

A Meditation on Hair

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I know it's a bit random, but as I type today's column I am in fact sitting in an airport lounge awaiting a flight to see one of the best people in the world, my brother. I'm lucky. Lucky to have such an amazing human in my life and lucky to be able to occasionally pop down for a visit. What does that have to do with hair? Well if you follow the bouncing ball that is in my mind, it's because sitting in an airport now, reminds me of sitting in an airport many years ago where I passed the time people-watching and noticed a woman with purple hair.

If we have had occasion to cross paths, you'll perhaps know that I too have purple hair. I know, I know, in the profile picture in this paper it simply looks grey and for the most part it is. But nothing says 'aging gracefully' like adding a few streaks of purple. At least in my mind, that is! Yes, I was one of the many who chose the pandemic as an ideal opportunity to ditch the dye and embrace the reality that I am 50+ and 'touching up' my hair every few weeks was tiresome, expensive and who knows, maybe not all that good for me, either. Locked up within the four walls of my own home seemed like a good time to experiment with yet another new 'colour.' (Perhaps I should also mention here that one of my besties used to regularly ask 'What colour is your hair this week?') Turns out I quite liked the grey, but after years of dyeing my hair various colours I wasn't content to simply go grey. What to do? Spice it up with a touch of purple was my answer.

That said, the truth for most women is our relationship with hair is fraught with a myriad of emotions, self-judgment and, when pressed, I'm betting many of us would admit to a flat out love/hate relationship with our hair. Some mornings I wake up and look in the mirror and wonder what happened to the young, vibrant me. The grey feels washed out, old and frumpy, even with the little splash of purple. Then I harken back to the days of colouring my hair; either loving or hating the current colour choice and then also dealing with things like hating the way it was cut, the style, the curls or the fact that when straightened the ends look dry enough to start a fire. I think about every woman I have ever known who at some point in their lives has hated their hair, had a bad haircut (or perm!) who left a hairdresser to find a new one rather than say they didn't like the style, or who loves their hairdresser more than their psychiatrist and will follow them willingly from salon to salon even if that means a 2-3-hour drive from home. Women often spend inordinate amounts of money on their hair and will invest in any number of products that claim to do everything from helping hair to shine, to curl, to look wavy or straight, or that will hold hair in place even through gale-force winds.

For many of us, how our hair 'turns out' in the morning potentially impacts our entire day. We'll say things like 'I'm having a good hair day,' or we lament that humid weather causes a 'bad hair day.' We will lounge in a pool, but not swim underwater so as not to ruin our hair and we'll alternate between avoiding wearing hats when our hair looks great or wearing one to cover up a bad case of 'bed-head.' Our relationship with hair can vary by culture and ethnicity and even by religion - this conversation is barely touching the surface of the discussion. Hair is too thick or too thin, and for men it might often disappear altogether - the topic of baldness could fill an entire column in and of itself. Then too, there are those persons facing treatment for disease who go through the trauma of losing their hair and/or when it grows back, it's entirely different. In short, hair dominates the discussion often, and quite often, not in a good way.

Back to the airport. (Bouncing ball indeed!) I don't care what anyone says, sometimes?sometimes we judge, not just ourselves but others too. We glance at a person, admire their hair, or their clothes, and sometimes we make snap judgments that are not as complimentary. We have no right to do so and hopefully, most of us strive not to. But here's how negativity and truth sometimes comes back to bite us.

As a young woman, many years ago in a moment of weakness, a woman walked past me at the airport with a bold streak of purple hair slashing through her grey. She was quite a bit older - realistically, probably about the age I am now. As I sit here, I shamefully recall thinking to myself, 'Oh, give it up, you're getting older, just admit it.' Hmm. My bad. Judged on the basis of my perceptions and what constituted an 'appropriate' hair colour for a woman of a certain age. I'm older now and I sincerely hope I've grown as a person since then. I hope I've released the ridiculousness of measuring self-worth (of myself AND of others) against impossible

beauty standards set solely by those who seek to profit from our emotion-laden relationship with our hair. I hope I've learned what that woman in the airport all those years ago obviously already knew; that hair should be embraced, colour should be played with, hair should reflect our personality and if you are bold enough (or trying hard to be bold enough) to plonk a streak or two of purple (or any colour!) into your hair - good for you! Be bold. Be grateful you have hair! Anyone judging you is the one with the real issue.

So here is my very public Mea Culpa, to the beautiful purple-haired airport lady from all those years ago.