



Before You Cross That Career Off Your List

By Ilana Jacqueline

IN SEVENTH GRADE, my business elective teacher gave our class an assignment. “Three careers,” she said. “I want you to think of three realistic careers you want to have in the future.” So, later that night, I took a poster and divided it up into three sections that read: PUBLISHER | JOURNALIST | TEACHER.

I was a kid. I wouldn’t be diagnosed with an immune deficiency for another five or six years. Even though all of my symptoms were present since birth (and, at certain points, severe), no one ever told me I wouldn’t be capable of doing any of these jobs one day. In fact, every doctor I’d ever seen had agreed that, one day, I would grow out of my allergies and infections. I could put whatever I wanted on that poster. It was mine to fill.

During my last year of high school, when my body was at its least capable, I realized I couldn’t finish out a full day of school as a student; how would I ever be able to take care of a class every day as a teacher? I crossed that career off my list.

That year, I also received my first pair of press passes to a presidential debate. I was so excited to go. I had my tape recorder and my notepad. Being in the frenetic hub of the media room, watching major networks and their anchors prepare to go live on air or online,

filled my gut with a fantastic thrill. This was the kind of high-energy career I wanted. That is, until about 9:30, when I

with others who want to learn — even those who are too sick to be in the classroom.

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was almost comatose from fatigue. The debate had barely started. Another career crossed off my list.

I clung to the hope that maybe a nice desk at a publishing company had my name on it. But when the time came to apply, I found the majority of these positions required a move away from my support system and doctors to the city.

Suddenly, that poster I’d made all those years ago seemed so much more ambitious than I’d ever imagined. I always believed that I would grow up and grow out of my disease. I had just assumed my career would follow suit.

It isn’t easy, but I have found there are ways to have a career despite the severity of my disease. I’m so grateful to live in a time when my laptop connects me to everyone from my closest friends to the VPs of Fortune 500 companies. I’ve been working as a freelance writer and journalist for many years now — researching, interviewing, submitting work and networking entirely from home or a hospital.

While teaching in a normal classroom will never be a fit for me with my unpredictable symptoms, I still do a lot of teaching. Webinars, articles and videos allow me to connect

allow myself to give my best effort whenever it occurs. At 9 a.m. on Monday, I may be drowning in brain fog. But, at 2 a.m. on Saturday, I might find the most clarity to do my work. Having the ability to manage my own schedule, tools of interaction, pace and environment has made any career a possibility for me.

We can earn our degrees online, search and apply for jobs online and even do interviews via Skype. Group management tools like Basecamp and Salesforce have made working with large corporate teams as a contractor a simple process. (It also doesn’t hurt to have an online portfolio or business card page to share with new contacts.) So, whether you want to be a fashion designer or a journalist, an IT tech or a marketing manager, the poster is yours to fill. ■



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