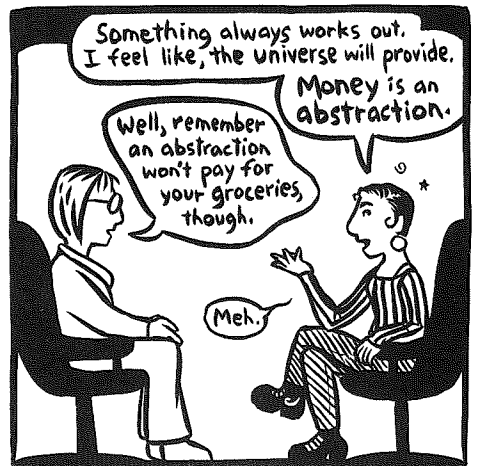
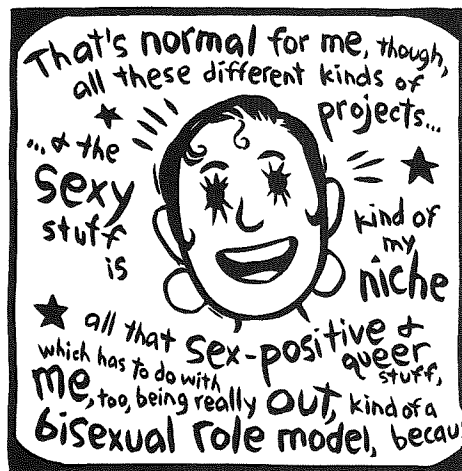


# MARBLES

MANIA, DEPRESSION, MICHELANGELO, & ME  
A GRAPHIC MEMOIR BY *ellen forney*



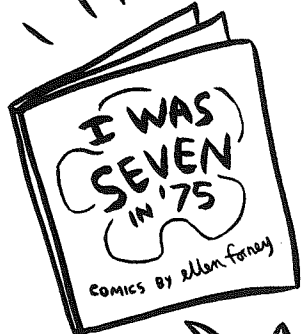
GOTHAM  
BOOKS



A WEEK LATER...

I HAD ANOTHER EXPLOSIVE, ELECTRIC IDEA ON ONE OF MY ENERGY-BURNING WALKS.

bright white flash!!



I'D JUST RELEASED MY FIRST BOOK, A XERIC GRANT-FUNDED COLLECTION OF MY WEEKLY COMIC STRIPS. I'D HAD ONE INTOXICATINGLY WELL-ATTENDED READING/PERFORMANCE--

but one was not enough!

I needed a BIGGER BOOK RELEASE PARTY!

I WAS REALLY EXCITED ABOUT MY UPCOMING MILESTONE BIRTHDAY, THE BIG 3-0.

I needed a BIG PARTY!



I could do them TOGETHER as ONE BIG BIRTHDAY PARTY for EVERYONE who was 7 in '75!! We were ALL turning 30!

I ROPED IN MY FRIENDS + MADE THE MOST OF MY CONNECTIONS.

LOCAL CLUB OWNER STEVE AGREED TO HOST AT COOL LOCAL CLUB,



Steve → Riz is deejaying that night, too. I ♥ Riz!

FASHION DESIGNER FRIEND REYMOND AGREED TO MAKE MY DRESS...



CLOSE FRIEND DI AGREED TO PLAY WITH HER 8-PIECE LOUNGE BAND...



PRINTER RISA (MY EX) AGREED TO PRINT POSTERS + STICKERS

CARTOONISTS MEGAN + CASEY AGREED TO HELP INDIVIDUALLY DECORATE OVER 100 PARTY HATS...



STRANGER COLUMNIST STEVE AGREED TO EMCEE...



SWIM TEAMMATE MARK AGREED TO DRESS IN DRAG + MAKE SURE EVERYONE WORE "PARTY GARB"...



WRITER DAVID AGREED TO READ THE SEX SCENE FROM FOREVER BY JUDY BLUME WITH ME...



ACTOR STEPHEN AGREED TO DO A WARM-UP ACT AS BUDDING FOLK SINGER



FORMER HOUSEMATE JULIE AGREED TO RUN MY NEW SPIN ART MACHINE...



SWIM TEAMMATE PHILLIP AGREED TO BE MY ASSISTANT...



...AND SHAWN AGREED TO DESIGN THE POSTER. HE URGED ME TO EDIT DOWN THE WORD COUNT\* BUT I COULDN'T - IT WAS ALL TOO IMPORTANT.

I COULDN'T STOP - EVERY TIME I HAD AN IDEA, I WAS COMPELLED TO PURSUE IT.

\*DESIGNERS, MYSELF INCLUDED, HATE WORKING WITH LOTS OF CLUTTERING TEXT.

I CONVINCED MY FAMILY TO COME.

ONLY MY MOM KNEW TO WORRY ABOUT MY UNBRIDLED ENERGY.

\*I BELIEVED MARRIAGE WAS AN OBSOLETE INSTITUTION THAT INEVITABLY LEADS TO DIVORCE (COINCIDENTALLY... LIKE MY PARENTS' DIVORCE).



MOM + I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CLOSE.



A LOT OF PEOPLE THOUGHT I WAS DRAWING MYSELF, WHICH PLEASED ME.

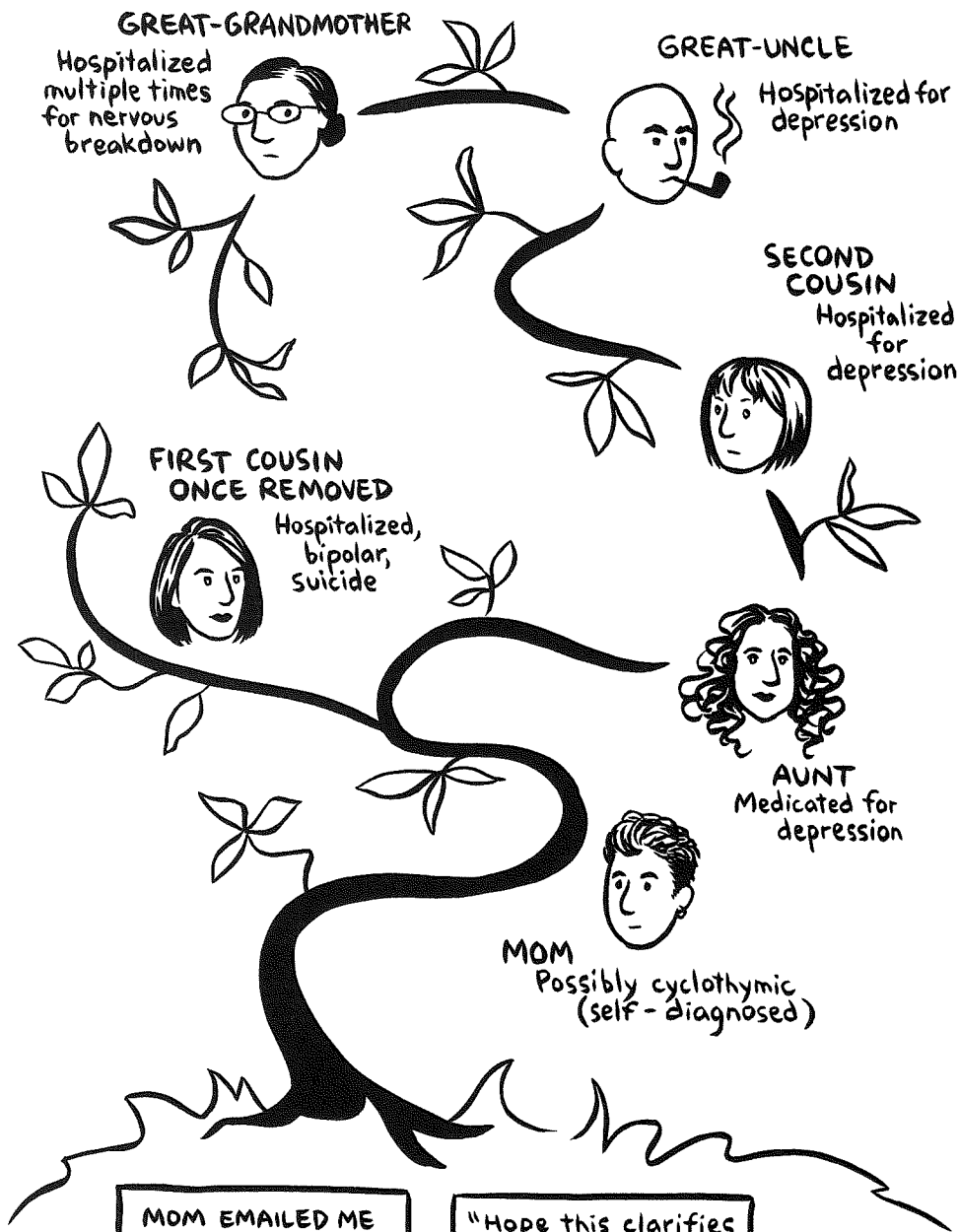


I HAD TOLD MY MOM (A DOCTOR) THAT I WAS BIPOLAR A FEW DAYS AFTER MY DIAGNOSIS. SHE LISTENED TO THE REST OF MY PART OF THE CONVERSATION AS A PARADE OF SYMPTOMS.



THIS IS THE JEWISH SIDE OF MY FAMILY, DID I MENTION THAT?

IT WAS MOM'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY WITH THE MOOD DISORDERS.



MOM EMAILED ME THIS LIST AT KAREN'S REQUEST.

"Hope this clarifies things.  
Love, MOMOX"

hug ↑ kiss

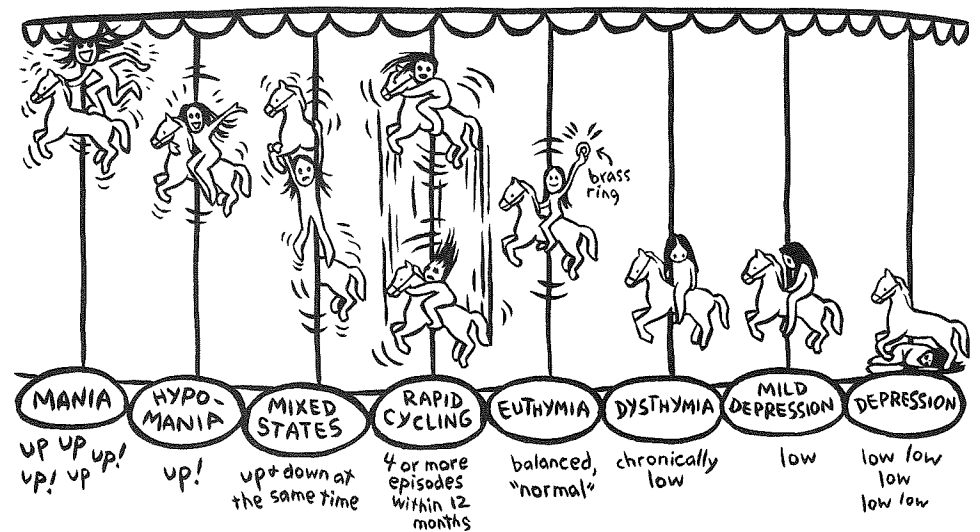
DEPRESSION, NERVOUS BREAKDOWN? BIPOLAR, SUICIDE?? I'D HAD NO IDEA.

# What is a "MOOD DISORDER" anyway?

BASICALLY, IT'S A CONDITION WHERE EMOTIONS ARE DERAILED FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME. THE MAIN TYPES ARE:

- ★ **BIPOLAR I:** ALTERNATING MANIC + DEPRESSIVE EPISODES ← (that's me)
- ★ **BIPOLAR II:** ALTERNATING HYPOMANIC + DEPRESSIVE EPISODES  
↳ "HYPOMANIA" = MILD MANIA
- ★ **CYCLOTHYMIA:** ALTERNATING HYPOMANIC + MILD DEPRESSIVE EPISODES
- ★ **UNIPOLAR DEPRESSION:** SINGLE OR RECURRENT EPISODES WITH NO MANIA
- ★ **DYSTHYMIA:** CHRONIC, LOW-GRADE DEPRESSION

... WHICH REFER TO THESE MOOD STATES:



NOTE: "BIPOLAR DISORDER" & "MANIC DEPRESSION" ARE THE SAME THING.

I TURNED 30! LOTS OF OTHER 7-IN-'75-ERS WERE THERE, TOO, ALSO TURNING 30! I WAS ON TOP OF THE WORLD.

**HOW TO COMB YOUR WINGS**

- 1 TAKE COMB OUT OF BACK POCKET.
- 2 RIGHT HAND COMBS HAIR DOWN INTO LEFT PALM.
- 3 RIGHT HAND COMBS HAIR BACK AS LEFT HAND FOLDS HAIR ONTO HEAD.
- 4 REPEAT UNTIL HAIR AROUND FACE IS PERPENDICULAR TO HAIR ON SIDES.

Comb down, & fold hair onto head. Repeat until hair around face is perpendicular to hair on sides.

Success!

HA YAY! ha ha HA

Thank you! okay, time for birthday cake! Who else was 7 in '75?!

Vanilla butter-creme cake from Borracchini's! *\$\$ Seattle bakery*

Make a wish! YUM!

shmoney! Money Display & costume receipt

I DIDN'T CARE. IT WAS A GREAT PARTY. MONEY HADN'T EVER FIGURED INTO MY PLANS AT ALL, ANYWAY.

The Big 3-Oh was a SMASHING SUCCESS!

THOUGH, THE GUEST LIST WAS SO LONG, & THE DECORATIONS SO INVOLVED, IT WOUND UP COSTING ME A LOT OF MONEY.

BECAUSE WE LIVE SO FAR FROM EACH OTHER, WHEN MY IMMEDIATE FAMILY GETS TOGETHER, WE USUALLY SPEND ABOUT A WEEK TOGETHER.

CONVENIENTLY, MOM & DAD GET ALONG GREAT.

Lee, did I give you the rental car keys? I'm going for groceries.

Yep, I gotten - you want some company?

Absolutely!

Ellen, your parents are weird & amazing.

I know.

the previous year's gathering: a week at a rental house on Long Beach Island

MY FAMILY HAS ALWAYS BEEN UNCONVENTIONAL.

WEEKENDS AT SUNSHINE PARK, A NUDIST CAMP IN NJ

POT-SMOKING PARENTS  
dollhouse furniture for a combo celebration of our new red, white, & blue bathroom & a pot party, called "The Potty Party."

UNITARIANS  
The Unitarian Society  
PARKING

IN 1980 WE MOVED FROM ONE HOUSE IN NJ --  
MOM → DAD  
TO TWO IN PHILA --  
& JOINT CUSTODY MEANT MATT & I MOVED EVERY 2 MONTHS.

AWKWARD BUT WELL-INTENTIONED THANKSGIVINGS  
me (14 yo) Matt (15 yo)  
Mom's girlfriend Dad's girlfriend

the early days (snippets from "I was seven in '75" strips)

the days just after that

the later days

DAD: ENGINEER TURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER TURNED OIL PAINTER

MOM: LESBIAN STONER PEDIATRICIAN

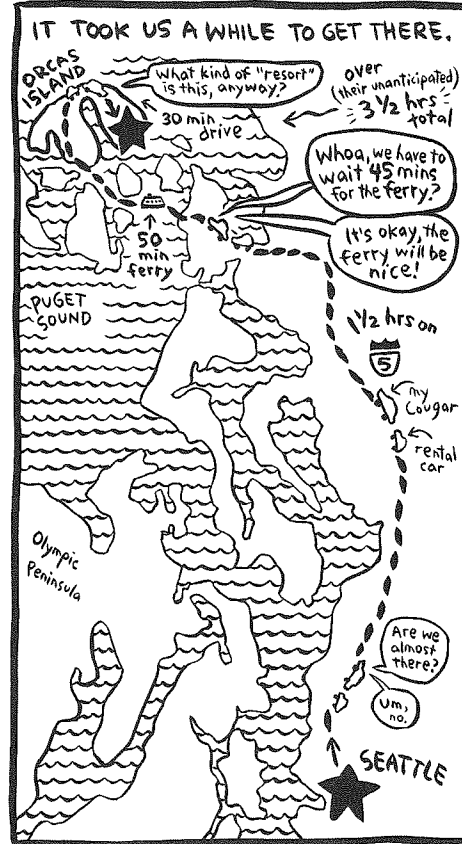
MATT: OBERLIN ALUM JOURNALIST EX-PAT IN CHINA

ME: VEGETARIAN BISEXUAL CARTOONIST

WE'RE PRETTY TIGHTLY-KNIT, WHICH HAS ITS ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES.



AS PART OF MY FAMILY'S EXTENDED VISIT, I PLANNED A 3-DAY STAY FOR US AT DOE BAY, A SEMI-RUNDOWN HIPPIE RESORT ON ORCAS ISLAND.

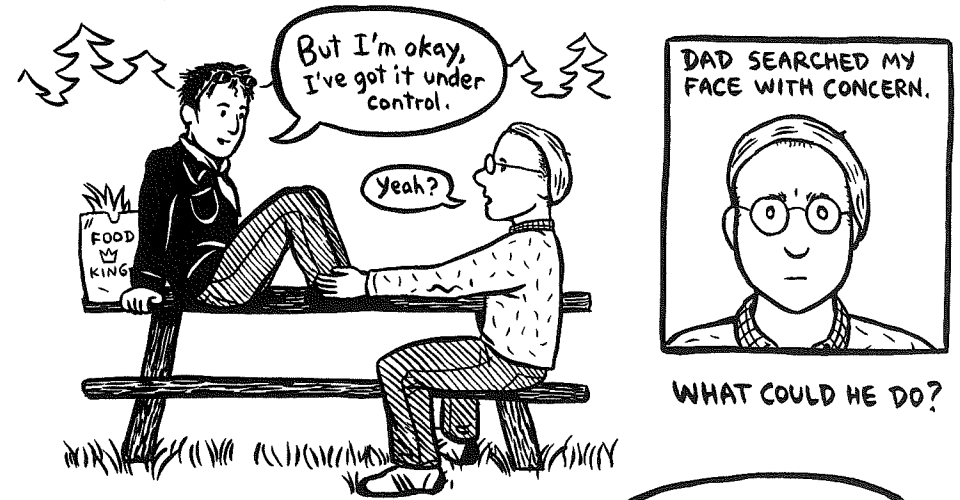


IT WAS IMMEDIATELY CLEAR THAT THIS HAD NOT BEEN A GOOD IDEA.



WE STAYED ANYWAY, DESPITE THE NAKED HIPPIES + PLASTIC DOOR FLAPS.

IN THE MORNING, WHILE MOM + MATT FORAGED FOR COFFEE, I TOLD MY FATHER I WAS BIPOLAR AS WE SAT ON A PICNIC BENCH OVERLOOKING PUGET SOUND.

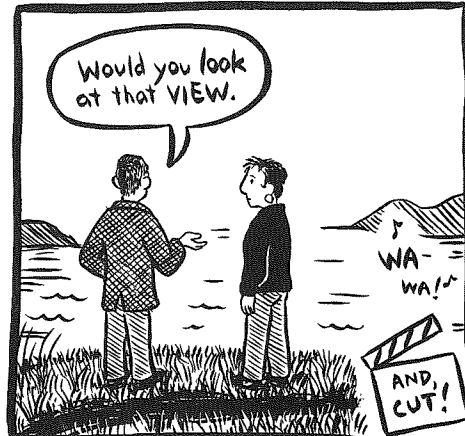


THEN HE TOOK OUT HIS CAMERA AND I CLOWNED AROUND WITH THE PINEAPPLE WE'D BOUGHT FOR BREAKFAST...

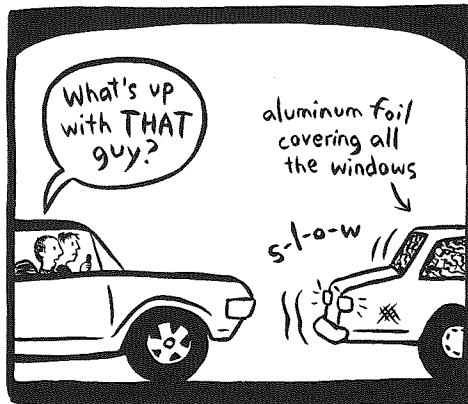


...NORMALIZING THINGS WITH THE FAMILIAR TAKING OF FAMILY VACATION PHOTOS.

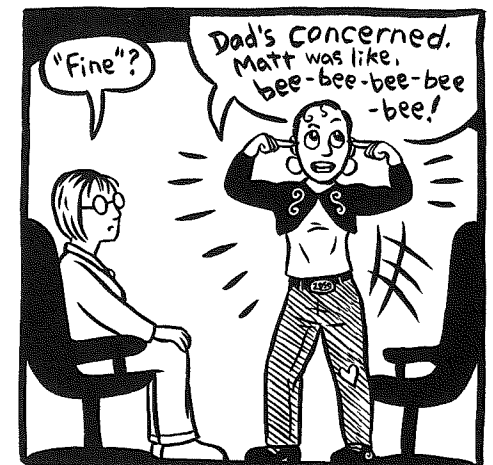
I TOLD MY BROTHER LATER, WHEN WE WERE HIKING ON THE TENDED PATHS OF MOUNT CONSTITUTION.



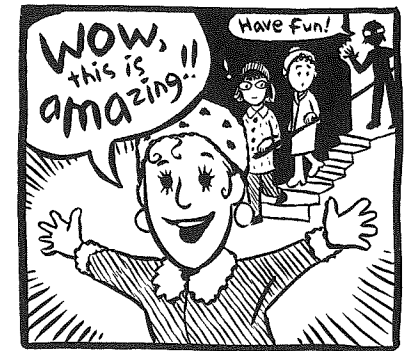
BUT LATER, ON THE WAY BACK TO DOE BAY:



WE LEFT EARLY ON THE THIRD DAY & HEADED BACK TO SEATTLE, AND THEN, WITH LOVE & RELIEF, BACK TO OUR SEPARATE PARTS OF THE WORLD.



\*ONE MILLIGRAM EVERY NIGHT AT BEDTIME



IT WAS, IN FACT, DRESS-UP HEAVEN.



BUT THERE WAS NO SEPARATE ROOM IN THE BASEMENT, SO WE HAD TO CHANGE IN THE OPEN, WHICH CLEARLY MADE MEGAN + CASEY UNEASY.

They need to loosen up! This is good for them.

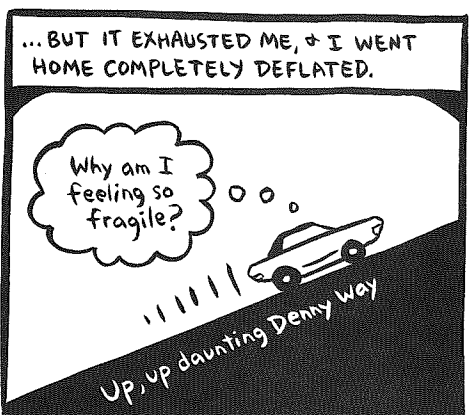
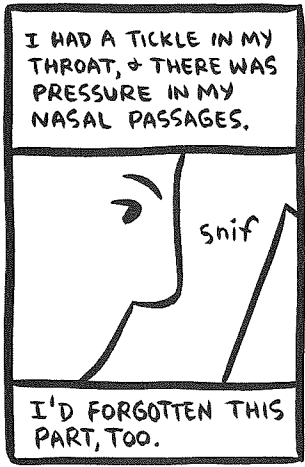
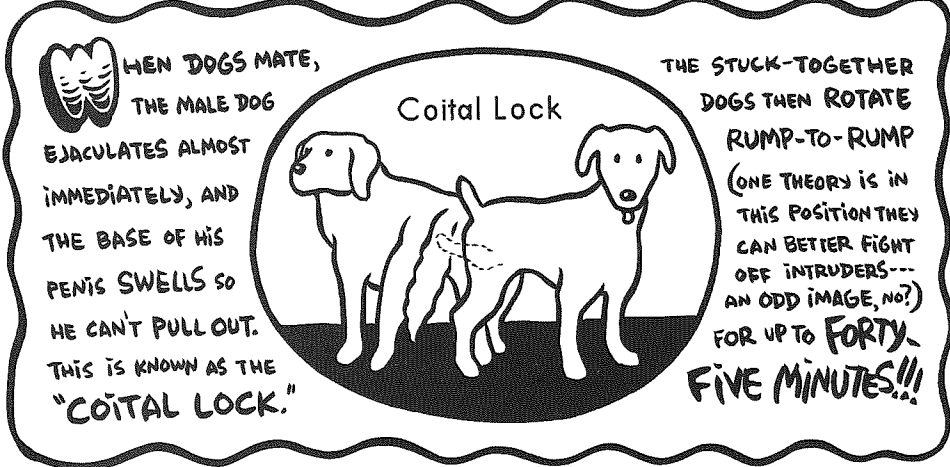
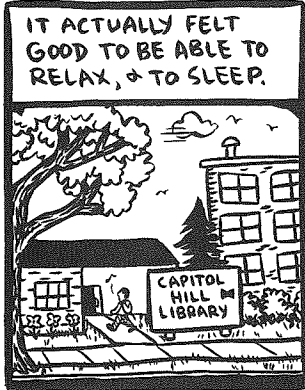


VAN + MO CAME DOWNSTAIRS, WE POSED FOR A FEW PHOTOS, + LEFT.

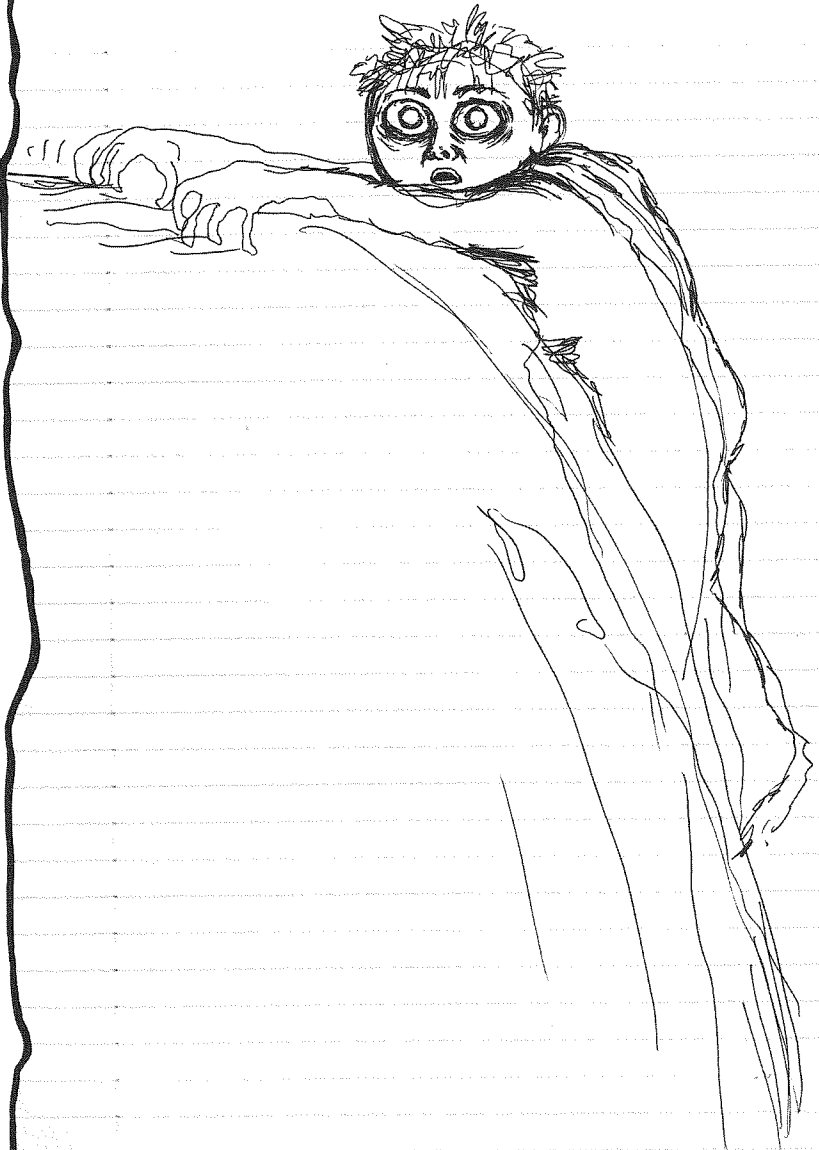


MY SURPRISE ADVENTURE DIDN'T GO OVER WELL. I DIDN'T SEE MUCH OF EITHER OF THEM FOR A LONG TIME.

AFTER A FEW WEEKS, I SENSED THAT I HAD LANDED, A FAMILIAR FEELING I'D FORGOTTEN.



I WAS SLIPPING DOWN  
AND THERE WAS NOTHING  
I COULD HOLD ON TO.



I'D BEEN SO SURE I COULD  
MANAGE WITHOUT MEDS, THAT I  
COULD TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

THAT CONVICTION DISAPPEARED  
ALL AT ONCE.

IN COLLEGE, I WAS A LIFEGUARD FOR A SUMMER,  
AND WE WERE TRAINED TO STAY BACK FROM A  
PERSON WHO WAS DROWNING + IN A PANIC.  
CHANCES WERE GOOD THEY'D CLIMB ON TOP OF  
YOU IN AN INSTINCTUAL DRIVE TO GET TO THE  
SURFACE, + YOU'D BOTH GO UNDER.

YOU TOSS THEM A LIFE PRESERVER.

FLAILING, TUMBLING OVER MYSELF  
+ DESPERATE, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO  
DO BUT PUT ALL MY TRUST IN KAREN.

SHE PUT ME ON LITHIUM  
+ I NO LONGER RESISTED.

LITHIUM MADE IT OFFICIAL:  
I WAS



THE LIST OF POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS WAS LONG.

Lithium also Eskalith  
Lithobid

weight gain  
hand tremor  
blurred vision  
confusion  
mental slowness  
poor concentration  
impaired memory  
skin problems  
(acne, hair loss)  
thirst  
polyuria  
(peeing a lot)  
renal problems  
(kidneys)  
liver problems  
thyroid problems  
cognitive problems  
cognitive dulling  
loss of coordination  
etc.

MY HANDS & EYES WERE TWO OF MY ESSENTIAL WORK TOOLS.

AS IF I DIDN'T ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH SKIN PROBLEMS!

HOW COULD I WORK WITH "COGNITIVE DULLING"?

WHAT CHOICE DID I HAVE?

I WAS LOST.

plus:  
wrong blood levels can cause dangerous lithium toxicity so drink 3 liters water every day  
+ expect lots of blood draws.

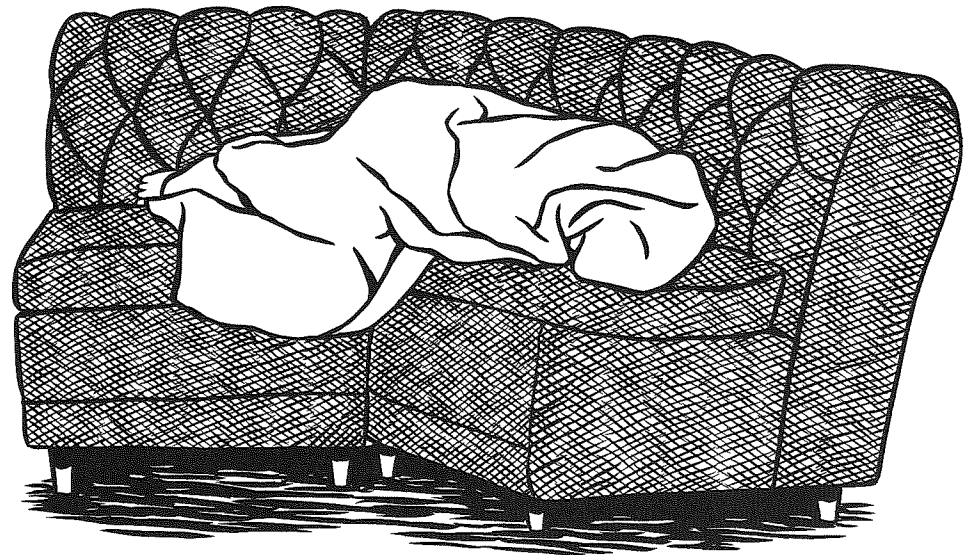
BUT LITHIUM IS A MOOD STABILIZER AND DOESN'T USUALLY LIFT A DEPRESSION THAT'S ALREADY BEGUN...

... SO I FELL INTO THE HOLE ANYWAY.

I COULD BARELY DRAG MYSELF OUT OF BED & TO THE COUCH.

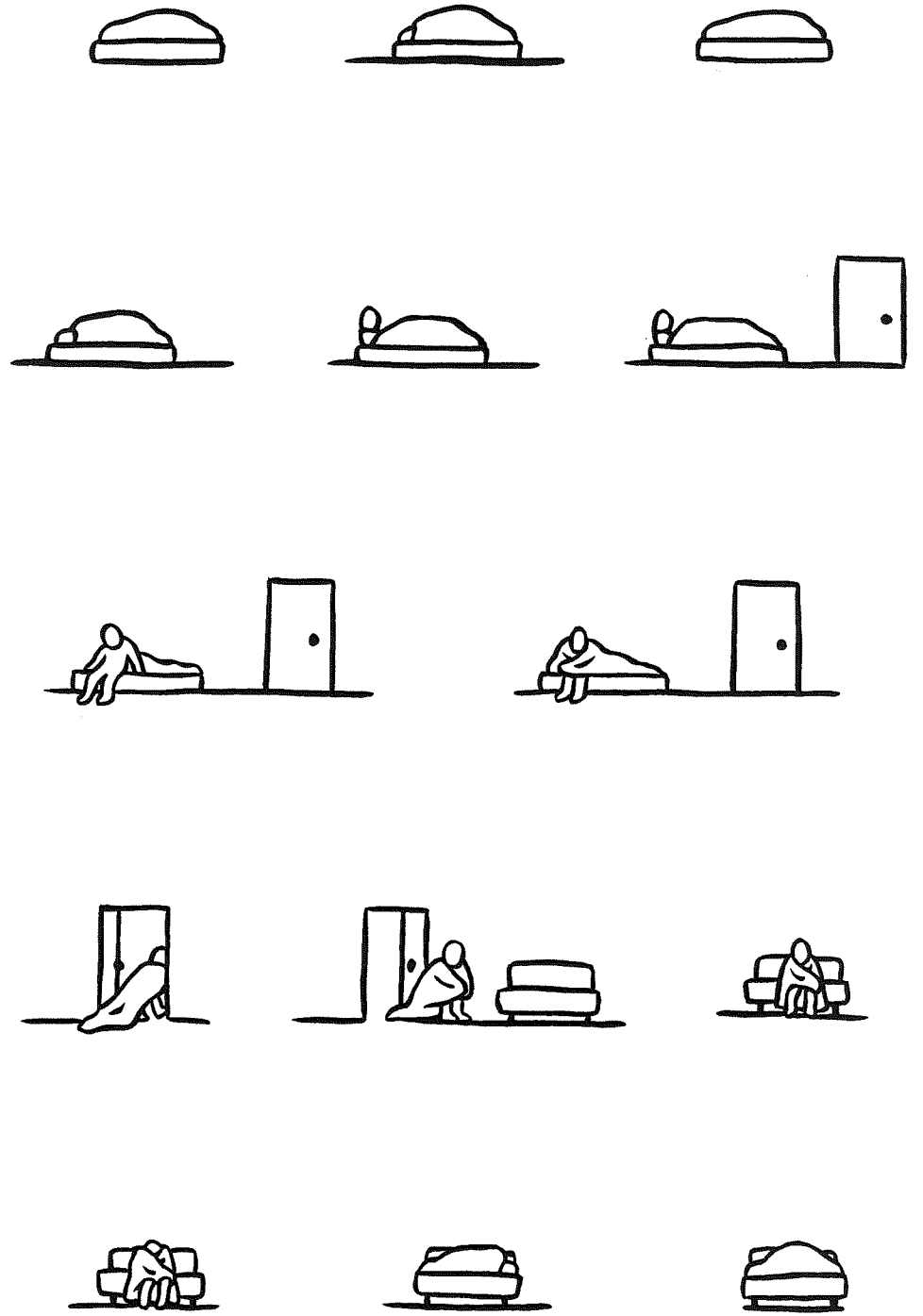
IT WAS CLEAR: THERE WAS NO WAY I'D BE ABLE TO DREDGE UP THE ENERGY OR SASS TO DO THE COMICS I'D PLANNED -- HALF-PLANNED.

THE MANIC-ME-THEN HAD NO POWER TO TAKE CARE OF THE DEPRESSED-ME-NOW.



## CHAPTER 4









WHO COULD I TURN TO? I WAS TERRIFIED, NEEDY, & BORING.

RISA?

WE HADN'T HAD MUCH CONTACT IN THE YEAR AND A HALF SINCE WE'D BROKEN UP.

BUT I TRUSTED RISA, AND SHE HAD A CLOSE FAMILY MEMBER WHO WAS BIPOLAR, SO AT LEAST IT WOULDN'T BE COMPLETELY FOREIGN TERRITORY.



I VISITED HER SHOP AT THE END OF THE DAY.

HER BUSINESS WAS STILL NEW SO SHE WORKED LONG HOURS.



Ellen, you look awful!  
What's going on?

I TOLD HER I'D BEEN DIAGNOSED BIPOLAR. SHE DIDN'T SEEM SURPRISED.



I FELT LIKE ALL MY NERVES WERE EXPOSED. IT WAS A PROFOUND RELIEF TO LET MY GUARD DOWN FOR A MOMENT. WE SAT ON HER COUCH FOR A LONG TIME.



Thanks, Risa.

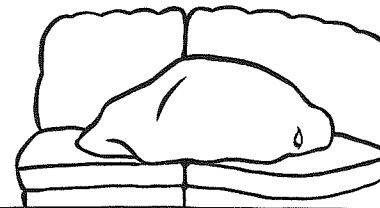
Come by again.

Call if you want.

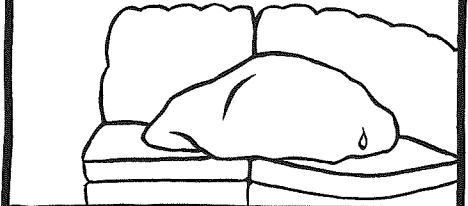
Okay.

Thank you so much.

I CALLED MOM ALMOST EVERY DAY TO HEAR HER SAY SHE LOVED ME, TO BE REMINDED OF ANY REASON FOR USING UP AIR...



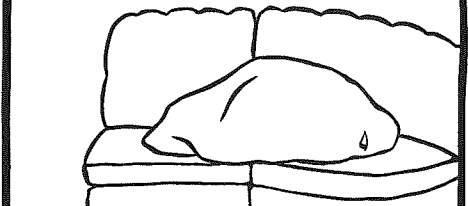
...EVEN THOUGH I KNEW HER LOVE WAS A BLIND MATERNAL INSTINCT, DENSE TO HOW PATHETIC I WAS.



ONE DAY I TOLD MY MOM, & LATER KAREN, THAT I'D BARELY GOTTEN OUT OF BED, ONLY TO FALL ASLEEP ON THE COUCH.

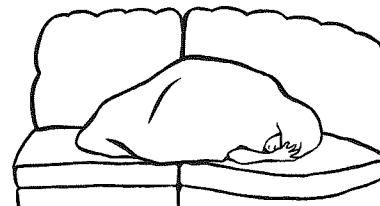


THEY BOTH CONGRATULATED ME FOR GETTING OUT OF BED.

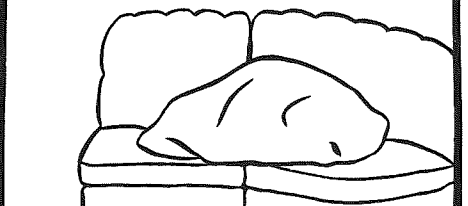


I WAS STRUCK BY HOW LOW THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF ME HAD BECOME.

I KNEW I COULDN'T SERIOUSLY CONSIDER ADDING TO THE SUICIDE STATISTICS, I KNEW IT WOULD RUIN MOM'S LIFE.



BESIDES, SUICIDE SEEMED LIKE AN AWFUL LOT OF EFFORT.



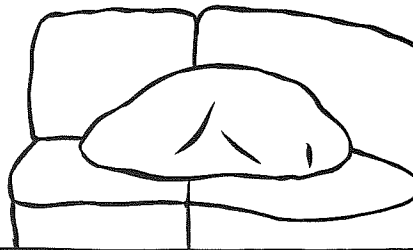
ALL I REALLY WANTED WAS TO DISAPPEAR.

I WAS HAVING A TOUGH TIME WITH THE LITHIUM.

FOR ONE, IT WAS GIVING ME TERRIBLE MEMORY PROBLEMS...



... BUT WORSE, IT WASN'T HELPING.



AFTER A MONTH, I TOOK MYSELF OFF THE LITHIUM.

KAREN WAS STILL HOPEFUL.

The memory problems might be from anxiety, or from the depression itself. The side effects may go away. It's too soon to know if lithium will work for you.



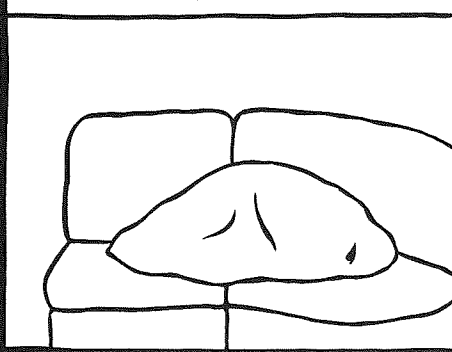
TRUSTING KAREN, & TRYING TO BELIEVE IT WOULD GET BETTER, I RESTARTED THE LITHIUM.

BUT SOON, STILL UNCONVINced THAT I WANTED TO BE ON MEDS AT ALL, TAKING A DRUG THAT MADE ME FEEL EVEN WORSE DIDN'T SEEM TO MAKE SENSE.

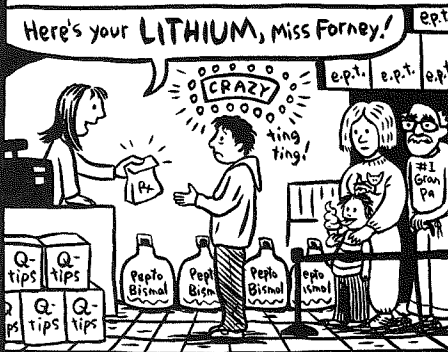


I TOOK MYSELF OFF AGAIN. I WAS ON & OFF LITHIUM FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.

MOM PAID FOR KAREN & FOR HALF OF MY RENT. I HAD HEALTH INSURANCE BUT IT DIDN'T COVER MENTAL HEALTH.



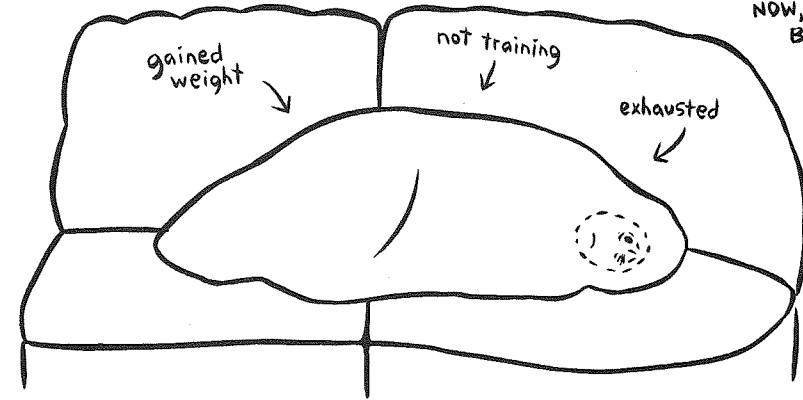
I BOUGHT MY OWN MEDS OUT-OF-POCKET, & I'D DRIVE DOWN SOUTH TO COSTCO, WHERE THEY WERE CHEAPEST.



I WAS IN A FOG. INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE TOOK ALL THE ENERGY I COULD MUSTER. I STILL SWAM, SLOWLY, BUT THAT WAS IT FOR EXERCISE.

BUT SOON LOOMED THE

# DANSKIN TRIATHLON.



I'D BEEN SO EXCITED. IT WAS GOING TO BE MY FIRST TRIATHLON. I'D TOLD EVERYONE ABOUT IT. NOW, I DREADED GOING. BUT, NOT GOING SOUNDED EVEN WORSE.

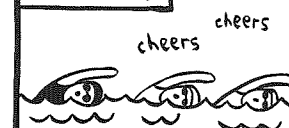
WHICH WOULD MAKE ME THE BIGGER LOSER?

I DECIDED I'D DRAG MY SORRY ASS THERE, & DO WHAT LITTLE I COULD.

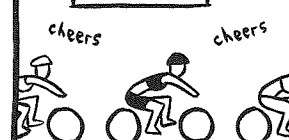
MOM CAME UP FROM LA WITH HER GIRLFRIEND TO CHEER FOR ME.

TO MY ENORMOUS RELIEF, MY BODY CLICKED INTO OLD FAMILIAR PATTERNS.

I SWAM,



I BIKED,



I RAN.



COMPETING IS VERY IN-THE-MOMENT, & REQUIRES LETTING GO OF EXTRANEIOUS THOUGHTS, THAT PLUS THE ENDORPHINS, & THE MENTAL FOCUS WAS STARTLING.



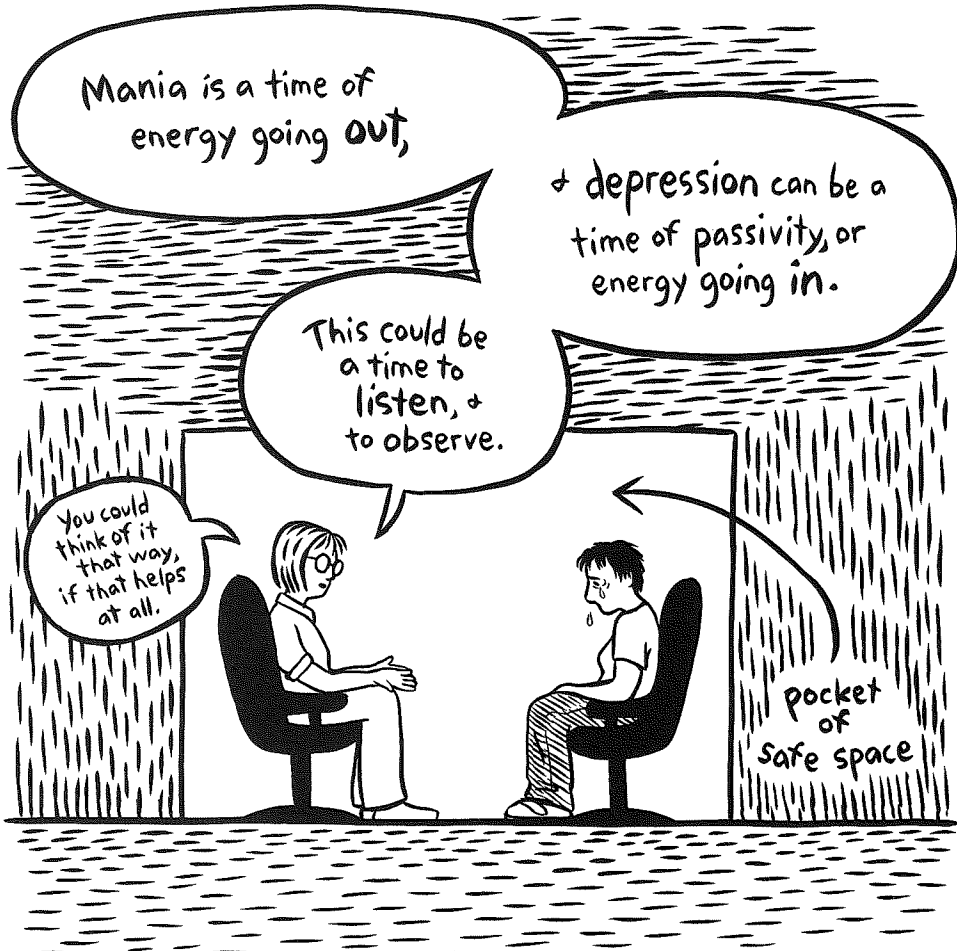
I MADE IT, IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE. I DID THE ABSOLUTE AVERAGE TIME FOR THE WHOLE RACE, BUT THAT WAS OKAY. FOR A FEW HOURS, I'D PIERCED THE FOG.

MOM TOOK DI & ME OUT FOR A REALLY NICE DINNER...



... BUT THE FOG DESCENDED AGAIN BY THE END OF THE EVENING.

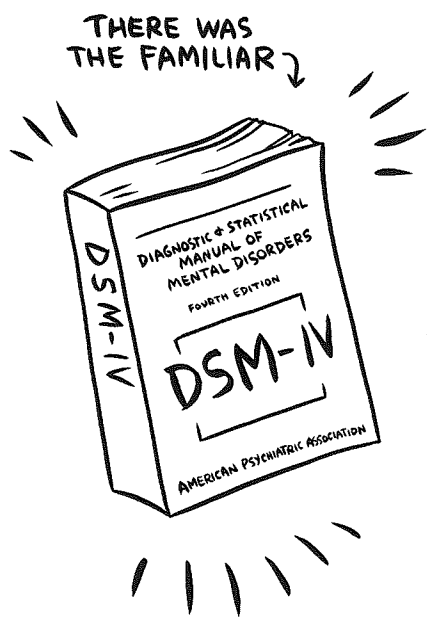
I HAD NO SENSE OF PURPOSE. I FELT LIKE I WAS MISSING MY SKIN.



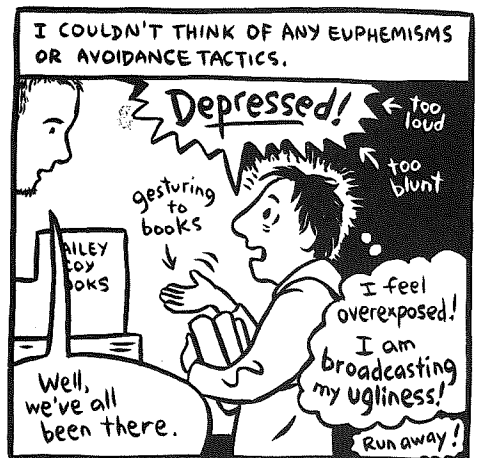
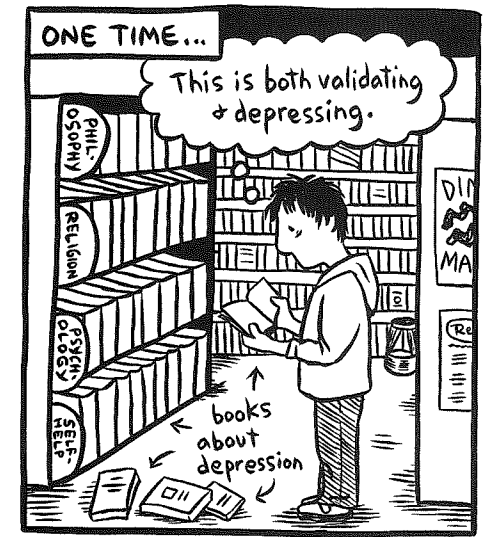
I SAW KAREN ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK, AND HER OFFICE WAS THE ONLY PLACE I COULD REALLY RELAX.

LONELY, NEARLY UNABLE TO SOCIALIZE, SCARED, CONFUSED, & ADRIFT, I TURNED TO BOOKS FOR SOLACE.

THERE WERE A FEW BOOKS IN PARTICULAR THAT PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR ME.



I DIDN'T FIND THE KEY TO RELIEF IN MY LOCAL BOOKSTORE, BUT I GOT TO READ THE LIST OF DSM-IV SYMPTOMS CITED OVER & OVER.



## DSM-IV Criteria for a Major Depressive Episode

5 (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-wk period & represent a change from previous functioning.

(1) depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day

every day...

(2) markedly diminished pleasure in all, or almost all, activities nearly every day

yes...

(3) significant weight loss or gain, or increased or decreased appetite nearly every day

weight gain...

(4) insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day

"hypersomnia," that's a good word.

(5) psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day

Weird, these are opposites but they're all true.

(6) fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day

every day, every day, every day...

(7) feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt nearly every day

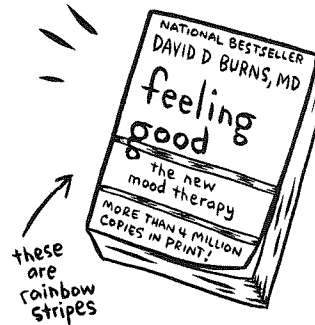
every day, every day, every day...

(8) diminished ability to think or concentrate nearly every day

no, thank god.

(9) recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation with or without a specific plan or a suicide attempt.

Yeesh.



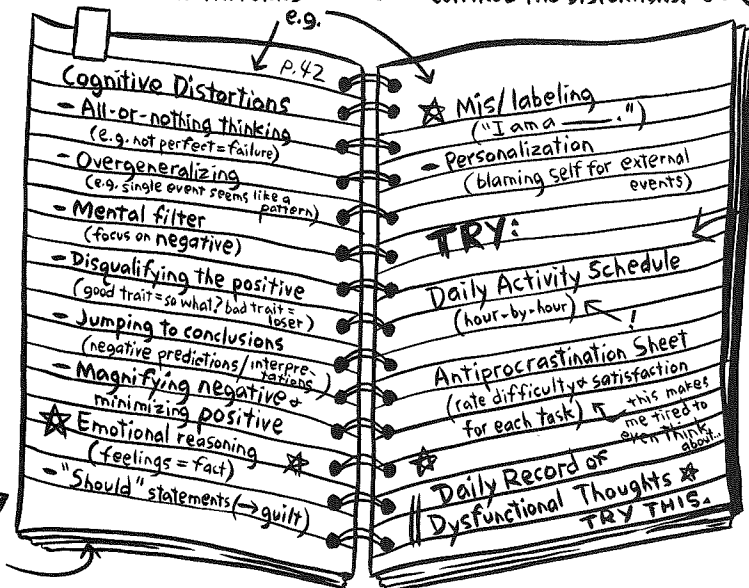
IT HAD A LOT OF GOOD INFORMATION, PRESENTED CLEARLY... IN AN ANNOYING, SELF-HELPY WAY.

CBT'S INTRIGUING PREMISE IS THAT DEPRESSION CAUSES DISTORTED THOUGHT PATTERNS, WHICH THE DEPRESSED PERSON CAN READJUST

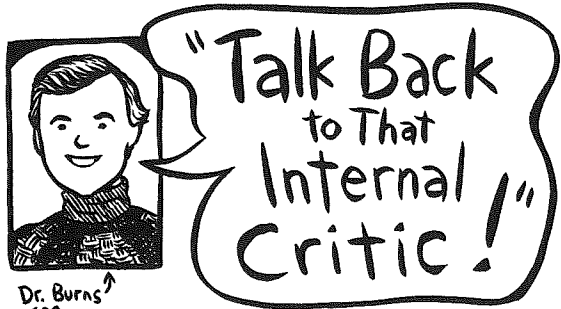
BY:   
 UNDERSTANDING HOW THE PATTERNS WORK,   
 & DOING EXERCISES TO CONTROL THE DISTORTIONS.   
 with no meds!

I took notes in my reporter's notebook (!)

notes for a comic about the Tacoma Zoo   
 Judy Blume interview



THE EXERCISE I FOUND MOST USEFUL WAS CALLED

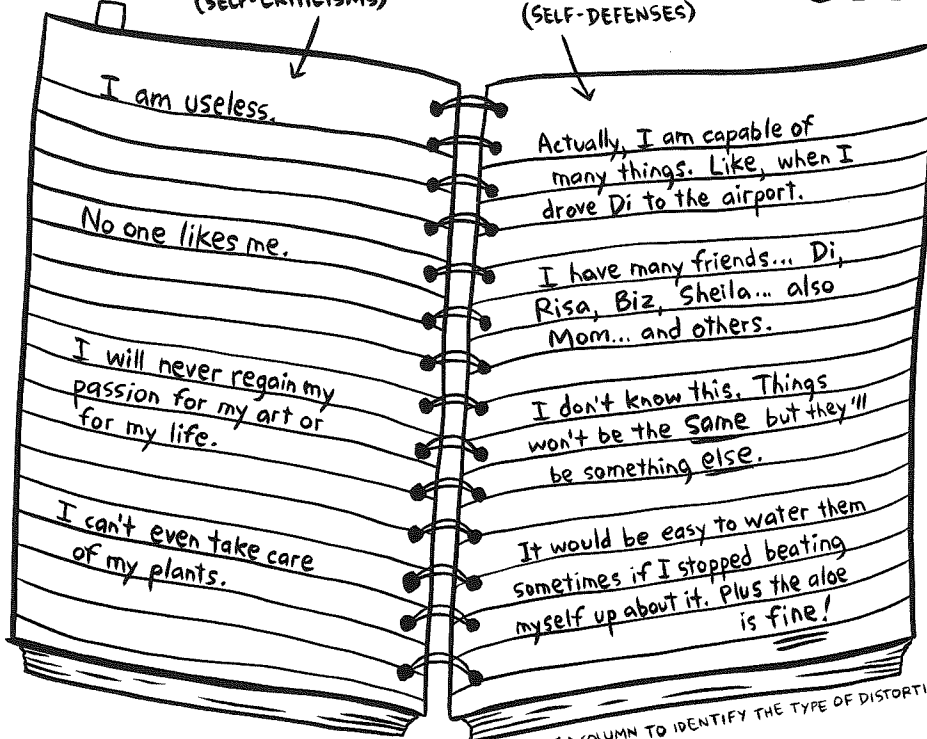


Dr. Burns uses lots of exclamation points.

MY VARIATION OF FOR THIS PARTICULAR EXERCISE, YOU MAKE TWO COLUMNS: \*

A LIST OF YOUR "AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS" (SELF-CRITICISMS)

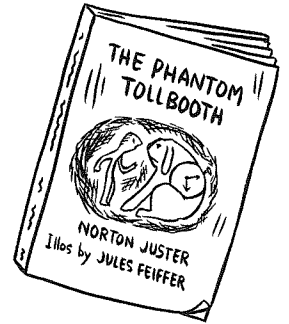
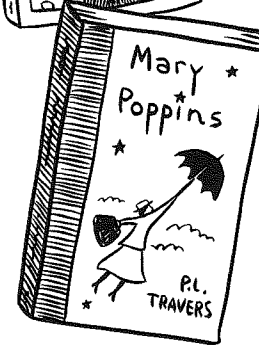
A LIST OF YOUR "RATIONAL RESPONSES" (SELF-DEFENSES)



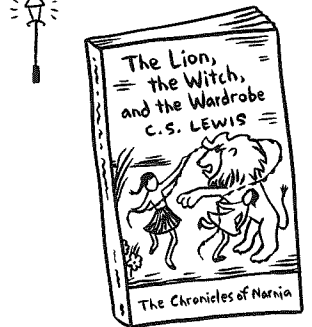
\*THE BOOK ALSO HAS A COLUMN TO IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF DISTORTION.

EVEN MY TEPID "RESPONSE" COLUMN WAS A HUGE EFFORT TO GENERATE, BUT IT HELPED A LOT. I DID THIS EXERCISE NUMEROUS TIMES, BUT DIDN'T CONNECT WITH THE MORE REGIMENTED ONES. KAREN WAS RIGHT - COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY WAS HELPFUL FOR ME, BUT ONLY SO MUCH.

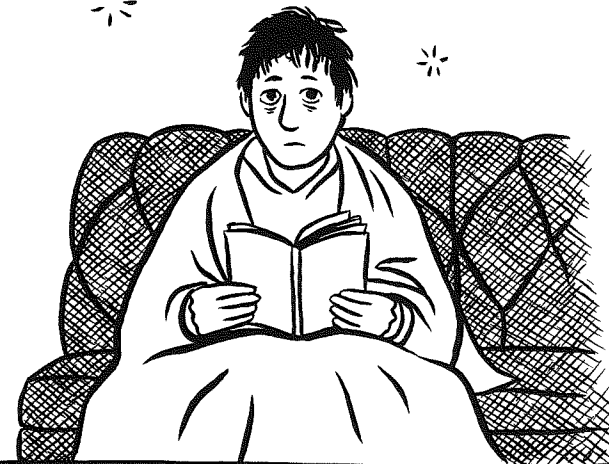
READING WAS AN EFFORT, THOUGH. I BOUGHT SOME OF MY FAVORITE CHILDHOOD BOOKS AT A USED BOOKSTORE - THE TYPE WAS BIGGER, THE LANGUAGE LESS DEMANDING, & THE STORIES PREDICTIBLY SAFE.



I READ THEM SLOWLY, GAZING LENGTHILY AT THE ILLUSTRATIONS.



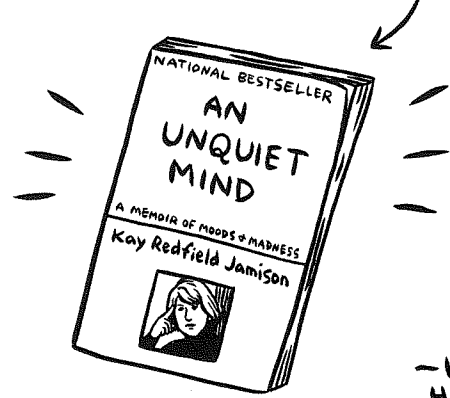
I GOT COMPLETELY LOST IN THEM.



WHEN I'D FINISH THE LAST PAGE, I'D BE HALF-SURPRISED AND SO DISAPPOINTED TO FIND MYSELF BACK IN THE JOYLESS REALITY OF MY APARTMENT.

TWO AUTOBIOGRAPHIES BECAME HUGEY IMPORTANT TO ME.

HAVING DISMISSED ANY RELEVANCE TO ME WHEN I'D READ IT A FEW MONTHS EARLIER, I READ THIS AGAIN:



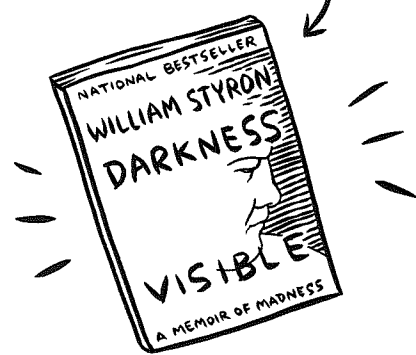
THIS TIME, I DIDN'T PUSH HER STORY AWAY JUST BECAUSE IT DIDN'T LINE UP EXACTLY WITH MINE.

WE WERE DIFFERENT, BUT WE SHARED SOMETHING IMPORTANT -

- IMPORTANT ENOUGH FOR HER TO WRITE A BOOK ABOUT.

SHE WAS COMPANY.

WILLIAM STYRON DESCRIBES THE PAIN OF HIS OWN EXPERIENCE OF DEPRESSION SO ELOQUENTLY, & SO VIVIDLY, IN HIS MEMOIR:



HE POINTS OUT THAT ARTISTS & WRITERS, "CHRONICLERS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT," OFTEN STRUGGLE WITH DEPRESSION IN THEIR LIVES & THEIR WORK. (Club Van Gogh!)

IT WAS STUNNING TO SEE MY OWN DEMONS NAILED SO EFFECTIVELY.

...self-hatred...

...fragility...

...hopelessness...

...dank joylessness...

...unrelenting...

...diabolical discomfort of being imprisoned in a fiercely overheated room.

...loss.

...smothering confinement...

...infantile dread...

...an immense and aching solitude.

...howling tempest... a storm of murk.

HE WAS COMPANY.

THE BOOK WAS ALSO EVIDENCE THAT DEPRESSION MIGHT GO AWAY, & CREATIVITY MIGHT COME BACK.

BUT IT WAS REALLY MY SKETCHBOOK WHERE I COULD FACE MY EMOTIONAL DEMONS IN A WHOLLY PERSONAL WAY.

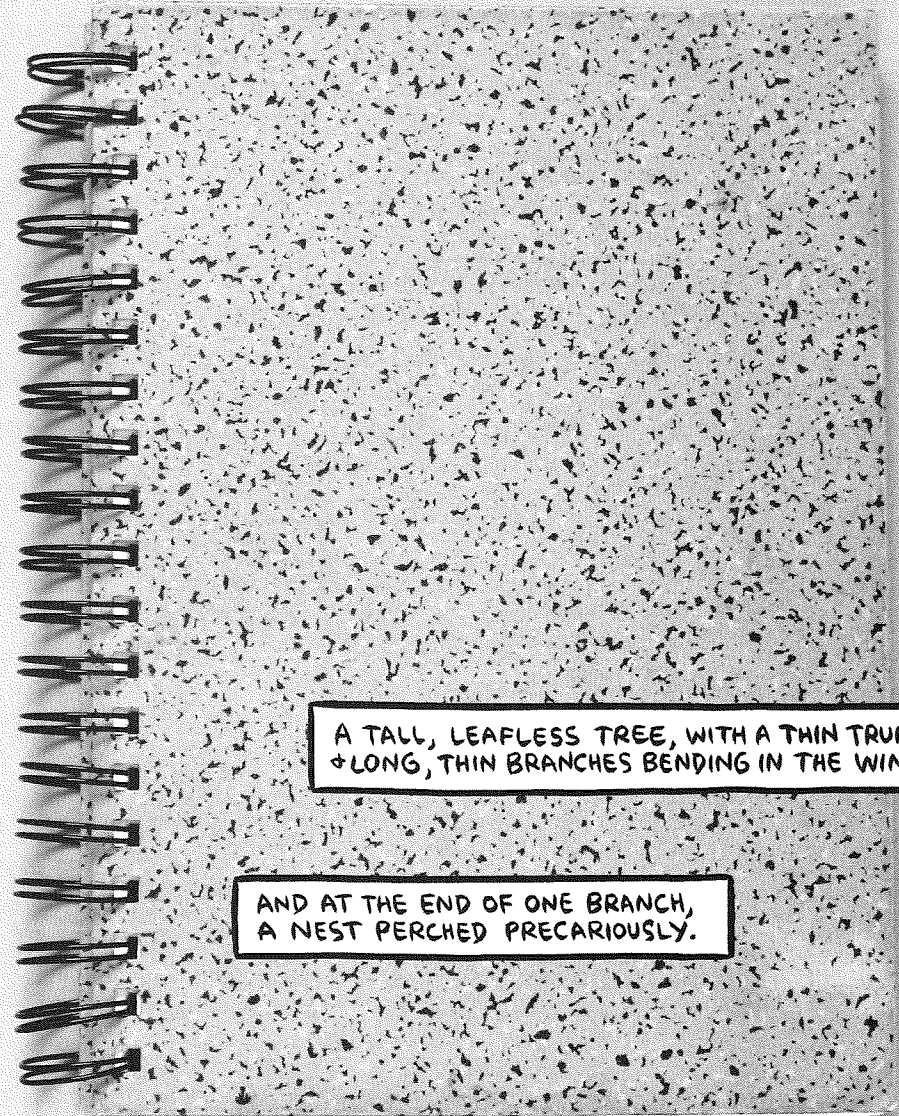
I DIDN'T HAVE THE ENERGY TO DRAW VERY OFTEN, BUT I STARTED CARRYING MY SKETCHBOOK WITH ME—

A COMBINATION OF CARRYING A TEDDY BEAR  
& CARRYING A CAN OF MACE.



THE DRAWINGS BOTH  
SCARED ME & GAVE ME COMFORT.

I'D INITIALLY TAKEN THE SKETCHBOOK OFF MY SHELF BECAUSE I WANTED TO DRAW A MENTAL IMAGE I'D BEEN HAVING—



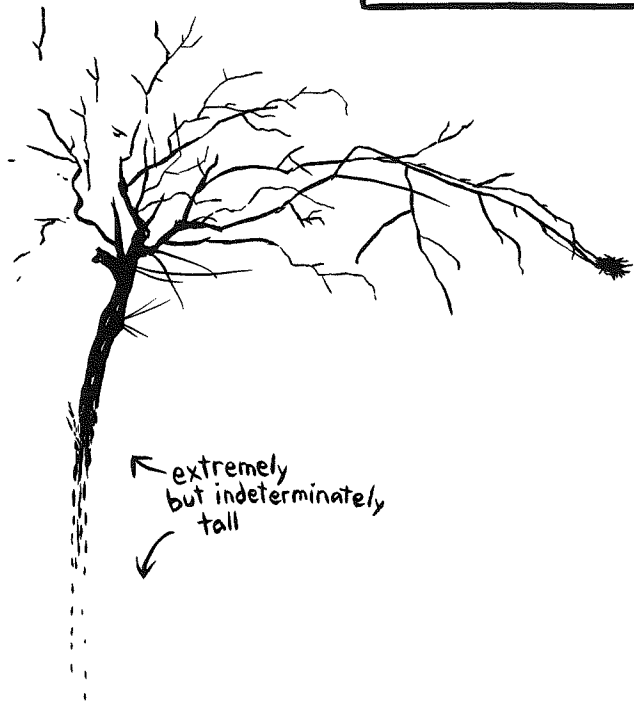
A TALL, LEAFLESS TREE, WITH A THIN TRUNK  
& LONG, THIN BRANCHES BENDING IN THE WIND,

AND AT THE END OF ONE BRANCH,  
A NEST PERCHED PRECARIOUSLY.



I SHOWED THE DRAWING TO KAREN + SHE SAID IT DIDN'T LOOK SO PRECARIOUS, BUT I ALREADY KNEW I HADN'T DRAWN IT RIGHT.

MY MENTAL IMAGE WAS MORE LIKE THIS:

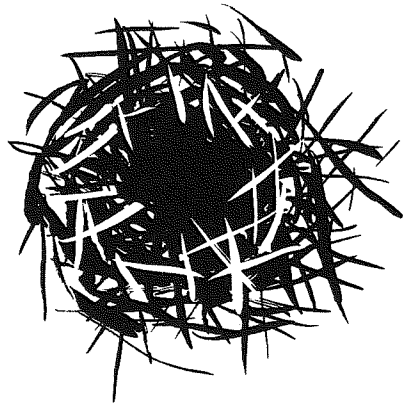


extremely  
but indeterminately  
tall



my nest  
hide  
fear of falling  
don't think

MY NEXT DRAWING CAUGHT IT BETTER,  
THOUGH THE NEST SHOULD HAVE BEEN  
TWIGGIER, WITH POINTY THINGS  
STICKING OUT + STICKING IN.



I SOON LEARNED TO KEEP DRAWING UNTIL I REALLY NAILED MY FEELINGS  
DOWN. I DIDN'T GET NEARLY THE SAME RELIEF IF I ONLY CAME CLOSE.



I DID A LOT OF SELF-PORTRAITS— SOME LOOKING IN THE MIRROR, SOME OUT OF MY HEAD.



WHEN I'D LEAVE KAREN'S OFFICE, I'D SOMETIMES FEEL DESPERATE, KNOWING I WOULDN'T BE BACK IN THAT SAFE SPACE FOR AT LEAST A FEW DAYS.



I'D FEEL A BIG CRY WELLING UP, + I'D HURRY TO HIDE IN THE RESTROOM.

CRYING COULD TURN INTO SOBBING, HARDER + HARDER. IT FELT LIKE I WAS FALLING INTO A BIG HOLE, LIKE I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO STOP.

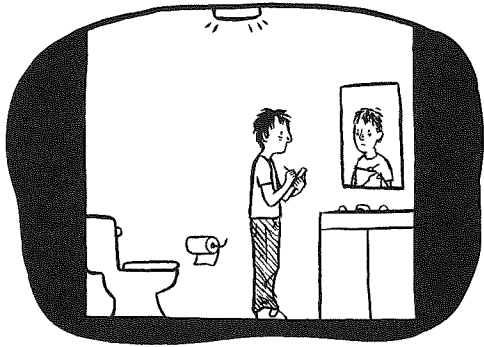


THEN I'D TAKE OUT MY SKETCHBOOK + LOOK AT MYSELF IN THE MIRROR--



I LOOKED SO SMALL, AND SO HUMAN - A SAD HUMAN - NOT LIKE THE HORRIBLE MONSTER I HALF-EXPECTED TO SEE.

IN MY SKETCHBOOK, I'D TRACE THE FAMILIAR LINES OF MY FACE, + I'D CALM DOWN + COME BACK INTO MYSELF.



INERT ON A PIECE OF PAPER, THE DEMONS WERE MORE HANDLEABLE.

OTHER SELF-PORTRAITS WERE DEPICTIONS OF HOW I WAS FEELING.

I OFTEN KNEW WHAT I WAS AIMING TO DRAW - SOME MENTAL IMAGE THAT I NEEDED TO GET OUTSIDE OF ME.

SOMETIMES I WOULD HAVE TO DRAW IT SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE I WAS SATISFIED I HAD CAUGHT IT.



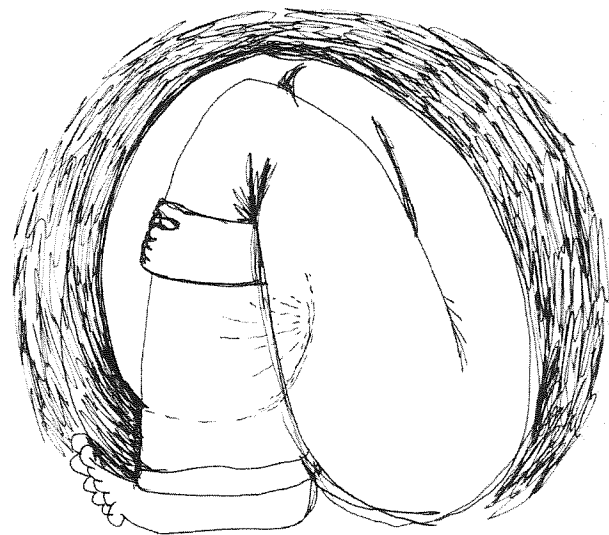
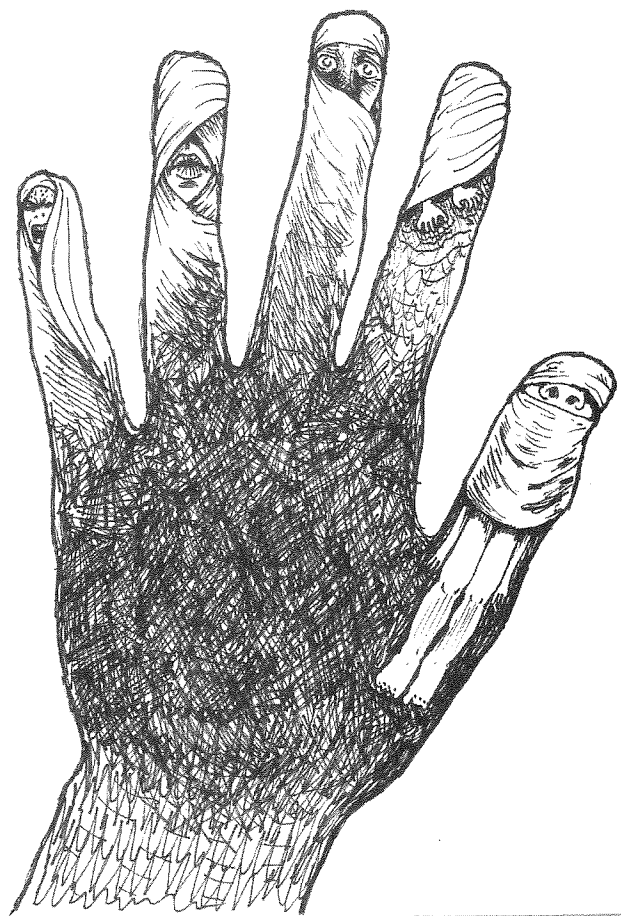
OTHER TIMES I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD DRAW, + JUST LET THE IMAGES POUR OUT OF MY PEN.

crying in the  
bathroom

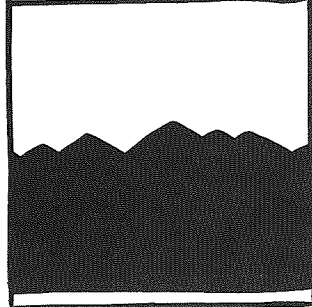

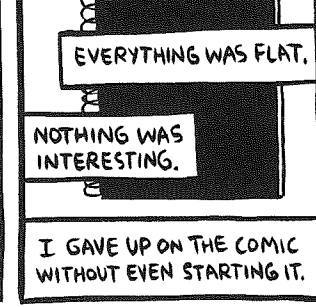


creepy baby



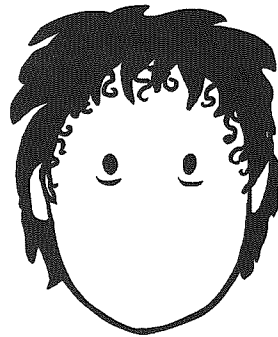


OVER THE SUMMER, MOM OFFERED THAT I COULD LIVE WITH HER IN LOS ANGELES FOR A WHILE. I CONSIDERED IT BUT I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SEE KAREN, & EVEN THOUGH MY APARTMENT WAS A PRICKLY NEST, IT WAS FAMILIAR.

I VISITED MOM FOR A WEEK, & WE DROVE TO HER FAVORITE B+B IN PALM SPRINGS.	MOM SUGGESTED WE GO TO THE PALM SPRINGS FOLLIES, FULL OF SHOW BIZ VETERANS, & I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT MAKE A GOOD COMIC.	EVEN AS I WAS TAKING THEM, MY NOTES SEEMED DISJOINTED & DULL.
	 <p>I TOOK NOTES IN MY REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK (ALONGSIDE MY LISTS OF SELF-CRITICISMS).</p>	 <p>EVERYTHING WAS FLAT. NOTHING WAS INTERESTING.</p> <p>I GAVE UP ON THE COMIC WITHOUT EVEN STARTING IT.</p>

AROUND THIS TIME, MY HAIR SUDDENLY GOT CURLY.

NOT ALL OF IT, JUST TIGHT CURLS BORDERING MY FACE.

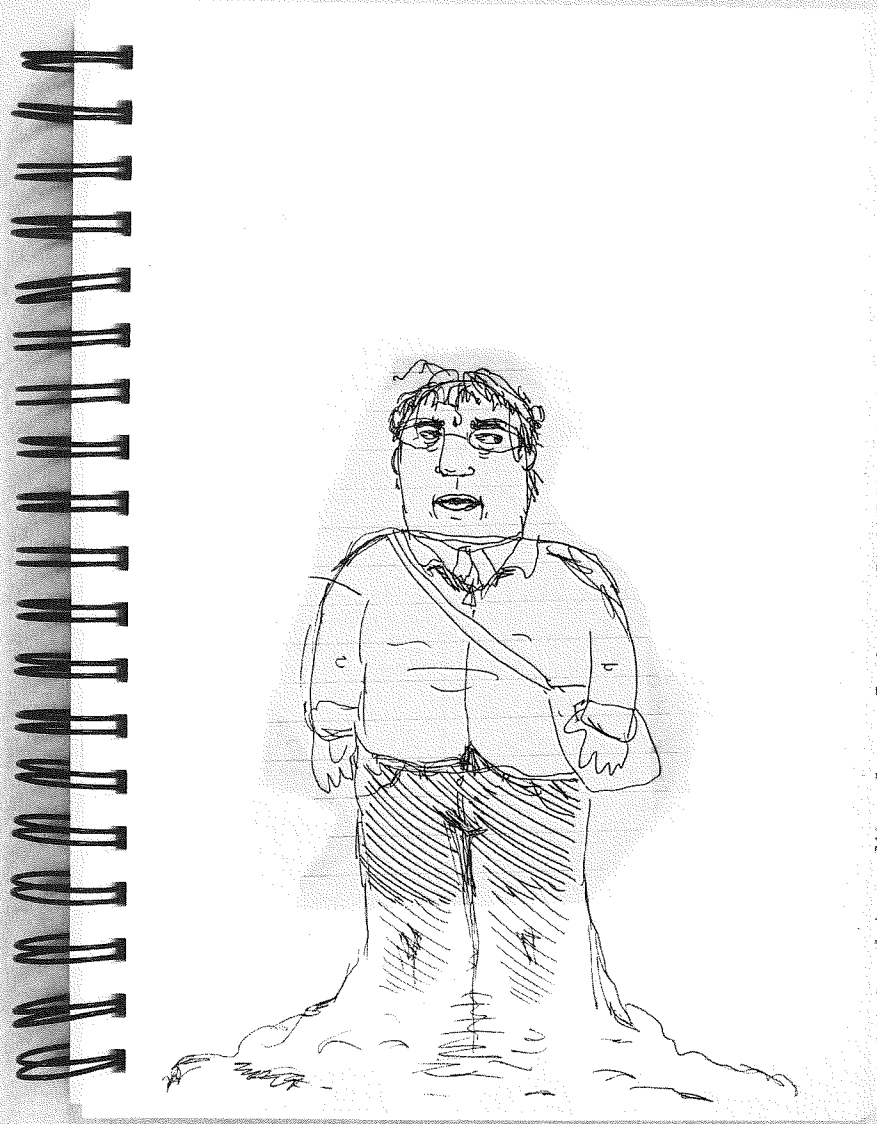
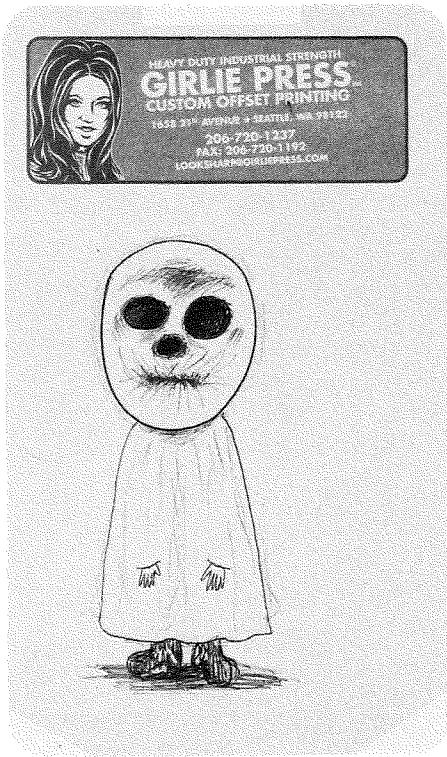


IT STAYED THAT WAY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, THEN STRAIGHTENED BACK TO NORMAL.

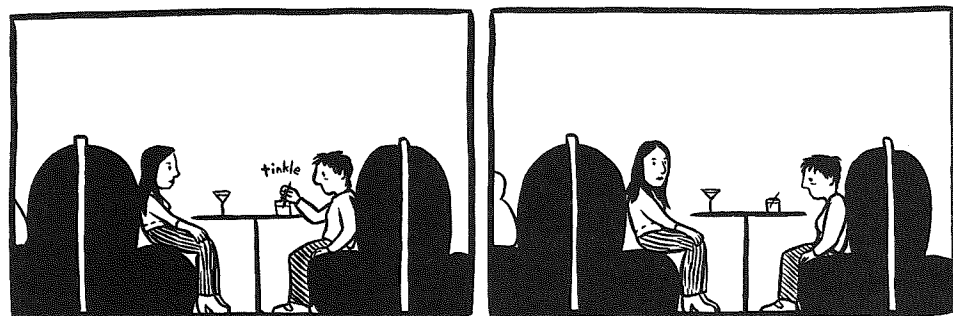
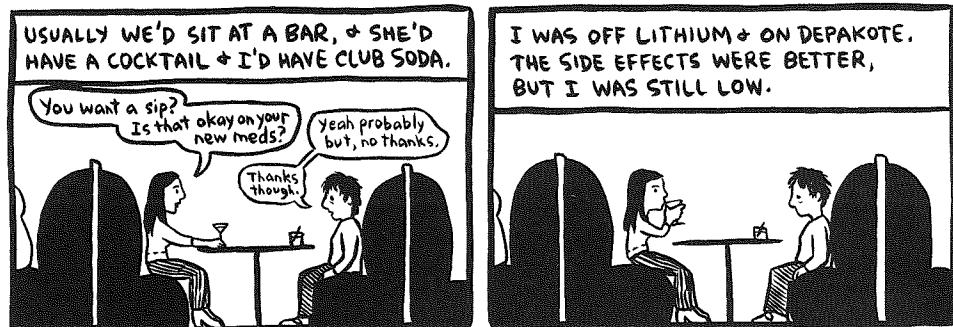
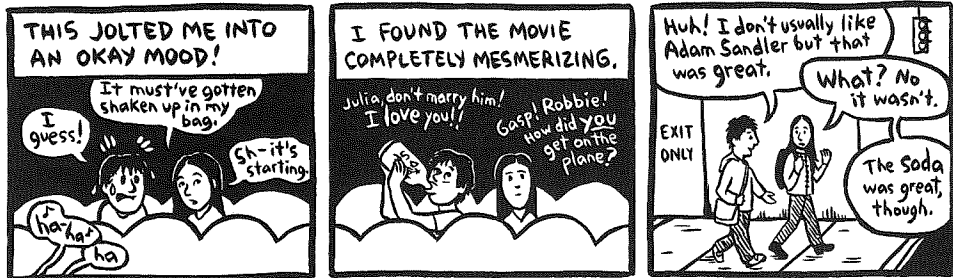
<p>MY MEMORY LAPSES WERE UNNERVING.</p> <p>The Follies would be... um... an old stage show... variety show... what's it called?</p> <p>"Vaudeville?"</p> <p>Vaudeville.</p> 	<p>I can't remember words, it's like they're underwater &amp; they won't come up.</p> <p>Is it the lithium?</p> <p>I think, yeah...</p> 	
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mom with bed head



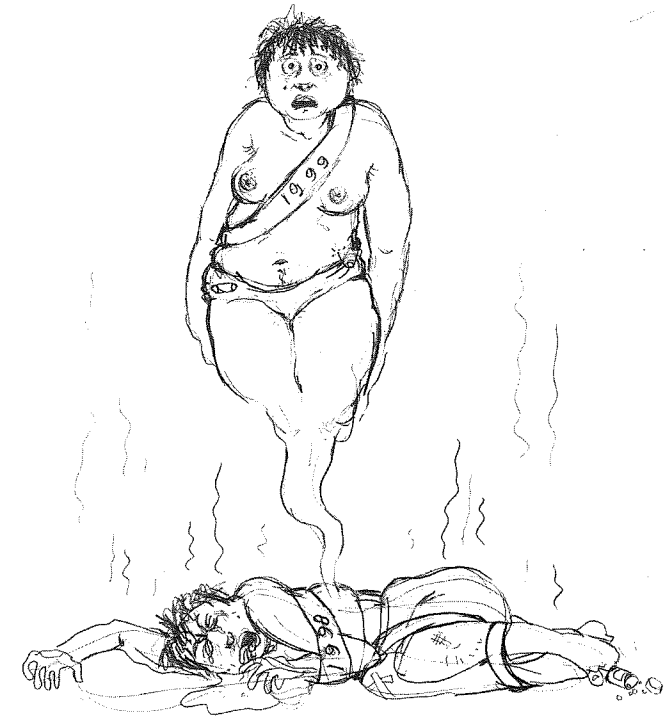


DI WAS ONE OF MY ONLY FRIENDS I COULD GO OUT + DO STUFF WITH. SHE WOULD LET ME JUST BE QUIET. ONE DAY SHE TOOK ME TO SEE A MATINEE OF "THE WEDDING SINGER" AT AN ENORMOUS, MOSTLY-EMPTY CINEMA DOWNTOWN.



MY SKETCHBOOK WAS PRIVATE, BUT I GAVE DI A COPY OF MY "PHOENIXLIKE" DRAWING → + SHE LOVED IT. (SHE HAS A DARK SENSE OF HUMOR, TOO.)

PHOENIXLIKE ELLEN 1999 RISES FROM THE ASHES OF ELLEN 1998...?

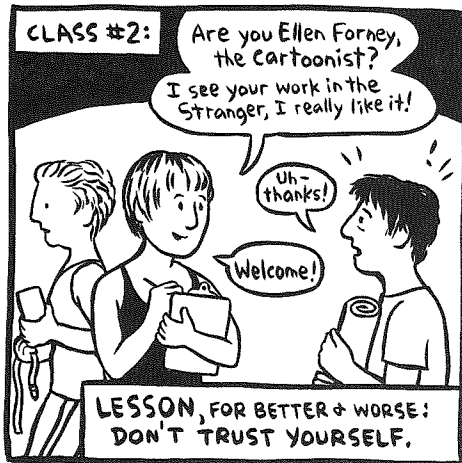




I MISSED EXERCISING, I STILL SWAM, BUT I DIDN'T HAVE THE ENERGY FOR THE GYM, OR FOR ANYTHING PARTICULARLY RIGOROUS OR COMPETITIVE.

I RELUCTANTLY AGREED WITH KAREN THAT YOGA MIGHT BE WORTH A TRY.

PLUS I FELT SO HEAVY, + MY NEIGHBOR TOLD ME YOGA WAS "SLIMMING."



I STARTED GOING TO CLASS ONCE A WEEK, DESPITE FEELING GRACELESS + WEAK.



IT WAS GOOD TO SPEND TIME WITH OTHER PEOPLE, KNOWING I WOULDN'T HAVE TO REALLY TALK WITH ANYONE.

peace mission



