

# Journaling for the soul



**How art and teaching keep me connected to my mind, body and community.**

by Suzanna Challen



**Art journaling helps Suzanna Challen express the feelings she can't put into words, specifically as they pertain to her MS.**

Art journaling is accessible. There are no rules. I was introduced to this expressive art form

five years ago, and my practice has allowed me to befriend myself during my journey with multiple sclerosis.

After sudden vision loss in 2018, I was sent for an MRI. My MS diagnosis followed. Art journaling became my refuge from “scanxiety.” I put my fear on the page.

I made major lifestyle changes, including diet and exercise. While listening to my body, I also nourished my soul. Art journaling provided a way to play with color and collage, and to make meaning out of my journey toward health.

I use mostly found images from magazines, acrylic paint and a matte gel medium. I arrange images until I feel some understanding of my experience, then I add paint to unify and transform them into a piece of personal expression.

Over two years, my scans stabilized. My own personal crash course in chronic illness was easing into a life that began to feel more normal. That is, until the pandemic began.



### **Pages from Challen’s art journal**

Having recently navigated so much change, I knew that I had something to offer. Art journaling helped me adjust to MS, and I taught a class online for others adjusting their lives to COVID-19.

Teaching art journaling is rewarding. Each person finds their own way of doing it. I continue my weekly practice and teach a few times a year. It’s a way to connect with and contribute to my community.

**Suzanna Challen lives in Champaign, Illinois, where she works as a clinical counselor serving university students with registered disabilities at the University of Illinois.**