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hypersensitive to sound and light and – (sigh) – I get overwhelmed pretty easily by crowds of people or intense environments. I had to really develop a lot of coping skills. I had to do a lot of affirmation.

My right foot is still smaller than my left foot. I don't have the same kind of motor skills on both sides of my body. I have to rest. I can only be really active for a certain amount of time, and then I have to rest and refresh myself. It's mainly the sensory input. And I still have to take anti-seizure medication, but it is much more manageable now. I also have a lot of anxiety. I would get up early in the morning and go through calming exercises, and I wore earplugs on the bus. And I would find a safe spot in the library where I could calm down.

S.Z.: *Those are huge barriers for most people. That's a lot of work just to get to school. I'm an instructor at (Mt. Hood Community College), and I see students with barriers all the time who vanish because of outside stresses. What would you say to these folks?*

F.F.: I would do this exercise where I would draw a circle and then I would divide it into four sections, and I labeled them 1, 2, 3 and 4. That was the importance rating I gave elements in my life. I always put school and homework in the first quarter. I put my health and close, supportive relationships in the second. And everything else was in the third and fourth.

So if something came up, I would ask myself what was more important to me. Knowing myself and considering my anxiety, I knew that I needed to really eliminate outside elements as much as possible. I signed up for any kind of tutoring that I could and study-skills tutoring. I learned a lot about my learning styles, and I just really stuck to it. I just kept telling myself that it was worth it. And that I could do it.

In the first year, I had to move three times. I realized that it was worth taking out loans to live in a more stable environment.

I also had to pass on people who told me I couldn't do it.

What isn't really talked about a lot: older students or people coming from backgrounds that aren't full of college graduates. There's a lot of separation and strangeness with relationships with people I had outside of school. Most of my friends are supportive, but I did meet resistance to what I was doing. I really had to stay focused on that No. 1 objective: to do well, to develop a good academic history and then to transfer to a respected four-year university.

S.Z.: *You like libraries. In a day and age when print media are under scrutiny and libraries struggle to keep doors open, you are looking at libraries as community centers. Tell me about your research.*

"I realized that it was worth taking out loans to live in a more stable environment. I also had to pass on people who told me I couldn't do it."

FRANCES FAGAN

F.F.: When I first enrolled in PCC, it was with an interest in creating therapeutic environments. Public service centers, like waiting rooms in disability offices that would be supportive to families and the lighting wasn't so harsh. (Spaces) that were easy for people to understand for people coming from different cultures, what to do. I went in with that idea: human ecology study.

I developed a plan about how to build therapeutic environments for public agencies. When I started (school), PCC had just received a large bond, and they were remodeling all of their campuses. I was able to sit in on an architecture, design, construction meeting where they were discussing these buildings that were going to be used by students and staff at PCC.

Immediately I realized that it was the decision-making process that was the most important part of any change. The meat underlying any kind of transformation that you see in this society, it happens in some office somewhere where these decisions were being made. I became extremely interested in decision-making process within the public sector.

At the same time, I read an article on the PCC website about Phil Seder in the business department. He was discussing decision-making processes. We met, and over a year and a half we had a series of conversations around (this topic). I asked him: Where is there an intersection between decision-making processes and information exchange and public service? And he told me to look at libraries.

It was kind of mind-blowing, because contemporary libraries are not only refining the exchange of information, but within their own building and between different library agencies crossing states, but they are also community centers, places where you can get job training, you can have day care, you can use the Internet even if you can't afford a computer of your own. They are nonpolitical, supportive environments open and accepting to the public at large.

S.Z.: *I've not been to a library that has a day care or job training. What are some examples?*

F.F.: The Seattle Public Library. And I think the Hillsboro Public Library; they have a play center. The library in Tigard is really incredible. They have a child play area and classes. And all of these libraries have computer centers. Libraries are not only refining technical infrastructure and information sharing, and they're having to be really adaptive to live in this world, because it is turning digital. Library science itself is really working around public exchange and support based on a deeper technical infrastructure.

Because of my love for environmental space, human needs and supportive architecture, I found the idea of a refugee camp really interesting. Over the course of developing this capstone, those ideas really merged. A lot of people will sit for years in these camps, waiting for documents to be transferred. Anyone who has had to sit in a waiting room in a public service agency or wait for a document to come through so that you can pay your rent or so that you can feed yourself or your family knows that information exchange is hugely important.

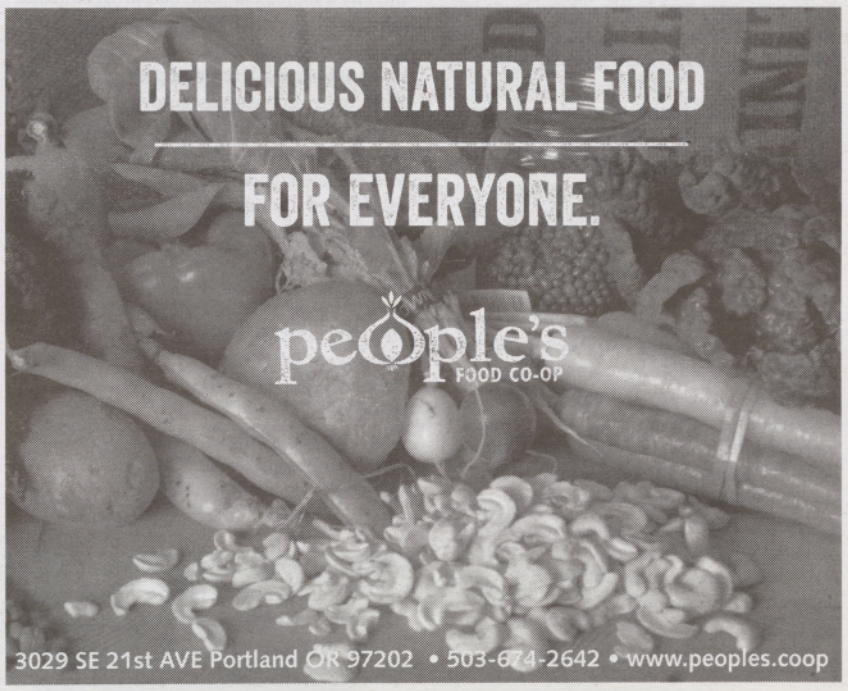
Libraries, their whole point is sending one piece of information to a specific person. They are streamlining this process of exchanging information as well as being centers that are welcoming to a diverse range of people.

S.Z.: *You seem to be innately driven, formal education or no. You are an exceptional student; surely you know this. Can anyone be successful in college?*

F.F.: I believe so, yes! If I can do it, anyone can do it – honestly. Yale is a big, shiny prize, but I've seen so many incredible people around me that have found more success than they ever expected. And that might be by completing a class or making it to school almost every day. It's up to the individual to define what success is to them at that moment. Successes build upon one another.

Also, you have to be willing to work for it. If you want to have a successful academic experience, I found that I had to sacrifice a lot of personal things. It was a lot of tears, and it was a lot of really late nights. It was, on average, 14 hours on a bus each week. It was a lot of lonely time, just working. You have to know that it's going to take some work. I had to work through a lot of fear of failure. I had to pretend like I was a student until I felt like I actually was becoming one.

S.Z.: *You are totally a Renaissance woman.*

F.F.: I love that you said that! Because when I was growing up, that is why I felt I didn't need formal education because I felt this romantic idea of acquiring skills by apprenticing and this kind of Renaissance lifestyle. And that's also one of the things that made Yale appealing to me. The program I am headed into, this art and culture and science, and it is related to ethnicity, race and migration. It is perfectly suited to my research. It's about having a seat at the table, you know?

It is so important to advocate for the greater good in some way. I was talking to a friend of mine, and she was saying, "Why would you choose *not* to be seated at the table where the conversation is happening?"