

DRYING YOUR HANDS WITH TOILET PAPER

Uncovering the root of all existence

I think I found the one. It's still a little early so I don't want to jump to conclusions, but it just feels right.

Finding that special someone is like trying to catch a football on the bounce: You'll look silly if you don't let the ball take its course — you need a healthy respect for the entropy of things. Yet we can derive some reassurance in the rules of nature, which tell us it is

highly unlikely that what we chase will elude us forever.

The relationship I speak of isn't trivial, such as one with a female.

Naw dude, I found a good barber.

Finding a barber who can cut your hair the way you want it is up there with finding that pair of jeans that fits you just right, or the fact that water becomes less dense as it freezes, thereby sustaining life on the bottom of ponds. With the discovery comes a sense of security for the future that not even a 401K can provide.

Now, I'm not simply giving a shout out to my barber, (Would that be a "hair plug"?) but his name is Louie. So, with a name like that, he pretty much *had* to become a barber. Or King of France.

His shop peeks out from below

the curb on Commonwealth Avenue, straddling the street level. Lou's personality, like his business, hides just below the surface, yet not so much that you'd ever miss it. His subterranean location fits nicely with his down-to-earth, grounded personality — there's something about a job that involves spending so much of one's time around mirrors that makes barbers very comfortable with themselves.

In addition to my hair, Lou cuts the hair of Saul Bellow, Nobel-prize winning author and professor emeritus at Boston University. Therefore, he has worked in closer proximity than perhaps anyone to two of the preeminent minds of this era. A framed quote, given to Lou by Saul B., welcomes patrons as they enter. "It wasn't until I was sitting in the barber's cubicle — I was here not because I needed a haircut but, as so often, only because I longed for a human touch — that I began to have clearer ideas," he wrote in *Humboldt's Gift*.

As I sit in the chair, — the blue-collar equivalent of a therapist's couch — I, too, begin to have clearer ideas. The cathartic effects of a haircut are like Ramen noodles: They're relatively inexpensive and always available as a simple solution to keep you going. The less your hair is out of place, the less you feel your life is. Lou puts the buzzer in gear, and along with clumps of my hair fall all my worries from the past few weeks, all my insecurities and all the nagging

doubts that put into question the goodness of life. There's usually some Juicy Fruit in there, too.

We see cavemen with long, matted hair grunt and hit stuff with clubs, and we assume they are unkempt because of their mental state. But what if it's the other way around? What if Mr. Grumpy McCaveman is just uncivilized because he needs a little off the top? I mean, who among us hasn't wanted to pick up a club and take a swing at something? (I want to walk into that store Sodom and Gomorrah-style and yell, "If you show me so much as one thing in here that someone actually *needs*, then I will spare every last Precious Moments figurine." Stupid little statue of Lot — caught on a technicality!)

The picture of me in this column is about 48 hours after a crisp cut. Sequential photographs thereafter would reveal a regression similar to one of those ape-to-man evolution charts in reverse.

The male obsession with haircuts approaches vanity but veers off and settles in the realm of self-respect. A fresh cut creates a feeling similar to that scene in "Pulp Fiction" in which Uma Thurman gets an adrenaline shot to the heart. Haircuts breathe fresh air into us guys. So after I get my haircut the right way, I swear I can suave my way out of anything. Suave's not a verb? Well I made it one, baby. And I made it a shampoo. How? I just got a good haircut, that's how.

The relationship with one's bar-

ber is odd. Nowhere else does another man touch your scalp with such nonchalance. (Scalp in any other context becomes an unpleasant body part to mention. You'll never hear a guy say, "Yea she had nice legs, but I'm more of a 'scalp man.'") Part of the barbershop comfort stems from the fact that we'll never reach the point at which barbers are obsolete. Our hair will grow, and barbers will cut it when it does. It's all very primal. More than anything else, the action brings us back to the days when we would pick bugs out of one another's hair. That's right, kindergarten.

My barber knows what my family does. He knows my blood type, my inseam, the way I eat Oreos by twisting them apart, placing another whole Oreo between the two halves and sticking them back together. He reads the topography of the back of my head the way a veteran golfer discerns the banks and knolls of a tricky course. When I got my head stapled after waterskiing, he shaved around it. When I forgot to tell him I had a sensitive lump from hitting my head at work, he reminded me what it is to cry.

Barbershops serve as places to digest the world. Lou's offers various media: a TV, more than a dozen magazines. Sports paraphernalia from BU and national teams insulate the walls. Ironically, there's nothing from the Clippers. (Once, I used a barbershop in a complicated theorem in which I proved that vampires don't exist. The gist of it is as follows: Where

would a vampire get a haircut? Barbers are only open during the day. "Oh, but they could cut their own hair," you say. Not likely. They would have to look in the mirror and vampires don't have reflections. Boo-yea.)

Time passes differently between haircuts than for any other routine activity. Or is it that the time between haircuts is one of the only things that remains the same? I can't speak for females because the average girl coordinates her haircuts with Jupiter's revolutions of the sun, but a guy can cling to this frequent routine as one of the last constants that chops up his existence into manageable portions.

I exit the shop as usual and watch the red, white and blue stripes of the barber's sign spiral down, vanish and reappear, suggesting a certain continuity of things. Wide-eyed, recharged, I try to think of something to pass the time during the upcoming four-week segment. Maybe I'll find love.

Or a football.

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