

## The Cost of Beauty

For attractive lips, speak words of kindness. For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people. For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry. For beautiful hair, let a child run his/her fingers through it once a day. For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone. People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone. Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of each of your arms. As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands; one for helping yourself, and the other for helping others.

Audrey Hepburn

When you wear your hair short—as I do—you're well aware of the exact day you need to get it cut. It's the day when you wake up and it lays flat on top of your head. When your usual tricks don't work. When extra root lifter or mousse or control gel have all lost their power.

Friday was my day. But I couldn't get to my salon at the mall, so I knew that Saturday would be haircut day whether I liked it or not. My twelve-year-old daughter had slept over at a friend's house the night before; I got the brilliant idea to take her and a fellow sleepover buddy with me. She needed to be picked up anyway, so I had to be out and about early. And it was one Saturday when we had little schedule conflicts: just a couple of sporting events easily handled by my hubby. "You do the girls; I'll do the boys," he ordered. Got it.

Being mall professionals, these two girls, I knew I had to take official control of the day, lest they seize it and become the boss of me. So on the drive over, I clearly laid out the plan: we would first check on the availability of my hair lady, and then we'd map out the mall. Lunch. Ice cream. Whatever. I go to one of those "no appointment necessary" haircut places. You know: the kind where you just walk in and get the next available hairdresser. My friends think I'm nuts. But at \$14 a haircut, you can't beat it with a stick. I always ask for the same cutter...and I always get her. She knows my hair as well as any of my fussier friends' hairdressers know their clients'. I also color my hair with stuff from the drugstore; it costs about \$6 a month. Contrast that with the \$50-80 haircuts around here—not to mention the upwards of \$200 ones in NYC—plus those \$100 coloring-highlighting-streaking jobs...and, excuse me, but who are the nutty ones?

Cedia, my Brazilian cutter, couldn't see me for forty-five minutes, so it was off to the food court for lunch. It was uneventful; I ordered my usual blackened chicken strips with sautéed green beans; the girls ordered pizza and donuts. I started doing the carb count on that one and got too whigged-out to add it all up. Then it was on to our master-mall-game-plan, with a divide-and-conquer scheme befitting an organizational guru and two faithful apprentices. The girls would quickly scatter to their favorite shops while I got a haircut, and we'd meet at the Lancome counter at Macy's one hour later.

My haircut went as usual: Cedia did her thing, we small-talked, and fifteen minutes later I was out there. I got the hankering to splurge on some new lotions and potions, so I headed for the shop famous in malls across America for such things. It was "beauty day" after all, what with me just having had a haircut and feeling perky and well-groomed. A new organic line had been introduced, and everything looked and smelled wonderful. New salts for the face, new anti-age wrinkle oils, and new firming-up-the-butt creams all containing olive oil, ginger, rosemary, mint, fig, or vanilla. Who could resist? But the maze was complicated. Did I want to go with the all-fig thing...or was I more mesmerized with the ad claiming that ginger had been used for its medicinal and beauty agents for centuries? Or should I let the fresh scent of rosemary and mint filtrate my master bath? And would those salts clog my shower drain, as they did in our Miami home, costing me \$150 in plumbing bills to snake them out?

Just when I gathered up a handful into a basket, I looked at my watch and realized that I needed to meet the girls. Dumping them out, it was down to the other end of the mall, where I quickly found the Lancome lady at Macy's who was very eager to sell me a "ready glow" line for summer. "C'mon, it's only \$50," the girls pleaded as they met me there with a quick "Sorry we're a little late; we got stuck at Abercrombie." I passed, with a "Let's ride the elevator upstairs and see what's on sale." They happily agreed and wandered around looking at bikinis while I scoured the clearance rack at the Ralph Lauren corner.

We left the mall with nothing but my haircut and three full tummies. Call it "I wasn't in the mood to buy." Or call it mid-life sensibility. As we walked upstairs towards the parking lot, both girls giggling mightily as they clunked their sandals down onto the steps in perfect unison, I did some mental gymnastics on our short-lived shopping experience: lotions and potions almost purchased but put back on the shelves due to time constraints saved me at least \$80; bikinis almost purchased by the girls that never materialized because their MasterCard holder was at the other end of the store saved me another \$72; and a fabulous spring top that I "had to have" never made it out of the store because they didn't have it in my size, saving me another \$40. And, oh yeah...I passed on that \$50 "instant tan." Did I mention all that money saved on my cheap haircut? Call it "I have four kids to put through college." Or "We have summer vacation to think about." Or "I need to buy some shrubs for the yard." And "Ben's room still doesn't have blinds on the windows." Or call it much, much more. Call it visiting indigenous tribes 200 miles from the outskirts of civilization in Panama in need of textbooks and language instructors—not to mention shoes, clothing, or clean drinking water. Call it listening to the challenges of friends seeking adoption in China—and of the needs there that make any of my personal financial challenges pale by comparison. Call it a commitment to tithe so that others might live more fully, and scaling back our lifestyle to ensure just that.

It's not a lecture on living a "sackcloth and ashes" existence. It's not denying good hygiene and a fashionable, up-to-date wardrobe. Hardly. That stuff adds color to life. It's about finding balance in this culture that continually seeks to convince us that we need more, more, and even more to be satisfied. It's a lesson, learned over this past decade and verified yesterday by hanging out at the mall with two happy-go-lucky pre-teens who were just happy to be together, that the cost of beauty has less to do with product than it does with spirit. For beauty doesn't exist in expensive haircuts and color jobs, or in the youth dew in the bottle, or in the outfit hanging on the mannequin in the shop window. Beauty exists in a heart grown old enough to know when she has everything one needs and then more. When she would rather see kids buoyed up with laughter rather than burdened down with shopping bags. When she can leave the mall without more stuff to hang into her closet and line up on her bathroom shelf. Beauty has more to do with going without so that others may go with. Beauty might just mean being happy with clean skin, clear eyes, and freshly shampooed, efficiently cut and styled hair. Simple things. Without a lot of the other stuff.

Because the cost of beauty can never be measured by the price of stuff anyway.

## About the Author

Due to her immense beauty Zeus was frightened that she would be the cause of violence between the other gods. He married her off to Hephaestus, the dour.

Source: <http://www.products herbal.com>