

# Going White

By Santa Shannon Settles



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## Foreword

“His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, and the beard of his chin was as white as the snow.” Are there any more iconic words to describe the expected look of Santa Claus? There are many men who have the heart’s-desire to portray Santa, but lack the necessary physical attributes. His “little round belly” is easy enough to accomplish with padding, or an excesses of cookies and eggnog! The rosy cheeks and cherry-like nose are a powder brush away. But that snow-white beard is a bit daunting for those whose hair persists with youthful color.

Sure, an easy solution can be an elastic-strapped number, but that may not provide the desired level of realism. Others will choose a theatrical-quality, glued-on yak beard and can achieve amazing results. But to be sure, to get the best results requires a great deal of skill and practice. Some will choose to go the natural beard route and use an applied color, similar to grease paint. But here, too, realism can suffer, and the paint tends to flake, drip, and transfer.

The final option, and the central topic of this document, is to bleach the color out of your natural beard. As with the theatrical false beard, though, this is not an *easy* option and will require some skill to get the best results. The goal of this document is to help shorten the learning curve and point out potential pitfalls so that you can get on with being the best Santa you can be.

## About Me, and a Quick Disclaimer

My name is Shannon Settles, and I am *not* a hair-care professional; I am a Santa. I have, however, been bleaching since 2008, on average every 7-10 days making for about 300 bleachings as of this writing. My natural color is dark brown with red undertones (thanks Mom!). In the time I have been bleaching I have pushed the limits in search of a pure white beard and head of hair. In the process I have had bleach burns to the skin, damaged my hair to the point that just running a comb through it created a chorus of snapping strands, and given myself a chemical shave... which melted the hair on my temples. It's safe to say; I know what not to do!



Since those first days I have improved my techniques, found the best products, and mapped out the limits of what it takes to produce a white yet healthy head of hair on *me*. I have become the world's best expert on how to bleach Shannon Settles' beard! That said, I cannot make informed recommendations for *you*. I have no idea of what will work for you, not specifically, anyhow. I am simply recording and sharing my experiences and make no claim that you will achieve similar results. It is up to you to take the information herein and become the world's leading expert on bleaching your hair.

I do not represent the manufacturers of any of the products mentioned, nor do I claim that my usage falls within their guidelines. So, always read the manufacturer's instructions prior to deciding how to proceed.

Finally, I have no idea of your personal capabilities. I make no warrant that just because I can use the enclosed procedures safely that, therefore, you can. Only *you* can decide what is safe for *you to attempt*.

## Growing Your Beard and Mustache

### Considerations Before You Grow

I know that it can seem that being Santa is all magic and joy, but it is really a pretty serious commitment. Here are a few things to consider before you bite the bleach. If there is one thing that I regret about my entry into the realm of being Santa, it's the timing. I wish I had taken a season to study other Santas prior to becoming one. Once you grow and bleach the beard you will basically never have the opportunity to watch other Santas work. Some of the best lessons I have ever learned about being Santa came from watching videos of others in their portrayal. So, if you have the opportunity, I'd take my pre-Santa'fied face to the mall and watch. And listen. And learn. Talk to moms and find out who is the best Santa in the area—and why he's the best. Travel to see the best Santas in the region, or if you don't know who that is, go to the high-profile locations—chances are they have invested in a quality Santa.

### Year-Round Santa

In my experience, there is no going back to brown, either... at least not without shaving the white all off! If you are mostly grey already, you might get away with just stopping bleaching, but for the rest of us, bleaching is pretty much a year-round commitment... unless calico cat is a look you want to emulate.

My first year I thought that after Christmas that I'd just dye my hair brown and have a normal year and then go white again next Christmas. Then I found out that hair dye sticks to the melanin in your hair—and bleached hair has no melanin! To get the dye to 'stick' you have to use a filler first. So I tried that, and though I was using professional products from Sally's, the results were *hideous!* The hair was absolutely one color, as though it were made from a single piece of plastic. It looked like an extremely cheap wig. I couldn't bleach it back to white fast enough and I've been Santa year-round ever since.

It's completely possible that a professional colorist could do a good job of getting you back to a natural-looking brown, but I can assure you it won't be cheap. So again, consider the commitment. Besides, think of how people act toward guys with long, dark beards... certainly a lot differently than they treat the Jolly Ol' Elf.

If you are going to stay white, then there will be year-round maintenance that comes with it. If you are naturally gray or blonde you might be able to go months before needing a touchup. But if you naturally have dark hair, and it grows quickly you will be bleaching quite often. My wife starts to complain about my roots about 10-12 days in. Guys who bleach twice a year, they can get away with torturing their hair without much difficulty, this guide is for those of us who have to bleach 45 time a year and cannot afford to do root maintenance on hair that is still damaged from our previous bleaching two weeks ago!

Being a year-round Santa also comes with a certain ethical commitment, or at least I think it should. How is it going to look when Santa gets aggravated with that driver that just cut him off waves his hands, or when he buys a pint of brandy for his eggnog, or has a disagreement with Mrs. Claus at the grocer? Are you going to be photographed with that bikini-clad gal at your Christmas in July event? You are always on-stage as a year-round Santa. Just a few things you might want to consider.

### The Cost

There are a lot of costs associated with maintaining a bleached white beard. You will need at least a developer and a bleach powder (which mixed together are used to actually leech the color out of your hair), a bluing shampoo, and a serious conditioner. You will probably want to add a leave-in conditioner, a styling gel, a sculpting gel for your 'stache, and an assortment of tools (which we'll get into later). I probably spend \$300 or more a year on these supplies.

## The Process Itself

The chemicals used can make a grown man cry, literally, and there is no escaping the smell when it is right under your nose and all around your mouth. Some guys even resort to breathing through straws or snorkels. Seriously! I spend about an hour a week on color maintenance alone. My beard grows in quite dark and it only takes an eighth of an inch of dark roots to start looking shabby. If you have dark hair, consider how long it takes you to grow 1/8" of stubble: that's how often you'll need to bleach! Blonde and grey haired fellows will be able to get away with less frequent touchups.

Part of the process is getting ready. My showers take two- to three-times as long as they used to thanks the demands of bluing shampoo and conditioning, to say nothing of the time spent blowdrying, curling and styling. I generally need to start getting ready two hours before I need to be somewhere, assuming I need to look presentable when I get there. Getting ready for an appearance will take even longer.

## Long Beards and Mustaches are a *pain!*

Growing a long mustache is no picnic. There is a stage where the hairs are long enough to get into your mouth, but not long enough to stay styled to the sides. For me, this stage lasted sixteen years and four months! Ok, it was somewhat less than that, but it sure felt like it. I would guess it took a solid four months for me to bridge that gap, and that's using an industrial strength styling gel to plaster the hairs to either side. It was probably six months until I could style the hairs to the side with a dry look. A lot of guys, understandably, opt for a bristle-brush mustache.

Even once the 'stache is long enough to style, it will be darn near impossible to eat certain foods—at least in public. Ice cream cones, ribs, spaghetti, heck even soup can be a challenge with a long beard and mustache.

Also, the longer the beard gets the more kids will inadvertently pull it, by leaning on you or hairs getting caught in jacket zippers, for instance. For this reason I have no interest in growing a beard that extends much lower than my armpits.

## It's a Bit Emasculating

I know it sounds a bit ironic, but yes, growing a long white beard can be emasculating! For instance, I have more hair care products than my wife. I have never seen another man in the Sally's Beauty Supply I frequent. I carry my Sally's club card in my wallet, and recommend that anyone deciding to go white join the club. I pack my own blow dryer, hair spray, and curling iron when I travel.

Even the guys who don't bleach will find themselves in fabric stores, picking out the perfect buttons; or ogling a fur trim walking through the ladies department; or spending entirely too much time in *Bath and Body Works* looking for the right blend of fresh baked cookies, pumpkin pie, and maybe a hint of pine tree!

And, as if the point is not made, one of the nicest compliments you will hear is, "you are the most *beautiful* Santa"! I'm 6' 2", 320 pounds and I'm *pretty*?! Get used to it!

## Setting Your Priorities

### Health, Style then Length

When it comes to how my beard is styled I have three priorities, in this order: health, shape and length. Highest priority is health; my stylist knows to cut off split ends without mercy. Second is shape; once the bad is gone the rest is cut to form an appealing shape; in my case I want a wide and round beard similar to the Sundblom Santa. Finally, the lowest priority is length. My stylist knows I want to grow my beard at least another 6 inches so he won't cut more than is necessary, assuming the first two criteria are met.

The net effect of adhering to my priorities is that I have only grown my beard by perhaps two inches in the last six months, but at least it is a full, healthy, shapely beard. I'd rather that than to have it six inches longer and look like Osama Bin Laden! I'm not saying you need to share my priorities, but I'm saying you should have some. Consider the results you want and then create a plan to achieve them.

And since healthy hair is a prime consideration for me (one I hope you'll share) it follows naturally that you must know what it takes to keep your hair healthy. Bad news is: I can't tell you what it'll take to keep your hair healthy, you will have to learn that on your own (I know, I sound like a broken record here). The main point I want to make here is that you need to start early.

### How Early is Early Enough

Well, here are some things to consider as you set a schedule. Take the earliest date that you might get a gig, Thanksgiving, a week before, whatever you think might be the case. Figure that it might take 4-6 bleachings to get to a suitable white, and that if your hair is particularly susceptible to damage you may need to allow a week or more between bleachings for it to recover.

The next step is figuring out your maintenance routine: how frequently do you need to bleach and how long can you expose without damage. I would expect you'll need to do 6 rounds of maintenance before you figure out what your limits are. Say you develop a definite perimeter of roots in 9 days, so to look your best you want to bleach every 7 days in-season. You need to practice in-season bleaching every 7 days for 6 weeks or so, adjusting the exposure time to find the balance between condition and whiteness. Of course, you want to start with brief exposures, say 15-20 minutes and see if that works. If condition remains good but the color is not, add 5-10 minutes on your next round. If your condition goes bad before the color gets good, you may need to try a different bleach powder.

So, how early? If you're going to be bleaching weekly in-season I'd say 2 months is the latest to start. If you are bleaching every 2 weeks in-season (i.e. you're blonde or gray already) you would do well to start 4 months out. If you have a lot of red tones in your hair, and will be bleaching weekly it's going to take more time to figure out your routine, so maybe 3 months would be good. Finally, there is more to being Santa than having white hair, you also need gigs! You need to have time to get good photos taken (preferably professional), use those photos to have business cards printed and have a basic website constructed (or at least a profile on one of the listing services), and then have time to use those tools to promote your services before prime booking season starts. So, 6-9 months is not at all unreasonable. I'm not trying to dictate anything to anyone, I just want you to consider what results you want and what might be involved to get there.

## Bleaching

### Before You Bleach

#### TERMS

Before you head to the store for supplies, we should talk briefly about the terms and basic methodology. I'm trying to keep this concise and simple, so the explanations might not be 100% *technically* correct, but convey the thought more easily.

#### Melanin

This is the substance in the hair (and skin, and eyes, et al) that gives it its color. It is also the substance that dyes cling to. This is what we are trying to get rid of when bleaching.

#### Keratin

This is the basic stuff that hair and nails are made of. The two most important things for us to remember is that, first, this stuff is dead cells, and so it can't heal. The 'healthiest' it will ever be is as it emerges from the follicle, our goal is to do everything we can to maintain that 'health'. Second, keratin is a pale yellow substance to begin with, so even if you get *all* of the color out of the melanin, the keratin will still be yellowish. To get to a white appearance, blue must be added to counter the yellow of the keratin.

#### Cuticle

The cuticle of the hair is the outer structure of the hair that protects the core of the shaft. It is quite similar to the bark of a palm tree in structure, with overlapping layers. Those layers need to be opened up to remove the melanin inside. The risk is that if the cuticles are forced open too wide, they won't interleave and lay back down properly. When this happens the hair will be substantially weakened, dull, frizzy, prone to split ends and breakage.

#### Developer

Developer is the stuff that opens the cuticle of the hair to allow the bleach access to the melanin inside. There are two types of developer on the market: peroxide and enzyme.

#### Peroxide

Peroxide developers are almost ubiquitous and have been used for decades. They work chemically, essentially by prying the cuticle open. Peroxide developers come in 20, 30, 40 and 50 "volume" varieties and the higher the volume number, the greater the percentage of peroxide in the mix. The more peroxide, the more quickly the cuticle is opened, allowing the bleach to work faster, but also the greater the risk of overexposure and the cuticle failing to interleave and close properly.

Peroxide developers are also available in two viscosities: clear and cream. Clear developer is generally better suited to head hair application by a second person, preferably while reclined at a beautician's sink because it is quite liquid. It is a good complement for the *RootsOnly Bottle* for treating roots on the head. Cream developers are thicker and less prone to drip. It is easier to apply to oneself since it will pretty well stay where it's put. But it is much harder to squeeze through a *RootsOnly Bottle*.

#### Enzyme

An enzyme developer works by creating heat on the hair shaft, and the heat causes the cuticle to open; rather like steaming an artichoke. The only enzyme developers currently on the market are sold under the *Trionics* brand. The *Lift Thru* variety is a direct replacement for a 50 volume peroxide.

### Heat

There is a debate about using heat in the bleaching process. Some will warn that heat will make the chemicals too aggressive for use on the face—even if the directions recommend heat, those directions are written with head hair in view. They will argue that heat is excessively damaging to the hair, and that irritation to the skin will be exacerbated. I do not dismiss these concerns lightly, and they may apply to you, but this is not in line with my experience on my hair and my skin. As with all other things I record in this document, proceed with caution and be aware that your results may differ from mine.

Here is my thinking about using heat. Enzyme developers recommend on their label that you apply mild heat, ideally with a hood dryer, to help the enzyme process to generate sufficient heat to fully open the cuticle. Opening the cuticle quickly minimizes the hair shaft's exposure to bleach and therefore damage. You will already be exposed to less damage since you have eliminated the peroxide, but bleach is also damaging so minimizing exposure to it also creates less damage.

Some (perhaps most) peroxide developers generally recommend using heat also, to help speed the process. Without heat, to get the same effect you have to leave the peroxide and bleach to set longer, or use a higher volume, so that the more harsh chemical process can open the cuticle sufficiently to expose all the melanin to bleach.

So, bottomline:

- Heat is damaging to hair.
- Peroxide is damaging to hair.
- Bleach is damaging to hair.

The problem is one of choosing between evils. Which combination of these 'tools' will provide the desired effect with the least damage? I choose to eliminate the peroxide by using enzyme, and I minimize exposure to bleach by applying heat. In my experience, heat is the least damaging of the 'evils'.

The question becomes, how to apply this heat? If you just use a blow dryer too long you will dry out the mixture. In a salon they would use a plastic bonnet over the hair and sit you under a hood dryer... but that won't work for a beard. Some guys wrap their beard with cling wrap before using a blow dryer. I've tried using infrared heat lamps, which will deliver the heat directly to the hair without a lot of drying. It works well even if it is a bit cumbersome.

The best solution I've tried is to pour the measure of developer you'll need in a pyrex measuring cup, cover with cling wrap and set in a sunny windowsill for an hour or so before using it. It will be a little warmer, just enough to give the enzyme a boost.

### Bleach Powder

Bleach is the active ingredient that removes the color from the melanin in the hair. This lightening is called "lift". Bleach works more actively on the black-brown melanin and less actively on the gold-red melanin. So, incomplete bleaching of brown hair with red undertones might result in orange hair (affectionately known as pumpkin-head). To get rid of the orange requires more exposure to the bleach, which increases the damage from the bleach, and the risk of opening the cuticle too much (see above).

## Overview of Methodology

To bleach, one mixes a bleach powder and a developer (and sometimes an oil mixture) and applies it to the hair. The mixture causes the cuticle to open so the bleach can leech the color out of the melanin. Ideally, you want to minimize the time exposed to the bleach, which is damaging to the hair, but you don't want to risk over-opening the cuticle, which is also damaging. Also, the quicker the mixture works, the more quickly you will want to apply it to the hair for an even effect.

Once the mixture has had time to work, it is rinsed out with water, which neutralizes it. Washing with a pH-balanced soap or shampoo assures that the bleach is completely neutralized and washed from the hair. Also, since the process is always damaging, it is good to apply a quality conditioner.

### MY FIRST TIME

The first time I bleached, it took three applications over four weeks to get to what I considered an acceptable color. My hair is naturally very dark brown, nearly black. Bleaching with a 30-volume peroxide developer on virgin hair, my hair went from dark brown to a pale pumpkin color with the first application (see photo), to a pale strawberry blonde with the second, to a pale straw yellow with the third. The pale straw yellow is about all you can expect since it essentially the color of the keratin itself.



If I were doing it all again for the first time, I would not use a peroxide developer. I spent over a year experimenting with peroxide I was never satisfied with the results. It seemed like my hair was always either too yellow or too damaged, I never got to a happy medium.

As of this writing I have been using *Trionics Lift-Thru* developer for over seven years and have been able to get much whiter and with far less damage. To be honest, I have tried to push the limits with the *Trionics*, leaving it on for nearly an hour (which you'd never do with a 50-volume developer, which it is supposed to replace) and had less damage than I would typically have with a 20-volume at 30 minutes.

If I were starting again I would also use the *Prism Lites Blue* for my initial bleachings since the brilliant blue color makes it easy to keep track of what you have covered and what you haven't. I would also do my subsequent lifts in 30-minute increments, max. There is no reason to risk serious damage to your hair just when you are getting to the look you've been yearning for! Besides, bleach mix becomes less and less effective the longer it sits, so two short exposures are more effective than one long one.

## PRODUCTS AND TOOLS FOR BLEACHING

### *Trionics Lift Thru Developer*

As will be easily apparent, I am a fan of the *Trionics* developer. As of this writing I have been using *Trionics* for over seven years doing at least a perimeter touch-up every week and doing a complete root coverage at least every three weeks. Which works out to right at a bottle every 3 months.

Story time. Last year while on an extended camping vacation I decided that my roots were showing too much and I didn't want to look shabby in the photos with my Granddaughter, so I swung by Sally's and picked up some 20-volume peroxide developer and my favorite bleach kit. I figured one root touch up with peroxide would not be too bad. Can I just say I was shocked? Shocked by how much worse it smelled, and even more so by how dry and frizzy my hair was after. I will never subject my hair to that again. Honestly, if *Trionics* ever goes out of business I believe I will probably buy a nice glue-on beard.

My stylist says my hair is in dramatically better condition than when I was using peroxide. I agree, it feels healthier, and is smooth and has a nice sheen to it. I am very pleased with the product. Do I still have breakage? Yes, but far less than I used to have.

The developer has almost no smell by itself and is somewhat gelatinous... more like a pudding than a cream. It mixes with the bleach powder quite well, despite the viscosity. It does seem to be a little more difficult to rinse completely than the peroxide.

Despite the developer itself being nearly odorless, when mixed with *Prism Lites* it becomes more astringent. When mixed with *Ion Crème Lightener* it becomes fairly strong to both the eyes and nose, but still not as bad as peroxide.

The biggest negative with the *Trionics* is the price. I have only been able to find it via mail order for about \$20 for the bottle and \$10 for the shipping. That works out to about \$3 per application for the developer alone.

There have also been reports of opened bottles losing their strength in the off-season if not used, but I never let a bottle sit around that long myself!

Trionics also sells other potencies of developer: one that's stronger (and not meant for skin contact) and several that are weaker. They even have one with "no lift" which would be ideal for use with permanent toners.

The only online source I know of currently is Trionics themselves, <http://trionicshaircare.com/products/lift-thru>.

#### ***ION Crème Lightener Bleaching Kit***

This kit, sold exclusively at *Sally's*, has both a powder and an oil. It works perfectly with the *Trionics Lift Thru*. The powder is in pre-measured packets and one packet makes a little more than I need for a perimeter root touch-up. I use one packet, one ounce of oil, and two ounces of *Trionics* for a full beard root bleaching. This stuff with *Trionics* is the best white I have ever gotten. I find the odor much harsher than the *Prism Lites Blue* (see below) but the lift is certainly greater. The condition of my hair is as good as it was before, so the odor is the only downside, and that may just be my specific sensitivities.

#### ***Prism Lites Blue Bleaching Powder***

I have tried most of the bleach powders that *Sally's* sells and find this to be one of the best. The scent is not too bad, smelling of apples. And the mixture is a vibrant blue, which makes it very easy to see where you've applied it and how good the coverage is. I think the color makes it a good choice for novice bleachers. And, it comes in a 1 lb tub that is sized right for 1 lb of product, unlike some others which provide 1 lb of product in a 6 lb tub (*Quick Blue*, comes to mind) which makes storing a lot easier! And it's among the cheaper powders. It does not whiten quite as well as the creme lightener kit above, and does not have the oil which adds some conditioning, but it is a very good option on a budget. Just be careful to break up any lumps before application.

#### ***Trionics KO Blondes Bleaching Powder***

This is the "new hotness", purporting to provide greater lift and less damage than other bleaching powders. Some guys are reporting great results using it. In my tests the only advantage is that there is almost no smell to the mixture. But, I have itch and burn when the mix touches my skin, especially tender skin like my lips. I have also experienced fried, brittle hair as the result of long exposure (45 minutes) even though the packaging says exposures of up to 50 minutes are possible. And that damage was using a thinned-down mix of 1½:1 ratio (developer to powder) and not even the advised 1:1. I'm certain the damage would have been significant breakage if I had used full strength. For this reason, I cannot recommend KO Blondes personally, but if other powders are not working enough it might be worth a try.

### Dye Brush

For application I like a small dye brush available at beauty supply stores. The bristles are stiff so they help work the bleach to the root, and can carry a fair amount of mix. The brush also has a long tapered tail that can be used to part the hair to expose the next row of roots to be coated.

### MAKE-READY

You will need:

- a mixing cup,
- a stir stick,
- applicator brush,
- developer,
- bleach,
- a clock,
- some paper towels,
- a safe work area,
- and unfettered access to the shower.

To mix bleach, you need a non-metallic container and you also need to measure the amount of developer. A pyrex measuring cup seems a natural choice as it meets both needs. Plus, it's transparent so you can see patches of dry, unmixed powder hiding in the crevices.

I use a sturdy plastic spoon to stir, but you can use whatever you like so long as it's not metallic. I'm not sure why, but every set of instructions make a big point of not using a metal bowl, so don't use a metal spoon! I don't like using my applicator brush to stir either; it tends to collect dry powder in the bristles and is simply not as effective at crushing little un-mixed grains as a spoon.

You will need at least 2 oz of Trionics Lift-Thru developer. I find a 2 oz mix is enough to do my beard roots and the roots around the perimeter of my face. If you are doing beard and hair, 4 oz is more likely the mix you'll want. Four ounces is about as much as I can conceive of applying in one round. If you need more than that you should probably break your processing into two parts (beard in one session and hair in another).

If you are using *Prism Lites* bleach powder, you will need 1 scoop (provided in the tub) for each 2 oz of *Trionics* you are using (1 scoop for 2 oz, 2 scoops for 4 oz). If you are using *Ion Crème Lightener*, you will need one packet of powder and 1 oz oil for each 2 oz of *Trionics*.

It's a good idea to have a stash of paper towels or rags close at hand, in case of drips. Do not use a good facecloth for this purpose, though, since the bleach will discolor it (yes, even white ones, ask my wife).

Which leads to the next criteria: a safe work area. Make sure everything that might be damaged by the bleach is put away: towels, bath mats, facecloths in the shower; everything that might conceivably receive an errant spatter of bleach.

If you are bleaching your own hair, you also need a mirror with plenty of light. If you are bleaching the back of your own head, you will need to add a large hand mirror, or better, an articulated wall-mounted mirror. This makes a difficult task easier.



One last thing to make your work area more pleasant is a small fan to blow the fumes away from your face. I place mine on the floor pointed up toward my face and the air then blows straight into the bathroom exhaust fan and out of the house.

Finally, you will need to rinse your hair at a definite point in time, so make sure that no one can sneak into the shower and impede your ability to rinse. You do not want to have to let the mixture sit in your hair twenty minutes longer than intended.

### Your First Bleaching

Now that all your supplies are gathered, and your workspace is prepared, it's time to get to work. First, comb or brush your hair thoroughly as you do not want to hassle with tangles when making parts.

For safety's sake, do a test patch. Mix a thimble's worth of bleach powder and developer together thoroughly and apply to an inconspicuous area of your beard. I suggest under your chin in the Adam's apple region. Make sure to coat the hairs and the skin; you need to see if your skin is going to have a bad reaction. If you experience more than a slight itching or burning sensation, or your skin turns red or begins to blister, rinse immediately. Otherwise, leave the mix set for at least 20 minutes before washing the area thoroughly with soap and water. If your hair didn't melt, and your skin is no more than slightly red then you are ready for a full bleaching.

Next, take off your shirt. You don't want to bleach it, nor do you want to have to pull it over your head later and drag the bleach from your beard across your face. If doing this shirtless is not an option, perhaps an old button-front shirt, or a beautician's cape. Or, you could use an old pull-over and just leave it on through your final rinse in the shower.

Pour a measure of *Trionics* developer into the measuring cup; either 2 or 4 oz. Please note that once mixed with bleach powder the mixture has a maximum useful life of about an hour, so do not mix more than you can use in one sitting. Add the bleach powder slowly as you mix it into the developer. Spend some time to make sure the mix is thoroughly blended with no lumps of powder and a smooth consistency. You may need to use the spoon to grind the mix against the side of the cup to get rid of any stubborn granularity; kind of like you might with a mortar and pestle. Make sure there are no dry patches hiding in the bottom curve of the cup, which is why a glass cup is ideal since you can see what's dry.

If you are using *Ion Crème Lightener*, add the measure of oil now and mix it thoroughly. I use my applicator brush to then scrape the mixture off the spoon into the cup, so as to not waste any.

Part the waves and start to paint on the mixture. Lay it on thickly, more like icing a cake than painting something, but don't lay it on so thickly that it drips. I coat the coarsest hair first, which for me is the goatee area, and work my way toward the finest hair, which is over the middle of my forehead. That way the coarse hair gets the full setting time and the fine hairs get less, which works out well since the coarse hair can handle exposure better and needs more time to bleach fully.

Since this is your first bleaching, you will start at the root and apply mixture all the way to the tips of the hair.

Once you are done with that row, make another part a half-inch over and start again. I start in the middle of my chin (again, the coarsest hairs) and then do a part to the left, and then the next to the right of the first. You don't want to do from the chin up to the left temple and then come back to the center and do the right side because your left side will be whiter and the right yellower! You want to have symmetry for your processing times.

The *Trionics* calls for heat and the *Prisma Lites* says heat is not needed. I have used both a heat lamp and a hair dryer with the *Trionics* before and believe it was a little more effective than

without. A hair dryer is very effective to focus heat on the areas of hair coated last so that they can catch up to the areas coated first.

You should consider 45-50 minutes to be the maximum set time. That means from the first application to those chin hairs (in my example) not from the final application to the last hairs. For your first bleaching, I'd say go on and do the maximum set.

Be aware that you might get some itching, skin reddening or even slight burning sensations. If you start to get sunburn-like stinging, or have any hint of blistering it is time to call it a day, skip to the rinse immediately.

Once the set time is complete get in the shower set to fairly warm water. With your eyes tightly closed, put your head into the stream and rinse the mix out thoroughly. Keep your eyes tightly closed until the water running over your face is no longer slick. Wash your face. Shampoo your hair gently but thoroughly, preferably with a mild, pH-balanced shampoo.

If you have a mirror in the shower, do not freak out! Depending on your original hair color you may now look like a pumpkin, a strawberry blonde, or scarecrow yellow. The color always looks it's worst when wet. The melanin-less hair is basically transparent when wet so you are seeing your flesh color and the little bits of remaining melanin. When your hair is dry, the surface of the hairs are more diffuse and look white (or at least whiter). Kind of like wet ice versus dry ice, one is transparent and the other frosted. Bottom line; remain calm and try not to judge the effects until you get out and dry your hair.

If you are going to do another round of bleaching right away, there is no point in using *Shimmer Lights* at this point or conditioning. Just be sure to completely dry your hair before repeating since water neutralizes the bleach mixture. I personally cannot bleach twice in a row like this, my skin is too sensitive, but I know others do so proceed at your own discretion.

If you are not doing another round, you might want to use *Shimmer Lights* now. Shampoo it in, gently (you're not scrubbing the grill!), and let it sit for a couple of minutes. Rinse with cooler water than you used to rinse the bleach. Then condition, again, letting it sit for a few minutes, and again, use even cooler water to rinse... downright cold would be good. While the conditioner works I use a wide-toothed comb to distribute the conditioner and get rid of any knots.

I try not to dry my hair too much with a towel since the rubbing action can be too damaging to wet, just-treated hair. Rubbing with a towel also tends to create tangles, which can be very detrimental. I prefer to shake my head vigorously (yes, like a dog!) before opening the curtain. It's amazing how much water you can get out that way. You might want to have hold of a grab bar before doing so, though. Then I can just pat my hair with the towel a bit.

### Maintenance Bleaching

Most of the steps above apply for your subsequent bleachings. The primary exception is you will apply mix only as far out from the root as the needed to coat the non-white parts of the strands. Make every effort to not coat the previously bleached parts of the hair unless you have a specific need to (which will be discussed later).

Also, your set time should probably be in the 20-30 minute range, especially as your hair grows longer since longer hair can more easily cover less-than-white roots.

### Perimeter Touch-up

When I need to do just a perimeter touch-up I use one ounce of *Trionics* and a half a scoop (provided) of *Prism Lites Blue* powder (also from *Sally's*). I used to use the *Prism Lites* exclusively and it does a great job, I just think the *ION Crème Lightener* leaves the hair a tad more conditioned. The *Prism Lites* however smells better, and it's a vivid blue color so it's easy to see where you've applied it and how good the coverage is. Not to mention, it's cheaper. That

small, half portion is enough to do the whole perimeter of my face and have enough left for the chin-area roots, which seem to show the new growth the most.

I leave the mix on for about 20 minutes for the hairs that were coated first, which means maybe 12 minutes for the hairs that are coated last. Because of the disparity, it is best to coat the coarsest hairs first and the finest hairs last... which for me means chin, cheeks, then the wispy tufts on my forehead last! Once everything is coated keeping it all warm with a dryer will help the Trionics work.

## Toning

Bleaching can only take you so far, usually to a very pale straw color, but toning can take you one more step by cooling off the remaining yellow tint of the keratin. There are many ways to add a blue tone to your hair, but they basically fall into the permanent, semi-permanent, and temporary kinds.

I have never used permanent toners, so I cannot comment beyond my reasons for not trying them. Permanent toners require application with developer in much the same process as used in bleaching. To me, that seems to be too much chemical processing, and time spent applying goop to my hair. Plus, my dark roots grow in to where I need to re-bleach every week or so, so the toner would need to be reapplied. I think these types of toners are really only worth using for guys who grow in grey and don't need to bleach but every few months.

## SEMI-PERMANENT TONERS

### *Manic Panic Virgin Snow.*

I have tried it, and I didn't like it, mainly because the application is a pain. You have to get out of the shower, get your hair mostly dry, apply the Manic Panic, wait for it to work and then get back in the shower to rinse it out. Well, chances are you didn't stand around dripping wet while you applied it and it set, so you end up drying off right before jumping back in the shower. I suppose you could stick your head under the faucet to rinse it, but all in all, it's too much trouble for me.

Manic Panic's color lasts a few washings, which can be an advantage, but it can also be problematic. If you go too far and end up blue it could take several showers to wash it out. Still, I know some Santas who really like the way Manic Panic works, so you might want to try it.

## TEMPORARY TONERS

### *Clairol Shimmer Lights shampoo.*

*Shimmer Lights* is a bluing toner mixed with a good quality shampoo. You use it like an ordinary shampoo except that after lathering you leave it set for a couple of minutes to several minutes depending on the level of bluing needed. This is my preferred product so I cover it in some detail in the *Hair Care* section, later.

### *Roux Fanci-Full White Minx*

This is essentially the blue liquid from *Shimmer Lights* but without the shampoo mixed in. Some folks really like this product but I find the application difficult since the liquid is very thin and prone to drip. I also find it hard to apply precisely. The easiest way I found to use it was to use a spray bottle, but that entails spraying a fine mist toward your face in the shower and then wipe the overspray from your skin (and the shower curtain, and the wall). To me it was far more trouble than *Shimmer Lights* for (at best) similar results.

## Hair Care

### Washing and Shampooing

#### CLAIROL SHIMMER LIGHTS SHAMPOO.

If you go too far with *Shimmer Lights* (or *FanciFull*) you can just wash it out. But you need to keep in mind that the color does wash out—I had a problem where the roots around my face were yellowish and the tips of my beard were downright blue. For some reason the *Shimmer Lights* was not getting rid of the yellow close to my face. And by trying to get rid of the yellow I was letting it sit too long and the tips got blue! The gradation from yellow to blue just looked freaky, and the only way to fix it was to bleach, which led to too many bleachings! I finally realized I was washing my face after using the *Shimmer Lights*, washing the blue off of the roots. Since then I have been washing my face first thing, rinsing, and then shampooing! It has made a considerable difference.

I still have stubborn hair in my goatee area, and I have started dispensing some *Shimmer Lights* into my palm and applying it full strength to the goatee and letting it sit for a couple of minutes before massaging it into a lather and shampooing the rest of my hair. I found this kind of spot treatment highly effective as well. It works as well as, if not better than, *Manic Panic* but the application is much easier (and cheaper, too).

Another thing to be very aware of when using *Shimmer Lights*: every course of shampooing strips essential oils from your hair and your scalp. I don't care what the bottle says about restoring or rejuvenating your hair, the bottom line is that if the shampoo actually cleans your hair, then it also strips oils that your hair (and scalp) needs. So, don't shampoo multiple times. I know the *Shimmer Lights* bottle says to shampoo, rinse and repeat, but they are trying to SELL shampoo! Wash once, leave the lather in for a few minutes to let the bluing take effect, and then rinse.

Some folks don't like the smell of *Shimmer Lights*. Do not shampoo again with another shampoo to get rid of the smell, you will simply wash out the bluing that you're going for. What you really need to do is condition your hair. Let the conditioner impart a pleasant smell and replace some of the oils your hair and scalp need. Let the conditioner set for a couple of minutes and then rinse with the coldest water you can stand, which closes the cuticle limiting frizziness and breakage.

If you can, try not to shampoo daily so that the natural oils can do their work. If you need to clean your hair daily, I recommend you try using what two-time World Beard Champion Jack Passion calls “hippy soap” (covered next).

#### “HIPPY SOAP”

I mentioned before that I generally only shampoo every other day or so to try to retain the natural oils in my hair. Most shampoos contain detergents, which strip oils, so daily shampooing can be pretty damaging. I realize that some guys work in conditions that make it impossible to not clean their hair daily; they get just too dirty or sweaty. A good option for those in-between showers is to use what Jack Passion calls in his book “hippy soap”.

Hippy soap is just a super basic soap, usually containing just oils (or fats) and lye, perhaps some other basic ingredients for fragrance or scrubbing power. This is not the bar soap you can get at the grocery store; you are more likely to find it at a farmer's market. This is a good option for getting debris out of your hair without stripping natural oils.

In his book<sup>1</sup>, Passion suggests using it for all your hair cleaning, and since you aren't stripping the natural oils, and the soap can impart some useful oils, he says you can skip the conditioning stage. But he is not expecting that his readers are otherwise damaging their hair with bleaching, blow drying and curling. For those of us who do, it's a good option for those days when we don't shampoo.

One of the biggest problems with using this kind of soap is that it doesn't lather as much as shampoo or typical bath soap, so it is hard to work through a thick beard. In my experience trying to thoroughly work it through results in undesirable breakage, so it is really better to just do a surface cleaning.

Another good thing about hippie soap, it seems like does less to wash out the bluing from your *Shimmer Lights* treatment. For that reason, I have started always washing my face with it, even if I'm not using it for my hair and beard. It leaves skin squeaky clean, literally.

## Conditioning

### ION EFFECTIVE CARE TREATMENT CONDITIONER

As far as I'm concerned, this is my secret weapon! This took me from looking like I belonged on *FraggleRock* (my hair was so frizzy) to a Santa. I have few split ends and my breakage is under control. Before, I would brush my beard and my shirt would be covered in quarter-inch long broken hairs, hundreds of them! My beard was breaking faster than it was growing and becoming thinner by the day. My stylist declared my hair and beard a lost cause and seriously recommended that I cut it all off and start over! This stuff really works.

I buy it in the large salon pump dispenser and I use one pump for my hair and another full pump for my beard. After working the conditioner through my hair, I use a wide toothed comb to really distribute the conditioner throughout my hair and release any tangles.

Now, I know almost everyone says to never comb wet hair. While it's true that wet hair is elastic and prone to snapping, I also feel that there is no better time to release tangles than when it is sopping-full of conditioner. The hairs will be very slippery, and more prone to sliding past one another—kind of like a pot of spaghetti. The wet noodles are so slippery that it's hard to serve them. Let them dry a little bit and they are so sticky it's hard to get them to not clump. When they completely dry, they are no longer sticky, but good luck getting a knot of them apart. But, even when full of conditioner, you should comb slowly, stopping at the first hint of resistance. If you hit a tangle, take the comb out and start combing in small increments from the tips working your way up. I also would avoid combing out tangles from dry hair, again, you will break a lot of hairs.



<sup>1</sup> The Facial Hair Handbook, Jack Passion.

There are lots of other good conditioners out there, and as far as I know there could be better ones. I tried a half dozen others that were lousy before coming across the Ion. The bottom line for me is this one works great and I have never been able to bring myself to try others because I'm so pleased with this one.

### Treatments

A lot of guys swear by oil- and hot-oil-treatments. Again, I'm so pleased with the results of my conditioner that I have never tried them.

### Diet and Supplements

#### BIOTIN TABLETS

I am not against Biotin tablets, but I have studied its results on me and I find it to be ineffective on me. Others swear by it. But if you want to take it, be my guest. I hope it helps. If nothing else it's good for your blood pressure.

#### EAT YOUR WAY TO STRONGER HAIR

You need biotin to stimulate hair growth and thickness, and if biotin tablets are of dubious value, what are you supposed to do? Eat biotin rich foods. Vitamins and minerals are much better absorbed by the body than pills are, and you've got to eat anyway, so why not increase your intake of eggs, nuts, beans and milk? Of course, you should discuss dietary changes, or the addition of supplements, with your primary healthcare provider.

### Dealing with Damage

First, you need to be able to identify that your hair is damaged. You do not want the first sign to be clumps of broken hair in your comb! The best early-indicator for me is what I call the "overcooked spaghetti" effect. Like I mentioned above, hair can be like a pot of spaghetti, very slippery and easy to comb when wet (especially wet with conditioner), let it dry a bit and it can get sticky and snap. Once it completely dries it is no longer sticky, but good luck getting knots out. It's the intermediate phase that I'm interested in. If your wet, but fully rinsed hair is sticking together and will not permit combing with a wide toothed comb your hair has significant damage. If your hair doesn't get sticky until it is towel-dried, you have moderately damaged hair. If there is just a brief window between damp and bone dry where the hair gets sticky then you have mild damage. So mild that I thought it was normal the last time I did a major rewrite of this document. Now I know that it is possible to strike a balance where your hair never gets "sticky".

There is one critical note to make here: if you put a leave-in conditioner or oil in your hair straight out of the shower, you will never see this early-warning. Those products will mask the true condition of your hair and can make you think everything is hunky dory. Then, next time you bleach more aggressively and the first hint that something is wrong is hair breaking or falling out.

Your second sign of damage will be once your hair is fully dry. Light damage might be a bit of frizziness. Moderate damage would be a fair amount of frizziness and the beard might feel a bit crunchy when you handle it (dry, brittle, stiff). With significant damage the frizzes will be bad and the feel will be very scratchy and stiff.

My suggestion is that each time you bleach you skip using any products after your final rinse and then fully dry your hair looking for these signs of damage. Once you have assessed the condition you can make a plan for how long to wait before doing more maintenance.

Now that you know your beard's condition if you want to use oil for fragrance, sheen and a bit of control, that's fine. Or if you want to use a leave-in after your second shower (after bleaching) that's fine, too. But my general advice is to do your best to not strip your natural oils in the first place, then you will not need to add oils back in.

## Styling

### Tools and Products

#### GÖT2BE GLUED FOR MUSTACHE STYLING

Simply the strongest gunk for exercising total dominance over your 'stache. Personally, I don't the "rollie fingers" curls on the ends of my mustache, which this is excellent for, but prefer an upswept style like the Sundblom Santa. So I apply the glue on my wet 'stache and then comb it constantly as I blow-dry and the result is a "dry look" on the hairs (they don't look slicked down or waxed) but a lot of style-holding power, especially if you hit it with hairspray after.

#### ELECTRIC CLIPPERS

Get rid of them! Clippers are about as good for your beard as hedge trimmers are for your bushes... they will both carve the offending bits off but the stuff they leave behind is battered, chopped and split. Get a small, sharp pair of scissors to trim your beard.

#### SCISSORS

Every man with a beard needs a sharp (strike that, very sharp) pair of scissors. Scissors will leave nice clean cuts that won't fray or split. They won't catch and pull, either, like clippers can. It will take a little practice to get used to using them, so start with very modest amounts of trimming. Turn your head every which way to get a good 3-D picture of the shape of your beard.

#### BEARD OIL

I am not a fan of beard oil. Particularly if you use it all the time in conjunction with bleaching. If you put a leave-in conditioner or oil in your hair straight out of the shower, you will never see early-warning signs of damage (see Dealing with Damage, above). The best early-warning I have that I'm over-processing my hair is what I call the "overcooked spaghetti" effect, and you simply cannot get that sign if your hair is full of oil. I'm also not a fan of the idea of using whatever shampoo you've always used (that strips your natural oils) and then replenishing afterward with oil or leave-ins, etc. It is far better to not strip the oil in the first place. But again, if you KNOW that your beard is in good condition and you want to use oil for fragrance, sheen and a bit of control great, use it in good health.

## Epilogue

You've made it, I'm finally going to shut up! There is a reason I wrote a 20 page guide and not a one page instruction sheet, and it's not because I'm long-winded. The point I try to make over and over in this guide is that **you** need to become an expert on **your hair** and find the routine and technique that works for **you**. In this guide I've tried to give you the info you need to become the world's leading expert on **your** hair, but this knowledge doesn't come quickly, or by reading, but by doing, and by failing, and finally succeeding. I wish you every success, may your days be merry and white!

