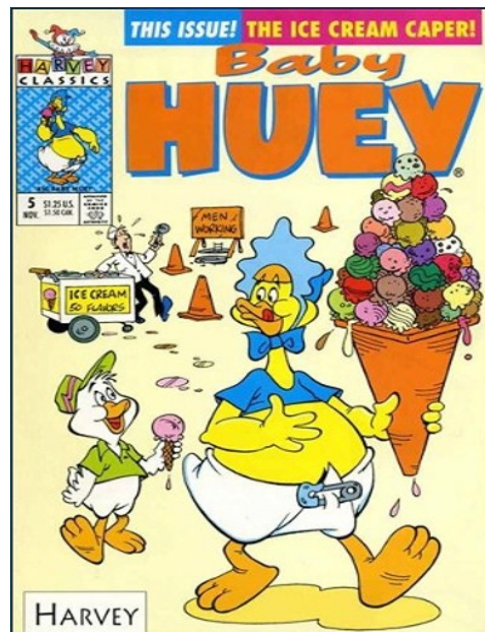


Today I am faced with a dilemma. Do I continue to color my hair, or not? I know this doesn't equate to solving world hunger, but personally, it's a serious matter. I've been coloring my hair long enough that I'm not quite sure how 'gray' I really am underneath. Friends are no help at all. Half of my friends are all for being completely natural, and the other half refuse to let the grays take over.

I turned fifty-nine this year. Fifty-nine. Is it possible? I confess I feel like I'm still in my twenties, aside from the arthritis in my back and knees! Getting older is an odd process, isn't it? It doesn't help that we live in a culture that is obsessed with how one looks, more than a person's character. I know men and women both have their own physical insecurities, brought on for different reasons.

I can't speak for anyone but myself on that score. It has been in the last year or two that I am finally 'lightening up' about how I look. My family genes ensured that I go through this life with a slow metabolism, but a love for bread and sweets. I have been chubby my entire life, and jokingly say that I needed a bra when I was an infant. I was the baby of the family, but you wouldn't know it by looking at me. When my mom introduced us to people, she would say, "This is Jimmy, the oldest, this is Susie, Ms. Sunshine (she was a grouch), this is Mike, my 'leany boy', and THIS is Lisa, MY BABY!" I was the baby of the family, but I felt like Baby Huey. Fellow 'boomers' will know who he is. For those who don't, I've provided a comic book cover for your enjoyment.



For as long as I can remember, my mom, also on the larger side, was always on a diet. When I look at this picture of me with my family, I can see that I really wasn't 'fat'. I was simply taller and started developing early for my age. Kids would tease me often because I was not like everyone else. When I would come home crying, my mom's answer was that I should go on a diet too. I was ten or eleven years old in this picture. How successful do you think a child that age will be going on a diet? I wish she would have just told me that I was fine how I was, and that my body was just in a hurry to grow up faster than I was. It's hard to set a good example when one has a low self-esteem, as my mom did.

Another observance I made growing up was that most of the women in both of my parents' families were on the larger side. Doomed from the outset. I also noticed that most of the women seemed to end up alone, either through the death of their husbands, or through divorce. From my child's mind, I deduced that if you're fat, people don't love you and they eventually leave you. I'm not kidding. I lived with this idea for most of my life, including while I was married for thirty-one years, which ended in divorce. Thankfully, it was I that asked him to go. But I didn't feel loved, which was likely more from my low self-esteem issues than anything else.



Most of my childhood was witnessing the demise of my parent's marriage. The picture shared above is right around the time my dad had an affair with his high school sweetheart, producing a brother ten years younger than me. Doesn't my dad look happy in this photo with his family? My parents divorced soon after this time, and I didn't see much of my dad until I was eighteen years old. Ah-hah! Proof that I was right. My daddy didn't love me enough, and he left me, because I was fat, like my mom.

Logically, I know this isn't true, but the reality is that he did end up marrying that same high school sweetheart and chose her family instead of his own. I am a perfect example of why a girl needs her daddy. A father's love and the way he treats his daughter is her first experience with the opposite sex. It will set the standard for how she will feel about herself for the rest of her life. At least this was proven to be true in my case.



Here are a few of my thoughts during those turbulent teenage years (I've been writing for a long time):

"Down On Me"

I look in my dreams, I see a goddess. I look in the mirror, I see a troll.

I look in my dreams, I see a svelte mistress. I look in the mirror, I see a boar.

When you look at me, what do you see?

The reason I ask, is because my vision is blurred through the tears.

"A Child at 19"

A virgin in white, afraid of the dark,

Her idols on the wall.

She hides the tears, and forgets the years,

She missed the proms and balls.

Because she feels odd, she hides the fact,

She's never had a date.

Don't be in a rush, everything takes time,

Sweetheart, you'll just have to wait.

A child at nineteen, alone in her world,

Hoping her dreams will come true.

She waits for the day, for someone to love,

And for someone to love her too.

Yep, I've pretty much been a mess most of my life. The saddest part is that I can look back at the same pictures I used to detest, and I see a normal, somewhat awkward, but lovely young lady. I wasted so many years hating who I was, hating the way I looked, and I most definitely hated my body. If you wonder why I am sharing this, it's because I know there are young girls, and boys, who feel exactly the way I did when I was younger. I want to say that you are just who you're meant to be. God didn't make you to look like everyone else because he loves variety, and he loves you! Of course, if you don't like something about yourself and have the power to change it, change it! Just remember you were created by an awesome God who doesn't make mistakes.

So, as I look at the ugly scar on my leg from recent knee replacement surgery, and the wrinkles and spots on my aging, sun-dried skin, I can confidently say that I feel better about myself now than I have my entire life. I'm still working on losing those extra pounds and will probably be doing so until Jesus calls me home. I still avoid the mirror when stepping out of the shower, because some old habits just don't go away. But I enjoy the pool now, and I am in awe of the women who are twice my size, walking around in bikini type bathing suits like it's nothing. You will never see this body in a two-piece bathing suit, but I give them credit for confidence!

Finally, just love yourself. You are of great worth, and you are beautiful. Oh yes, I've made an appointment to get my hair colored again, scheduled for next month! I'm not fully ready to look like the grandma I am, yet.