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With apologies to Barbara Walters: "Old journalists don't get older, we just get blonder."

Cynthia Robins, OF THE EXAMINER STAFF Published 4:00 am, Thursday, December 18, 1997



I HAVE JOINED the enemy. I am a blonde. And I'm not sure I quite understand the implications of the change yet. Will I be insulted when somebody tells a "Blonde Joke" in my presence ("What does a blonde say when you blow in her ear?" "Thanks for the refill") Or will I just flutter my eyes and giggle. Bleach does weird things to people.

It all started about six weeks ago when I looked at my roots, which are decidedly gray, and announced to my hairdresser **Ron Pernell**, "Let's do it." And that is how I found myself sitting in his chair from 11:30 a.m. until 3 p.m. with a toxic substance fizzing away on my head. Ron's proviso: "Don't itch it. You'll hurt your scalp." It could be more effective than the Chinese water torture.

"Now you know what **Marilyn Monroe** went through," laughed Ron as he started to paint my locks with a blob of cream bleach made from 20 volume peroxide and a few other mysterious

chemicals. Ron did the roots last since they are close to the scalp and what colorists call "the hair zone," which "lift" very quickly.

Putting a shower cap on over the bleach, Ron sits me under the dryer. Rivulets of sweat course down my face. I am dying to scratch an ear. Every 15 minutes or so, he comes back to me (by now, my eyes are tearing and I'm looking suspiciously like a rabbit), rub the bleach off my ends and murmur something like, "Hummmmm. It's working."

The first time you have your "job," you have to be patient. It's a lot of sitting and reading **fashion** magazines and fantasizing about changing your makeup and buying silver and powder blue and palamino-colored clothing, colors a brunette classically shuns.

I was used to going to see Ron every five weeks or so to have my gray "disappeared," as they say in mob circles. It took an hour, max. This time, with high-lift color, the initial process was long and difficult. Mostly because we'd never done something this radical before and we didn't want to fry my hair, which, despite years of tinting it everything from deep auburn to copper, had never been this light.

Meanwhile, I'm looking at my complexion glowing, even with the noxious pink shade that seem to be developing under dollops of souffle-like bleach. "Blond is very, very soft," says Ron. "It's pretty and it softens your features." It's also like wearing portable key lights. As if you were illuminated by some kind of movie pro. We're not going for any soft blond, however. I want a light, golden, baby blond, not platinum. And, says Ron, it's going to take some doing. We may not get there the first time out.

By now, my **Grace Kelly** fantasies have started to percolate. When I was a kid, the reigning movie queens were all cool Hitchcockian blondes like the future **Princess Grace**, **Vera Miles**, **Eva Marie Saint**, **Tippi Hedren**, and the va-va-va-voom girls like Monroe, **Jayne Mansfield**, **Mamie Van Doren** and **Lana Turner**. But I was this sort of height-challenged **Audrey Hepburn** with a cute-as-a-button pixie cut and a definite edge to my personality. There was one girl in my first-grade class named Paula who had blond corkscrew curls. I don't think I ever got over it. Wanting to have long, blond hair, that is. I always figured that in my next life, I'd be a blonde but with my luck, I'd come back as a Golden Retriever.

In this my early years, it was not to be. Hydrogen peroxide and lemon juice during a Florida vacation when I was 13 was the closest I ever came to Hollywood glamour and it turned bright orange within two weeks. So much for Goldilocks.

Forty years after, I am close to my girlhood ideal. This great adventure is probably akin to getting a full face lift or a nose job or new breasts. Something has to happen inside to accommodate

what's changed on the outside. You have to learn to articulate your "inner blonde."

I've been back to Ron three times now and each time, the color gets better and better. The first go-round, it was too yellow with pink ends and we had to cut it pretty short. The second time, I was highlighted and sat with about 50 packets of tinfoil on my head looking as if I could contact Venus. The third time, roots. My goodness, is regrowth fun. (Cue punky **Debbie Harry** fantasy). And each time, I am lighter and lighter, closer to my goal. Blond, baby, blond.

The line everyone has been using when they see this blond thing I've done is: "Well, do you really have more fun?"

In the beginning, I wasn't sure. The first night I had to work a society party, I ran into glamour photographer Russ Fischella who stood about a foot away from me, his hand on his chin and his photographer's eye honing in on what was missing. Probably attitude. I was terrified. Every time I looked in the mirror, there was this stranger staring back at me with what looked like straw sticking out in all directions. Russ promised that if I sat for him and he did my makeup, we could find the new me. "The inner blonde," was how he put it.

The next step on becoming a blonde was discovering which one I was. Certainly not Lana Turner or Marilyn Monroe. Couldn't carry that off if my life depended on it. But on the walls of Fischella's studio, there were flattering, glamorous portraits of every great looking woman in town, including former movie star Tippi Hedren.

A solution dawned, and soon I was blow-drying my hair swept up on the sides and into a duck tail in the back, like **Doris Day** in "Pillow Talk."

For the photo session, Russ handed me a huge length of black jersey. "Material has a life of its own. It will speak to you. Play with it." So I imagined a throw of Blackgama mink and we were off to the races. By the end of the session, I was Grace Kelly and Tippi Hedren, even in the plain white men's shirt I ended up in.

Fischella had found the inner blonde. And now I was ready to take her to the streets and the buses and the cable **cars** to see if, indeed, blondes had more fun.

I hate to admit it. But guys treat you differently when you're a blonde. They look at you. They try to establish eye contact. It's as if blondes are more trustworthy or approachable. My first afternoon as a blonde, for instance, a studly blue-collar guy in a Dodge pickup winked at me. Would he have done it had I still been brunette is a moot point. He did it. And I blushed. Which haven't done in years.

Maybe the word "baby" in baby blond isn't so far off, after all.<

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