

Refocusing After an Unexpected Career Change



What do you do when it feels like life has other plans for you?

All I wanted to do in life was to draw. It started when I was three years old at my grandma's house when she pulled out this bright yellow plastic suitcase full of every kind of pen, pencil, and wax crayon in every color of the rainbow. I'd scribble away for hours.

I knew I had to be some variety of artist as a career – even if my dad didn't think it was a "proper job."

After completing my art degree, I decided I wanted to specialize in illustration. I spent the final two years of my degree setting up an illustration business on the side. By the end of the last year of my degree, I had an agent waiting to represent me around-the-world. I had work stocked in boutique stores up and down the country and had a contract for a children's book. All waiting and ready to go.

All I needed to do was finish university and commit full time to my new life.

Then I woke up on the very last day of university with a numb left side, and the world caved in around me.

My left side was weak, numb and tingling for around 6 months. That hadn't happened before.

A few weeks later, my right hand (my drawing hand) did the same thing.

It turned out I had my first MS attack. I no longer trusted my body.

My illustration career went down the drain and everything I'd worked for suddenly vanished.

"How could I be an illustrator when I don't know if my body would work properly? What if I can't fulfill a client order?" I asked myself. It's safe to say I felt like I lost who I was and my purpose in life.

What happened next was unexpected.

I became a fashion designer. It was the perfect cover. Using a stylus on a graphics tablet meant that no one had to know that I couldn't feel my hand. With a stylus pen, you move it and tap, not like drawing where you needed muscles in your hands to draw the intended character.

But employment didn't sit well with me. The closest position for a graphic designer in fashion I could get was around an hour away so I had to commute.

Commuting was hard on my body, especially with my new MS fatigue. My colleagues couldn't understand why I got there half an hour early to sleep in my car before starting work.

I wanted to be self-employed, and I had to find a business that could work around me. For a long time, I didn't feel like I "fitted" anywhere.

I started making wedding stationery that I sold every Sunday at wedding fayres around the country (my wedding-singer husband luckily drove). I then ran a wedding coaching business to help brides-to-be feel confident on their wedding day. I then tried drop-shipping bridesmaid's dresses from China, buying and selling books on Amazon through their FBA program, became a digital marketer, an affiliate marketer, a freelance graphic designer, an author, a podcast host, and a freelance writer writing about MS. What did I come back to in the end? Illustration.

After seven years of my first attack, I'm going back to illustration. Honestly, it feels like home. I finally feel comfortable and happy. I know what you're thinking, "what about not trusting your body?" I've decided I'm sick of living in fear of what might happen, and I'm starting to live with being happy in the present. Truth is, I have no control over what my body does. I can manage my diet and exercise. I can take supplements. At the end of the day, if my body does relapse, I can't stop it. It'll do what it wants to and if/when that time comes, I'll deal with it then.

The message here is to do what makes you happy. Live in the present. Adapt to new situations as they arise and pivot, pivot, pivot!

What if we asked ourselves, “what if I just **tried** that”? What would happen?

We never know what is around the corner. We have no control over challenges that arise. All we can do is figure out the best actions to take at that moment.

Was your career affected by your diagnosis? Did you find a new, unexpected career because of it?