

WISDOM FROM

ME, MY HAIR, AND I

Twenty-seven Women Untangle an Obsession

REBECCA NEWBERGER GOLDSTEIN

Being the late sixties, we took turns ironing each other's tresses to suppress any bourgeois pro-war tendencies toward curling. My hair and I have grown into ourselves and know what we're about.

SULEIKA JAOUAD

Chemotherapy is a take-no-prisoners stylist. I was angry at the teenage version of myself, for nitpicking over the color and texture of my hair, when now I had no hair at all.

MARITA GOLDEN

If you are a Black woman, hair is serious business. Black women's hair is knotted and gnarled by issues of race, politics, history, and pride.

ANNE LAMOTT

Dreadlocks make people wonder if you're trying to be rebellious. It's not as garbling and stapled as a tongue stud, say, or as snaky as tattoos. Most people, if asked, might wonder if perhaps dreadlocks are somewhat unpatriotic—isn't it unpatriotic not to comb your hair?

PATRICIA VOLK

High-functioning hair obsessives rarely go it alone. We have a team. The products, the people. Was our species given bigger brains so we could worry about our hair? Hello, Darwin? Why us? Why me?

ALEX KUCZYNSKI

Women celebrities talk about their pubic hair in an open and casual way, and I am still not used to hearing it.

ROSIE SCHAAP

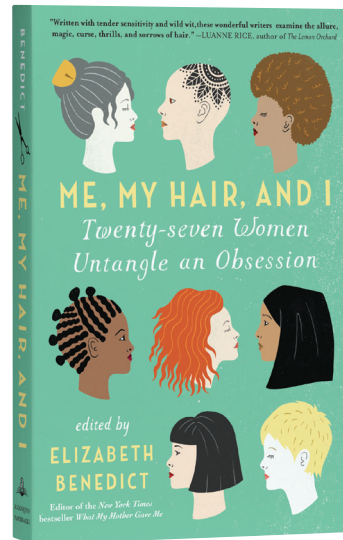
How I once longed for hair like hers; how deeply and unhappily I knew I would never have it. My hair can only stand to grow so much, and then, when it has no more will, it stops.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE

Decent men were to avoid women with hairy bodies, women with reddish hair, and women with bald or balding scalps. Hindu Bengali tradition requires widows to keep their heads permanently shaved as one of many gestures of penance.

EMMA GILBEY KELLER

"Your hair is so thick," my grandmother used to tell me with a curled-lip emphasis that immediately turned the statement into an insult. When I was pregnant with my first child, Molly, I didn't cut my hair. I felt like Björn Borg, who never cut his hair or shaved during Wimbledon, for luck.



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ADRIANA TRIGIANI

I figure when Madonna gets scared about changing her hair, something is about to blow again, like Vesuvius. Never one to sulk, I shook up my routine and cut my long hair short, into a wedge. It was a disaster. I was the only girl in my ninth-grade class who looked fifty-three.

DEBORAH TANNEN

Another woman told me that after she appeared on television standing behind the president of the United States in a bill-signing ceremony, her mother's comment was, "I could see you didn't have time to cut your bangs."

HONOR MOORE

I have been told that the dance of my hands twisting and lifting my thick curtain of hair is an act of kinetic sculpture. I believed my hair was how I might claim beauty, and beauty was freedom I would make for myself, not artifice designed by others.

MARIA HINOJOSA

As I came to accept and even love my wild hair, it became a way for me to feel power that I had never experienced. But soon after, when I was asked to anchor my own show, I was told to tie my hair back and make its distinctiveness disappear. I think they wanted me to be a Latina Talbots model.



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*Twenty-seven Women Untangle an Obsession***KATIE HAFNER**

Of course, many women want another woman's hair. If yours is curly, you wish it were straight. If it's black, you want it blond. If it's blond, you want it to look more ethnic.

Now, four years after her death, when I conjure an image of my sister at the end of her life, the first thing to appear in my mind's eye is her hair, still long—and kept meticulously straight.

JANE GREEN

I wanted so badly to be someone I wasn't, wanted so badly to find a way to be comfortable in my skin. Hair was simply the easiest thing to change.

I scraped my hair back in a ponytail, eschewed makeup, and took the kids to the beach every day, where we made picnics and built sand castles.

DEBORAH FELDMAN

Eventually I threw away my wigs. I abandoned the community that had forced me to wear them.

My hair was my strength. I would never again allow that strength to be undermined.

RU FREEMAN

My oldest brother grows his down to his waist and when pressured to cut it by our mother, when she was still alive, would invoke Samson.

As I grew up, I learned to organize my clothing around my hair: whatever looked best with whatever my hair happened to be doing was what I wore. It never failed to work its magic.

ELIZABETH SEARLE

Years before I was born, Mom saw JFK speak as a presidential candidate, his famously fab hair tousled in the wind. He looked, Mom reported reverently, "like a Greek god."

It was worth all the hard brushing and twisting needed to create ponytailed perfection. I was learning this lesson young: beauty hurts.

HALLIE EPHRON

Everything in the salon is pink or gray, including Mr. Latour, who has thick gray curls that remind me of a French poodle.

It's a good thing no one asks me what I think, because if I try to say anything I'll burst into tears. All the way home I'm thinking, I hate my hair, I hate my hair, I hate my hair.

DEBORAH JIANG-STEIN

My father's big, clumsy fingers, thick as the smuggled Cuban cigars he smoked, braided my hair, a mass of black hair like a troll doll, into weak twists.

The intimacy blends my two mothers—my hands stroking my dying mother's hair, and the strands of my baby hair that my birth mother kept.

SIRI HUSTVEDT

I especially liked the braiding ritual, liked the sight of my child's ears and the back of her neck, liked the feel and look and smell of her shiny brown hair, liked the folding over and under of the three skeins of hair between my fingers.

We are the only mammals who braid, knot, powder, pile up, oil, spray, tease, perm, color, curl, straighten, augment, shave off, and clip our hair.

MYRA GOLDBERG

Before adopting, when I mentioned difficulties I might face raising a biracial child, people often started talking about hair.

JULIA FIERRO

Why would I let my adorable little girl, so often compared to the dimple-cheeked, ringlet-adorned Shirley Temple, be turned into what most strangers thought was an adorable little boy?

Wanting my daughter to look like a girl made me feel not only like a bad mother, but also like a bad feminist.

DEBORAH HOFMANN

My hair, like a Persian rug, she said, was my own magic flying carpet. Adventures and romance would be mine. Taking care of my hair seemed part of the fare.

I confess, fussing with my hair meant surrendering the saintly pedestal of the illness, the prolonged privileges and considerations I earned as Miss Cancer.

JANE SMILEY

All I knew was, the hairstyle that I chose from the styling book was called *Femme Fatale*. Or maybe it was *Harlot*.

The bonus I got with this haircut was that I could put a hat on, take it off, and have the hair fly out to its intended shape again. It was just like Barbie in every way.

ANNE KREAMER

I'd fretted that having gray hair would make me feel even more invisible than a middle-aged woman ordinarily feels. But I was happily shocked to discover the opposite.

Much to my surprise, when I stopped coloring my hair, time began to slow down, in a good way.

Rather than depressing me, every glance in the mirror at my gray hair has become a *carpe diem* moment.

ELIZABETH BENEDICT

The older I get, it seems, the more attention I pay to my hair, and the more outright fakery I'm willing to bankroll and endure.

I can't bear admitting to myself that I belong to a cult, albeit millions of members strong, whose core belief—whose only belief—is that our fake hair color is essential to our well-being.

I'm embarrassed by my vanity, but I'd be more embarrassed to go gray, gracefully or any other way.

