

Haircut  
by Dolores Wilber

*Produced by Ira Glass and Soundprint, as part of a program entitled Haircut, 1995, SOUNDPRINT is broadcast weekly on public radio stations nationwide, and is the longest-running documentary series on public radio*

He kept fussing with his hair. Pushing it around, tying it back, touching it always touching it. It was long curly wavy fine, kind of blowy, wild wisps were always escaping the band he'd hold it back with. It fell in his face fell down his back, he'd toss his head, toss it around. Sometimes he'd just let it fall forward around and down his shoulders. You could tell he was really into it, proud if it, talked about it all the time. Had all sorts of stuff to say about it—the kind of band he used, couldn't find the right kind of band, you used to be able to get it no problem. Now those damn stores just didn't make 'em like they used to. The time he's fended off the taunts and menace of more from young short-haired toughs who aimed to show a long hair he wasn't so special. His mother's disapproval. How it set him apart, how much his old girlfriend loved it, how if he cut it he's know he was over her 'cause she'd loved it so much. I liked it too but mostly I liked watching him fool with it, liked listening to him talk about it.

Yeah I liked listening to him talk all right and was anxious to see him. You know the way it is when you meet someone new, who you like, who you really like, and you're excited as hell all the time, you want to see him all the time. He was late, It wasn't like him. I had been twice through the newspaper sitting on the table I latched onto. I was outside in one of those backyard cafes, used to be an old German beer garden years ago where there was an old soggy pool table and they'd serve bratwurst and sauerkraut. Now there were video games and sports stuff, lots of tvs inside. We'd gotten into the habit of meeting there. Come to think of it don't know why really. Who were these people anyway? And where the hell was he? I decided to call in for messages to see if there was word from him.

It was scratchy hard to hear. There had been an accident. His car couldn't drive. He had hit his head, had tried to call the bar several times, they couldn't find me. He sounded upset, confused, long pauses, not himself. Very afraid, he didn't sound good, I got over to

the bar and just looked at the bartenders. They knew right away who I was. He's going to call back they said, just wait, he's going to call back. He did call back and I asked if he wanted me to come and get him. He started to say something, he stopped. He started, he stopped. He said yes, please. Come please.

The road was under construction. Hazy dust and barriers and dividers and warning signs and arrows pointing every which way, flashing lights all over traffic crawling. Shaky, I drove slowly sure I wouldn't crash myself. I saw the cars and the police lights swirling right away. I pulled onto the median and parked. Walked carefully. He looked pale and drawn, his forehead was bashed and purplish swollen, but he was standing and talking. I could breathe again. Two girls and a cop watched as I approached. He watched too almost puzzled looking. We held onto each other for a while. The cop said, so you're his friend, huh, now we been talkin' don't you think he looks like a student, he looks like a student don't he? I said, yes, simply evenly. This copy, what an asshole, I thought. Well I guess he did look like a student all right. His hair was all over the place, he had a big worn-out t-shirt hanging over old jeans. He looked completely spent but in one piece. The girls were stupid chattering. There was too much easiness between them and the cop, I mean they had crashed into his car, he was hurt, why was everyone so cheerful. The cop said the car would be towed to who knows where if he didn't have it removed himself. Thankfully the cop and stupid girls left. We walked over to a phone booth in the park next to the road and he proceeded to make an endless series of phone calls. His AAA card was expired but he thought there was a grace period so there were calls to another state to try and work things out. He had to keep calling and waiting and waiting and calling. So we would sit on this park bench to wait. It was hard for him to talk at first so we'd just sit together, we were close, he kept touching me. There was that trembly feeling about everything when you know it's okay it's going to okay but you're not there yet, and you just want someone to hold onto for a while, someone to be with for a while.

Arrangements were finally made. We crossed the road again and sat in my car to wait for the tow truck. We smoked and talked amidst cars rushing in either direction. It was kind of wild, we were in that space where you end up if you've done something like trying to dash across a speeding highway and only make it half way or you've been caught doing

god knows what the cops have pulled you over and so there's this edge of giddy excitement, impending disaster.

It was taking a long time. We decided we'd better unload his car. He said he had important stuff in there. And he did—tape recorders and cassettes and books and clothes and all manner of things just kept coming. He handed me a tape cassette and said, here, take this, you'll like it. I looked at the box. It was Jonathan Richman's greatest hits.

He pulled-out maps from trips taken years before. Louisiana, Texas, Reno, upstate New York. And he was talking. You know how it is. It's like when you're moving and you suddenly find this old photograph of some you used to know and who used to be special, so you start to thinking and you start to talking. It has a kind of sweetness to it, the distance can make it sweet and not hurt quite so much, you know what I mean. He came upon a crumpled old receipt that stopped him cold; He said he remembered it exactly, he remembered when he got it exactly and he just leaned up against the door of the car, put his head down onto his arm for a while sad silent. He finally said it was from when he had moved here from the east coast must have been close to two years ago now. When he moved here with her. And she was gone now see. Well yeah I guessed I could see all right. And then there was this plastic bag, one of those zip-locked varieties zipped up with the bits and pieces of a smashed cup saved carefully inside. He said he always thought he'd take the time and glue it right and make it fit back together again. I asked if I was going to hear about how the cup got smashed and he said smiling, oh it was an easy over-handed lob. We laughed at this. I had my own share of smashed cups.

Anyway finally the damn tow truck came, he had to tip the guy ten bucks in order that we wouldn't have to follow him to the mechanics garage, see we both wanted to get the hell out of there and just be alone together without being straitjacketed by all these cars barreling by at either elbow. Wouldn't you know it we got in my car and the goddam engine wouldn't even turn over. I had been holding it together up until that point just fine but I hit the wall when my car went dead, wanted to just leave the useless thing in the middle of the road didn't give dam about it one way or another. So he took over and

flagged someone down in nothing flat, got the car jumped and we were on our way. It was almost one in the morning by now but we were both starving and wanted a drink. We hit an all night Mexican restaurant and ordered Margaritas with lots of salt thank you very much. He was getting back to his old self by now and kept thanking me for being around and pulling my feet up into his lap. Kept saying things like well we got through that now, didn't we, like it was a notch in our belts. In the middle of eating he would get up and walk up behind my chair put his hands on my shoulders for a minute, kind of silly. He was always doing things like that. We drove home and we made out like crazy in front of his house for a while. That hair of his was down in his face, I had to keep pushing it away from his mouth.

He found out the next day that his car was totaled, it couldn't be repaired. He said he was depressed, felt everything was going downhill in his life. I knew how he felt, cars can be really important, you spend a lot of time in them and like I said they have a lot of your stuff in them and they cost so much to replace. Then he got his hair cut, said he needed a change.