

Featured story:

LAUGHING HAIRCUT

Written by Max Neil Maximchuk

It's time for a haircut. But what to do with that unruly hair? Maybe the best thing is to fork out the extra money and place yourself in the hands of the experts.

My hair goes its way and I go mine. It's an understanding we've reached over the years. Sometimes I was resentful because my hair almost always seemed to get its way and I was the one who had to adjust or accept but sometimes life is like that. I've been told that this matrimony between hair and person is similar for others and this brings some consolation to me. So rather than continuing to fight a losing battle I gave in more often. It was either that or lose my relationship with my hair altogether and I didn't want to be hairless. Even with all the problems, I could still see some silver lining in it.

In spite of our differences, I really like my hair. The colouring of it, the feel of it, even more than the look of it. When it's worn long I can feel its frequent sensual brushing against my neck and shirt collar. I have tried persuading it to follow some particular pattern, like having a part line here, or to please not reach so skyward there. As I said, it makes its own mind up about these things. Short of a heavy gel or grease application, I know that no matter how many times the hair stylist shows me how my freshly cut hair looks at different angles from the handheld mirror, it will not last a moment once I step out that door leading to the street. A gentle puff of wind is all that is needed and long before I get home or to whatever destination, my hair will be pointing to a multitude of directions simultaneously. If I meet somebody familiar to me, one of the first words after the initial greeting could very well be asking me why I didn't bother to brush my hair after getting up.

In Winnipeg there was this hair salon on Portage. It claimed fame as the place to go for many of the local and visiting celebrities. It was more expensive but they were reputed to work miracles. So I tried it.

There was a person not unlike a maître d' who showed me where to wait until my appointed team was ready. The latest trendy magazines were artfully spread out on the designer table before me and soon I was interrupted from my reading to be escorted to a place to exchange my shirt for a fashionable nearly floor length cloak which protected the rest of my clothes from stray hairs.

Another person led me to a place where the preliminary work was carried out, specialists in relaxing the client, washing and rinsing out the hair, and getting everything prepared for when the star cutters turned their attention to the latest client.

Now sitting in a swivel chair in front of a long stretch of mirrors, I could watch the choreographed activity from different parts of the room. The ingratiating laughs, the exaggerated exclamations, the off-colour comments, the juicy gossip, the sometimes bizarre combinations of bold colours of clothes and hair, all welcomed you into this theatre of arts. You couldn't help feeling part of it and that, with all this expression and creativity, well, maybe something could be done with your hair after all.

A man started in my direction but twice hands pulled on his shoulder along the way, distracting him temporarily. A comment was made, a joke exchanged. He seemed popular, capable and confident and he was headed my way.

He introduced himself as Doug and easily asked what we had in mind today. I told him that I didn't have anything in particular set in stone but there were some general guidelines I'd appreciate him following (no special colouring or shaving, for example). I discussed with him the stubborn streak my hair holds fast to and how this might affect

our options. He nodded understandably, obviously having encountered this sort of thing countless times. My time with him wouldn't be all that challenging and those objectives could easily be accomplished.

He immediately set to work and we made light conversation. It quickly became apparent that we both had a good sense of humour and at that moment of our crossing of paths, we both seemed to be especially predisposed to exploring it a little further. He combed and snipped as we exchanged even funnier anecdotes. There were times that we came across something in a story, or maybe it was just the way it was said, that was so funny he had to put the comb and scissors down. Once some form of control and decorum returned we attempted to continue with the task of my hair being styled.

But the taste one feels in such a full release is hard to give up and soon we were back at it, one providing good audience for the other, prompting and inspiring each other to even more hilarious nuances, turns of speech, even fresh new jokes.

The session lasted much more time than it would have otherwise taken, but we both felt good after so much expenditure. It was like a good workout, but now, the eyes no longer crying, the stomach without its contractions or the protective hands covering it as you were doubled over, we could relax and look deeply into the mirror to inspect the final product.

I have to admit I was still not completely over the effects of all that laughter. I would have liked almost anything, being in such good spirits. I gave that reflective person in the mirror a cursory glance and perhaps feeling a little embarrassed after laughing so much, was eager to pay the bill and leave.

I opened the door to a very windy day and proceeded for a content walk home. Once in my apartment I decided to have another closer look at what Doug the Stylist had done.

The wind and the walk home gave me a different perspective and there was no amount of water or rigorous combing and brushing that could have had much effect on the monstrosity I saw on top of my head.

Some people have an innate understanding of the few and simple laws of nature, and some have to learn the hard way. There aren't many but that afternoon I learned through experience that never, but never, do you engage the person cutting your hair in hilarious conversation.

This is a true story as the other anecdotes are. There were some lessons in life I forgot as quickly as I had learned them. This, fortunately, is one that stuck with me. Too much joking around with hair stylists and other important authority figures is definitely not a recommended route to take.