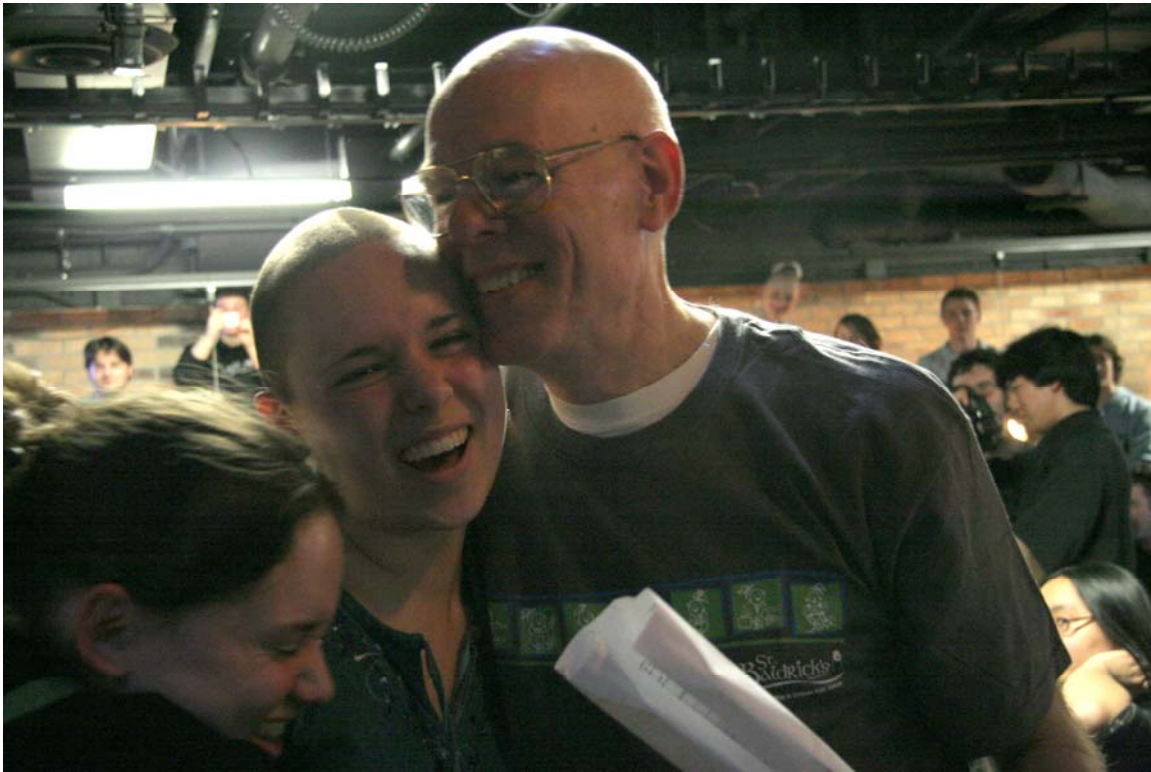


Thoughts from a Newly Shorn Head

by Meg Nelson, Class of 2011



It's fairly cold up top.

My father was my initial inspiration. He'd shaved his head with the St. Baldrick's organization for two years already. The idea was to see how much people would pay you to shave your head, as a kind of solidarity with chemotherapy patients, because the money would go to helping kids with cancer. I thought, since I have a lot more hair, people should pay a lot more to see it go, right? Maybe I'd be able to raise more money for kids that way.

I admit that I didn't go much beyond that. But once I signed up formally to place my locks on the line, my perspective changed.

I had no idea how many people I know have been affected by cancer. I talked to relatives and friends who shared their stories of people they knew, or even themselves, who had suffered through the disease and come out successfully—

or sometimes no. My awareness grew with others'. Many people had never heard of the St. Baldrick's foundation, but they were happy to donate or support once I'd explained it to them. And I was amazed by the amount of support and even enthusiasm that I found. I did get a few "What if I paid you more not to shave your head?" reactions, but thankfully I never had to deal with that problem.

The day to shave drew closer, and I started thinking less of the overall cause and more of the aesthetic challenges I would encounter. Would my head be the right shape? Would I have completely ruined my look? I feel a little silly looking back on those feelings, because I didn't have to worry.

I entered the Bog (IIT student hangout) on the night of the shaving event. Before I knew it, I was third in line to be shaved, and I was filled with so much nervous excitement that I couldn't stop smiling. I could see the faces of all the people that I knew grinning at me and yelling my name, and my nervousness disappeared, to be replaced simply by happiness. I felt that, for once, I had done something right. Beyond being willing to give up my hair and raise some money for kids with cancer, I had raised awareness—both of others and my own. I felt that I had made a difference. And this more than anything kept the smile on my face as my locks fell off one by one. A friend later gave another's impression of the scene to me: "She looks like she's being showered by diamonds." To me, that fits it perfectly.

The whole event wasn't about me. But I took away from it much more than I ever thought it would mean to me. I saw how much a few dedicated people can start with an idea and grow it until it becomes so much larger than themselves. I saw how a community can rally around a single person supporting that cause and help to bring it to fruition. I saw how much giving a way a part of yourself makes you much happier than keeping it ever would.