

This is Me

by Hannah Hodgson

Since becoming ill I have felt as if I have lost a component of myself. Be this because strangers think they know everything about me and my illness, or because there was a period in which I felt like nothing more than a list of diagnosis', I'm not sure. The view of the self is a powerful thing. To have that change suddenly, from healthy bodied to ill, is earth shattering.

I thought I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Since the age of thirteen I wanted to train as a teacher. I loved writing as a hobby, but never thought of it as a viable career option. Fast forward five years from my diagnosis, and I have had work commissioned by Grazia magazine and released my first pamphlet of poems to critical acclaim. I often reflect on where I would be now without the cataclysmic events of 2015. I've concluded I'd be middling rather than thriving. I love what I do every single day, there are few jobs in which you can whole heartedly say this. The variation, the rewarding nature, the innovative element of my practise, all give me a unique satisfaction. It's strange to align something as traumatic as illness with a grateful air – because I wouldn't be a writer if I was healthy. I wouldn't have met any of my now close friends, and I wouldn't be developing my own potential – I'd be giving my all for the talent of tomorrow.

Illness has forced me to be selfish. It has forced me to enjoy every single day, every moment I can, because we aren't sure about my future. Being diagnosed with a horrendous illness has freed me from the expectation of settling down, getting a job, a mortgage etc. It has made me assess everything I commit to with 'what will I get out of this?' in mind. Illness, surprisingly, has forced me to love myself.

It's unavoidable that people assume my disability is a huge part of me – because it is. Both my physical and emotional lives are dominated by it.

Everyone may know me as Hannah the Disabled Woman, but that doesn't mean that's all I am. By writing about my experiences, and being able to share this with an audience, I have liberated myself. This allows space for other things – Hannah the sister, Hannah the friend, Hannah the daughter. Writing has allowed me to interrogate the feeling of dislike in my body, in myself, that pitched up after my diagnosis. It has allowed me, like a skilled surgeon, to use my pen as a scalpel and separate my experiences from my being. Illness has shown me I can be more than one thing, it has made me live every single day (even if that day is in bed) as if there is no tomorrow. As humans we are mortal, it's easy to forget that – don't wait for your stark reminder. Just live every day, love every day.