

FROM NATASHA

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Dear You,

I'm extremely sorry that you're feeling this way right now. It isn't fair and it isn't right – mental illness never is. But I, a chronically depressed, treatment-resistant person, am here to tell you that there is another side to the pain. I know it feels like there isn't, but I promise, there is.

When depression lays its heavy, spikey, leaden blanket on you, I know it feels like everything is impossible. I know it feels like you're buried six feet under in muck and slime. I know sometimes you don't shower for weeks. I know it's tempting not to change your clothes for days and days. I know you don't want to cook yourself any real food for a month.

I know what it feels like when every cell in your body hurts. I know what it feels like to seem to fail at everything you do. I know what it's like to take medication that seems to only produce side-effects and never makes you feel better. I know what it's like not

to love yourself and I know what it's like to think that death is the only way out of the pain.

Because of this, your life may have fallen apart around you. It may feel like you can't do a thing about it. It can feel like reaching out to fix it is like trying to catch water with an open hand. I know that all of this hurts immensely.

But here's the thing: I also know what it feels like to start lifting your way out of that dreck. I also know what it feels like to take a baby step forward. I know what it feels like to get up, and make yourself a grilled tomato and cheese sandwich after only eating ice cream for days. I also know what it feels like to take a deep breath and to have it relieve some of the pain that you've been feeling.

I know what the road to recovery feels like.

This road is a long and bumpy one – there are switchbacks and mountainous hills and treacherous turns; but this road truly does exist and you can find it. You can navigate it. It's not easy. You'll have to take it one tiny step at a time, but you can do it.

Keep working with your psychiatrist. Keep talking to your therapist. Continue using your coping skills. Follow your treatment plan. Maintain your healthy lifestyle changes. These are things that can help you find the roadmap to recovery. I know, sometimes, it feels like no matter what you do, it doesn't help. But these things do

help – over time. I know that waiting for them to work is agony. But it is an agony you can survive in order to live a good life again.

Because in the end, what you will experience on the other side of the pain will make slogging through it worth it. I have experienced skydives and flying with eagles over the mountains of Venezuela and starting a major mental health blog at NatashaTracy.com and falling in love – all post-depression. And there is nothing special about me. If I can survive it, so can you. What you need to know is that another side exists and you can get there. I'm not saying it's easy but I am saying it's possible.

You can do it.

Natasha