

OUR STORY

Bald is Beautiful.



(Raquel giving the very first doll to Georgina, 7 years old.)

Introduction

Our names are Raquel and Maria, and we are just two girls trying to make a difference. When I, Raquel, was 16 years old, I got diagnosed with Leukemia: a type of cancer that requires a lot of chemotherapy, which, as you might know, will knock your hair right out. Like me, many children go through intense chemotherapy which also knocks their hair out. Although there were many side effects I was being impacted by, hairloss was a tremendous blow to my self esteem.

For the first few months of my treatment, the idea of leaving my house without wearing a wig scared me. So I wore it wherever I went, even though it made my scalp itch and in the hot Florida weather, I was scared I might melt into a puddle at any second. Even worse: I was constantly scared that someone might knock into me or a breeze might make my wig fly right off, leaving me exposed to the world.

Eventually, I decided the wig was not for me. The familiarity of seeing hair around my head when other people looked at me did not make up for the discomfort I felt. So, I decided that I would try to embrace my bald head. And even though some people would stare or turn around to give me a second look, I slowly realized that most of them were probably not judging me. Because, truth be told it is, in fact, uncommon to see a girl with no hair walking down the street. It's probably more uncommon than baldness itself, because those of us who have hair loss, are quick to hide our heads with wigs, scarves, hats, etc.

Now, don't get me wrong. *There's absolutely nothing wrong with wearing wigs, or hats, or scarves, or anything you want on your head.* It's more important than anything else to just feel good with whatever you are doing. But I have to wonder how many people resort to headwear because, like me, they were scared of what people would think.

And so I realized, a major change of mind is needed in society. You should be allowed to go grab a bite to eat, hang out with your friends, or even go to prom bald without worrying you'll be judged for it. I frequently recall when my hair first started falling out and I showed my doctor. He told me that I shouldn't be upset by it, because it's a sign that the chemo was, in fact, killing quickly dividing cells. The cancer cells were losing their battle against the chemo. So, I was winning my battle.

This is the reason I wear my bald head proudly, with my chin up, like a badge of honor. Because I. Am. Winning. And winning is something to be proud of.

So Maria and I decided to tackle the stigma from the bottom up. We thought that if we taught kids going through similar struggles to be proud at an early age, maybe they will teach their friends, and when they are older they will teach other children, and maybe, someday, it won't even have to be taught at all. Being bald will be normal. It will even be decidedly beautiful.

We're battling the stigma by comforting children. When we were the age these kids are, we were glued to our toys, especially our American Girl dolls. We dressed them just like us, gave them the hobbies we had, characterized them with the likes and dislikes we had, and so they were in every sense of the word a reflection of us. I think this made us more secure. It made who we were very real.

We want younger children faced with cancer to be able to feel more secure. And we thought maybe dolls who were also bald could help. We think if these children feel mirrored through a companion that looks like them, they will start to embrace who they are and accept their situation.

Through our partnership with the foundation Sofia's Hope, we have raised over \$12,000. Enough for more than 100 dolls. We hope to distribute these dolls at Nicklaus Children's Hospital (where I am being treated), Baptist Children's Hospital, and pediatric hospitals in Bogota and Cali, two cities in Colombia.

We hope you will consider donating to our cause and joining us in making a difference.