

Aoife - living with psoriasis



Psoriasis
Association of
Ireland

Aoife is 12 and lives in a small town in Ireland. Life is good. Everything's going well for her – she's a confident person and has lots of friends.

Aoife is pretty and likes the way people look at her. She loves fashion, shopping and music. She doesn't have any particular problems at school.



She only gets bad marks for PE and swimming.



She often skips these two classes, giving a different excuse each time.

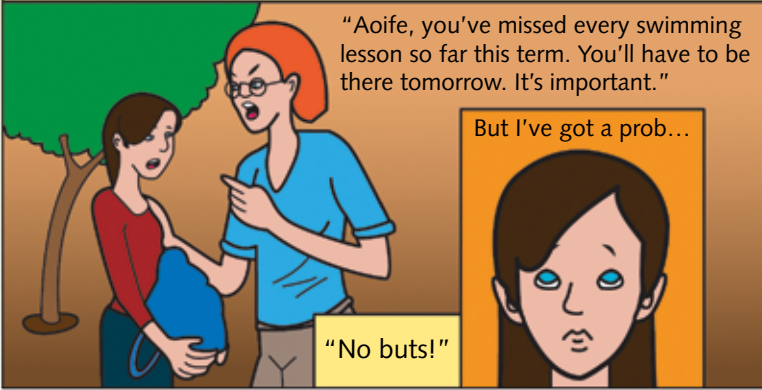


One day, her PE teacher, Ms Byrne, corners her.

"Aoife, you've missed every swimming lesson so far this term. You'll have to be there tomorrow. It's important."

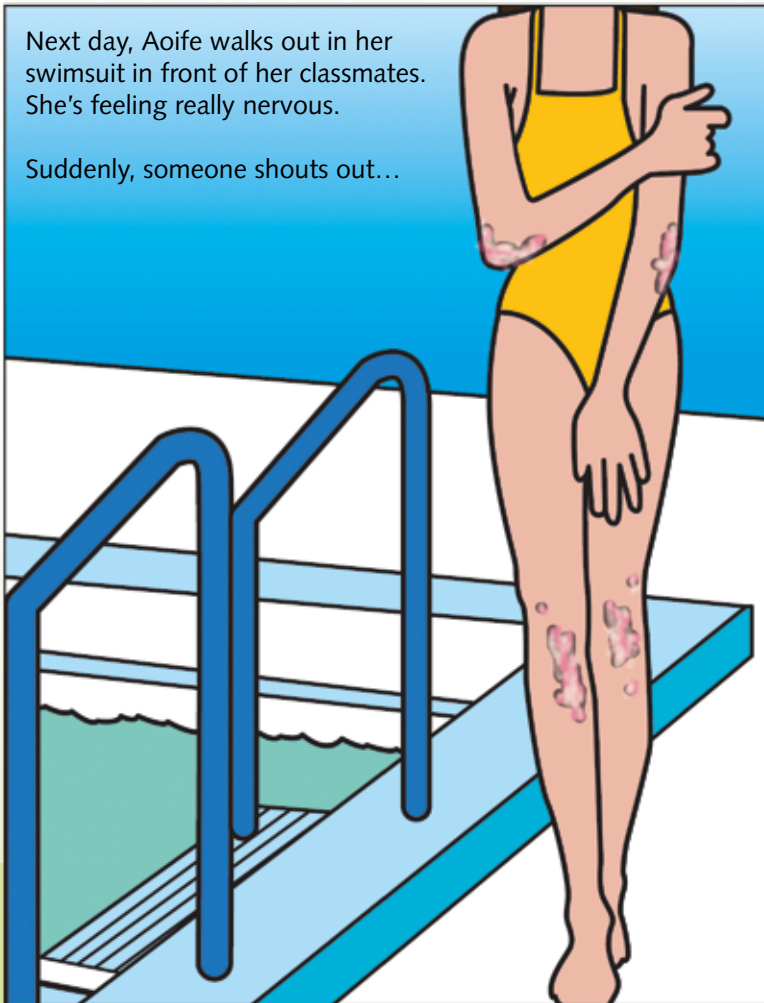
But I've got a prob...

"No buts!"



Next day, Aoife walks out in her swimsuit in front of her classmates. She's feeling really nervous.

Suddenly, someone shouts out...



"Hey Aoife what are all those scabs? Have you been rubbing up against a tree or what?"

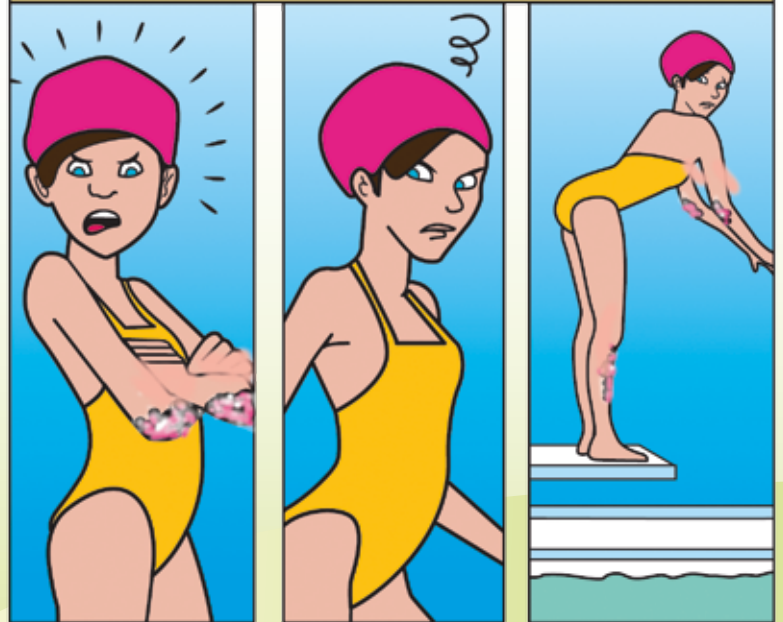
"Yeah, it looks like your skin's covered in bits of bark."

"We didn't realise you were a tree..."



Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Aoife feels humiliated and embarrassed in front of her entire class, but she says nothing. She steps onto the diving board and gets ready to dive in.



"Hey, don't go in the water, I don't want your disease!"



"Oh yeah, if she gets in, I'm walking out."



The weeks afterwards are really tough for Aoife. Teenagers can be very cruel. Her classmates make constant, hurtful remarks. She even gets a nickname: Bark Skin.



Upset and ashamed, Aoife turns and runs back to the dressing rooms. She gets dressed and leaves the pool, ignoring her teacher.



Three weeks go by, and Aoife spends most of her time in her bedroom. She feels like the computer and books are her only friends. She looks at her skin, and thinks...



"What's wrong with me? Am I some kind of freak? I'm sick of the stares and the smart comments!"



She starts to cry.

One day, Aoife packs a bag with clothes and books, puts her iPod in and runs away from home, for good.



When she reaches the edge of the wood, she tells herself to be brave and heads on in.



The wind starts whistling and she hears strange noises. Aoife panics and starts to run, until she is completely lost.

She has had enough.



"Since I'm a tree, I suppose I belong in the woods."

Night comes, and it starts to rain as she walks.

Tired, sad and scared, she lies down on some ferns. The rain and the wind have stopped, and she falls asleep.



Suddenly, she's woken by voices and a light on her face. There are young people, like her, who are standing around her, shining their torches.

"Who are you?
What are you doing?"



"My name's Aoife. I've run away from home."



"Follow us!"



Everyone has their own cruel nicknames: The Scab, Mister Giant Dandruff, Scratch-Scratch...

A little later, she can hardly believe what she sees. There is a camp with around ten tents. All the residents of the camp have run away for the same reasons:

The way people look at them, the cruel remarks about their psoriasis patches, their spots and their eczema problems.



They all have the same symptoms as Aoife, and have lots of stories to tell. The night passes quickly as they all share their experiences.



In the morning, Aoife goes for a walk around the camp and meets Tom.

"Are there other people living in the forest?"

!?

"No, apart from the crazy old lady who lives in the oak tree. We never talk to her - we think she's mad."



"Have you ever said a word to her? How do you know she's mad? That's ridiculous for someone who knows what it's like to be judged by their appearance. You're just like the people who avoid us."

"Where is this old woman anyway?"

"Over there."



Aoife walks towards the tree.



She reaches the oak tree and calls up "Hello?! Hello?!"



"Up here...come on up!"



Aoife looks up through the leaves. There she sees the old woman sitting on the floor of her tree house.



She's old, but looks smart.



"Climb up if you're not afraid."

Aoife walks up the steps around the old tree trunk. Two metres above the ground, she is amazed to see the old woman has built a house in the tree.



"Wow – if the others could see this they wouldn't believe it."



"Well now, what brings you to Mary's place?"

Aoife does not feel nervous around the old woman. She tells her about why she left home and how she met the other young people who had run away for the same reasons as she did.



Mary looks at Aoife's skin.



"Aoife, you have psoriasis." "What?"
"Psoriasis. Don't worry, if you go and see your doctor they'll be able to help you. You know, the people making fun of you are just ignorant. Tell yourself that they should be pitied rather than blamed."



"But how do you know what I've got, if you live in a tree?"
"Trust me Aoife, that's the voice of experience."



"I'm just here to keep an eye on people like you who have escaped to the woods. I don't live here, I'm just passing through. As you said before, you shouldn't go by appearances."



"So who are you then?"

"Goodbye Aoife. Go home and go see your doctor."



Mary disappears and leaves Aoife thinking.

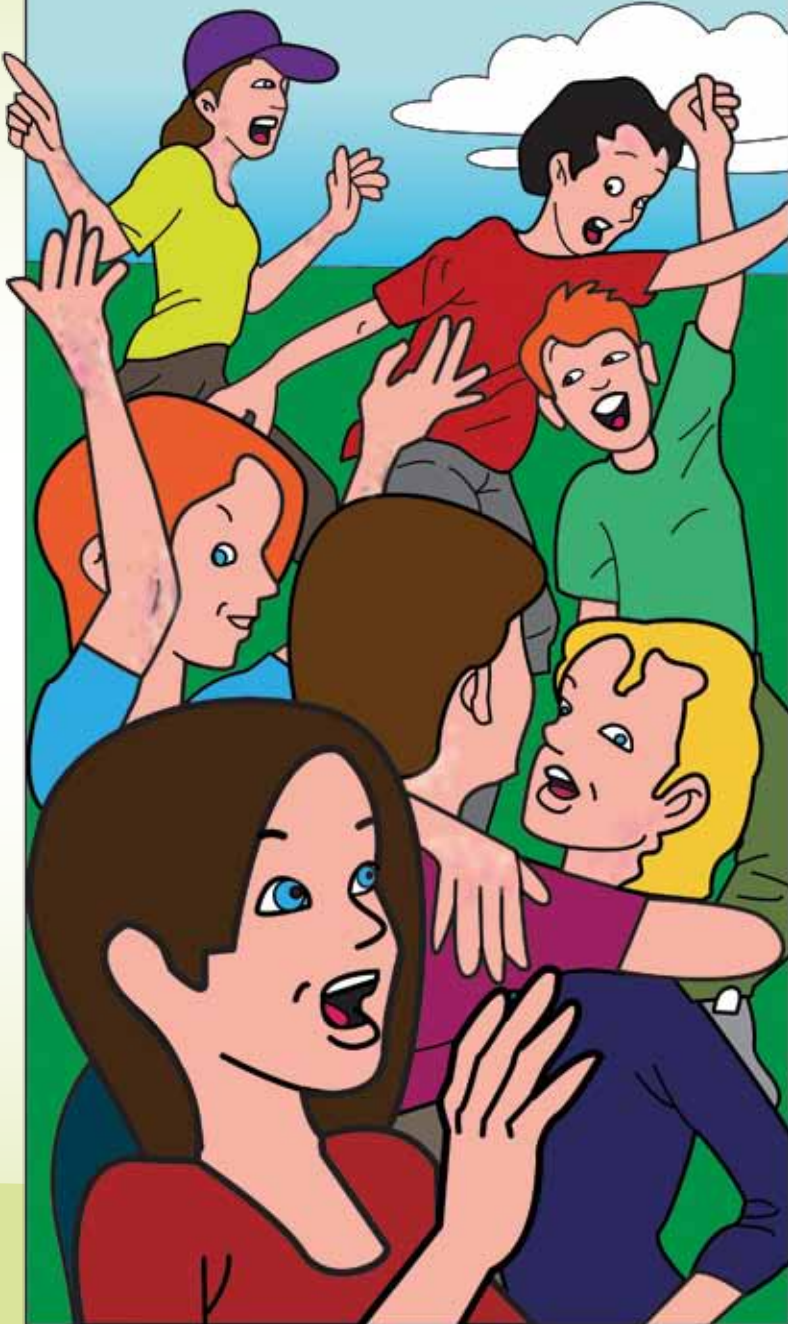
Later Aoife tells the others about her adventure. She convinces them to follow her, to go home, and to see their doctor. There really is a solution to their problem.

Above all, she encourages them to stop worrying about what other people think.

"All you need do is explain to people exactly what psoriasis is. It's not contagious, it doesn't mean I don't wash and it can be treated".



Aoife feels better, and her future is much brighter.
She can get back to getting the most out of life.



For more information

The Psoriasis Association was set up to help you and provide all the information you may need.

Psoriasis Association of Ireland
P.O. Box 4233
Balbriggan
Co. Dublin
Email - info@psoriasisireland.ie



Only my smile is contagious!



With the support of Pfizer Healthcare Ireland.

www.pfizer.ie



ENB/2011/024