



Maeling Tapp

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Before I met the face behind the blog, *Natural Chica*, I knew of her. I would watch my older sister place a miasma of products in her hair while watching one of the many video blogs (vlogs) of Maeling Tapp speaking about different styles for transitioning. Joining the movement of numerous black females transitioning from their chemically straightened hair to their natural curls and kinks, my sister depended on various natural hair bloggers for her inspiration. However, the one from whom she gained the most support from was Mae. And that was the intention.

Tapp decided that she wanted to transition from the chemically processed straight hair that she had since the age of six, she took advice and support from the growing natural hair community. With hair bloggers such as Curly Nikki and KimmyTube, as well as her two younger sisters and a group of friends who “went natural”, Tapp garnered the information and assistance she would need to make the journey. Due to her gratitude, she uploaded her first vlog on YouTube on July 16, 2009.

“I wanted to document my experience because others helped me,” she says.

Today, her YouTube viewership tops 8 million and she has over 100,00 subscribers. A remarkable audience for a young woman who started her YouTube channel simply as an online journal. As time passed her community evolved and her vlog became an influential platform to share whatever was in her heart, not just on her head. From her own experience, Tapp soon realized that “going natural” was not just a state of her hair, but also the way she thinks.

Transitioning from relaxed hair to natural appeared to affect some of her viewers negatively. An email from one of her readers/viewers confessed, “I literally thought I made a huge mistake. I felt ugly.” However, watching and reading what Tapp had to say about her own transition made a difference for this viewer.

“Having one person in your corner can really make a difference,” Tapp answered as I asked her about how a person could deal with making their hair transition. While she did not receive plenty of negative feedback when she transitioned to natural, as many women do, she did receive a number of emails from other women who did.

Tapp is a Christian baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist church and uses both her blog and vlog to build the confidences of other women through the way they take care of themselves both inside and out. “I wanted people to know that I love Jesus.” Her purpose for the blog was not to advertise her denomination, but to be an encouragement. Tapp prayed about her platform and through it gives positive insight, information, connects with people on a deeper level and shares the Bible and Jesus with Christians and non-Christians alike. She even started a prayer forum on www.theprayerconnection.forumotion.org and sent a link through a video she posted on her page. Through this forum, she and others are able to share their testimony.

Tapp admits that her personal success was not fully realized until she was shopping in a grocery store one day and a woman came up to hug her. It is because her posts are benefitting people that she still continues.

However, while her vlog is an online journal and a platform for good, it is also a business. Due to her high number of views and subscribers, she is paid by Google and has advertisements on her page. When she first started, she had only one contact, Shea Moisture, an organic hair product brand. “You never really know how one connection can lead to another,” she admits, as she begins to tell how Shea Moisture led her to being a mentioned blogger in the *New York Times* article, “Going Natural’ Requires Lots of Help,” by Jamila Bey. From there, Spark and Hustle, started by Tory Johnson to help small-business owners, contacted Tapp to ask if she could speak at one of their conferences.

Tapp has progressed from being able to communicate with her viewers online to having one-on-one conversations at hair conferences and admits she prefers these interactions.

The 26-year-old has truly excelled and been blessed. The 5th year Ph.D candidate at Georgia Institute of Technology was married in March 2013. She continues to post and attend conferences so that she may interact with her viewers/readers. “As God leads me to continue it [*Natural Chica*], I’m going to keep doing what I’m doing.” **e**