



Winter Growth

Men Get Scraggly for "Bearduary" Organization Now in Sag Harbor

By John Capone

Hark! Bearduary — that desolate patch between December 31 and March 1 in the middle of the long road toward summer in which an expanding group of men give up on shaving and many pretenses of better grooming habits — is upon us. Think of it as organized beard growing — members of the club hope that with their collective energies focused, their beards may grow fuller and longer, or if nothing else,

have a shoulder to lean on during those initial itchy stages. The first Bearduary took place in 2005, begun by hirsute visionaries Chris Rubino and Sean Donnelly in Brooklyn, New York. This year marks the emergence of the Hamptons Chapter, founded by Michael Wilson of Sag Harbor. Mr. Wilson, reached for comment at his Sag Harbor home, could only mutter, "I think I had a breakthrough last night."

Do keep in mind that he was reached during the aggravating, irritating and rash inducing days seven to fourteen, or Week Two as it is called on the Bearduary website. It is rumored that there are new chapters sprouting in Providence, Rhode Island, Los Angeles, California and possibly as far away as Japan.

While the start of festivities was January 1st, Bearduary officials are not strict and will accept late arrivals to their stubbly brother-

hood (they call each other Beards). All that is required are a discontinuation of the shaving ritual and pictures documenting your beard growth. The first step in growing your beard is similar to most of the subsequent steps: Do not shave; cease shaving activities; stop touching your face with a razor. Of course, this is jest: After an initial grow-in phase, sculpting is encouraged and the personality of each Beard shines through.

stairway of the John Jermain — Steinbeck also founded a beard growing competition when he was named Honorary Chairman of the Harborfest, then called the Whaler's Festival, in Sag Harbor in 1966. That year he threw himself enthusiastically into the annual festival, which still takes place every September (though, sadly, *sans* beard judging). The founders of the local Bearduary chapter like to think of this event coming to the Hamptons as

a continuation of Steinbeck's legacy. By the end of the second week you might be strolling the streets of Sag Harbor on a foggy morning humming a little tune to yourself: "I got blue and things got weird, when I started growing John Steinbeck's beard."

There are many misconceptions about just what Bearduary is. To get a clearer picture of the concept we spoke to the esteemed founders of

Bearduary. Mr. Rubino corrects a common mistake, saying that Bearduary is not a contest per se. Hence, there is no prize. "When one has grown a beard superior to his peers it is evident, and recognition is not necessary," he says, then adds haltingly, "Then again, maybe we'll buy the best one a drink."

The founders see Bearduary as performing a

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John Steinbeck is an important figure to the Sag Harbor Chapter. They have been known to meet at the (bearded) bust of Steinbeck on the top floor of the John Jermain Library to discuss Chapter activities. Besides often sporting beards himself — from the pointy Russian anarchist beards of his youth to the bushy goatee of *Travels with Charley* to the full beard which can be seen in a picture in the main

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great service, enlightening men about the natural protection from the harsh winter elements, which has been right under their noses all along. When asked what possessed them to start Bearduary, Mr. Rubino states simply, "In January it is cold. A beard keeps your face warm." It might be said that a gentleman in winter should have a beard. The founders claim that this gives a man time for more chivalrous pursuits is intriguing, but unsubstantiated.

The comparatively rougher, more scenic environs of Sag Harbor and the East End lend themselves to many Bearduary events. There is sure to be flannel-shirt-wearing-wood-chopping and maybe a warming tumbler of Scotch after. Bearduary founders are pleased by the growing ranks of the event. Mr. Rubino says, "Hopefully we can open the eyes of numerous men from Manhattan to Montauk to the noble endeavor of growing a winter beard. Also, I can see us drinking together in a ribald night of revelry at the end of February before the razors come out." The Hamptons Chapter has taken Steinbeck as an icon, but whom do the founders consider the greatest Beard of all? "Either Hemingway, Castro or Katie Holmes," Mr. Rubino says.

Besides the bust of Steinbeck in the library, another popular meeting place for Sag Harbor's Beards is Murf's Tavern. There is a

standing weekly meeting there at four p.m. every Wednesday. Let it be known that this is when happy hour begins, and your drink price is set by a small ticket you pick out of a coffee tin and peel open before you pay. All are welcome. The Hamptons Chapter will host a night of bearded celebration on Thursday February 9th at Murf's, which will be attended by the founders and other beards from throughout the region. Again, all are welcome.

An issue to many men embarking on growing a beard is whether or not this endeavor is tantamount to a vow of celibacy. The look of consternation on the face of a spouse when a man declares his intention to let his face go woolly can be cause for concern. This look has resulted in at least one case of a Chin Curtain (or, Surgeon General) beard, in order to keep the upper and lower lips free of stubble. Mr. Rubino says potential Beards needn't worry needlessly. He advises, "Shampoo with conditioner. Get that hair long and soft as fast as possible." He has more words of encouragement for lonely Beards. "During Season One we were quite surprised by the response. Of course, some do not like it, but the beard really opened the gates to a whole other world. It



Katie

really can't be explained in print other than a lot of girls dig beards."

But the most important aspect of Bearduary, of course, is not what others think of your beard; it is what the beard means to the man wearing it. Mr. Rubino puts it this way: "When you grow your first beard something inside you changes." A beard is different for every man, but whether you come out more Jesus or more Che Guevara, as the face staring back at you in the mirror slowly changes daily, so does what is behind it. Who you are in Bearduary is not quite who you are the rest of the year. Maybe you start taking your coffee a little blacker, maybe you consider your words a bit longer before speaking, maybe you preset the country station on your car radio, or start rolling your own cigarettes.

The inevitable conclusion of Bearduary though, is a good shave. "After two months (or longer) of staring at a new man in the mirror," Mr. Rubino says, "Shaving is kind of like getting reacquainted with an old friend—an old friend that all of a sudden has a strange upper lip and no chin."

For more information on beards, Beards and Bearduary or to join, go to www.bearduary.com.



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