

Mel....why fit in when you are born to stand out.

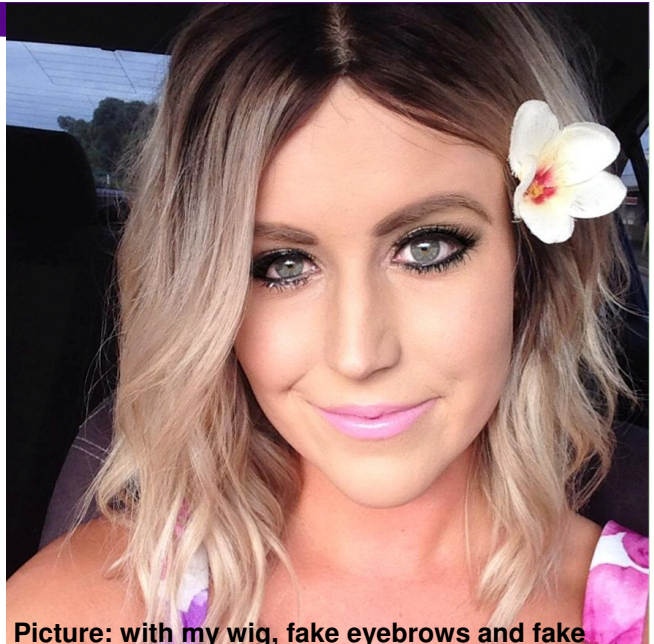
Every challenge is an opportunity to become stronger.

My name is Melissa and I am 20 years old.

My alopecia began when I was thirteen in 2006. It initiated with a small bald patch that grew back. In 2007 I lost three bald patches. As a result I wore headbands with hair extensions in them to cover the baldness. In 2008 whilst on a holiday in Queensland I lost all hair on my body. To this day I still have no hair and my diagnosis is Alopecia Universalis.

When my alopecia first began I loathed it. Growing up in the small country town of Broken Hill was difficult with alopecia. I love Broken Hill but could not escape the reality that everyone knew about my hair. I viewed it as a weakness, that people saw me lower than them and an easy target. There were numerous times at school when students would make inappropriate comments, stare at me, whisper remarks to their friends and attempt to bully me through social media. It was definitely an emotional struggle throughout these years. I hated my appearance and just wished I could be 'normal' again. We tried absolutely everything to get my hair to grow back, but there's only so many times you can hear 'there's no cure', 'we can't help you', or 'your hair will never grow back', so we eventually gave up. Throughout this time I was lucky to be surrounded by supportive family and friends.

It's wonderful how much can change in a few years. I have developed a positive attitude towards my alopecia and now embrace it. It's who I am and I'm happy with it. I've found products that satisfy my needs and have more confidence than I did with hair. I see alopecia as an opportunity. We are given the chance to express our individuality and be different. I am also thankful for the difficult times I encountered because without it I wouldn't have found my strengths and capabilities. Until this year I had never met anyone with alopecia. It's great to be able to connect with other alopecia sufferers, share stories and make new friends. For people just being diagnosed with alopecia, the best advice I can give is you're not alone. View alopecia as a positive experience because I guarantee you will become a stronger, wiser and more optimistic person because of it. Every challenge is an opportunity to become stronger!



Picture: with my wig, fake eyebrows and fake