

Stacey — Learning to love alopecia

I was nine years old, getting my hair cut before going back to school and the hairdresser discovered a small patch of hair missing on the back of my head. At the time I didn't really think anything of it, however my Mum seemed concerned. I thought it would go away eventually and then everything would go on as usual. After going to the doctor and finding out that the diagnosis was alopecia areata, I wasn't really bothered. That is, until it started bothering other people.

Within the early years of high school it was beginning to get more and more difficult to disguise the lack of hair gradually increasing across my scalp, despite many failed attempts at treatment. Once I began to notice other people's stares, I was convinced I had to hide my alopecia at all costs. I avoided participating in activities that I used to enjoy, to ensure that no one else would find out.

In my last year of high school, it was impossible to disguise the patches without covering them with a beanie. Following multiple unsuccessful treatments, I started to come to terms with wearing a wig which, very conveniently, arrived the day before school photos. With a new found confidence I decided to shave off my remaining hair. At the end of my last year in high school, I was apprehensive but determined to attend the end of school year picnic without my wig. With supportive friends and teachers, I had nothing to lose and only confidence (and possibly sunburn) to gain. It was the first time I felt comfortable with my alopecia, without hiding it with a beanie or wig.

When I started College, I was surprised with other's fascination and eagerness to learn about my alopecia. I felt like once I transitioned from high school to college, people at school had gained new found acceptance. In my first year of college I participated in a course called Design and Production, which included a project called 'My Generation - society and the environment'. The brief was to create a garment or an outfit that was creative and reflected this subject and model our creation in a photo shoot at school. Immediately I thought of creating a garment related to alopecia, however at first I was unsure, as I knew people would ask questions and I wasn't sure if I was ready to give answers. Despite this, I began my research and I came across the Australian Alopecia Areata Foundation (AAAF) website.



Stacey — I now have the most confidence I've ever had

Little did I know a few years later I would rediscover the website and find a whole new community of alopecians and numerous helpful support networks.

After completing my research I purchased a dress from the op shop and printed two variations of the AAAF logo onto calico material. I cut out the logos and hand stitched them to cover the skirt of the dress. I used the larger logos on the front and the back of the dress bodice. Once I was happy with the completed dress and had gathered all necessary information, I started preparing for the photo shoot. But I had some concerns; do I come to school without my wig on? Or do I take it off when I get to this particularly class? If I do, where the heck would I put it? I decided to still wear it to school but I would take it off for the class when getting ready for the photo shoot. As soon as I took it off I felt uncomfortable, even though no one could see me. I cautiously walked into the classroom. I was preparing myself for questions that I most likely did not want to answer. Surprisingly no one seemed to notice at first, perhaps they thought I was someone else, but then they began to stare. I smiled and tried to brush it off positively, even though a part of me still wanted to run out of the classroom. A few people were curious, started asking questions and said that they had never noticed, I was surprised, nevertheless I answered their questions. The pictures were taken of me wearing my dress, my bald head on full display. After class, I was proud of my decision to enter the classroom without wearing my wig, despite my initial concern.



I have realised that people who do not accept my alopecia, are people that I do not wish to know. After having alopecia for over a decade, I now have the most confidence I've ever had since being diagnosed. Even though I may still have my low points, I have accepted that there is no avoiding them because it is all part of learning to love alopecia.