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VIDEO

GO TO WEB VIEW

# "I Went Viral for Being Bullied"

LAUREN "LULU" WILLIAMS, 16

# Cruel classmates embarrassed Lulu at school—and posted it all on social media. Lulu was crushed, but she didn't give up. She found a powerful way to show she was stronger than her bullies.

BY MICHELLE CROUCH

**L**auren “Lulu” Williams was in middle school when her mother noticed the first bald spot on her head.

“When my mom showed me, I started crying,” remembers Lulu, now 16. “I wanted to hide.”

Lulu has a condition called psoriasis (sor-EYE-uh-sis), which causes patches of dry, scaly skin. The patches were making Lulu’s hair fall out. There are treatments that can help with the symptoms of psoriasis, but there’s no cure.

The bald spots made Lulu feel **self-conscious** and

unattractive. She was already one of the shyest girls at her school in Franklin, Tennessee. Sometimes she got nervous and **stuttered** when she was called on in class. Lulu didn’t want anything else to make her stand out at school.

Lulu tried to conceal the bald spots with braids, but sometimes that was impossible. Finally, Lulu’s mother took her to buy a wig. Lulu attached the wig to her head with clips and glue.

Lulu was aware that her classmates whispered about her wig behind her back, but she tried to ignore them. “My wig was like my security blanket,” Lulu explains. “It made me feel like I fit in.”

## A \$5 Bet

In January 2018, Lulu was talking with a friend in the school hallway when a boy snuck up behind her, ripped off her wig, and ran away with it. Lulu screamed. Her scalp felt like it was on fire.

Lulu covered her head and fled to the bathroom, where she locked herself in a stall.



## HAPPY DAYS

Lulu (right) and her mom (left) used to style Lulu’s hair to hide the bald spots.

She sobbed and shouted for her friends to retrieve her wig.

Then Lulu heard laughter and glanced up. A girl was staring down at her—and recording everything on her phone. It was the most devastating moment of Lulu’s life.

Why would anyone do something so incredibly cruel? Lulu later learned that the boy had torn off her wig on a \$5 bet. He and his friends posted the entire incident on Snapchat. ➔

## VOCABULARY

**self-conscious:** nervous about what other people think of you

**stuttered:** repeated the beginning sounds of some words

**console:** give comfort when someone is upset

**empower:** give power to

**therapist:** a person who helps others deal with personal problems



## A Brave Decision

Lulu cried all the way home from school. She was so hurt and humiliated that she couldn't eat dinner. Her closest friends came over to **console** her.

Her mother gave her a new wig, and Lulu stood in front of a mirror to put it on. Her scalp

was red, and there were injuries where her wig had been glued.

The thought of everyone at school talking about her made Lulu angry—and it suddenly occurred to her that she had nothing to feel ashamed about. She didn't need to hide under a wig.

In that moment, Lulu made a bold decision: to shave her head completely.

Lulu went into the bathroom with her mother. As they ran the clippers over her scalp, Lulu's hair fell to the floor. "I felt so free," Lulu recalls. "My hair was the one thing that made me feel bad about myself."

Lulu's friends were assembled on her mother's bed. When she emerged from the bathroom with her shaved head, they cheered.

"They were lifting me up," Lulu remembers, "and I started to feel beautiful."

## Going Viral

With Lulu's permission, her mother and sister posted on social media about her experience. They begged people to increase their efforts to combat bullying.

### FEELING STRONG

1. Lulu tries a new wig.
2. Shaving her head made Lulu feel free.
3. Lulu poses with her sister Kayla (left) and her friend Camden.

They included a photo of Lulu with her newly shaved head.

Lulu's story rapidly went viral, and messages of encouragement poured in. Lulu even got a shout-out from TV host Tyra Banks on Twitter: "I want you to know how unbelievably fierce you are." The hashtag #Love2LuLu was trending.

Lulu drew strength and courage from those messages: "I felt loved and special," she says. Lulu's confidence increased, and she stopped feeling shy and afraid.

## Speaking Out

Lulu began speaking out against bullying on TV and on social media, as well as at anti-bullying events. She has spoken in front of a hundred people—without stuttering.

In an effort to **empower** other teens and convey the message that you don't have to look a certain way to be beautiful, Lulu started a website called iamshamefree.com.

Lulu hopes to become a **therapist** in the future and help other girls cope with difficult experiences. She's also interested in modeling, provided she doesn't have to grow her hair.

"I want other girls to know that beauty is not defined by the number of strands on your head," Lulu declares, "but by what's in your heart." •

