

Profile: Jasmine Ahumada



By Trudie Mitschang

JASMINE AHUMADA was an active 27-year-old with a career she loved when her life took a dramatic turn. After chronic illness and a serious staph infection left her hospitalized and grappling for answers, Jasmine was eventually diagnosed with common variable immune deficiency (CVID). Unable to work, the California resident began to dabble in makeup artistry, a move that launched an entirely new career. She has been featured globally in print, news and television for her creativity, even appearing on the TV show “The Doctors.” Going viral online also led Jasmine to become more active in speaking about patient advocacy. She was originally featured in *IG Living* in 2016.

Trudie: Tell us about your life before CVID.

Jasmine: Prior to being diagnosed with CVID, I was a healthy, active young woman. I was in the process of buying

my first home, in a steady relationship and working at a job I loved. For almost 10 years, I had worked as an instructor at a day program for developmentally disabled adults, and I loved it with all my heart. During my last few years there, I was chronically ill but didn't know why, especially since previously I had always been healthy. Even as a child, I lived a normal, active life with very few medical issues. Suddenly, I found myself in my mid-20s with constant infections and medical problems.

Trudie: How were you diagnosed?

Jasmine: When I was 27, I developed a methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infection on my leg. The infection was very serious and landed me in the hospital for about a week. After healing from that, I continued to get small staph infections randomly on different parts of my body. While this was going on, I was also suffering with lung infections and pneumonia. I went to my primary care physician literally every other day. I would tell him I felt unwell and that something must be wrong. Finally, after many appointments with him, he sent me to an infectious disease specialist. It was that doctor who actually listened to me and ran the one test that confirmed I was making little to no antibodies.

Trudie: What is your treatment plan today?

Jasmine: I receive 30 grams of intravenous immune globulin (IVIG) every four weeks at my local hospital.

Trudie: When we last spoke, you were just starting to promote your makeup artistry to raise awareness for invisible illness. How did social media help you go viral?

Jasmine: I went viral due to my consistency of posting and remaining engaged with my audience. Once I was in a position to give back, I held contests for those in the makeup community. After a few years, my focus shifted, and I developed a real desire to stand out from the crowd. That's when I started an educational makeup series where I would use real insects in my makeup looks. As you might imagine, this sent a worldwide shockwave throughout social media sites, as well as news outlets. It definitely helped me stand out!

Trudie: How did you manage chronic illness while being in the public eye?

Jasmine: Because I was using insects to promote my makeup artistry, one of the main concerns I heard consistently from my audience was my health and safety. I would always do my best to address their concerns and let them know what precautions I would take. In addition, I have made a YouTube video where I answered all my frequently asked questions.

Trudie: What are some unique challenges you've faced being in the public eye?

Jasmine: Having an immune deficiency makes it so hard to be depended upon. There are many things I want to do and so many things I want to say yes to. I tend to get a lot of anxiety due to the unpredictable nature of my illness. Will I be too unwell a week from now when it's time to fulfill a commitment? Do I have to say no to something so I can avoid a crowd? I recall one time that I was invited by a German news station to come to Los Angeles. It was an all-



This concept photo by Jasmine represents the dual sides of life that are always present for someone living with invisible illness — even on good days when doing “normal” things such as going to lunch means dragging around that critically ill patient, even if people don’t see it. On the floor are Jasmine’s hospital wristbands she’s worn (and saved) over the years.

diagnosis, I have kept almost all of my hospital bands. Each one represents anywhere from eight hours to five days in the hospital. I feel like seeing all the hospital bands gives a visual impact that words could never describe.

regularly. One of my strengths is that I maintain a positive attitude. I try to count the great things in my life because even if I have it rough, there are still things that are wonderful to enjoy.

I wanted to show the reality of someone with an invisible illness. One half shows what I present on the outside, the other side shows what I feel like on the inside and some of what I endure medically.

expenses-paid trip where I was going to be interviewed live while doing the host’s makeup. We were going to talk about my immune deficiency and makeup art. A few days before the event, I fell very ill and was admitted to the hospital for meningitis. I had to cancel the entire trip.

Trudie: How has your artistry and career evolved?

Jasmine: My artistry evolved greatly as my confidence grew. The longer I did it, the more skill I gained. I always did makeup art as a form of fun and life enrichment. To be honest, it was physically demanding, and I eventually had to stop altogether. Although I do miss it, I am now more able to focus on my personal health and well-being.

Trudie: Tell us about the inspiration for the photo you’ve shared in this article.

Jasmine: I wanted to show the reality of someone with an invisible illness. One half shows what I present on the outside, the other side shows what I feel like on the inside and some of what I endure medically. Since my immune deficiency

Trudie: What is your focus now when it comes to advocacy work?

Jasmine: Since I’m not as heavily into social media, I do a lot of word-of-mouth advocacy. I belong to support groups where I can chime in on this topic. I randomly came up with this photograph idea and feel so grateful to have it represented here for all patients and loved ones to see. This is one way I can continue to spread awareness.


Trudie: What message would you like to share with the medical community?

Jasmine: For me, I think the most important thing is self-advocacy. Do research and stand up for your well-being. Keep your mind on the positive side. I’m a firm believer that a good mindset can go a long way.

Trudie: How is your health today?

Jasmine: I would say that my health is OK. I have more medical challenges that make daily living a bit more daunting as the years go by. Although I’m not as healthy as I was 10 years ago, I still feel too blessed to complain

Trudie: What advice do you have for others who want to make a difference?

Jasmine: One of the greatest ways to make a difference with the community of people who require IG therapy is to donate plasma. Plasma donors are the root of all things great when it comes to lifesaving treatment. I will require some form of IG therapy for the rest of my life, as is true for so many others. If you’re a patient or are unable to donate, keep talking and spreading awareness. Sometimes awareness is all we need. A lot of these illnesses are so rare that most doctors are not educated enough to help. And of course, try to approach it all with a positive attitude. 

Editor’s note: You can see some of Jasmine’s past work on Instagram: @Butterflyjasmine49.



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