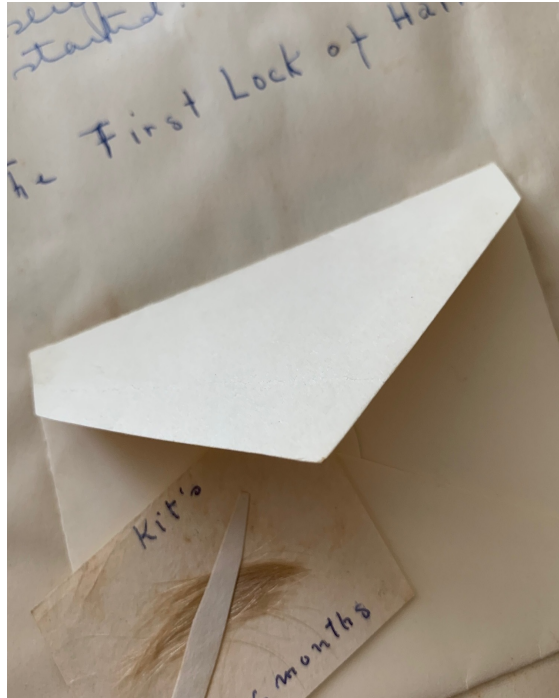


Hair-Raising Tale

Fred Gielow. November 1, 2025.

For a year or two after I was born, Mom kept an album of early photos she took of me along with a number of her comments. She also kept a clipping of my hair. It was on a card, enclosed in a small envelope (see photo). I have no idea why she did that. Perhaps it was “the thing to do” at the time, but it seems pretty silly now. Who would ever want to see what



my hair looked like way back then?

Of course when I was a baby, Mom told the barber just how she wanted my hair to look. I remember once when I was maybe six, she asked if I'd like to have a baby sister. I replied emphatically “no!” Perhaps her wish for a daughter influenced her selection of longer hair for my appearance when I was a baby.



In short order, my hair was clipped to a “proper” length. Naturally, then, I was paying no attention whatsoever to my hair



length, style, or condition. Mom was tending to all that.



In kindergarten, my haircut was traditional. Mom chose the clothes and shoes I wore, the food she served on the dinner table, my bedtime, and lots more. Why not my haircut style as well? And so it was.

By the time I was ten or

thereabouts, I still wasn’t thinking about my appearance. Lots of other things were on my mind instead, like school work and friends and play. (Photo: Dad and I are at the end of the pier at Saugatuck, Michigan one summer vacation.)





In my senior year in highschool, my hair was slightly longer than average, but not by much. This photo was taken for our class yearbook . Little did I know then, that I was about to enter a really short-hair phase. It began in 1953 when I headed off to college.

My roommate during my first and third years was Chuck Jones, a good friend from highschool days. We decided to cut each other's hair as a way to save money and time. We invested in a clipper that had a variety of height attachments and that's all we needed. My hair was cut nice and short. Well, at least short. *Really* short. (Photo: 1957.)



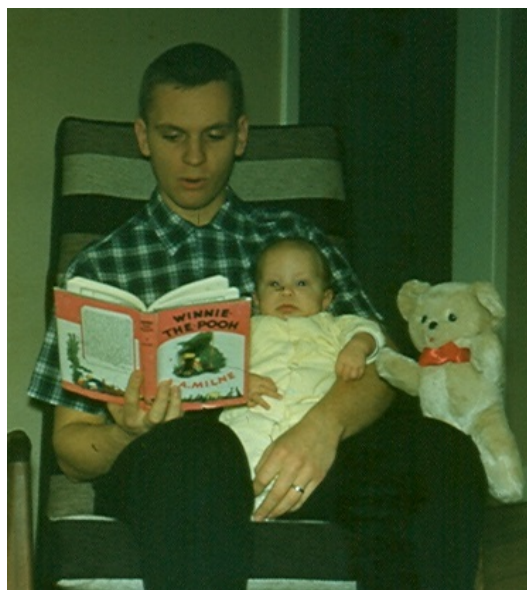
I was very comfortable with my hair short. It was easy to shampoo and never needed to be combed. I could just forget about it. How convenient. (Photo: 1958.)





In 1959, I graduated from college, bought my first car (a Pontiac), moved to Poughkeepsie, New York, started work at IBM, and got married. Quite a busy year. My hair remained very short.

In this 1961 photo, I was a father and my hair remained cropped. But I was nearing the end of an era, when the tight restrictions on how men were expected to appear would relax. I was about to find myself in a mild dress and grooming revolution. I had no idea what changes I was about to experience.



I'm guessing this photo was taken in 1962, maybe 1963, I'm not sure. After my third year in college, I never saw Chuck Jones again. I tried numerous times to get in touch with him, but was never successful.

Anyway, how did I get my hair cut when he wasn't there? That's an interesting question. I don't remember.

Maybe my wife cut it. Maybe I did. Maybe I went to a barbershop. I simply don't remember.



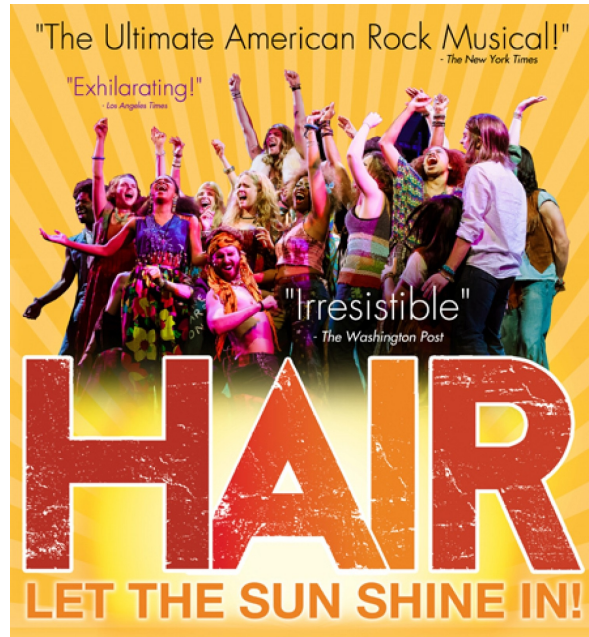
This photo of me sitting at the console of an IBM 7090 computer was taken in 1964, plus or minus a year or so. It was taken to recognize the publication of a little booklet I had written: "Introducing the Computer."

Note that my hair had grown out quite a bit, and there was no hint of the buzz cut I had had for five or six years. A very slow march to longer and longer hair had begun.

In March, 1966 I joined the Poughkeepsie Chapter of barbershop singers. After some time, four of us formed a temporary quartet so we could compete in a contest. At this point, my sideburns were sneaking down ever so slightly, and my really-short hair was never to be seen again.



When I was in grade school, I didn't like my blonde hair because most of the other kids didn't have blonde hair. But by the time I got to college, I *liked* my blonde hair because most of the other kids didn't have blonde hair. Many years later, I even bought some "SunIn" shampoo that I used occasionally to lighten my hair even more.



In 1968, the musical “Hair” debuted, and with it came a focus on – what else? – hair. Men began sporting longer and longer hair styles.

The following decade (the 1970s) was a time of new-found personal freedom and personal expression.

Men let their side burns flourish. Bell bottoms were the rage. Men wore high-heel shoes. Strict dress boundaries were demolished almost overnight. And it seemed everyone not only accepted, but applauded the changes going on. It was a time of partying, discarding old customs, and rejoicing.



I was in a barbershop quartet (maybe it was 1970) that was invited to sing at an event held by the Providence, Rhode Island barbershop chapter. We got to our hotel room Saturday afternoon, and much to our surprise, we were introduced to a caricaturist, who offered to draw a caricature of each of us. What fun! In his drawing he exaggerated the length of my hair, but not by much.

For some unknown reason, our quartet bass, George Nagy, had brought along a blonde wig with much longer hair than

mine, and he suggested I try it on. Reluctantly, I went in the bathroom and put it on my head.

I liked it. I thought to myself: “Some day I’ll be bold enough to let my hair grow this long.”



In 1971, IBM announced the IBM 3270 Display Terminal, a product I had worked on for several years. In this photo, I was describing the new display to an audience of IBMers. Note my sideburns had crept down a little further, and my hair was ever so slightly longer.

My parents subscribed to “Life Magazine.” They had every issue from the very first one. Dad built a big, long bookcase in the basement to hold all the copies. Naturally, after getting married I got my own subscription. I remember one cover, probably in the 1970s. It showed a highschool football player with long hair extending from beneath his helmet.

I stared at that cover. It seemed crazy. A guy with really long hair. Shoulder length. That wasn’t right. His hair shouldn’t be that long. It was a contradiction. But at the same time, there was a strange allure in that image. It was a bold statement. Daring. Edgy. Brave. Exciting.



Maybe I should let my hair grow out a little bit, I thought. Just a little longer. And I did, as seen in the photo above.

(I searched through hundreds of Life covers on the Internet, to find the football player. No luck. Did I imagine it?)

While working at IBM's North Hamilton Street Lab (maybe 1973), I decided to let my hair grow even longer. After a while, a fellow IBMer noticed and said, "I see you're letting your hair grow." I replied, "I can't stop it!"



This 1979 photo shows the effect the decade of the '70s had on me. I readily embraced the long hair fad and several other excesses of that period as well. I took great delight in wearing bell bottom pants and stacked-heel shoes. The freedom of expression was exhilarating.

At an IBM function I attended in Miami Beach probably around 1980, there was an artist who sketched portraits. He was one of the artists who produced images for use on TV news broadcasts for trials that didn't permit photographs. Not all the attendees were sketched,



but I made certain I was. I thought the artist did a real good job.

Once, probably in the early 1980s, I was scheduled to make a presentation to an IBM customer. It was rather important because the customer, General Motors, was considering a large order involving the product I was presenting. The IBM sales rep, however, objected to my long hair. He refused to let me speak to the customer, so my manager decided he would present the product (a new IBM display unit). On the day of the presentation, my manager came to work with the shortest haircut I had ever seen him with.

In 1984, I celebrated my 25th year with IBM and the influence of the '70s (see photo) was still quite apparent. At least for me.



I retired from IBM in 1991. One of the great benefits of retirement was not having to wear a suit and tie every day. That was wonderful.

Also, I could let my hair grow longer without feeling I was disrespecting IBM protocol. No one at IBM ever criticized me for the length of my hair or for my attire, but I knew I had gotten close – or possibly even overstepped – the bounds of expected appearance.

By 2004, the length of my hair had scaled back. The 1970s were long gone and



the influence of those years had clearly faded away. And I was comfortable with that, though I liked my hair longer rather than shorter.

When I went to get a haircut once (maybe 2015), while I was living in Winter Garden (Florida), I found a barbershop that was new to me, and I walked in. The shop was a little off the beaten track, at the back of a building, and it looked like it had been there a hundred years. The barber also looked rather old. “Can I help you?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said. “I’d like to get a haircut.”

“I’m afraid I can’t help you,” he replied. “Your hair is too long.”

“Well, yes,” I thought, “that’s precisely why I’m here!”

One time, maybe it was 2018, I was in my son’s car and he was driving. His car needed an oil change, so we stopped at a fast oil-change place. Tim and I sat in the car as the oil was replaced, and when we were ready to go, the attendant looked at Tim and said, “Hope you and your wife will stop in again when you need service.” Tim thought that was a real hoot. I thought it was pretty funny myself.

One day in 2024, I was entering the front door of my apartment building, just as a man was exiting. He looked at me, smiled, then said in a pleasant voice, “Good morning, young lady.” I was then in my late 80s. At least he got one of the three right.

You’d think these embarrassing experiences would have encouraged me to return to shorter haircuts. For some reason, they did not. Not at all.

In my old age, I was evolving. I would see a guy with hair down to his neck, and I'd think to myself: his hair is too long. Much too long. He should cut it back several inches.

As time went on, however, I found it perfectly acceptable for *my* hair to be as long as the guy's hair I had criticized. There was some sort of fixation going on. I decided how long I wanted my hair to be, but then when it got that long, I thought I'd like it even longer yet.

In April this year (2025), I came across an Internet website that allowed me to superimpose a picture of my face over the face in any picture I wanted. I spent a lot of time looking for pictures and then pasting my image on them. There was something quite fascinating about seeing an image of me transformed.

I was so intrigued with the process, I made a video about it. ("If I Were This Person." It can be viewed at https://rumble.com/v6sqqbx-if-i-were-this-person.html?e9s=src_v1_cmd%2Csrc_v1_upp_a)

One particular picture in that video caught my attention. This one. I thought to myself: I rather like that look. I think maybe I'd like to look just like that. Maybe I should let my hair grow longer than it had ever been before.



Then, I had second thoughts. Wouldn't it be rather silly, particularly at my age, to let my hair grow that long? Well, of course it would. What was I thinking? I knew Dad would never have indulged in such a self-centered pursuit.

His appearance was always neat and proper. His hair was cut just right, and he kept it that way.

And besides, the era of long hair on men was by then long gone. It would be just dumb to climb on a bandwagon that hadn't been seen in about 45 years! All logic and common sense said *don't* do it!

I decided to do it.

As my hair grew out, I realized there was a price to pay for long hair. It was harder to shampoo. It took longer to dry. It was harder to comb. There were more tangles. A section sometimes tumbled down over my left eye. Once and a while, a few strands would tickle my nose. And on a windy day, some ends occasionally would get caught in my mouth. I didn't like that at all! But I persisted nevertheless.

It was exciting to get a new look, a significantly new look. It was daring, dramatic, courageous, I thought. It was fun. I wasn't doing it to impress others. I knew others might actually not approve. I was doing it for myself. Very simply, I wanted my hair really long.

Even though my hair in natural light is now more gray than its original blonde, that's okay. Even though long hair is for a younger generation (or maybe out of style entirely), that's okay, too. Even though it's sort of weird to let my hair grow this long, I think that's probably okay as well.



I like it long. It's different. It's fun. It's a brand new appearance. It's a brand new experience. And I'm enjoying it. Quite a lot, I'd have to say. (Photo: October 19, 2025.)