

Charlotte....In accepting who I am, I've moved from feeling like the bald girl, to Charlotte who just happens to not have any hair.

I'd never been someone to fuss or worry about my hair. When it started to fall out two years ago, I was surprised that I felt as though I was losing my sense of who I was as a person. I became really angry at myself for feeling this way. I felt that I was being vain for caring about my hair as much as I did.

Within three weeks I had lost all hair on my body and was suddenly faced with a diagnosis of Alopecia Universalis. I think it was the initial shock of looking and feeling completely different that was the hardest thing to deal with.

I began to lose my hair a fortnight before I had planned to move overseas for 18 months. I questioned whether it was still a good idea to go, but ultimately decided that having alopecia wasn't something that should stop me from doing what I really wanted to do. After all, I was still completely healthy! Rather than working, I decided to just travel for 4 months and then come home. In many ways travelling really helped me deal with my alopecia. It was an escape for me. I was anonymous while I was overseas. The people that I met only knew me without hair, so I felt as though I was given the opportunity to redevelop my sense of who I was. This helped me realise that nothing had really changed. Yes, I looked different, but I could still do the same things, have the same experiences, and laugh at the same lame jokes as I did when I had hair. This made coming home and dealing with people's reactions to my hair loss a lot easier. As

soon as my friends and family saw that I was happy and confident, my relationships with these people went back to how they had always been.

I didn't feel comfortable wearing a wig for a long time and opted to wear head scarves instead. When I wore a wig, I felt as though I was pretending to be someone that I wasn't and as though I wasn't being true to myself. I thought that people should accept me for who I am. While I still believe that, I've realised that how I feel about myself is more important, rather than what people think of me. If that means that I feel more confident and more like myself when I am wearing a wig, then that's okay.

I've realised that having alopecia is only as big a deal as I make it. In accepting who I am, I've moved from feeling like the bald girl, to Charlotte who just happens to not have any hair. For me now, having alopecia isn't a big deal, just another way that I am uniquely me.

