

Brush Fights

As my hairstyles changed, so did my outlook.

Society throws a fit when advertising perpetuates the idea that looks define a woman. Let's face it girls: America is an appearance-based society. Yes, I am a woman who strongly agrees that physicality is of utmost importance. This is not a shallow perspective meant to spread the cycle of cookie-cutter cover models. It is quite the opposite. Admitting that looks matter makes it easier to embrace your own uniqueness.

The Perm

I wanted to be a grown up. Like any little girl, I spent hours in front of the mirror practicing with curling tools of all shapes and sizes. Smoothed under. Flipped out. Hot rollers. Shirley Temple spirals. Loopy waves. Pin straight hair was my destiny, one that I chose not to accept.

I convinced myself that a perm was my magic wand to hair happiness. I would walk in a seventh-grader, but walk out a suave teenager. Two hours in the beauty chair would solve every problem. My hair would swish with each step like the Pantene Pro-V commercials, full of body and shine. Friends would stare in awe. Guys would relish tugging loose curls between their fingers.

Such were my expectations as I anxiously waited with my head full of plastic. The cosmetologist unwrapped each pink roller, revealing locks of hair wound as tight as a new Slinky. My nose stung with a chemical odor screaming of abnormality.

It looked worse. "It'll loosen up in a month or two!" my mom encouraged.

My older brother wasn't a fan of the subtle approach. "You look like a French Poodle. What did you do that for?" He barked at me and petted my hair at every opportunity.

At the time my mouth was also full of metal brackets linked with neon rubber bands. Glasses drew attention to unplucked eyebrows. My physique resembled a love for fettuccini alfredo more than any sports involvement.

Thirteen years old is not a shining memory.

Overdrive

The perm grew out after two years, much to everyone's relief. I was determined to do anything necessary to save my high school hair fate from that of my middle school experience. I could only find courage to trim my hair for fear of living with another disaster through graduation. Leaving the house without blow drying was simply unacceptable. I woke up early in order to sculpt my extra-long locks into the silky curls the perm didn't deliver.

I hit the treadmill, embraced marinara, and eventually lost the layer of pre-pubescent padding on my body. Contact lenses and tweezers became my friend. I divided the pictures of my life into stacks, scrapbooking the “cute” and destining the “other” pile to the basement dungeon.

I did everything expected of a seventeen year old.

Balance Beam

My hair is as straight as ever now in college. I’m in remission from fear of scissors, playing around with layers and even – gasp! – bangs. I’ve mastered using a curling iron in a timely fashion, but it takes a special occasion to warrant its use. If you love me, you better love a ponytail. A nickname stuck as an ode to the Poodle look; I will be deemed “Frenchie” by my family well into middle age.

Physically, I took it down a notch. I was surprised to discover relief after years of obsessing about looks. I find it extremely ironic that I met my first boyfriend at the heaviest I’d ever been. That was a turning point of self-acceptance. He didn’t fall in love with my concept of a perfect image. He simply fell in love with me.

I’ve since lost the weight, but it wouldn’t kill me like it used to if a few pounds crept back. I laugh while showing my boyfriend the “other” set of pictures, now occupying a place inside the photo album.

At 21 years old, I’m still waiting to be a grown up. Once in awhile, I even whip out the glasses.

This is happiness.