

# ASAYBI SNAPE

HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

‘ **NOT A VERSION OF EVENTS BUT A CULTURAL JOURNEY THAT HIGHLIGHTS THE LINKS BETWEEN: NATURAL HAIR; CULTURE, FAITH, VIRTUE, CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM** ’

**M**y hair story has been a long but rewarding journey. It's had its highs and its lows, even made friends with great products and products likened to foes. My hair story is not just a detailed version of events and processes but highlights the culture I was raised in and the struggles I had as a young person trying to cope with having mixed race afro hair in a society that celebrates and idolises white women with long silky hair as beautiful. My mother is a very head strong Rastafarian woman and my father the same.

He had dreadlocks and my mother did not. As a child between the ages of 1 – 6 I grew dreadlocks as it was a part of our culture and what my mother and father intended as being best for me. Surprisingly enough, I did not get bullied in school or by my peers, instead, was liked more and befriended by new children because of my dreadlocks. Not only were they a conversation starter, adults and my fellow peers loved to play with them. But, then came the day my dreadlocks were removed from

my head. My mother explained that it was because they were made from baby hair and were going to eventually fall out. I was not excited by the idea of not having dreadlocks but on the other hand I was not against the idea either as I did not like the idea of being bold either and as my mother did not have dreadlocks this made me warm to the idea even more as I wanted to be and look like her, having them removed meant having the same hair as my mother.

Another reason why I warmed to the idea was because I wanted to try new hair styles as my mother once did as a punk teenager and also I believe I was the only girl in school that did not get to have other cultural styles specific to black afro-Caribbean groups i.e. canrows, twists, plates etc in my hair as a result of having dreadlocks, therefore having the dreadlocks removed would give me the opportunity to try other black cultural styles thus allowing me to explore my culture even more. My father spoke to me about different styles of hair and tattoos that were cultural to natives in Ethiopia and how do-



“MY MOTHER WAS AN ADVOCATE FOR MAINTAINING NATURAL BEAUTY”

#HAIRSAY **HAIRSTORIES**



**W**hen I reached the age of 10 - 11 I started to learn to do my own hair. However this I found quite a challenge as my mother and father did not let me comb my hair, still reaffirming their Rastafarian beliefs and principles. They believed that even if hair isn't loxed that it still needs to be left in its natural form. They encouraged me to undo binds and knots using my hands, my mother too used this method and still does to this day i.e. your hand becomes a natural comb thus enforcing being natural and not conforming to vanity.

Also, my mother was an advocate for maintaining natural beauty and she was set out to make me love myself naturally before she would let me play with products etc to change the way my hair or face would look in its natural form. She also taught me that my hair is my virtue and doing things like; straightening it, cutting, dying, perming etc destroys that virtue i.e. in order to straighten hair you have to burn it. Once I had learned this I was fine, but it did take a year or so of moaning and crying in order to straighten my hair to look and fit in with my peers in secondary school at the time. I had my hair canrowed regularly and would sometimes leave it wild or put it in a bobble.

I only used natural olive oil and water in my hair and it grew profusely. When the black girls at school would ask me what i put in my hair in order for it to grow so long and strong they were amazed as they were under the impression that you needed to buy products etc from the hair shops to help with hair growth as opposed to the natural benefits of using water i.e. water makes plants grow. I must confess during secondary school I struggled, as I noticed everyone had gelled down hair, crazy

**“HAIR IS A PROCESS AND SO IS LEARNING ABOUT IT AND HOW TO TREAT IT”**

styles etc that I could not achieve using water, olive oil and no comb. I felt quite estranged from my peers as they had never met someone who had never combed or brushed

their hair before. Not only was my hair significantly different but the cultured background

I came from and not being able to wear certain clothes my friend's could wear highlighted this. None the less, a lot of the girls in the older years were fascinated by my hair

and would attempt to canrow it and do different styles in my hair, using the comb to part my hair and using my hands to comb. When

I turned 16 I was able to take more control over my life and I was allowed by my mother to start maintaining a beauty regime in order to

transition

into adulthood. I then decided that I wanted to straighten my hair as id always wanted to see what it would look like during my time in secondary school. My mother did not think it was a good idea as she did a similar thing when she was young and protested that straightening and dying her hair ruined it long term. She also reminded me about natural beauty and my culture and suggested that I should keep my hair the way it has always been; wild, afro and curly. I did not listen of course and went on to straighten my hair. This was a big step for me taking into consideration my cultural background and strict upbringing.

I liked the way my hair looked and realised that when it was straight I needed different hair products in order to keep it healthy and nurtured i.e. heat protection oil. I eventually started straightening and cutting my hair all the time. This then lead to my hair being damaged and quite dry and brittle by the time I turned 18. Moving to Bristol for my first year of my law and politics degree allowed me to reflect on my life and my hairs journey. During my reflection I learned that my mother was right!

Natural hair is the best hair anyone could wear! Using products such as Olive oil hair-spray dried out my hair when it was curly and I found that when my hair was straight olive oil hair spray worked. I also learnt looking back that many hair products designed for afro hair i.e. ORS moisturiser etc are not fit for purpose and are designed to make you buy other products to compliment them i.e. shampoo for sensitive hair – hair that only became sensitive due to using that brands other products i.e. olive oil hair spray (ORS).



“I HAVE NO SHAME IN ADMITTING THE TRUTH AND I HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT I AM MY OWN DEMON”

**I** made a decision to perm my hair in order to kill the already damaged hair and to grow it out slowly as opposed to pulling an Amber Rose stunt and going bold. I did this and it was the best decision I had made regarding my hair in my life. I went back to using natural olive oil and only straightening my hair once or twice a year. My hair started growing fast and long again and I was happy, well at least I thought I was satisfied until I went to SGHair salon to audition for a modelling position to represent Samantha

Golding in the Kera Care and Avlon hair show 2013. Samantha Golding without knowing; completely transformed my hair using Natural Textures Kera care leave in condition, cleansing cream and hair butter. I learnt from our meeting that my hair does not have to look wild whilst it is out and in its natural state and she showed me how to get the best out of my natural hair using these products including regular use of water. Since then I have maintained the regime she has taught me and my hair has never been as healthy. I have even managed to convert my mother, who now too

uses the Kera Care Natural Textures products in her hair (she now has dreadlocks). My hair does not stop growing and it continues to grow long and now even stronger than before. I still do add a bit of colour here and there but it does not damage my hair any more as I have learnt how to keep it healthy and strong whilst having colour in my hair. However do not be fooled. I am still working on building my self esteem as a young woman growing up in a majority white country.

I do not straighten my hair more than twice a year HOWEVER I still do it once or twice which in itself is still not appreciat-

ing my natural beauty in the way I should be. This highlights my dissatisfaction with maintaining the same look. I no longer straighten my hair because I want to fit in or because I am ashamed of my culture, natural hair or heritage. I do it because I get very bored with repetition and love change and its process. One day I will be completely done with straightening my hair and exploring with different colours, I would have exhausted my boredom and grown into the confident, strong independent woman I aspire to be and I am slowly getting there. I have no shame in admitting the truth and I have acknowledged that I am my own demon. I am slowly working towards becoming the woman dream to be and I am slowly gaining the confidence to not be influenced by those and the society around me.

One day I seek to grow dreadlocks and once again look like my mother who now has dreadlocks. Writing this hair story has also taught me the direct role in primary socialisation parent's play in terms of building young women's self esteem and confidence. If my mother was not so strong and did not practice what she preached I would not have become the woman I am today and I to this day do not brush or comb my hair when it is natural, instead, I use my hands just as I was taught as a child.

I hope from reading my struggled journey thus far that you are able to understand how culture, faith, self esteem, confidence and primary socialisation influences hair and how the two can affect how you feel about your natural hair. Also, that hair is a process and so is learning about it and how to treat it too. On that note I must conclude that my story is not yet finished nor will it be over soon, therefore my hair journey must go on. Before I end this writing I would like to share with you the main lesson I learned in this key message; always remember to love yourself, be yourself and more specifically love your hair. Until next time.. Thank you and I hope you enjoyed reading

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