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Rebuilding Self Image: the BeauBeau

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by Liz Schau

For many women with health problems, the worst part often isn't a diagnosis itself, but the physical and mental consequences of illness. Finding a new identity in a new body, appearance, and mind is necessary to the recovery process, even if it takes a great deal of time and patience. Rebuilding life after it has been wrecked by illness is never easy, but for many women, fixating on the damage is simply not an option. One woman has built an entire company around a creative solution for ladies with a common illness: hair loss.

Seven years ago, after developing an autoimmune disease called Alopecia Universalis, Susan Beausang realized the headwear products on the market at that time left a lot to be desired. Not wanting to wear a wig or turban or square scarf, Beausang started developing her own headwear product that would be fashionable, comfortable, and secure for women with active lifestyles. In 2005, the BeauBeau and [4women.com](#) were born. Scarves that range in style and color and texture, BeauBeau offerings are numerous: silk and rayon, animal prints to pastels.



"We live in an appearance-driven culture that chains women's identity to female sexuality and perpetual youth. Hair is one of the most powerful symbols of female sexuality and youth. Even women with full heads of hair will spend a lot of time and money trying to create an image of more hair that never turns grey. We are exposed to images of abundant and perfect hair in every advertising venue. Hair is symbolically viewed as a woman's 'crowning glory'. Women without hair therefore lose one of the most visible symbols they have of female sexuality, health and youth," says Beausang. "Without hair, I felt I had somehow lost much of my personal identity--that I previously communicated by the color, length and style of my hair. Without a frame for my face, I felt exposed. Some women never become comfortable with the unfamiliar face that stares back at them in the mirror."

Susan Beausang offers women hope, not just in her product, but also her own story. To women experiencing hair loss, Beausang says, "My advice to other women... is do not add to your emotional burdens with additional harsh self-criticisms for being 'vain' or 'shallow'. You cannot accept and love yourself without first allowing yourself to grieve and without first exploring and understanding your deepest emotions... There are so many clichés that seem empowering on the surface, but that can actually make the journey more difficult when adjusting to major appearance changes. These statements actually dismiss those feelings about ourselves that relate to our appearance. 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.' 'Beauty is only skin deep.' Simply dismissing those emotions or thoughts about our appearance that damage our self esteem is not the way to a more permanent sense of self acceptance and inner peace for those of us adjusting to major appearance changes."

In the future, Susan will continue committing herself to helping girls and women regain their sense of worth and beauty when experiencing medical hair loss. "I've discovered that medical professionals often dismiss our emotions as secondary to treatment, even when we are faced with lifelong hair loss... I want to help them have an outlet to express their emotions as well as offer them a way to regain their sense of dignity and style."

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