

# TO BEARD OR NOT TO BEARD

BY MATT KEEFER

A rancorous pack of snarling hyenas, wicked shrieks of laughter flinging strands of saliva off dull incisors and across the table. Typically our weekly meetings at Mercury are more cordial (I baked brownies that day, after all) but the fact of the matter is that I had to write a piece on growing a beard, that, well, fell flat. Fell off my face. Shaved off, more appropriately. If you've tried a beard before, you know why; if not, consider photo exhibit A through D.

So photographer Jacqueline Marque suggested, for at least the third time, that I wax between my eyebrows. She apparently badgered her husband into doing it.

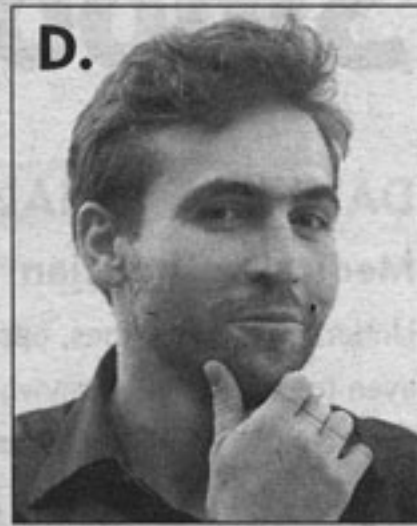
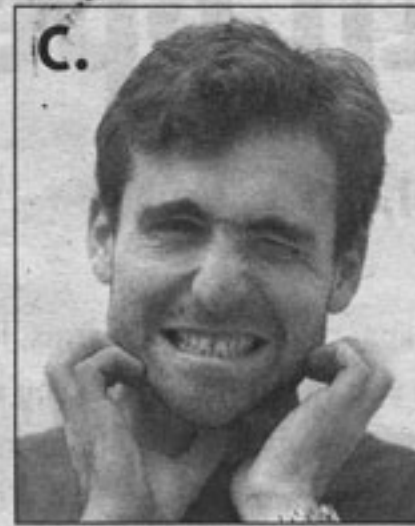
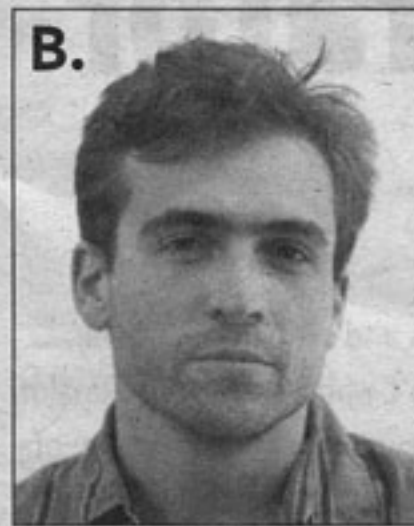
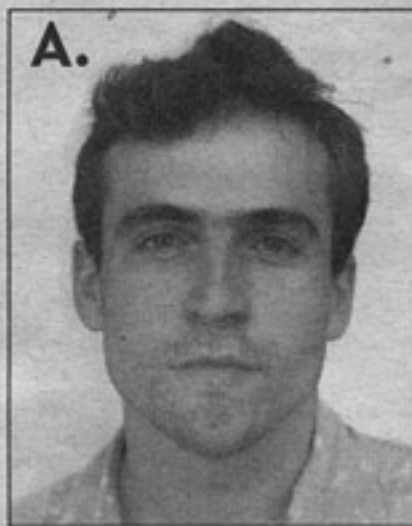
"It looks so much better!"

The Mercury, in its never-ending quest to hit the young male demographic, needed a "guy" story that was slightly less depressing than Dave Christner's essay on baldness. But to do something, anything, to disturb the natural growth of hair on my body, other than the bidiurnal shave and the semi-annual haircut, could not possibly yield a young-male-demographic story. Even Jacqueline's husband must've felt some manly respect yanked out along with those errant follicles. I had no choice but to turn to the one man who has more experience in prop planes, automotive mechanics, and beards, than anyone else I know.

"Any advice for growing a beard?" I asked.

"Well, not to shave it off."

Yeah, that's my dad. He places the age of his beard this way: the side growth he got in Rhode Island, and the beard and 'stache he had in California, i.e., it's old-



**A. Day one:** about 14 hours into experiment. I look to save about 37 cents/week in shaving gel. **B. Day three:** Not bad, not bad. On your coattails, Clooney. **C. Day seven:** Oh, the utter inscrutable agony! Like a muzzle of bees! **D. Day ten:** Is there no merciful – hey, what's cooking, good looking? – God, time for the shaving cream!

er than me. After wasting the last two weeks turning to my coworkers in the newsroom and lacking enlightenment from my drinking guru, my dad was my last, best hope to avoid the waxy fate.

"It can be a giveaway on what you ate for lunch," he told me of the beard. "But look at Abraham Lincoln. Without a beard he'd just be another guy; with a beard he was one of the greatest presidents. Is this going to be in the paper?"

I asked him about the immeasurable itch. "It bothers you. After a while it goes away."

"How long is a while?"

"At least two weeks."

"How do you stop the itch?"

"If you can live with it for a couple weeks..."

Then he lays a bit into me about "incentive," weighing the word as if he were handing me a shiny dollar. Some people need beards, he lectured; some, myself included, could pull it off without one. Great. Be grateful for what you've ... whatever.

I had to find out from my father that my weak-willed generation doesn't have the gumption to grow a beard. That's why we respect men like Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. When called upon, great men are willing to suffer the excruciating agony of beard growth for the betterment of their country.

*Matt Keefer refuses to wax on the grounds that it is contrary to his religious beliefs, moral convictions, and biological sex. Unless there's money involved.*