

# Surviving the emotional rollercoaster of living with no hair. How I overcame my 25 year battle with Alopecia to help other women learn to love themselves again.



Imagine if what you define your femininity by is suddenly taken away from you, without any rhyme or reason by a mysterious and confidence crushing disease. We live in a culture obsessed with hair and everywhere we look we see the next TV commercial, billboard, supermodel or social media superstar showing off their luscious long silky locks. Can you imagine what it would be like to suffer from having no hair, in a world that defines people by their hair? This reality is very real, and affects more Australians than you know, with one in four suffering from some form of hair loss.

For me, this reality was all too real and one morning at the tender age of just 9, I woke up to my worst nightmare. What was happening to me? My once thick long brown hair was falling out everywhere, my pillow was covered and handful after handful of hair would come out in the shower and my brush was overflowing with hair. It is both scary and confusing at the same time, because you have no idea what is going on, where is my hair going? Why me?

It was not long after that I was diagnosed with Alopecia, a rare auto-immune condition which causes sudden hair loss and just like that, you automatically feel stripped of your femininity, sexuality and beauty.

Is there anything you can do about Alopecia? In short, no. I would go through agonising lengths to get my hair back, yet nothing would work. From acupuncture and strict diets to lathering my head in strong hair growth chemicals, drinking flour like powders and even sleeping with black tar on my head, these are just some of the failed treatments I had to endure as a young child and teenager.



Life doesn't stop when you get Alopecia, I still had to go to school when my hair was coming out, but what I couldn't come to terms with, was how can you go to school with no hair? Over the next few months things proceeded to get even worse, the kids at school started realising my hair was falling out and I got to the point where I just couldn't cover it anymore. So I decided to wear a wig. Sadly, this still didn't put an end to my bullying nightmare. Kids in the playground can be so cruel, the looks, the comments, it was never ending. Kids think it is "cool" to make fun of you.

My first wig it was stringy and made from synthetic hair, aka it was plastic! Who wants to wear plastic hair when all you want to do is fit in? It just looked so looked awful, like a wig and huge plastic ball of frizz on my head. No wonder the kids at school called me "mop head".

I remember so clearly when our family had to pack up and move to Ireland, I thought no one will know me, know my past and most importantly know I have no hair. This was going to be sweet, I thought to myself, and I had just gone from a brunette to a blonde overnight and I was going to conquer the world! I got to my new school, and my new wig was quite clearly more obvious than I had thought.



## **Hair loss doesn't need to define you, it just one tiny part of who you are.**

My new classmates thought I was some ex criminal hiding my identity by wearing a wig. Seriously? Eventually, I admitted why I wore a wig, but this only opened me up to the evil side of teenagers. I hit an all time low when a close friend of mine walked up to me in the middle of the playground, grabbed my wig off my head and threw it on the floor. In a complete state of shock and devastation I picked up my wig off the playground floor and ran to the bathroom where I hid for several hours until the head mistress eventually convinced me to come out. This was always (and still is) one of my biggest fears, that someone will just come and yank it off.

I survived Ireland and thankfully not long after my hair started to grow back. But this didn't solve my problems. Think back to your first day starting high school, you wanted to make a good impression right? I remember walking in that first day with boy short hair thinking this is not how I want to make my first impression. For me as a young woman I didn't feel feminine or pretty and at this highly vulnerable time you just want to fit in, and be like the rest of the girls and to be "normal".

But the boy short look didn't last too long, as the alopecia beast made its way back into my life. In high school there are things that you do miss out on or things that are just so much harder. I always backed out of school camps as it meant keeping my hair on for 7 days straight, as I refused to take it off. I would play netball and have to duck to the bathroom in the breaks to wipe the sweat out, as at the time I had a suction based wig that wouldn't be able grip if there was any sweat. It also meant shaving my head daily to make sure any hair I did have on my head was gone so my wig would stick. When my hair grew back this time, my parents took me on a family holiday to Bali so I could take off my wig and let my hair grow. This time it stuck around for just over a decade but the beast struck again.

So when it came to losing my hair for the 3rd time, I had decided this time I would take control and not let this beast beat me. It was at that point that I said to my hairdresser, shave all of the hair I had left on my head off. She asked did, I want to look the other way? No, it was almost like I was numb to the whole experience. That very first moment you see yourself totally bald again, it is a complete mix of emotions. In one sense it was invigorating as you made the decision this time, but at the same time, boom there goes your femininity again, in one clean shave.

This time around there were no more synthetic wigs, no more suction based wigs but sadly I had been sold into a wig which I quickly learnt was doing more damage than good. This "fusion wig" would be glued onto my head every few weeks with heavy chemical glues, leaving my scalp not only raw but blistering and weeping. Then to add salt to the wound, I was being sold what I was lead to believe was premium hair, yet had been subbed in for a cheap off the floor asian hair. These wigs were next to impossible to manage and the hair would fall out everywhere, the floor was covered again and at best these wigs would last 5-6 weeks. It was like re-living alopecia all over again, but this time it cost over \$2k per piece.

It was from this nightmare I turned things around and this became my light bulb moment and the beginning of my beautiful journey! A friend referred me to a spiritual healer, my first session I walked in and she said to me you have alopecia and we will fix this. I was in tears while I told her all about my battles to find the perfect hair in Australia. Little did I know 12 months later I would have opened my very own wig shop.

Now my goal is to help the women feel beautiful, sexy and feminine, all of which having your hair back can do for you. I want to help others with Alopecia or any type of hair loss fall back in love with themselves again. Hair loss will affect your confidence, but you can learn to live with it and you will overcome it and it ultimately this will give you the strength to also overcome challenges in other areas of your life. I honestly believe I am a stronger person because of it. Hair loss doesn't need to define you, it just one tiny part of who you are.

I am proud to have launched The Beautiful Hair Boutique, I am excited to help women feel feminine and beautiful again and I am excited about what lies ahead of me.