

Brushes With Beauty

By Deborah Paul

I've had very few brushes with beauty for beauty's sake during my life, but until I turned 60, they weren't memorable.

My first launch was at age 13 when I tried out with 500 other adolescents in St. Louis to be a Famous & Barr teen model.

I tearfully didn't get picked.

My best friends and I discussed -- ad nauseum as only teenage girls can -- my rejection, and came to the brutal conclusion my loss was because of my crooked teeth.

Our puerile reasoning was the judges zeroed in on my pick-handle barracuda bite -- thus, the universal appliance soldered to my teeth from age 15-to-18 years.

Much later, during my first semester at Florissant Valley Community College in St. Louis -- immediately after I got my braces off -- I was nominated for "Troll Queen."

As the legend went, every year the mysterious Flo Val Troll, who lived under a tiny bridge on school property, would make an appearance and take a queen to rule over homecoming.

There were 23 Troll Queen wanna-bees vying for the coveted title. No talent contest or intellectual prowess needed for that lofty misnomer. A school photographer lined us up, took 8-by-10 head shots and publicly displayed the photos inside the student union for everyone to scrutinize down to the last blemish.

I didn't promote myself by holding rallies, passing out candy, or making telephone calls like many of the girls. Not because I was shy, I was simply too naive to know how to conjure up a vote. Somehow, I managed to squeak in eighth on the list.

I still have the head shot of that even-toothed, happy college girl, but 44 years have passed and she is hardly recognizable. Did I really look like that?

In my 20's someone talked me into participating in the "Queen of the Beach" contest in Hermosa Beach. I was fit enough, but lacked the pre-requisite volley ball skills that materialized to give the judges something to pretend to vote on besides looks. I quietly disqualified myself when I realized I couldn't duck fast enough.

In my 30s, although I had worked out hard, I backed out of a body building contest at the last minute because I couldn't bring myself to pose in a gold bikini in front of a crowd.

I did have a plan. I was going to start my two minutes of fame with a running handspring, land on my feet, then strike a winning stance. But modesty ruled out -- and I'm pretty sure I was the only lady in the contest who didn't need a shave.

Truth be known, I've never aspired to be a "beauty." Good thing. Who wants to peak at six?

Now, I use 12X magnified mirrors to put on make-up that takes twice as long to apply and achieves only petulant, quizzical effects. I notice specks where there was once smooth skin, and smooth skin where there used to be eyebrows.

Let's face it, witnessing too many moons -- about 3,000 by my count -- is about as alluring as lips plumped up by bee stings. Still, having a silver-headed husband and lots of friends accompanying me into the next right of passage instills a kind of grimalkin satisfaction knowing that I won't be the only one dragging around a saggy behind during our golden years.

Maybe Baby Boomers, who think aging is inadvertent, ask too many rhetorical questions.

Like, why do once-adorable cheek dimples become cavernous bat caves after age 50? Why do perfect, little princess ears grow longer? I never asked for gauged earlobes, but I swear I can see daylight when I take off dangly earrings.

And where on earth do our eyelashes go? Missing them, a friend who is in the beauty business turned me on to a product that conjures up those wispy, beautiful butterflies of youth.

Having long, thick fronds is such an important aspect of a senior's retirement-age persona. You never know when (your granddaughter isn't around) you might need to bat your lashes at a ranger to get some extra firewood at an Appalachian RV camp, or maybe to comb the cattails out of your terrier's forelock.

And why after all those years of rubber band cables and rebar-like braces, does that one stubborn front tooth have to snaggle its way back over its sister like a water damaged piano key?

Yet, even during our physically insane 60's, the battle rages on among us to hail victorious against the discouraging, disparaging and disconcerting, ever-tightening waistband.

Drinking more water, eating (yawn) plenty of fiber and avoiding cruciferous veggies are sure to help us feel beautiful during our twilight years -- but I know from experience, there ain't nothin' like a good 120-gage, doubly-ply, 15-hour Spanx body suit to take the edge off a creeping Body Mass Index of 24.9!

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