

Favorite chair? Yeah, plenty, depending on era. Here's one.

There was a time when boys, men, girls, ladies, made use of the Barber's chair.

Leather seat and back, foot and head rest, white baked-enamel arms,
all polished clean.

The chair, a necessary instrument in this ceremony. It didn't matter that it could be swung in circles, either way, raised to impossible heights, required an insert seat for children, never made a sound, was otherwise unmovable.

It provided the means for the barber to ply his skill, quickly. And just sometimes, the barber would be a fountain of words covering national and intimate social news, baseball, political tales, whatever the barber chose. You were in his world. For boys, that hour could be a time to expand male adult conversation skill with barber, and other males. Always pretty much routine.

Except.

This Saturday, pre-Easter morning, I arrive the fourth in line for the haircut.

Look at the Field & Stream, Boys Life, Sports, other magazines Mr Welch kept for waiting customers. No customer had to remember where he was in line. That record rigidly kept by Mr Welch, no cheating.

Two customers were trimmed without my awareness.

The adult immediately ahead had not been in my sight as we waited. He was greeted by name. The draping of the covering cloth, raised dust, his clothes and body were filthy. Well, what I could see, unkept, matted.

Mr Welch, 'The same?'

This elderly man was obviously a repeat customer to Mr Welch.

The reply, "Yes. Extra aftershave smell'um."

Nothing else was said, until twenty minutes later, "Thank You".

In the moments between, I could do nothing but gape at a transfiguration. Mr Welch began by creating a huge lather in the sink. He vigorously rubbed some to the stranger's beard and head. The lather turned black. Then Mr Welch lowered the chair's back, raised the foot support, until the chair was the shape of a bed, flat.

I had never seen this.

Now mesmerized, could see nothing else. Mr Welch placed a basin on a platform , under the man's head, poured hot water onto the sudsy head, He then soaked a clean hot towel in the sink, washed away the residue from the nearly invisible head. Soap, cleaning and emptying the pan of dirty water was repeated. On the third cleansing, the suds, almost white.

The barber chair was reassembled, and the softened beard shaved with a straight edge razor, quick lengthy strokes.
This was not an old man.

The reddish hair on his head was scissored, as crew cut.
This was a hard-working youngster.

Before completion, the Barber had one more act, again, never seen. He lighted a taper, like we use in Church to light Mass candles , allowed a large flame to develop, proceeded to singe hair from, and in, both ears.
The aroma reminded me when Mom and I burned hair off the newly killed broiler chicken.
What is that unique smell?

Mr Welch nods to me, sweeps the floor. It is my turn.

I climb up, could say nothing.

I knew I would never again be in such a performance,
involving two, an audience of one,
chair in the supporting role.