

Up until the 6th grade, I straightened my hair. Around that time, I started to find a piece of myself and that piece so happened to be my roots. On social media, “black hairstyles” were becoming so popular. It was the first time I saw black girls actually do something with their hair other than braids, ponytails, or straightening their hair. But something was wrong. When I looked at my hair or when I wet it, it didn’t look like those black girls. I slowly started to lose confidence. My hair didn’t feel like my hair. My “afrocentric features” didn’t look good to me... my nose, hair, eyebrows. . Around that time, I was also gaining more independence from my parents. I did my own hair, picked out my own clothes, etc.. Hair tutorials aimed at black girls were becoming more popular so I was receiving some type of help. Instagram was a life saver. When I saw that I wasn’t the only one and there were ways to “fix it”, I felt a little better. I started to do those styles but I was never satisfied because my hair still didn’t feel like it was mine.

Fast forward a year later, I stopped straightening my hair. I tried to wear my hair in “natural” styles: braids and anything else that didn't include heat or chemicals. But it still never looked right. My hair was still “straight” or in other words, heat damaged. Heat damage means my hair never coiled/curled up. It was just straight and never went back to it’s natural curly state. It broke off and looked weird because the bottom was straight and the top was curly. I was still clueless, so I asked my mom. No hate to my mom but, she was the worst person to ask about it. For one, she grew up in times where afrocentric hair wasn’t “normal” and second, she knew absolutely nothing about natural hair. Her hair was either always straightened or in a wig. She told me the damage was normal and that it was my curl pattern. Spoiler alert: it wasn’t. I proposed that I cut my hair but like almost all black moms, she had an obsession with the hair that wasn’t hers. Something I see a lot in the black community is the belief that having short hair is a bad thing. People are called things like “bald headed” and everyone has an excuse as to why their hair isn’t long. “Yeah, some girl cut my hair when I was little” “My mom permed my hair when I was a child and it fell out” “My hair used to be long but a hairdresser burned it off”. The perm story was definitely the most common. But, even with these negative views on short hair, my mind was already made up. I wanted my hair gone.

My older brother’s birthday is on the 4th of July and we celebrated on the 6th. We were having people over so of course I had to get ready. But there was one problem: my hair. That was the first day I disregarded my mom’s instruction and cut it. I cut all of the straight pieces off and any other piece that was too long to blend in. I could only hope my mom wouldn’t notice and she never did. I cut it so short that I couldn’t even do a ponytail at the top of my head. But that day forward, I took pictures. I hated pictures. I never thought that I looked good in them but for some reason, I didn’t feel ugly. I went from having maybe 3 or 4 pictures of myself to 1k+ now. I even started to post on instagram. My hair did grow back fast but by then, I had lost my need for length. The need for length was obviously something dragging down the black community, I shouldn’t participate in such toxic culture. I shouldn’t have to prove that I can have long hair. Throughout my 3 year journey, it made me aware of the suppression of our features. The negative stigma around black girl’s hair as it grows out of our head and the length. Pretty sure I’m the first to do it in my family and I hope that we all can discard the negative ideals on our afrocentric features. It’s done nothing but make us tear down our own community from within.

