

Jennifer S.: Hi. Welcome to the Feminine Foresight podcast. I'm your host, Jennifer Spoelma. I'm an author and speaker, and my favorite thing in the world is helping people unlock their potential. In this podcast, I'll be sharing interviews and educational insights all about confidence, communication, and leadership. Sometimes we might nerd out a bit, but we're always going to have fun. I hope to inspire you to build a career you love and equip you to speak with purpose and lead boldly. I know that you're full of power and finesse, and I want help you use your foresight to become who you are meant to be. So let's dig in.

Jennifer S.: Welcome back to another episode of Feminine Foresight. Today I have a truly phenomenal woman as my interview guest. Her name is Kait Masters. Kait is a Community Support Manager at the Rising Tide Society, which is a worldwide organization that supports creative entrepreneurs through educational resources and in-person community meetups in cities all over. She also is a painter under her brand Larkspur + Laurel and an advocate for people with chronic illness. Every experience I have interacting with Kait just leaves me in awe. She inspires me so much with how much of a compassionate and patient person she is, and she always makes me want to be a better person myself. This podcast is no different. As you're listening, if you love what you hear, if you're encouraged and inspired to become a better leader and a better person, please take a screenshot of the show and share it on social media with your friends, then hit that subscribe button so you never miss a Feminine Foresight podcast. Thank you so much for listening. Let's dive into my conversation with Kait.

Jennifer S.: Hi, Kait. How are you doing?

Kait M.: I'm good. How are you?

Jennifer S.: I'm good. Thank you so much for joining the Feminine Foresight podcast today.

Kait M.: Thank you for having me. It was such a nice surprise to get your email. I'm excited to be here with you.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, I am too, and it's been a while since we've actually gotten to talk and catch up, so I'm really looking forward to the chance to do that today.

Kait M.: We do.

Jennifer S.: So let's give some background. Well, maybe we can introduce you first. Why don't you tell everyone a little bit about yourself? What do you do professionally?

Kait M.: So, I wear a few hats. I work full-time for Rising Tide and HoneyBook heading up community support. I'm also a part-time side hustle painter, which I was doing full-time before and kind of did the opposite flip-flop and went back to working full-time, and made my passion my side hustle again. Then I also volunteer with

rare disease and chronic illness advocacy. Not really a job, but it does take up a lot of my spare time.

Jennifer S.: Yes, it does. I can tell you put a lot of work in that too, which is awesome.

Kait M.: Thank you.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, and those are all things that we're going to be talking about more in this interview, because I'm really excited about all of them. So yeah, the Rising Tide Society, doing the community support. That's how we originally got to know each other. I used to lead the Tucson Tuesdays Together group, and before there was really a lot of the infrastructure that there currently is now supporting leaders, I remember when you came on board and I was working on transitioning out and moving. I was just so amazed by you and I was like, "This is the most wonderful person I've ever talked to. She is just helping me manage this whole thing and taking all of the work off my plate." So cool. Thank you for everything that you do.

Kait M.: [crosstalk 00:04:06].

Jennifer S.: In my head, I was stressing out a lot about, "How is this transition going to go smooth? How do you hand off leadership to somebody else?" Having you be there just being like, "That's my job. I will onboard the next person. I will look through applications and find the right person" was the coolest thing.

Kait M.: Well I'm glad it helped. I was really bummed when you said that you were stepping down because you were getting ready to move possibly and all that, and I was like, "Dang it, I really like Jenny," but we somehow managed to stay connected-

Jennifer S.: Yes.

Kait M.: So that's kind of the beauty of it, right?

Jennifer S.: It is the beauty. It is beauty for sure. Yeah, I totally miss leading that group but I'm excited to get involved in the one here in Albuquerque now, so...

Kait M.: Yes.

Jennifer S.: And the leaders here are awesome. Cool. Let's talk a little bit about your painting side hustle.

Jennifer S.: So Larkspur + Laurel.

Kait M.: Yes.

Jennifer S.: It's beautiful.

Kait M.: It's actually undergoing a rebrand, so I'll put that out there-

Jennifer S.: Really?

Kait M.: Yeah, so I haven't actually announced it yet but I'll let you in on that little secret. I've been working with someone I actually know through Rising Tide to bring it under my name for the first time. I'll actually be branding my work as myself, as Kait Masters. It's a little scary. Larkspur + Laurel will still live out there in some capacity maybe, but...

Jennifer S.: Wow.

Kait M.: I know, yeah.

Jennifer S.: Has it been Larkspur + Laurel up until this point? Is that what it's always been?

Kait M.: It's always been that, yeah. When I started in 2015 like officially, that's when I decided to go full-time into making it my job, I didn't feel comfortable using my name, which I think is just like a common issue when you're young and starting out. It just feels awkward to be like, "So what do you do?" You say, "Oh, I own my own business." "Oh, what's the name?" You're like, "Oh, Kait Masters."

Jennifer S.: Right.

Kait M.: I didn't have that confidence yet, so I tried to choose a name that had a lot of sentimental meaning to me and was separate from who I was, but I've developed a brand identity over the last several years that really is very personal. It seems like it's the time to bring it under my name now, so it just-

Jennifer S.: That's exciting. I can't wait to see it. Does that mean that your paintings themselves are going to be taking any turns, or you're going to keep with a lot of the nature focus, nature-inspired paintings you've been doing?

Kait M.: It'll definitely still be nature-focused, nature-inspired, and I think the name change comes out of finding that specific desire to keep doing that. When I first started out, I kind of did a little bit of everything. I was painting really abstractly. I was also very sick at the time, so I actually started my business because I was fired for requesting accommodations at the job I was working at-

Jennifer S.: Wow.

Kait M.: When my disease started getting worse, which fun fact: it's definitely illegal, but at the time, I just didn't have the energy to try and fight it, to try and make it right, and it's much more common than you think, even with ADA law. Most places are at-will employment, most states are at-will states, so they can give any reason they want but you kind of know given the circumstances what really happened. At the time, I was really not doing well and a lot of my work was

more abstract, and I think that was coming from a place of not being able to really enjoy the world around me. It was inspired by nature, but I really wasn't able to explore it to the full extent that I am now that I'm doing a lot better. Once I started receiving treatments and started really developing my voice as an artist more, my work started to shift more to the nature-based, still a little on the abstract side sometimes, but not as abstract as when I first started.

Jennifer S.: Wow, that's so interesting. Do you tend to paint based off of scenes you've actually seen or pictures you've taken, or do you pull from other sources?

Kait M.: Usually it's from me. Most of the reference photos are just from my cellphone, from hikes around the area. Most of my work has been Pacific Northwest-based since we moved here about a year ago. I do have an amazing brother-in-law who does photography as kind of like a hobby outside of his marketing job, and so my sister and her husband, they'll send me photos of their adventures that I'm not strong enough to go on. Sometimes I work from those as well, but usually it's scenes that I've actually experienced, yeah.

Jennifer S.: That's awesome, because yeah, you had more, South Carolina is where you were before or North?

Kait M.: Yeah.

Jennifer S.: Okay. Yeah, so South Carolina, they looked a little bit different when you were there, which makes sense because it was things that you were actually looking at and seeing on a daily basis.

Kait M.: Yes, so it's definitely grown and changed over the last few years, but I'm really happy with where I'm at now. I'm excited for what's to come. It's definitely kind of a hard balance sometimes to try and keep running a business on the side while working full-time, but both really fulfill me so I'm going to keep doing it as long as I can.

Jennifer S.: Yeah. Oh man, I totally get that.

Kait M.: Yes.

Jennifer S.: I am a sister in that one.

Kait M.: Yes, I know you [crosstalk 00:09:48]. It's like, "Oh man." We could go down that rabbit hole for a long time.

Jennifer S.: Exactly, totally. Oh yeah, so as far as the business part of your painting goes, do you take commission work or is it selling your existing artwork? How do people go about usually finding and purchasing your artwork?

Kait M.: Great question. So I do still do commissions. Not as often as I used to just because my time is a little bit more limited. My originals have been doing a lot better than I could've anticipated, which was nice-

Jennifer S.: That's wonderful.

Kait M.: It's always a little scary as an artist to start making a series or original artwork and you're like, "Is anyone actually going to buy this? Am I going to get any return on this investment?" I do still do commissions. Most of my commissions and sales come from word of mouth and through relationships that I've built. I think that's really important, and I know you had a question that talked about people over profit, and I think it kind of goes back to that. I've been able to sustain this business because I've built relationships over the last few years where I don't have as much time to invest in marketing and in all these other endeavors that I'd love to do, but I still have those relationships built, so I'm still able to keep this little art business afloat, which is really nice.

Jennifer S.: That is really nice. That's amazing too because I think it's so much more fulfilling when you feel like you're giving something to a real person or somebody that you care about and you know. I'm not saying it's not fulfilling and not gratifying to just have random people and strangers purchasing and you don't know their faces, but yeah, that relational aspect, I'm sure especially as an artist, just fills up your heart a lot-

Kait M.: [crosstalk 00:11:46].

Jennifer S.: Yes, yes.

Kait M.: No matter who buys, I always do a little bit of a happy dance that somebody is taking a piece of work home, and that hopefully it will bring them joy to their home, or if they're gifting it that it's going to bring the other person a lot of joy. It's always surprising when I find someone who I don't know who buys something. It weirs me out. I'm like, "Do they know me? Do they follow me? How did they find me?"

Jennifer S.: Right.

Kait M.: Most of my clients actually know me.

Jennifer S.: Then it's like, "What does my artwork mean to them? Like enough that they wanted to buy it." That's really cool. Maybe it weirs you out, but I would also be so pumped.

Kait M.: No, it's definitely exciting. A little weird, but definitely exciting.

Jennifer S.: So okay, I love always hearing about people's creative processes and wondering how they go about creating the thing that's so uniquely them. You talked a little

bit about your inspiration and where your pictures and ideas come from, but what does the creative process look like after that?

Kait M.: It looks ugly until it's not.

Jennifer S.: Amen.

Kait M.: I'm being honest, right? We could get really granular if you want. It could get boring, but I don't actually sketch before most of my paintings, if they're originals. If they're commissions, I do sketch because the client has to approve the design and everything that's going into it. I'll give them different variations of what their piece could like, but when I'm creating like for my own series, I don't sketch it out beforehand. I just start layering and blocking in light layers of color. It looks really elementary at first, and very much like what you would probably give up on if you were in third grade and you were like, "Oh look at this painting I did. It's great. I'm done. Hang it up." It's really just a lot of trusting that each layer is going to add a new element of value to actually describe what I want to describe. Like I said, a lot of times it's pretty ugly until all of a sudden I put one mark down and you're like, "Oh wow, yeah. That's that. That's what that is." It's pretty fluid and freeform and intuitive.

Kait M.: I know obviously Emily Jeffords, like she has #doitforthe process, and there's been a lot more in recent years of just how process is really important, and that's something that is carried over from art school for me, even now that the process of making the piece of art is just as important as what the end result is oftentimes, and trusting my own intuition within. Trusting that, I'll get that information across that I want to, or that emotion. The half-granular, half-abstract-

Jennifer S.: Yeah.

Kait M.: It looks like, and I do have an office and a studio, but a lot of times I end up painting at my kitchen table or on my parent's porch. Not in my-

Jennifer S.: Designated spot.

Kait M.: Yep. So you know, I don't know what that says about me, but...

Jennifer S.: It's intuition, right? If you feel like a certain place is going to inspire you or make you feel more comfortable, then that's where you should work.

Kait M.: Exactly. That's what I try to tell myself.

Jennifer S.: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. It's just nice to know that you have a studio and an office, that you have that quiet, sacred space but you don't need to use it.

Kait M.: It's really just a storage area. I won't show you. I'm in right now. I use it for calls like this. I need to organize it. I'm looking around-

Jennifer S.: Okay.

Kait M.: It's very, yeah.

Jennifer S.: Well my view right now is totally clean, so you're good.

Kait M.: Awesome. I tested it out, so...

Jennifer S.: Good. All right, so I want to hear a little bit more about your role at HoneyBook and Rising Tide Society. Two-in-one. What does a normal day-to-day look like for you in that job?

Kait M.: Oh my goodness. Every day is a little bit different, so that's kind of fun and exciting. For anyone who is listening and doesn't really understand the HoneyBook/Rising Tide relationship, Rising Tide is part of HoneyBook. We're like a brand within a brand. HoneyBook is a CRM for creatives and Rising Tide is a community of free and accessible education and camaraderie for creative and small business owners. I head up support for Rising Tide, but that also means that I work under HoneyBook and I can work collaboratively with other teams.

Jennifer S.: I'm glad you broke that down. That was helpful, thank you.

Kait M.: Hopefully I explained that well. HoneyBook is what is able to allow us to continue to create free education, so we don't charge membership dues, we don't charge for the monthly guide, things like that. That's a great part of being part of the HoneyBook family. Most of my day is Rising Tide-focused, so I usually am posting daily prompts in the Facebook group, checking in on there to make sure everything's running smoothly and there aren't any issues in the Facebook community land. Usually I have a couple leader interviews, so I manage applications for, like you mentioned, for anyone who wants to start a new group or anyone who's taking over a group. I may have a couple of film calls with new leaders who need to get acquainted with the resources we have and how everything functions, and then I usually have a couple of meetings for just any initiative we're doing. Like we just did 20 On The Rise, so the last four months I've had a lot of meetings between HoneyBook and Rising Tide and then our partners for that.

Jennifer S.: So you managed that whole thing?

Kait M.: I helped.

Jennifer S.: Okay, you helped.

Kait M.: I helped. It was a team effort, but on the Rising Tide side, I was like the point person for it. Anything that could potentially involve Rising Tide, our leaders, or our members, I'm usually the point person for it that manages the nitty gritty, and then Natalie manages me to make sure that I hit all the points that I'm supposed to hit. Yeah, a lot of meetings, a lot of phone calls, and a lot of just brainstorming, support, putting processes together. I try to be organized. Even though I said my office is really messy, I really like having systems-

Jennifer S.: Right.

Kait M.: So I guess I'm kind of split on that, but just trying to make sure that people are able to get the information they need, to get the support they need, and that we can really hone in on what the community needs and advocate for that. I know that sounds like a really broad paintbrush of what I do, but essentially that's what it is. Like I mentioned earlier, I do wear a lot of hats-

Jennifer S.: Yes you do.

Kait M.: [crosstalk 00:19:05] different, yeah.

Jennifer S.: That makes me so excited, and it makes actually perfect sense to me because I don't know if I've ever told you this or if we ever connected over this, but I basically do your job at my company.

Kait M.: No way.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, and to make it even more similar, so my company's called Simple View. We make CRM systems, and-

Kait M.: [crosstalk 00:19:29].

Jennifer S.: Yeah, and also like CMS website building tools and some other things for destination marketers. I'm trying to think of in the Pacific Northwest what some of them are, but like here it's like Visit Albuquerque or New Mexico True, like all the organizations that are promoting tourism.

Kait M.: Yeah.

Jennifer S.: I do all of the support and training for our CMS website-building platform. Yeah, I'm like, "I totally get all of the processes"-

Kait M.: This is blowing my mind.

Jennifer S.: I know. It's so funny because it's so similar, but some of these questions I want to ask you, I'm like.

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:20:04]

Jennifer S.: Some of these questions I want to ask you, I don't know how she does it because I do this. I'm the only person that does the training and support for our clients all over.

Kait M.: We need to have some more coffee dates and things.

Jennifer S.: We do, we do. I feel we have so much in common and I'll say too, I am very organized at my job, like you said you are, but my house and my area, not so much. I think it's part of being creative. I don't know what the other side of it is, but, yeah, I rely so much on processes and organization in my work life, but it doesn't mean it reflects in my spatial area.

Kait M.: Exactly. Oh, my gosh, we're totally cut from the same cloth. My mind is blown. I can't believe we haven't talked about that before.

Jennifer S.: I can't either because I feel we have a lot of similarities, but I wanted to hear you say what you do for your job first and how you describe it before I actually said, it's really similar, but it is.

Kait M.: Oh, my gosh, I love it. Okay, we're definitely going to have to connect on that.

Jennifer S.: Yes. And also I wear a headset like you're wearing right now, all day, every day.

Kait M.: Do you really?

Jennifer S.: Yeah.

Kait M.: Do you have a Jabra? Is that what you wear?

Jennifer S.: Well, I used to, but now mine's a Logitech. I like the Jabra better, is that what you have?

Kait M.: Yes, I was going to say I started to wear mine out so I wanted to know if you liked the new one better. I think I'll get another Jabra when this one starts to go.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, I used to have one that plugged into my phone and it was awesome. The clarity was good and it wasn't too heavy, but now the Logitech one, it's like a USB went into the computer and it just hurts my ears after a while. It also picks up all of my breathing. So when I listen to recordings of myself, I'm embarrassed because I'm, oh, my gosh, sounds like I'm [crosstalk 00:22:01].

Kait M.: Story of my life though. Okay, so having a neuromuscular disease that affects breathing no matter what headset I wear, no matter what mic I use, I'm going to sound a little bit like Darth Vader going on there. I can't help it. Sometimes it's awkward and I just roll with it, I just accept that it's part of my life.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, that's good. I just started blaming it on the altitude. Albuquerque is kind of high elevation it's just my lungs can't handle it. You don't sound like Darth Vader at all, I can't hear your breathing so you're great.

Kait M.: That makes me feel better, thank you.

Jennifer S.: All right. I would love to know, we talked a little bit about your job there, what parts of the job do come naturally to you? Of your favorite parts?

Kait M.: My favorite parts, oh, man. I love providing support for our leaders and our members. I don't know if empathy is the right word, but I feel that sense of connection and wanting someone to feel known and understood and just having someone in their corner comes really naturally to me based on my personality and the volunteering work experiences I've had in the past of just being focused on community. Being trusted to brainstorm and come up with really great ideas to help people out.

Kait M.: On the flip side ... you'll think this is probably crazy, I was the type of person growing up and even as an adult who would never answer the phone. I hated talking on the phone, I didn't like showing up places where I didn't know anyone. It's really funny to me that I spend the majority of my day talking to people. I am not an extrovert at all.

Kait M.: I am the most INFJ person you could ever meet. It has never changed in 10 years of taking Myers-Briggs. I am so introverted. That one-on-one connection is great, but I definitely like being on a larger scale of having 650 plus leaders where sometimes I have to go on Facebook live and do that kind of stuff, oh, my gosh. That's not what I'm good at, but I've slowly started to learn.

Jennifer S.: You're good at it, you're good at it, but it doesn't feel comfortable maybe?

Kait M.: Yeah, not at all. Honestly, after I have to do a talk or anything like that, I usually have to go lie down afterwards because I have to amp myself up so much to do it. It's just kind of funny sometimes how roles in jobs can really fit you really well, but it's also still a continuing, growing edge that I don't think people would expect because of the type of role I'm in. I don't think people expect me to be an introverted person who hates publicly speaking.

Jennifer S.: Right. Yeah, because you're basically doing it every time you get on the phone for an interview or whatever. I think that's really inspiring.

Kait M.: Thank you.

Jennifer S.: Yes.

Kait M.: Now everybody knows my secret. If you ever feel awkward on the phone with me, don't worry, I do too.

Jennifer S.: And we can all just be more gracious to other people on the phone because even if they're doing the job, they might feel uncomfortable.

Jennifer S.: I know I do that time. Sometimes on my training calls, well, because I'm doing training a little different. Some people are amazing and nice and we get a good connection, but every once in a while I'm training clients and they put me on mute and it's the most deflating thing ever.

Jennifer S.: Because if you can try and engage them and get them back on, but they're all adults and if they don't want the training, they're just going to put you on mute you can't get them to take you off of it. That makes me feel so nervous and so uncomfortable because you don't even care what I'm saying right now. It's my worst nightmare.

Kait M.: That sounds like my worst nightmare too. It's so deflating and discouraging.

Jennifer S.: Thankfully, most of our clients are amazing and awesome, we have good relationships with them. But, yeah, whenever that happens I'm like what am I doing with my life?

Kait M.: You can always come commiserate with me.

Jennifer S.: Will do. All right. You talked about your chronic illness for a little bit and I'd love to hear more about that, how it affects you as well as how it's spurred you on to be an advocate for other people's chronic illness. I'm going to try and say it correctly, it's myasthenia gravis, right?

Kait M.: Yes, or MG for short. I told Jenny earlier, my dad still can't say it right and it's been 17 years, but don't even worry about it. Everybody just calls it MG for short because it's kind of a mouthful.

Jennifer S.: Okay, MG. Can you share, what is MG and how does it affect you on a given day?

Kait M.: It is a rare autoimmune neuromuscular disease. Basically, I'll get on the scientific level for anybody interested. There are several types of antibodies that block, attack and destroy the neuromuscular junction at your muscle, which means your muscle can't receive the message from your brain to work.

Kait M.: That causes fatigue and sometimes even temporary paralysis of the skeletal voluntary muscles of the body. It can affect every muscle basically from head-to-toe.

Jennifer S.: Does it usually affect everything at once or certain areas randomly?

Kait M.: It depends on the person. I know that this term is used negatively in the news today, so don't take it that way. It's called the snowflake disease, which has been a little bit sad for those of us who have it-

Jennifer S.: I don't know what that means actually.

Kait M.: Man, it's in the news. People talk about snowflakes as people who are very easily offended by things.

Jennifer S.: Oh, okay.

Kait M.: That's kind of ruffled some feathers in the MG community. Because they're, hey, not that was us first. Now when we describe ourselves as snowflakes, we sound like we're talking about something entirely differently.

Kait M.: They call it that because each case is so individual and so it can be really tricky to diagnosis even if you have what would be textbook. Positive blood work, positive response to all the tests, your symptoms and the way your disease impacts your day-to-day life could be so different from somebody else who is also textbook.

Kait M.: For me personally, I'm mostly impacted in my upper body now. There was a time where it was literally my whole body. When I was first diagnosed, I couldn't brush my hair, I would fall every time I would start to walk. I couldn't go up and down the stairs or chew and swallow food very well so I lost a lot of weight.

Kait M.: I'm doing a lot better than that now. I look fine and that's kind of the curse of it too, is until you're really, really sick you basically look totally normal, but mostly what I deal with is muscle fatigue in the upper extremities, my diaphragm and some of the [inaudible 00:29:54] muscles. My mouth, chewing and swallowing can sometimes be tough, and then just general fatigue, which is common with a lot of chronic illnesses. I just need a lot more sleep and it's the kind of fatigue where sleep doesn't really help it.

Jennifer S.: This is the only thing I can do right now, but it doesn't always make the situation better?

Kait M.: Exactly. It's a long term thing. There is no cure. They don't know why it happens for most people. There are several different types of it which I don't have to get into. They estimate there's 60 to 80,000 of us in the United States. It's really low prevalence, very low chances of meeting somebody else in person who has it, which also means there aren't a lot of doctors who know how to treat it.

Jennifer S.: Do you know anybody else that has it personally?

Kait M.: I do. Thank you, internet.

Jennifer S.: Okay. So not in day-to-day life?

Kait M.: I know two people in person that I met pre-internet support group days. The chances of that happening are one in a million. But around the time I was diagnosed when I was in middle school, we had a friend at church whose older sister had been diagnosed when she was in college. We got connected with her and she's become one of my mom's best friends. That is probably the only reason why my mom kept her sanity during that whole process of understanding and trying to figure out what we needed to do.

Kait M.: Then the only other person I've met in person, which this is probably a HIPAA violation, but in terms of how we met, but I had knee surgery when I was in high school and my surgeon was, "Hey, one of my surgical nurse's daughter was just diagnosed with this. I'm pretty sure I'm not allowed to share your information with them, but can you give me permission to share? Because she's desperate to find somebody else who has this." Don't come after us HIPAA people, but we were able to connect with that mom and daughter in person. But most people don't meet anybody else.

Jennifer S.: Wow. What a gift that you were able to.

Kait M.: Yeah. It definitely was helpful to know those two people in person, but still lonely even with that.

Jennifer S.: Yeah. A lot of the reason why you're doing well right now is because of the infusions that you receive, correct?

Kait M.: Yes.

Jennifer S.: Okay. Can you talk little bit about that? What does an infusion day look like, how often do you need infusions?

Kait M.: Yes. My infusion day are very exciting.

Jennifer S.: Okay, I remember when I first got to know you, you used to do infusions in the hospital and you would paint in there. I was, oh, my gosh, this is the coolest thing. She is just turning any expectations I would have of what this might look like on its head. I know you do them at home now, but, yeah, tell us a little bit about that.

Kait M.: I was doing them at an infusion center that's affiliated with the hospital, and I wasn't able to take work calls while I was there because of how it was set up, and it can be a HIPAA violation because I do so much video stuff. It really wasn't cool to keep working and doing this stuff.

Kait M.: I decided to use those days to paint. So I'd pack up my watercolors and go paint there for seven hours. I get these done every 14 days and it's about a seven

hour day. So when insurance was telling me I had to do it outside of the home, I would paint during it and sometimes do computer work as long as it wasn't a phone call.

Kait M.: Now that I do them at home, now that I'm in Washington, thank you changes to insurance, I still work. I don't take that many phone calls just because people get a little weirded out sometimes seeing a port accessed and having the nurse and the pump beeping and stuff.

Kait M.: But I basically get up usually between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m. We usually start between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m. and then I work the whole infusion and then spend the weekend just resting, sometimes painting, usually Netflix bingeing. If you have any recommendations, let me know.

Kait M.: But there are a lot of us who actually work during our infusions. My co-leader for the Tuesdays Together I lead, she is on a very similar treatment regiment that I'm on, plus some extra infusions, she has lupus. She does pet portraits and she brings her commissions with her to the infusion center and she works on them while she's there.

Jennifer S.: That's so cool.

Kait M.: She's incredible. Kit Gray is her name. Kit Gray Illustrations is her business. She's amazing. I've never actually met her in person, we met through Rising Tides, but lead this group together I literally talk to her every day. Love her to pieces. She is crushing it, spending hours and hours and hours working at an infusion center.

Jennifer S.: That is incredible. Okay, talk more about that Tuesdays Together group. It's called Creative and Chronically Ill, is that what it is?

Kait M.: Yeah. Tuesdays Together and Creative and Chronically Ill, which is a mouth full, but it's hard to know what to name a group like that. We've been around since February 2016, we've got about 450 members of creatives who are trying to manage their small business ventures while also dealing with chronic health issues or disabilities where the solutions for an able bodied person might not work for them.

Kait M.: We have a space to be able to share resources and support where otherwise it might be kind of hard to find that. It's all online, we do it all text based so it's accessible for anybody. Yeah, it's a really special group and we go over the same monthly topics everybody else goes over in person, we just do all of our discussion through typing.

Jennifer S.: Wow, that's so cool. So does that mean you have a set monthly time where everyone's online, a traditional Tuesday scheduled meeting or is it a continuous conversation throughout or somewhere in-between?

Kait M.: Somewhere in-between. We always post the guide and the discussion questions in the units. I don't know if you've used unit tabs on Facebook groups now, but they have a new social learning tool on Facebook. So every month we set up a new unit and we'll upload the guide and then the second Tuesday of the month we'll post the discussion questions and the conversation usually continues for a few days to a week. Just as people are able to hop on.

Kait M.: It's really nice to be able to share that and some people do both. They attend in person, but they also are in our group and it's a totally different experience for them. Our group tailors it to what the needs are of someone who's balancing health and limited time and resources with their business. Yeah.

Jennifer S.: That's awesome.

Kait M.: I love it, I'm biased though.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, well, I think anybody that hears about that is going to love it. It's so important to have things like that.

Kait M.: I agree.

Jennifer S.: Yes. All right. You do volunteer work right now. Do you do volunteer work with a specific group or for advocacy or is it part of your Tuesdays Together or ...?

Kait M.: Right now it's kind of a mix. I have been volunteering with the MGFA, which is the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation of America, off-and-on for, gosh, probably six years. I've been part of their MG Friends Program, which essentially pairs a new patient with a long term patient to get peer-to-peer guidance and advice and basically just provide someone who can listen.

Kait M.: We can't give medical advice, but we can just try and support them and make sure they have access to education and resources. I also host a annual art auction to benefit MGFA every year during our awareness month in June. I have kind of taken a bit of a step back doing that in an official capacity because I'm 23 weeks pregnant and I'm just tired a lot more.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, congratulations.

Kait M.: Thank you. A lot of what I'm doing is a little bit more free form now. I'm just being available in support groups online. I'm trying to help with any one-on-one patient connections, but not in an official capacity, just as I'm able to. Then with our Tuesdays Together group.

Kait M.: I've had to scale back a little bit, which has been hard. I'd like to say yes to everything, but I also know in the season of life I need to take care of myself as well. I've had to limit that a little bit more.

Jennifer S.: You use your social profiles a lot on Facebook and Instagram to educate other people and to advocate just for patients with chronic illness. I'm curious what would you say motivates you to do that? There are probably a lot of people-

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Jennifer S.: To do that because there are probably a lot of people that have some form of chronic illness and they might just keep it to themselves or they might seek out resources, but I am so curious what motivates you of this is something that I want to speak up about, I want to educate, and be a voice for?

Kait M.: Oh man. It's hard. I don't think that it's for everyone because any time you open up and are vulnerable in that sense obviously you open yourself up to criticism and I think you have to be at a point with your disease and with yourself emotionally to be able to know that some people are going to have some not great things to say about you. And you might lose some friends even along the way. Some people who just don't understand why it's important to talk about. But I think social media gets a bad rap a lot because we talk about being addicted to technology and it's ruining the way we connect with people. But social media has been such a valuable tool for chronically ill people who cannot participate in day to day life in the way that able bodied, normal, non-sick people can.

Kait M.: And so to be able to foster those connections and use the tools that we have at our disposal to make a community that's so invisible visible is like really important to me. I was diagnosed at a time where there wasn't support groups really. There wasn't the online presence. Information didn't pass online as quickly as it does now. There was no such thing as virality right. Things didn't go viral. So it was just really lonely and there's a lot of misconceptions and stigma around health and chronic illness. I remember around the time I being diagnosed, so this was 2001. So I had just turned 11. My mom pulled me out of school because I was so sick and I was just missing so much school and we just really needed to focus on trying to figure out what was going on and get me to a point where I could manage my symptoms to be able to go back to school.

Kait M.: And the assumption was from one of my neighbors that I must be really troubled and they actually put a pamphlet in my parents' mailbox for school for troubled kids. Like there's just no understanding of what chronic illness really is and the assumption is usually that it's behavioral issues or if you just did x, y, or z.

Jennifer S.: I'm sure you get a lot of advice unsolicited.

Kait M.: Yeah. So I think it's just really important to try and break down those barriers that continue to perpetuate those misunderstandings. But I also know that some people aren't receptive to it. I've definitely had some people who've unfollowed me. Whenever I do speak up on Instagram about accessibility or just

about what it's like to actually try and manage something like this long term. The follow count goes down, down, down, down. And attract and repel that's totally fine. But I feel like someone has to do it otherwise we're going to just keep having the same issue over and over again of like out of sight, out of mind. It's not an issue because people never see or hear anything about it. Sorry that was a tangent.

Jennifer S.: No. No that was wonderful. Yeah, if you had to sum up now after 17 years of having your diagnosis if you had to say the biggest misconception that has affected you or that you've noticed, what would that be?

Kait M.: Oh gosh.

Jennifer S.: There's probably several.

Kait M.: There's several so I'm trying to think of what like. I think there are two. I'll pick two. I think one of them is the misconception that people dealing with chronic illness just aren't trying hard enough. Just because it's hard to imagine what it's like to experience something that you never experienced. And having gone through it for as long as I have, I know just how much harder you have to work to perform at the same level as somebody else to prove your worth. And that when you take time to rest it's often perceived as lazy when you're trying to get accommodations and it looks like special treatment. So it kind of looks like oh they're just not trying. I guess maybe that's the big one. I'll just pick that one.

Jennifer S.: Okay. That is big. I'm sure that is hard too because I can imagine it'd be really easy to try and compensate for that even though you aren't being lazy and even though those accommodations are necessary and logical. I feel like it could be difficult especially as you're getting used to something like that. To actually ask for what you need because you don't want to be perceived as getting special treatment. So yeah, that would be really difficult.

Kait M.: And it's hard too. I think a lot of general sense of what chronic illness looks like is people assume that it's really visible. That any type of disability or illness will be visibly apparent and the majority of chronic illnesses are not detectable visibly. It's I think the stat is close to 75%. So when you do ask people look at you like you're crazy because you look fine and everything from disability placards to having to use a motorized cart at a grocery store. People getting shamed all the time for using what is their rightfully entitled to use to be able to get around their day to day life and try to be independent. And people come after them and they're like, "You shouldn't use that. That's for x, y, or z." And you're like, "No, that's me too."

Jennifer S.: Right.

Kait M.: It's hard.

Jennifer S.: It's not something that you always want to be like fighting for to prove.

Kait M.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Jennifer S.: All right. So this is a question I'm always interested in asking people. And it's geared toward social media.

Kait M.: Okay.

Jennifer S.: The balance between authenticity and transparency because to me they're two different things. I think you can be authentic and you can be genuine without being transparent and needing to say everything and tell everyone everything. But a lot of times I feel like when people talk about authenticity online they talk about them like they're the same thing. And I think there's benefits. There could be benefits to both. But I'm curious how do you balance authenticity and transparency when sharing personal things? So everything from your illness to how you've managed stress to things that you share with your family to pregnancy, all of that.

Kait M.: It's tough. I think that you bring up a really good point that those terms are used interchangeably and it's one of those situations where you kind of like I don't think that means what you think it means. They're not fully the same. I use the word open a lot when I talk about hey I try to be as open as possible to be a resource for especially anyone who's following me who has a chronic illness and is looking for someone to connect with. But I try to share things that are either allowing someone to find a resource and open a connection. Or has some type of value attached to it because I think there's really easily when you start to talk about health and anything related to that which obviously I talk about. It's easy for it to be perceived as just complaining. Or, "Oh they're being dramatic. They're oversharing. I don't need to know this."

Kait M.: As much as I share and weave that into my narrative as a brand and as obviously a person I kind of measure everything against is this going to be valuable to other people or valuable to me. What is the end goal there? And I think that can be really helpful in trying to figure out what are you able to share and what should you wait to share and what should you just not share at all. Respecting the privacy of others. Obviously there are things I don't share about with my family life or with my illness. Because if I shared about it 24-7 all the time with the level that I deal with it, people would be like who are you, go away. And then other times I'm just not... I just haven't gotten to the point where there's a value tied to it yet that I feel like I'm giving a resource or a value to somebody else. We talked a little bit about pregnancy and I haven't shared very much on my social media channels about it because being pregnant and being chronically ill there's so many nuances with it within the community.

Kait M.: Within your own individual care. And I've had to navigate my own emotions around some of the things that have been frustrating and really hard that the

typical if there's such a thing person might not deal with or understand. And I've shared about it maybe like three times over the last 23 weeks or however long it's been. But just because

Jennifer S.: That's very different from what most people would do.

Kait M.: Yeah. So it's a work in progress but I think you have to know what your end goals are and where you draw the line of privacy and what your family is okay with, like your loved ones. And also just measuring it against the response of your audience as well. The responses I get when I wait to share something that's really purpose or value driven really helped develop more relationships than if I were to just share all these little one offs that could come across as really complainy. So that's definitely been a learning. I haven't always been the best at it. And there are definitely times when I'm tempted just to take to social media and complain.

Jennifer S.: Quality over quantity.

Kait M.: Yeah. Exactly.

Jennifer S.: Yeah. Thank you. I think that's awesome. And I like the term that you said you use like open. I'm being open to you which is also to me communicates a lot of it's a gift to share and that's how I tend to perceive it too. Anytime somebody shares something personal, whether it's difficult or happy it's like to me it feels like a gift. You just shared that with us and we can learn from it. Transparency or just sharing everything feels a little bit more of the... it feels more selfishly motivate. I need to get this out. Or I need a response. Where as I think yeah I'm just rambling now.

Kait M.: We're on the same wavelength though. I think being able to share truly is a gift and when you look at it in that framework and through the lens of how can this provide value to the relationships that I'm building through this platform, it really changes the way you position what you share even. You can share about the same situation, but the way you share about it might be a little bit different. And it could really impact someone in a really positive way versus if you were to not think about it as a gift to somebody else. It could be more of a negative impact.

Jennifer S.: Exactly.

Kait M.: Yeah.

Jennifer S.: Yes. Amen. Okay. So I have one final question to ask you. So I'm curious how having your chronic illness has impacted your view of work and life. And I'll add a specifically like I'm curious since you have them, the backwards... I don't know if we should call it that, but the backwards entrepreneurial dream of you work

full time and now you work and it's a side hustle. How does that change your view of work as in working for someone else?

Kait M.: Oh man. It's so interesting. I think a lot of people with chronic illness that I've met especially through our Tuesdays together have kind of stumbled into it because they couldn't work a traditional job anymore. Either they were fired like I was or they were just too sick to do it. I shouldn't laugh, but all I can do at this point is laugh sometimes. This is ridiculous. But they've built something that is able to give the purpose and hopefully help financially sustain them when their life kind of got flipped on its head. I feel like I've been really fortunate because there aren't a lot of companies who are willing to take a gamble on someone who has special needs I guess we'll say. So I work 100% remotely. I'm one of the only remote employees at Honey Book and Rising Tide. Obviously I don't take calls every other Friday because I'm hooked up to an infusion and I like tallied it out last year and it was like, oh man, like seven hours times 52... or 26 year. I mean it's a lot of hours every year that I spend needing flexibility.

Kait M.: And I think what I've learned is that it is really possible to provide those accommodations and I hope that more businesses see the value in flexibility. So that way there's a little bit more security for people who might want their entrepreneurial dream to be a side hustle so they can have things like health insurance. So obviously I'm looking at it through a scope that's a little bit different. Looking at long term security and a regular pay check and health insurance. But having that opportunity has just shown me that you're able to adapt to so many different things that you didn't think you'd be able to adapt to. I never thought I would work full time again when I lost that job for somebody else. I thought I could only ever work for myself. So to be able to show myself and to show others that it is possible. There aren't a ton of people who are out there who are willing to do it. But maybe we can change that.

Kait M.: But also seeing just how valuable it is to have something that you can build and sustain yourself. So that way you're never feeling like you're in a position that you can't take care of yourself. So it's been really interesting. Sorry, I feel like I'm getting very existential on that.

Jennifer S.: Hold on one second. This is weird. I'm getting a call on my computer so I feel like. Okay.

Kait M.: That happens to me though. Do you use Google Voice?

Jennifer S.: No that was my iPhone connected to my computer.

Kait M.: Oh. That's so weird.

Jennifer S.: FaceTime. Yeah, anyways.

Kait M.: You're a very popular lady.

Jennifer S.: It's a telemarketer.

Kait M.: But yeah.

Jennifer S.: Existential topic.

Kait M.: My existential topic. I think to summarize it, the TLDR since I was kind of rambling there. I think the most important thing that you can find in life or that I found is being able to have a purpose and sometimes it looks different than what you expected it to. I never anticipated going back to work full time. But I found a lot of creative purpose and a lot of relationships that are so invaluable to me that have helped me grow in so many ways. So I'm really happy to be open to the way that life kind of leads up there through work even if it's not the way we anticipated. For a lot of people it's kind of the opposite maybe and starting their own business and then finding that comradery and leaving that full time job. But it can go both ways. And it's okay to still work full time if you need that health insurance and you really love what you do.

Jennifer S.: Yeah. Awesome. Kait, thank you so much. That was amazing. All of your insights and perspectives are so inspiring and helpful and I just appreciate you so much.

Kait M.: Thank you for having me. This was really fun.

Jennifer S.: Yeah, and I have one last question. I think I said that last time. But where can people find you online if they want to learn more and follow along with your journey?

Kait M.: So for now my Instagram is @larkspurandlaurel. My website's larkspurandlaurel.com. But I also blog about health and art and all that good stuff at kaitmasters.com so you can find me any of those places.

Jennifer S.: Perfect. And I'll link all of those in the show notes so people can find them.

Kait M.: Thank you.

Jennifer S.: All right. Thank you so much, Kait.

Jennifer S.: I hope that my conversation with Kait encouraged you in some way. Whether that's the value of work with fresh gratitude or to better perspective take people who have experiences different than your own, or to get involved with something that's near and dear to your heart. I know that I've gleaned a lot from Kate and her wisdom. If you want to get involved in the conversation, ask a question or share something that you learned please hop over to femenineforesight.com. Look in the show notes section of the podcast so that you can leave a comment on this post. There's going to be links to all of the resources referenced as well as a complete transcription of today's show. This is so cool but Kait actually requested that we transcribe this podcast so that

people that can't hear and listen to the podcast would be able to read the podcast and she could share it with her friends in the deaf community. I love her heart so much and how it exudes out of everything she does.

Jennifer S.:

So please jump into that conversation and again don't forget to hit that subscribe button so that you can listen to our next interview. Thank you. Have a wonderful day.

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