

# TELL ME HOW YOU FEEL

CELIA  
COUSINEAU



TELL ME  
HOW YOU  
FEEL

Tell Me How You Feel

<i>1</i>	<i>Introduction</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Sometimes, I feel anxious.</i>
<i>21</i>	<i>Sometimes, I feel a little all over the place.</i>
<i>35</i>	<i>Sometimes, I feel depressed.</i>
<i>49</i>	<i>Tell me how you feel.</i>
<i>59</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>

Tell Me How You Feel

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This book was made for Graphic Design Capstone,  
ARTD471, in the Graphic Design program at the  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

## Introduction

*This work discusses self-harm and suicidal ideation. See the back matter for resources if you feel that you need help.*

Sometimes I feel a lot, all at once, overwhelming and intense. I'll never know if it's the same way other people feel. My feelings are familiar to me. I can analyze why I feel them, and where they come from, the why and when. I can argue with myself if they're worth feeling or not.

But that doesn't matter - I still feel them all the same. Right now all that matters is: How do you feel? In what ways do you feel it? What is your story?

I have a few stories of my own and from others, and each of these stories follows a similar structure. If you'd like, you can also use this structure to make your own story - about as many feelings as you'd like.

Sometimes I feel...

*An emotion or set of feelings that have been central to you in your life.*

I remember...

*What were your earliest memories of this feeling?*

*How did it manifest in your life?*

I thought...

*What did you think this emotion looked like before you identified with it?*

*What stopped you from identifying with it, or might have stopped you from validating your own feelings?*

But looking back...

*What is apparent to you now?*

*How has this behavior affected you? What costs in your life?*

Turning point

*What is a recent event that brought this feeling into awareness?*

*How might it inspire you to change?*

I've learned...

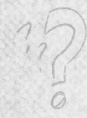
*What thoughts and behavior help you thrive (or function) now?*

*What are the ways you've persevered, despite all the costs you're aware of?*

*Be kind to yourself.*

You are burdening him  
with your insecurity.

he is going to get exhausted  
reassuring you.



Why are you sending this anyway?  
Why are you sorry for affection?  
Will you feel like reassurance and not love?  
What are you feeling?  
Soon it will be a...

Please retext  
please call me  
please reassure me

Why can't I just do something with it?  
Why do I need to retext?

Why the fuck is it that... I'm like they don't visit. Because we both mutually agree we want to see each other? and you're like year, that's normal, and then I wake up the next day in a full panic convinced that...

anyway I just thought you should know this is happening

I just want you to know I had this morning I'm not sure what was happening

when we were talking I was honestly freaking out about planning with no excuses to see you despite having evidence that...

like I know I joke about this all the time but like I am not having a time when will I be able to rest

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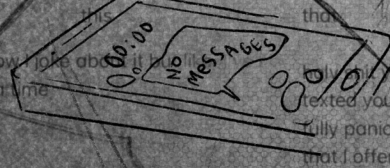
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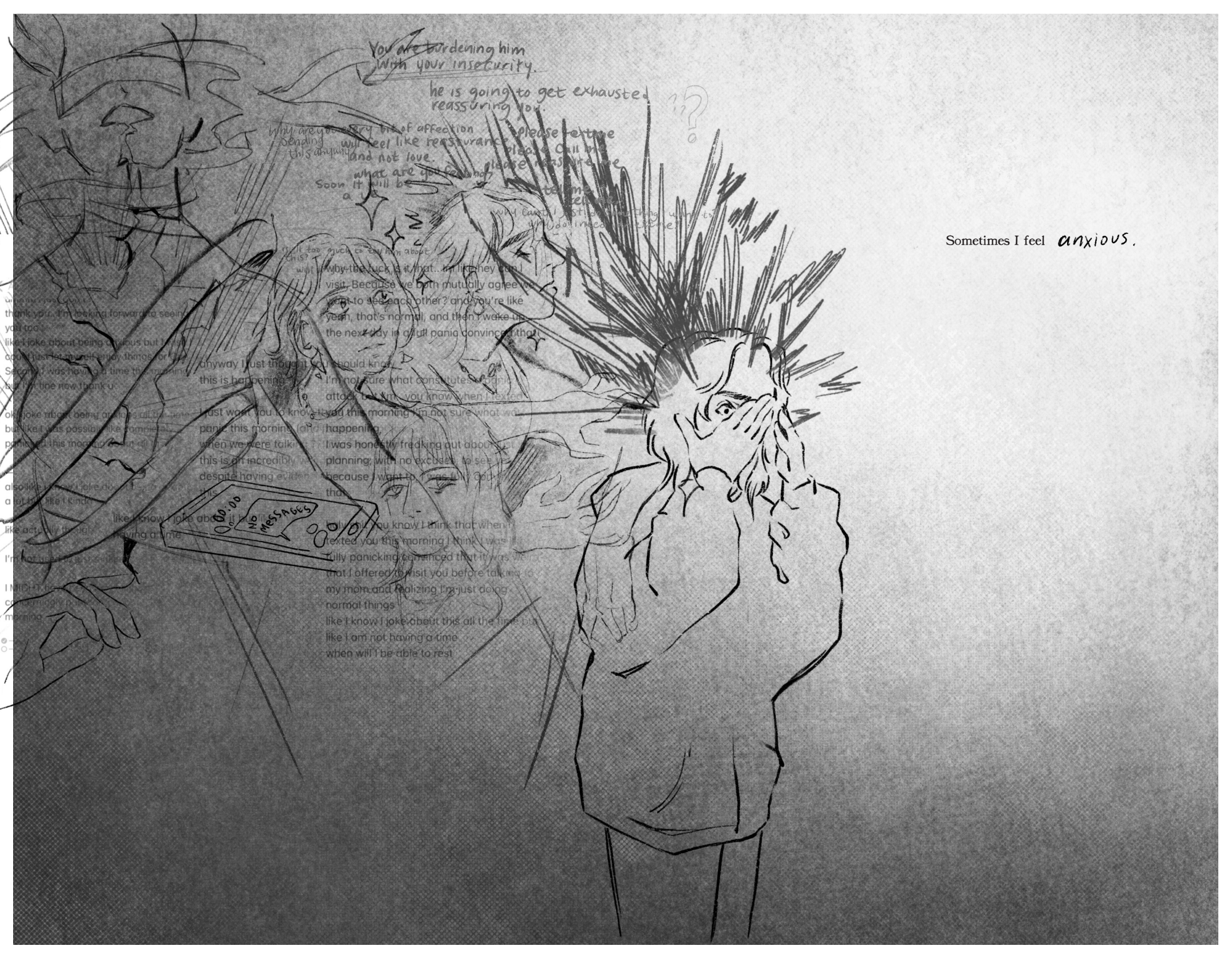
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Sometimes I feel **anxious**.

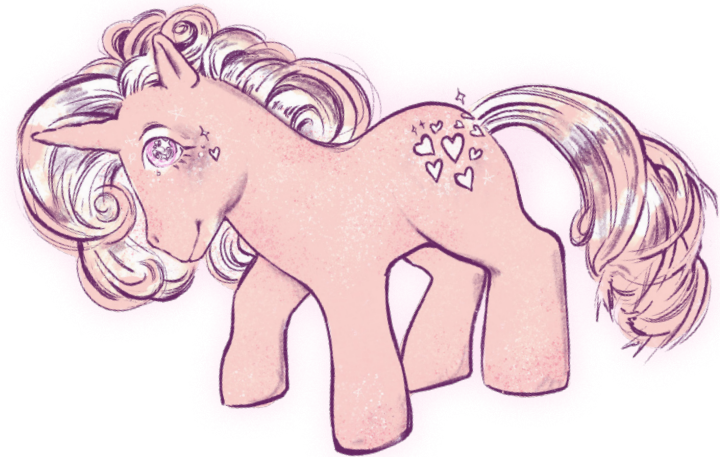


## I remember,

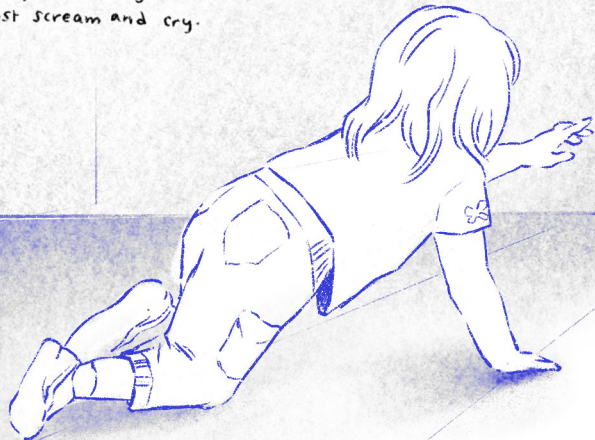
as a young kid, I was always very shy. But even around my parents as well, I was afraid to turn on my own TV, or ask for toys I wanted, or tell them what I was really thinking about.

In preschool, I still remember the image of the most beautiful sparkly little pony. But I couldn't have it. I couldn't ask for it. I sat in another room when everyone had snack time. Filled with fear, when nobody was looking,

I reached for it.



I always sat to the side alone when the other kids had snack time because when they tried to get me to join I would just scream and cry.



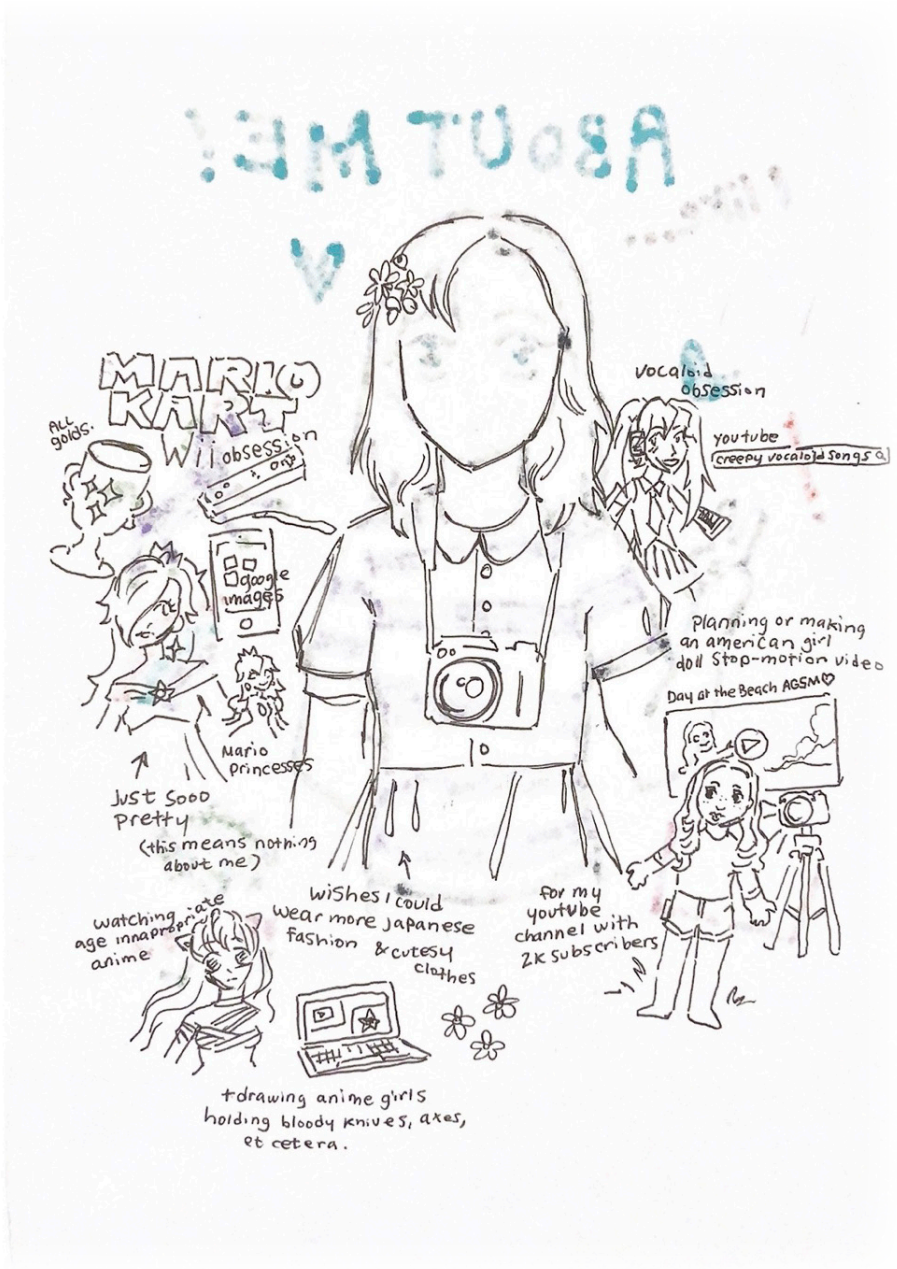


It didn't end there. I was scared of telling my friends what books I was reading, about the games I liked to play, or about the shows I watched on my laptop. Just talking about interests was hard enough; talking about my feelings, especially about other people, was unthinkable.

I felt that I needed to create, and control, a curated identity for other people. If people knew I liked something that had its own associations, they'd think of me that way, and I couldn't control that.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OTHER PEOPLE,  
my entire being was made up of  
their assumptions about me.





I felt like my true self was a secret. I felt safe this way, but I was often jealous of how openly other people could talk about every detail of their lives. I wanted that, too.

Would it ever be possible for me to be truly known? Because opening up was difficult: terrifying, destructive, messy.



I thought I managed things well. My constant state of fear helped me a lot in my classes. I couldn't rest knowing I had work to do, and made extensive day-by-day lists to block out my time to get assignments done weeks in advance.

I was still able to find friends, and I was able to share things with them. I was able to work through a lot of this. I did really well. But why did it seem like so much more work to me to do what came naturally to others?

I DIDN'T THINK I HAD AN ANXIETY "DISORDER."

an "anxiety Disorder" looked like:

- breathless panic attacks that pretty girls had in shows and movies
- One of my friends who said she would throw up from nervousness if she ate before school.

But when I got sick on vacation across the country, and I had to figure out how to contact a doctor, all I could do was hide in a corner and rock back and forth. And I thought, "am I doing this because I really feel this? Or for attention, so I can say that I have anxiety?"

Once I started to live on my own in college, it was really hard to eat on some days. Nervousness before every class caused a knot in my stomach that made it hard to put food in my mouth.

Why could other people claim these things as an anxiety disorder? What made my feelings different? I realized that my feelings weren't much different, and that feeling anxious can look different for everyone.

I did the same things anyway...  
I was having trouble accepting they were the same.

It was easier for me to alleviate this fear of going out, the difficulties of talking to new people, dissolve that knot in my stomach... by just staying in and clinging to the few people I was already comfortable with. By the end of my second year of college, I realized I barely had any new friends. *I was letting things happen to me, waiting for things to happen to me.*

LOOKING BACK, I REALIZED I WAS LETTING MY WHOLE LIFE SLIP BY ME.



LATER, IN A PARKING GARAGE AT 5AM AFTER GIVING UP ON SLEEPING:





holy shit, ✨  
**SLOW  
DOWN!!**

i cannot.  
see it.

**I DON'T  
THINK  
↓  
THIS  
IS REALLY  
HAPPENING**

IF IT EATS  
ME UP INSIDE  
SO LET IT  
FEED!!

I WANT SO  
MUCH  
I HAVE SO  
MUCH

I'LL DO IT  
AGAIN.  
ILL FUCKING  
DO IT AGAIN.

SWAY??

you just  
WANT friends

YOU JUST WANT ATTENTION

overthink it,  
overthink it!

you just want them to like you!  
you're just lonely!



I had crushes before. But this was different.

I ignored my feelings, tried to justify and explain them to myself. The feelings ate me up as I affirmed to myself that nobody could ever know. To me, it was out of the question to ever talk to the person of interest.

But then I was sitting outside at night with a group of friends, and everyone was leaving, except for someone I really, really liked. "THOUGHT WAS COOL, and liked to spend time with, because he listened to me"

And I made the choice to stay there with him.

BECAUSE  
I COULD.



I made the choice to text him. *after consulting nearly everybody I knew on if I should text him, and what I should say*

Then planned a whole "meet up" with him.

*It was a date. I got so nervous from not knowing if it was a date that I threw up my breakfast before leaving.*

I drove two hours to visit him, just because I **WANTED TO!!!**

he was the one to invite me to drive down, but I still had another entire panic about it...

< All on My iPhone

thank you... I'm looking forward to seeing you too  
like I joke about being anxious but I wish I could just let myself enjoy times for one  
Second I was having a time that I didn't  
but I'm fine now think  
Why are you every bit of affection  
ok I know I'm being a bit of a  
but like I said I'm not really  
panicked this morning about all this  
—  
also like I know I joke about it but  
a lot but like I kinda  
like actually though  
is it too much to tell him about  
I'm not used to just making  
will it just bother him?  
I MIGHT have been like, fully and  
concerningly panicking this  
morning

why the fuck is it that.. Im like hey can I visit, Because we both mutually agree we want to see each other? and you're like yeah, that's normal, and then I wake up the next day in a full panic convinced that

You are burdening him with your insecurity

he is going to get exhausted reassurance

DEAD PANIC

Who are you every bit of affection

Soon it will be a U.S.

BURDEN

please text me

please call me

please reassure me

tell me

tell me

just do something I want to?

who do I need an excuse?

when will I be able to rest



Do you really want to see me?

Yes I do. I'm really looking forward to it.



Me too. Thank you.

im just going because he asked me to because I have to visit campus anyway

BECAUSE I WANT TO!!

The biggest thing that helped me was simply getting everything everyone else told me through my head.

It feels useless when people give you advice that sounds impossible: *All of those thoughts aren't true, they're just anxiety! Just don't be anxious! It's not rational!* I knew my thoughts weren't rational, and were just anxious.

But then, some people I've only met a few times did recognize me. My friends and I made a point to invite other people we thought were cool to our gatherings, and made sure they felt welcome if we knew they might be anxious. They made a point to invite me.

And realizations just suddenly happened: They saw me the same way I saw others. The way I saw people who I thought were interesting... they saw me as interesting too.

Though it still feels like an affirmation,

It's a truth.

Other people actually do like me, want me around, and have the capacity to care about me.

It takes more work for me to do a lot of things, but I have noticed, over time, it has started to take less work. As I meet people older than me, I learn that a lot more people than you think are also secretly anxious and just faking it.

Looking back, really, I realized I was just surviving the best I could.

Sometimes I feel *a little all over the place?*



## I remember,

As a teenager, for weeks to months at a time I had endless energy. On top of a normal school day, my schedule was packed, and I'd stay up playing video games until late at night.

If I didn't feel like playing games, I'd pace. I paced all the time, while thinking, but sometimes I would pace around my pool for hours at a time if I had nothing else to do.



I thought that this was just the normal high schooler's sleep deprived life. When everyone was in a constant competition to get less sleep, everyone has so much to do, and so much stress. I was on the same grind as my friends, who were up all night doing their AP-honors classes.

Except I wasn't stressed. I was getting by just fine in my classes, doing whatever I wanted, whenever. Stress wasn't affecting my sleep schedule.



And then, suddenly, I'd lose that energy. It felt reasonable - after having all that energy, I'd gotten burnt out and the tiredness caught up to me. I would be less funny in class, have trouble getting up, and have less interest in going out. I got a little sad for a few months at a time.

I considered that I might be depressed. But I couldn't be depressed; the sadness ended. The energy would always suddenly come back to me.

Things just got rough for me for a while, but I'll be fine again.

This is just the human experience. (usually a healthy thing to think)

WHAT MAKES ME SO SPECIAL?

Why am I so special that there would be something "wrong" with me?

Shut the fuck up, you're not.

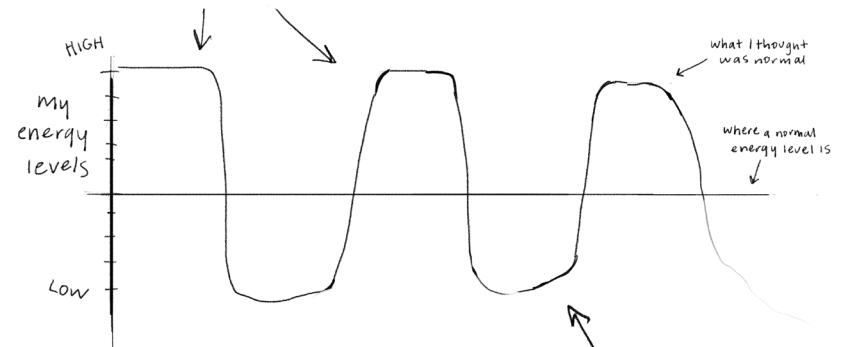
But actually, like, statistically. The odds are that I am average.




THESE WERE ALL EARLY SIGNS WHICH INTENSIFIED OVER TIME.

I can see now that there were cycles, a pattern.

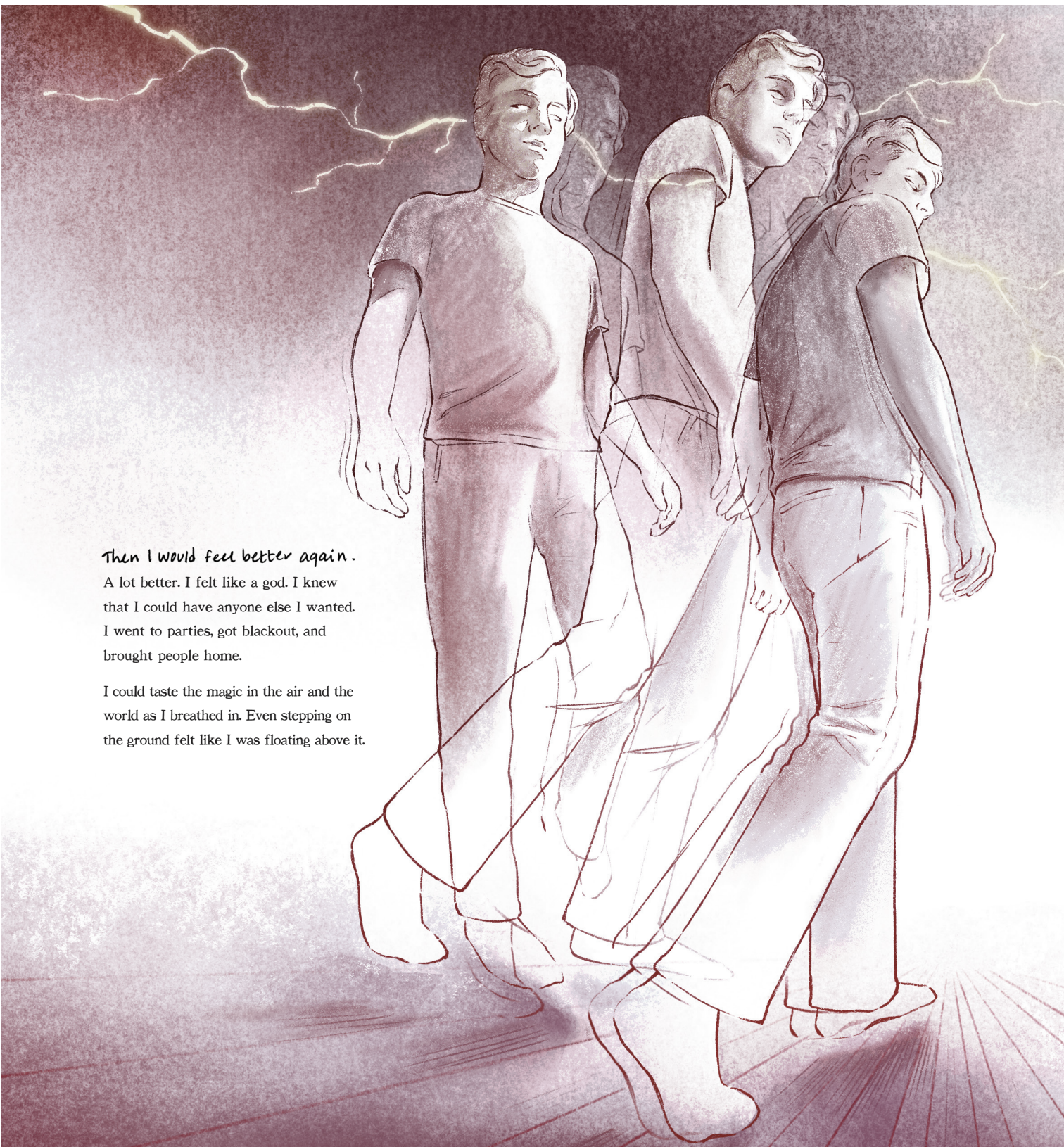
what I thought was "normal" or feeling better was mania.



and that didn't invalidate my lower periods - that was still depression.



I had a very intense breakup. It occupied  
All of my thoughts. Of course I was going to feel SAD,  
that sad. I talked to my therapist about it, and  
he said it was normal. I was grieving.



*Then I would feel better again.*

A lot better. I felt like a god. I knew that I could have anyone else I wanted. I went to parties, got blackout, and brought people home.

I could taste the magic in the air and the world as I breathed in. Even stepping on the ground felt like I was floating above it.

I could wake up feeling confident, like a god;

then something would remind me of her, and by the same afternoon I fell back down again. I felt lost, my whole world upturned, nothing but sadness and pain.



I'D STAND ON THE ROOF OF THE  
KRANNERT CENTER.  
JUST EXISTING, DANGEROUSLY.

OR, I'D TAKE A  
KNIFE TO MY BACK.



Then after a few hours, I was confident again... and reflecting on the day, was confident that I was depressed. (*Confident that I could always feel like I did when I was manic*).

So finally, I reached out to a psychiatrist about depression - through my general practitioner, to get a quicker appointment through the university system.

They got me a depression diagnosis, and antidepressants. And to my surprise, they made me feel better - a *lot* better.

RED FLAG  
antidepressants want  
make you feel all better

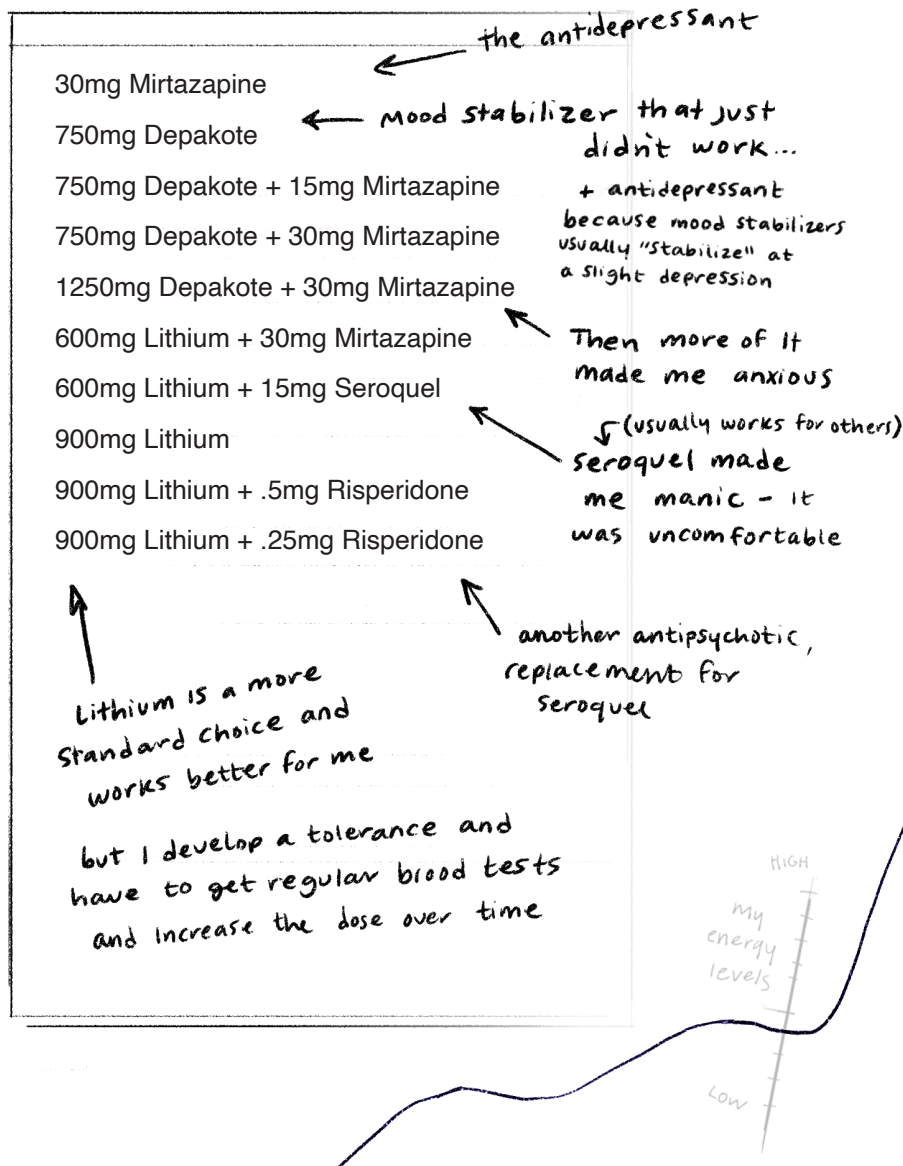


I hadn't heard the voice of god but that made it quickly obvious that how good I was feeling was not normal, but rather, mania.

Putting words to this didn't help at first because I didn't have an image of what this meant for me. But over time, it helped me understand what I was feeling and what I could do about it.

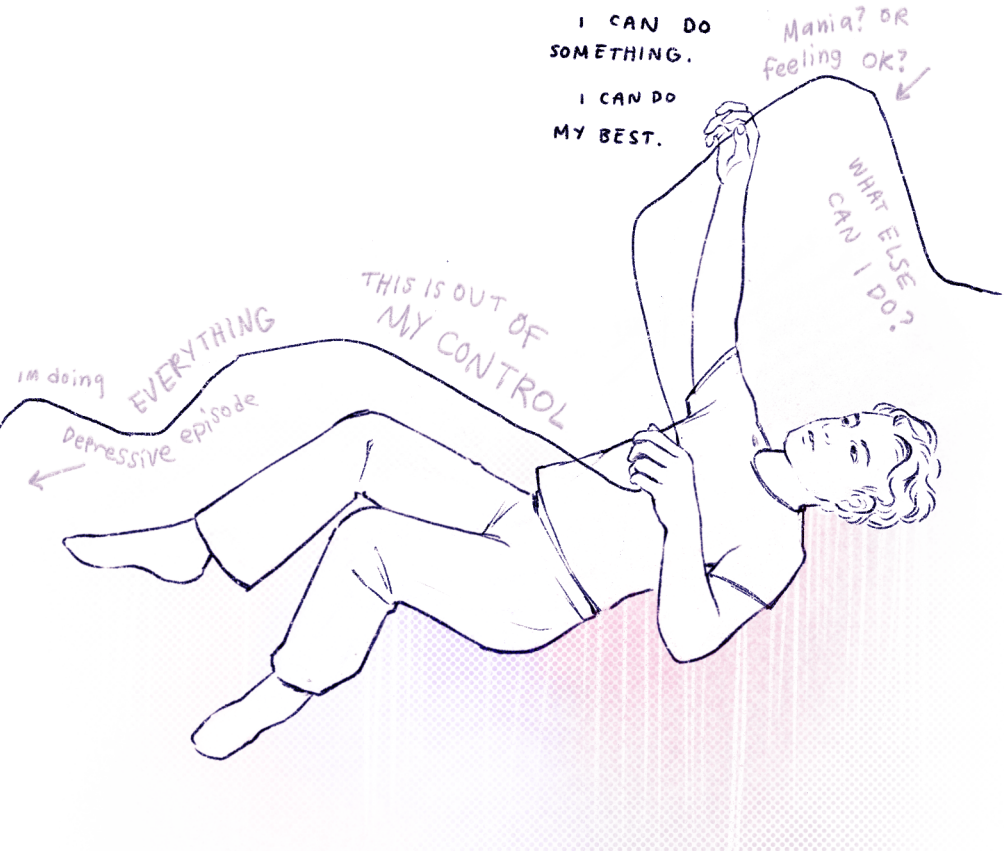
Formal treatment, therapy and medication did help me, though it takes a lot of work.

Bipolar takes a long time to figure out the perfect recipe that works for an individual. Here's my low amount of medication changes:

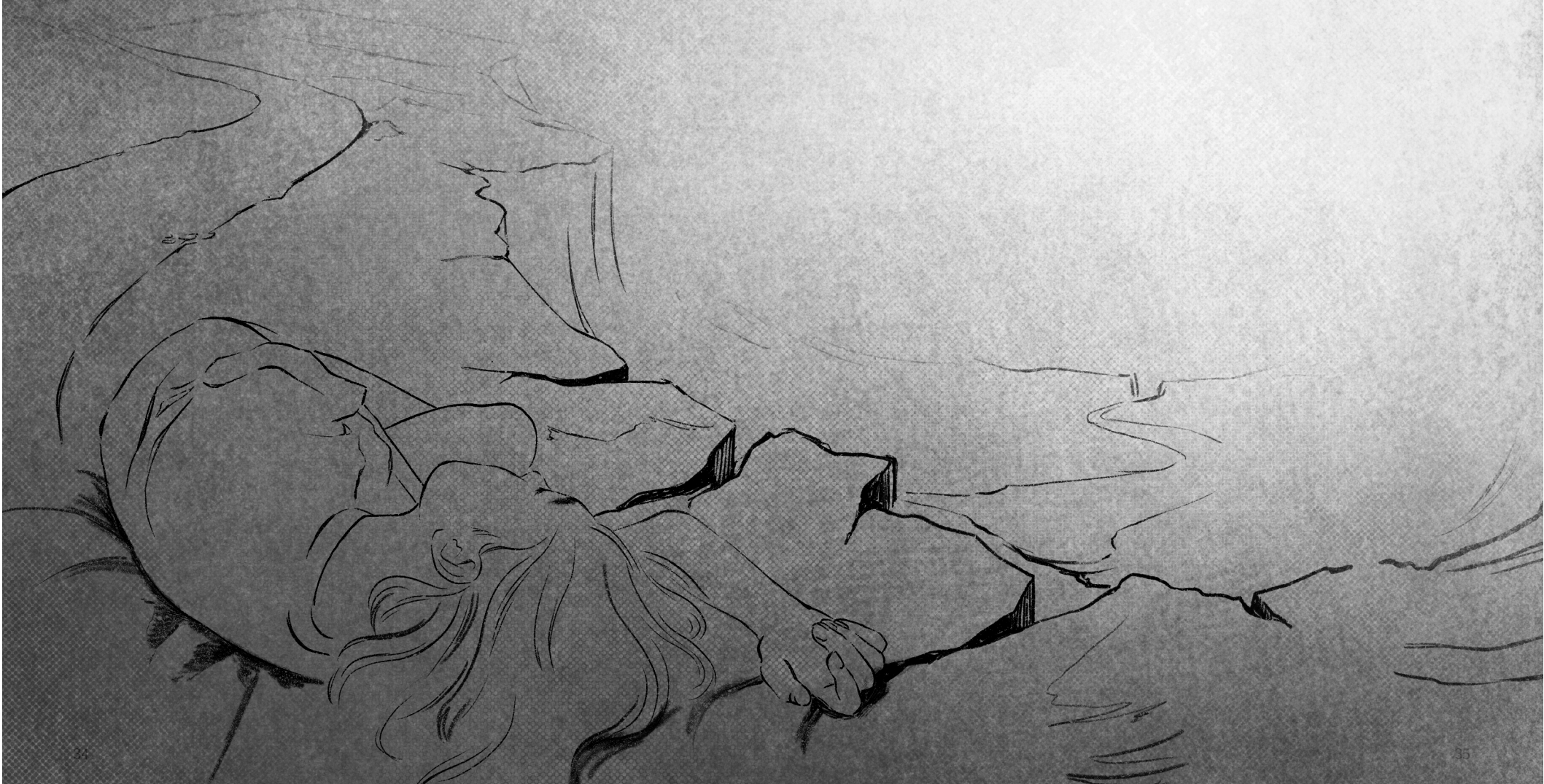


The story isn't over, and I'm not sure it ever will be for me.

I'm doing a lot better now as I'm more aware of what's good for me. Awareness was a necessary step in my journey, yet only still the first step. It's a difficult balance of feeling out of control because of this disorder, and still recognizing that there are things I can work on and take responsibility for. It's a lot of work, and I hope I can make it easier for myself over time.

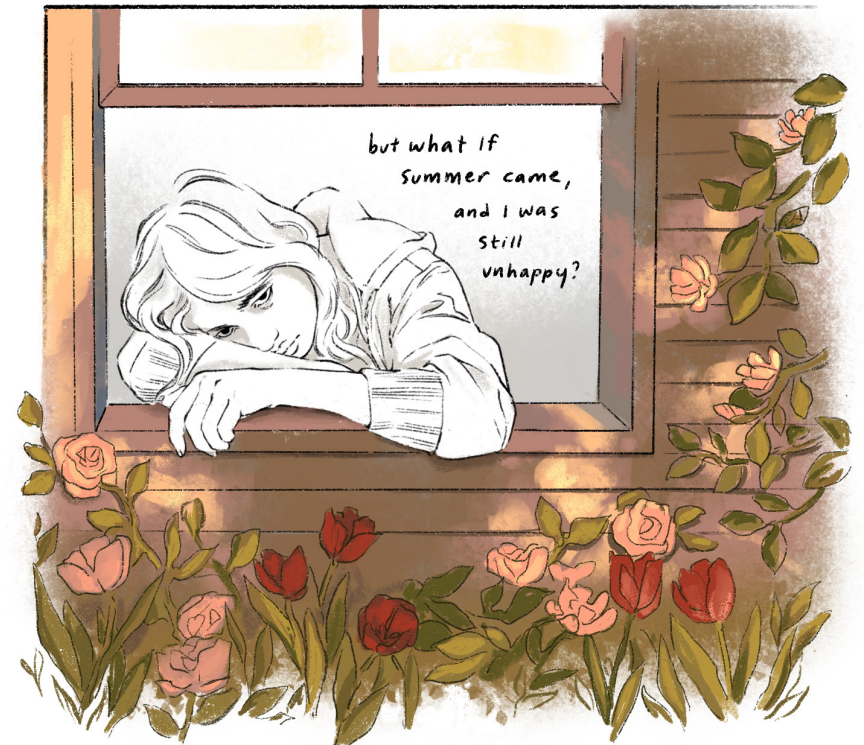


Sometimes I feel *depressed.*



# I remember,

*Always* feeling like I was waiting for something. I didn't know what I was waiting for, but I knew I didn't have it.



5/26/2016

## ON HAPPINESS

- am I happy? unsure.
1. happiness will come when I will grow older, when school ends. I will find someone I love and have enough to support myself without stress and I will travel and be free. Someone who I love will love me and we will be happy.
  2. Will I ever get those things?
  3. Will I get these things, and still not be happy?

I never had anything to be sad about, I told myself. I had a good family, not much hardship, friends, and did well in school.

I was sad because I was overthinking, I was lonely, maybe it was hormones, the experience of growing up. I just didn't like my friends, didn't like living at home, that was why, I wasn't *depressed*. There were people out there who were way worse off than me. I had never self-harmed, honestly, because I was afraid to.

I mean, I was able to get myself out of bed in the morning. Life was always too quick, and pulled me through the day. I was able to cope with this sadness. Yet as soon as I wasn't busy, I wondered if everything else had just been a distraction from feeling sad. It was easy for me to mask and forget whatever I felt when I was around people. As soon as I was on my own, it often felt like it was hard to be present in the moment.



wait, where am I.



I'm literally on vacation.

I'm hiking. in nature.  
I'm on a mountain right now. on a beautiful day.

I need to FOCUS  
on ENJOYING  
This



I can tell when things start getting worse - when I start joking about it to myself.

I always tried to avoid "I want to die" jokes because I honestly... got tired of hearing everyone make them

but when I started getting intrusive thoughts while stressed out at 2am my brain says, I want to die!

im feeling a little silly goofy what if I just ran into traffic?

...would people see how I am hurting? would that give me an excuse to rest? and just step out of my world for a moment? what do I have in this house that could hurt me?

no... that would actually hurt. Just go to sleep.

I felt like I was just getting through things. I realized a lot of work I was making was just to get it done. The most important things I had done were projects important to me; but it was getting hard to keep caring about things.

But over time, caring about things started to not even matter any more. Living on my own in college suddenly made things a lot more difficult. Feeding myself was unexpectedly difficult. Finding jobs soon, and the growing threat of having to financially support myself seemed impossible on top of a workload I was already overwhelmed by.

All of these things loomed over me, but all that felt possible to do was to lie down. "Coping with it" turned from going along with the daily routine, to barely getting through the day.

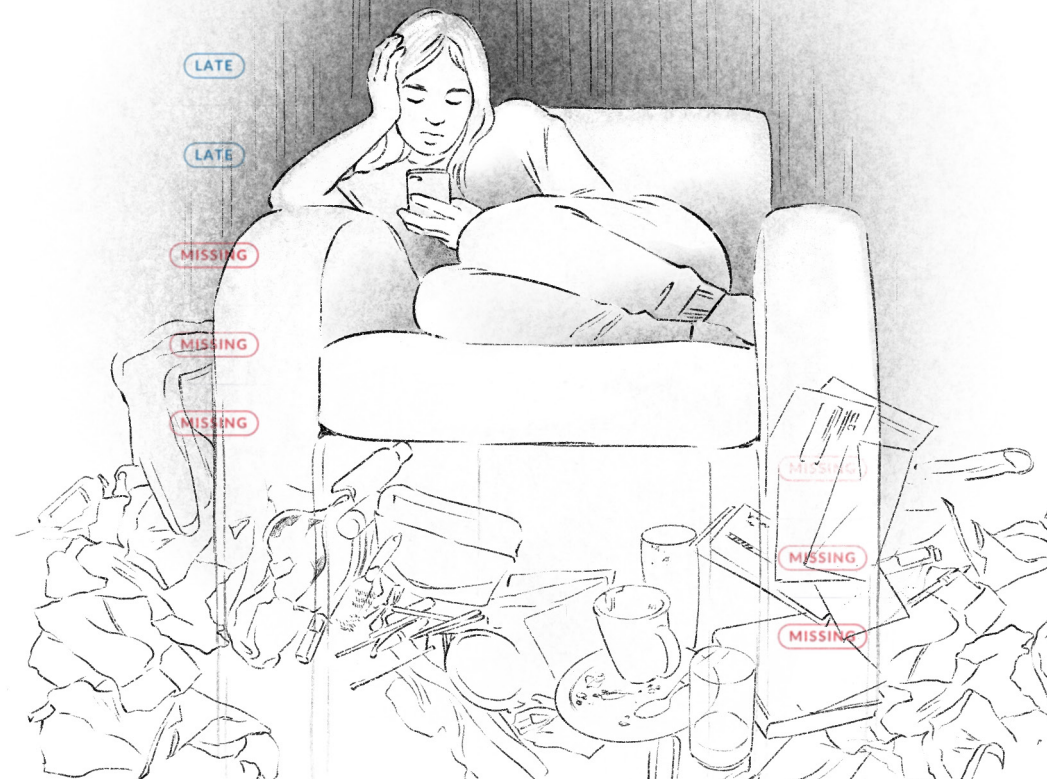
I knew tackling my responsibilities, just getting started on one thing would be the best for my mental health. But overwhelmed by constant stress, the easiest way to get through the day was to give myself a break from worrying and just ignore it for a

moment...

Just a moment...

Just a moment...

Just a moment



The walls were closing in, and I was so overwhelmed, that it felt like there were only two paths before me:

Get up, get my class projects done, and maybe make it through this semester of college, *OR*,

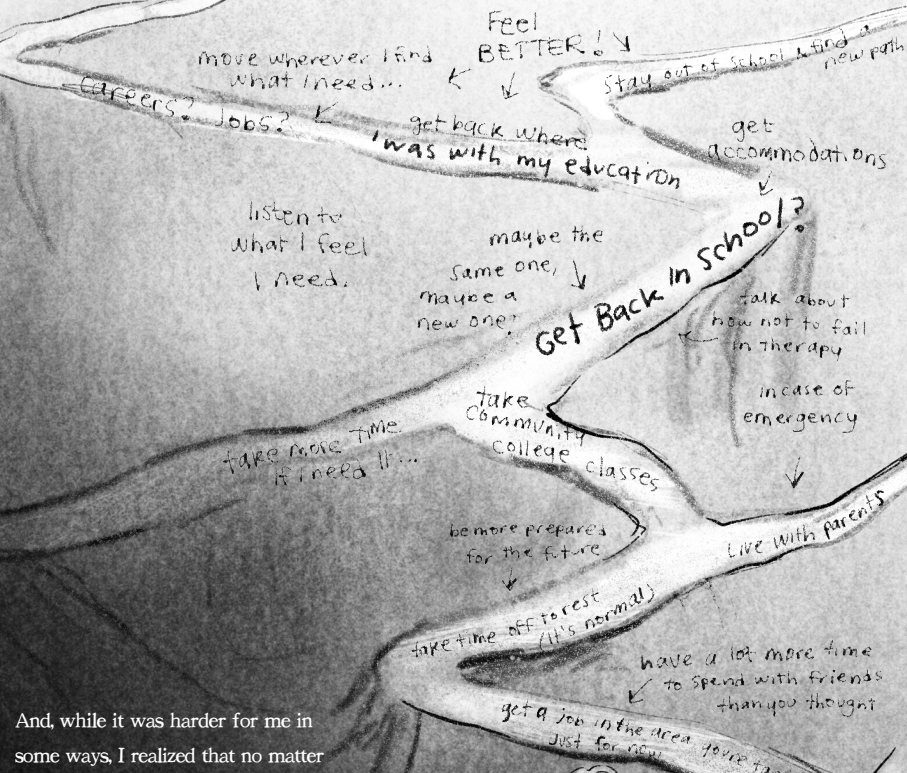
Fail everything,  
drop out of school,  
lose my entire future,  
and consequently identity;  
basically,

Just  
kill  
myself!

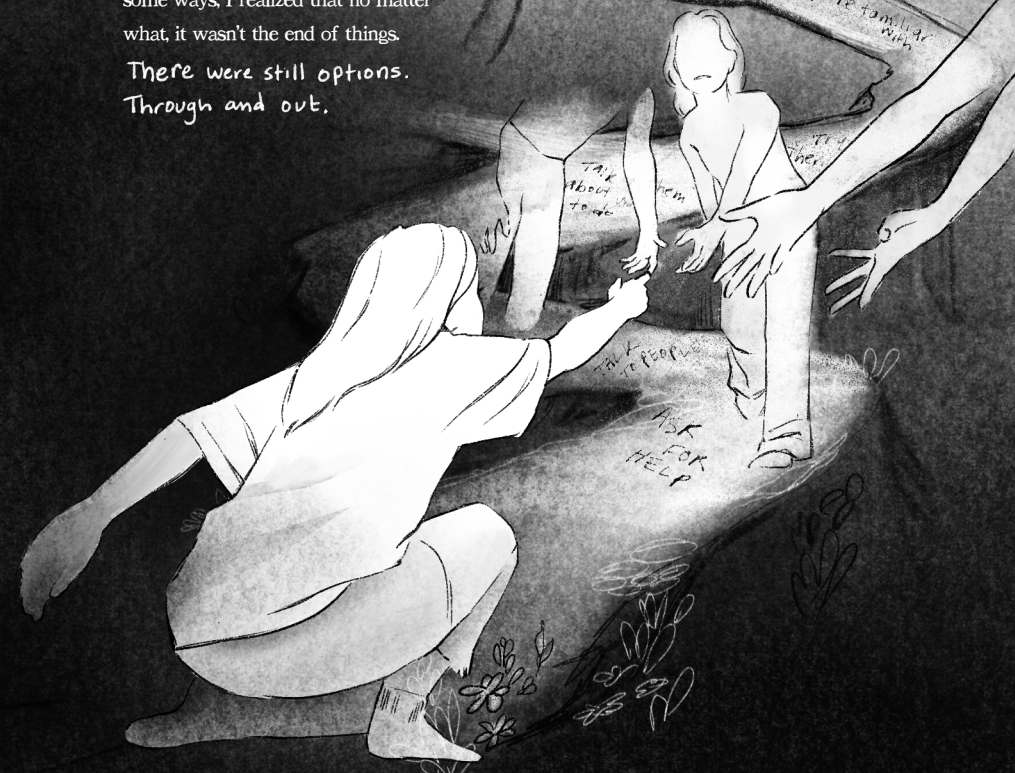


Then, the unthinkable happened:

I DID FAIL  
OUT OF SCHOOL.



And, while it was harder for me in some ways, I realized that no matter what, it wasn't the end of things. There were still options. Through and out.



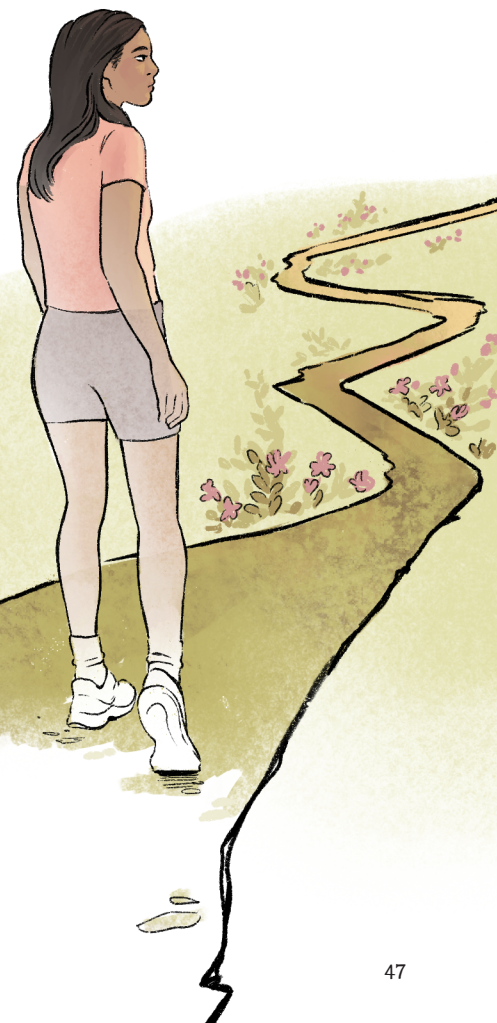
It surprised me how many friends I knew had also taken breaks from school, or failed out. And also, how many people were still willing to help, or just still be around.

Dropping out of school provided surprising opportunities, even just little things like getting to know the area I lived in outside of the college, having an extra year to spend with friends, and saving up some money at a part time job. It felt freeing knowing I could do things at whatever pace worked for me. It really is like everyone tells you, you don't need any certain conditions for happiness. You really don't need to be getting anywhere at any particular time at all. Just getting through it in whatever way works for you.

Even knowing all this, I am still depressed. It's still difficult to motivate myself on a lot of days, I still cry at parties, the smallest things can ruin my day, and I don't know if I'm going to need even more breaks from school in the future.

But I will still be getting through it.  
And enjoying the fact that I'll be alive  
to experience anything I encounter  
on the way.

TAKE  
CARE OF  
YOURSELF,  
OKAY?



tell me how you feel.

Sometimes I feel..

*Tips:*

*Collage old photos from a memory, a journal entry,  
or old drawings.*

*Take photos of yourself acting something out.  
Collage them or trace on top of them.*

*Use the questions however works best for you!*

What were your earliest memories of this feeling?

How did it manifest in your life?

I remember...

What did you think this emotion looked like before you identified with it?

What stopped you from identifying with it - or validating your own feelings?

I thought...

What is apparent to you NOW?

How has this behavior affected you - what costs does it have on your life?

But looking back...

What is a recent event that brought  
this feeling into awareness?  
tell me about it!

How might it inspire you to change?



What have you learned?

What thoughts and behavior help you thrive (or function) now?

YOUR EXPERIENCES MAKE THE THINGS YOU LEARN, and what makes sense to you, and what works for you, UNIQUE!

Where do you want to be?

What are the ways you've persevered, despite all the costs you're aware of?

BE KIND TO YOURSELF.



## Find this work online



Read this story on Issuu



Read and download the full story from itch.io

*(and make a donation, if you'd like!)*

In the future, this project hopes to expand to include a website for sharing your own stories and reading others' stories. Right now, you can follow project updates on instagram!



@tell.me.how.2023

You can find Celia Cousineau on social media as @PineyBlues or see more design and illustration work at [CeliaCousineau.com](http://CeliaCousineau.com).

## Resources

### Emergency help

Call 911 or go directly to an emergency room if you or someone you know is in immediate danger.

National suicide and & crisis lifeline: 988

Rosecrance 24/7 Crisis Line: 217-359-4141

### Resources for students

*UIUC's counseling center* 217-333-3704

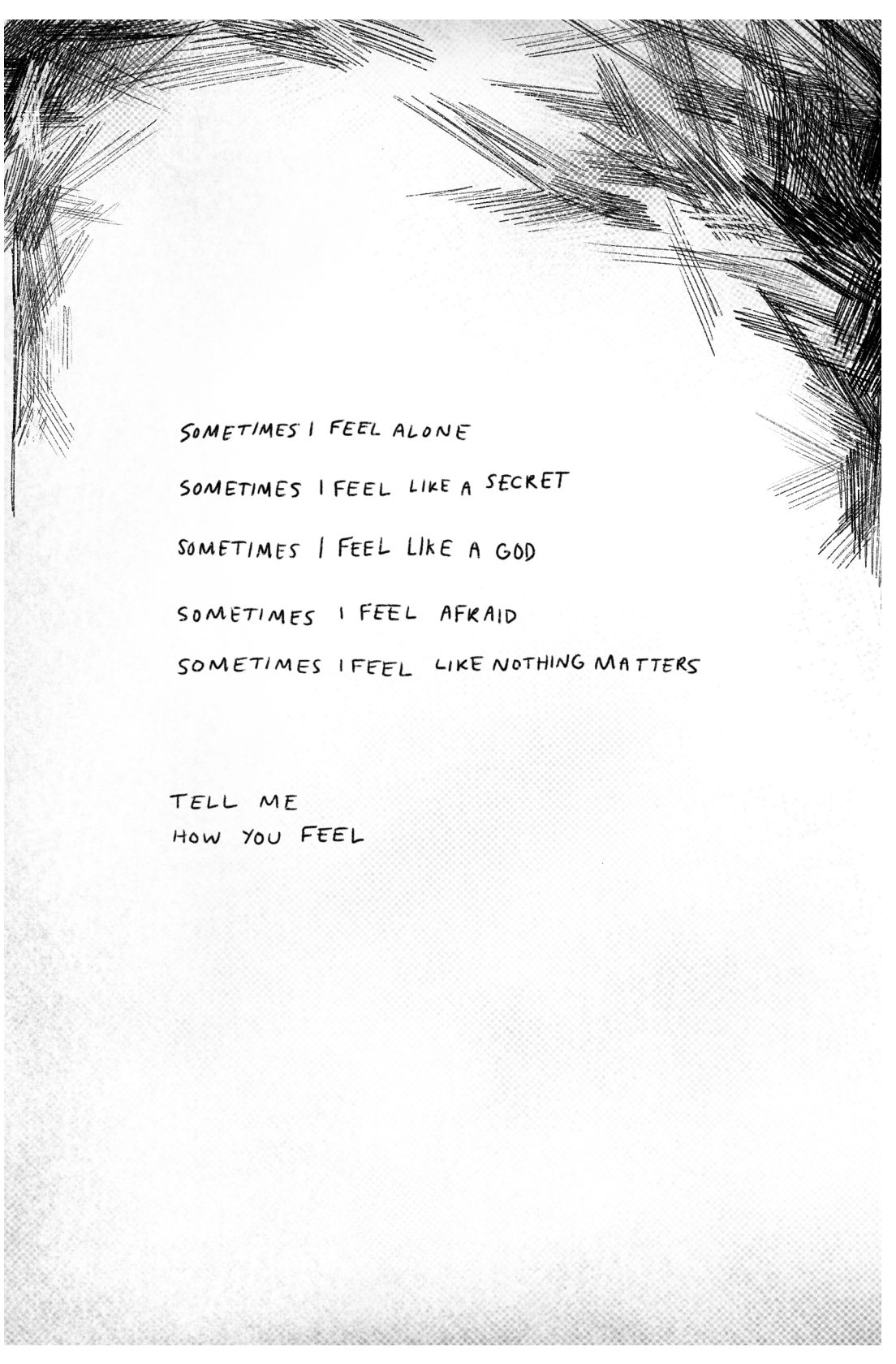
You can schedule counseling appointments during weekday business hours, either online or by phone call. They take emergency calls and walk-ins, or an appointment can be scheduled within a few days. They offer limited time services, but can help you find a longer-term community therapist.

*Mckinley Mental Health* 217-333-2700

You can schedule same-day emergency appointments from 8am-4pm if you feel you are a danger to yourself or others. Otherwise, an appointment can usually be scheduled within a few weeks. Appointments can be made over phone only.

Psychiatrists at Mckinley can provide a diagnosis, prescribe medication, and help with coping skills over time. Mckinley also offers limited counseling.

*More resources for students and community can be found at:*  
[psychology.illinois.edu/mental-health-resources](http://psychology.illinois.edu/mental-health-resources)



SOMETIMES I FEEL ALONE

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A SECRET

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A GOD

SOMETIMES I FEEL AFRAID

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE NOTHING MATTERS

TELL ME

HOW YOU FEEL