

The Rollercoaster

For those who are struggling with their mental health, I'd like to offer this analogy that I've been reminded of during various, often turbulent, points in my life.

Mental health has always felt like riding a rollercoaster. I find myself in a constant cycle of ascending upward to the pinnacle of the tall tracks as I await the gloomy downward plummet cascading to a pit of what I can only describe as expectant anguish, and after I finally fall, I'm left to once again board the coaster and start the climb up to feel that anticipated crash for another repetitive plunge down to the abyss that is mental illness.

Depression has its highs and lows, the highs being as fluorescent as the lows are low. Do you know that feeling when you're on a really tall roller coaster and you finally open your eyes after squeezing them shut the entire time? That's what the highs feel like. For once, I can finally take a moment to open my eyes and sample all of the brightness that life has to offer.

The highs are filled with realization and motivation. In my head, I find myself repeating sluggishly: I don't want to just survive anymore, I want to *live*. I imagine how it would feel to experience the routine things that high schoolers boast without feeling guilt. I crave the feeling of falling in love without letting my depression drown me in its melancholy waves, and I think about how it would feel to be in a crowd without my anxiety pushing me to become a background character in what was once a function I'd willingly invested myself in. Just as I gather weary scraps of personal incentive to start to work towards these goals, the roller coaster declines down and suddenly all of my thoughts feel suffocatingly insurmountable.

As the roller coaster falls to its inevitable dip, the low once again begins to take over. My eyelids feel heavy as I start losing sleep, and classes suddenly become insufferable to sit through. Even though I love writing, it's the last thing on the now overwhelming agenda of topics to

overthink soaring through my mind. My bedroom becomes my safe haven, and when someone asks me if something's wrong, I either respond with hostility or by merely protesting the idea that I now see as advertently ludicrous.

The roller coaster is inescapable. You can try to neglect the reminder in the back of your head prodding at the fact that you're tumbling into an abyss of depression, but no matter how much you try to pretend that the feeling of dread isn't present, you'll still end up feeling dreadful. Mental health doesn't just go away, therefore, you need to make the best of it. To anyone who's struggling with mental health, I want to tell you, even if it seems redundant, that it truly does get better. You need to be present where you are, and relish in those highs. Right now, life might seem like it's adherently dreadful, but it's not going to feel that way forever.

It's important to learn how to hit the brakes at the end of the roller coaster and start the incline of your future. There's a light at the end of the tunnel, no matter how long that tunnel may seem. Use your highs, or periods of feeling bliss, to get yourself through the lows where you feel inescapably depressed. For the most part, there's no permanent cure to mental illness, so it's up to you to both make the best of it and find the good in even the most miniscule situations. One way to soothe melancholic feelings is speaking them out loud. In my experience, therapy and conversations with close friends about my depressive feelings has helped me get those repetitive thoughts of despondency out of my head. Sometimes just recognizing those feelings caused by depression is enough to uplift yourself.

Mental illness is turbulent and unpredictable. The only way to overcome feelings of hopelessness and gloom is to revel in your highs to push yourself through the lows, and make peace with the rollercoaster of emotions that mental illness can be.