

Barber in a Box

Thursday, 17 February 2011

When my husband quit his job to start his own company, we knew we'd have to find ways to tighten the budget.

"Hey, Cindy," Chuck said, eyeing the clearance table, "Look at this, hair clippers on sale. Why don't you cut the family's hair to save a little money?"

"I don't know," I answered, "I've never cut hair." It was almost true, I did snip my little sister's curly locks when I was five. On the other hand, that was thirty-five years ago and I'd since gained proficiency with scissors.

"Okay," I agreed, "how hard can it be?"

I opened the box and scanned the enclosed brochure which promised I'd "style hair like a pro." It was beautiful. The weight of the tool in the palm of my hand felt like a natural extension of my body. I popped the blade protector and ran my finger along the comb. I dreamed of people stopping me to ask who does our hair. "Oh, I do it myself," I'd smile and do that hand wave thing people do when feigning modesty.

Finally, the day arrived. "I need my hair cut," Chuck said, handing me the box like it held the key to a new Porsche or a gift certificate for maid service.

I laid out the attachments and perused the instructions. "Position victim's head at operator's eye level."

"Victim?"

"No," I joked, "I added that."

Chuck was not at eye level, but I figured I could bend and squat. "Next, Comb hair to remove tangles and hold clipper in a relaxed, comfortable grip for best control."

I switched the machine on and it hummed to life. Starting at the base of his neck, I carefully clipped around Chuck's head.

As I continued, the gentle hum gave way to a greedy, gnawing sound and a thick shock of hair fell to the floor. "That didn't sound good," Chuck laughed.

It didn't look so good, either. And I don't know why I thought bending and squatting would work, I've never been good at gymnastics.

Once accustomed to his new look, Chuck suggested that I cut the boys' hair. It took some bribing, but our youngest agreed to sit first.

It's hard to clip the hair of a four year-old with the wiggles. I started to panic and lost my relaxed, comfortable grip. I made blind passes across his head, desperate for an even cut, but he kept shaking his head and finally slid his body off the chair. When he looked at me, I nearly cried. Gone were his wispy blond waves, replaced by what looked like the work of a pocket knife in the palsied hands of a drunk.

"Here, let me try," Chuck smiled and took the clippers from my hand. "There," he announced after a few passes, "you look great!" He lied.

Our older son, who had been silently observing, piped up, "You look like a clown! I don't want my hair cut!"

"Please keep your comments to yourself," Chuck admonished, "you know your brother is afraid of clowns."

The following day, we took the boys to a real salon. The stylist glanced from father to son, but I caught the flash of pity.

"Dad hair cut, eh? We see it all the time," she said and offered the guys lollipops.

I studied the grain on the hardwood floors.

The boys left the salon looking handsome again, and I vowed to leave our hair cutting to professionals and find another

way to stretch the budget.

Like a garage sale. First item - one set of clippers.