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I need more hair and less trim

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I need a haircut. I've needed one for a couple of weeks. It's bushing out back there.

Those who know me will think I'm just joking around since I have more hair in my ears than I do on my head.

Because I now guzzle memory-saving olive oil by the quart at every meal, I can still recall when I had lots of hair on my head and no hair in my ears.

Head hair fled in my late 20s. I may have run it off by shampooing with bars of Ivory soap.

Ear hair invaded without warning in my late 50s. It was a midnight landing on deserted-but-fertile soil. I awoke one morning with dueling thickets bristling in each hole.

I accused the resident gardener of fertilizing me with Miracle-Gro.

"I wasn't aware that you were lacking compost between your ears," she replied.

When I lived in Washington, D.C., in the late 70s, I would go to an upscale, male-only barbershop near K Street. It was a genuine barbershop, not a "tonorial salon."

Joe would drape a cloth over my suit, dizzy me up with three flashy chair spins, shave the back of my neck, snip the air for about 30 seconds and then pronounce me done.

I would hand him \$25 while scanning the autographed customer photos on his "glory wall." These beamers included two former presidents, many White House hopefuls and lesser luminaries who voters had rejected or juries had convicted.

Those who could, Democrats and Republicans alike, copied John F. Kennedy's hair. I noticed several plug jobs and even a couple of hair pieces. Five customers had used the same mirthless witticism: "To Joe: Who knows."

None of the political wigglers and waddlers on his wall looked like me. I took this as more evidence that guys who favor Nikita Khrushchev don't win American elections against guys who look like Ringo Starr.

"Do you want my photograph?" I asked.

“What for?”

I pointed at his wall.

“No more room,” he said, ignoring an empty space the size of an outdoor billboard.

“You could take down Nixon and put up me.”

“Are you famous?” he asked.

“Well, my secretary generally remembers my name,” I said. “And I do get haircuts here.”

“True,” Joe said, “but these photographs advertise that I cut hair in the plural sense of the word. Nothing personal, but your head is a bad rap on me and my profession.”

Joe always gave me a hand mirror so that I could approve his work at the back. My rear fringe, before and after, always looked about the same, a kind of post-adolescent ducktail.

He explained that I had a “natural curl that supplies the volume that every woman wants.”

(I guess this is my major cool.)

“Is ‘natural curl’ the same as sticking straight out?” I asked. (I had always assumed that this unruliness was just an involuntary reflection of my personality.)

“You could just let it grow wild like Einstein,” he said.

“Einstein looked like Einstein. I’d look like a bum.”

“Maybe our best path forward would be for you to get your wife to cut your hair, which I’m using mostly in the singular sense of the word.”

“I’m not married.”

“Grow out your half-dozen stalks. You’ll be irresistible, just like Albert.”

My local barber in residence has always approached this task reluctantly. She’s uncomfortable using an electric hedge trimmer on my natural curl.

I continue to ask her to cut my hair, because there are no barbers where we live ... and because I am cheap. (I do use shampoo these days, but it’s like closing the barn door after the horses have escaped.)

I’ve offered to cut her hair in trade, but she’s declined for reasons that she’s never explained. I’ve even promised to use the good scissors, the one I use on gift wrap and cardboard.

She’s also declined my offer of an autographed photograph for her office wall. She prefers autographed photos of her horses.

Cutting marital hair is not one of the marriage vows. It doesn't rise to an obligation, or even an expectation. It's just one little thing that one does for the other to keep bigger things moving forward.

And so it occurred to me that Congressional Democrats and Republicans might relearn how to act as legislators on some things even when they don't agree on all things by doing one or two little things together.

Cutting each other's hair, for example.

One benefit of this innovation would be that over time we, the people, would elect fewer ideologues and more beauticians and barbers. This would increase the productivity of Congress, because no beautician or barber has ever stopped working for a customer in the middle of a do. Beauticians don't default, and barbers don't sequester.

Since it takes training, skill and practice to master barbering and beautician work, I propose an alternative that requires no training, skill or practice.

Our 535 elected Democrats and Republicans should volunteer for one meal a week at a local soup kitchen, of which several are convenient to their Capitol Hill redoubts.

The rules I suggest for team-building are three: first, ideological opposites are to work side by side and together until the assigned task is completed; second, they do jobs other than serve food, which is the only work ever given to politicians; and, finally, publicity and photographs are not permitted.

The least desirable jobs -- cooking go-fer, dishwashing, pots and pans scrubbing, floor-sweeping and garbage management -- would be assigned to two-person teams of political enemies who are most in need of learning cooperative civility.

Jobs that don't require much collegiality like table set-up, food prep and stove-to-line runner would be reserved for those who have shown their ability to get along with their political opponents by not calling them "traitors."

The Seltzer Scheme for Retraining Our Politically Challenged will eliminate the federal deficit, squelch terrorism, restore soundness to the dollar, cool the global warmers, warm the global coolers and resurrect shave-and-a-haircut, two bits.

You can't help but learn to work with an ideological opponent when you're running the mop, and he's ringing it out.

For my part, I will try to think of future homemade haircuts as a marital enhancement and not the next indignity imposed on my shrinking remnant.

And I hope that our next retrained Congress will stop quibbling over health insurance and finally repeal male-pattern baldness.

This will draw oodles of contributions from the entire political spectrum—a win-win for everyone.