

LIVING BLONDE BROUGHT OUT A DARK TRUTH

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The plastic bag full of clipped hair sitting in my bedroom is all that remains of my life as a blonde. It's a bit pitiful, I know, but it's hard to let go of those golden locks.

Who hasn't wondered if they have more fun? If gentlemen truly prefer them? There's something special about blondes, and I think everyone should take the time to see the world through their eyes. It's not just a hair color; it's a way of life. Hair is the chimney to the soul, right?

My time among the blondes counts as some of the most interesting weeks of my life.

It started as an idea for a costume party - dye my hair yellow and go as a Malibu Ken doll (accompanied, of course, by Malibu Barbie) - but it quickly grew out of control. I suppose I could have worn a wig, but what would have been the fun in that?

The hair-dyeing process itself is fraught with danger, especially if, like me, you want to go from a natural dark brown to very, very blonde. The suggested time for leaving the blue goop from the hair care aisle on one's head was 20 to 90 minutes; I left it on for more than two hours.

The result was Maxiblondie, something between bright yellow and pumpkin orange, depending on where you looked. This contrasted greatly with my eyebrows, which remained their natural color. (Despite some insistent prodding from a friend, I decided to heed a warning on the box about the product burning my eyes.)

To be honest, I didn't feel inherently different. After the initial shock subsided, it was as if I was the same person I'd always been. But then I'd pass a mirror and see the eyes of someone who looked like me - only hipper - peering back under a yellow coiffeur. I'd stop, point my fingers at that other guy, and ask, "How you doin'?" Those moments were pretty cool.

For all the excitement surrounding blondes, though, there also is a dark side. Discrimination is rampant, and for the most part, socially acceptable. Don't even think about going blonde and expect to be treated like everyone else.

Walking into work the day after my hair job, I sensed the whole office staring at me. Many of my co-workers stood silent, mouths agape, possibly undressing me mentally, but more likely accusing me with their eyes of being a platinum, towheaded, fair-haired, ash-blond, lily-white freak.

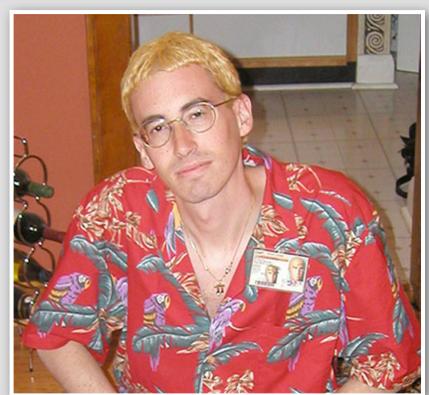
They called me Eminem, Dennis the Menace, Richie Rich, Blondie. I'm not sure why, but one woman called me Conrad.

Some friends shielded their eyes and asked me to turn my hair down. Others questioned my intelligence and said that they always knew I was a natural blonde.

My grandmother, who always fawned over my long brown curls as a child, had a hard time keeping a straight face as she told me it looked "alright."

Even those who favored my change seemed to take perverse pleasure in suggesting that I dye my hair other colors in the future, perhaps to reflect my mood or an upcoming holiday.

In the end, most people urged me to shave my head right away, or at the very least dye the hair back to its original color. They did this in the most blunt of terms, saying that my hair looked awful and that it would only get worse as it grew out. People wouldn't take me seriously, they said, and my hair would scuttle any attempts at dating.



Ryan Smith learned what it was like to live a blonde's life.

I fought to protect my golden halo for as long as I could. Perhaps, like they said, it was purely out of stubbornness or blonde ambition.

Or just maybe, I thought, I'd tapped into something special. To know for sure, I might have to try life as a redhead.

That would look good for Valentine's Day, don't you think?

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