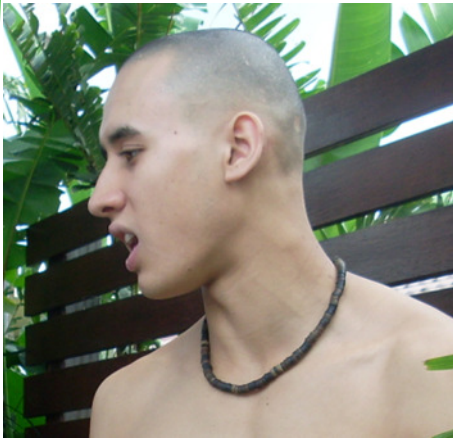


# Cameron .....If I had paid less attention to my physical attributes, I would have realised that I actually have a lot more to give to the world than my hair. .



My name is Cameron and my journey through Alopecia started when I was just seven years old. I first noticed there was something different about me when two hairless spots appeared on the back of my head. At first I didn't worry about it but as the spots grew my parents became worried and that's when they took me to the doctor, who then had to refer me to a specialist. I then went through vigorous testing and the specialist still couldn't give me an answer as to what was wrong with me - I was scared. As the weeks went on between appointments, more and more hair started falling out and patches were appearing rapidly. I was too embarrassed to go to school so mum let me have some time off. During this time is when I learnt of my condition. I was diagnosed with an auto-immune disease known as Alopecia Areata, which I was devastated to learn had no direct cure and treatments were not proven to be 100% effective.

With the encouragement of my family I came to realise that I had to face this issue head on. After all, I couldn't hide away from school forever. On my first day back, mum could see the anxiety on my face. She then handed me my first hat which I wore *religiously* as it gave me more self-confidence to be able to face my peers at school. To my surprise I didn't get bullied but the other kids were always asking me why I continually wore my hat indoors, outdoors, rain, hail or shine.

As the years progressed, I lost count of the number of treatments I underwent. I was continually assured that they would be effective and with each treatment my hopes grew higher and higher. At times it seemed as though my hair was growing back but at the same time it was also falling out at a significantly faster rate than before. It was then advised that I discontinue the corticosteroid injections into my scalp as they were too costly and the results only lasted temporarily. The spots followed no specific pattern and seemed to be completely random. Eventually many other patches on my head joined together and I also started losing all my body hair. By this stage I had next to no self-confidence as an adolescent. I continually wore my hat every day from year's two to twelve and felt as if I was naked without it. My dad would always tell me "Its only hair Cameron, it doesn't define you as a person". This logic I rejected.

School didn't treat me too bad though. I had great friends (who I still have today) who accepted my condition and me for who I was. Even though I was not bullied at school, I started falling into a trend of avoiding certain social situations such as swimming carnivals, class photo days, school camps and even regrettably, my year 12 formal. I was constantly afraid of being in the spot light or having people look at me and avoided any situation where it wasn't acceptable to wear my hat. Year 11 was the first time I decided to shave my head. It was a huge shock for me because for the first time in my life, it was official - I had absolutely no hair (besides eyebrows). It took some serious getting used to but in the end I wish I had done it earlier.

After finishing school I realised there was something I hadn't thought of yet - the work force! How was I to begin my career whilst still wearing my hat every day? I decided the hat HAD to go and I attended my first job interview with a freshly shaven hat-less head. I was nervous, I was fumbling on my words, but after some time in the interview went on, I realised that this man sitting across from me was completely un-phased by my shiny head. I got the job and as the weeks went on where I was constantly meeting new people and being taken out of my comfort zone, my confidence finally grew back.

I am currently 24 years old, I am a qualified fitter and turner and I have a beautiful girlfriend named Tamara. Tamara knew me as 'the hat guy' in high school but despite this fact, she is completely accepting and un-judgemental. She thinks it was silly of me to purposely miss out on so many of my high school events for such a silly reason. To ME losing my hair was the biggest thing to have happened to me in my life, but when I finally got the courage to openly talk to other people (including my friends) about my situation, I realised how LITTLE this meant to everyone *else*. They liked me for the person I was inside. It was this realisation that broke me free from the constraints I had set upon myself whilst growing up with Alopecia.

For my entire youth all I ever wished for is the return of my hair so I could be a normal person just like everyone else. I never thought my hair would return but within the last few years it has broken its cycle and has slowly come back. I now have an almost full head of hair and even though I have the potential to let it grow back entirely, the irony of this story is that Tamara and I honestly could not picture myself being any other way.

When I look back on my childhood, the only part about it I would change is that I would've displayed my bald head with pride, instead of convincing myself that I was a freak and I was alone. The truth is, I was too busy wallowing in self-pity to see all the people I had by my side supporting me. If I had paid less attention to my physical attributes, I would have realised that I actually have a lot more to give to the world than my hair. My dad was right after all - It is only hair and doesn't define you as a person.