



Au Naturel

September 2011
Volume 6 Issue 9

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Monthly Meditation: On the morning of Sept. 2nd, as I drove into work, an Amel song that I've heard a thousand times grabbed me as if I had never heard it before: [Sacred](#). It's a haunting commentary on the state of our world. (*Click on the play symbol.*) This morning, the spirit of this song brought tears to my eyes. Perhaps my own melancholy just got the best of me for a moment. In all, it just reminds me that there is much work to be done. My personal motto is a quote by Hugh Mulligan: "What I do today is important because I am exchanging a day of my life for it." My only problem with this quote is I wish I had said it first. ☺ So with that thought in mind, I pray that the spirit of compassion reign in us all throughout this month and all the days of our lives.

August Updates

Okay, August was an eventful month—in so many ways. It was indeed nice to have the cooler temperatures for more enjoyable outdoor recreation. But with the earthquake on the 23rd and the hurricane on the 27th, I feel there's really nothing to say but "Thank the Lord it wasn't worse." I wasn't my first earthquake though. I had experienced a 5.4 earthquake in Jamaica many years ago. Lost all decorum. I almost knocked down the poor cleaning lady standing in the doorway of my office as I bolted to the stairwell. Does "wuss" sound like an operative word? I've remembered that incident because I never apologized to that woman for so unceremoniously scooting past her. All I saw was a blocked exit that I was all about clearing. Fear is a terrible thing. For this earthquake, I was again in my office on the computer. (*Some things never change.*) This time, I felt the rumbling but continued with my phone conversation. Did I mature that much in those 18 years between the two events? No. I just thought the movers two doors down were destroying someone's furniture. *Ignorance is indeed bliss.* Glad my co-workers didn't get to see another side of me that day though. I might never be able to live it down. ☺

On the salon side, Etheopea took some much needed vacation so my son Jamar did reception duty for the week. That was most helpful. With him

Appreciating Natural Beauty - Masculine Insights

After participating in this year's Natural Hair Care Expo discussions, I concluded that it was time to write a piece on male insights about beauty, filtered through the prism of their mothers. I felt the necessity for this piece because I have sons. From living with my house full of men and growing up with my Dad and an older brother, I think I have come to know a little something about the male species. It doesn't change the fact that they're still perplexing at times ☺ but I do have some insights. All the same, what it doesn't take a genius to know is that boys love their mother, implicitly and explicitly. They see beauty in her when she doesn't see it in herself. Their love is unconditional and when Mom has a healthy love and respect for herself, he will have a balanced outlook towards women. That healthy love and respect will hopefully translate into stable children and families for the future. However when Mom is hating on herself (whether her weight, her height, her hair, her features or her skin tone), Son is going to seek to correct that fatal flaw to achieve perfection for the next generation. In a way, he's still seeking to please his Mom. It's as natural as walking or breathing and comes from a child's innate desire to please the person closest to his life. Consider how much women in the

Please see *Appreciating Natural Beauty* on page 4

Anna Julia Cooper – A Raleigh Woman of Distinction from wikipedia.com

Anna "Annie" Julia Cooper was born a slave in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1858 to Hannah Stanley Haywood, an enslaved woman in the home of prominent Wake County landowner George Washington Haywood. Haywood is widely believed by historians to be the biological father of Stanley's seven daughters. Cooper had two older brothers named Andrew J. Haywood and Rufus Haywood, and worked as a domestic servant in the Haywood home. ^[1] In 1868, when Cooper was ten years old, she received a scholarship and began her education at the newly opened Saint Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute in Raleigh, founded by the local Episcopal Diocese for the purpose of training teachers to educate former slaves and their families. According to Mark S. Giles, a Cooper biographer, "the educational levels offered at St. Augustine ranged from primary to high school, including trade-skill training." ^[2] During her fourteen years at St. Augustine's, she distinguished herself as a bright and ambitious student, who showed equal promise in both liberal arts and analytical disciplines such as math and science; her subjects included languages (Latin, French, Greek), English literature, math and science. Although the school had a special track reserved for women dubbed the "Ladies' Course" and the administration actively discouraged women from pursuing higher-level courses, Cooper fought for her right to take course reserved for men, by demonstrating her scholastic ability. In fact, Cooper excelled in her academics to the point where she was able to tutor younger students. ^[3] During this period, St. Augustine's pedagogical emphasis was on training young men for the ministry and preparing them for additional training at four-year universities. One of these men, George A. C. Cooper, would later become her husband for two years until his death. ^[4] Cooper's work as a tutor also helped her pay for her educational expenses. After completing her studies, she remained at the institution as an instructor.



Anna Julia Cooper – 1858-1964

"[Her] central thesis was that the educational, moral, and spiritual progress of black women would improve the general standing of the entire African American community."

During her years as a teacher and principal at M Street High School, Cooper completed her first book, *A Voice from the South: By A Woman from the South*, published in 1892. It was her only published work, although she delivered many speeches calling for Civil rights and woman's rights ^[6]. Perhaps her most well-known volume of writing, *A Voice from the South* is widely viewed as one of the first articulations of Black feminism. The book advanced a vision of self-determination through education and social uplift for African American women. Its central thesis was that the educational, moral, and spiritual progress of black women would improve the general standing of the entire African American community.

Cooper was not only an author and educator, but she was a speaker as well. Some notable speeches were delivered at the Worlds Congress of Representative Women in 1893 (in which she was one of three black women invited to speak) and the Pan-African Conference in London in 1900..... Cooper defended her thesis *The Attitude of France on the Question of Slavery Between 1789 and 1848* in 1925. At the age of sixty-five, Cooper became the fourth black woman in American history to earn a Doctorate of Philosophy degree (University of Paris-Sorbonne).... On February 27, 1964, Cooper died in Washington, D.C. at the age of 105.

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up at college now, I'm on my own for a stand-in. I know he's not THAT far but I'm sure he'd rather do something else with his week-ends now. In the spirit of information sharing, some of you may recall back in February we participated in a "hairstory" discussion forum that was organized by Ranata Reeder—a student at the NCSU Women's Center. Well, Ranata just uploaded the video of our interviews to Youtube, so check it out, particularly if you were not able to attend the forum. People interviewed for the [pre-discussion video](#) were Dr. Moses, Dr. Grimmett, Dr. Hall-Campbell (all of NCSU) and myself. The video was a wonderful preamble to some pretty lively discussion in a somewhat ethnically mixed room. Dr. Moses is indeed a well-spring of knowledge and wisdom. Please forward the link to anyone that you think could benefit from the message.

Well, this month's issue is an interesting mélange of topics, links, etc. hopefully to inspire the soul. I've added a brief factoid about Raleigh Native Anna Julia Cooper, PhD. I had never heard of her before my husband made me aware of her. As a woman born in Raleigh myself, I must say I like this woman's spirit. She's an inspiration. I would have loved to have known her; but alas, she's in me and in many of us. So, we know her well.

Readers Speak Out about the August Issue of Au Naturel

Sending out a newsletter is much like a “message in a bottle.” You throw it in the current of life and have faith that it will touch someone...anyone. You can never really be sure but you’re hopeful. But the August issue was a pleasant surprise in regards to the message being received. The following comments are from just two of the readers who received my message of love last month and sought to return that love! I am *truly humbled* by your thoughtful consideration and acknowledgement of all points raised.

“Thank you so much for the depth of thought you provide in your newsletters! This month's newsletter was not only thought-provoking but it was filled with so much love and concern (as they ALL are). The insight you shared regarding the challenges of going natural are timely and provide a resolve for many of us who need to feel comfortable about our decision to start or maintain our natural progression.

I am sure you are busy but please consider starting a support/discussion group regarding the real concerns you address in this newsletter. I know so many sisters who are engaged in a psychological battle about whether to embrace their natural selves or surrender to the societal norms placed before us daily to conform, on the basis of appearance (one of many). Many sisters need to hear your words to reshape the false notions that have poisoned what is true and beautiful.

Thank you again for caring!”
Taz G.

“Schatzi, I just had to drop you a note to tell you that your newsletter this month was “off the hook”! :) The piece on black women and relationships was so intriguing and inspiring. You've really got me thinking about some things. That Pepsi commercial (which I had not seen before) was a total let down. I won't be purchasing their products anymore either! Anyway, please continue to put things like that out. I know a lot of black women that feel the same way your client did. She is definitely not alone.

Thanks!”
Cheryl

Thanks for allowing me to reprint your thoughts ladies. And I thank all of you readers for being a part of this (your) publication. I value all advice or comments, large or small that can keep this newsletter relevant to you. Regarding the comment “thank you...for caring” I say, my sister, I don’t know how to be any other way. Last month’s issue referenced a quote by Colton “Lil’ C” Burton about life. The trials of life are indeed painful and real. I believe that collectively speaking, Black women and Black people have more trials than many. I feel that pain. It is deep and profound. I also know that *only love can heal* a pain that is as profound and real as what I have in my own heart for my people.... It was after crying about a little girl within the salon who touched my heart so deeply that I began my lectures through the forum of the Hair Expo. In the words of the great poet and philosopher Anthony Hamilton, “The point of it all” is it to enrich the universe with God’s greatest gift and command--love. Check out this powerful [link](#) to understand why we should all endeavor to shower the universe with the chi (energy) of love. Words are power! Can you imagine the healing power of *forgiveness*? What about *laughter*? I would love to see those water molecules crystallized! Because of the influences of this clip, I wear a ring on my right thumb that spells “compassion” in Tibetan script. It is my ever-present, visual (and spiritual) reminder of life’s mission. Sometimes, I forget. Always I aspire. And *always*, I’m *giving thanks*.

In closing, I must say that I endeavor to always keep these posts upbeat and positive as they are designed to uplift. Thanks for feeling me! But honestly speaking, I DO get jaded at times. So if you ever feel that the energy of this newsletter lacks the love and positive energy that prayerfully is its hallmark, feel free to share your thoughts and say a prayer that I might “[return to love](#).” I will. The video link is of my favorite poem, beautifully written by Marianne Williamson. I close my lectures with a reading of this poem. Listen. As for the discussion group: I’m going to pray about that one. The idea is a good one, so I remain open to receive word. Before I add another morsel to my plate, I will seek guidance. Thank you for trusting me enough to make the suggestion! The spirit IS willing... ☺

Poetically Speaking – God-sight

August was a reflective month for me. Clairvoyance has been a predominant theme throughout this period. It is with this reference in mind that I penned the attached poem on August 15th. Perhaps some of you can relate to the core message. For me, I KNOW that I am made stronger and better for my life experiences [II Corinthians 12:9-10](#), Oh, but the road is grueling and relentless...

God-sight

God,
if I could reduce my ego down to the size of a grape
and squash it as effortlessly,
would I?

You are my strength, my fortress, my restful
comfort.

But why do I take such comfort in sleep?
Is that why it so often eludes me?

God,
today I solicit your help for increased understanding.
I know my weakness as a human being.
Unfortunately, I can only see a small fraction of the
whole.

Please give me god-sight
that I may see through my ego to see only You.
I am blind.

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the powerbrokers in his life. So when I've spoken with women in the context of the hair expos about the need to talk to their sons about hair and natural beauty, in the same ways that they talk to their daughters, I invariably receive some surprise. "I never thought about my son. I've been so busy trying to get/keep my daughter straight." I'm not surprised because men are often removed from the mini-drama that is hair within the Africa-American community, so it seems unnecessary to bring them into the fray. The problem is, as I've explained to many women, our sons are always going to choose natural beauty because natural is easy and instinctive. Natural is free and comfortable as Dr. Moses says "in its own skin." I then proceed to explain that when we as women are too concerned about our hair to take the sexy mid-night swim with our significant other, we have to realize that there are psychological and spiritual consequences. He may say "okay" today but tomorrow, he may just go with Heather because fi sho' "Heather is going to swim!" That reference typically gets a laugh. But, the truth of the matter is: Heather represents and celebrates natural beauty. She's down with life because she's "comfortable in her own skin." We really should not blame the Black man for desiring what is natural and beautiful. Instead, let's stop hating and start appreciating what is natural and beautiful within ourselves. Eager to testify, a sister in Tennessee shared how she attended a pool party recently and was the only Black woman swimming. She then stated that several Black men approached her afterwards and expressed sincere surprise and appreciation for that the fact that she was willing to swim. I responded, "So, you were immediately more approachable and more attractive because you were free and natural." General silence reigned across the room as these thoughts were ingested by all. I drive these points home not to make anyone insecure with their choices but only to state the obvious: Hair gets way too much play among Black women. It should not drive our enjoyment of life. It should not dictate how we interact with others. Many sisters will not let their man touch their hair AT ALL!!! What is that about?! Is there shame that drives this sentiment? If so, release it! Let him smell your hair AND touch it. Here, I'm not really hatin' on relaxed hair because if it's your own—give God thanks. Be happy and enjoy. But, hair weave that can't get wet and can't be touched is just too much work! Nurture and grow your own.

I prayerfully have modeled a natural way of life for my sons for over 19 years now. When they make their choices about life partners, I really don't know how they'll choose. She could be Black, Asian, Hispanic or Caucasian. I really don't dwell on that aspect of things because the choice ultimately is theirs. What I do know with almost 100% accuracy is that she will be a woman who is confident in her own skin. That sure knocks out a whole bunch of sisters that I saw at Hampton University's campus when I dropped off my eldest, as hair weaves were the order of the day. What troubled me most was that the mothers dropping these ladies off were obviously of the belief that their daughters needed this "extra help." Why? What is she attempting to attract with the "added adornment?" Why is what she has somehow seen as "insufficient?" When we embrace this stereotypical view of beauty we force the men in our lives to do the same by default. WE force them to choose the mainstream image of beauty. So, when they go whole hog and choose Heather, we have ourselves to blame as much as the wider society. I feel that I have stated this point a million times, but as they say, "repetition deepens impression." Embrace the Beauty of You.