Editor’s Letter-Winter 2012

December 6, 2012 By Kate Ferguson

Length and texture. For years, these two words summed up all that mattered to me when I thought about my hair. But despite what you might be thinking, I wasn’t a black girl who wanted long, straight hair. I craved a thick head of nappy, kinky curls that I could braid into fat, chunky plaits that hung past my shoulders. I visualized how, as they unfurled, they would frame my face like a fierce, fluffy mane.

Alas, my hair journey to this desired destination was sidetracked by many unfortunate detours. The first happened when I entered elementary school. There, I fell victim to the straight-hair-is-more-manageable myth, and my tresses suffered the first setback. I began pressing my hair. The result? The more my hair received hot comb kisses, the further away from my goal it took me.

By high school, I’d graduated to wearing wigs. The length and lush volume of my childhood hair had fled. What else was there to do but cover up what was left, I thought.

Then, quite by accident, I learned that my hair could bounce back. I’d been wearing a weave for several years and stopped going to the salon for servicing. I’d come to hate that long trek to the beauty parlor where heavy-handed hairstylists would apply relaxer to my reverted roots to blend the newly straightened strands into the added hair I sported. At the age of 30, I called it quits. I started doing my own hair and decided to say bye-bye to using chemicals to straighten my curls.

Unfortunately, right off the bat I faced a problem: I didn’t want to immediately remove the weave. So my roots reverted, and the new growth wrapped itself around the base of the weave. Despite any possible repercussions, however, I left the matter alone.

When I decided to remove the sections of weaved-in hair, I realized they’d become almost permanently attached. In a panic, I applied the chemical relaxer I’d sworn off. But common sense prevailed. I left the relaxer on only for the time it took for my tightly curled hair to straighten enough and unwind itself from around the sewn-together base of the weaved hair (a.k.a. wefts). Then, I carefully loosened my own hair from the wefts and gently pulled them apart. Next, to reduce damage, I rubbed oil into the areas where the hair had been attached. Then, I combed out tangles with a wide-tooth comb. Evidently, the years of not using a relaxer had paid off. Finally, my hair was in its natural state. Not only that, but it was long enough for me to put into two thick braids.

But instead of leaving my hair alone, I decided to get another relaxer—just to see how how long my hair was when it was totally straight. About one year later, when the stylist combed my tresses, all I heard was snap, crackle and pop; my hair had broken off again. That’s why one sunny summer afternoon when I went in for a touch-up, I bid my stylist adieu. Once I left the salon, I never looked back.

Nearly 20 years have passed since then. Countless fashions and hairstyling trends have come and gone, but my natural braids and hair are here to stay. I think it’s a timeless look, don’t you?

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