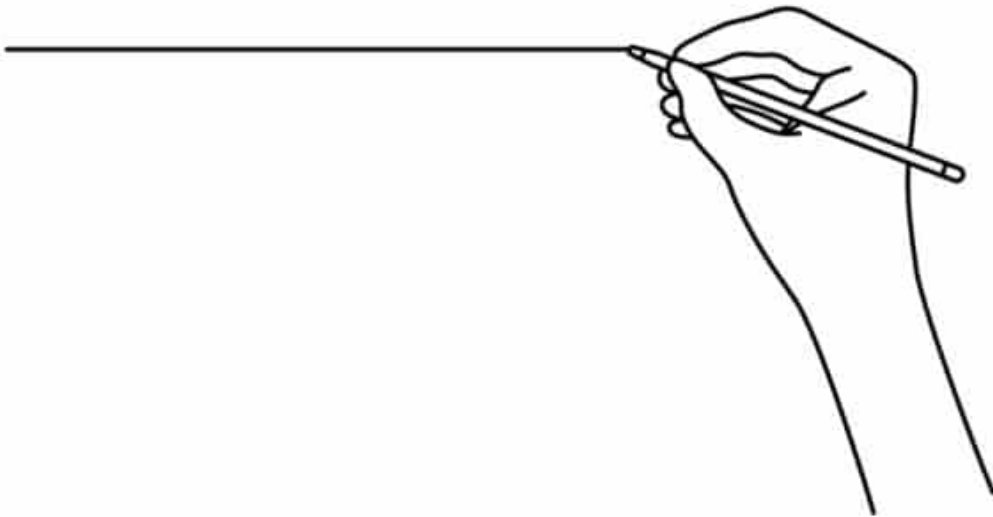


Hand Lettering My Way Through Tough Times



I first started practicing hand lettering in 2015 when my friend Amina and I started a casual lettering club called the [Unofficial Hand Lettering Society of Silver Spring](#). At the time, we wanted to create a space to practice our lettering together. It was a fun outlet for us to be creative in a more personal, just-for-us way than how we are creative in our jobs (me as a graphic designer and her as a candle and beauty goods maker). It wasn't until a few years later that I learned how I could use my hand lettering to cope with my experience living with multiple sclerosis.



2017 was a tough year for me because healthcare was a hotly

debated political topic. I was starting to get more comfortable with being able to trust and love my body since being diagnosed with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis six years prior at age 23. But hearing people talking day in and day out about sick people versus healthy people when it comes to health insurance really threw me for a loop in terms of how I saw myself as part of society as a whole. At that time, there was a bill introduced that proposed to solve the trouble with health care costs by essentially separating sick people into high-risk insurance pools so healthy people wouldn't have to pay for the costs that sick people incur.

I really saw myself as a burden to society because of the medical costs required to keep me well. The narrative was persuasive that it wasn't fair that other people who didn't need a lot of medical care were carrying the weight of my illness (even though that is how all types of insurance work). I started to see myself in terms of dollar signs rather than as a complex, valuable human being. I felt like I had to prove I was worth the costs. It was hard to prove that to myself and I felt stressed and sad a lot of the time that year.

One thing that really helped me cope during this difficult time was my hand lettering. The first thing I tried out was an Instagram post where I hand lettered the word "sick." I shared a caption that said:

"Here's to those that are battling with words. Sick. Sick people. This kind of labeling still has a lot of power over me these days and though I wish it didn't, I'm fighting to stay grounded. I make sure I have people reminding me that it's bullshit that I feel like damaged goods and a burden. Thought I'd share in case anyone else is struggling with the same."



My Instagram post

It felt really powerful to use lettering to share how I was feeling so I wouldn't be so stuck in my head with negative thoughts.

After this post, I started a 100-day challenge where I committed to practicing my lettering every day for 100 days and sharing it to Instagram. I make the theme of my challenge "100

Days of Health Stuff” and made lettering about my thoughts about my health experience as well as quotes and affirmations that resonated with me. I also used the challenge to explore



my now signature brush lettering style. I used my daily practice to try out new ways of pushing how my lettering could be messy and imperfect because I loved how that style really felt like me in my messy, imperfect life.

The first day what I lettered was, “You are not broken.”

This mantra started to help me open up to the possibility that I am more than the social category of “sick” and there are more ways I can feel besides busted and damaged. Somehow writing it out helped it feel more real and true. I also lettered affirmations like, “I am worth what it costs for me to be well” and “I am more than a pre-existing condition.” The last day when I completed my challenge, I wrote the simple but powerful phrase of, “You are enough.” That’s an affirmation I return to quite often.



During this time, I learned how helpful hand lettering is for me in tough times. I’ve kept up with lettering about my health experience and even made an Instagram account for it called

Human Plus Kind Co. I'm so grateful to have this tool to help me process and move through difficult thoughts and experiences that are part of this MS journey.