

It's possible you're a Ginger

Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune

Rumor has it that redheads are blending with the rest of humans, gradually disappearing. They may no longer exist 100 years from now.

And at the same time, red hair is suddenly everywhere.

How could both developments be true?

I asked a real or possibly artificial redhead about that the other day. And I didn't go so far as to think there was some kind of sudden population explosion among red-headed people. I realized I was witnessing the miracle of hair dye.

But why, I asked the redhead, are women and girls suddenly turning red on the head?

"Red," she said, "is the new blonde."

In other words, all those pretend blondes and maybe some natural blondes are now turning for stylistic variety to a different display of hair. So here comes the red fad.

Apparently, the new hair color doesn't involve the alleged disappearance of redheads in the world. According to one expert, that rumor is mistaken.

"People really shouldn't believe everything they read on the Internet," said Joshua Akey, associate professor of genome sciences at the University of Washington. "There is no scientifically compelling basis to the claim that redheads will become extinct in 100 years," he told MSN News.

However, if people shouldn't believe everything on the Internet, then should I believe everything I read on the Internet about redheads being safe from extinction? I wonder if I should believe Akey's comment because I found it on the Internet. But his words on the bright future of redheads do ring of truth.

I am intrigued to learn on the Internet or otherwise that people with red hair, pure white skin, freckles and blue eyes shall not perish from the earth. They aren't going to disappear from the earth like blondes without bleach.

If the truth be known, I am sort of among those redheads who might have been eliminated from the earth if the Internet were correct, which it probably isn't.

I am what you might call a retired redhead. I had the freckles, those dreamy blue eyes that are so popular with red hair, and while I never had red head hair, my younger beard was red. When that turned gray, I was no longer suspected of being a redhead.

I miss that because red hair was once a rare and tremendously attractive condition. That global website Wikipedia says real red hair involves only 1 to 2 percent of the human race (including Neanderthals).

But I have also discovered in recent reading that some nut jobs in the world consider red hair a mark of racial inferiority. Just as there have been unkind blonde jokes running rampant around the globe, Great Britain is especially fond of jokes about "Gingers," as some call redheads. Those hateful insults follow the astonishing myth that Gingers are boneheads who are socially and sexually unattractive.

(People who think redheads are sexually unattractive have obviously never seen a Maureen O'Hara movie.)

Actually, I suspect a deliberate fib that is being used to teach some Irish louts how it feels to be regarded as inferior. Those who have suffered through history with poverty, minimal education and second-class status are likely to seek someone else to look down on. And sometimes I think that weak tendency includes my Irish brethren.

So what better way to teach bigoted Irish that lesson than to create a joke mythology about how incompetent, stupid and ugly Gingers like me are?

Tim Minchin is an enormously gifted red-headed Australian comedian, singer and pianist. He has written a song about a Ginger in which he spells out a racist word with a G here and an R there that he pretends to suggest is the spelling of Ginger. As he concludes the song, he somehow makes the audience realize that those exact same letters can be used to spell the N word commonly used by anti-black bigots (some of whom are Gingers).

It's an old story in this slowly healing world. Racial insults can become boomerangs. Today, it may be your slur hurting someone else. But when you participate in racial insults and direct them against others, you risk contributing to a climate in which boomerangs readily return to you on the winds of bigotbabbble.

I fear that when you name sports teams things like Redskins or Savages, it's just a matter of time before some Indian school starts calling its team the Ginger Journalists.

Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is wilberth@cableone.net.