other in Social Studies. I was convinced I wasn't pretty and my hair was the

One day after school, I staged a covert operation to the small and untouched

black haircare section of the local drugstore and bought myself a Dark & Lovely

relaxer. I slopped my hair in white, nose hair-singeing goo for 10 minutes and

came out with straight hair. It was a miracle. My hair was dry and a little stiff, but

with some gel and a blow dryer, it looked pretty good. tried a hair flip like in the

Revlon commercials, but my locks looked like cardboard blowing in the wind. I

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didn't care; I would finally fit in. I would finally be pretty. I made sure to walk past Jeremy's locker that morning, but when I turned the corner, I stopped dead when I saw him sucking face with Trish, a cute sophomore with long, dark, heavy tresses. I smoothed my hand down my hair and slumped away.

I took my straightened shoulder-length hair to college and met Chris, an Italian-American from Queens

"You look exotic. What are you, Filipino?" he asked as he narrowed his eyes in a flirtatious stare.

"Noooo, Try again," I said, twisting a lock around my finger.

We played the "What are you?" game until he gave up and I told him I was mixed. We became friends, fell in love, and eventually got married.

In the beginning, I continued to straighten my hair, knowing Chris preferred it that way. But during a two-week trip to Argentina, when I had forgotten my outlet converters and couldn't blow out my hair, wearing my natural curls felt freeing. I was channeling the tan-skinned women of Argentina who wore their soft waves and curls with pride. Feeling my curls bounce against my shoulders felt sensual and romantic. One night I lay on our hotel bed in only a T-shirt and struck a sexy pose. "What do you think," I asked, pushing my hands in my curls.

Chris turned toward me and said, "It looks different." Then he turned back to the dresser.

"So you don't like it?"

"I didn't say that ... it just looks different." I stared at his back as he went into the bathroom and shut the door

I started wearing my hair natural more often, which irritated Chris, but I was sick of conforming. Our relationship ended in divorce, but the relationship I had with my curls flourished.

I came to love my wild curls as an extension of me and who I was as a woman: spicy, sassy, sexy. I didn't touch my head with an iron or a blow dryer after that and what used to be big curls became healthy loose spirals. I learned to love my mane for the sexy beast that it was, but really I just learned to love myself. And my hair is such a part of me that when I meet the man of my dreams he is going to love me, but is also going to love my wild crazy hair.

Photo: iStockphoto

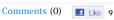
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