

How Shaving My Head Redefined My Beauty

As a child, the hair on my head refused to grow. All I craved for was the ability to trade in tight and frilly silk headbands, used by my mom to help others clearly define me as a girl, for thick voluminous hair. Once I entered kindergarten hair was intertwined with the definition of what it meant to be beautiful and feminine. As I began to see real growth, I leaned into various hairstyles which of course changed throughout the years as a little black girl's hair normally does.

At the time protective hair options, cornrows, twists, and braids, were a go-to.

After I entered my teens I no longer wanted the same three options, understandably. I was young and exploring different styles and techniques was part of my hair journey. But of course, changing hairstyles welcomed unwanted breakage. Seven years of the constant heat, maintenance, and washes left my hair damaged and brittle. In the end, it forced my longtime hairdresser to suggest a temporary fix, shave it off and restart the process.

The idea was simple. The plan placed an emphasis on the word *temporary*. I would be hairless for a few months. Eventually, new hair would reappear and I'm back to booking biweekly trips to the salon.

With this in mind, I agreed and shaved off every inch.

For the first few days, I had phantom hair. Time after time I would reach up to my scalp and attempt to fix strands that no longer existed. I was learning how to navigate life missing something that had been vital to my womanhood for years. One day, after the shock faded away, I began to see myself and my facial features. There are no distractions. My face was on display. I fell in love with the high cheekbones that I inherited from my grandmother and the smile took up more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of my face, which is a feature I share with my father. I started to admire the faint scar above the right side of lips that of which I received after taking a hard fall as a toddler. At that moment I learned that there were so many different quirks that made me beautiful and having hair was an added bonus, not the deciding factor.

Today, I continue to receive buzz cuts at my local barbershop but more importantly, I offer extra attention to my face by investing time in my skincare routine. Using sheet masks twice a week has become a must. On top of that, I set aside 10 mins at the end of most days to indulge in a nightly skincare routine with serums, creams and the occasional exfoliant.

I've decided to put a brief halt on my journey hair and enjoy it or the lack thereof at this moment in time. Removing my hair helped me embrace who I was. Will I grow out my hair in the future? Maybe, but I'll never be able to unsee when I was finally able to embrace the face looking back at me, quirks and all, for the first time.