



Au Naturel

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NUSOL Natural Hair Expo
 Raleigh Convention Center
 Saturday, March 4, 2017

A Bit of Comic Relief

The socio-political reality of America and the world can seem rather depressing of late. The themes of race, power, control and life are more daunting than ever! But real change is an uncomfortable process. We can't want it and stability at the same time. It's not the order of nature. So, here's a bit of light fare to remind us all that: Life is good, even when it ain't...

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Personal and Salon Updates



Summer is in full swing and our figs are in full bloom!! Yum, yum! ☺ Every evening, I pull in the driveway and make a beeline to the side of the house to grab a few handfuls of these morsels before entering the house. The mosquitos absolutely love this ritual of mine because while I'm stuffing my face with succulent sweets, they're getting a mouthful of their own. Needless to say, I never stay out there for very long. ☺ I invariably surprise the rabbits or the birds that quickly make room for me to dine while they continue their feasting on the ground or in the higher branches. There is indeed balance in all things.

We planted this tree about nine years ago when we wanted to do something with the sunniest side of the house and didn't quite know what to do. The area is not large enough for a garden, so we decided on a fruit tree. We made a great choice! I love this tree! I understand why [Jesus cursed the one that didn't bear](#). What a tease!! I'm so glad that ours is rather prolific!

Within the salon, life is good. We give thanks. There has been MUCH discussion about the socio-political realities that we all face in the coming election. I personally have very mixed feelings. I watched the Republican and the Democratic National Conventions, though I honestly gave more attention to the RNC. I already know what Democrats have to say. I wanted to better understand what the heck is going on in the Republican party! It was pretty amusing to say the least! Aside from the obvious faux pas and near-brawls that made the news, I was honestly impressed with Trump's son Donald Trump, Jr. He has the carriage, delivery and charisma of a leader-- much more so than his father, in my opinion. I noticed that PBS/NPR downplayed his speech, which frankly wasn't surprising in light of his youth and how easily poised he is for a national platform. As for Hillary, I'm a diehard Sanders supporter. She would get my vote with great regret, if I'm being honest. In all however, I have no angst whatsoever about the outcome of this election. The world will not implode because either of them takes office. The country has gotten through worse, and it will get through this. On a personal note, I lived through a great depression while leaving in Jamaica between 1991-1995. When you've experienced a "run" on your nation's banks at least four times within a few years' time, I'd say that's a depression. (**Note:** *It didn't make the news because when African peoples suffer, it's called "normalcy." When European peoples suffer, it's called "austerity."*) In all, been there done that. As bitter a pill it is to swallow, conditions such as these do make you stronger, if you don't faint. But then,

who's to say we'll suffer with either of these leaders? In all, whoever winds up in the driver's seat will be placed there at God's discretion. And somehow, I know that God has hand-picked whichever of them is victorious for such a time as this. And for one candidate in particular, that time may simply be to be brought to their knees to learn humility for the first time in their life, on a public stage, with all the world watching and with NOWHERE TO RUN! I almost want to see that...if I'm honest. Whatever the outcome: Take heart. God is good and ultimately, His will prevails. Amen.

The Why 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), it's 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 in [A Natural Attitude](#) called “The Greatest Challenge of Going Natural...” (Page 83). 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!

Natural Hair News: A Friday the 13th Nightmare

"Inter-connectivity is a far greater life ambition than confidentiality." Schatzi

Introduction: I read [this devotional the other day](#) and laughed at several places therein. I laughed because I believe it's so true. The devotional references God's laughter at our folly. This one tickled my fancy because through all of my life experiences, I've long concluded that not only is God a poet, God is a comedian extraordinaire! This understanding has given me an aptitude to seek balance in the most mundane or painful life experiences. I know that God is in control. So, whatever it is, I better have faith in that knowledge and learn the lesson. I know this because during one of my most intensive life challenges, I experienced God's presence so closely that it felt like I was in an arena, and the heavenly hosts were all in the stands cheering me on to victory through this trial. The game was so intense that one of the hosts seemingly volunteered to be my coach, while the others watched. It felt something like this:

Heavenly host 1: "10 to 1 she's going to buckle under this one, Father. Hell is dealing with her. It's too much."

Heavenly host 2: "Maybe we should shorten the game this time. She's at level 4. She has no idea what she's up against. I'm not sure she's ready."

God: "Do you know my child? She's got this!"

And suddenly, [WIPE OUT!](#)

HH Coach: "Oooh, that hurt!! I felt that one WAY UP HERE!! Let's help her a bit. She's grappling with fear right now. Fear just won't help! Po' baby! God, you sure she's got this one!"

God: No response. (*Only rolled eyes in the direction of HH Coach, while thinking "Ye of little faith. I'm in her. Of course, SHE'S GOT THIS!!"*)

Meanwhile...

Me: "Okay, God. You can beam me up now. I'm kinda tired of this game. Can I come home to glory? God? God? God!" (Silence) *Sigh.* [Damn, I gotta figure this shit out for real?!](#) I don't really cry that much anymore. I don't know if I've become numb, cold or indifferent... I think it's best defined as resolved. I go to sleep, regroup, and start a new day; or as Jamaicans say [Wheel and come again!](#) And when the story's played out, I look back and realize I surfed that wave like a champ. **Food for thought: Now, just imagine that God is doing this same thing with all of us...all at the same time! Amazing!!**

At times, the waves are pretty fast and furious. That's when I think God and the Heavenly hosts are most proud at the strength of the human-god spirit. I imagine then, the dialogue is something like this:

Heavenly host 3: "She's got skills for real! But, dang!! We should let up some, right?"

God: She said she wanted the advanced course in spiritual development. Well, this is IT!! [Ain't no half-stepping.](#) Ain't no wimps getting through this curriculum! She asked for it, she's getting it...lock, stock and barrel. IT IS WHAT IT IS!"

Heavenly host 4: (Rather sheepishly) "Yes God." And they work overtime sending me signals, butterfly kisses, dreams and the like to say, "Girl, you got this. We see you. It's gonna be alright."

Nightmare on Bush Street: My most recent encounter with chapter 48 of the Advanced Course in Soul Maturation was more of a ripple than a tsunami.

Some things just don't faze me anymore. Ironically, it occurred on Friday, May 13, 2016. Yes, Friday the 13th!! (I told you God's a comic. ☺ He KNOWS I aint superstitious like that, so he threw me a curve for humor's sake. He knows I got the joke. I DID! And I still aint superstitious! I could roll with the comedy of this encounter because neither life nor limb nor personal well-being was greatly impacted by the outcome. So, it all counts as good.) On said occasion, I was at Wake Tech teaching (6-10pm). We had no clients so students focused only on completing their competencies. It was going to be a quiet evening. Well, as was so often the case with my last class, what should be simple became complex in light speed. In a nutshell, my only male student presented these two mannequin heads to me for grading.



(Yes, I put this work on blast which ordinarily would be a very unprofessional practice. You'll understand why very soon.)

The word that came to mind was "cauchemar"!! I thought: What happened here? I was shocked as the class was well into the curriculum (only 6 weeks

left) and I had seen better quality work from this student already. (These were supposed to be two-strand twists styles.) My colleague thought it was intentional. I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. The night before, he had confessed that he was feeling really tired and felt he needed a day off. I said, "Do what you gotta do, man." So seeing this work, I thought: Something's going on. So I found him in the break room and sat down to talk. I expressed deep concern that these mannequins are not up to par and are not even consistent with his past performance. I didn't want to grade them as the outcome would not be passing. After a few seemingly benign exchanges, he suddenly jumped up and walked out. I was so surprised that I called his name out of incredulity. He turned and looked at me with venom: "I know what you're trying to do!!!" When I reflected on the words and the depth of the over-reaction, I thought I better leave this alone in this isolated space that we're in. So, I out-walked him back to the classroom area, reviewed the work of the other students and went to the office to regroup.

After he had time to calm down and was back in class, I noticed he wasn't trying to work. He was seated at his station listening to music with his earbuds in. When you're clocked in at a cosmetic arts school, you are expected to be working *per State Board standards*. I thought, I need to do something. I had already gone through progress reports with all the students, and he knew he was doing well in the class. So, I thought I just need to talk with him. I walked to the clinic floor, lightly touched his shoulder to get his attention and asked him to come to the office. (*With his earbuds in and his head down, he didn't realize that I was in his presence.*) He jerked away from me and roundly dismissed me! So, I left, took pictures of his work, called my supervisor (though I only got her voice mail) and started documenting EVERYTHING! Well long story short, brother promptly went to the campus police and accused me of assaulting him stating that he wanted to press charges. On Monday morning, I was fired in my supervisor's words, "for assaulting Mr. ____". (*You know I couldn't make this shit up, right?!*) At no time did she: 1) ask my side of the story; 2) acknowledge my phone call or respond to my documented texts and email of happenings on the same night of the event; or 3) even want to listen when I said, "He's lying." I felt most disheartened because I knew that she didn't even believe this charge to be true; but, she used it anyway. To this date, I have received no paperwork notifying me of any charge levied against me whatsoever. School officials have notified me that based on investigation; I'm still eligible to work at Wake Tech. However because NC is an "at will" state and because I was contracted faculty, I had to just pick up my marbles and go home. As for Wake Tech, I'll likely never work there again. I knocked the proverbial *dust off my feet*.

When I told my mother I got fired, she said: "Did you know all of this was going on during Jamar's graduation ceremony on Saturday, the 14th?" I said: "Yes." (*Luckily, I got the heads up about what was going on from an inner circle; because otherwise, I would have totally been blind-sided.*) I then heard her long pause of wonder, as she had detected no concern, angst or worry on my part. There was none. When you are innocent of a charge, why should you be anxious? Besides, it was my son's big day and my big week (with both sons graduating)!! NOTHING was going to affect my joy! I was on a cloud. I imagine that Satan saw me rejoicing and had such anger about it that he decided to throw his own curve ball. "She's so content with life! I'm going to crush her ego. She's never been fired before or even had a negative performance review. I'm going to bring her down...way down!! And I know just how to do it." And so, circumstances materialized, the lie was crafted and the rest is history.

Reflection: When I reflect on all parties involved, I have great love and empathy for them, as foolish as they were. As Black people, we have been taught to live in fear. We fear for our jobs; we fear failure; we fear that others will look better than us; we fear that others will have more than us. As it relates to this situation, the student feared failure. As for my supervisor, she feared my competence and thus was fearful for her job. I observed insecurity from her the first semester and worked overtime to put her at ease. I have a lifetime of working with people who feel threatened because I CAN WORK!! So, I stretch to make my employers look good. After all, that's why they employ me! Men accept this as the free gift that it is, and say: "Thank you." (*That's because it's a man world, and they got it like that.*) Insecure women connive to "put me in my place." I've had so many instances of this foolishness in my life that I could write a book. But then, that would be another story, wouldn't it?

The Lesson: Of course as it relates to the *Nightmare on Bush Street*, you're free to believe what you want. There are always two sides to everything. But, these are the facts as they unfolded before me. I'm only sharing them so that the wider natural hair care community knows that I am no longer associated with that program. I came to learn that at least one student in the class was actively spreading the news that I got fired for assaulting the male student. As the Raleigh natural hair community is rather small, I seek only to set the record straight. Most people who know me personally wouldn't believe this charge against me anyway. But, the fact that I am no longer teaching at Wake Tech is a damning fact that doesn't bode well for a silent person. So, I'm breaking the silence for the sake of my name and reputation, which I've taken years to build but which can be destroyed in an instant. I have likewise formally notified Wake Tech officials that I would be publishing the facts of this case from my perspective, as is my prerogative.

In retrospect, I know each person involved in this affair, and I see the soul in each one of them reaching for acceptance. I have looked into their eyes. I recall laughs and inspiring encounters that I've had with each one. I know God loves them as much as me. I know that people do CRAZY THINGS when they are afraid. And I know that most fear is a product of the mind and is not grounded in truth. FEAR IS WHY EVERY GREAT EVIL ON THE PLANET HAS EVER BEEN COMMITTED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME! I get it! I know and I understand. I love each and every one of them. But folks, can I keep it real? I can't pray for them. Truly. [Matthew 5:43-45](#) calls my spirit to submission but, I'm stubborn and incorrigible. I could go within myself and say a prayer out of compliance; but, what would be the point if the prayer has not reached my soul? It would be like a child spitting out the words "Sorry!" when forced to say it by their parents when in truth, they ain't sorry and would do it (*whatever it is*) again!! In saying such a prayer, I'd just be muttering words like the hypocrites and the pagans that I'm encouraged not to emulate in the [very next chapter of Matthew](#). Prayer must be authentic or it is useless. So as it relates to them, I'm not going to bother. Forgive me Lord. To you the reader, I say: Pray for the administration of that program. Please. Do it for me. Do it for the future students who will be trained by them. Do it for the future clients that they will serve. Do it for the future instructors who will work under them. Do it for the greater good of natural hair care. Just do it. Because I can't. I am so apathetic about that program that it could disintegrate into nothingness, and I wouldn't be upset one iota. That's real! God's still working on me. I am vain and self-righteous to be this way. I would have the audacity to feel that a transgression against me is equal to a far greater loss to the wider community. My ego much surely be as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon...and as empty. I am an imperfect child of God. He loves me

anyway! Praise be to God!! As for Satan, you win. You crushed my ego. And I say...THANK YOU!!

Afterthought: Rather ~~ironically~~ ...~~coincidentally~~ ...expectedly after writing this post on July 27th, I read Fr. Richard Rohr's devotional of the same day titled "[Following Jesus](#)." The ending quote is one of those beautiful signals from the heavenly hosts (*that I mentioned above*) that help me to walk with greater assurance.

Those who agree *to carry and love what God loves*, both the good and the bad of human history, and to pay the price for its reconciliation within themselves--these are the followers of Jesus. They are the leaven, the salt, the remnant, the mustard seed that God can use to transform the world. **The cross is the dramatic image of what it takes to be such a *usable* one for God.** [The emphasis is my own.]

I know I'm on the right path! I've got a long way to go and the world will surely deal with me along the way; but, I have faith (and confirmation) that I'm at least moving in the right direction. And that [I have help when the going gets tough](#). Know that whatever path you're on; you're moving in the right direction too. Some routes are surely more circuitous than others, but [God's will prevails in all things](#). Give thanks. 😊