A Hair Tale

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When I first heard the news that more black women than ever were eschewing relaxers and wearing their hair in its natural state, that was no surprise to me. During the past few years, I've noticed a marked increase in the number of African-American women I've seen who are rocking natural hair.

During my childhood, I grew up loving the soft, puffy feel of my hair after my mother combed out the tangles and fashioned my hair into thick, puffy plaits that bounced around as I jumped rope or played hopscotch with other little girls in my neighborhood. (I say this at the risk of dating myself because kids these days probably don't know what the heck hopscotch is.) But back to my favorite subject...hair.

Back then, like many other young girls who had virgin hair untouched by a straightening comb or relaxers, my hair was of moderate length and healthy. When unbraided and combed out straight, my hair would fan out around my head framing my face in a wild halo. But at that age there were no hairstyles for me. My mother would simply comb out my hair, rub Dixie Peach (Hey, is this product even still around?) between her palms and use it to hold and smooth down my tresses. She'd brush my hair without mercy, until the pomade melted into my curls and laid every single strand flat. Then she'd gather a section of hair and separate it into three parts to fashion either loose three-strand braids or she'd plait my hair closer to my scalp in tight, neat cornrows. Where I was born, cornrowed tresses was the everyday style of choice to support a well-groomed look and maximum growth. (I have to say that the cornrows my mother did weren't the kind that hurt your head and pulled out your hair.) When gently braided, cornrowed hair simply prevents the hair from unraveling to achieve a neat, well-groomed look that lasts for several days.

Although I have no scientific evidence, just take a look around you. There are so many little black girls who have long, thick, healthy hair that grows without a problem. Once the straightening begins, however, watch out! Ostensibly done to make the hair more "manageable" to manipulate into a greater variety of styles, hair straightening is the culprit that often places young girls on the road losing their hair to damage and breakage. Once they hit their teens, so many have lost much of their healthy, beautiful hair.

For me, that's when my ongoing journey began. I vowed to return my hair to its pre-straightened childhood glory. Please comment and tell me if you can relate. I'd love to hear your stories.

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