

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2007

HELPFUL HINT: An e

Going gray and loving it

I have a lot of respect for women who decide to throw out their rubber gloves and mixing bottles and do away with hair coloring when the gray starts to come in.

It takes heaps of courage to go gray in a fashion-conscious world where many think gray hair is appropriate only on grandmothers who bake apple pies and wait patiently for their grandkids to arrive.

Today, women of all ages are getting on the bandwagon of letting nature take its course. According to AARP, 53 percent of women over 50 color their hair ... but 47 percent do not and that doesn't include women in their 40s.

Did you know that someone turns 50 every seven seconds and the numbers have tallied up to almost 16 million women?



Generations

Peg DeMarco

Adding in women over 40, the number jumps to 43 million be-

tween the ages 40 and 64 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000 statistics). That's a lot of women teetering on whether to go gray or not.

Positive spins have Meryl Streep's white classy hairdo in the movie "The Devil Wears Prada" to thank and a best-selling book by Diana Lewis Jewell called "Going Gray, Looking Great!" As the former marketing director of Vogue, she presents her own personal story as well as reasons why the inner woman in all of us decides when the time is right to show our natural gray hair.

An article I was reading on the Internet provided a quote that kind of summarizes what I think going gray means. It comes from Linda Gordon, 48, who experimented with using henna on her hair when she started going gray at 16. The henna, however, made her gray hair turn orange. She finally decided to go gray and wound up with a head of platinum gray curls. Linda, an accomplished horsewoman who loved the gasps she got every time she removed her helmet after a show, said, "It's a character kind of thing. You wear your wisdom with your hair rather than your face."

I was almost there myself. It had been over a year since I had colored my hair and I was still going strong a couple of weeks before my 60th birthday.

Deciding that I had earned each and every strand of gray hair over the years, there was a streak of white right in the front that I hoped would eventually spread to the whole head so I could get away from that skunk look.

My reason for letting the gray creep in was very succinct to me: each strand represented an event in my life that had a right to be displayed for

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represented an event in my life that had a right to be displayed for the world to see — happy times, sad times, thrills, spills and everything else that goes into building a life over a course of six decades.

It was very liberating and it didn't hurt the shafts of my hair either that had been colored since the tender age of 16.

But as my 60th neared, I started to get a little restless. And, eventually, it was the white streak in front that did me in when my reflection caught my eye and whisked away my smile while walking past a Wal-Mart front window.

A day later, I sheepishly strolled into a salon and was back to blonde in two hours. It looked chic for my surprise birthday party, but, now, a few weeks later ... well, let's just say that I'm once again on the bandwagon for gray. I miss it.

It's a matter of preference to all of you whether to go gray or not. I've seen absolutely amazing heads of gray and white hair on beautiful women all over Morganton and other parts of the U.S.

Sometimes I walk up to them and tell them how vibrant their hair looks because I'm secretly jealous. But I'm hoping I'll get

there someday ... if I don't cave again right before my 70th birthday.

Diana's book gives a few pointers to those who are considering whether to go gray or not so I thought I'd pass them along to you:

1. Be patient. Graying is a process. You can't and shouldn't rush it;

2. Have fun. If you decide to go cold turkey, revel in the changes. Be excited by the new silver streaks, learn to play up the areas that are coming in nicely with a new side part, or a swept-off-the-face look;

3. Get help. Good colorists have numerous ways of easing you into it, and helping you find the level of gray you're most comfortable with. Maybe pure white isn't for you, but a fabulous streak is;

4. Think color. Gray is as viable as blonde, brunette and redhead. Give your gray a name: silver, pewter, charcoal, pearl, ice (why should strawberry blondes have all the fun?);

5. Beat the blahs. Once or twice, try a water-soluble rinse to blend and brighten. But avoid using a semi-permanent color. It eventually will stain the hair, no matter what the bottle says;

6. Stay in control. Your gray

doesn't have to stay the way nature intended. Talk to a good colorist about ways to beef it up, brighten it and take away a yellowish cast. Play with it as you would any hair color;

7. Fight fade-out. If you're feeling a bit washed out, turn your attention to your skin and makeup. Investigate the newest in skincare treatments, glow-enhancing products, a new cosmetic palette;

8. Revitalize your wardrobe. Bright, clear colors work. So do high-definition shades: crisp white, deep navy, black, and red. Strong pastels can add punch. Don't go against colors that worked with your skin tone before, but try different tonalities: green to teal, for example;

9. Think "color zones." If you don't want to invest in a whole new wardrobe, pick pretty, exciting colors to wear near your face. Throw on a scarf, or add an eye-catching necklace. Look for accessories that reflect the light; and, finally;

10. Give it your best shot. If, after everything, it's not working for you, remember this, you don't have to stay gray.

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