

# Black newswomen break the mold by 'going natural'

By Tonya Mosley 11/30/10



*KING-TV's Tonya Mosley before and after (photo courtesy of Mosley)*

I had been running away from scissors all of my life.

"Just skim my ends," I'd tell every hair dresser who dared bring scissors near my shoulder length "Oprah hair." It was my look, my broadcast reporter look -- even before I was a broadcaster. So it seemed unbelievably surreal that one year ago I took scissors to my own beloved tresses and cut, cut, cut...until I had a 1/2 inch Afro. I was tired of the time and money that went into maintaining the look. In an impulsive instant I made the decision to "go natural," and it continues to be one of the best decisions I've made in my life.

It takes guts to [wear kinky hair](#) in the television news biz, an industry that fawns over "the look." So last week, I was overjoyed when I saw another fellow broadcaster take the plunge.

[Rochelle Ritchie](#), a television reporter in Florida, recently documented her "big chop" in a long format sweeps piece. Her story focused on the new trend of black women going natural and the health issues surrounding the use of chemical relaxers. Like me, Ritchie's management team has been extremely supportive. The tide seems to be turning. We've come a long way from what our predecessor's went through.

WATCH COVERAGE OF BLACK WOMEN GOING NATURAL:

"It amazes me that after 40 years, my story continues to resonate with folks," says legendary New York City television reporter [Melba Tolliver](#). In 1971 Tolliver's bosses at WABC banned her from their studio after she went from relaxed to natural. She had been assigned to cover Trisha Nixon's White House wedding and they suggested she either relax her hair back or wear a head scarf. "A local newspaper got wind of what was going on. The public responded incredibly positive to my hair change, even people who didn't care for my natural thought the choice of hairstyle was my right," says Tolliver. Decades later Tolliver tells me she still wears her hair chemical free.

There are others, [Michel Martin](#), Denise James and my friend [Farai Chideya](#) just to name a few. They are however, far and few between and most of them were already well established in the business before going natural. It's not as easy for those starting out. Journalism schools encourage young grads to wear their hair "neat and well groomed" which often translates to "no braids, dreads or Afros." Realistically, there are deep seated prejudices against natural hair and while news directors may not be as blunt as Tolliver's former bosses, there are pressures.

"For T.V. personalities to appear outside the 'norm' goes against the TV zeitgeist if you will," Renee Ferguson said last year in an interview with The Maynard Institute. Ferguson retired two years ago from NBC's WMAQ in Chicago. "When my news director at Channel 13 in Indianapolis told me my afro scared white people he was reflecting his concern for advertising revenues that paid our salaries. Hair, clothes, plastic surgery, weight issues, aging issues -- American women are brainwashed."

Those words are powerful and painful. This is why the story Ritchie produced is brilliant. Through her piece she has in many ways blown the lid off of what we as black women go through to conform. For us, it's painful. For other cultures it's shocking and enlightening.

I truly believe myself and women like Ritchie are ushering in a new generation of black television natural reporters who are proud, fearless and accepted.