

HAIR (created with PDFLatex)

by Joanne Christian jchris1@gl.umbc.edu

Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

February 9, 2006

Contents

1	Welcome to My Hair!	1
2	About My Hair	3
3	The Beginnings of My Dreadlocks	5
4	Locking My Hair	7
5	Keeping My Dreadlocks Clean	9
6	Grooming My Hair	13
7	Coloring My Hair	15
8	Repairing My Hair	17

Chapter 1

Welcome to My Hair!

1

Dear Reader, Thanks for buying HAIR! Before we go on, I wanted to explain

- a. Why I wrote this book, and
- b. What type of information you will find in the subsequent chapters.

Why Did I Write HAIR?

First of all, I have had dreadlocks for over seven years. Almost everywhere I go a stranger expresses interest in my hair. While standing in line at the drug store or at the bank, I invariably hear something like, "Your hair is so beautiful, how did you do that?" or even better "Is that your real hair?"

Since I now live in the South (and thus have to be polite), I try to answer the questions as nicely as I can, but to tell the truth, the constant, unwanted attention has started to freak me out. Nevertheless, I understand that since many black women tend to either straighten their hair or wear artificial hair, many people have a surprised reaction when they see a style made with naturally-kinky hair. Furthermore, since my hairstyle looks a little different than the thick "dreadlocks" that many people identify with Bob Marley, I suppose they would like to know what exactly I do with my hair.

At any rate, after a few years, I began to answer the same questions over and over again, so I decided to write this book.

What is in HAIR?

One thing you should know is that this book is mostly about my hair, not dreadlocks in general. As you may know, people have allowed their hair to tangle into various interesting shapes for hundreds of years. If you would like to learn more about dreadlocks through history, please consult the references at the back of the book.

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

In addition, unlike Rastafarians, I choose my hairstyle for aesthetic reasons only. My dreadlocks have no particular spiritual meaning; but I continue the hairstyle because I think my hair is beautiful and suits my face.

If you are interested in the religious or political facets of the "dread-lock" hairstyle; or if you would like to know more about dreadlocks for other types of hair, once again, please consult the list of suggested readings at the end of this book.

Thanks and happy reading!

Chapter 2

About My Hair

1

Hello, and welcome to chapter two. Before discussing my dreadlocks, I would like to give a brief description of hair in general and mine in particular. My hair has four properties that contribute to the appearance of my locks and the steps that I go through to maintain the hairstyle. These attributes are: thickness, kinkiness, dullness and cohesiveness.

Thickness

Have you noticed that dreadlocks don't look the same on everyone? They appear in a variety of colors, textures and thicknesses.

IMAGE2.1 : differentdreads

My dreads are relatively thin and extremely abundant. In fact some of my friends tease me and tell me that I look like a mop or a lion because I have so much hair!

I have extremely thick hair, so I decided—OK, I didn't have much choice—to form a lot of dreadlocks. If your hair, on the other hand, is thinner you or your stylist may decide to create thicker, fewer dreadlocks.

Some stylists believe that this will prevent breakage of the locks. I'm not sure if there is any proof to support this assumption; and I've noticed some Rastafarians with very thick dreadlocks who still have hair breakage. The hairstylists may have a valid point, but in my opinion proper grooming, regular trims and conscientious repair are the only ways to really handle inevitable dread-lock damage.

Kinkiness

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

Another property that my hair has is kinkiness, also known as nappiness. By kinky I mean that the strands of my hair are shaped like tightly coiled little springs (See Image 2.2). This shape made forming my hair into uniform dreadlocks fairly easy.

IMAGE2.2 : Springofmyhair

Well, what is nappy hair anyway? Well, just like people, hair comes in all colors and shapes; and there are basic differences in different types of hair.

According to

Reference

when viewed from a cross-section, all hair is shaped like an ellipse. A strand of very straight hair is the most round, and the strand is shaped like a cylinder. A strand of very curly hair, like that possessed by the majority of Negroid peoples, is the most flat. Because of the shape of the kinky strand, it easily forms an irregular spiral pattern.

IMAGE2.3 : straight, wavy, curlyhair

Dullness

Besides the shape of the individual hairs, nappy hair also possesses the property of dullness. Because of the shape of the strand, a mass of kinky hair does not look very shiny. Kinky haired peoples in the United States, Caribbean and Africa habitually add oils and butters to their hair to add an attractive sheen and prevent the breakage to which kinky hair is also prone.

Cohesiveness

Some of us will remember this word from our chemistry courses. I think the term describes kinky hair perfectly.

Tightly curled hair tends to stick together. As a result, it can be difficult to untangle; and should be combed carefully and patiently to prevent breakage.

Fortunately the cohesiveness of the hair also makes it perfect for braiding and twisting into intricate styles. For example a stylist does not need to place a rubber band at the end of a braid or plait that has been formed in naturally nappy hair. On the contrary, a plait in straight, wavy or chemically straightened hair may unravel if unsecured at the end.

Chapter 3

The Beginnings of My Dreadlocks

1

Well, now that you have an idea of the type of hair that I have, I'd like to share with you the story of how I started my dreadlocks.

Bye Bye to Chemically Straightened Hair

During my sophomore year in college, I decided to stop relaxing my hair. I had very thick, medium length hair that had been straightened regularly since I was 13. I absolutely hated relaxing my hair. Because it's thick and kinky, the strong chemicals needed to straighten it almost always irritated my scalp.

In fact, I had actually wanted to "dread" my hair in high school. Unfortunately, my parents are conservative as well as from the Caribbean, so that was out of the question. They may have convinced themselves that I really was going to become a pothead and drop out of society! And I half-believed my stepfather when he said that I wouldn't be able to get a decent job. Anyway, their efforts discouraged me enough to put off the change for two more years.

Experimenting with New Hairstyles

Well, back to college. My boyfriend at the time was surprised that I relaxed my hair. I guess he assumed that black people naturally had straight hair, too! At any rate, I said to myself, "He's right. I like my own hair, and I'm not wasting any more time changing it."

I decided to stop relaxing my hair and wore cornrows on my semester abroad in Mexico. I absolutely love cornrows, but the weekly washing, combing and braiding really hurt my arms and neck; so when I got back to the US, I cut it all off.

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

IMAGE3.1 : Mexicocornrows

IMAGE3.2 : shorthair

I loved the convenience of my extremely short "natural" hairdo, but one day I noticed that my hair formed little coils when I twisted it. Well, I decided to keep going, and soon my head was covered in little twists.

To my surprise, everyone I met loved the style. The compliments that I received gave me the extra little push to dread my hair.

So, to sum it up, here are the steps that I went through to begin my dreads:

1. I stopped relaxing my hair.
2. I cut my hair very short.
3. I twisted my natural hair into evenly spaced coils.

Once I had the twists, though, I still had to wait a few months for my hair to "lock". You can read about the locking process in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Locking My Hair

1

So just what is "locking," anyway? Well, a dread is described as locked when you can't comb it out! To attain this state, I suggest three things: twisting, suspension of washing and braiding.

Twisting

There are two types of twisting that I employed. One uses untwisted hair, and the other an existing twist or dread-lock. To twist loose hair, I chose a small section of hair, and rolled it in my fingertips. Because of the kinkiness of my hair, it naturally formed a little coil.

Once I already had a head full of little coils to work with, I would employ the same tactic to periodically twist them. In addition, I would use a method that involved a) holding the twist in place with one hand and b) grasping nearby loose hairs with the other hand and wrapping them around the baby-dread in a spiral motion.

This is actually a simplified description of the maneuver that I use, but it's pretty close.

While waiting for my dreads to lock, I twisted them almost every day.

Suspension of Washing

I also did not wash my hair for about a MONTH when I first started my dreadlocks. Why?

Well, before a dread-lock achieves permanency, any moisture will unravel it—even rain. Every time it rained or even got misty, I had to re-twist my hair. In order to avoid starting over from scratch, I stopped washing my hair until my dreadlocks were tangled enough to survive on their own.

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

I don't have very smelly hair, so I didn't do much during this time aside from oiling my hair and avoiding strenuous exercise.

Braiding

The last method I used was to plait my hair. In some spots on my head, the hair is smoother and more loosely curled; therefore more resistant to locking. To combat this difficulty, I employed the tactic of first making freestanding plaits, and then rolling the plaits between my fingertips.

And that's pretty much all I did to lock my hair.

The one thing I did not do was to use beeswax or aloe. People actually recommended both of these products to me, but—let's face it—my hair was dirty enough, I didn't want it to LOOK dirty, too!

The only product I suggest using is a good quality olive, almond or coconut oil. Rubbing the oil into your scalp will prevent flaking, and placing it on your hair will help reduce some of the breakage that regular twisting will cause.

At any rate, once my dreads finally locked, I resumed washing my hair. Because of the complicated process I now go through to clean it, I sometimes wish I hadn't! To learn about how I wash my hair, please see the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Keeping My Dreadlocks Clean

1

Normally people don't ask me this, but I am sure they wonder. Just how often do I wash my hair? The answer is one to four times a week, depending on how often I go to the gym.

This surprises some of my friends who wash their hair every day—but not as much as what I do AFTER I wash my hair, which is add more oil!

Washing is only one of the things I do to keep my hair clean. I also protect it from dust and debris as much as possible. I will describe both of these methods in the following pages.

Washing

If you have hair like mine, thick and prone to dryness, I suggest washing your hair once or twice a week at most. If you engage in any strenuous activity, you will of course have to wash your hair afterward. Nevertheless, you should reserve a few hours once week to thoroughly wash and groom your hair.

I use the following steps to wash my hair.

1. I Thoroughly wet my hair.
2. I add shampoo to my scalp and massage it with my fingertips. When my locks were new and apt to unravel, I used coal tar shampoo for this step.

Afterward, I would wash again with a very sweet-smelling shampoo to get rid of the odor of the coal tar.

3. I rinse very well. If I'm feeling energetic, I wash my scalp again.
4. I add shampoo to my hair as well as my scalp. Now I make sure that I shampoo my scalp as well as massage the entire length of my hair.
5. Once again, I rinse very thoroughly.

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

6. I add conditioner to the entire length of my hair. I think this step is only needed if your hair has been damaged. To tell the truth, I sometimes I skip the conditioner if I'm feeling lazy, or if I know I'm going to wash my hair the very next day. At any rate, unless you spend a lot of time in the sun, swim in a chlorinated pool or color your hair, this step is not too crucial. In any case, I use a high quality, moisturizing conditioner.

7. I rinse the conditioner thoroughly from my hair.

For washing my hair, I use high quality, generally more expensive shampoos. I have found that when it comes to hair products you generally get what you pay for.

Drying

After washing my hair, the next step is to dry it. Since I have so much hair, this is a big production, and gets a whole section of the book devoted to it.

1. Shaking - First, I shake my head up and down to get rid of the bulk of the water. Hey, if it works for dogs. . .

3. Towel drying - After shaking to get rid of some of the excess water, I usually wrap a towel around my hair, making sure to squeeze a little to remove more moisture. Of course, I have to make sure to use a dark-colored towel to avoid getting light-colored fibers stuck in my hair.

2. Blow-drying - Thank goodness for technological advances. I have found that blow-drying my hair with a high-wattage dryer on the COOL setting is a great way to remove moisture from my hair. Especially from my scalp. For the length of my dreadlocks, I usually squeeze along the dreadlocks while using the blow-dryer. The cool setting not only feels great, but it also helps to prevent burnt hair.

4. Air drying - Finally, I air dry my hair. No matter how long I blow-dry my hair or towel dry it or shake it, it usually needs about two more hours to dry completely. If I wash my hair at night, I slather on some tea-tree oil (just in case) and sleep on a dry towel to make sure my hair dries completely.

Protection from Dust

Apart from washing, another important way to keep dreadlocks clean is to protect them from dust and debris. Pet hair, lint and the like are all my enemies. If you have dreadlocks and would like a pet, I seriously suggest adopting one with a coat that matches your hair color. Remember, as long as you have dreadlocks, you will not be able to comb your hair; and any little particle that gets stuck in your locks will be a part of your mane for life.

In addition to color coordinating your pet, I also recommend covering your hair with a scarf when sleeping, doing housekeeping or yard-work. I actually forget to do this myself most of the time, but it's still very important.

Nevertheless, you will probably end up with some lint or debris in your hair anyway. So, occasionally check your hair for "foreign objects" and remove them promptly, and remember to give your mane an occasional trim.

The following chapter describes my hair maintenance routine in more detail.

Chapter 6

Grooming My Hair

1

After washing my hair, I usually do some sort of grooming. This post-wash haircare falls into two categories: light grooming and once-a-week-is-this-really-worth-it comprehensive grooming.

In addition, every few months, I trim my dreadlocks to keep them clean and healthy. By cutting off a half of an inch to two inches of hair, I can keep my dreadlocks looking even and attractive.

At any rate, the light grooming includes oiling and light twisting only. On the other hand, the comprehensive grooming encompasses oiling, complete twisting and debris removal. I will detail these procedures in the succeeding pages.

Oiling

The first thing I do after washing is oil my scalp and hair. As I mentioned before, I use a high quality, moisturizing oil. My favorites are olive oil, almond oil and coconut oil. I advise against using mineral oil, waxes or petroleum jelly on your scalp. In my personal experience, skin doesn't absorb mineral oil well. In addition, according to

Referencetodiseaseforcoloredsbook

, the petroleum jelly and waxes found in many "pomades" can cause clogged pores and pimples. Ewww.

During the oiling procedure, I deposit a few drops of oil every few inches on the surface of my scalp. Then I massage it in. After that, I rub some oil between my palms and smooth it onto my locks.

Light Twisting

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

I described the method for twisting dreadlocks in chapter four. During light twisting, I apply this technique on only the first two rows of locks at the beginning of the hairline.

IMAGE6.1 : twistingonlyfirst2rowsofdreads

At this point, you may be wondering just what is the point of post-wash twisting. Well, hair is constantly growing. And before you can incorporate the new growth into a dread-lock, it forms messy-looking fuzz. On it's own, this fuzz would probably lock anyway, but in a much less predictable manner.

IMAGE6.2 : messylookingfuzzversustwistedlocks.

Complete Twisting

As the name suggests, complete twisting means twisting each and every dread-lock. During this process, I try to incorporate all of the new growth into a nearby dread-lock. This process assures that my dreadlocks retain a uniform shape.

After the twisting, I try not to wash my hair for at least two more days. I also do some twisting on each of these days to further encourage good lock formation.

Debris Removal

During this stage, I check my dreadlocks for lint and alien hairs. The alien hairs usually come from friends who shed on me, and I have a weakness for fuzzy sweaters—hence the lint. After checking my locks, I do my best to manually remove the unwelcome intruders.

I should probably mention at this point, that sometimes I cannot remove the lint that's embedded in my dreadlocks. Therefore, I do the next best thing and disguise it using a semi-permanent rinse, or more-recently a permanent black dye.

Yes, I'm a bad girl. You can read more about my hair-coloring escapades in chapter seven.

Chapter 7

Coloring My Hair

1

Some people think that since I have a "natural" hairstyle, I don't use chemical products in my hair. These folks may be surprised to find out that I have colored my hair on a number of occasions and continue to color dye it on a regular basis.

Sadly, this practice has contributed to most of the damage to my hair, roughening the texture and causing breakage. In fact, I would never recommend using bleaches or permanent hair dyes at home to anyone! Nevertheless, I have used both in the past, and continue to use a dye to change the color of my hair.

In the rest of this chapter you can find out why I dye my hair, and the process I use to maintain my current color.

Just why do I color my hair?

When my dreadlocks were a few months old, I decided to lighten my hair. My plan was to bleach my hair and then use a temporary color to tint my locks purple. Needless to say I was still a student at the time.

To my dismay, the bleach made my hair a hideous orange color. To correct the damage, I decided to dye my hair black. Unfortunately, I guess that "permanent" has a different meaning when used in conjunction with hair dyes. Although I ended up coloring my hair black twice, the shade always faded, and the pesky orange hair made its evil re-appearance until I wised up and cut it off.

Another reason I color my hair is that I like my "fake" hue better than my natural one. Although my natural hair color looks black, it's actually a very dark brown. To me, this is much less attractive than the rich, bluish black with which I tint my hair. Since my skin is very dark, I find that this tone really complements my complexion.

The final reason I darken my hair is to cover up two of my hair's number

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

one enemy: lint. To avoid getting unwanted attention, I use hair color to make sure that my dreadlocks are uniformly black and beautiful.

How Do I Color My Hair

After using a semi-permanent rinse for many years, I now color my hair occasionally with a black dye—usually followed by a trim. I buy my "professional" brand of hair color in a beauty supply store. Then I basically follow the directions on the bottle. Since I color my hair at home, I use the following accessories to avoid making a big mess: plastic caps to cover my hair while the color sets, plastic gloves and a plastic smock to keep the color from staining my clothes and skin. If you plan to dye your hair at home, I would suggest buying these products from a beauty supply store.

If you have naturally dark hair, and really would love to lighten it; I suggest consulting a professional. A licensed hairstylist should be able to give you the color you desire with as little damage as possible. The only change adjustment that hairstylists have had to make during the times when I have had my hair colored in a salon is to use more dye because I have so much hair!

Chapter 8

Repairing My Hair

1

Welcome to the final chapter! In the next few pages, I will describe hair damage and repair. Over the years I have invested hundreds of hours in creating my dreadlocks. As a result, I am extremely loath to part with any of them. Unfortunately, as a result of several factors, I sometimes experience hair breakage and have to act fast to combat it.

In this section, I'm going to explain the foolish things that I did to personally contribute to my hair damage, the types of breakage I experience, and ways that I repair my dreadlocks.

Causing Dread-lock Damage

When my dreads were about an inch long, I decided to dye them purple. Since I have dark hair, this involved a two-step process, the first of which was to lighten my hair.

To make a long story short, I ended up with dry, orange hair. Then to cover my little faux pas, I dyed my hair black, damaging it even more. As a result this abused hair—which I have since cut off—was very prone to thinning and breakage.

Sometimes I just pull off the loose ends, but mostly I try to fix them.

In addition to bleaching my hair, I also discovered a cute new hairstyle that required the use of rubber bands. The friction from the rubber caused several of my beloved dreads to thin and almost break—this time in the middle.

I think the most valuable advice I can give anyone with dreadlocks is to never, ever bleach his or her hair, and to never, under any circumstances use rubber bands. Actually, I should qualify that. I recently discovered a type of "rubber" band that supposedly doesn't snag or damage hair. I can't completely vouch for their effectiveness as yet; but so far, so good.

¹Registered ©2004 Joanne Christian Reproduction in Part or Whole Prohibited by Law

Types of Breakage

So far we've covered two types of lock breakage: end breakage and center breakage.

IMAGE6.3 : Threetypesofdamage

The last type of hair damage that I have had to fix is Wimpy Dread-lock Syndrome. This condition is characterized by a dread that is so thin it literally hangs from the scalp by a few hairs!

So how exactly do I repair all this damage? Well, I employ four different methods. 1. Combining - In the case of Wimpy Dread-lock Syndrome, I twist the weak lock together with a stronger neighbor. The result is one strong dread with two "tails."

IMAGE6.4 : dread – lockwith2tails

2. Sewing with thread - Using a needle and thread, I reconnected breaking or thinning dreads.

Although I used it myself, I do not recommend this procedure.

After I spent a few hours swimming in a chlorinated pool the once-black thread turned to a yucky gray. Talk about unattractive! Even after I used a permanent black dye (yes, again) on my hair, the color of the thread remained the same. Luckily I only repaired a few dreadlocks using this method, and until my hair grew out, I could usually hide them in the rest of my hair.

3. Sewing with human hair - After my pool experience, I decided to buy some human hair from a local beauty supply store. Using a needle, about 5 strands of human hair and a threader, I reconnect damaged dreadlocks.

The human hair is a little expensive, but I think it's worth the price. The type I buy is described on the package as "kinky weaving" hair, even though it's straight. Actually, the texture is the main disadvantage, since it doesn't match my naturally nappy hair.

On the other hand, human hair locks naturally with my hair, forming a reliable way to mend breaks. Since it's real hair, it's also dyeable and will match any tone that I add to my natural hair. Finally, although I stay away from swimming pools, I am pretty sure that chlorine will not turn human hair gray.

IMAGE6.4 : Stepstosewingwithhumanhair

In order to sew a dread-lock together, it's a good idea already know how to sew. If you lack this particular skill, then I would suggest leaving the repair to a professional. If you do know how to sew, and would like to re-connect a dread-lock, you will need:

- a. Human hair that matches your hair color.
- b. A straight needle with a relatively large eye.
- c. A threader

d. Small, sharp scissors

First you should cut about 10 strands of human hair from the bundle. Then, using the threader, thread the hair through the eye of the needle. Thirdly, pull a few of the hairs on either side so that the strands are not all the same length (see the image).

Then begin stitching the dread. I suggest starting the stitch a few millimeters below or above the thinning section. You stitch over the thinning section at least twice. As a result, you may have to re-thread the needle before you have finished with the dread-lock.

Once you have strengthened the lock to your satisfaction, trim off the loose hairs with scissors. As you wash your hair, the human hair should tangle with your natural hair and form an increasingly strong bond.

4. Trimming - Every few years, I trim my dreadlocks. Trimming can minimize lint, and even-out hair that has become damaged or ragged over time.

So now you know all about Joanne Christian's Hair!