



Warren Beatty and Julie Christie in *Shampoo* (1975), a movie that cast salons into the national spotlight as both arbiters of style and hotbeds of intrigue.

the Kindest Cut

Contributing Editor Karen Ford remembers the transformative power of her first great haircut in 1975.

N

o one in my family had ever been to a salon, at least not the kind I had in mind in the summer of 1975. My grandmother had always gone for a weekly wash and set at the local “beauty parlor,” but that wasn’t for me. In recent years, in urban centers like New York and Chicago, a new kind of salon had taken hold, but in the city of Orange, CA, 35 miles and one light-year away from Los Angeles, they were just getting the memo. Both social nexus and style vanguard, salons like the one in the movie *Shampoo*, which had come out in the spring, offered more than the wash-and-wear cuts that were all the rage. They offered membership in a new kind of club, and that’s what I was after.

In the fall I would start ninth grade, and I was determined that my last year at junior high was going to be different. The first two years had been miserable. Everyone there seemed to know each other on Day One, but because of a quirk of districting all of my grade school friends had gone to another junior high. My family also lived on the wrong side of the tracks—literally. The school drew from two suburban communities, one affluent, one not-so, with train tracks running right down the dividing line. A few years from now, the girls I went to school with would be getting Porsches for their sixteenth birthdays while I’d make do borrowing the family Chevette. For now, the difference was manifest in our wardrobes: the right clothes, from the right stores, versus jeans from Kmart with the labels cut out so no one would know.

Being between worlds put me in sync with the times. Things were changing, but in 1975 the culture hadn’t yet arrived at whatever waited on the horizon. We’d left Woodstock and the Summer of Love behind; “The Hustle” by Van McCoy, number one song of that summer, hinted at things to come. At my school, the popular girls started abandoning their hippie locks—long and straight, one length with a center part—in favor of more styled cuts, done in salons. Words like “layered” and “feathered” started to crop up in conversation and in my mother’s women’s magazines. The girls at my school called them “wings”—face-framing layers, swept back from a center part. I’d watch those girls at the mirror after gym class, touching up with curling irons. Pam, captain of the girls’ drill team (which I hoped to join in the fall) had shown up on the last day of school with a daring wedge cut, à la Olympic ice-skater Dorothy Hamill. I knew I wasn’t

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ready for something that dramatic, but I knew what I did want. I wanted wings.

Mom was against it, but not because she thought I might be corrupted by Warren Beatty. A haircut at Eastside Crimpers cost \$15, about half what she spent on groceries for a week. But I persisted. The money was mine, I'd worked all summer for it, baby-sitting and doing odd jobs. The spoils nestled in my purse: a crisp twenty-dollar bill, neatly folded into thirds. Mom drove me to the salon on the appointed Saturday and I insisted she drop me in the parking lot.

Nothing could have prepared me for what waited inside. The place was a far cry from the bare linoleum floors and perm-smell of Nana's haunt. As I remember, the décor was pure mid-'70s cool in a riot of citrus colors: white lacquered furniture and yellow walls decorated with huge, Marimekko

**Contributing Editor
Karen Ford on her first
day of ninth grade, 1975,
sporting her confidence-
boosting layered cut.**



daisies, and the green of ferns—everywhere ferns—hanging from hooks on the walls, dangling in macramé holders, bracketing the mirrors. The styling chairs were separated by lattice-work partitions, painted white and hung with still more ferns, giving the impression that each station was its own little gazebo, private but joined by the shared roar of blow-dryers and banter, “Kung Fu Fighting” and Redbone’s “Come and Get Your Love” providing the soundtrack.

I had no way of knowing just how large this place, this environment, would loom in my life in years to come. I just knew that I loved it. It felt like possibility. It felt like the one place that could maybe, just maybe, make me into the person I wanted to be. Telling myself to be cool, I bit back a grin as I was led to the shampoo bowl, and then to a chair, where I met my stylist, Robert

Saavedra, a man with platform shoes and a Sonny Bono mustache. He would turn out to be a big part of why I remember this day so many years later.

As he sectioned my wet hair he explained what a blunt cut was and how it would make my hair look fuller. To someone who spent most nights sleeping on pink foam rollers, only to see all curl depart before second period, this was a revelation. My straight, fine hair, which I brushed obsessively, was long enough to touch my shoulder blades, with margins uneven from lack of trimming and ends that were ragged and split. My stylist also explained how removing some length would help make my hair look thicker, and healthier to boot. So how much length would I like him to take off?

In a move that must have been divinely inspired (because I could make no claim to the wisdom it demonstrated) I said, “Whatever you think is best.” I also told him about the wings. Then I held my breath as he made the first snip and tried not to look shocked at the length of hair that fell.

Half an hour later, my back was to the mirror as he scrutinized his work, shielded my face with the side of his hand and spritzed hairspray over his creation. Then he turned me to face myself.

My hair just touched my shoulders, much shorter than I'd imagined, but somehow there seemed to be more of it. He told me to shake my head and I saw it had a bounce and a swing I'd never seen before. And I had wings! I felt pretty. I felt confident. I felt ready. It was the first time I'd experienced the power of a good haircut to transform not just my outside, but how I felt about myself inside. Later that day, I'd also learn something about the people who make up this business, their kind and generous nature.

Other stylists called out compliments

as Robert led me through the warren of trellises to the front of the shop. It felt like an acceptance I'd never had from my peers. I wish now that I could thank him and everyone in that shop for the way they made me feel at that moment.

Robert presented the ticket to the woman at the front desk. I'd already calculated a \$3 tip in my head and was wondering how to ask for change from my twenty without looking like a jerk as I opened my purse.

The twenty was gone.

Feeling the heat rush to my face, I dug around frantically, sure it must be hiding. But there was nothing in there for it to hide behind—a hairbrush, a pack of gum, a tube of strawberry lip gloss. It was simply gone, along with all my newfound poise.

“I... um, my money,” I stammered. “I lost it. I had a twenty-dollar bill in here. I don't know what happened to it.”

Robert was so kind. He took me back through the shop, retracing our steps. We poked around his station and under the shampoo bowl. Word spread through the shop. Soon everyone was crawling on hands and knees or lifting seat cushions, on the lookout for the missing twenty. I was busy berating myself. How could I have lost it? What was I thinking, carrying it loose in my purse like that? It was 1975—\$20 was a lot of money, more than I'd ever had at one time in my life.

My second walk to the front of the shop was a different experience. Before I had been Miss America. Now I was panicked and ashamed, the little kid who couldn't be trusted with money.

I called Mom to come pick me up and bail me out. The wait for her to arrive was excruciating. Sitting on a white vinyl chaise in reception, I tried to make myself as small as possible, my eyes on my shoes, using all of my will to keep from crying.

But of course as soon as we were alone, the tears started. Mom had already searched the car, but once we got home, we

searched again, then every possible nook and corner of the house, me squinting through a blur of tears. The prospect of having to pay Mom back was bad enough. What really destroyed me was how quickly the loss of that money had deflated all the good feeling I'd had just minutes before, that floating-on-air sensation, that confidence and sass.

About an hour after we returned home I was in my room, flopped facedown on my bed, when I heard the phone ring. After a brief, muffled conversation there was a knock on my door and Mom poked her head in. "They found it."

It should have made everything better but somehow all I could think about when I went back into the salon was to wish that my eyes weren't so puffy from all that crying. The receptionist pretended not to notice. I asked, "Where was it?"

She told me Robert had found it at his station after I'd gone. He appeared at that moment, poking his head from behind a fern. "Hey! We found it!" he said, brightly smiling.

I thanked him. "No problem," he said, and went back to his work.

It wasn't until years later that I really thought about that exchange, and the look on his face when I'd thanked him. At the time, in my relief and lingering shame, I'd read it as pity for the dumb little girl, trying to play grown-up and falling on her face. Now, of course, I see it for what it was. Did he really find my twenty? We'd looked everywhere; it seemed impossible we'd missed it. Now I wonder: Did he cover it himself or did everyone in the salon chip in a few bucks? I'll never know. But I do know this: the bill I got back was crisp and new, without a single crease.

I did end up making the drill team in ninth grade. I got my first boyfriend, and my first kiss. And I finally found my tribe, not among the popular girls but the kids on the school newspaper staff, a home that would sustain me through high school and pave the way to my future. I won't say it was all because of that haircut. But when you're just trying to get your life off the ground, getting some wings is a good place to start. <

POP CULTURE SHOCK

1975

Billboard's top single is "Love Will Keep Us Together" by Captain & Tennille but the **Grammy goes to Olivia Newton-John's** "I Honestly Love You."



Prime-time television provides **a style icon for every personality**: the classic (Mary Richards, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*); the quirky (Rhoda Morgenstern, *Rhoda*) and the feminist fashionista (Emily Hartley, *The Bob Newhart Show*).

Jaws takes the biggest bite of the movie box office; **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** sweeps the Oscars.

The Eagles album "**One of These Nights**" holds the top spot on the charts for five weeks straight.

All in the Family is the top-rated television show.

The Armani fashion house is born; Diane Von Fürstenberg's **iconic wrap dress** turns one year old.

Dorothy Hamill wins the U.S. Figure Skating Championship; her "**wedge**" **haircut wins the hearts of women** everywhere.

Saturday Night Live debuts on NBC.

Bill Gates and Paul Allen start a little company called **Microsoft**.

