

## I STOPPED DYING MY HAIR AND REDISCOVERED MYSELF

By Lisa Curran Matte



I DIDN'T REALIZE I WAS STARING until the object of my gaze looked me straight in the eye.

Snapping out of my trance, I stumbled into an explanation, "Your hair; I love your hair." The woman in front of me visibly relaxed as a smile spread slowly across her face. "Two of the hardest years of my life, but totally worth it," she said.

Sometimes, big decisions require careful analysis. Other times, we know in an instant what we're going to do. My decision to stop coloring my hair was somewhere in between.

It started with a nagging "why" whispering in the back of my mind every time I pulled out the touch-up solution to cover my roots between salon appointments. Gradually, I found myself searching Pinterest for "deciding to go gray" or "how to go gray" or "going gray gracefully."

As a lifelong brunette, I'd notice other women's hair color, playing a guessing game of natural-or-not. Gradually, my focus shifted from brunettes to shades of gray. I noticed that women who embraced their gray as a component of their personal style — at age 40 or 60 or 80 — had certain panache, even swagger.

I wanted to be like those women. I wanted to be confident. I wanted to look in the mirror and see me, not some illusion of who I was before my hair started to gray.

Decision made, the next question was, "How?" I researched options. Maybe I could dye my hair gray then let it grow in? Cut it short? Nope. Been there. Done that. Never again.

Could I quit cold turkey and let the gray gradually grow in through my shoulder-length hair? No.

For me, it had to be intentional. I wanted strangers to see me and know my hair color was a choice, not an oversight.

When I broached the subject with my hairstylist, Dee, she was thrilled. Dee is a beautiful 20-something woman. She has a quirky style—definitely all her own—long jet-black hair with blunt-cut bangs, tattoo sleeves up and down both arms, exotic eye makeup. Dee embraces her own uniqueness, and she encouraged me to do the same. She had a plan.

The transition was surprisingly easy, although a bit costly. Dee used foils to blend my incoming mix of brunette and gray with my dyed ends. It took two rounds of foils before I was dye-free, and another six months or so before the foil highlights were all but gone.

Salon appointments are simple again. I can make an appointment for "just a cut" with only a few days' notice. Two- to three-hour appointments are a thing of the past; I'm in and out in 30 minutes.

Two years in and I have rediscovered myself. I recognize "me" when I look in the mirror, and I like what I see. I've found ways to make my gray my own, too. A tinted conditioner (discovered by accident when I inadvertently picked up Aveda Black Malva for black hair instead of Aveda's Blue Malva for gray hair) gives my hair a barely there blue tint.

At least once a day, I catch someone's gaze. Inevitably, they stumble for a split second before blurting, "I love your hair."

It was pretty easy, I tell them. Best thing I ever did.