

PEGGY KNIGHT

# THRIVING WITH HAIRLOSS



Helping women look younger,  
feel more confident and  
be more secure

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# CHAPTER 1

## GOING, GOING, GONE!

*Hair loss was not in my realm of consideration. No child should have to be tested with such a loss.*

I've traveled a long, tough road to get to this place in my life. I learned about hair loss at the age when other girls were exploring hairstyles.

Losing one's hair is never easy, a fact that millions know all too well. But it's devastating when you're a youngster who's enthralled with hair. As a girl and then a young teen, my dark, curly hair—a byproduct of my Italian heritage—was not only my pride and joy, it was my obsession. At age 10, I made what could very well have been the world's very first highlight by creating a tiny fall out of silvery thread, attaching it to a bobby pin, and then blending it in with my own hair.

During the next few years, my girlfriends and I would spend hours in front of the mirror experimenting with new 'dos. My dad would pound on the bathroom door, saying, "Hurry up, girls, you've been in there for hours!" He was right – but after all, we were fussing over our hair, and that was just *what girls did*. Great hair made us feel, well, great. Conversely, of course, bad hair days made us feel terrible – and not just about our hair. I learned about the lack of self-esteem at an early age. It took years to overcome.

I remember vividly the day my mother gave me a home permanent wave right before my First Holy Communion. She meant well, but the result was the perm from hell! Nothing could calm down the frizz, and I was sure that my life was ruined forever. As all

of my girlfriends were leaving home in their white dresses and veils the following morning, I curled up on my bed and sobbed. I hated my hair and wanted to hide away forever. Instead, my parents sent me off to church to face the humiliation. I'm pretty sure that I burned all of the photos of that holy day. As I look back on that hair-related incident that once seemed to be the end of the world, I realize that the perm was a subtle preparation for what lay ahead. The day would come when I would long for even those frizzy locks I once hated.

## **What was happening?**

As I brushed my hair in preparation for my 14th birthday party, I felt a smooth patch on the side of my head. Where was the hair that was supposed to be there? In a panic, I ran into the living room to show my parents. "What happened? What happened?" I cried. "Look at my hair!"

The round bald spot was the size of a quarter. I didn't know what had caused it, but I knew something was very wrong. Finding that first spot is devastating to a young girl. I sat down and cried. Despite their alarm, my parents decided to give my hair time to re-grow before rushing me to the doctor. That seemed like a good call because, in a short period of time, fuzz covered the smooth surface. All was forgotten... until a second spot appeared on the other side of my head. And then another, and another. The spots seemed to have a life of their own. As one began sprouting new hair and filling in, another grew even larger and balder.

Thus began a cruel yo-yo process of having my hair grow in and fall out and grow in and fall out. It would actually have been easier if my hair had all fallen out immediately. If it was going to come out, let it come out. If it was going to grow in, let it grow in. But no: every day was a different story. Eventually, the spots started to appear more and more frequently. So instead of one spot on the side of my head, there would be two that would grow to the point where they merged together to form a figure eight.

Eventually, it became clear that my hair was falling out faster than it was growing in. By the age of 24, ***I was completely bald.***

When I started to lose my hair, my first experience seeing a medical doctor seemed like the end of the world. I felt hopeless and as if I were doomed to be bald forever. Looking back on my own experience has given me the perspective to help countless women experiencing hair loss.

Shortly after I had lost my first patch of hair, my petite, beautiful mother developed a bald spot of her own, which simply grew larger as others developed. Within six months, she had lost all of her waist-long hair, along with all the rest of the hair on her body. Questions began to race through my mind: *Is this what I have to look forward to? What could have caused this hair loss? Do I have a strange disease that I share with my mother? Is our nutrition lacking, or are we using the wrong shampoo?*

## **Fear of exposure**

As a teenager with hair loss, my primary concern quickly became hiding my increasingly bare head from the rest of the world. I had no idea how to cover up the four-inch-diameter bald spot on the top of my head, along with the others that had cropped up, for school picture day. I took mental notes as our local hair stylist somehow managed to create something out of nothing. Before long, all of the spots had been camouflaged, and I was ready for my close-up. The artfully created look might have been unusual, but at least I didn't look hairless.

The difficult task of cosmetically concealing my growing baldness took longer and longer as I had less and less hair to work with. I would spend huge amounts of time teasing my remaining hair and using hairspray to hold the style in place. The night of my senior prom, I was supposed to be picked up at 6:30 p.m. for dinner, but as the afternoon turned to evening, my hairstyle was still a work in progress. This time, I was forced to add a hairpiece, which I attached to my remaining hair with dozens of bobby pins. The fake

hair blended with my own, but my entire head was so heavily doused with hairspray that it had a lacquered finish. With just 30 minutes left on the clock, I finally completed my updo (and I use the word literally) and had just enough time to slip on my dress and make up my face. At the prom, I had to walk —and dance — like I had a book on my head because, with the slightest tip, the entire coif tilted. But I made it! That wouldn't always be the case.

## **Wearing scarves and hats**

As my hair loss progressed, first eyebrow pencil and then scalp crayons and hair additions were incorporated into my routine. I longed for those days when I was able to get up, wash my hair and run out the door. What used to take five minutes – unless I was fooling around with hairstyles – now routinely took about an hour from start to finish, with much of that time spent in frustration and tears.

Eventually, things got to the point where my hair was so thin that I couldn't cover the bald spots with my hair. By high school, I had already started wearing scarves to cover the missing patches of hair, and they became my trademark. Each scarf matched the outfit of the day: not difficult because my mother or I made most of my clothes. Unfortunately, the school had a dress code that prohibited head coverings. The principal and most of the teachers knew about my situation, so my scarves were approved. On one occasion, however, I was confronted by a substitute teacher who ordered me to remove my scarf in front of the entire class. Profoundly humiliated, I bolted out of the classroom and headed home. That afternoon, my parents visited the school, and the teacher apologized to me the next day. The gesture, however well-intentioned, could not erase the pain and embarrassment that I suffered.

Scarves quickly became a mainstay of my wardrobe at home and on the road. I had one in every color and material. They were stashed in my purse, glove compartment, next to the bed, in my

gym bag, and in my suitcase. All the while, I never knew when a big wind might blow, leaving me bareheaded.

Hats were also a good cover-up for bald spots, and they prevented the wind from totally devastating a hairstyle that took me hours to create. Accordingly, I made sure to have one for every occasion: casual hats, sports hats, and dress hats in all colors, styles, and fabrics. My style efforts, however, did nothing to stem the lack of self-esteem caused by my hair loss.



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