

Jasmine Eats Stuff

Volume II: Comfort



Jasmine LaRue Hagans

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**Dedicated to all who feel at odds with their
health and who seek comfort to regain the
strength to heal.**

I. Introduction

I have PTSD. I'm not sure how long I've had it but over the past few months PTSD occupied significant part of my life. It took my girlfriend asking if I needed the help of mental health professionals after a particularly dark evening with a panic attack for me to realize how far down the spiral I had gone.

So I got help. And I'm writing this volume of the zine to reach out to you. If you or someone you know has PTSD, anxiety, depression, an eating disorder, are bi-polar, or have any number of other mental health issues, I want you to know that I'm here. You're not alone and help is available. There are things you can do to improve your quality of life. You can work with what you have to get healthy. It's possible.

After several weeks in an evening intensive outpatient program (IOP), I'm coping with this better and maintaining good self-care. Before I go further, here is the definition of PTSD, from the Mayo Clinic:

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event.

Many people who go through traumatic events have difficulty adjusting and coping for a while, but they don't have PTSD — with time and good self-care, they usually get better. But if the symptoms get worse or last for months or even years and interfere with your functioning, you may have PTSD.

Getting effective treatment after PTSD symptoms develop can be critical to reduce symptoms and improve function.

Check out the Mayo Clinic's website for more info on symptoms, treatment, and what to do if you or someone you know needs help.

So PTSD is scary! You experience or witness something terrifying and then your brain says "Nope, can't think about this experience safely right now so let's get super anxious and pay extra close attention to everything in your life to make sure you're not in danger again. Forever." Forever! Nope. Not going to do it. I've had enough.

So now after this IOP program helped me to bring my symptoms down to a manageable level, I'm working with an individual therapist. My goal: process past experiences and develop skills for processing future events. Trauma won't stop but I can choose to process it differently.

A big part of recovery thus far has been figuring out ways to bring my anxiety levels down. The keystone

of this process is letting my brain know my body is safe. Going for a walk, talking to my girlfriend, meditating, working out, drawing, and eating good food have been my top methods. Coping helps me feel my emotions. We all need to let ourselves feel our emotions. Don't ignore them or stuff them away. If your emotions are scary or weird that's ok. You, your loved ones, your community, and mental health professionals are here to help you feel them in a healthy way and think about them, even the dark ones like loss, sadness, anxiety, and depression.

My Instagram hasn't showed me having anxiety attacks or PTSD because I choose to project the images of enjoying food. It's a signal to me: if I don't feel like posting a #jasmineeatsstuff photo then I should pay attention to my thoughts around food. If I'm anxious, my thoughts around food go something like this: *Don't eat. If you eat you will relax and relaxing is bad because then you're not on high alert. You must stay on high alert because you are in danger. If I recognize this thought cycle then I can repeat to myself, "You are safe. You are not in danger. You are safe. You are safe. You are safe."* It's tough to repeat but it usually sinks in after a few minutes. I'm getting better at recognizing when this anxious thought cycle is happening. It happened on Christmas. I told myself that it's ok to relax. This is a planned chill day. Everyone in this damn country is taking a chill day. You are safe. It's ok.

I keep a list of what makes me feel safe so I know what to use when I feel PTSD creeping into my

reality. So the images in this volume are organized by comfort. Cereal in my favorite bowl, pizza, good salad, sugary cookies, ramen. There are so many foods that bring comfort and thus safety to my life. I want to celebrate that.

Some of the images in this volume are from the cross-country drive in September as my girlfriend and I moved to LA from Boston. Some are from our new life here in California. Although the images aren't in chronological order, I haven't had a haircut since I moved so you can tell the LA ones by my longer hair. Ha!

For a variety of reasons, not least including the American political climate, I know that I'm going to be extra vigilant about self-care in 2017. I want to keep moving forward. Even if the government takes away my right to make choices about my body, my right to marry my love, or the right to information, I am determined to keep moving forward. The first way to do that is to make sure I'm strong, healthy, and full of hope.

So here's a cheer to food. Let's eat!

-Jasmine LaRue Hagans, January 2017

II. California Living: In-N-Out





Umami Burger is also pretty good



III. Mac n Cheese

Sometimes when my brain is telling me not to eat, I can somehow eat this. When you have the choice, Comfort > Suffering



IV. OMG SO MANY GOOD BURRITOS







V. How to Survive IKEA

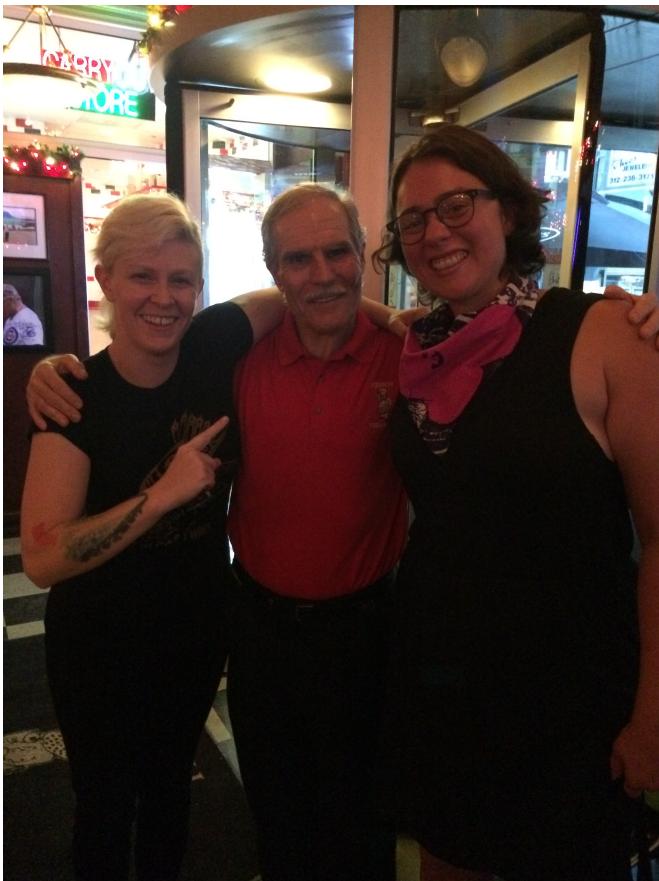


VI. Pizza

Chicago: we meet Joe Chachi, aka The Chach, at Pizano's Pizza



The Chach welcomes everyone with enthusiasm that seems impossible for anyone much less a waiter. He said that his mother and aunts were the biggest influence in his life. (Women, yea!) He lives every day with joy and delight's in peoples' stories. In my dark moments I take comfort in knowing that he exists and that Jess and I had the good fortune to meet him at one of his tables.



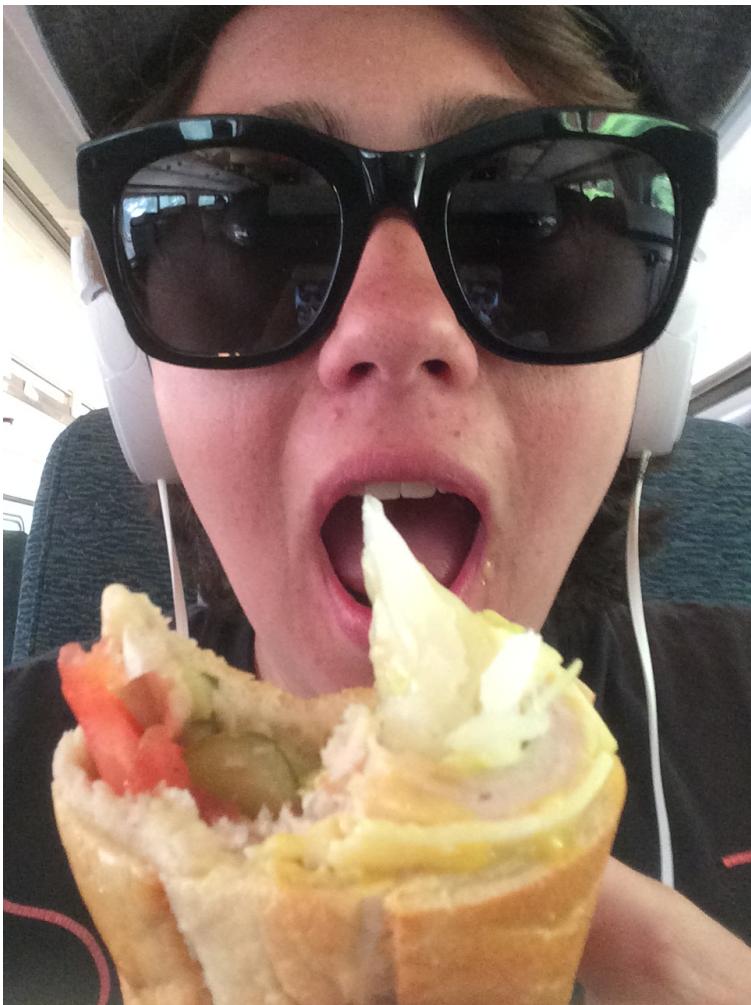
Pizza in LA is a-okay.



**Family is rad and food can connect us across
the country. This is my Grandma Vicki,
known to us as GMV. Love you, GMV!!**



VII. Sandwiches. Yum.



WaWa hoagie on a SEPTA train while visiting family before the trip out to LA.

**Grilled cheese and tomato with dad. Check
out that pinkie!**



The best way to get through Penn Station is
with a big sandwich.



Somewhere West of the Mississippi...



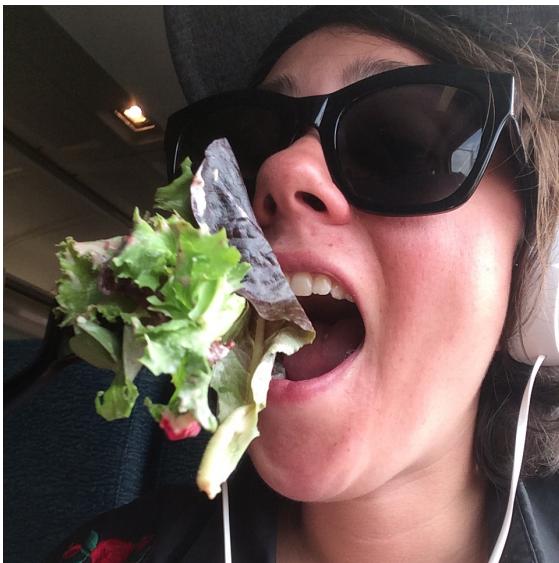
VIII. Tater Tots. I Like Them.





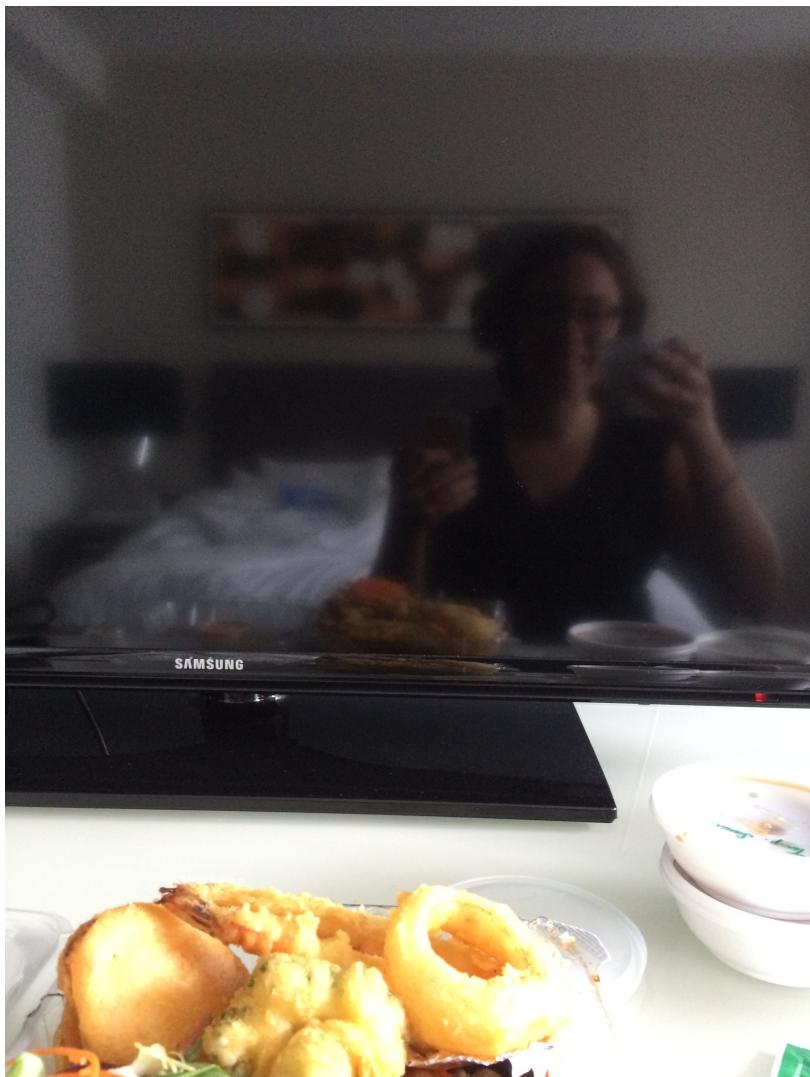
IX. Self-Care Is Important. Eat Those Greens.





X. Eating with Chopsticks: Builds Patience and Extends the Meal





Chicago hotel eats



Ramen at a mall in Omaha. It kicked a road cold!

XI. My Favorite Bowl and Mugs

Surrounding myself with objects that comfort me can help in moments of anxiety.

It helps to focus on them and know that even if my emotions shift, this bowl will always be there to deliver joy - and cereal!



We had a lot of good laughs this fall and
then he was there for me with tea on
November 9.



Fake it until you make it.
Favorite mug, a gift from Tom. (Hi, Tom!)



XII. Seltzer



XIII. The Sweet Stuff

It's best when its strawberry pie from GMV





But ice cream is great too



<3 Cupcakes with Jess <3

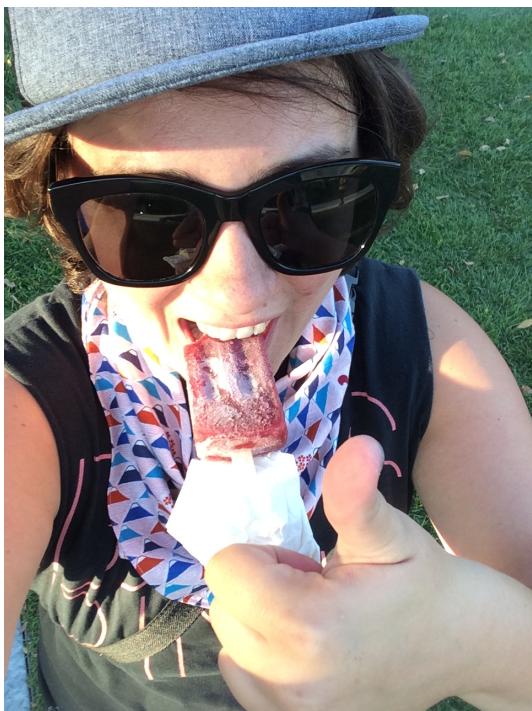
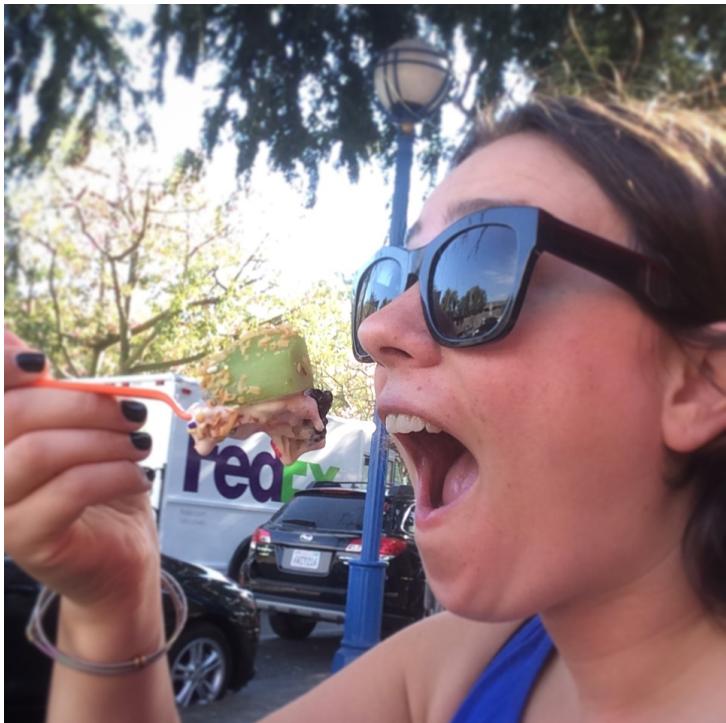


Muffins in the Middle of the Country



Pancakes Forever





Giant pop tart. Yesssssssss!



Nature is comforting. Those trees and mountains have been around for so long – so much longer than my anxiety triggers.



My hat is from Waffletown, a legit restaurant in Virginia.

More cupcakes.



Baking brings me comfort. Take ingredients and turn them into something more delicious than their separate selves. Being connected is good, whether you're sugar or a person.



Cake with Dad!



Cake in the car. Car cake!



XIV. Tea: Switch Your Temperature, Switch Your Mind





So at the end of this volume, I want to say the following:

You are loved by many.

There is help available. Mental health professionals, your loved ones, and community members are all there to help.

Take help if it is offered. No shame in help.

We all experience pain but pain need not lead to suffering.

Sadness comes from loss. We all experience loss.

It's ok to feel sad. Just by being alive we will experience sadness.

You can form new paths through your brain. The reactions you have now don't have to be the reactions you have tomorrow.

Those new paths take work but I'd rather work on the new bright pathways than wallow in the old dark ones.

**There is hope.
You are loved.
You can do this.**

Let's share some food!