My Reflection

My life lately is confusing, painful and disappointing. Yet, it's also been liberating because I am beginning to see a familiar reflection.

August 25, 2019 By Megan-Claire Chase

I somewhat freaked out some fellow coworkers when I showed up to the work happy hour on Friday. Why? Well, I had my hair pulled back. My chemo curls were blown straight last week. I had been wearing it down at work with my usual hair accessories. I had discovered on Friday that my hair is just long enough to pull back if I use a tiny clip and a million bobby pins to hold the sides in place.

So, when I walked into Taco Mac, no one recognized me at first. The looks of surprise were apparent.

No headband.

No fascinator.

No hair clips.

Just pure ME.

So why did the bulk of them freak out? One of my male coworkers said he hoped I wear a tiara or flower in my hair on Monday because then I'll "look like royal one they all know." I confess I was taken aback by the comment. I thought I looked smashing. I looked like the ME I remember. Then I thought about it and get his comment. I believe he was trying to say the hair bling fits my big personality.

I always wore my hair up or pulled back since I was a kid, teen, young adult and as an adult. Wearing my hair in a ballerina bun, French braid, French twist, pigtails, etc. is very much a part of ME. I used to be svelte and statuesque. I loved brushing my hair and deciding which classy or cute style I would create each day. Then when I added my glasses, I was often described as the "sexy librarian."

I've been working very hard to claim back some parts of ME. I've been recognizing my reflection more and more when my hair is blown straight. I finally see the length. The thing is, others I've met post-cancer don't recognize me this way. They don't know what I really look liked. Everyone at work knows I'm a cancer survivor because I don't hide it anymore. So, they either forget these are chemo curls or think they are natural.

Someone commented on my Instagram when I posted a little about this. They said, "Interesting that you don't see your curls as feminine. I see you as very feminine, but from my view, it's not the hair but the face."

To me, I…and I will repeat…I think I look like a chia pet on steroids. The chemo curls make my head look huge! The height of the hair really bothers me. I can't wear hats when it's like this. I don't want "big" hair. I've never wanted curly hair. EVER. That's why I started wearing the hair accessories because I can't do anything with those chemo curls. The curls are so tight, that I can't style it. So, I added the bling to feel feminine and give myself the variety I crave.

As a birthday gift, my mother is paying for me to get the chemo curls blown straight 2x per month. Any time I mention this, I always get those saying to get a keratin treatment or sending me pictures of the hair tools they use. Well, I don't have the physical strength to blow these suckers out. They are TIGHT curls. It takes a lot of arm strength, technique and patience that I don't have but my stylists do.

How come no one sees I'm playing a character when I wear my bling? The character of a cancer survivor who doesn't recognize herself or her body.

I've never once felt feminine with the chemo curls unless I have a hair accessory. Notice I never say 'my' when I refer to them. To me, they aren't natural. Poison changed my hair chemistry, not me. It wasn't MY choice. Why can't others get that? I'll say it again. It wasn't MY choice to have curly hair.

I get sooo many people telling me how cute they are. If they were loose curls, maybe I would agree. I always feel the need to tell people what I used to look like and show the pictures as proof. I wasn't always this overweight woman with a tight, curly 'fro. I was fit, classy and stylish.

Am I happy my hair grew back? Of course, I am. Did I think it would grow back entirely different from what was my norm? No. So, I can't stop being surprised and dismayed every single time I look in the mirror when the chemo curls are there. It's not what I know.

I've always been a tad extra from birth. Adding a hair accessory doesn't change that. It's strange the more I'm starting to look like ME with my hair blown straight, no one else seems to recognize me.

My life on the cancer train lately is confusing, painful and disappointing. Yet, it's also been liberating because I am beginning to see a reflection that is familiar.

I am seeing ME, even if no one else does.

Until next time,

Warrior Megsie

This post originally appeared on Life on the Cancer Train. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/reflection