

I've had ups and downs, I've been self conscious and I've been brave. I don't know where I will be this time next year, or what my head will look like. But it's an adventure, and it's all part of my story. I'm Sarah.



Growing up with Alopecia Areata has made my life unique. My Alopecia first began when I was around 3 years old, with a few small patches developing. We lived on a property at a small place called Arcadia Valley, a beautiful place 'if you blink you miss it'. My earliest memory of my Alopecia is having my mum do my hair up in pig tails, but instead of the traditional two, we went for three in order to conceal one of my Alopecia patches. This was in grade 2 or 3, and by now we had moved to Roma. I remember getting up in front of the class and doing 'show and tell' about my Alopecia. It mustn't have been planned, just a spur of the moment decision, as I remember my teachers looking surprised. As a teacher myself now, I wonder what they thought about this little girl randomly presenting her baldness to the rest of the class.

When I was around 9 or 10 my parents took me to a specialist. I only remember sitting on a high stool and having someone look at my fingernails. Mum tells me that all of the treatments seemed too harsh, and she didn't want me to have to go through that.

Somewhere along the way I obviously started becoming more self conscious about my patches. From grades 8 through to 10 I went through stages of wearing a bandana to school and being very aware of my hair loss. It's quite funny thinking about it now, because I was only losing tiny circles of hair at this stage, but at the time I thought I had lost so much. We went for a trip to Brisbane to have a look at wigs (which was a pretty big deal, living 7 hours away) and I just remember the whole thing feeling awkward and weird. I hated having this big thick thing on my head, and I remember that at the time all I could think about was going on year 8 camp and I didn't want to be wearing a wig for that.



By the time I was a Senior all my peers knew what it was, and I guess I just settled into who I was a bit more. The patches started to get smaller, and for a few years between the end of high school and the start of uni, I only had tiny patches of hair loss. I had decided that my philosophy wouldn't be to try and hide my patches.

Then, in 2009, my hair just started falling out more rapidly. It got to winter and I started wearing beanies, and by the end of that winter, when it was really pushing it as beanie weather, I realised that I had begun to rely on the beanie. I had to sit down and decide what I was going to do. At the time I didn't have the confidence to just let people see my patches. Even though I had been very open about it with my students, and they were very supportive, I hated the way it looked, with all these long strands around big bald patches. So, I decided to make the plunge, shave it off and get a wig. I ended up with three completely different wigs. And so I became a wig wearer. I would change my wigs for school a lot, depending on my outfit and mood, and while it wasn't all great (I found wearing wigs a challenge in the heat, and for the first few months they gave me terrible headaches) I felt like I had embraced this new adventure. After nearly two years of wearing the wigs, I started to yearn to be wig

free again, and if that meant going out baldly beautiful, then so be it. There's a big difference between feeling this way and actually acting upon these thoughts, and for 6 months I dealt with the rise and fall of confidence around going wig free. In my senior classes at school I had already started taking off my wig anyway, and it helped me realise that the people who matter don't care and will accept you the way you are.

I moved to Toowoomba at the start of 2012 and wore my wig when I moved, although I was getting very close to the idea that since I was moving to a new place, I could just rock up as the bald chick and that's how people could meet me.

The day after I moved to Toowoomba I was in Laidley for my Aunty's funeral. She had survived breast cancer a few years ago, but in December 2011 she found cancer again, and within the space of two weeks she was gone. She was only in her 40's and is my Dad's youngest sister. It was a terribly sad time for our family, and we were sitting in the church and all these photos of my Aunt were playing through, even some photos of her when she had lost her hair due to chemo, and it was clear to everyone that she was still beautiful, that her smile radiated through her eyes, that she had bravely faced this disease. I remember one of the ministers assisting with the service saying she was a beautiful woman of God, and I remember at that moment deciding to go wig free. I want to be as brave and strong as my Aunty. I want to show people that bald can be beautiful. I want to empower others to embrace whatever it is that makes them unique.