

## Chapter 9

### My Hair

I shaved my head 10 months ago. Well, technically I didn't shave it. I buzzed it. I had a little hair left. About a quarter of an inch. Having had hair down to my waist for many years people were surprised by the sudden change and wanted to know, “Why?”.

Since I was in my teens I'd wanted to cut off all my hair or do something outrageous like spike it or dye it a wild color. I never did. Fear stopped me. I was worried about discrimination. I thought that buzzed hair on a woman would lead to people to treat me different. Maybe they would think I wasn't smart, serious, or a hard worker. I thought looking “regular” helped teachers to like me or at least not dislike me. I thought it helped me easily get the jobs I wanted. It made me feel more confident not having to worry about people judging me because I had different hair. I wanted to do something unusual with my hair, but I didn't want to stand out.

Ten months ago my life was undergoing a lot of transitions. Things had ended and new things had begun. The change had happened very rapidly in a matter of a few months.

I'd rented out my beloved home and moved into a condo next to my daughter's high school. To finance the large mortgage I'd accepted a well-paid position with a previous employer that wanted me back. It was work I loved, so I was thrilled to be able to go back and work for them full-time. However, in accepting this full-time position I had to let go of my private massage practice that I'd just spent the previous year building up. This was hard to let go of. I love giving massage and the business had just gotten to the point where I could envision it paying the bills.

Along with doing bodywork, I was teaching at the Santa Rosa Junior

College part time. I'd spent two semesters teaching Physiology 1, a challenging course, and the time I had invested was just about to pay back. I imagined that the next semester, it would take about half the time to teach the course as it had the first semester. Unfortunately, with the new job it made more sense to give this up as well.

When I first decided to move (and that process is another good story), I imagined the move was temporary. I thought I would be in the condo until my daughter graduated and then return home, perhaps even picking up where I had left off. However, as time went on, I felt that the Santa Rosa house and life was behind me and that I was moving forward. I sensed something big was about to happen. I envisioned the company I worked for experiencing phenomenal growth as a result of my input and in response to the drive and efforts of their new marketing director. I felt momentum. I was excited.

When there is so much change happening, it seems helpful to do an inventory to see what's left. Despite the positive changes and expectations for the future, I took time to experience the loss of the “teaching at the Junior College and doing massage” dream/life. I also noticed that long term desire and drive to find a partner and have a second child was beginning to fade. I'm not sure whether it was deciding 42 years old was too late, in light of there being no prospective mates in sight, or if I was getting excited by the prospect of complete freedom when my daughter graduated in four years.

It was probably a combination. I realized that I didn't really want to have more children. What I really wanted was to have had a big family. This hadn't happened. I was 42 and I didn't have the big family I'd wanted. Sure, it was still a possibility. I could marry into a big family. My daughter might decide to have a dozen kids. I might create an alternative family that would satisfy that desire. But right in that moment, 10 months ago, I woke up to the fact that I didn't have a big family. That was something that I'd wanted for my 20's, 30's, and 40's

and it hadn't happened.

I started reviewing my life. What else had I wanted that I'd never gotten or done?

I'd always wanted to go to medical school. Here again was something that I could still do. In fact, I always said I'd go when I was 50 years old. Sometimes, I'd threaten to join my daughter at college and get my M.D. while she got her bachelor degree. The potential of doing this was certainly still there, but what I realized was that much as I'd like to be a medical doctor, I wasn't really interested in investing the time and money into the training program. Something that used to be really important to me just wasn't anymore. I'd made different choices. Certainly for the next 4 years I was tied to a job I loved in a condo next to my daughter's school. Getting a medical degree wasn't worth the time and effort it would take.

I felt the loss of my dreams. I evaluated my choices. I projected back in time and reaffirmed my decisions. I chose to be an active player in my daughter's life and that choice had brought me to where I was. I also chose to be actively involved in personal growth and learning how to live in balance and that choice also had consequences. Just because my life was a result of my choices didn't limit the impact of reality when it hit me.

I wasn't a medical doctor and I didn't have a big family.

My chances to have a big family and become a medical doctor had past. I had other interests now. I really felt how finite life is. I couldn't make it to fit my desires. I wasn't going to get to do everything I wanted in the way I wanted to do it. There simply wasn't enough time. My choices were limited by time and energy and by the other choices I'd made.

That is how it went. Over a period of several days I adjusted to my new realizations. One morning I was looking in the mirror and nodding at myself.

“You don't have a big family”.

“You are not a doctor”.

“And you never cut off all your hair.”

That was it. It was just a passing thought. Granted I was a little bit angry. Hell, I was disappointed. Things had not gone the way I'd wanted them to. I knew that what I had was perfect and fine and great, but it wasn't what I wanted. In perfect addict fashion I wanted everything I had and the things I had given up to get what I had. Yes, and I was a little peeved that I had so little control. Well, you know what happened next.

I had wanted to buzz my head for over 20 years and of the three things it was something I still had a chance to do. I made a quick check on my situation. I was employed, my boss was out of town for two months, and my job was primarily writing. I didn't have to worry about impressing anyone. I didn't have much contact with our customers. I'd like to say that I was completely free and uninhibited, but no, I did the math first. This was as good a time as any to shave my head.

Out came the scissors. I just started cutting. The bottom 9 inches came off first. I liked the way it looked. I wanted to stop. When I was 17 years old I managed to cut this much off and stopped because it looked good and I wasn't sure how I'd look with it shorter. I reminded myself that I was cutting it all off today and proceeded.

I cut off some more. And then some more. My hair got shorter and shorter. With each increment I would look it over and want to stop. “It

looks good at this length. I don't know how it will look shorter.” I wavered. Then I'd look myself straight in the eye and say, “Do you want to spend the next 20 years wishing you'd cut all your hair off?”

With resolve I realized that I couldn't do much more with scissors. I needed hair clippers. I contemplated the state of my head for a second, told myself “people actually wear their hair like this”, and headed for the car and Kmart. Within half an hour I was back home with a hair clipper set.

The clippers were wonderful. I attached the ½ inch blade first and gave it a try. It was effortless to cut the hair down to ½ inch even, all the way around. I actually liked the way it looked. It was stark. There I was “naked”. I felt empowered. I might not be able to get a medical degree or have a large family, but I was able to buzz the hair off my head. And all by myself for that matter. I nodded, pulled off the ½ inch blade, and snapped the ¼ inch blade in place. Within minutes I was done. My hair was ¼ inch long.

I contemplated the 1/8 inch blade, but decided I wasn't quite ready for that.

It was neat having really short hair. Absolutely no maintenance. I'd let it grow for a month or so and then buzz it again. Not surprising that once my hair was cut off, I ended up in the public eye on a couple of occasions. The first was a TV interview and the second was a distributor training. Not much I could do about it. I just showed up as is - short hair and all.

I also had a clipper disaster one of the times I buzzed. I'd finished and set the clippers down, when I noticed my hair wasn't quite even at the temples. I picked up the clippers to remedy the situation. As I was puzzling the large amount of hair that fell with that last pass, I noticed the blade guard had fallen off the clippers. Oh, darn. I had achieved the 1/8 inch look I'd been avoiding. Unfortunately the close cut was

only in one spot right above my left ear.

I wasn't entirely happy about the situation. Nor did I enjoy walking into work the following day. They were used to my short hair, since it had been a couple months since I first cut it off, but they weren't sure what to make of this new look. I'd tried to blend the short patch into the rest of my hair, but it was still noticeable. You could tell by the way they looked but said nothing they were trying to decide if I was I trying to make a fashion statement and whether they should laugh, ask what happened or compliment me on the "change".

To make matters worse. This all happened days before I was to leave for Europe to meet with a couple of our vendors and a researcher from Pennsylvania that we were collaborating with. Despite cutting my hair, I am still the person that thinks first impressions are important and that there is potential for being judged as a woman with a buzz cut. I'm not sure why, but it did seem important that my hair be at least 3/8 inch long when I met this researcher. And for the most part it was.

That was the last time I cut my hair. The clippers were retired to the bottom drawer in the downstairs bathroom vanity. My hair began to slowly grow out. My friends watched with interest. "Are you letting it grow out now." "It looks really good short."

I didn't really have a plan. I knew that the road from short hair to long hair was really difficult. That was really the primary reason I'd never chopped my hair off before. Did I want to go through that in between period? Did I want long hair again?

As can be expected the maintenance free period only lasted a month or so. Then I'd wake up with my hair plastered in weird positions. This I could still manage. I actually had to wash my hair more often now that it was short, just to keep it laying flat.

Sometimes it seemed like I needed to make a decision immediately. It was just too unmanageable. It was time to do something about it. Shape it. Train it. Something. Then it would get a little longer and become more manageable (or maybe I'd just get used to it.)

Then I was fired from my job and became concerned about being presentable at interviews. My friends continued to assure me my hair looked great and in perfect shape for interviews. Truth be known, when I looked around at other short-haired women I noticed that many times short hair just does what it wants to. I also noticed that I didn't judge people based on the state of their hair. I began to relax about my hair. I told myself, "You don't have to like it. It is just hair." and "Smile and you'll look beautiful."

Still I was beginning to feel the pressure. Yes, my hair was short, but if I didn't trim it it would get long. Not making a decision would mean I was making a decision to have long hair. I wanted to make a conscious decision regarding my hair. That's when I really realized there was some emotional baggage surrounding my hair. I had strong opinions and judgements regarding hair length.

I liked long hair and disliked short hair.

Now, was this really true? I'd always said this, but if it was true for me, how could it be possible for me to have short hair? Do I really dislike my hair? No, in fact up until the last couple of weeks I really was enjoying my hair. In fact, I actually thought it looked better on me than long hair. I was having a case of inner conflict. It was time to examine my beliefs and feelings.

I realized my feelings or opinions about hair had been set along time ago. Until I was six I had long brown wavy hair. I think I got a lot of positive attention for it. This is one of the reasons I think I have an attachment to long hair. In addition, my mother always said that my

father liked long hair. I don't ever remember my father saying this, but certainly if long hair was what my father liked then long hair was best. In contrast, I always remember my mother commenting on how nice I looked in short hair. She thought it made my eyes stand out and my eyes were another feature that I'd gotten a lot of attention for. But I didn't like my mother growing up and her liking short hair would have been a good reason for me to reject it.

Although this might have supported a bias towards long hair, my feelings seemed to run deeper. I think the inner conflict I felt regarding hair was due to an emotional trauma I endured the summer I turned six. That was the summer my father cut my hair really short and I was devastated.

My father always trimmed my brothers' hair and my grandfathers' hair in the basement in his work room. I remember sitting on a stool downstairs in the work room on the occasion in question while my father trimmed my hair. I guess my mother had told him to do it, since he would never had been inclined to do it given his preference for long hair. I'm not sure if she had asked him to trim it or cut it short, but really short is what I got. It was just an inch or two long when he was done. When he was almost finished, I remember my mom walking in the room and them having some sort of argument. They were both upset. Whatever the plan had been, my hair was shorter than either of them wanted. I “knew” from their conversation that my hair had been “ruined”. My father was defensive. There was some talk that I was at fault because I had not sat still. Apparently, my dad had to keep cutting my hair shorter and shorter as he tried to even it out.

Since my dad has training as a barber, I wonder now if perhaps he'd been drunk or mad at my mom. I also don't understand why my hair was being cut at all, perhaps I was being “punished” for not brushing my hair regularly? This would be in line with my mother's belief that it was her job to teach me lessons. Or maybe it was simply a mistake.

Perhaps I was supposed to get a trim and the short cut was a mistake.

I never believed the comments my mother made about how good I looked in short hair. I thought she was just trying to make me feel better regarding that hair disaster. In addition, I couldn't believe her because I didn't like how I looked in short hair. In fact, I still feel pressure from her to keep my hair short.

It is interesting how the past bleeds in to the present. Not only am I responding to outside pressure regarding my hair, I also equate short hair to “ruined” or less desirable at some level of my consciousness. If I equate short hair to being a bad person, it is not surprising for me to have difficulty “owning” my short hair.

The idea that short hair is less desirable has also been reinforced in my adult life. I remember my second husband saying something like, “Woman always cut their hair short after they have a child.” I can't remember what the point of the sentence was, something about shifting sexuality, but fourteen years after it was spoken I can still remember the sentence. For me to remember such a statement means that it hit me in a sore spot. There was some unresolved issue that the statement stirred up for me. At the time I'm certain to have voiced a denial of such a sweeping statement. Further I would have claimed that even if the stereotype of short hair after children was accurate, I would think it would have more to do with the need for ease than a desire to become less attractive. However, that statement, the message behind it, and my reaction to it reminded me that short hair was undesirable.

In the recent past, my friends have been saying encouraging things about my hair and how good it looks short. As it continues to grow out, the urgency to make a decision regarding my hair is increasing. I don't like the stage it is in. Others are noticing also that it is getting a little fly away. Today, someone said, “Have you thought about getting a trim.”

I have a choice about whether to live in the past or live in the present. Does all that analysis and inventory help me live in the present? No not necessarily. The truth is the question is very simple, “Do I want to cut my hair?” “Do I want short hair ?”

You know I really do like long hair. I find long hair more attractive and more beautiful. These are my preferences. On the other hand I am enjoying my hair short. It resonates with who I am today. I like the ease, simplicity, and no frills. Although, people tell me I look better with short hair, I feel less adorned, more exposed. This hair state matches the changes that have been going on inside me.

So I'd like to keep it short. And this brings me to the next hurdle of how to trim it. Can I do this myself or do I need to find help? Or maybe the question should be: Can I allow someone else to trim it? I know I'm not willing to hire someone for this job, but would I even trust someone to trim my hair. Oh no! Another can of worms! With every new choice I make I am faced with letting go of that which was not chosen.