

It's all Agnes' fault, a do-good state employee who appeared at my cubicle early this year and asked, "What'd you paint this weekend?" and pointed to the temple of my head. I feel bad that I broke her arm, but pointing at my hair was impolite. Not to mention that it wasn't paint. Or white-out. Or misplaced powder. Or fur from my dog, rabbit or white ferret.

I happen to have some shoe polish in my drawer and applied it hastily to the corner of my head. It would have worked--at least temporarily--had it not been navy blue. Susan, another do-good co-worker, stopped in next, pointed and told me I had navy blue paint in my hair. I had to break her arm, too.

Fearing everyone would soon know the demise of my formerly youthful appearance, I got online to learn how to combat aging, only to read that the Fountain of Youth was under repairs. Anti-Aging was off on a twelve month sabbatical. The AARP was seeking new members.

My usual resources suddenly unreliable, I met secretly with a future professional hair stylist at the Douglas J Institute. In a fit of indecision and confusion typical of an aging person, after learning about highlights and lowlights, cuts, waves, perms, extenders, shortners and dyes, I told the very, very

young girl to, "Curl the bastardly white ones so they hide behind the good ones." Five torturous hours later, I looked like a cross between Shirley Temple and an old bat. And I smelled funny. Like a citronella candle. Turned out to be handy, that smell, not only keeping mosquitoes and flies at bay but making them drop dead at my feet.

With my elderly hair temporarily sequestered, I



turned my obsession to other parts of my aging body: to keep from squinting and developing crow's feet, I began wearing glacier glasses; to prevent deep creases from forming at the corners of my mouth I stopped smiling; so the furrow between my brow wouldn't deepen, I stopped worrying about everything; and so the horizontal lines on my forehead would go away, I stopped by surprised by anything. At my age, I've seen it all anyway; nothing is surprising.

To further my war against aging, I stole an Avon catalog from the bathroom at work and purchased a few . . . thousand dollars of "products", including butt firming ointment, bust sculpture contouring cream and face peeling lotion. The butt firming thing worked so well I bounced when I sat down, making me appear flighty at work. The five-gallon bust sculpture contouring cream was Mark's and my favorite, turning me instantly into a full figured gal. But I did the best with the face products and love the way the dark circles under my eyes fell off when I peeled off that goopy concoction. Amazingly, with my dark circles gone, I haven't been tired since.

To further the removal of dead skin, I took to running, my theory being that I could wind-whip, freeze and bounce the cells off my face. All year I felt good about running, until I ran with my sister--five years my junior--and got left in the dust . . . to dust, ashes to ashes. The bitch.

My doctor wasn't any help relieving me of the stress of my sudden aging, asking me how old I was and, after I answered, asking me when I was born. When I answered when I was born, she told me I was older than I'd told her, based on the math anyway. Then she asked how long I had been married and what year I was married, and I told her I didn't want to answer, because if I was wrong, it might seem I was married longer than I had been and she'd tell my husband. I've since changed doctors.

Mark wasn't any help either when he said, "You don't look so bad. Yet." Then he reminded me I would only look worse as more time passed.

My parents--who both turned 70--don't look their age. My Dad said that I would look good at 70, too, if only I wasn't really related to the milk man. He died at 50. Mark's offspring were as helpful as a heat rash by offering to dye my hair for me "since we've all done it, orange being our favorite." It's not fair that they all got a year or two older this year and nobody said anything about their hair.

My animals all got older, too, and nobody said anything about any of them. Of course, half of them are white to begin with, so it's not like you can tell they're older.

Speaking of white rabbits, somewhere along the line my male rabbit, Magic, began to take a liking to Purrkins, our cat. I'm sure I'm just showing my age again when I find it embarrassing to report that my rabbit's name should be changed to Humper.

the white ferret I mentioned was named Smiggles during hour four of painting The Bunny Bedroom with Holly. It might have been the lack of ventilation or fumes or something, but Holly said something about the ferret smiling and wiggling and me drawing smiggles in the condensation of the steamed up window. It all came together and made sense at the time, anyway. Another sign of aging, I'm sure.

But at least I am not yet the way of the black gerbil. I think his name was Blackie--obviously named during another exceptionally inspired moment--and he just plain died in his cage recently. It brings the number of cages on our counter to 5 and created enough room to make one single-item sandwich. Poor Holly, stuck with plain old peanut butter sandwiches every day because there is no counter space.

Yes, Holly is living with us, and I just realized that my bodily demise occurred shortly after she moved in. Hm. She's swimming most mornings and was recently named a captain of her swim team for the fall 2007. I suggested that at her first coin toss, she elect to receive.

Word is that Arthur is a sophomore at MSU but we haven't seen him recently to ask. Willi is working in Lansing rehabilitating the socially challenged, and Becky will soon wrap up a mechanical engineer-type master's project none of us understand. Of course, with a teenager in the house, I don't understand anything anyway.

Mark and I abandoned all children and animals in May to see New Zealand with another professor and 22 Alma College students. I'd say I had fun and saw lots of

great things but that would be telling the truth and I haven't done much of that in this letter thus far.

In August, Mark and I took Holly and our pal, Jack, to the mountains of Montana for a "torture walk at elevation," as Mark called it. Seems acclimating is a great idea when you have the time, but, when you don't, hardly worth it. Nothing like 48 hours of driving for a one-on-one with mountain goats, shooting stars at 2 a.m., cutthroat trout leaping up waterfalls, a grizzly wrestling a moose. Oh, there I go again, stretching the truth.

I hope you had a great year.

