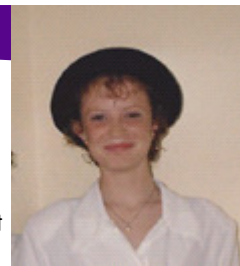


## Heidi.....I probably missed out on a lot because of my insecurities but I did have a great group of girlfriends who didn't care that I didn't have hair



I was 12 years old and talking to my best friend Susan & Melissa when Melissa noticed I had a small bald spot on the back of my head. I thought she was mucking around, she assured me she wasn't joking. I immediately ran inside the house to get my mum to have a look and she too confirmed what would be the start of a very trying and emotional couple of months.

I grew up in a small country town of 1500 people; the doctors were not sure what to make of my hair loss. After several appointments being told it would grow back and not worry about it I pushed to get answers as it clearly was not growing back & it was something to worry about.

After three appointments with our local doctor I eventually managed a referral to a specialist. The specialist appointment meant a day trip to Adelaide (2½ hours drive) where we attended the Skin Cancer Centre. It was incredibly emotional sitting in a waiting room with people who were undertaking chemotherapy, they looked sad like I was. I was scared as I didn't know what to expect & what was going to happen once I walked through that door.

The specialist who saw my mum and me that day was not very child friendly. I remember I was wearing a hat by this time to cover my ever expanding bald patches and she made me take my hat off in her appointment room with the door open for anyone walking past to see. On top of this she had six men come into the room to inspect my head as well. I never used to show anyone my bald spots so by this stage I was totally mortified and just wanted to crawl under the desk. Then came the diagnosis, she wanted to take a sample from underneath my skin on my head with what she described as 'an apple corer'. Nothing more needed to be said, the tears started streaming down my face & thankfully my mum opted not to undertake this procedure. To the disgust of the specialist she prescribed cortisone cream that I was to rub on my head every night before bed.

The cortisone cream was sticky and disgusting and made a mess of my pillowcases at home. After a short period of repeating this process every night I told my mum I didn't want to use it anymore.

It only took a month or two for the rest of my hair to fall out and I started wearing hats all the time.

Life really felt hopeless and I truly didn't know if I wanted to live like this for the rest of my life. Now when I think about it I can't believe I had these thoughts but I did think about killing myself & every night I thought about what would be the best way to do it as I cried myself to sleep. One thing I did know was that I didn't have the guts to do it and thank goodness for that.

No one in my home town had heard of alopecia & it was embarrassing being asked why I wore a hat or if I had cancer. If I had a dollar for everyone time I was asked if I had cancer as a teenager I could probably afford to find a cure.

I finished up my last year of primary school then came the dreaded high school years. Being the only person wearing a black hat really made me stand out. There were older boys who used to pull my hat off when I walked past (totally embarrassing), I didn't want to participate in swimming lessons as I didn't want to swim without anything covering my head & I never went on school camps as I didn't want to sleep without my hat on in front of other people.

In general I probably missed out on a lot because of my insecurities but I did have a great group of girlfriends who didn't care that I didn't have hair & often they would totally forget about it. We always laughed when they would ask me for a hair brush without thinking about it.

I was never an A grade student but enjoyed school, I loved reading and loved art & photography. When I was in year ten I found myself hanging around with troublemakers. They accepted me freely & didn't really care that I wore a hat or didn't have hair. I just felt comfortable around these people as they saw me as a good person and didn't care about the rest of it. School kids were so hurtful and always made me feel like crap.



By the age of 17 years I moved out of home & at this time lost my eyelashes, eyebrows and all my body hair. This was the kick in the guts that I could have done without and thought 'What else is God going to throw at me'. I didn't think I could handle too many more disappointments.

I finished year 12 and got a traineeship working for TAFE as their office administrator. Again, still being the hat wearer that I was I was extremely nervous about my first day. I told my boss before I started that I wore a hat due to having alopecia but that I wasn't sick. She didn't seem to mind and said that it wasn't an issue for her.

I have to mention my boss Petra C because if it wasn't for her I would never have had the courage to start wearing wigs. I remember my dad was the first person I went and saw after buying my wig, I was excited and nervous at the same time as I knew people would have to know that it wasn't my hair. How could my hair have grown that length in a short period of time? I decided that I didn't care as it meant I finally looked like everyone else and didn't have to feel like an outsider anymore.