

# Don't wash that gray away

By JOY SEWING  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

**W**HEN Susan Ralph stopped dyeing her hair a decade ago, she also unshackled herself from the daily routine of curling and blow-drying. For work, she gently tucks her long, gray mane under a baseball cap; the rest of the time it goes loose and wild.

## MORE WOMEN ARE AVOIDING HAIR DYE AND LETTING THEIR HAIR GO NATURAL

It's liberating, said Ralph, 58 and the owner of Dharma Cafe.

"You have to take life as it comes," she said. "Women have got to become more comfortable with who they are. It's on us to say, 'Look, I'm gray, and I feel good about it.'"

With the aging of the baby-boom generation, some beauty experts have declared gray the new in hair color. But many women still aren't comfortable letting their natural side show. Nearly 65 percent use hair color, many starting at age 18, according to a Procter & Gamble survey. In another report, Clairol says the 71 percent of women who dye their hair do so in order to "look and feel more attractive."

Ralph, who started going gray in her 20s, understands both sides. She said she felt obliged to dye her hair while working as a financial officer for an oil company because she didn't want to be "perceived as old." She didn't embrace her gray until after she left the job.

"It's an unfortunate double standard that men can go gray gracefully, but women with gray get old," she said. "I hope that changes someday."

Anne Kreamer, author of *Going Gray: What I Learned About Beauty,*

*Sex, Work, Motherhood, Authenticity, and Everything Else That Really Matters* (Little, Brown, \$23.99), is on a mission to get more women to follow Ralph's example.

Kreamer estimates she spent  
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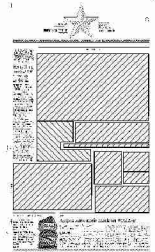
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\$65,000 over more than two decades on hair dye and color treatments and thought her dark hair masked the 10 pounds she had gained over the years. She also admits to even getting several rounds of Botox to help her stay young.

But Kreamer grew weary of her routine salon appointments and became more curious how she would look with gray hair. So she finally freed herself of "a much too darkly shellacked helmet of hair" at age 52.

"Artificial color was simply what I had always done, what almost everyone my age did, and what I unthinkingly assumed looked good," she writes.

In a phone interview, Kreamer said there is an overwhelming, unrealistic pressure



to stay young-looking, and gray hair isn't a part of that image.

"Whether they live in an urban or rural setting, women especially feel pressure to dye their hair in order to position themselves and advance in their careers," she said. "But the reality is age really is all in your mind.

"We're all fooling ourselves if we think we don't age and won't get gray. It's like wearing a miniskirt over a certain age. You just have to accept the fact that you can go gray and still be fabulous."

Kreamer says she was most surprised by men's reaction to her hair.

"In the entire 25 years I had my dyed hair, no man ever stopped me to tell me he liked my hair," she said. "Now, I get compliments all the time. I never expected that to happen."

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Women have been dyeing their hair for centuries. Ancient Egyptians used henna and kohl to darken or alter their hair color. In the late 1800s, hydrogen peroxide was discovered as an effective chemical to lighten hair. And Clairol launched its first coloring shampoo in the 1930s and created a do-it-yourself hair dye women could use at home in the 1950s. It also gave people of all ages the freedom to change their hair color without spending a fortune.

In *I Feel Bad About My Neck and Other Thoughts About Being a Woman* (Knopf, \$12.95), writer Nora Ephron offers a humorous take on the issue.

"The reason why 40, 50 and 60 don't look the way they used to is not because of feminism, or better living through exercise," she writes. "It's because of hair dye."

She also concludes hair dye is the most powerful weapon women have against aging, and it has led to acceptance of other beauty processes — face-lifts, liposuction, etc.

Interestingly, Hollywood

seems a fitting example of Ephron's philosophy. A handful of female celebrities, such as singer Emmylou Harris and actress Jamie Lee Curtis, proudly show off gray hair. Only a few, including Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*, go gray on the big screen.

And Kreamer notes in her book that none of the 14 female U.S. senators show any gray and just six of the 67 members of the House of Representatives do.

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We found several Houston women who are proudly letting nature take its course.

**GAYLA GARRISON**, 46, started going gray in her early 30s. It came as a surprise, since no one in her family had gone gray so early.

She tried tinted rinses, cellophane treatments and other

products to cover the gray. Then one day, tired of running to the beauty shop at even a hint of gray, she decided to cut off the color and go gray completely, at age 35.

"I had no idea how much gray there was," said Garrison, a territory manager for Pepsico. "When my mom saw my hair, she was speechless."

Now she's amused by all the compliments she gets.

"Some people actually think I color my hair gray," Garrison said, laughing. "I think it's how you carry yourself. I have a fairly youthful demeanor — and a good haircut."

And guys love it, she adds. "It definitely takes courage to go gray when everyone around you isn't. But it's liberating."

**ZITA GERALDO** let her hair turn a silvery hue for a different reason.

She grew up in Colombia, where she saw many women, including her mother, gray naturally. So six years ago she let her hair do the same.

"As I've aged, I have realized my features have become more

relaxed," said Geraldo, 59, an artist and former president of the Friends of Women's Studies at the University of Houston. So, she said, the gray gives her "a softer look."

"I think your beauty comes from the inside, and it shows on the outside," she said. "The more you know yourself, the more you don't care about what others think about you."

**ANNIE TSUI** says she and her older sister Mae Chien are the only ones in her family who let their hair age naturally.

Tsui says she didn't want all the fuss of constantly using chemicals to cover the gray, preferring to let "nature take its course."

She isn't bothered by people thinking she's older because of it.

"I don't know what old is,"

**YVETTE CHARGOIS**

said Tsui, 54, an administrative assistant at Houston Community College and a graduate student at the University of Houston. "I feel young at heart. I keep myself active. Sometimes we get older, we put on a little weight and we go gray. That's life."

**YVETTE CHARGOIS** — who's known in Houston's social scene as "Ms. Chag" and writes

a weekly social column for the Houston Defender newspaper — is equally known for her stylish gray hairdo.

The oldest of five sisters, Chargois saw her first gray strands as "a sign of distinction and wisdom." She proudly says she's never dyed her hair.

"I earned every one of these gray hairs. I believe in growing old gracefully. I think if more women let their hair be natural, it would be more acceptable. So many women are just too reluctant to try it."

For the hesitant, Chargois offers encouraging words: "How are you going to know how you look with gray hair if you don't try? You can always change it back."

**SUSAN FARB MORRIS** says she was reluctant to go gray 11 years ago when she spotted her first few gray hairs.

"I didn't want to look old," said the 52-year-old public relations consultant.

Today, Farb Morris says her gray pixie hairstyle gets compliments almost everywhere she goes.

"People tell me I'm brave," she said. "I guess I'm a role model to inspire women to go gray, but they don't realize their compliments have empowered me."

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## PRODUCTS FOR GRAY HAIR

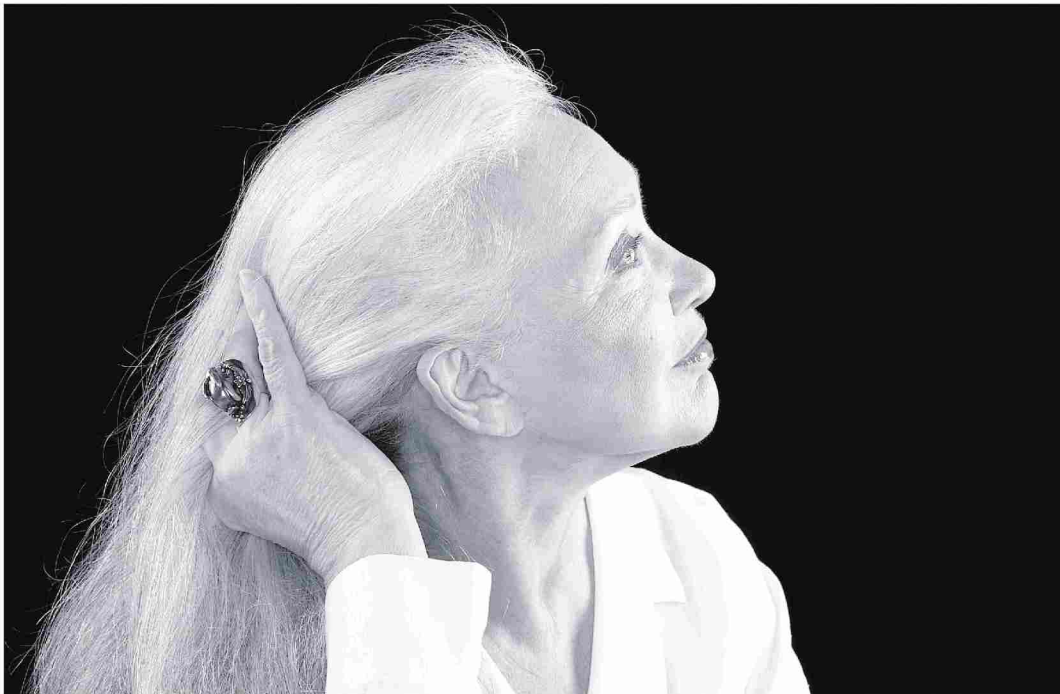
**Shampoos:** Phyto Phytargent Whitening Shampoo for gray and white hair, \$24; L'Oreal Professional White Violet Color Depositing Shampoo, \$15; Aveda Blue Malva Shampoo, \$16; Davines Alchemic Silver Shampoo, \$25.

**Conditioners:** Aveda Blue Malva Shampoo, \$16; Davines Alchemic Silver Conditioner, \$30; Mizani Scalp Care System.

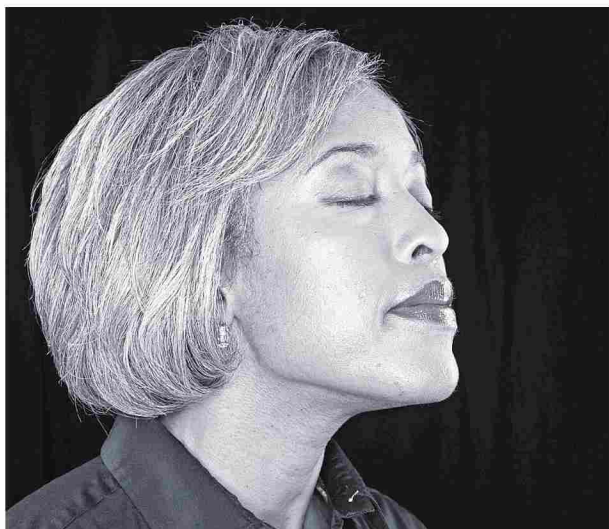
**Books:** *Going Gray: What I Learned About Beauty, Sex, Work, Motherhood, Authenticity and Everything Else That Really Matters* by Anne Kreamer, (Little Brown, \$23.99); *Going Gray, Looking Great: The Modern Woman's Guide to Unfading Glory* by Diana Lewis Jewell, (Fireside, \$25)

### BEFORE & AFTER

**SUSAN RALPH**  
Dharma Cafe owner and chef Susan Ralph started going gray in her 20s and colored her hair for years to fit in with the corporate world.



BILLY SMITH II PHOTOS : CHRONICLE



**BEFORE & AFTER**

**GAYLA GARRISON**

Gayla Garrison says she gets more compliments on her gray hair than she ever received when it was dark brown.



**BEFORE & AFTER**

**ANNIE TSUI**

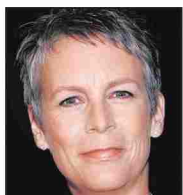
Choosing never to color her hair, Annie Tsui says she just didn't want the fuss of keeping up with chemical dye treatments.

**chron.com**

**ONLINE:** A few celebrities have let their hair gray naturally. See photos, [chron.com/life](http://chron.com/life)



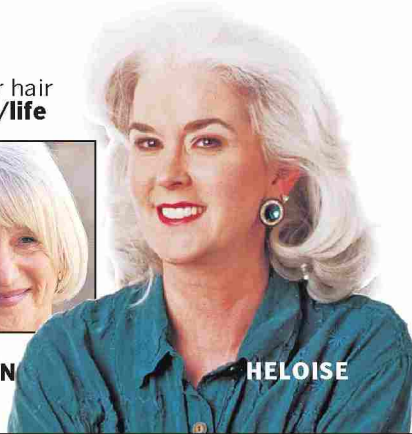
**NANCY WILSON**



**JAMIE LEE CURTIS**



**HELEN MIRREN**



**HELOISE**



BILLY SMITH II PHOTOS : CHRONICLE



## BEFORE & AFTER

### SUSAN FARB MORRIS

Susan Farb Morris hadn't intended to make a statement of bravery when she went gray more than a decade ago. It just happened.

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## **GOING GRAY GRACEFULLY**

Everyone grays differently, but you'll never know how you'll look until you try. Gayla Belay-Iyamu, a local stylist and national trainer for Mizani, says plan on a one-year transition. She offers these tips:

### **Go lighter**

It's easier to transition to gray from lighter hair. Try highlighting, tint or brightening treatments.

color treatments can turn gray hair yellow.)

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### **Moisturize**

Weekly conditioning will help gray hair, which has a tendency to become dry and brittle.

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### **Cleanse**

Shampoos designed specifically for gray hair can help your hair shine, as well as remove chemical discoloration. (**Note:** excessive cigarette smoke and improper

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### **Get a great cut**

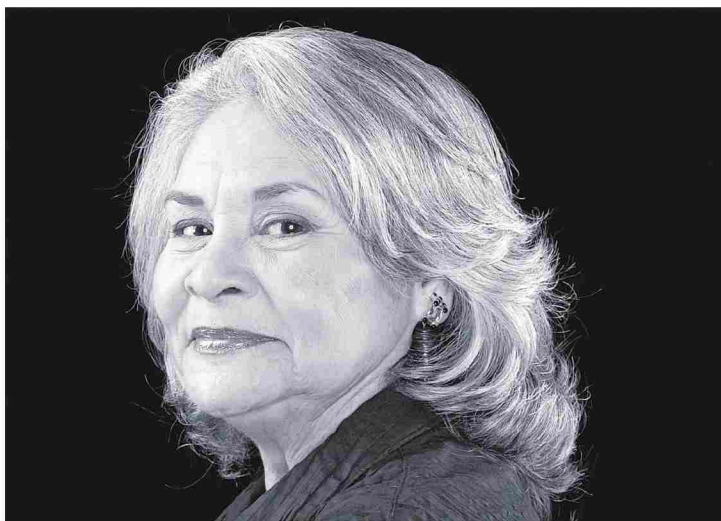
A hairstyle that suits your personality, face and lifestyle, says Belay-Iyamu, "makes all the difference."



#### **BEFORE & AFTER**

#### **ZITA GERALDO**

In her native Colombia, many women let their hair gray, so Zita Geraldo did the same without reservation.



**BEFORE & AFTER**

**YVETTE CHARGOIS**

"I earned every one of these gray hairs," says Yvette Chargois, the oldest of five sisters. She chose never to cover up any of her gray.