



## The Glamour of Aging

by Barbara Strakele



Getting ready for bed is becoming more of a project than I ever dreamed. I can rationalize that in the morning a woman will fix her hairdo, apply makeup and select an outfit, leaving it up to the individual as to how much fussing is warranted.

But for bed????

Every night I run a brush through my hair to free up all of the hairs that would have fallen loose during the day if they weren't epoxied together with hairspray. Then I run my fingers around the surface of the sink to capture potential drain clogs. If a lot of hair has scattered on the floor, I have to shake them off the bathmat and blast them with the blow drier to corral them for disposal.

Makeup comes off easily with soapy hands followed by a gentle rub of a warm face cloth and a pat with my bath towel. Are we done yet? No. I need to apply a thin application of Metrogel, a prescription cream, around my nose and mouth to protect me from the horrors of adult acne.

Prescription eye drops are next. Right eye first...and it must be kept closed for at least a minute. Meanwhile I fish the nasal spray out of the makeup/medicine draw of the vanity. This gets a gentle shake before spraying two fast shots into each nostril while looking down at my toes. The looking down part only pertains to the position that your head should be in while you are squirting. Remember, I still have one eye closed until I stop counting to 60.

After using the eye drops on the left side, (and needing to accomplish something, anything, while counting to 60 again,) I go pee. And return to the vanity to wash my hands. By then I have forgotten about counting to 60 and both eyes are open, so I am not really sure if my left eye really ever gets enough Restasis, which is costing me a small fortune.

I start to wonder why the cabinet under the bathroom sink cabinet is called a "vanity." There is nothing vain in my nighttime routine, which makes me think of the kitchen cabinet downstairs which originally stored our small supply of liquor.

Now the lone bottle of vodka is hidden behind his and her vitamins, fish oil supplements, calcium pills and milk of magnesia amongst a dozen other choices. There is no medicine cabinet in our house but we are thinking of converting a walk-in closet into our own personal CVS.

In the corner of our master bedroom is a plush Queen Ann chair upholstered in blue and white brocade. This is where I sit to start on the other end of my evening routine.

Removing surgical support stockings is not a fun thing to do, but it is easier than putting them on (which compares to putting a condom on an elephant.) The tightness of the hose is compounded by the amount of swelling that manages to take place during the course of the day, and as I peel a stocking down past my calf, the degree of difficulty increases.

Since my shins are the most painful part of my legs, somehow I have to maneuver around my heel without adding pressure to my lower leg.

The challenge is to pass over the shin area without allowing the fabric to snap like a rubber band, while at

the same time not poking a hole through the stockings with my fingernails, which are finally looking pretty good. The IOC should really consider adding this activity to the Senior Olympics next year.

I rinse the stockings off in the vanity and hang them over the shower curtain. There are ruts at the top of my feet below my shins from the bindings that have just been removed. Picture a foot made out of clay that is attached to a clay leg and left to dry before the artist had time to smooth out the juncture. Or just picture the neck of an armadillo.

The final insult to my evening boudoir is called a C-PAP. (Think sea, then PAP. No. Forget about the PAP.) It seems that, if things aren't bad enough with my hair, eyes, skin, sinuses and legs, my doctor tells me I now have sleep apnea.

The guy from the medical supply house was here today to show me how to use this respiratory apparatus and to give me a pep talk to motivate me into using it whenever I go to bed. I didn't need much convincing when I was told that I stop breathing so often in my sleep that unless air is forced into me, I have a higher risk of stroking out.

My night stand has been overtaken by an appliance that looks like a boom box but doesn't make any noise. Hardly leaves room for the lamp, tissues, bi-focal glasses and current reading material, which are all part of my routine for falling asleep.

Webs of head straps tightly bind a clear plastic mask to the front of my head from the top of my nose to my chin. A six-foot hose connects the mask to the boom box. How glamorous is that? Since I can't wear my glasses while wearing the mask, I wonder how I am ever going to fall asleep without reading.

The demonstrator-guy was very enthusiastic about convincing me of the wonders of this contraption. I will be healthier, get a good night's sleep, and have improved blood pressure and metabolism. My husband will be able to sleep on the same floor as me and not wake up from my thunderous snoring and snorting and gasping for air. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

The truth is that I have no choice in the matter. What the hell do I care anymore? So after spending a half hour with us, when the demonstrator-guy asked if I could get into a routine starting tonight, I almost felt like telling him about the creams and the sprays and the stockings and the eye drops. He's probably never met a glamour queen like me. This? A piece of cake.

At 10 p.m., I try on the mask for the first time standing in front of the vanity mirror. The triangular plastic digs into my face as soon as I connect the cheek straps. In my attempt to loosen the bindings, I end up helplessly snagging my hair instead.

Eventually I loosen the screw that puts pressure on my forehead. Funny, the demonstrator was able to put the mask on me in no time, yet I struggle for at least five minutes before halting any more attempts at comfort.

The mirror reveals a ridiculous, distorted reflection of someone who doesn't look at all like me and I laugh. At least I think I am laughing; my face doesn't seem to move. Tomorrow will be easier, and tomorrow I'll remember to put chap-stick on my dry lips before the mask goes on.

Barbara is currently writing a memoir, her mother's story, titled "Anne with an E". Having spent four years caring for her mother who had Alzheimer's Disease,

Barbara now volunteers her time by speaking to caregiver groups. A part-time bookkeeper, she lives with her husband in Eastham.