present. Let's try to bring you back to where you were before the fall." My uncle, visiting from California, told me he was scheduled for surgery on his arthritic knees, but he declined since he lives alone. He travels wherever he wants at 88 years of age so I was hopeful of my prospects.

When I went to Jamaica for Christmas, I had to use a wheelchair in the airport. I could walk at this point but I was not full weight-bearing so I could not have successfully navigated Miami airport. Decreased mobility definitely changes your perspective. I have been supporting the work of disabled peoples in some way or another since taking a job at Mustard Seed Communities in 1992. But when you are disabled yourself, the world looks and feels different. On St. Patrick's Day while talking with my uncle, now back in Sacramento, he asked how my knee is doing. I was proud to announce that I am fully recovered. I am comfortable completing my hour long walk around the neighborhood. I used to do these walks daily. But, I had to build back up to it. Because of the condition of my knees, I've had to adjust my exercise schedule as well. No longer will I do daily walks. Now, I go to the gym for strength training 3 times a week and fit walks in as appropriate on off days. My knees have always been my weakest link. I'm built like a giraffe, so I guess it's the price of having some height with super long legs. It might look good in magazines, but it has a price.

So this spring as I watch trees and flowers emerge heralding the beauty and bounty of God's love, I am truly grateful for a healthy body that is capable of healing. I am grateful that I have been active all these years so that I could achieve full mobility within 6 weeks of my injury. I'm thankful for Dr. Qi who worked with me throughout this process to promote healing and full recovery. I'm also grateful that he has cared for my knees for about 20 years now. This injury helped me recognize the blessings that I easily take for granted. I don't know all that this year holds for our nation, my community, my business, my life, but at this moment in time, life is good. I give thanks. I pray that you and yours are healthy, prosperous and graced by God's blessings....