

There was a little girl

who had a little curl

By Dawn Fallik

For The Inquirer

Being a curly girl means being a walking weather barometer. As the humidity-free winter explodes into spring, all I need to do is look in the mirror to see what the weather's like outside. Big, bigger, Jewfro.

Oh yes, there are weapons to tame the wild beast - closets full of pomades, gels, creams, detanglers, defrizzers, and something called "Superstar" and "Fat Head" (I swear), enough so that the shelf is sagging slightly in the middle.

Then, after an hour of pulling and gelling and defrizzing, it takes about three minutes of pre-thunderstorm humidity to move the bar from sleek to static shock.

And yes, we realize this is not as important as the war in Iraq or contaminated pet food, or nine million other things. But the way you look makes an impression, and when the way you look includes a curl sticking up in some sort of corkscrew Alfalfa wig, that impression is not always kind.

Haley Boyer-Ettinger, 24, of Mount Airy, was so frustrated when her straight hair turned curly after puberty that she gave up and went dreadlocks for a while. Then she straightened it for six months.

Now she's working on being at peace with her reddish-brown curly top with Aveda's "Be Curly" line. But other people aren't so happy with her new acceptance.

"When I go to hairdressers, they never really understand what I'm trying to tell them, they treat me like I have straight hair," she said. "One even said, 'You could just straighten it.'"

Lorraine Massey, author of *Curly Girl* and co-owner of Devachan, a New York City

salon devoted only to curly girls (sometimes referred to in online forums as "the mothership"), says it's time to stop fighting and find the love for the untamed.

"No curly girl comes into the world loving her hair," she said. "From one day to the next, it's different. You've got to have a Zen attitude toward your hair."

Curly hair is drier than straight hair, and so it needs more moisture. That's why it expands when it's humid or rainy, because it's sucking up all that liquid.

Massey was once a "straight" girl, but turned natural after one rainy November wedding when she watched blow-dried women turn into frizzy, moisture-seeking missiles by the end of the ceremony.

Frustrated by beauticians with no formal training in curly hair, she created her own specialty, and has found joy in her own wild tresses.

"It scares me how much something that was the bane of my existence has become the vanity of my existence," she said. "I love looking in the mirror and saying, 'So this is what my hair is giving me today.' "

Now she has rules for those with locks that resemble Roseanne Rosannadanna's: no shampoo, no blow dryers, no brushes, and no silicones. Curly hair needs moisture, and shampoo, with its detergent agents like sodium lauryl sulfate, strips moisture.

Instead, she suggests washing with conditioner (and scrubbing well) once a week, and using a homemade lavender spray, gel and fingers.

And yes, she has her own line, called Devacurl, but she rather vehemently said she'd rather see women use the cheapest conditioner than any shampoo.

Of course, it's not just the shampoo that's a problem, it's all those other products that we slop on to streamline. Gretchen Heber and Michelle Breyer used to spend hours talking about the latest trend, the best conditioner and the worst hairstylist. It made them a big hit at parties, they said.

Finally, the Austin duo started their own Web site in 1998, NaturallyCurly.com, to share the love and the agony of unruly tresses.

Now they rate products, discuss 'poo or no 'poo, and share beautician recommendations. There are also success stories of curl girls gone wild.

"When the Rachel from *Friends* became popular, that was not a good time for us," said Heber. "But I'm loving *American Idol* this year, although Jordin [Sparks] straightened her hair one night. Then LaKisha [Jones] went curl."

Also while the naturally curly have their favorite products (see sidebar), they also know

that a good hair day is gone tomorrow.

"I used to think that one product would do everything, but I get the best results with a variety," said Breyer. "One regime will work great for a week and then it's like, what happened?"

So now the women have embraced the daily unpredictability. And they consult with hair care companies, like Redken, as new products are developed.

"Curly hair is its own culture and we're at the ground zero of this culture," said Breyer. "Like it or not, we're shaped by our hair and we all fight the same battles."

Share your curly-haired tale of woe! Or tell us why straight hair is the bane of your existence at image@phillynews.com. Please include your full name and town where you live.