

## EDITORS' NOTE

*Kris Schobert's writer's history essay discusses the process of acceptance he went through after learning he has Alopecia Areata. After reading his essay, locate his thesis, and determine if you think it is implied or explicitly stated. How does the author's tone convey his initial emotional trauma? How does Schobert's use of concrete details throughout his essay engage his audience? What does his second-grade photo add to his essay? Finally, in Schobert's conclusion he asserts that his experience "actually inspired [him] to be more distinct and original." How has his tone shifted? What inspires you to be distinct and original and how might that inform your writing?*

## Shine On

*Kris Schobert*

Once each individual strand of sunlight had fallen behind the horizon, my hair began softly drifting downward from my innocent, seven-year-old head and settling onto my pillow as I slept. When I awoke to find my pillow doused in hair, I dashed to my parents' bedroom, violently shook their bed, and pleaded for an answer. They were as bewildered as I was. The number of expressive wrinkles on my Mom's forehead must have doubled due to her distress. My Dad, being a doctor, felt it was his responsibility to help me but was equally baffled since his specialty was orthopedics. After this ritual continued for a week or so, my parents decided it was time to seek medical attention.

I recall sitting in an uncomfortable, wooden chair in a chilled office waiting for the doctor to come in and reveal my fate. After a long ten minutes, he entered with his chart and a misshapen smile. He disclosed that I had been diagnosed with Alopecia Areata, which is an allergic response to one's hair. It falls out. A wave of self-consciousness swept over me as I came to the realization that my physical appearance would now be completely different to all those around me. I was bald.

Although I felt hopeless at the time, my disease ultimately led me to mature into a distinguished, understanding, unique individual. I spent the rest of that summer hiding from the public as much as possible. Once, my Dad and I were driving to McDonald's to get some lunch. I was content with coming along since the restaurant had a drive-thru, and my Dad's car windows were tinted. I would be completely out of public view. On the way home, my Dad without warning decided to get a cup of coffee at the local coffee shop. He wanted me to come inside with him since it took roughly ten minutes to prepare the drink. I was not about to reveal my nakedness to a dozen judgmental caffeine addicts, so I refused to go. My Dad insisted that I come since ten minutes was too long to leave me alone in the car. That valid point might as well have been spoken in some alien language since it meant nothing to me. I was staying in the car and nothing was going to change that. We left the parking lot with a vacant cup holder, and a feeling of guilt within me, since I wouldn't even attempt to conjure up the courage to walk into a coffee shop.



Figure 1: My Second Grade Yearbook Photo

After that long and overwhelming summer, I found myself walking through the gates of my elementary school with a brand new, navy blue, corduroy baseball cap on my head. I never took it off at school for fear of being taunted for my condition, but during P.E. one gloomy Friday afternoon, the unthinkable happened. Instead of having us perform numerous jumping jacks and run two gruesome laps around the track, which was our normal routine, our instructor decided to cut us some slack since the weekend was right around the corner. We were going to play the harmless, innocent game of duck-duck-goose instead. Ecstatic hooting and hollering filled the air as we all sat in a circle. After a few minutes of anxiously waiting to be called upon, I felt the swift sensation of a hand pressing down on the button that held together the triangular sections of fabric of my baseball cap, and then releasing with a noticeable sense of urgency. I swung my upper body a full ninety degrees, uncrossed my legs, and darted toward my target. I was closing the gap, when all of a sudden it happened. I had gotten so lost in the moment that I had completely forgotten to hold down my hat. My disguise went flying, and my bare head was revealed. My peers erupted in laughter as I dashed in the opposite direction to snatch my blown cover. No. This could not have just happened. The months of successfully concealing my baldness were now concluded due to this involuntary, demeaning confession.

I came home that afternoon and told my parents about the incident. They were very concerned and decided it was time we had a crucial talk. They sat me down in my bedroom. My father asked me, “Do you think it’s about time to start going to school without your hat. You don’t look bad without hair, just different.” I was much more accepting of that possibility since most of my classmates were now aware of my baldness. “Not yet, but maybe sometime soon,” is what I left them with. However, I did begin to leave the house hatless on the weekends. I was surprised to find that people weren’t as harsh as I had imagined. Some would look at me, but they didn’t glare. I became more and more comfortable with my condition as time went on. By that summer, I began to leave the house as the proud, bald child I was. I can still recall that glorious freedom of abandoning that hat completely. I remember prancing through the neighborhood park. I sprinted across the grassy field and for the first time could feel the crisp air crest over my scalp. No longer would that heavy cotton weight restricted me.

As the new school year started, I was more than ready to just be myself. I recall strutting onto the blacktop in the early morning on the first day of third grade with nothing but a warm, liberating shine atop my head. I was ready to astonish all my classmates; however I was the one astonished. I found no weird looks, and very minimal cocked heads. I went over to the foursquare court for further experimentation. Again, everyone treated me just as they always had, as their friend. As it turns out, all of my friends had already accepted my baldness. From that day on, I have always felt an abundance of support from those around me, including my

classmates, teachers and most of all my parents. I will always be thankful for the encouragement they gave me.

As the years have passed, my baldness has affected me in many aspects. It has led me to feel certain empathy for those who have trouble fitting in. During one of my high school track and field practices, a teammate and I were running warming up laps around the track. All of a sudden, I looked over to find him yelling at a student over by the bike racks. He began taunting this person; calling him fat and saying that he would crush a bike if he were to sit on one. I was appalled. I felt a certain understanding towards this student, since I had been in his position in similar situations. The immaturity of my teammate sickened me, and I have since distanced myself from him.

Not only has being bald giving me insight with respect to people and their insecurities, but it has actually inspired me to be more distinct and original. I feel that living with a unique appearance for a few years has affected my personality and actions; leading them to be more unique as well. This aspiration is reflected well in my songwriting. Ever since I was twelve years old, I have been in bands and writing songs. When I am composing a song I have this obsession of making the tune sound original. During my junior year of high school I felt I needed to be more open and outgoing in social situations. Songwriting is very therapeutic for me, thus I decided to write about this difficulty. The lyrical content of the piece was quite original in my opinion. I chose to tell the story of a man who keeps to himself, dies alone, and ultimately regrets his lifestyle. It took me several weeks to develop original vocal melodies, and guitar riffs. Once I completely finished the song, I was very pleased with the outcome for I had created a novel rock song. If it weren't for my desire to be unique and original, I feel my passion for music would have faded years ago, possibility being only a pre-teen pipedream of popularity and stardom.

One last way being bald has affected me is that ever since I took off my hat; the title of "the bald kid" has been with me. I am in no way offended by this. I somewhat enjoy the persona. I often will meet people who have seen me at summer camps, at school, or around town. I know this sounds a bit childish, but it's fun for me. I feel like some sort of celebrity. I get a real kick out of meeting people who already know me. It is defiantly an amusing aspect of being bald.

I am often asked if I could grow my hair back would I? Maybe being bald has grown on me, or maybe the sense of personal dignity I have gained is the explanation. Whatever the reason, I always answer no. I embrace being "the bald kid." While having no hair sets me apart from the crowd, you may be "the soccer girl" or "the surfer dude" or "the smart kid." We all are unique individuals, with interesting personalities and talents. We each have our own stories of developing personas and growing from them. I will be forever grateful for my story, which began the moment the sun set on that first dreary night, the episodes of darkness that followed, and that beautiful, sunny morning on the first day of third grade. Without this journey, I would have never grown from a shy, scared, little boy, into the compassionate, dignified, bald man I am today.

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