

## MOP-TOPS AND GOAT WHISKERS

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Until recently, hair styling was an activity engaged in almost exclusively by the female branch of humanity. Long hair, short hair, long bobs, short bobs, pony-tails, peek-a-boos, French twists, bouffants, split-curls, frizzed-Poodle and wet spinach styles appear and disappear in rapid bewildering manner. Women enjoy it; their constant pursuit of youth, beauty and fashion supports a vast industry and bolsters the economy. For many decades men have been content to plop themselves in a chair, pick up a magazine, and let the barber do what he will with clippers and scissors. That is, they used to. A new generation of males has appeared, however, with an interest in hair and hairy adornment that rivals the interest of the distaff side. Voltaire once said: "Ideas are like beards; men do not have them until they grow up." The present generation of masculine youth, with haystack top and scraggly whiskers, may have misinterpreted Voltaire by confusing hirsutism with intellectual maturity.

Having mulled over the problem for some time now, and having suffered frequent bouts of apoplectic indigestion in arguments about the same subject within our own household (we always come out losing), we thought it time that the Doctors' Lounge readers be exposed to a small symposium of current hair styles.

Accordingly, we are reprinting a couple of observations, cut out and saved for just such an occasion. The first is by our favorite medical editorialist, Mark Altschule, and is reprinted from the May issue of *Medical Science*. The second is by Ed White, our farmer-columnist friend (and partner in the horse-raising business) from West Virginia.

### **St. Jerome on Long Hair and Beards**

St. Jerome (A.D. 340-419) is perhaps best known for his translation of the Bible into Latin; his version, The Vulgate, was the standard for many centuries. However, his other writings include a wide range of less scholarly works. For example, he discussed a form of hypocrisy prevalent in his time in a way that sounds completely modern. He wrote about gloomy young men who claimed to have turned their backs on the materialistic world and who had "hair as long as women's and beards as long as goats'."

Jerome distrusted long beards on young men because they were often worn in order to convince people of their wearers' spiritual superiority. He pointed out that if the relative length of a beard is an index of spirituality, nobody is more spiritual than a goat. Paradoxically, the denser the beards the easier they were to see through. A thousand years later Erasmus of Rotterdam made similar comments.

It is comforting in way to know that things are no worse today than they were in the days of Erasmus and St. Jerome.

## **Not by Hair Alone**

Many years ago, a young man worked here who had straight black hair. One morning he appeared with his forelock curled. When I laughed about it, he explained quite seriously in his true West Virginia vernacular “All the boys are wearing curly hair anymore.”

Well, apparently now all the boys are wearing girls’ hair anymore. I too have succumbed to the current vogue. (*Ed. Note: A picture accompanying the original column showed crew-cut White in a long, black Cleopatra wig.*)

I do not consider myself a beatnik for letting my hair grow. Not by hair alone can you tell a beatnik. In fact, they are supposed to be the ones who avoid, among other things, conventions of dress or style. Accordingly, today’s beatnik should have short hair.

To be fair one must compare the present fashion with hair styles of long ago.

Benjamin Franklin, for example, 1706-1790, was a leader in his time, a friend of all in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. His hair was a scraggly bob that reached to his shoulders.

Portraits of centuries of heroes of all nations depict men with long tresses, one of the most notable of whom was king Louis XIV of France who wore his mountain of curls to the battlefield. One cannot measure the masculinity or effeminacy of a man by the length of his hair. There was no reason to think that the clean-cut appearance of my generation would last forever, and as a matter of fact I am delighted to see most anything take the place of the flat-top.

Analysis of the trend toward long hair for men has encouraged differing opinions from psychologists on college campuses. It is variously said to be a protest, a self-assertion, an expression of individuality, a resentment, an identification, etc.

I believe none of it. It is the obvious result of that old economic law at work when the price of a product passes the point of diminishing return. The truth is that haircuts are simply too expensive. The barbers of America have over-estimated the value and popularity of their product.

When my older son leaves for college in September his hair is short. But three months later, when he returns at Christmastime, he is barely recognizable. He says that haircuts are an unnecessary luxury.

The situation in Ashville, N.C., where my younger son goes to school, is even worse. The boys at this school are permitted \$100 allowance for nine months. The cost of a haircut in the barber shops in Ashville is \$1.75. At this outrageous price, it is a valid question whether or not anyone can afford to keep his head well groomed.

For years haircutting arrangements at the school were very satisfactory. The cook's helper not only cut hair himself but taught some of the upperclassmen his art.

Several years ago, the local barbers' guild notified the headmaster that he was violating the law by permitting his cook to cut hair without a license. They had had this restrictive law passed to protect their monopoly. So, their threat had legal teeth in it.

The headmaster gave up most reluctantly. The cook no longer cuts hair. Those upperclassmen who used to know how have graduated. And, because the headmaster insists that the boys keep their hair short, they have no alternative to having their hair cut in town, although he himself has been known to enjoy cutting the hair of a few especially impecunious cases.

If barbers generally have benefitted from their monopolistic greed one might understand their insistence upon the lockout and the unreasonable charge. But to my simple mind they have contributed measurably to the popularity of long hair, and I hope they lose proportionately. The great flaw in my argument, of course, is that the Beatles, who started it all, can certainly now afford a haircut once in a while. It might even be cheaper than a hairdresser.

If the mop-top still bugs you, you might try an ancient come-back of P.G. Wodehouse: "Why don't you get a haircut; you look like a chrysanthemum."