

## My Jesus Hair

Lev Raphael

"Hair is an accessory," my gruff-voiced stylist told me more than once when I wanted to keep it short. "You're not thinking about your hair the way you should be."

She could be bossy at times, but she did get me thinking.

I had favored short hair because, as a writer, I did frequent book tours and worrying about how my hair looked before a reading was not something I needed. Especially since I'd been an awkward flat-footed boy with bad teeth and had worked for years to ease my body shame.

But Pam was so insistent, she convinced me to let it grow out, even though it might have some unflattering stages. She promised to keep me looking good nonetheless.

I was naturally sort of auburn-haired, but occasionally let her put in blond highlights and since we were changing things up so dramatically, I went full blond with lowlights. In a year's time my hair was almost at my shoulders and I felt more masculine than ever. Long hair was definitely not hip then with gay or straight men, but I enjoyed the lion's mane that complimented an auburn beard I wasn't messing with.

That's when Jesus surprisingly entered the picture. Or the classic, blond, light-eyed Western image of Jesus, who had actually been, most likely, short and dark skinned. Me, I was six feet tall, on the slim side, and Scandinavian-looking with green eyes. That, and my new hair, opened up a strange world.

Checking in at a Delta counter at La Guardia Airport for a flight back to Michigan, I felt the agent staring at me. As she handed me my boarding pass, she asked if anyone had ever said I looked like Jesus. I was feeling frisky, so I leaned forward and whispered,

"I *am* Jesus." She gasped.

"I'm a good Catholic girl — don't say that!"

My Australian acupuncturist was laughing one morning when she greeted me in her waiting room.

"A woman who just left said she saw a vision when driving the other day. She said Jesus was in the car behind her. I asked if she lived in your town and she did. So I said, 'Oh, that's just Lev.' "

While working out at the gym days months later, I was passed by a burly man holding his little son's hand and the wide-eyed boy asked very loudly,

"Daddy, isn't that Jesus?"

It happened less often if I pulled my hair back in a ponytail, but even then I'd get the question that the Delta agent had asked me more than I could ever have imagined.

I eventually went back to shorter — though not short — hair. It wasn't the questions as much as the time I could save not wondering which product to use when, and spending time drying it. Then there was my spouse, who complained about my hair getting in the way when we made love, even if it was tied back.

But people who'd admired my Jesus hair started asking me why I'd had it cut. My answer was simple: "I got tired of being followed around by those twelve guys."