

I've decided to let my hair colour grow out. I'm not prepared to divulge how many years I have been dyeing it for, but safe to say I have no idea what colour it is any more. Last time I saw my own hair colour it was dark brown and Duran Duran were in the charts. But both my parents went grey much younger than I am now, and I am getting some hints from the roots I occasionally spot in a bright changing room.

Like all teenagers, I first coloured it as my pathetically safe attempt at rebellion. I had a childhood of neat buns for highland dance competitions, so when I went off to university (far too young), one of my first acts was to chop off and attempt to dye my lovely locks red. The shade I was after has remained elusive. Despite coming from a largely ginger family, I never could achieve any natural shade of red, although I did get some interesting tones over the years.

You could always tell when I had an exam or an essay deadline looming. The flat was immaculate and my hair took on new, and sometimes strange, shapes and colours. Forget any theory about new haircuts signalling significant events in a women's life. It usually just means boredom (if strange) or a job interview (if nice but dull).

I've tried all the variations – henna paste, highlights, lowlights, permanent, spray in (pink); some more successful than others. I remember once as a student when the whole flat decided to dye their hair black all at once. Not a good colour choice at any time, and walking into a room full of your closest friends who all look like the living dead can be bit disconcerting, especially when you remember that you look as bad as they do. We had hardly any visitors to our flat in the few short weeks that we maintained the look.

The only other time I sported very dark hair was a solo effort. I was back in the Highlands, living in a village not well served by public transport. I cycled at first,

but hated arriving at work all sweaty (it was a 10 mile journey). After getting knocked off by a caravan wing mirror (they had no caravan attached at the time, so obviously thought the mirror never counted), I decided to try and thumb a lift to work and back. If I was feeling mentally strong, I would catch the school bus in the morning, but it left too early for me to get it home at night.

I found hitching surprisingly easy. Local people got to recognize me and I began to rely on regular lifts in and out of town. The occasional visitor would pick me up too, and I was able to repay them with inside information on where to go and what to avoid.

At this time I was blond, but as always began to get bored with the colour. There is a seasonal effect on colours, for some reason I go light in the winter and dark in the summer months; maybe a lingering attempt at rebellion? Anyway, having learnt from the black incident, I thought it safer to go very dark brown. It was around the time that Madonna and Gwyneth went dark, and it struck me as a little bit more sophisticated than my existing mop. My hairdresser at the time wasn't so sure about the look, but despite his bluntness, he knew better than to argue and let the new me loose on the world. When I was still waiting on a lift two hours later, I began to wonder if my hair was part of the problem. Accelerating away from the lights, my usual lifts didn't recognize me and I found out that strangers are much more likely to give a lift to a young blond girl than a dark haired person of indeterminate sex. I remained blond for the rest of my hitching career.

Two things have happened this week. A friend (who is younger than I am) had a significant birthday and was mumbling about middle age, and then someone on the radio said that no-one over the age of thirty should wear leggings. Both these

events have reminded me that, although I might still feel twenty inside, I clearly will never look that age again and am in danger of becoming a very sad woman.

When I was a child, my mum had a friend who claimed she was always being mistaken for a film star. She wore mini-skirts and no bra and when my dad made a joke she would laugh loudly and touch his leg. People laughed at her behind her back and I swore that would never happen to me. Despite being convinced I resemble Lauren Bacall, I have always tried to dress my age.

So the leggings have gone in the bin, and the slow process of growing out the hair colour has begun. From now on, it's temporary colours until the roots are long enough and then a short cut to reveal the new grown up me. Philip Schofield still looks cute, right?