

Girl trims locks to help kids in need

Courtney Burns/Catholic Courier

A series of unrelated events three years ago led Alyson Caito, a fourth-grader at St. Joseph's School in Penfield, to make a personal sacrifice in order to improve someone's life.

Alyson had always wanted to grow long hair, and once she entered second grade her mother, Donna, finally allowed her to do so. It was also around that time that Alyson learned that her piano teacher, Maura DeMayo, had cancer. Caito said she explained to her daughter that DeMayo was very sick, which was why she was losing her hair and had to wear wigs.

DeMayo remembers that when she started to lose her hair following chemotherapy, Alyson would always stare at her wigs.

"I would say, 'Do you like my hair today?' and Alyson would always say yes," DeMayo recalled.

Soon after Alyson learned of her teacher's illness, a family friend told the Caitos about the nonprofit organization Locks of Love. With help from people who donate their hair, the organization makes wigs and hair pieces available to financially disadvantaged children who suffer from long-term hair loss.

Alyson and her mother learned more about Locks of Love from its Web site (www.locksoflove.org), which showed photos of children without hair, as well as pictures of the same children smiling proudly after receiving their new hair pieces. The photos deeply affected Alyson, Caito said.

"I asked Alyson to imagine how she would feel inside if she didn't have any hair," she said.

Alyson's compassion for the children in the photos, coupled with the personal experience of her piano teacher's illness, inspired her to grow her hair to donate to the organization. On June 13, Alyson made her donation complete by cutting her hair, which she is preparing to send to Locks of Love.

During the three years she was



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

After learning her piano teacher, Maura DeMayo (right), was losing her hair following chemotherapy treatments for cancer, 9-year-old Alyson Caito decided to grow her hair and donate it to an organization that provides wigs to children with hair loss. Photo below shows Alyson before cutting 12 inches from her mane.

growing her hair, Alyson said she never once wanted to give up and cut it, and didn't tell many people what she was doing.

"I told a couple of my friends, and they thought it was a nice thing to do," Alyson said.

And Caito just recently let DeMayo know about Alyson's endeavor.

"I told her, 'You're the one that got us thinking about this in the first place,'" Caito said.

DeMayo noted that few children would do what Alyson did, and described her pupil as "such a special child."

Through the process, Alyson learned that it takes 10 to 15 hair do-

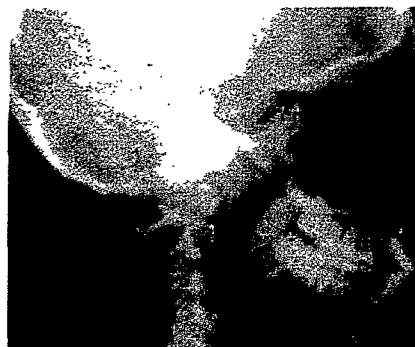


Photo courtesy of Donna Caito

nations to make one wig, Caito said. She recalled how excited Alyson became at the thought that her donation might be the last one needed to complete a wig for a child in need.

Although Locks of Love only requires a donation of 10 inches of hair, Alyson said she was determined to donate at least 11 inches so the organization would have more to work with. As her hairdresser cut Alyson's mane June 13, Caito said she watched the smile on her daughter's face grow. A full 12 inches of hair were removed.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information about Locks of Love, call 888/896-1588.



Watch for it