

# CHAPTER 3:

Generalized Awfulness,  
Not otherwise  
classified.



I realize these are kind of spoilers. You knew about the hep by now. But the other things, BOOM. No warning, just bullet points. I figured we could get it all out of the way instead of slowly introducing one item at a time. Rip off the band-aid.



The drumset purchase is a good thing, overall. It doesn't even really belong in the list above, except it also happened that day. I want to be thorough.

And while the following didn't technically happen ON May 26<sup>th</sup>...

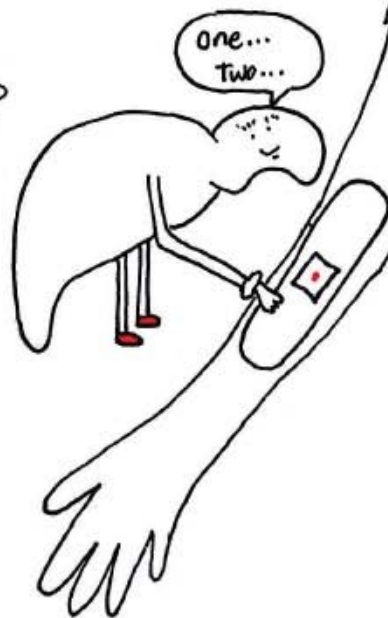
On Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup>, we're going to take the sweetest cat in the world to the vet. We'll drop her off at 8:30am for a few tests, and find out by noon that we have to put her to sleep. But we'll spend four more awful hours trying to find a reason to not do it yet.

I'll spend the warmest, sunniest day of the year so far in one-on-one emotional wreckage with my ex-girlfriend, trying to say goodbye to a perfect pet and a lost band and a flawed relationship and a shoddy liver and my sense of myself as a healthy person.

Seriously, Universe. Could you back off just a smidge?

Unless you were just trying to get it all over with.

I get that.



Where was I...

Oh, yeah.

HAPPY HOUR! ☺

I sat drinking my sparkling water,  
and told my then-still-girlfriend all I  
knew about hep c so far.

It attacks the liver. It's spread blood-to-blood.  
It's about 99.9% certain you don't have it, but  
you should get tested just in case.

I'm not worried.  
Don't you worry.

Haha, you may still be eligible to donate blood!

...hooray!

It replicates in my liver, a trillion times a day.  
Eventually it causes cirrhosis and maybe cancer.  
AND I can't drink. Again. Ever.

What about after you're cured?

There is a treatment that works 50-80%  
of the time. It's extremely expensive.

You have insurance.

I have no idea how I got this.

You have no risk factors.  
The test was probably wrong.

I agree about the no risk factors,  
but I'm starting to doubt the  
probably wrong.



Then we  
break up.

I know it's over.

I already knew.

We're much better friends  
than girlfriends.

**Rip off the Band-Aid.** What's one more wound  
on a day like this?

But still.

I wish we'd done this  
before I went to Texas.  
So there'd be one less  
thing on my plate  
now.



I wish I hadn't  
sent her that postcard.

I wish I hadn't eaten  
all that sushi.

I'm starting to wish I  
hadn't gone to that  
**Blood Mobile.**

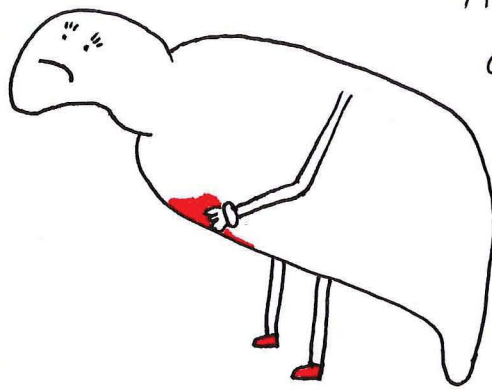
I cry. In public. The worst.  
I don't know which thing I'm crying about.  
Is it us? Is it the hepatitis? Is it the band?  
Is it the cat? Is it us? Is it the hepatitis?  
Is it the band? Is it the cat? Does it matter?



We go back to her house  
to finish breaking up.  
And I head straight to  
the kitchen and make  
myself a gin & tonic.

I know I shouldn't.  
I know it is self-sabotage.  
But... this DAY.

What's a little extra liver  
scarring after a boozy  
wedding week in Texas?

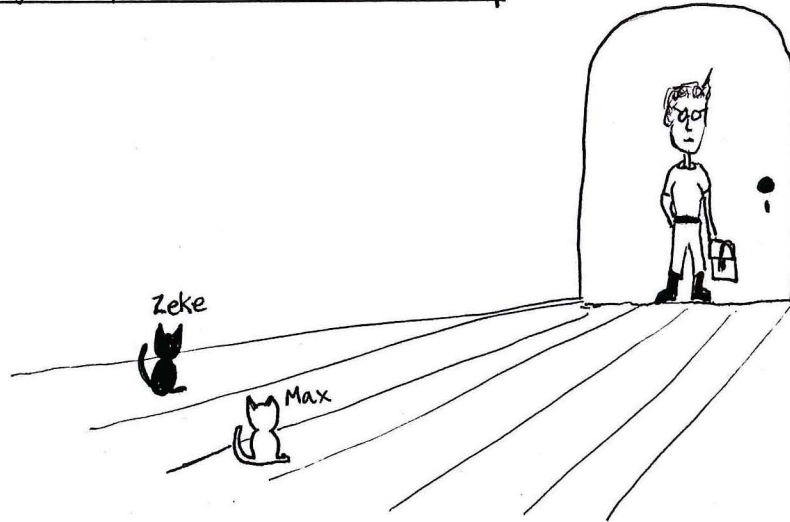


After 13 years  
of enjoying pinot  
noir and IPAs,  
what's one  
more wound?



Around midnight I leave and go to my own apartment. I walk in the door and feel more alone than I've felt in my life. I pile my pliant, compliant cats on me and hope they'll protect me from

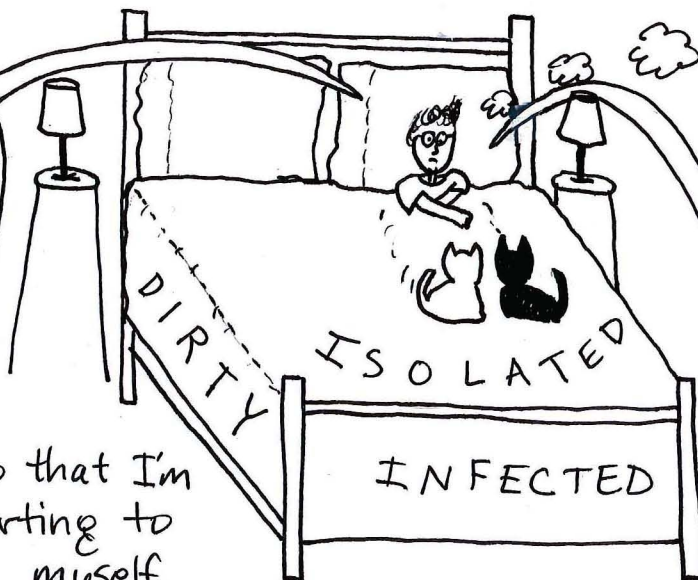
the void.



I fill them in on what's going on. They take it pretty well.

Max. Zeke.  
I have a deadly virus.  
It is highly stigmatized.

So much so that I'm already starting to stigmatize myself.



I picture all Those Liver Disease Patients out there. The addicts and the alcoholics, the abusers and the abused.

I'm not one of those people.

Max. Zeke.  
I'm not one of those people.

But.

I am exactly *one of those people*.

*Those people and I* are just people who got a virus, somehow. The somehow doesn't matter as much as the having the virus. Somehow.



I don't panic.  
I don't feel  
depressed.

I just feel  
Bad with a  
capital B.

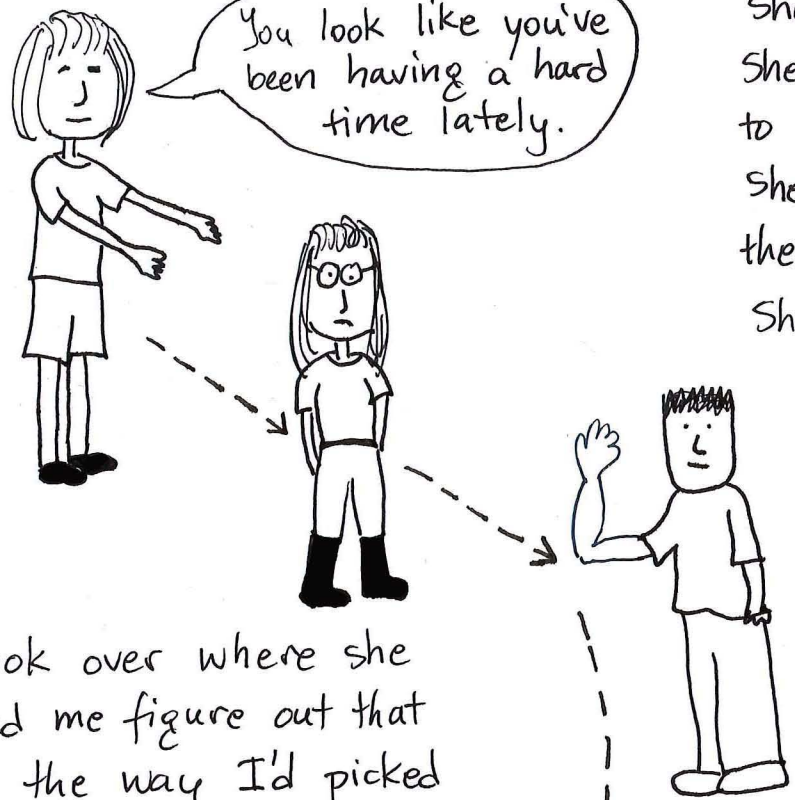
Speaking of being one  
of those people.

...WAY BACK IN TEXAS...

I finally went to a therapist after a TA kindly took me aside. A practical stranger.

You look like you've been having a hard time lately.

She saw me. She took the time to talk to me. She pointed me to the counseling center. She saved me.

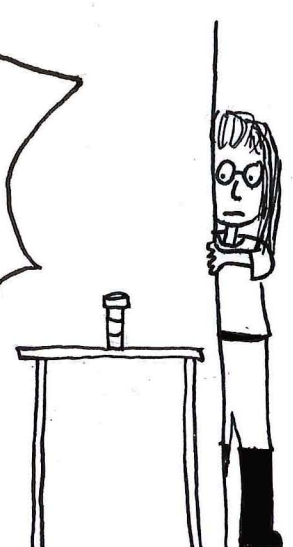


The therapist took over where she left off. He helped me figure out that somewhere along the way I'd picked up the idea that if I got less than an A, I was a failure. Not someone who got a failing grade (as if a B were a failing grade), but a failure. At life. Pointless. Over.

He referred me to a psychiatrist. He helped me get a diagnosis.

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER, NOT OTHERWISE CLASSIFIED.

And a prescription. It took me another month to accept the drugs.



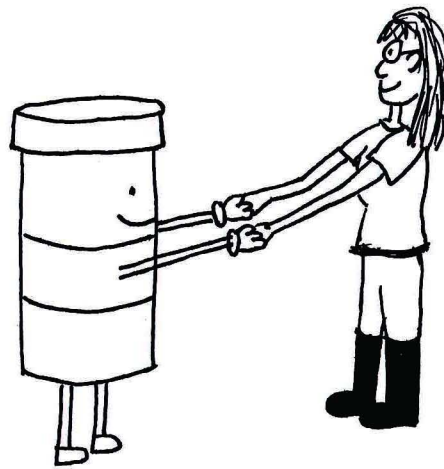
I've suffered from actual panic disorder over the years. The first time was in grad school. It took almost a year to realize that sobbing on a daily basis was not normal.

It didn't HAVE to be that way. It hadn't always been that way.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

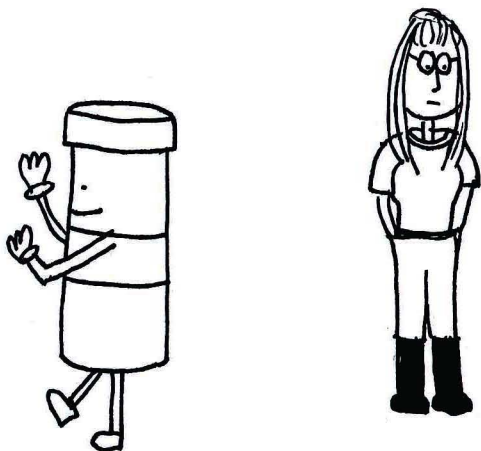


I didn't want to be  
**one of those people**  
who needed antidepressants.  
Even though I was already  
one of them.



I didn't want to be  
**one of those people**  
who accepted meds  
even though I needed  
to be.

But as soon as I started taking them,  
and as soon as they started making me  
feel better (that is to say, garden-variety normal),  
I vowed I would never again hesitate to take  
drugs if I needed them.

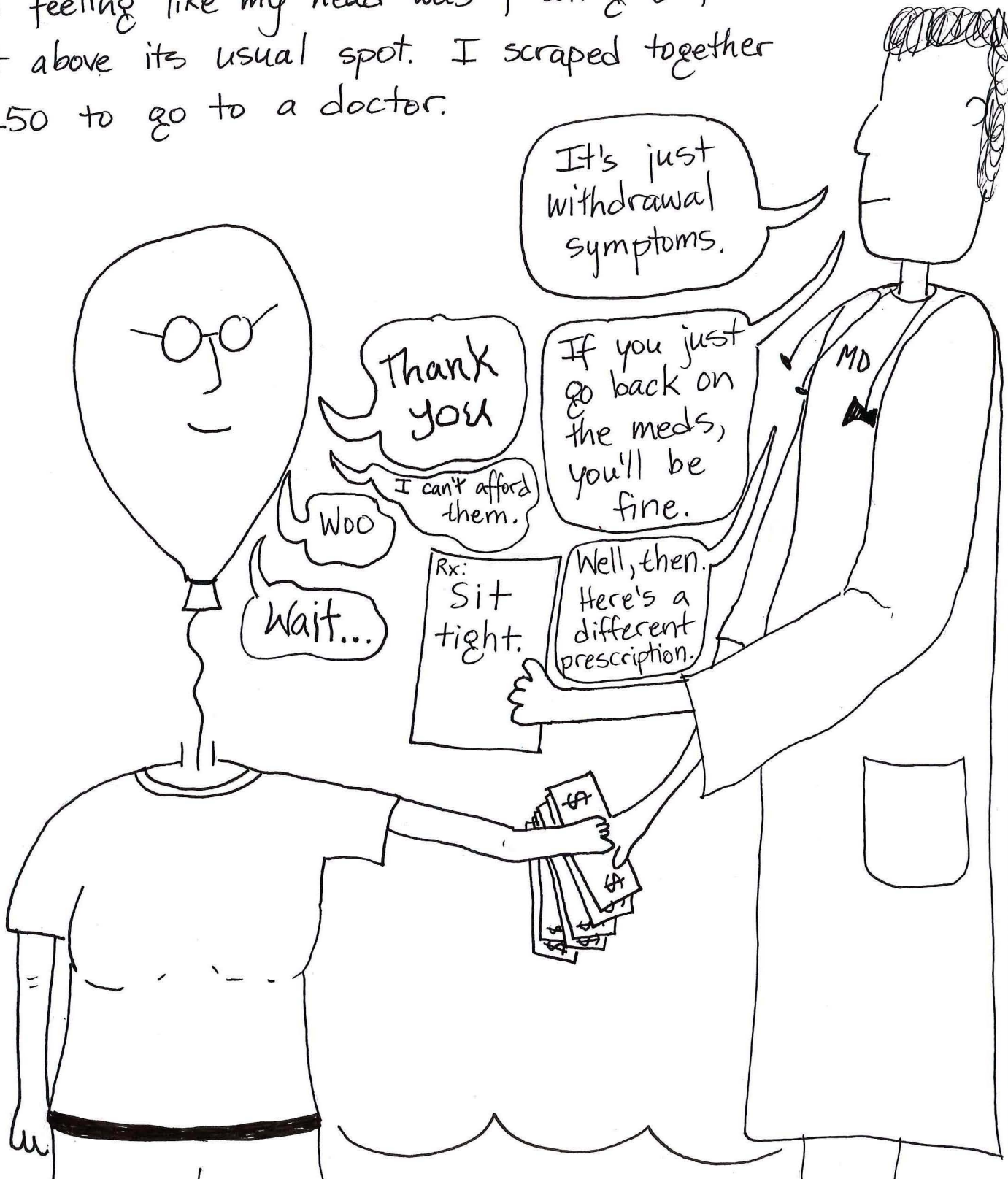


After graduation, I found a  
job at a non-profit advocacy  
group and found myself  
without health insurance.

I had filled my last prescription  
before leaving school and the  
school health plan. By October,  
I ran out of pills. The result  
was sudden cold-turkey withdrawal.

On my \$10 hourly wage (still far higher than minimum wage),  
and no insurance, I had no choice.

Fortunately, my anxiety & depression seemed to be in remission by then. But at the time, I didn't know about the possibility of physical withdrawal symptoms. I started to worry about the dizziness and tingling fingers, the sweating and feeling like my head was floating a few feet above its usual spot. I scraped together \$250 to go to a doctor.



It's just withdrawal symptoms.

If you just go back on the meds, you'll be fine.

Thank you

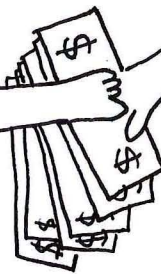
I can't afford them.

Woo

Wait...

Rx:  
Sit tight.

Well, then. Here's a different prescription.



I learned: Health insurance = health care.

A few years later, my depression recurred in the middle of a high-stress job and a bizarre and frightening divorce.

I had health insurance.

I got the medicine I needed.

I felt better.

I saw a therapist.

But.

I had just stopped going to therapy two months before the Blood Mobile came. My psychiatrist weaned me off antidepressants because I was in remission again from this bout of Not Otherwise Classified, precipitated by divorce's betrayal.

I know the difference between depression and sorrow, mania and happiness.

I know the difference between panic, a panic attack, and plain vanilla worry.

When you are depressed, your brain chemicals are not working correctly. They fool you into feeling false things.



My brain chemicals are fine now.

I am not depressed.  
I am sad.

I am not having a panic attack.  
I am worried.

I don't need anti-depressants.  
I need anti-virals.

I don't need a psychiatrist.  
But I may need a therapist. Again.

My medical chart now includes  
GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER,  
NOT OTHERWISE CLASSIFIED,  
IN FULL REMISSION.

CARRIER OF THE HEPATITIS C VIRUS.

Carrier. So innocuous.  
Not sick. Not infested. Just... carrying.



## A confession.

On June 30<sup>th</sup> (a way future spoiler), I'm going to head to the beach for a sunset picnic and liver-health ceremony with dear friends. (Including now-ex-girlfriend now-friend). I'm going to drink wine along with playing in the sand and passing out little clay model livers for everyone to hold safe. It will be my last ever drink. *Maybe.*



It feels like when you have your last drink, you should KNOW it's the last.

Does having a shitty week make it OK to hurt your liver just a little bit more?

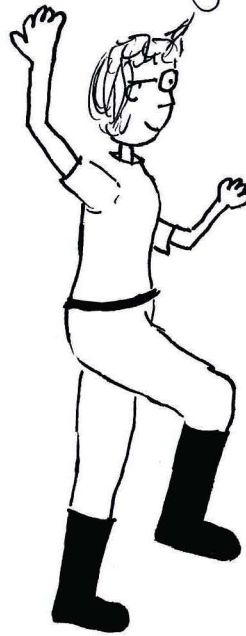
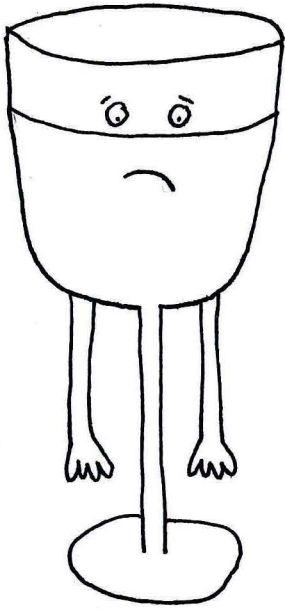
Does it mean I need therapy?

Am I in denial?

Am I crazy?

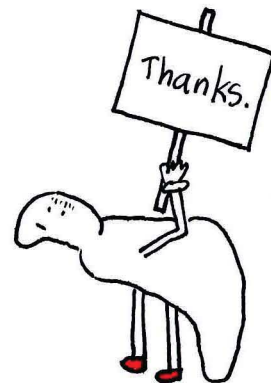
Did I want a glass of wine because I enjoy it? Or because I have lost so much in just a few days? Was I self-destructing?

There will always be a bad day  
(or a good one for that matter)  
that makes it make sense to have  
just one drink. Just this once. Just every now and then.  
Avoid usually, but embrace occasionally.



So after June 30, never again.  
Not ever an excuse.  
No more.  
**Possibly.**

Sobriety may be worse than  
having hepatitis, but it is also  
the one and only thing that I  
and only I can control.



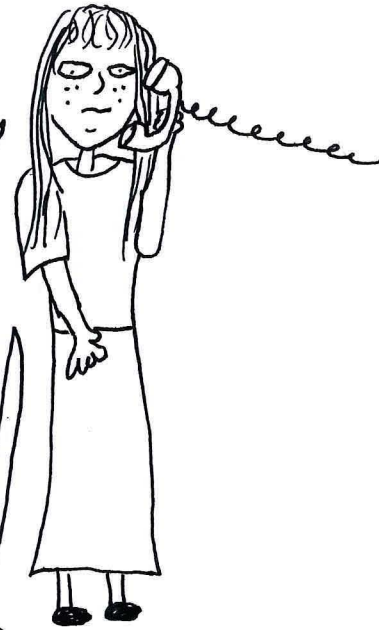
Friday, May 29. Back to the worst week ever. Winding down. The clinic calls...



on landline with clinic

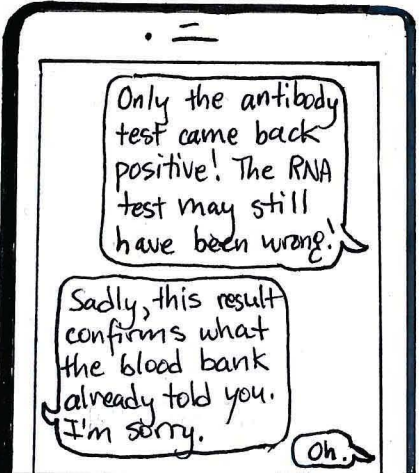
texting friend, who is a nurse

You again tested positive for hep c antibodies. This means it was in your blood at some point, and your body tried to fight it off.



We're still waiting for the RNA test to confirm that there is still hep c virus **not** living inside you, and get its genotype.

There's still a chance I'm OK. I could be spared. I may be clean and good and alive and innocent. I still inhabit a world separate from **those people**.

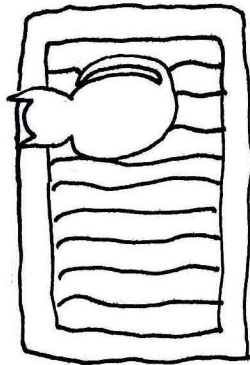
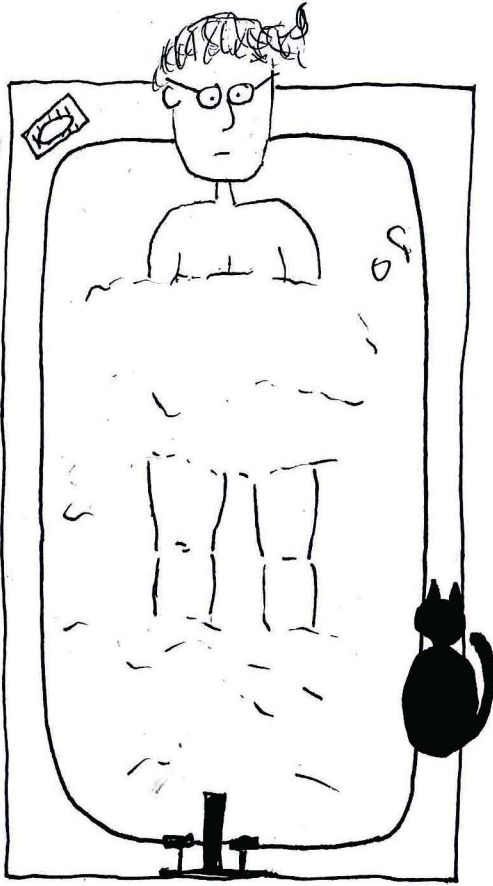


I know I have it.  
I already knew.  
But still.

I breathe.

I buy a taco.

I don't eat it.  
I go home.



I pet my cats.

I take a bath.

I have hepatitis C.  
I have hepatitis C.  
I have hepatitis C.

I breathe.