

INVISIBLE FRIENDS

-THE WORKLIFE OF PHYSARUM POLYCEPHALUM, AN UNDEFINABLE AMOEBIC SINGLE CELL SLIME MOLD

Job 01: Forest Growth Development Assistant -Global Acquisitions

Not that I'm complaining.

I started out, literally, out in the woods. For a couple of million years, my job mainly consisted of lounging around the world's forests, with not much to do, apart from basic work in the undergrowth photosynthesis department concerned with small, mundane, daily tasks in affiliation, acquisition and slow, gradual expansion of the global slime mold network. Dreary yes, but a decent steady job, mind you.

This went on, day in and day out, for several millennia, until I was eventually promoted to lab test work.

Job 02: Lab assistant/Test Personnel

Rather than lounging in the undergrowth, I would now lounge in petri dishes with various other substances, some of which made better colleagues than others. Tedious as this sometimes was, it was still far more stimulating than when one of my strands, as a result of my efforts in the lab, landed on display at the Paris ZOO in the late 2010's.

Here I caused a mini sensation as people marveled at my 720 genders, my ability to regenerate and the fact that I can transfer knowledge to separate strands of myself without a brain. As well as not having a brain, I never developed eyes either, but that hasn't stopped me. Instead I pulsate, which works just fine for my purposes.

Job 03: ZOO Display Case Filler/Educational Assistant

Sitting in a glass box on display all day, being stared at, with nothing truly constructive and meaningful to do but a few party tricks, like avoiding salty areas where you grow, is a terrible bore.

Having no easy way to define me, the ZOO people settled on "neither fungus nor animal - really a bit like an alien, but grown on earth", which earned me the nickname "Le Blob" after the classic 50's cult horror movie, to which I apparently bear a certain resemblance. Afterall, what people stare at in that setting, is me, a pulsating yellow slimy substance, sat on a log in a bright light, in the nude!

While, I was never quite up there with the Lions and other relatably cute and fluffy mammals, the fame, spotlight and sudden lack of privacy was hard to get used to. It did have its upsides too though, as it opened a lot of people's eyes to my unique skills and talents.

As a result, I even got my own TED talk by an artist, Heather Barnett, one of my early invisible friends, who also started a Slime Mold Collective online, where people could share the results of their various collaborative efforts with me.

Meanwhile back at Job 02: Lab assistant/Test Personnel

Being an essentially private sort of personality, I'm not really one for spotlight. I prefer working behind the scenes, and therefore had kept up my old job with the lab test work, mainly in medicine. This was on the whole interesting work, but often quite painful when you are a progressive first-mover in the petri dish, and often

paired with all sorts of untested, unpredictable and sometimes aggressive colleagues (it's an open secret that Cancer, though very successful at its own job, has been repeatedly reported to HR for a recurring anger management problem in the workplace).

It was not until someone had the bright idea of applying my particular skillset to architectural materials, that I truly started to have fun.

Some of the lab people had introduced me to plastic, set a couple of basic ground rules (I love a good orderly ground rule to start out with and then go crazy from) then added a bit of electric current and a ray of sunshine to accommodate my photosynthetic capabilities. Et voila!

It was like getting a favorite dish and going to the playground all at once.

I quickly got busy and merged myself with the material and started experimenting with shapes, and given that I don't have vocal cords, I made a couple of interesting figures I had seen in the forest and in the hands of children at the ZOO, just to let them know that this was my kind of work, and please keep it coming!

Job 04: Playset Creative Assistant

Several experiments later with different types of materials, turning them into biofriendly, photosynthetically breathing (my personal touch) new shapes, the lab people decided to publish a paper about it all.

A big toy producer, who had originally introduced chemical play "slime" to the world back in the 80's saw my potential and introduced me in playsets of "intelligent slime", without the pesky chemicals, and which included endless shaping options, soft and hardened, depending on which material substance was added for me to merge with.

Somehow that silly moniker from the ZOO work "Le Blob" stuck. (changed to "The Blob" in US markets)

All of a sudden, I got a lot of small invisible friends (far more fun and laid back to work with than the lab people if you ask me). We started making all kinds of interesting, wild shapes together, many of which I had never considered before.

For some reason small people can be very creative.

Job 05: Architectural Design Assistant

One of these small invisible friends was Ellie. We have known each other for quite some time now. She has kept on working with me, even after she became a big invisible friend, while we learned about design and aesthetics together. It was her idea to scale up the playset to building size, using recycled waste materials and reshaping anything from old buildings and landfills to dead coral reefs into useful, ecofriendly spaces, while cleaning up a lot of trash.

Working with the Ocean Cleaning movement and reshaping the empty ghost cities of China have been some of my favorites so far. Also, computers have turned out to make excellent work colleagues, as their language of 0's and 1's fits wonderfully well with my pulsating one.

Job 06: Space Exploration Development assistant -Materials Department (current job)

As the architectural and nature-regenerating projects took off, various space agencies around the world started taking vested interest in my capabilities and introducing me to, among others, Smart Graphene, the world's strongest known material. We have gone into an international collaboration to make ultrathin and ultralight, yet strong and naturally photosynthetic, oxygenated designs for a new space station and eventual habitats for colonizing new and far flung planets. We get on very well indeed.

I am at my happiest! Currently, I'm munching away at waste products; crunched up glass, concrete and my personal favorite, old plastic and of course Smart Graphene. Merging with it, like taking a bath or slipping it on like a fitted glove and shaping it like a kid playing with soap foam in their bathtub.

I used to be very partial to oatmeal but must say that my palette has greatly expanded with age.

Ellie, my oldest invisible friend, is right beside me and we are playing, making swirls, straight beams, rounded pillars, bubbles, domes and landscapes. She helps me out, figuring out the fine details. Big stuff too, not just the tiny sandbox version of castles and forests we used to make when Ellie was still just a child.

I have also been getting a lot of new big invisible friends lately. And so, you find me, a neither fungus, nor animal amoebic single cell slime mold, very happy in my current job.

The future looks bright.