

Naturally Speaking



Hillary's "Comfort" in the Kitchen It's all Relative



"If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen."

Those words made famous by Harry Truman have been used a lot lately by Senator Hillary Clinton during her bid for the Democratic nomination. She uses the phrase as a way of saying that she can handle the pressure of being president.

She invoked the phrase just before the Iowa caucus in January to set her all male political opponents straight. She also used it in April to chide Barack Obama, her remaining rival, following the Philadelphia debate. When she resurrected Truman's quote on that occasion, she added her own line.

"And just speaking for myself," Hillary said, "I am very comfortable in the kitchen."

When Hillary boasted her comfort in the kitchen, I knew right then that she was not speaking from the perspective of an Adult Survivor of the Hot Comb.

If she were, she would have refrained from making that claim.

Adult Survivors of the Hot Comb, or ASH for short, are women who were born with nappy hair. They are women who endured traumatic hair straightening sessions and lived to tell about it. Those notorious hair-straightening sessions took place in the kitchen.

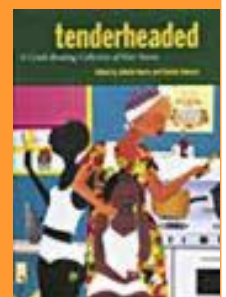
When Hillary rhetorically spoke of being comfortable in the kitchen, she was apparently referring to the room that most people know as the place where food is cooked. But ASHy women know all too traumatically well that the kitchen is also the place where our hair was cooked.

I am an ASH and during my occasional flashbacks, I am transported back to the days when my sisters and I sat in the sweltering kitchen waiting for our turn for the burn. The kitchen was the place we reported to on Saturday nights to get our hair pressed, or o-pressed to be more precise.

Our rebellious naps were neutralized by a hot, steel-toothed comb that my mother heated on the kitchen stove.

The hot comb was the weapon of nap destruction.

Just before placing the hot comb in our hair, my mother would wave it in the air and blow on it a few



times, as if that was supposed to make it cool enough to bear.

It didn't work. The comb was still hot and my hair still sizzled. My mother cooked my hair until all traces of what it used to be, and was supposed to be, was gone. But the lost identity of my hair was only temporary.

As soon as it came into contact with water, sweat, or any other form of precipitation, it reverted right back to its natural state. That is why the dreaded kitchen hair straightening sessions were ongoing rituals that took place in my house and in countless other homes where nappy-headed females dwelled.

In our kitchens, the smell of burning hair was as common as the smell of fried chicken.

But don't misunderstand. Those uncomfortable hot comb sessions were not performed by our elders with meanness in mind. Albeit misguided, they were very well intended acts of love.

Our mothers wanted us to be presentable and pretty. But they were led to believe that kinky-textured hair was not a thing of beauty. So we had to sit in the kitchen and take the heat.

This is no criticism of Hillary's claim that the kitchen is her comfort zone. She is within her rights to feel that way. But as an Adult Survivor of the Hot Comb, I maintain that kitchen comfort is definitely in the mind, and in the head of the beholder.

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