

**Woman denied haircut at Westdale barbershop
Owner says clients expect a 'women-free atmosphere'**

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When might a gift certificate for a free men's haircut not be honoured?

In one case, when the customer is a woman.

Armed with a voucher for a free haircut she won in a silent auction at the end of June, 38-year-old Lyla Miklos went into the Westdale Barber Shop Wednesday afternoon. She had just finished work at Westdale Secondary School.

She took a seat in the King Street West shop, pulled out a book and waited for her turn. The barber, who was cutting another customer's hair, asked how he could help her.

Miklos, who identifies as a queer, feminist and a labour activist, was shocked when he told her the shop is for men only.

"Even if I want to get a men's cut? You're joking, right?" she asked the barber.

"Emotionally, I was very angry and slightly hurt," she said, noting she's had short hair her entire adult life and has been to other barbershops in the area.

"I didn't want to cut her hair," said Phil Angemi, who's owned the Westdale Barber Shop for the past 12 years. "That's my reason."

Angemi said men come from Welland, Toronto and Ottawa to get their hair cut at his shop, and they anticipate a women-free atmosphere. He said it's partly about tradition.

"The shop's been (open) since at least the '40s. I seriously don't think it's good for business if I do a woman's haircut here."

It's also about time, he said, noting his shop runs on a first-come, first-served basis, and men might not want to wait for women to have their hair cut.

"It is more time-consuming," said Angemi, who worked in a hair salon cutting both women's and men's hair for three years.

Miklos, in an effort to prevent the same hurt and embarrassment she felt, has contacted the Westdale BIA, Councillor Brian McHattie and MPP Ted McMeekin.

She says she's also in the midst of filing a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.

"There's a barber out there who really needs some sensitivity," she said, adding she'd like an apology and for the barber to undergo anti-oppression training. She also suggested he could offer free haircuts to women in need or make a donation to a sexual assault centre.

Angemi says he has told other women who have come into the shop that he won't cut their hair.

"It's just the business, that's all it is," he said.

"I said to have the people call me who gave her the gift certificate to make sure she was taken care of because there was obviously some sort of misunderstanding as far as what a barbershop means."

Sean Gibson, president of the Ontario Barber Association, said "As an association, we don't condone such behaviour."

Gibson took the province to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario for what he believes is discrimination for failing to include instruction in how to cut a black man's hair in its curriculum for hairstylists.

Each claim submitted under the Ontario Human Rights Code is examined on a case-by-case basis, looking at the particulars of the situation, such as whether it involves other aspects like race or religion as well as whether the discrimination can be proven, said a representative from the Human Rights Legal Support Centre who could not be named as an official spokesperson.

Charles Lugosi, a Brantford lawyer and law professor, said if a person was denied service outright, based on gender alone, it could be classified as discrimination under the code.

But it's not that simple.

He said the situation can vary depending on whether it was "an honest misunderstanding" or whether someone was "discriminating because of hate."