By Jessie E. Hawkes

I have thick, curly, wild hair. It has more volume than the tuba section at a middle school band concert. It's huge. Unfortunately, super silky, straight hair was the trend in high school, so I lived in fear of frizz and bought tool after tool to hide my unruly locks—hair straighteners, blow drier attachments, smoothing oil, smoothing cream. When I got home from school every day, I would go to my room, plug in my straightener, and spend the rest of the afternoon flattening my hair while I did my homework.

Despite my best efforts to have soft, movie-star-straight locks, my hair usually came out looking pretty fried and bumpy. I started to hate the way I looked, and I often wished I could magically change that one thing about me. I just wanted to fit in and look "normal" for once.

Then when I was 16, I was cast in a musical that was set in the 1980s. As we were nearing the performance, the director showed us photos of how our characters would have worn their hair.

When the pictures got to me, I was astounded. What was I seeing?!

Poofy hair? On such gorgeous women? I felt a glimmer of hope. Maybe having wild hair wouldn't be such a bad thing for once.

Before our performances, while all the other girls were ratting their hair and hosing themselves down with hair spray, all I had to do was let my hair air-dry and run my fingers through it. I couldn't help being

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proud—for the first time, my wild hair was awesome!

And you know what? Other people thought so too. They started complementing me on how it looked. "Is that your natural hair?" a lot of my friends asked. "Why don't you ever wear it like that?" "It's different! It's cool!"

After the play, I decided that I was going to just let my hair be. Even if it was different from what was popular, it was me—the *real* me. I started leaving my hair straightener on the shelf more and more, and I eventually gave it away.

And something else happened too. Learning to accept how I looked, frizz and all, helped me stand up for the other things in my life that made me unique, namely things related to my faith.

In my high school, I was one of only two Church members. As I let my locks go natural, I realized I didn't have to be scared of standing out in a crowd. I shared the Book of Mormon with some of my choir friends—and to my surprise, they were interested in learning more! For prom, I designed and wore a unique, modest prom dress that definitely made me stand out. I started speaking out about bad language in the locker room at track practice. I felt happier than ever—all because I decided to love who I am.

I still straighten my hair sometimes, but to be honest, I like it better curly now. Besides, it's a reminder for me to stand out and be who I really am—no matter what. **NE**

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I always hated my wild, curly hair, but it was about to become my secret weapon.

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