



BITE SIZE RECOVERY

simone yemm

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SIMONE YEMM

I'm sorry you're struggling right now. Life can be tough—I get it. I've been there too.

My name is Simone. I've lived through chronic depression and anxiety. I have overcome self-harm, survived 50 years of Eating Disorders and been diagnosed with Bipolar II Disorder.

I HAVE ATTEMPTED TO TAKE MY OWN LIFE

But I am still here and in the past five years I have learned so much and become so well. I have learned there is **hope**.

There are so many tools that have helped me—pharmaceutical support, psychological therapies, medical professionals, friends, family, strangers on the internet, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, journalling, psychiatric inpatient stays, prayer, fellow sufferers, internet searches, books, podcasts, music, and positive and inspirational social media accounts. No single thing cured me, but together all these things supported me and taught me how to make change and become more well.

Life is not perfect.

I still have good days and bad days. Just like you.

Contained within these pages are words that I hope will give you courage and lists of resources that might speak to you. Some things work for some people—other things work for other people. Don't be discouraged if something doesn't magically fix your problems—there are **no rainbows and unicorns here**.

Recovery is a way of life. It is an ever-evolving process that is rarely perfect and sometimes goes so far backwards you're not sure if you have the strength to get up and do it all again. But you do have the strength.

YOU WILL BE OKAY

Chin up my friend. If today is a day you're staying in bed all day that is okay, we do what we must to survive. One day things will be different. I believe in you.

I don't know who is in your circle of support—maybe your circle is so small you can barely see it, maybe it's massive and you don't know where to begin. But there are cheerleaders out there for you. I am cheering for you. So don't give up.

Please look after yourself—you are worth **it**. Much love to you my friend.

Simone
XX

A field of white baby's breath flowers with a single red poppy flower in the foreground. The text "BREATHE..." is overlaid in the center.

BREATHE...

CRISIS & SUPPORT

If you think for one single solitary moment that you, or someone you love, is unsafe, then **STOP** right now.

Don't go it alone. As they say in *Toy Story*, you've got a friend in me.

If you are in crisis, take a moment to reach out. Just a moment. I care. I really care. Hang in there and reach out.

DON'T MAKE THAT PERMANENT DECISION TODAY

Here are some crisis line details that are current as of September 2022.

AUSTRALIA

[Beyond Blue](#) 1300 22 46 36

[Headspace](#) 1800 650 890

[Kids Helpline](#) 1800 551 800

[Lifeline](#) 13 11 14

[MensLine Australia](#) 1300 789 978

[Suicide Call Back Service](#) 1300 659 467

[The Samaritans](#) 135 247

NEW ZEALAND

[Lifeline](#) 0800 111 777

CANADA

[Talk Suicide Canada](#) 1833 456 4566

INDIA

[1 Life Crisis Support](#) 789 307 8930

UNITED STATES

[Crisis Text Line](#) text "START" to 741 741

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) phone 988

[Drug Rehab Suicide Risks](#) 24/7 help on 877 589 4784

UNITED KINGDOM

[Samaritans](#) 0845 7 90 90 90

[SANE](#) 0845 767 8000 (1:00pm-11:00pm every day)

SOUTH AFRICA

[South African Depression & Anxiety Group](#) 0800 567 567

CHINA

[Lifeline](#) 400 821 1215

FRANCE

[S.O.S Amitié](#) 09 72 39 40 50

Can't find what you need? For a comprehensive list of international hotlines visit:

[**SUICIDE.ORG/INTERNATIONAL-SUICIDE-HOTLINES**](https://www.suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines)

There are numbers to call, chatlines to log into, messaging services to connect with and websites full of material. Connect **now**.



HOLD ON PAIN ENDS

We all want to know why we are like we are and when it comes to mental illness, there is a lot of self doubt.

How did it come to this? Is it really as bad as all that? Am I making it up? Is the problem with everyone else? How can I help the people I love? While we're seeking answers, there is so much information out there—and not all of it's good.

HERE ARE SOME REPUTABLE—AND AT THE TIME I WROTE THE LIST, CURRENT—WEBSITES, WITH GOOD INFORMATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#) A fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other

[Black Dog Institute](#) World leader in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mood disorders

[Butterfly Foundation](#) A Foundation for Eating Disorders

[Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#) Providing hope, help, support, and education to people who have mood disorders

[Drug Rehab](#) Advanced Recovery Systems

[Eating Disorder Hope](#) Education, support, and inspiration to eating disorder sufferers

[Embrace](#) Body image movement

[Head to Health](#) Digital mental health services from some of Australia's most trusted mental health organisations

[InsideOut](#) Rethinking eating disorders from the inside out

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) America's largest grassroots mental health organisation

[Psych Central](#) Breaking down the stigma that surrounds mental illness

[Recovery Warriors](#) Dedicated to boosting emotional intelligence and resilience with depression, anxiety and eating disorders

[ROAR](#) Reach Out & Recover

[RUOK?](#) Suicide prevention charity

[Secular AA](#) Assuring alcoholics they can find sobriety in AA without having to accept anyone else's beliefs or deny their own

[SIOS](#) Self Injury Outreach & Support

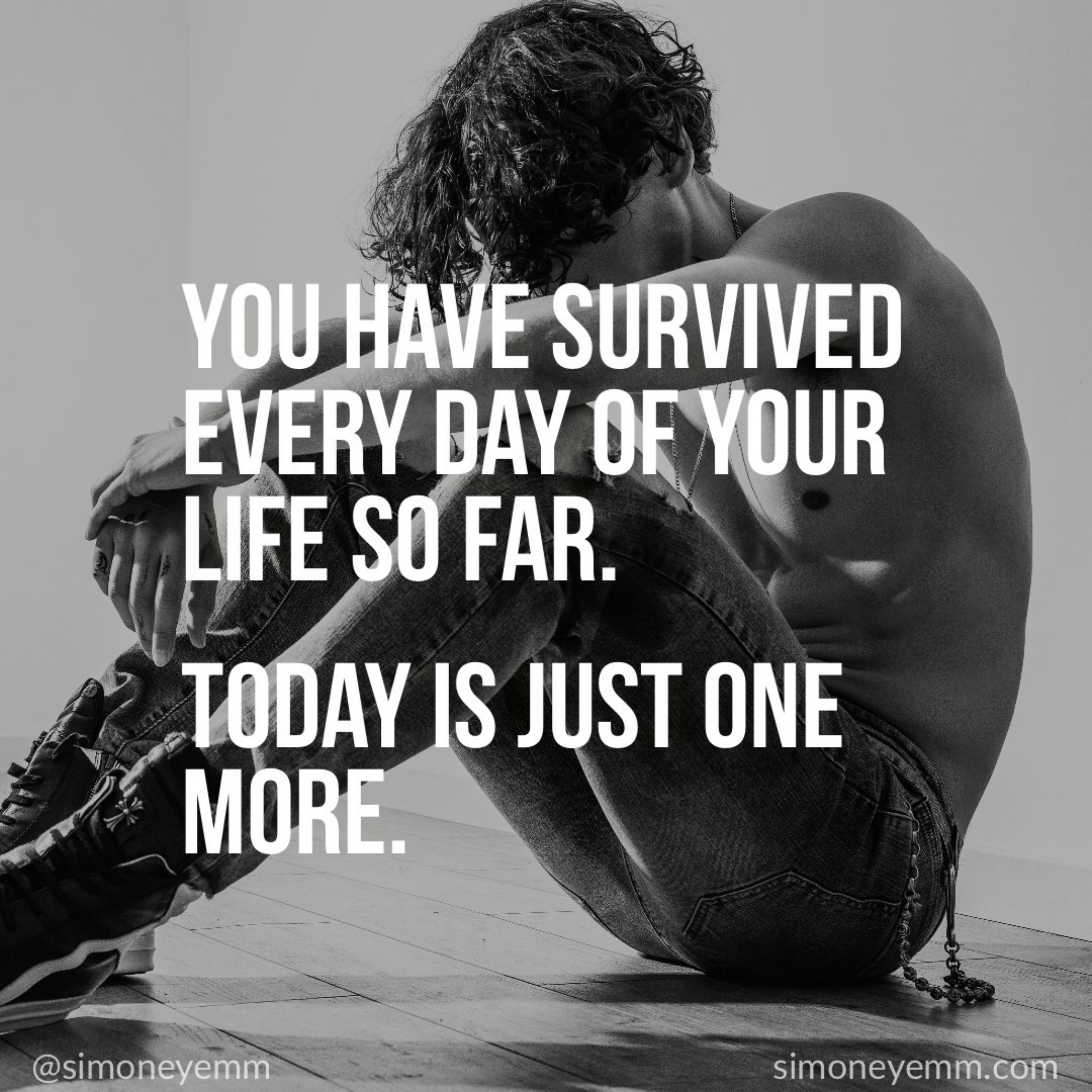
[Something Fishy](#) Dedicated to raising awareness and providing support to people with Eating Disorders, and their loved-ones

[Suicide.Org](#) Suicide prevention, awareness & support

[TED Talks](#) A collection of TED Talks on mental health

[The Mighty](#) We face disability, disease and mental illness together

Don't suffer alone. I have found much empathy and compassion in the words of people with lived experience. Keep reading, connecting and hoping for a better tomorrow. Share these websites with your loved ones, so when you don't have the words someone else might. And one day, when you're well, you can share your story of hope with others.



**YOU HAVE SURVIVED
EVERY DAY OF YOUR
LIFE SO FAR.**

**TODAY IS JUST ONE
MORE.**

MENTAL HEALTH

What is wrong with me?! I used to bemoan. Now I have words—Childhood Emotional Neglect, Major Depression, Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder, Bipolar II Disorder. It sounds pretty full on and has taken me some time to come to terms with having diagnoses. But it is what it is and facing things head on has propelled me a long way forward.

A mental health diagnosis is not something you do yourself on the internet. It is a serious health complication and needs qualified professionals—often more than one—to ascertain exactly what is going on. While researching symptoms can be a helpful starting point it is crucial to seek help. You shouldn't self-diagnose diabetes, multiple sclerosis or cancer without a medical professional.

MENTAL ILLNESS IS NO DIFFERENT

If in doubt, **check it out**. But for interest's sake, here are some of the more frequently diagnosed mental illnesses.

ADDICTION: Persistent and intense urges to engage in a particular behaviour that results in negative consequences—often as the result of substance abuse such as drugs or alcohol, but other addictive behaviours include shopping, gambling, sex or gaming.

ANXIETY: Characterised by excessive and incessant worry or fear about everyday situations. Usually accompanied by physical changes such as increased heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating and fatigue.

BIPOLAR DISORDER: Formerly called *manic depression*, bipolar disorders are characterised by extreme and unstable mood swings, ranging from depressive lows to manic highs.

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER: BPD is a mood disorder that causes highly unstable moods, erratic behaviours and interpersonal relationship difficulties.

DEPRESSION: A persistent low mood, usually unrelated to life circumstances. Often accompanied by loss of interest in normal activities, poor self-care, struggles with sleep and energy levels, and weight changes.

EATING DISORDER: EDs are complex and life-threatening. They impact an individual's thoughts, beliefs and actions in relation to food, eating and body image. An Eating Disorder is **not** just a diet gone wrong.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER: Characterised by obsessive, recurring, unwanted thought patterns and repetitive, compulsive behaviours.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER: A range of ongoing, uncontrollable responses that continue after experiencing something traumatic—including nightmares, flashbacks, dissociation, isolation, anxiety, irritability, hyperarousal and depression.

SCHIZOPHRENIA: Characterised by psychotic episodes (derealisation, dissociation or hallucinations) as well as social and emotional difficulties, decreased motivation and memory difficulties.

I just want to reiterate here, you can't diagnose yourself. Please seek professional psychiatric and psychological guidance.

MENTAL... HEALTH

OUR EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SOCIAL WELLBEING THAT AFFECTS COGNITION, PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOUR, AND IMPACTS HOW WE HANDLE STRESS, RELATIONSHIPS AND DECISION-MAKING.

ILLNESS

A HEALTH CONDITION THAT CHANGES EMOTION, THINKING OR BEHAVIOUR AND IMPACTS FUNCTIONING IN SOCIAL, WORK OR FAMILY ACTIVITIES. EG. DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, SCHIZOPHRENIA, ADDICTION, MOOD DISORDERS (AND MANY MORE).

WELLNESS

A STATE OF WELL-BEING IN WHICH WE'RE REALISING OUR OWN POTENTIAL, COPING WITH NORMAL LIFE STRESSES, WORKING PRODUCTIVELY AND FRUITFULLY, AND MAKING A CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY.

I'm always hesitant to bandy statistics about—because they change as fast as I find them and they're not always relevant. If you're unwell you're unwell—whether your experience is rare or there are millions of people experiencing the same thing, you're still in a unique and probably distressing situation.

But . . . sometimes misery enjoys company. Here are a few Australian statistics.⁽¹⁾ You are not alone.

- ◆ One in seven Australians will experience depression in their lifetime
- ◆ One quarter of Australians will experience an anxiety condition in their lifetime
- ◆ One in 16 Australians is currently experiencing depression
- ◆ One in seven Australians is currently experiencing an anxiety condition
- ◆ One in six Australians is currently experiencing depression or anxiety or both
- ◆ One in eight Australians is currently experiencing high or very high psychological distress
- ◆ Suicide is a major public health issue. More than 3,000 people die by suicide in Australia each year
- ◆ Over the decade since 2009, the number of deaths by suicide has increased by 33 per cent
- ◆ More than nine people die each day in Australia by suicide
- ◆ Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians aged between 15 and 49
- ◆ Approximately one million Australians are living with an eating disorder in any given year; that is, 4% of the population
- ◆ Many more people experience disordered eating (i.e., behaviours consistent with an eating disorder such as restrictive dieting, binge eating, vomiting, laxative use) that do not meet criteria for an eating disorder
- ◆ Approximately a third (31.6%) of Australian adolescents engage in disordered eating behaviours within any given year
- ◆ Eating disorder symptoms are on the rise with at least weekly binge eating increasing almost six-fold since the late 1990s and strict dieting increasing almost four-fold with parallel increases in other behavioural and cognitive eating disorder symptoms (e.g. increased dieting, decreased quality of life)
- ◆ Of people with an eating disorder, 3% have anorexia nervosa, 12% bulimia nervosa, 47% binge eating disorder (BED) and 38% other eating disorders
- ◆ Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that bipolar disorders affects 1.8% of Australians aged 16 and over
- ◆ Research has shown that from the average age of symptom onset (17.5 years), there was a delay of approximately 12.5 years before a diagnosis of bipolar disorder was made

**ALMOST HALF THE POPULATION
WILL HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH
ISSUE AT SOME POINT IN
THEIR LIVES.**

FIFTY PER CENT OF US.

**DO YOU KNOW ANOTHER HUMAN?
THEN STATISTICALLY SPEAKING,
ONE OF YOU IS IT.**

SO WHAT NOW?

**RECOVERY IS NOT
A DESTINATION.**

**IT IS A CHOICE WE
MUST MAKE EVERY
DAY OF OUR LIVES.**

There are a great many options for improving mental health. We should never try and compare ourselves to others—some of us have mental illnesses that will be with us forever, some people will go through a period of illness and then recover. And some lucky people may never become unwell at all. Whatever your story, please know that there is always help available.

These are **the things that have helped me**. Maybe something here will soften your load for a little while.

COMMUNITY: Mental Illness can feel very isolating. In fact, isolating oneself is a common side effect. People are exhausting. The risk of isolation is that we stay inside our heads and get caught in a cycle where nothing feels like it can ever change. Finding communities of people who understand this difficulty can be heartening. I read a lot of websites—especially [The Mighty](#)—read blogs and follow mental health hashtags on Instagram. Anything that keeps me out of my head for just a little while.

CONNECTIONS: Family, friends, colleagues and my gym buddies have also been key to my recovery. Real people in the real world who saw the real pain I was in. More often than not they didn't fully understand, but they did care. A lot. When I was at my most unwell I couldn't get out of bed or feed myself or function in any meaningful way. I needed that real life support. I also needed help decoding my mess of thoughts. When face-to-face was too much, I stayed in regular touch through messaging apps.

CREATIVE OUTLETS: I cannot stress enough the importance of finding a healthy outlet for emotional pain. It is so common for people to engage in harmful behaviours, like self-harm, disordered eating or substance abuse. Emotional pain needs to be dealt with and sometimes we don't have the words. I listened to a lot of music and I learned the art of journaling. Some people express themselves through art or drama or dance. Getting creative is cathartic.

A GRATITUDE PRACTICE: It sounds so naff to me—gratitude. When you're knee deep in a pit of depression it is pretty jolly hard to find things to be grateful for. It is just not how the mentally unwell brain wants to function. But over time, I have come to appreciate the incredibly positive difference this simple practice makes. I start every single day of my life with a few little sentences expressing thanks—for the day, sunshine, my children, being pain free, my cat, my friends, sleep, porridge . . .

PHYSICAL WELLBEING: It is hard to care for physical health when you're well. It feels impossible when you're unwell. If needs be, enlist help. We are whole beings and when one thing is neglected everything is affected. **Eat Well, Move Well, Sleep Well** is my new mantra in life. Three meals a day—whether you want them or not. Food is medicine. Daily movement—a walk up the street, make the bed, walk in nature. Just something where you're moving. And a night time routine that hopefully involves sleep.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES: Never underestimate the difference that professional help can make. I wouldn't be here without it. My brain needs pharmaceutical support to balance it out. I did three years of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy that was brilliant. I gathered together a professional team—psychiatrist, psychologist, general practitioner and dietitian. I also did three inpatient psychiatric stays. Different people need different things. Consult the professionals—that's what they're there for.

**MENTAL ILLNESS IS NOT
ABOUT WILLPOWER OR
LACK THEREOF.**



Gratitude used to be something that was spoken about in New Age or Alternative Lifestyle circles. Now it is considered mainstream practice in mental health healing. I gotta admit—I was reluctant. What possible difference could a few half-arsed mumbled phrases make each day?

I was surprised.

A daily practice of gratitude has made an enormous impact on my life. I'm not always happy. And I'm not always grateful. But almost every morning I start the day with a list of things to be thankful for.

Perhaps that sounds like I'm an eternal optimist. I'm not. I was—many years ago—but life beat that optimism out of me. I'm not sure I'm a fully-fledged pessimist, but I am a realist. Sometimes bad things happen. Sometimes they happen to good people. Sometimes they happen to me. It's not fair, but it is what it is.

I can't predict what will happen so I prepare myself for the worst but still hope for the best.

Are you struggling to see anything positive? You're not alone. It is common for people, especially when they're mentally unwell, to see all the problems that have been and to worry about all the problems to come. But try. Please just try my friend. See if you can search for the good. It may not outweigh the bad—it probably won't. But those good things are important.

All too often a negative mindset becomes a habit. Just because bad things have happened in the past, or mentally we've become really unwell, it doesn't mean we can't look for the little shiny bits of good that are easily overlooked.

IF WE'RE NOT GRATEFUL FOR THE LITTLE THINGS, WE WON'T BE CONTENT WITH THE BIG THINGS IN LIFE


Now don't get me wrong . . . Saying thankyou for the day won't magically cure all our ills or erase any trace of mental illness, but it can begin to tip the scales in our favour. And most certainly, gratitude is an important practice for maintaining good health.

Part of the reason that gratitude works is that it's external—instead of looking inwards we're looking outwards. Depression and anxiety in particular are very inward focussed—ruminating and worrying about things that have happened in the past or might happen in the future. A gratitude practice looks outwards—at the things around us.

So, I hear you ask, exactly how do I practice gratitude? It's really simple—**just say thank you.**

You don't need to say it to anyone or anything in particular. Just say . . . Thanks!

Some people write gratitude journals, pray, do vision boards or share their experiences with other people. I'm very basic and very personal—I just start my day by looking out the window (that I'm grateful to have) and saying, *Thank you for the day.* You do not need a faith in God or Higher Powers to say thanks. Just say it—a whisper, a shout, a loud thought in your head. Thanks!

A scenic landscape at sunset or sunrise. A large, dark tree stands in the foreground, its silhouette against the bright sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. In the background, there are rolling hills or mountains and a body of water. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

**PRACTICE GRATITUDE WHEN
LIFE GOES WELL, SO YOU
CAN SEE THINGS TO BE
GRATEFUL FOR WHEN LIFE
GOES PEAR-SHAPED**

I once sat in an abominably boring meeting and instead of sitting there seething on the inside, I got out my phone and quietly wrote a list of all the things I was grateful for. It filled the time in nicely. Here is my list. **What's in yours?**

- My 3.5 children
- My husband
- Kiki
- My daughters-in-law
- My granddaughter
- The Girls
- My friends
- Coco
- Sunsets and sunrises
- Sunny days
- Refreshing rain
- Courage
- Love
- Financial security
- God
- Music
- Writing
- My book
- My comfortable bed
- My medical team
- Medications
- Mental stability
- Views of the ocean
- Intelligence
- Travel experiences
- Roof over my head
- The completed renovations
- Employment
- Writing ability
- My years as a musician
- My tattoos
- Humility
- Patience
- Thermomix
- Laughter
- Camping
- My book launch
- Sleep
- Acceptance
- The Big Bang Theory
- My lounge suite
- Good health
- Strong body
- Learning things at gym
- Book club
- Mum's amethyst necklace



**WHERE THOUGHTS GO,
ENERGY FOLLOWS.**

There are three more ways that I have learned to get out of my head—to stop ruminating on the past and present—and to live in the moment. I will be the first to admit that I don't spend much time in any of these three states, but I have practiced them in the past and I know a lot of people who swear by them for healing, recovery and mental wellbeing. So I'm including them here in the hope perhaps you might benefit. Give them a go—you **just never know!**

MEDITATION

Meditation is often thought of as a spiritual or religious practice, but anyone can do it. I tried! All the meditation I did was accompanied by music (in apps) but it doesn't have to be. Meditation is focussed attention on an object, thought or activity. The goal is to train attention and awareness—letting go of intrusive thoughts—and to attain a state of emotional calm and mental clarity. I have used the concept of meditation with creative dreaming—to get away from negative thought patterns I have dreamt of something positive (even impossibly nonsensical) and focused my thoughts on that vision. I cannot tell you the number of times it has helped calm me down. Perhaps a little non-traditional—but then so am I.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the art of being aware of the moment—utilising the senses to notice what is here and now. Right at this moment. The feel of the table under my arms. The taste of my English Breakfast tea. The sound of Bach playing softly in the background. The blue carpet under the table I am writing on. The smell of the musty air-conditioner. When anxiety has struck, I have used mindfulness techniques as a grounding exercise—to try and reset the panic. The traditional grounding practice is 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell and 1 thing you can taste (if taste is a difficult sense in your circumstances, substitute with 1 big breath). But overall, mindfulness is a way of being in the moment and that is a very good way to be.

PRAYER

Prayer is a conversation with someone who isn't there. Most commonly God. But if you don't have a faith in God or Higher Powers, I still believe you can pray. To the universe. To the world in general. To the concept of good. To loved ones who are no longer with you. Traditionally prayer is to someone or something that you worship but it is just a conversation with no audible answers. While I do personally have a very non-traditional Christian faith, it is not compulsory. Much like gratitude you can begin your day with a supplication to whomsoever you please. Asking for guidance, love, support, clarity, freedom, healing. You can pray for yourself or you can pray for others. Or both. Whatever works. It is a very powerful and spiritual practice.

**LISTENING
WITHOUT
TALKING
IS
THE
GREATEST
GIFT**



CREATIVE OUTLETS

**EMOTIONAL
HEALING AND
RECOVERY
IS A VERY
LONELY AFFAIR**



There is no way to run a marathon without actually putting your feet on the ground—one after the other—and propelling your body forward. Healing and recovery is the same. People can cheer you on but at the end of the day, nobody can do the work for you.

Healing emotional pain is painful and there is an inherent tendency to want to numb things away—somehow. People use all types of numbing techniques—self-harm, disordered eating, substance abuse, alcohol, sex, gambling, exercise, work, video games. All sorts of things. Next time you have a really bad day, something shocking happens, people are really mean to you or just some really shitty situation arises, take note of how you want to respond. Are you keen to get home and have a glass of wine? Do you want to yell at the next person who sees you? Do you want to sweat it off at the gym?

WHAT THINGS ARE YOU DOING TO IGNORE AND AVOID CONFRONTING EMOTIONAL PAIN?

Sex and drugs and alcohol and work and exercise and computer games and food are not inherently bad. There is nothing wrong with any of those things—it's how they are utilised that can become a problem.

Learning healthy tools for navigating emotional distress is really important. I cannot even begin to touch on all the different ways this can be done. All I can do is to encourage you to keep researching and forever be open to new possibilities.

But, I can highly recommend a creative outlet.

Sometimes we have no words and it is then that unspoken communication is valuable.

Creativity can be found in music (playing, singing or even just listening), art (painting, pottery, sculpting or even just looking through galleries), dance (I don't know the first thing about dance), theatre (I know precious little about this as well) and writing (my go-to). It can also be found in gardening and nature and home design and engineering and woodwork and cooking and any time you find yourself feeling creative.

I don't have the knowledge or the space to go into great details about all creative outlets, but I just want to say again, find an outlet. You'll be surprised at how much emotional expression can be directed into a song or a poem or a beautiful cake.

Aside from creativity, it is important to acknowledge that emotional pain needs to be felt. And it is painful—sometimes physically painful. But it passes. Nothing stays the same forever. *This too shall pass. Surf the urge. Ride the waves. Gotta feel to heal.* There are lots of clichés out there—if one speaks to you, listen. But emotional pain needs to be felt and lived. And yelling your pain at another person is not a healthy outlet. Punishing your body is not a healthy outlet. Creativity is a healthy outlet. Caring for your mind, body and soul is a healthy outlet.

WHAT ARE YOUR GO-TO BEHAVIOURS WHEN THE SHIT HITS THE FAN?

**ONE WAY OR ANOTHER,
ALL PAIN IS DEALT WITH.
WHETHER IT IS DEALT
WITH PRODUCTIVELY
OR NOT, IS THE CHOICE
WE HAVE.**

Music is powerful. Babies are comforted by music in utero. My son used to wake up and dance to the 'Sound of Music' when I was six months pregnant and performing in the show. So it stands to reason something as emotionally challenging as recovery from [name your problem] can benefit from soaking in the soporific sounds of music that calls you.

I grew up listening to and performing classical music but it is popular music I turned to in recovery. I think the easy melodies and catchy lyrics helped. I also had a lot of grief at the loss of my musical career which was triggered when listening to classical music. But it doesn't matter. Whatever your genre, find something that sings to you—with or without words.

Find something that speaks to your heart.

I should point out I am no spring chicken and nor is my music selection. If you're hoping for a top of the pops list, you're definitely in the wrong place. Also—I lean toward cheesey pop, so read on if you're brave enough.

1-800-273-8255—Logic

Beautiful Girl—Sarah McLachlan

Beauty from Pain—Superchick

Be OK—Ingrid Michaelson

Better Place—Rachael Platten

Be Yourself—Hilltop Hoods

Brave—Sara Bareilles

Carry On—Fun

Close Your Eyes—Meghan Trainor

Feeling Good—Avicii

Fighter—Christina Aguilera

Fight Song—Rachael Platten

Floodgates—Colbie Caillat

Fucking Perfect—Pink

Get Up—Superchick

Hold On—Riley Clemmons

House with No Mirrors—Sasha Sloan

It's On—Julia Michaels

Just Be You—Anthem Lights

Keep Breathing—Ingrid Michaelson

Keep On—Sasha Sloan

Missing You—All Time Low

Never Give Up—Sia

Not Ready to Die Yet—Mary Lambert

Rise Up—Andra Day

Secrets—Mary Lambert

She Used to Be Mine—Sara Bareilles

Soldiers—Rachael Platten

Swimming—Pearl & The Beard

This Too Shall Pass—OK Go

Wake Me Up—Avicii

Victoria's Secret—Jax

Warrior—Demi Lovato

Who I'm Meant to Be—Anthem Lights

After I left the clinic for my first inpatient psychiatric stay, I was encouraged to journal. People kept telling me again and again what a useful tool it was. For six months I ignored them, then I gave in. I have been an avid writer ever since. Journaling and writing are the creative tools that have spoken to me the most.

I learned the art of dream writing. It is not about producing any kind of quality content. Dream writing is about accessing your subconscious and exploring what is hidden there.

TO START DREAM WRITING:

1. Choose a writing prompt (I've offered a few suggestions, but honestly—any old thing will do)
2. Set your timer (I started with five minutes but increased to fifteen+ because I'm very verbose on paper)
3. Write your prompt and then keep writing any old thing that pops into your head. Do not let the pencil stop for the whole time. Keep writing anything—if words dry up just repeat the prompt over and over. Do not worry if you write the prompt then explore some completely unrelated topic. Just write whatever is in your head and heart and let it all out. When you're finished you don't need to do anything. Throw it away if you want. The goal is not to create a literary masterpiece but to release unspoken thoughts.

Sound stupid? That's what I thought. Then I tried it (because by then I'd given up on relying on my own resources) and I was overcome by the kind of things I was writing and the positive impact it had on me. Give it a go—you never know!

JOURNAL PROMPTS

I dream about . . .
I remember when . . .
I feel safe when . . .
My favourite smell is . . .
My eyes have seen . . .
My body can . . .
Rain feels like . . .
I can hear the sound of . . .
Summer tastes like . . .
When I close my eyes . . .
My earliest memory is . . .
I am proud of . . .
Today I will . . .

I love it when . . .
I can feel . . .
My day is full of . . .
I was brought to my knees when . . .
I get mad when . . .
The world is full of . . .
My childhood was . . .
I am . . .
I love . . .
I am afraid . . .
I wish . . .
When I am old . . .
When I was young . . .



I AM NOT...

**MY ILLNESS
MY PAST
MY WORST MISTAKE**

I HAVE...

**A CONDITION
A LIFE
A BODY**

I AM...

**WORTHY
PURPOSEFUL
ME**

SELFCARE

EAT WELL

MOVE WELL

SLEEP WELL



I know, I know, I know. It sounds so boring and shit, but self-care is critical to wellbeing. It is all well and good to look after other people and it is all well and good for other people to look after us. But we have to look after ourselves too—physically, mentally, spiritually. Nobody can force you to be well.

Do you eat well, move well and sleep well?

If not, why not? A great many of us have limitations in some or all of these areas, but that doesn't mean we can't do the best we can in our circumstances. If you need support from a doctor, physiotherapist, dietitian, exercise physiologist or some other allied health professional, then get their support. You deserve to feel well.

EAT WELL

If you don't eat well your body is compromised. Cognition is affected. Blood sugars go haywire and you get whacky hormones. If you're malnourished your organs become compromised—and malnourishment occurs in people of all shapes and sizes.

I do not believe in diets. Ever.

Dieting has taught me that you lose weight for a short time then gain it back plus a bit more.

I do not believe in cutting out food groups or fasting when you're hungry.

There are no 'good' or 'bad' foods (although there are allergies and intolerances—know your body).

I believe in [intuitive eating](#) (check out the website . . .) combined with a little bit of common sense.

We need to eat a wide variety of nutrients—foods from different food groups, foods of different colours, foods that are as close to nature as possible.

We need to eat food that is enjoyable and satiates us.

We need to eat when hungry and stop when we're full, which means tuning in to hunger signals.

We need to enjoy social eating—food is a sensory, sensual, pleasurable experience.

If you've fallen into difficult eating habits you may need to reset by timetabling food for a period of time—three main meals and three snacks per day. Non-negotiable. Never let yourself go hungry.

You don't need to have an eating disorder to be in a period of restriction and restriction always leads to bingeing.

If you want to eat cake—eat cake. If you eat intuitively, you will not want to eat cake all the time. This was my greatest fear—and it was never realised. I consulted a fantastic dietitian and she helped me a lot.

I will include the Australian Dietary Guidelines here as they are very helpful—the goal is to score three out of five for every main meal. i.e. something from three (or more) different main food groups each time you eat.

It may seem like I've spent a lot of time talking about eating, but in my experience, mentally unwell people often eat very poorly. Eating regular meals and having a widely varied diet won't cure mental illness, but erratic eating will make it worse.

Our goal is to make things better—not worse . . .

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.

Drink plenty of water.



Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties



Vegetables and legumes/beans



Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans



Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat



Fruit



Use small amounts



Only sometimes and in small amounts



The other two main aspects of core physical health are moving well and sleeping well. These things are often out of our control—it is easy for me to say *move well* but if you're living in a wheelchair, have chronic back pain, or fibromyalgia or any of a gazillion health conditions, your ability to move may very well be compromised.

And as for sleep—either you can or you can't. I am a chronic insomniac, at the very severe end of the spectrum. I am also very well medicated these days and take five medications to support sleep. I am not ashamed of requiring assistance to sleep.

LIKE EVERYTHING IN LIFE, WE MUST DO THE BEST WE CAN WITH THE CIRCUMSTANCES AT HAND.

MOVE WELL

If you don't move well your body loses strength and flexibility. Your mobility becomes impacted which affects your ability to participate in every day life. If you are physically able to go for a walk, then do it. Preferably outside as fresh air is good for us.

Moving well does not have to mean signing up for a gym membership that you never use. It's about finding something you can do that doesn't cause distress. Personally, I do go to the gym. I do not have physical limitations—something that I am grateful for. And I have had very positive gym experiences in my later years. So I try to get there a few days each week.

I adore being in nature. While climbing a mountain seems a lot like hard work, the rewards **are well worth it for me.**

Some people I know love gardening. Others love dancing. Some walk their dogs. Some people have kids or grandkids they run around with. Some people are very house proud and do lots of housework (nobody will ever accuse me of being house proud . . .)

WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?

Perhaps you already move a lot, in which case this little spiel is probably not for you. Perhaps you know that you need to get out and move more, in which case, what is a practical way for you to do this?

I just want to emphasise here that you are aiming to move more for health and strength and mobility—not weight loss. If you don't have an eating disorder, you don't want to get one. We all need to move—within our limitations but do the best you can. If you put your shoes on and walk to the letterbox today, that might be a huge achievement. Well done! Try it again tomorrow.

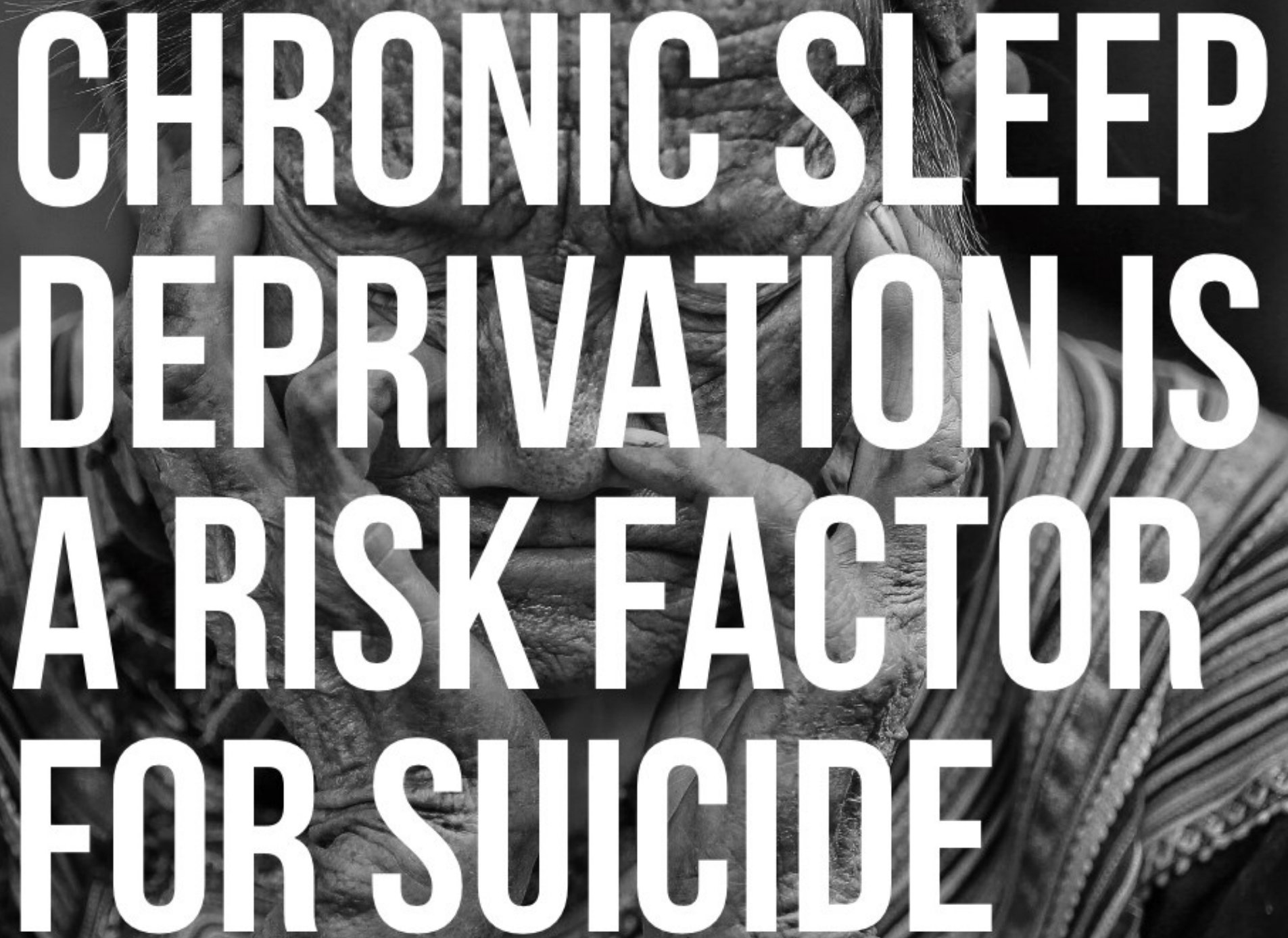
SLEEP WELL

If you don't sleep well everything is awful—that's my experience. I could write a whole book on chronic insomnia. I [write regularly about insomnia here](#) if you're interested. My worst insomnia coincided with my worst breakdown. I'm sure that's not a coincidence. If you are fortunate enough to be able to sleep, make sure you're getting some regular shut-eye in.

Mental illness is exhausting and when people are very ill they often sleep a lot. If that's you, please don't fret. Your body is telling you to rest. And when you're asleep your mind is (hopefully) resting. Trying to push through the fatigue won't make you feel better. Rest when you can.

If you're having difficulty with sleep then make sure you have addressed the principles of [good sleep hygiene](#). Most of it is common sense, but have a quick read and ensure you are maximising your chance of good rest.

Ultimately, when it comes to sleep, get what you need and if you aren't able to sleep regularly, let yourself rest. Put your feet up and listen to music, read a book, watch television, snuggle your cat. Just rest your body and mind.



**CHRONIC SLEEP
DEPRIVATION IS
A RISK FACTOR
FOR SUICIDE**

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge that I write from a point of privilege.

I am a middle class, able-bodied, white, straight woman. I have easy access to good health care and education, I have never lived in fear for my life, and I have a supportive network of friends and family. I cannot pretend to know what it is like to be marginalised.

NOT EVERYONE IS SO LUCKY.

Mental health does not discriminate. Wealth, colour, gender, identity—none of these things can prevent illness. But with privilege comes access to levels of care that not everyone has. If you are fortunate to have access to that care please accept whatever help you can. It is still a lot of hard work and becoming well is no guarantee, but I want to acknowledge the inequities in our society.

If you do not have access to care I want you to do the very best you can with whatever resources are at hand. Anything you can do to improve your situation is a job well done. Eating a meal. Resting. Seeking refuge. Letting go of self-recrimination. These are all major accomplishments in many circumstances.

American psychologist Abraham Maslow theorised on our [hierarchy of needs](#). My life really fell apart at the connections level and it is from that point I have worked on improving things. If your physical needs are not being met, or your environment is unsafe, those situations need to be addressed first. Work on doing what you can, at your needs level.

PHYSICAL: We all need to eat well, sleep well, move well—have access to clean water, warm clothing and shelter. I have struggled with severe insomnia all my life and spent most of 50 years with an eating disorder. Lacking those basics of nutrition and sleep impacted my mental health so badly that I cannot calculate the damage it did. If this is where you need help, begin here.

SAFETY: Living with security and without fear is a basic human right. I did not grow up in an environment of abuse, although I did grow up with childhood emotional neglect. If you live in fear, I am sorry. You do not deserve that. I do not know how to change your circumstance but I want you to keep hoping that change can happen. Keep searching for ways to be safe.

CONNECTIONS: Humans are social beings and we all need a sense of connection, love and belonging. Many people find these connections with family, but some of us miss out and instead find our community of people elsewhere—through friends, acquaintances, colleagues, gym buddies or even online communities. Somewhere you are accepted for who you are—right now.

ESTEEM: Creating a sense of self-esteem can be a big thing. If you weren't taught to love yourself in childhood, it is difficult to learn as an adult. But learn we can. Confidence, a sense of achievement and a sense of worthiness—combined with a little bit of humility—are important aspects of becoming whole. You can not get well if you are hating on yourself.

SELF ACTUALISATION: Maslow's ultimate goal—for us to reach our full potential, embrace our morality, creativity, explore all our talents and accept our worth. This is a big step for anyone and I have to confess, I'm not sure I've crossed this threshold yet. But I keep working and keep believing. You are worthy simply because you exist. One day I hope you believe that.

I have no magic answers for you my friend. I hope and believe that you will find the means to meet your needs - level by level.

If you belong to a marginalised group of people, through race, sexuality, gender identity, religion, body size, disability, social status, or another minority group, I encourage you to find your community if possible. Somewhere you feel loved and accepted for who you are. The world can be cruel but there are good people in it and you deserve to find those good people.

The world is a better place, because you exist.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

SELF- ACTUALISATION

**FULL POTENTIAL,
CREATIVITY, ACCEPTANCE**

ESTEEM

**CONFIDENCE, ACHIEVEMENT,
DIGNITY, RESPECT**

LOVE & BELONGING

**FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY, INTIMACY,
SENSE OF CONNECTION**

SAFETY

**SECURITY, STABILITY,
FREEDOM FROM FEAR**

PHYSIOLOGICAL

**AIR, WATER, FOOD, SHELTER,
CLOTHING, REST**

LAST WORDS

Mental illness can be fatal—it is not to be taken lightly. And even if it is not fatal, it is miserable. Often, a very difficult way to live. Some of us experience mental illness for a period of time in our lives—perhaps just once, or recurring episodes over a lifetime. Some of us experience chronic mental illness that never goes away but can be managed. Whatever your situation, take care.

If you are in any way concerned about your safety, or the safety of someone you care about, please refer back to page seven for crisis lines or dial emergency services in your country of residence.

There are a great many tools for working on improving mental health—I've only touched on a few. Keep reading and researching and find what works for you. There is something out there that will help. Your healing will most likely be a whole pile of different things that come together to create your own unique little pot of recovery.

If you would like to know more about me, you can find me on Instagram [@simoneyemm](#) or Facebook [/simoneyemm](#) or visit my website [simoneyemm.com](#). And if you want to know ALL about me, you can purchase my memoir, [Stalked by Demons, Guarded by Angels: The Girl with the Eating Disorder](#). If you've read it, please consider leaving a review. Reviews make us authors very, very happy.

So, thank you for reading my little book, *Bite Size Recovery*. Feel free to drop by my social media accounts and say hello! And my friend . . . please take care. You are worthwhile and you are loved.

DISCLAIMER

I am not a mental health professional. In fact, I'm not any kind of health professional. Everything I have shared in here is just anecdotal information about my own personal experience of living with chronic mental illness. The views expressed in this document are mine and mine alone. They do not represent any other organisation or body.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record I will repeat once more, seek **professional guidance**—either for yourself or your loved ones.

REFERENCES

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PRAISE FOR “STALKED BY DEMONS, GUARDED BY ANGELS: THE GIRL WITH THE EATING DISORDER”

NATIONAL INDIE EXCELLENCE AWARDS FINALIST IN MEMOIR CATEGORY, 2022

“An inspiring and timely story told with honesty, humor, and a generous heart. Everyone knows someone—or is someone—who battles with the issues Simone explores. Here is a book to shine light on your journey.”

—Katherine Scholes, Best-Selling Author of *The Rain Queen*

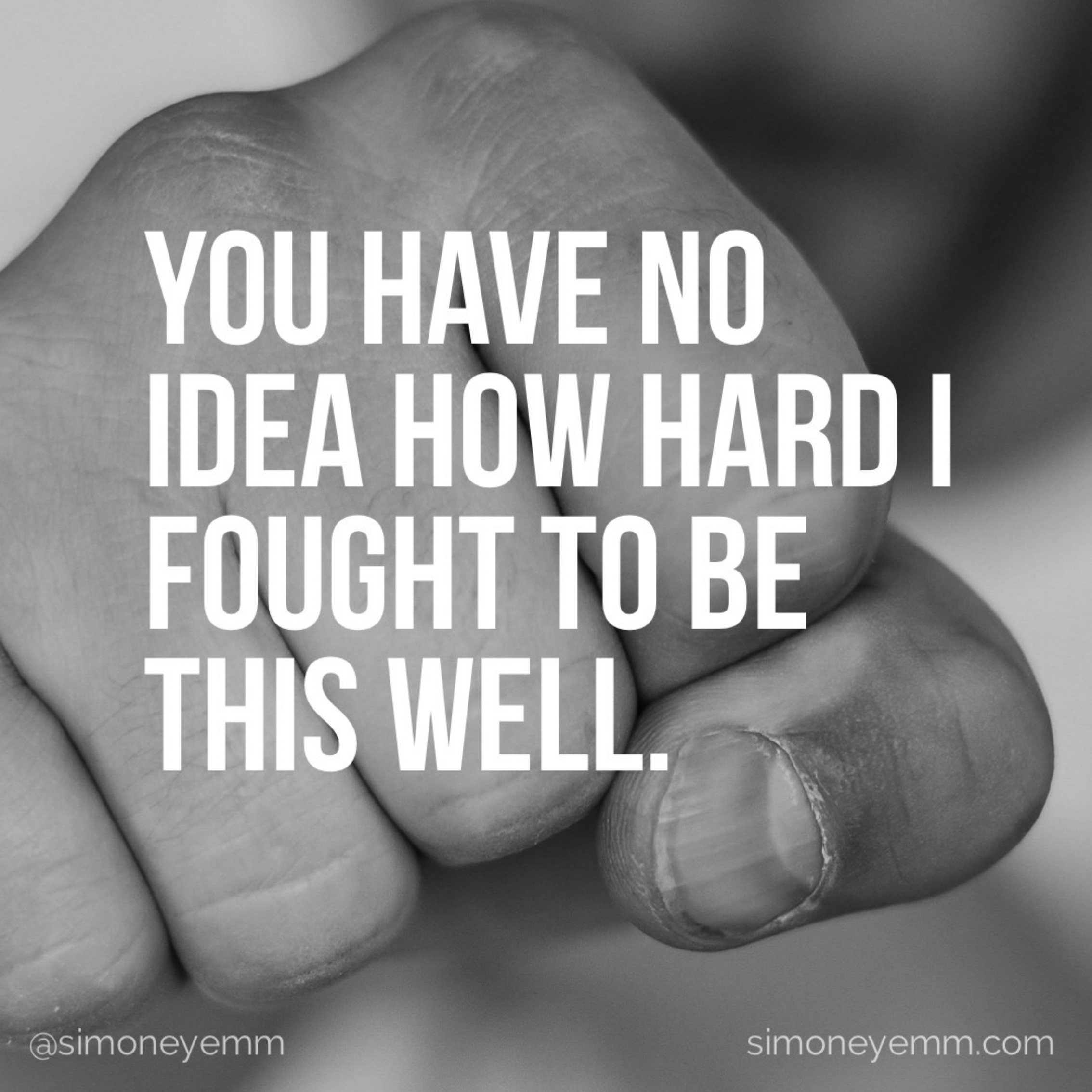


“Well. I am on the floor. Stalked by Demons, Guarded by Angels is a devastating read. It was tough. I recognized so much of myself and so many women I know in the manuscript. The writing is superlative. There are so many moments of beauty and pain. It is unflinching in its gaze, and does not sugarcoat or become preachy or smugly, happily ‘Look, I did it; so can you!’ I started to read it and couldn’t stop. I was just glued to the reading as I went and was so deeply affected by the read. It is such a work of heartbreaking beauty, with such compelling, poetic, and raw storytelling.”

—Julie Gray, Author of *The True Adventures of Gidon Lev*

“This memoir is honest, intelligent, and generous. I felt the heartaches and hard-won triumphs to the point where, after surfacing from an hour or two of reading, I was surprised to find I was someone else entirely. How do you make such raw, complex, personal material feel like a cozy chat over a cuppa? I’m not sure. Magic, I suspect. I usually read to feel entertained; Simone’s book went beyond that. Reading it, I felt trusted, and that is a gift.”

—Lindsey Little, Author of the *James Munkers Series*



**YOU HAVE NO
IDEA HOW HARD I
FOUGHT TO BE
THIS WELL.**