

MY DISCOVERY

Last summer, I was in London for an event and was having a blowout at the world famous Errol Douglas salon. Errol is the President of the Fellowship, the UK's most prestigious association for award-winning hairdressers and he's a multiple British Hairdressing Awards winner, not to mention one of my favorite hairdressers to have drinks with! After my service, Errol saw me checking out a bright display of brushes without handles. Clearly curious, he ran over and picked one up and said, "Do you know these?" Umm. No. It looked like a brightly colored computer mouse, a handle-less brush, with all these little teeth of different lengths, along with a cute name—Tangle Teezer. Errol put it into my hand and continued, "these little brushes are miracle workers in our salon—especially with so many textured hair clients—and every client leaves with one." *Reeeally?* A brush for taming tangled tresses was a best-seller in a salon? After feeling ridiculously uninformed, I gathered myself up and wrote it off as just a "European" thing. Brushes are not best-selling items in salons.

Not more than two weeks later, I was having drinks with celebrity colorist Tracey Cunningham in her new Beverly Hills salon, Meche—she works on Jessica Biel and Gwyneth Paltrow—and, OMG, there it was again, another display of cute brushes without handles. I was clearly being stalked by them or even more uninformed than I had previously thought. I picked one up and Tracey said, "Oh my God, we sell more of that brush than any other product in the salon." REALLY? Okay, well, then. While the pond between us is big, I suppose women around the world are all the same when it comes to tangled tresses, so I decided to investigate. Expecting a large corporation, I found it wasn't so. In fact, the inventor, the owner of Tangle Teezer, is none other than a hairdresser... okay a colourist (an ode to the Brits with the u), who got tired of pulling, tugging and ripping at clients' hair for more than 25 years and decided to invest all his money and risk everything to tame the dreaded tangle. Today, with more than 6 million brushes sold, it is the best-selling brush in the world, proving that it doesn't take big companies and big dollars to create big wins, it takes big ideas and even bigger dreamers to do it. Meet Shaun P, my new BFF and now my new partner. I believed in this product so much, that for the first time ever, BTC has become an exclusive U.S. distributor for a product line sold in salons. It's called Tangle Teezer and here's Shaun's story.

— Mary



BRUSH with GREATNESS

how haircolorist shaun pulfrey created the best-selling brush in history

By Mary Rector-Gable

Photography by Trevor Leighton

When a youtube video was posted showing "it" model, Cara Delevingne pulling a Tangle Teezer out of her bag while sitting on the carpeted floor of a Topshop in London, everything changed. Cara was barraged by photographers snapping photos as she reached into her bag, one by one, pulling out watches, honeybee-inspired creams, multiple headphones, even a used face wipe—and then there it was, an orange Tangle Teezer. As the Topshop model brushed her hair with it on camera, she shared how everyone needs one to untangle their tresses and how great it made her blow-dry look! And, that wasn't just a lucky fluke. The same sentiment has been shared by model Georgia May Jagger, as well as celebrities like Victoria Beckham and Emma Watson. That pretty British princess who recently had a baby with the future king of England has even been rumored to have benefitted from the unique brush. It seems that Willy Wonka's Gobstopper may have a run for its money with Tangle Teezer as hairdressers, celebrities, women, children (okay...and even guys) from around the world—in fact in 60 countries—are screaming "Daddy I want it...and I want it NOW."

The Tangle Teezer's inventor is Shaun Pulfrey—he goes by Shaun P. He's a funny, quick-witted man, with the energy

of a Jack Russell terrier and every bit as lovable. He's been immersed in Tangle Teezer for nearly eight years, but like most entrepreneurs, he's as focused and enthusiastic about his business today as if he had just launched it yesterday. His passion scoops you up and soon you can't help but root for this guy—because he truly, sincerely wants his product to change lives—and believes that it will. Hairstylists are making more money, thanks to Tangle Teezer. Kids are no longer screaming when it's time to brush their hair. He even got a letter from the parent of an autistic child, thanking him because she was able to brush her son's hair for the very first time thanks to his creation.

Shaun was born in Northern England, the son of a strong, working class man—a deep sea fisherman by trade who would go off to sea for weeks at a time. When Shaun was a kid, he didn't care much for fishing or for football. He liked to get his hands on everything he could; he loved trying to figure out how things work. "My mom called me 'Meddlesome Mattiel'" he laughs. "When we went into a shop, my orders were, 'hands in your pockets—just touch with your eyes.'"



HE REMEMBERS LOCKING HIMSELF IN HIS “HOME SALON” AT FOURTEEN, SO HE COULD CUT A MASTERPIECE ON HIS OWN HEAD—THE WEDGE! “MY HAIR WAS LONG ENOUGH, SO I FOUND THE LONGEST PIECE AND STARTED CUTTING FROM THERE. ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT CUTS IN HISTORY AND I WAS DOING IT IN MY BATHROOM. WHAT A MESS I MADE!”

One of Shaun’s favorite times was accompanying his mum to the hairdressers each week. He loved watching all the stylists set up their rollers on the trolleys and arrange all of the hairpieces. As he got older, he became fascinated with his mother’s hair bleach. While most teenagers would sneak into the bourbon cabinet when their parents were away, Shaun would head in another direction—to the bathroom. There he would lock the door and pull out his mother’s powder bleach and peroxide from under the sink and try to lighten his own hair. “Oh what a mess I would make—polka dots of bleached spots on my head! My mother would be furious when she came home!” Another time, he remembers locking himself in his “home salon” at fourteen, so he could cut a masterpiece on his own head—the wedge! “My hair was long enough, so I found the longest piece and started cutting from there. One of the most difficult cuts in history and I was doing it in my bathroom. What a mess I made!”

At one point, he decided it was time for his mum to change *her* hair. “I told my mother, ‘you have to stop having your hair set—it’s old fashioned,’” he laughs. “So she went to the hairdressers, had it cut off, bought a little orange Molinex blow dryer, and yelled from our “home salon,” ‘Hey you—get in here. I can’t dry this haircut by myself—you do it!’ So I helped her until she got the hang of it.”

As Shaun was just about to finish highschool, his father had fully expected him to work in the family business. When Shaun disagreed with the idea, the conversation went like this:

Dad: So what do you want to do after school?

Shaun: I want to be a hairdresser.

Dad: A hairdresser? WHAT? No way.

Shaun: Sorry, yes I do.

Dad: No, you’re going to be a fisherman.

Shaun: But, I don’t like fishing.

Dad: You’ve never tried it before, so you’re going.

So over his summer holidays, Shaun went out to sea for three weeks. When he returned the conversation continued.

Dad: So, you’ll be a fisherman now.

Shaun: No, I don’t like fishing.

Dad: You haven’t been enough. You have to come again.

So, off Shaun went to sea once again for three more weeks. The next conversation went like this:

Dad: So, you’re going to be a fisherman.

Shaun: No, I still don’t like it. I don’t want to be a fisherman. I want to be a hairdresser.

Dad: Fine, then! Go off and be a bloody hairdresser!

When his parents gave him the British equivalent of Legos, he threw away all of the directions and building plans and set out to make his own designs. “I always liked to solve problems. In fact, I remember when I was very young in school and we ran out of tracing paper for a project. The teacher didn’t know what to do, so I ran to the toilet and grabbed the toilet paper—it was so awful and so rough and we hated it for the true purpose it served—but I thought it would be perfect for tracing paper. Sure enough, it worked and everyone ran off to the toilet to get their “tracing paper” to finish their projects.”

But after all that, Shaun’s application to the local beauty college wasn’t accepted. Undaunted, with his mother’s help, he obtained an apprenticeship at the local Glemby Salon. After a year, he requested a transfer to a larger Glemby Salon in Manchester, then moved to the Pierre Alexander Salon. At the time, the art of haircolor was in its infancy, but Shaun was drawn to color, and was teaching himself as he shampooed and applied tint under the direction of the senior staffers. He even started questioning some of their formulas, because his grasp of color was rock solid—often more so than theirs.

One day a friend stopped by the salon, wondering if there were any openings for colorists. “No,” Shaun told him, “but I saw an ad in *Hairdressers Journal* for a job at Vidal Sassoon in London.” His friend thanked him and left. “A week later,” Shaun says, “I thought, ‘Hang on! Why don’t I apply for that job?’”

At the Brook Street salon, the line of applicants for the Sassoon position snaked down the stairs and around the block. Job seekers were seen in groups of 20. “I marched in and sat right in front,” Shaun remembers, “in front of [Sassoon International Colour Director] Annie Humphreys herself. I made sure to ask a question so that I would stand out, and a week later I received a letter offering me a trade test with Annie in the Sloane Street salon.”

Annie was impressed with Shaun’s test, and even more impressed that he was completely self-taught. Annie asked if he had accommodations in London and, thinking quickly on his feet, he told her he would be renting a room from his aunt. As it turns out, he had no aunt in London, but it satisfied Annie and he was offered a position as a *vardera* (taken from the Latin word *to watch*), meaning he would be employed while undergoing training. “As a *vardera*, you work as an assistant,” Shaun explains. “You work in the salon during the day and take training at night.”

“I WAS MAKING 35 POUNDS A WEEK, LIVING IN A FLAT WITH A BLOODY GUY THAT KEPT HITTING ON ME EVERY NIGHT OF THE BLOODY WEEK, BUT I COULDN’T AFFORD TO LIVE ANYWHERE ELSE. I COULDN’T EVEN AFFORD TUBE FARE. BUT, THIS WAS MY DREAM JOB.”

He moved to London and found a room to share with another guy for six pounds a week. “I was making 35 pounds a week, living in a flat with a bloody guy that kept hitting on me every night of the bloody week, and I couldn’t afford to live anywhere else. I couldn’t even afford tube fare. But, this was my dream job.” It was, as Vidal used to tell me, like working all day and playing all night, and Shaun loved it. He quickly qualified for full time training in the Vidal Sassoon Academy and completed his six month program in just four months. After qualifying he joined the Sloane Street salon. “I was in heaven,” he remembers. “They had a whole color department, which was rare, and nobody questioned your abilities. I was willing to do anything—if Tony, the manager, asked me to get his dry cleaning I’d say, ‘No problem—how many times?’ I watched Tony and Trevor and Jane and tried to pick up something from all of them. That very system—which created so many amazing hairdressers in England and abroad—would now be considered slave labor today, but I loved it.”



Shaun was a rising star within the organization and at the time, the company was expanding. He was asked to move to the U.S. to open the new Sassoon salon in Boston. But before it was complete, he was sent to New York, and then to Los Angeles, picking up more knowledge and experience along the way. Finally, he cashed in his plane ticket, loaded up his ‘61 Chevy Corvair and drove across America to Boston.

For eight years he headed up the color department of the salon on the famed Newbury Street. “My first impression of Boston wasn’t great,” he admits. “I arrived and thought, ‘Oh sh#t, this looks just like England! But after six months, I loved it. Unlike England, all of the small towns surrounding the city had money!’”

HAIR TO THERE

In Boston, there was a client whose long hair extended to her waist. She had a standing, every-six-weeks haircolor appointment. After her shampoo, the assistants would go to work detangling her mane, and soon, impatient, she would snatch their combs and do it herself. “I thought that was very unprofessional,” Shaun says, “so I would step in to help.”

After a while, Shaun had perfected his detangling method on this client. Rather than pulling the brush or comb through the hair, he devised a method of tapping and flicking the hair with the brush and literally knocking the tangles out. Only when the hair was detangled would he run the comb through. In no time, he became the detangling guy in the salon. When a stylist had a problem client with long tangles, Shaun became the go-to guy to get them out—quickly.

After eight years in Boston, Shaun came to a crossroads. He knew he could stay on and continue to be quite comfortable in the U.S. But he also knew that if he did, he may never be able to return to England. So he

returned to Manchester and went to work at TONI&GUY. There, he made a startling discovery. “At Sassoon you have a strong family, but they expect you to do things their way,” Shaun explains. “I remember once Annie came into the Boston salon and I had this massive tint brush. She asked, ‘What’s this?’ I said, ‘Oh Annie it’s great—you can put the color on so much quicker!’ She took it from my hand and dropped it in the bin (trash). It was against Sassoon regulations. But at TONI&GUY I had the freedom to try my own thing. I saw that if I still respected the basic rules, I could try new things and I enjoyed it. It gave me a lot more confidence.”

After a year in Manchester, he decided it was time to return to London. He got a position with Nicky Clarke, who, after Vidal, is the most recognized hairstylist in the country, thanks to his years of television talk shows and appearances. But things were in a bit of turmoil at Nicky’s salon at the time, so he took a position at the Richard Ward Salon, where clients included members of the British royal family.

Shaun describes his time with Richard and Hellen Ward as a great experience, and his own reputation as a colorist grew. At the same time, though, his thoughts kept returning to that long-haired client in Boston and to the method he had created for detangling her hair. He wondered, what if there was a brush with the right types of bristles that could do what he did with his paddle brush? He hadn’t been successful teaching people his method, so perhaps he could create



a tool that did the job. It was all about the bristles, he knew. They had to enter the hair without gripping, but be strong enough not to collapse. He decided it was time to reawaken that curious kid who longed to know how things worked and give this idea a try.

UNTANGLING THE JOURNEY

His first stop was the British Library. "Imagine, a hairdresser poring over books on patents, engineering and injection plastic molding," he shared. "I realized injection molding was the route to go, so I set out to find a factory that could bring my idea to life. I was determined to keep the manufacturing in England. I knew that working with Chinese factories would be

"IMAGINE, A HAIRDRESSER PORING OVER BOOKS ON PATENTS, ENGINEERING AND INJECTION PLASTIC MOLDING."

cheaper, but ultimately the risk would be higher because of the distance and communication issues. Most of the places I called actually hung up on me, but one place in Oxford—Data Plastics—took my call and agreed to work on my brush."

For the next two years, Shaun worked four days a week in the Ward's salon and the rest of every waking hour on Tangle Teezer. He invested nearly £100,000 (\$155,000) of his own money.

He ultimately determined the ideal number and flexibility of the bristles and worked with the best attorneys to patent his design. Finally he knew he had it. "The factory told me I had to make a model to test it but I didn't have the money," he remembers. "So I went ahead and had it tooled and produced. When the box came, I opened it and pulled out the black brush and I thought, 'Sh#!! It looks like a Porsche!' It was even better than I had hoped and it worked beautifully. I could do short hair, medium, long. It was brilliant and I was over the moon!"

One of the most unconventional aspects of Shaun's brush is the fact that it doesn't have a handle. "If it had a handle, people would try to blow-dry with it," he explained. "It's not meant to do that and I didn't want people to try to use it for something it wasn't meant for and then think it didn't work. Plus, it makes it different. It doesn't need a handle."

Now it was time to take his baby for a test run. The stylists at the Richard Ward Salon flipped over it. Staff members were asking him where they could buy Tangle Teezers, and when he told them they weren't yet for sale, the test models mysteriously "disappeared." Tangles can be annoying for adults and downright painful for kids, and clients were thrilled at how easily the brush removed the snarls for both.

Then, in 2007, everything came together in a completely unexpected way. First, Shaun decided that Tangle Teezer required his undivided attention. So he gave his notice at the salon and made arrangements to introduce the product at Salon International. At the same time, a friend nagged and nagged at him until he agreed to submit an application to *Dragon's Den*, a British television show that brought prospective business owners in front of a panel of wealthy investors. Think *Shark Tank* with British accents. The best pitches get funding in return for a stake in the company—the rest get tossed off the show.

Within two weeks, Shaun was pitching Tangle Teezer to the Dragons on TV. After 15 minutes, he was off the show—all of the Dragons had passed on the opportunity to invest, and one judge called the idea "hairbrained." Hah. The joke was on her, because after the show aired, Shaun's phone started ringing off the hook and over 2,000 orders came in online from the UK and from Holland, where *Dragon's Den* also aired.





After Salon International, the next trade show—in Birmingham—was a disappointment. Shaun was relegated to an empty alley and attendance was dismal. But one very important person was there—the beauty buyer from Boots. Boots is a high-end pharmacy chain in the UK, with shops on nearly every high street in the country. The buyer was impressed with the brush, and had also seen Shaun on *Dragon's Den*. Shaun and his team had just turned down an offer from a lower-end drugstore—they wanted to sell the Tangle Teezer for about 30-percent less than his asking price. “I knew I would be creating the Salon Elite for hairdressers,” Shaun comments. “So I knew we could work with Boots and with salons.”

At first sales at Boots were averaging about two brushes a week, so Shaun introduced a pink Tangle Teezer and it went viral. The story spread like wildfire throughout social media, magazines picked it up, awards began rolling in. Clients were buying multiples—for the kids, for home use, for their handbags. Celebrities and models were endorsing its detangling power. Salons were seeing a huge rise in retail thanks to the brushes, as were retailers and beauty distributors.

THE ROOTS REMAIN

Fast forward to today. The Tangle Teezer is sold in 60 countries. More than six million have been purchased worldwide. The latest iteration is the Aqua Splash, which is a water-friendly model that evenly distributes haircolor and conditioning treatments through the hair. Shaun has received the Queen's Award for Innovation—the highest official UK award for business entrepreneurs—and met the Queen in a special ceremony. Recently, he was invited to meet the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street because he is part of a new British campaign that spotlights six outstanding British companies and Tangle Teezer is one of them.

But what is most impressive about Shaun isn't his stunning success. It's the fact that he is still putting one foot in front of the other. He's not dreaming of “the big sale” in which a multi-national corporation buys his business for bazillions of dollars. He says he doesn't even have a five year plan—it's not about the money. He is carefully expanding through handpicked salons like Errol's and Tracey's and through distributors who share his passion and integrity. He's thinking about new products, some of which will be released in 2014, which he says, “will blow your mind.” He's proud of the fact that, thanks to years of steadfast vigilance in the development of Tangle Teezer to “get it right,” the customer satisfaction and word of mouth makes Tangle Teezers sell themselves.

Most interesting of all is the fact that he equates his training and career as a hairdresser with his success as an entrepreneur. “I didn't go to university,” he shrugs. “When I started the business someone called me a CEO and I didn't even know what that was. I had to look it up! All I really did was set out to make a detangling hairbrush based on everything I had learned as a hairdresser.”

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Through his Sassoon training, he says, he learned systems and discipline and attention to detail. He learned the importance of mastering the basics. In salons, he learned communication and collaboration—with clients and colleagues. He gained confidence in his skills and in his creativity. He saw the merits of hard work and going the extra mile to cement relationships. And he learned problem solving, which led to his amazing invention.

Shaun said, “Years ago, an American guy—a big entrepreneur—said to me, ‘The trouble with you British is that you fart around so long trying to get it right. If it delivers, get it out there and tweak it later.’ His advice gave me confidence and off I went to get it out there...and it appears to have worked.”

Yes, Shaun, it appears that way!

I got my Aqua Splash at the BTC COLOR Show; we'll be retailing these!

—Peggy Hargrave

This has been a godsend for my 6 year old. She loves brushing her own hair now and it's not painful when she wants to brush mine. Thumbs up!

—Mandy Ring

This brush is a must-have if you have a problem with tangles and knots! I have a client whose hair gets so tangled because it's so long and it takes forever to untangle. I got the Tangle Teezer and it works like a charm! I love, love, love it!!! It's a must-have for those tangled, mangled heads!

—Lynne Powell Hill

I GOT MY AQUA SPLASH FROM THE BTC COLOR SHOW GOODY BAG AND I'VE USED IT TO PULL COLOR THROUGH ON THREE DIFFERENT SERVICES. IT'S AN AWESOME TOOL. GREAT INVESTMENT!

—Damien Davenport

I SWEAR BY IT, AND IT'S BLOWING OFF OUR SHELVES!

—Stephanie Aitken

We can't keep these things on the shelves at our salon. They slide through tangles, and if you're using them on clients, they're great for pulling color through hair. I actually have been using less color!

—Abbi Pfaff

WE USE THEM AND WOOOOOOOVE THEM IN MY SALON, AND ALL OUR CLIENTS USE THEM AT HOME!

—Melanie Vespa

This is absolutely amazing. Best purchase ever.

—Gina Marie Blanchard

WHAT A GREAT TOOL THAT MAKES LIFE EASIER ON STYLISTS AND THEIR CLIENTS. BRAVO!!

—Giovanni Ferraino

THIS IS THE BEST INVENTION CREATED FOR DETANGLING! I USE IT ON ALL OF MY GUESTS!

—Erika Rodriguez

