

Finding Confidence In A Hair Solution

when you need it most

By Tracey Porpora

When faced with a cancer diagnosis, vanity is the last thing on your mind. But when women must undergo certain types of chemotherapy and radiation, hair loss becomes inevitable--and devastating. By seeking a hair solution, such as a cranial prosthetic, many women can regain the confidence they need to aid them in their battle against cancer. We found two very brave breast cancer survivors who shared their stories about how hairpieces helped make their cancer treatment a little more bearable.



Adrienne Biggs, 42, of Marin County, CA A Public Relations Professional

After being diagnosed with breast cancer last year, Adrienne Biggs knew she needed a solution to the inevitable hair loss she would experience during intense rounds of chemotherapy. "I had long hair. I knew I would rather see short hair than long hair falling out in the shower," she recalls. "Knowing I would need four months of chemotherapy, I became empowered to cut my long hair off before it fell out due to treatments. I had a hair cutting party with my friends at a fancy salon. This is how I dealt with it emotionally." After a lumpectomy, and eight rounds of chemotherapy, Adrienne had successfully fought off the cancer

that had invaded her body. Her hair, however, would take time to grow back. In the interim, three wigs of different hair lengths helped her maintain an active lifestyle that included taking her pre-teen daughter to many activities, such as softball tournaments. By maintaining a positive attitude, Adrienne managed to embrace wearing hairpieces that would help her "not stand out in a crowd." "I invested in a long-hair wig, which looked like my old hair--only better. It was sexy Angelina Jolie-like hair. Insurance covered the wig, which was a cranial prosthetic. I also bought a short-hair wig, which looked like a cute short cut, and a medium-length wig, both from the American Cancer Society (ACS) catalogue." A busy public relations professional who works from home, Adrienne maintains a very active lifestyle. "Having the wigs made me feel like I wasn't sticking out like a sore thumb when I was at sporting events with my daughter, or the farmer market."

Ironically, Adrienne was approached one day while wearing her medium length wig at a local farmers market by a hairstylist. "He said, 'I hate to bother you, but I work at the salon downtown, and we're looking for hair models. You have such beautiful hair, I would love to use you as a model. That was one of those moments when you think, 'How ironic is this?'"

When her hair started growing back after her last chemotherapy session last June Adrienne was invited to be a runway model for a "To Celebrate Life" cancer fundraiser called "Stepping Out To Celebrate Life." "I put little flowers in my hair that were attached with baby-sized snaps," she says. "They had been my daughter's when she was a little girl. My hair was the hit of the show!"

Her advice for other women who may be faced with hair loss due to a cancer diagnoses is, "Know it's temporary. Look at it as a period in your life where you get to try things you never would have before," says Biggs. "Get out there, and see if there are fundraisers you can be part of."



Ana S. Gonzalez, 47, of Union County, NJ
A newspaper editor, and special sections production supervisor

After a routine mammography, Ana S. Gonzalez was diagnosed with Stage I breast cancer in February, 2007. Determined to battle the disease, Ana remained positive throughout her lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "My oncologist told me that the chemotherapy I chose would make me lose my hair right after the second treatment," she recalls. "I've never been an extremely vain person, but I like my hair. You're used to looking at yourself in the mirror with hair, then all of a sudden you're completely bald."

Shortly after she was told of her inevitable hair loss, Ana decided to purchase a hairpiece. "I went to a local store that has an extensive list of chemotherapy clients," says Ana, noting she chose a hair prosthesis that closely resembled her natural hair, and was partly paid for by

insurance. "They fit the wig, and it was so close to real looking hair, it was incredible. To me, it was the closest thing to my hair."

Like her oncologist had forewarned, it was after Ana's second chemotherapy treatment that her hair began to fall out. "When I was driving home after my second treatment I had my hand by my hair, and when I looked into my hand, I had a chunk of hair there," she says. "So I went to a local hair salon, and had them shave my head."

At this point, the hair loss due to her chemotherapy treatment now became reality for her. However, with her wig, Ana managed to feel a sense of normalcy at a very difficult time in her life. "The people at the wig place were lovely. They fit my wig to my scalp after I shaved my head," she recalls. "They take their time with cancer patients, and they know what you're going through. For as bad of a time as it was in my life, that part was a pleasant experience." Soon after, Ana took the hairpiece to her regular stylist, and had her cut it in the shape and style of her own hair. "I needed to be comfortable, and feel that if I looked in the mirror, I looked like me," says Ana.

A busy special sections production supervisor and editor for the Star-Ledger newspaper--a major Northeast regional daily newspaper--Ana never took time off from work for her treatments of chemotherapy and radiation. "I couldn't sit home. I had to work. I couldn't imagine sitting on the couch all day," she says. And she never has.

Today, Ana wants to help spread the word to women about the importance of breast cancer prevention and detection. "All women should take charge of their health, and be vigilant," she says. "Women need to do self-exams, and get regular mammograms."

