

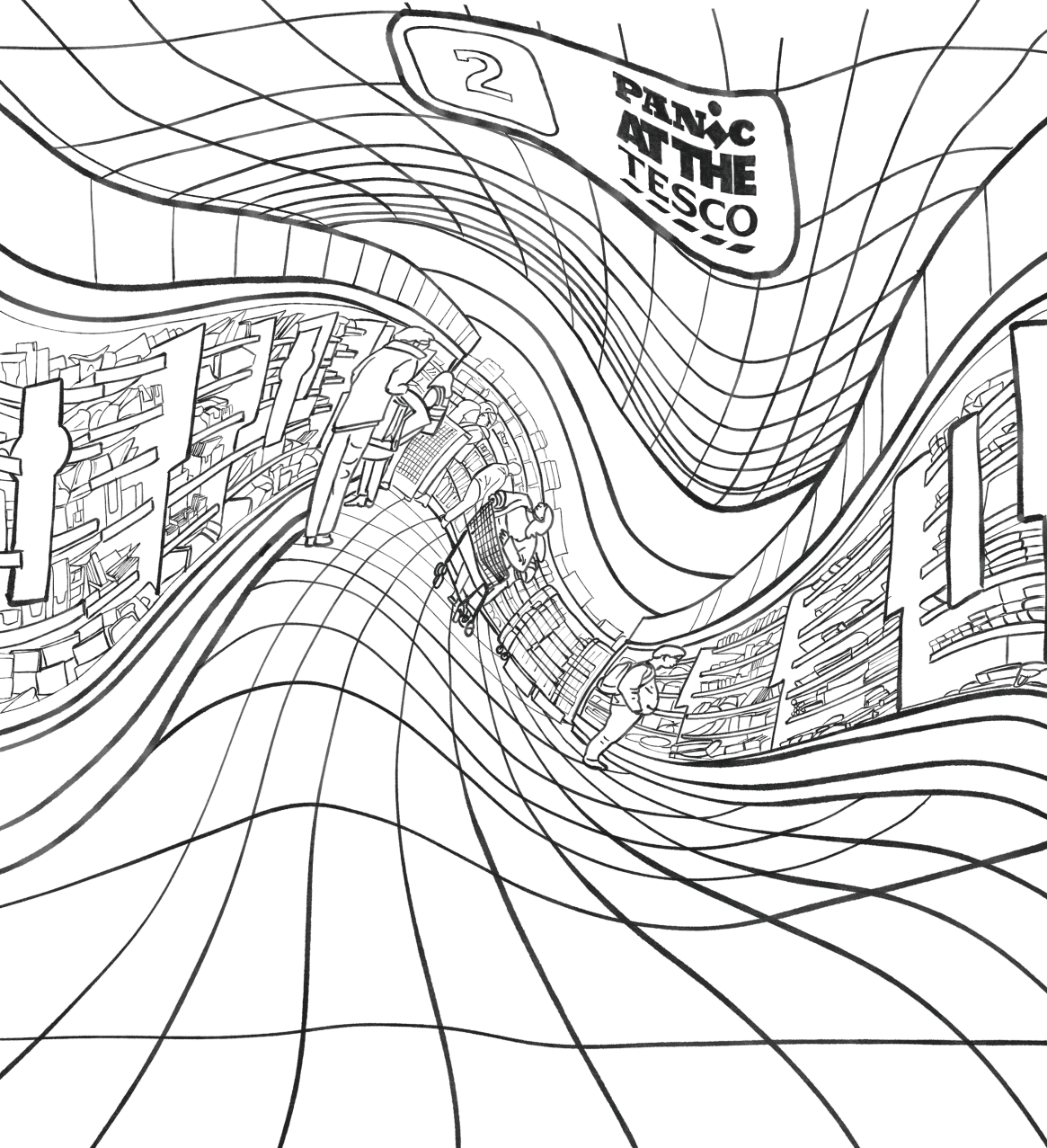
# QUEER.INK

No 2

May 2024

presents

**Fiona Margrie's**



for my loving partner who  
has stuck with me and helped  
me through dark times

i love you



<https://queer.ink/playlist-002>



or the longest time I didn't really feel much at all. I had a really rough time with my mental health as a teenager. A lot was happening, and I was scared and confused. I didn't know what I was feeling, why my body was doing certain things, or why no one else seemed to struggle with any of this.

I found out that I was autistic when I was 12, but I was ashamed of the label. The little representation there was in media was either non-existent or played for comic relief (much like trans and non-binary representation). I found it very hard to make and keep friends, my special interests got me branded as "weird," and my underdeveloped social skills made me an easy target for bullying.

In 2007, after starting college, I started taking anti-anxiety meds and have been on one in some form ever since. While they did help manage my anxiety, they also flattened out my mood completely.

Like a heavy blanket, depression smothered me. My creativity and motivation had all but gone, and having to survive in the real world with rent, taxes, and bills sapped what little enjoyment I could still feel.

The weight of masking my mental illnesses at work and in public became unbearable, and I found escape in drugs and alcohol. Getting high and watching cartoons let me forget for a moment that I hated myself and thought everyone else would hate me too if they knew what I was really like.

It was a lonely time. I was living alone on a boat on the river with no permanent mooring. It was a fun adventure at first and the summers on the River Lea and Grand Union Canal were idyllic. But then you run out of gas or water halfway through a shower, or there's so little daylight in winter for the solar panels that you get home from work to a cold, dark, floating metal box with only battery-powered lights and a whole lot of blankets.

During this time I was really very depressed. I began questioning everything: the boat, my job, past relationships, my sexuality, and ultimately my gender too. Although that last one wouldn't pop up again until a few years later.

I used to hate what made me different. I used to think those traits were bad and I had to hide them. I used to see those traits in other people—people like me—and hate them for it. I used to think everyone hated me for those things too.

When I realised I was trans, there was a fear deep inside me that people wouldn't understand or be hostile to the whole idea. But since starting my transition and being met with nothing but love and support from my friends and family, I've been shown that people *do* like me for who I really am. My friends love me and I love them, for all our quirks and differences.

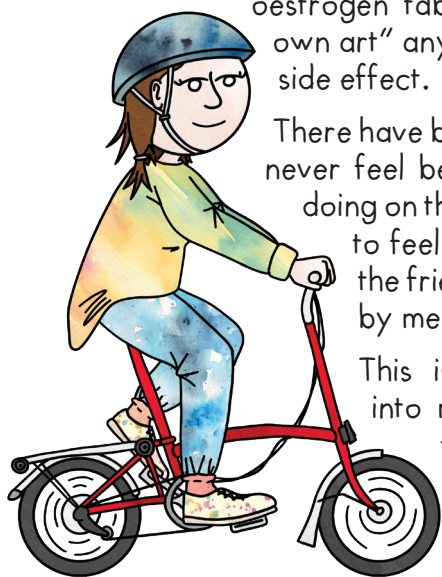
Learning to love myself (and that I am worthy of love) has given me room to explore my mind in all its uniqueness and discover tools and techniques that other neurodivergent folks use to navigate this neurotypical world. I've found it helpful to know that there's names for the unusual ways in which I experience the world, knowing that there are other people out there facing the same challenges and seeing how they overcome them.

I've crawled out from under the blanket of depression and begun to feel again. My creative motivation has returned too; I've started drawing for fun for the first time since I was a teenager. My

oestrogen tablets don't mention "not hating your own art" anywhere, but it's a pleasantly surprising side effect.

There have been many times when I thought I would never feel better. When I questioned what I was doing on this earth and worried that the only way to feel was to hurt myself. I'm so grateful to the friends, family, and colleagues who stuck by me so that I could still be here today.

This issue of queer.ink is a little insight into my mind and some of the tools and techniques I use to make the world more accessible for me.



☆ FIONA ☆



YOU'RE **BRAVE**  
YOU'RE **STRONG**  
YOU'RE **GOING**  
**TO DO FINE**

I KNOW YOU'VE  
BEEN THROUGH  
TOUGH TIMES  
BEFORE AND WE CAN  
GET THROUGH THIS  
**TOGETHER**  
XOXO

I LOVE THAT  
YOU'VE OVERCOME  
YOUR FEAR OF  
DRESSING FEM  
IN PUBLIC AND I'M  
SO PROUD OF  
YOU FOR FINDING  
YOURSELF

YOU LOOK **AMAZING**  
YOU'RE NOT A  
GROSS SWAMP WITCH  
YOU'RE A HOT  
SWAMP WITCH

  
**YOU'RE**  
NOT A FAILURE OR  
BROKEN IF YOU  
NEED TO LEAVE  
(I PROMISE!)

  
RANDOM  
PEOPLE  
IN THE STREET  
**DON'T**  
HATE YOU!

DID YOU  
THINK YOU'D BE  
HERE 10 YEARS  
AGO? YOU WERE  
A DEPRESSED  
EGG AND NOW  
LOOK WHERE  
YOU ARE! ✓

**THIS**  
FEELING WILL  
**PASS**

You can  
go home!  
It doesn't  
mean you failed.  
You tried and I'm  
proud of you  
for that ♥

Remember to  
keep breathing  
IN AND OUT AND IN  
AND OUT AND IN AND  
OUT AND IN AND OUT

# HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

"OK," I'll usually answer. Apparently, most people can feel more than just good or bad. Apparently I have alexithymia; it's like being colour-blind for feelings. It's a lot more common in autistic people than in the general population and describes difficulty recognising, describing, or expressing your emotions. It was very distressing for me as a child to not have any idea what I (or other people) were feeling inside.

I still feel the physical sensations associated with emotions such as a faster heart rate, chills, or butterflies, but I can't tell the difference between worry or excitement, for example. Even with more than 30 years of experience, I still find myself with no idea what's going on inside my head besides being "OK" or "not OK." This breakdown in connection between body and brain means I will often wear a blank expression that reveals no insight into my mind. It's frustrating not only for me but also for the people who love me and are unable to tell if I'm having fun or bored out of my mind. I call it my *"resting concerned face"*.



Some feelings are easier than others to identify based on the same cluster of sensations. It's like looking at a black-and-white photograph of a grey-looking London bus; you could be quite confident in guessing that it is actually painted red.

Tingly pins-and-needles in your hands and feet is more likely a result of you sitting weirdly, rather than anything more serious.

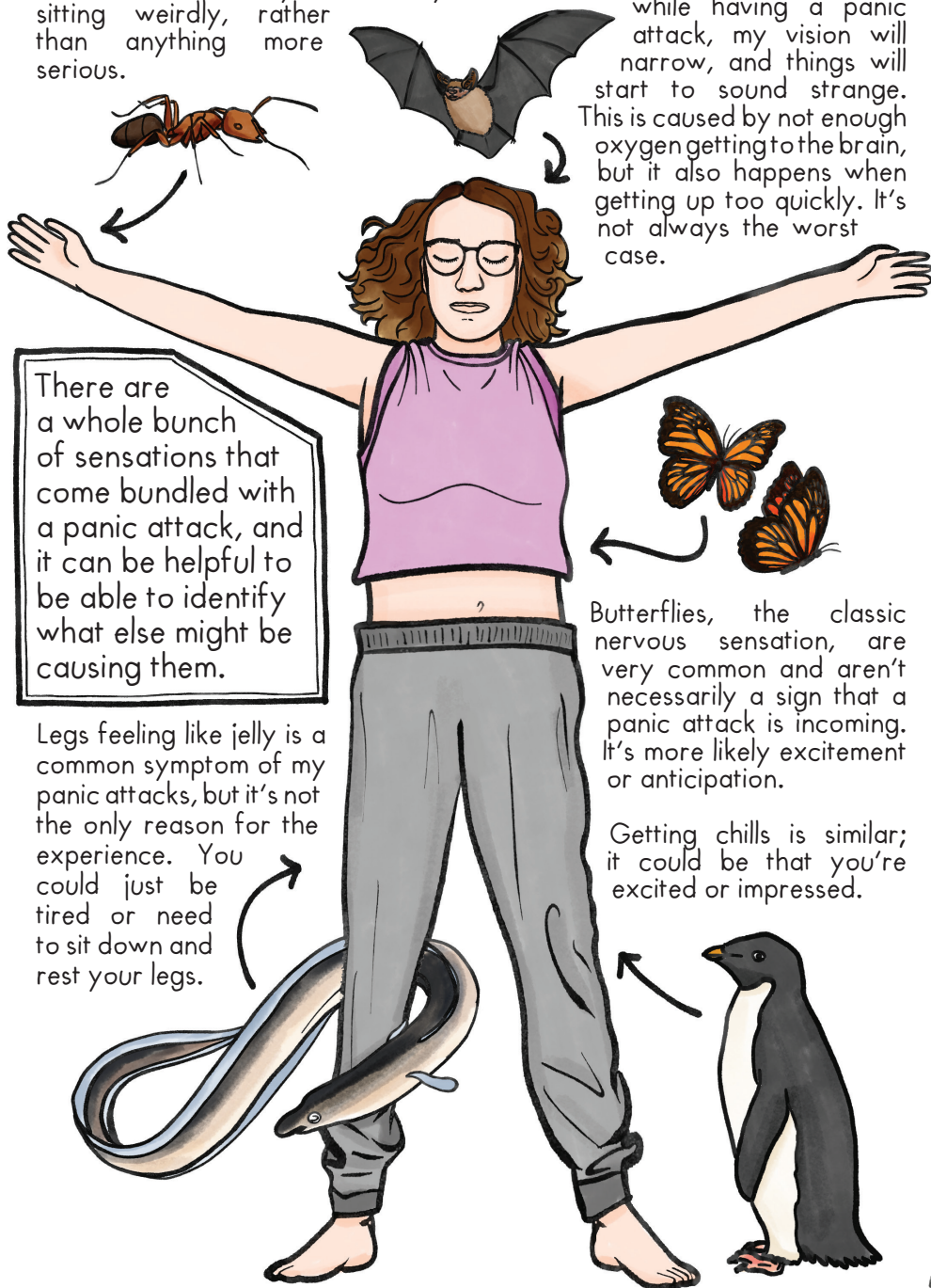
When I hyperventilate while having a panic attack, my vision will narrow, and things will start to sound strange. This is caused by not enough oxygen getting to the brain, but it also happens when getting up too quickly. It's not always the worst case.

There are a whole bunch of sensations that come bundled with a panic attack, and it can be helpful to be able to identify what else might be causing them.

Legs feeling like jelly is a common symptom of my panic attacks, but it's not the only reason for the experience. You could just be tired or need to sit down and rest your legs.

Butterflies, the classic nervous sensation, are very common and aren't necessarily a sign that a panic attack is incoming. It's more likely excitement or anticipation.

Getting chills is similar; it could be that you're excited or impressed.





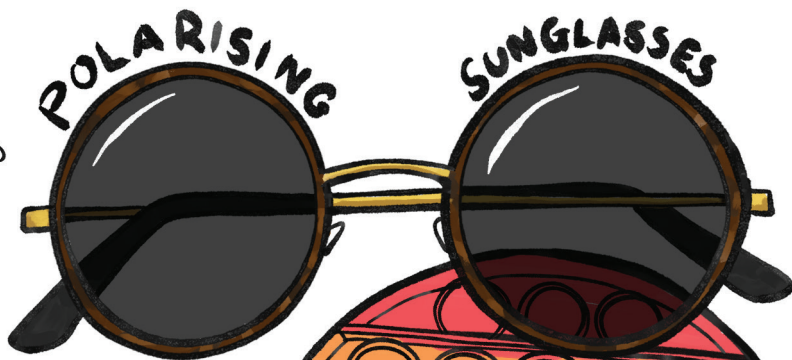
# SENSORY GO BAG

When you're out and about, it can be very useful to have some tools to overcome different sensory obstacles you might encounter. Supermarkets, trains, and offices can be loud and overwhelming places. Headphones and sunglasses can counter noise and lights, and things like fidget toys and Wiki articles can distract you from spiralling into dark thoughts.



WIKIPEDIA





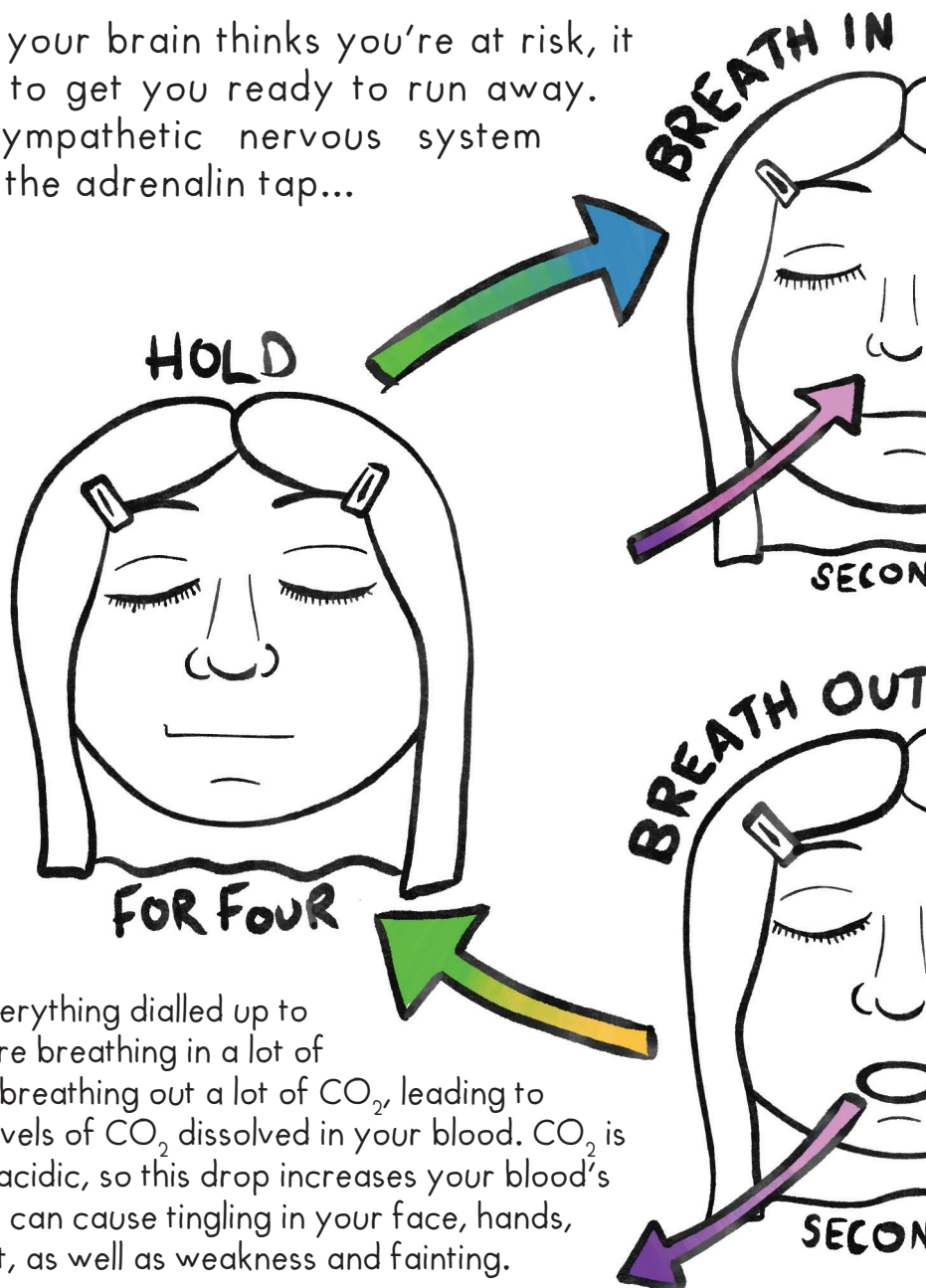
FIDGET  
TOY  
LOOP  
EARS  
PLUGS®





# SURVIVE A PA

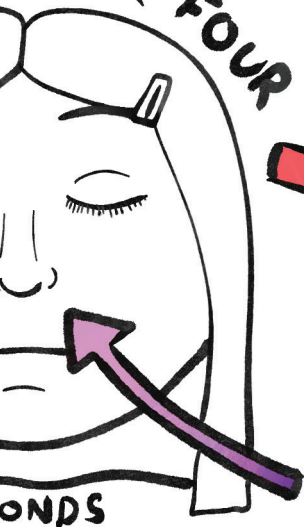
When your brain thinks you're at risk, it wants to get you ready to run away. The sympathetic nervous system opens the adrenaline tap...



With everything dialled up to 11, you're breathing in a lot of  $O_2$  and breathing out a lot of  $CO_2$ , leading to lower levels of  $CO_2$  dissolved in your blood.  $CO_2$  is slightly acidic, so this drop increases your blood's pH. This can cause tingling in your face, hands, and feet, as well as weakness and fainting.

# PANIC ATTACK

IN FOR FOUR



...and causes your heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration to all increase. This is great if you do need to run for your life, but it's bad if you've frozen in place.

HOLD



OUT FOR FOUR



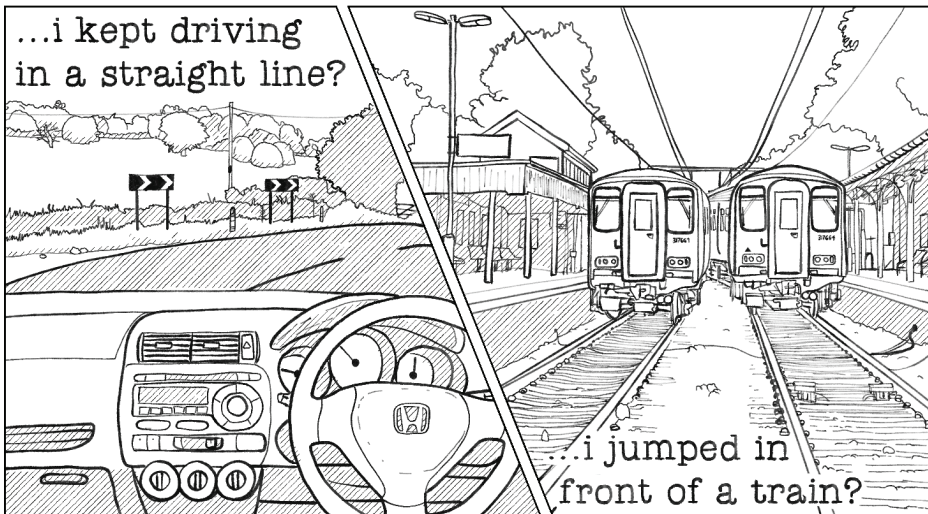
FOR FOUR

If it gets bad, you can get spasms in your hands and feet. This is all very scary if you don't know what's going on, and you will probably panic more. Regulating your breathing is the key to bringing your panic attack under control and giving you something to concentrate on.

# WHAT IF...

...i never got out of bed?

...i kept driving  
in a straight line?

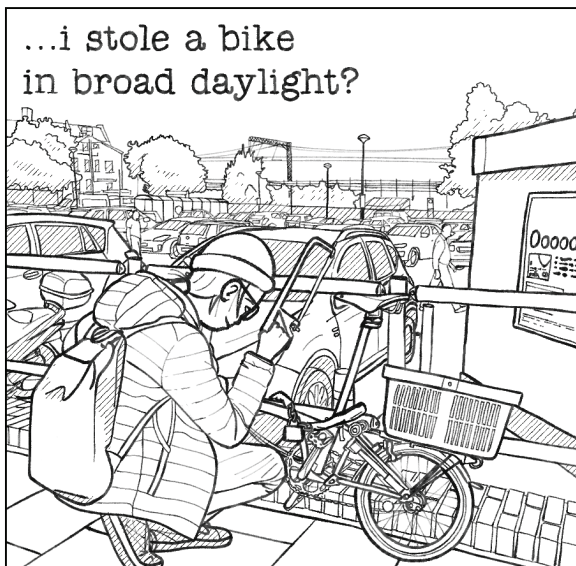


...i jumped in  
front of a train?

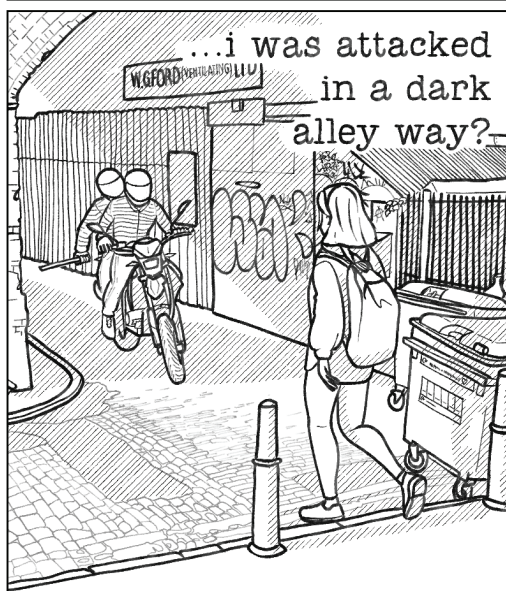
...i smashed  
a mug on  
the floor?



...i stole a bike  
in broad daylight?







Everyone has dark thoughts from time to time. They're usually no big deal, right? They just ignore them, I guess. But sometimes I can't ignore them. Sometimes they overwhelm me and freeze me in place. Sometimes they take over my life for days at a time. Sometimes I think to myself, "Everyone else can go about their lives like normal people; why do I have to make it so difficult?"

I feel ashamed to talk about my anxiety, afraid people will see me as weird, crazy, or overreacting. But talking about mental health and acknowledging everyone's different needs and abilities is a step towards a more accepting and understanding future.

# RESOURCES

Everyone is telling you how to be normal, but it took me an embarrassingly long time to find resources telling you how to be weird, successfully.

For me, knowing that what I'm experiencing is a "thing" with a name that other neurodivergent people also live with.

- » @neuro\_divers on Instagram

[https://www.instagram.com/neuro\\_divers/](https://www.instagram.com/neuro_divers/)

@neuro\_divers is an Instagram account with a focus on education and sharing neurodivergent lived experiences while combating mental health misinformation.

- » Neurodivergent Friendly Workbook of DBT Skills

<https://www.livedexperienceeducator.com/store>

Dialectical behavioural therapy is based on cognitive behavioural therapy but adapted for people who can feel overwhelmed by their emotions. This workbook reworks DBT skills into neurodivergent affirming strategies for both self-acceptance and growth.

- » Sony WH-1000XM5 noise-cancelling headphones

<http://sony.co.uk/s-y34v9>

Like many autistic people, I'm sensitive to noises; lots of discordant, overlapping sounds can raise my stress levels to breaking point. When I first tried the Sony WH-1000XM5 headphones, I was blown away by the power of silence. Busy offices, streets, and trains are so much less overwhelming now!

- » Loop ear plugs

<https://www.loopearplugs.com>

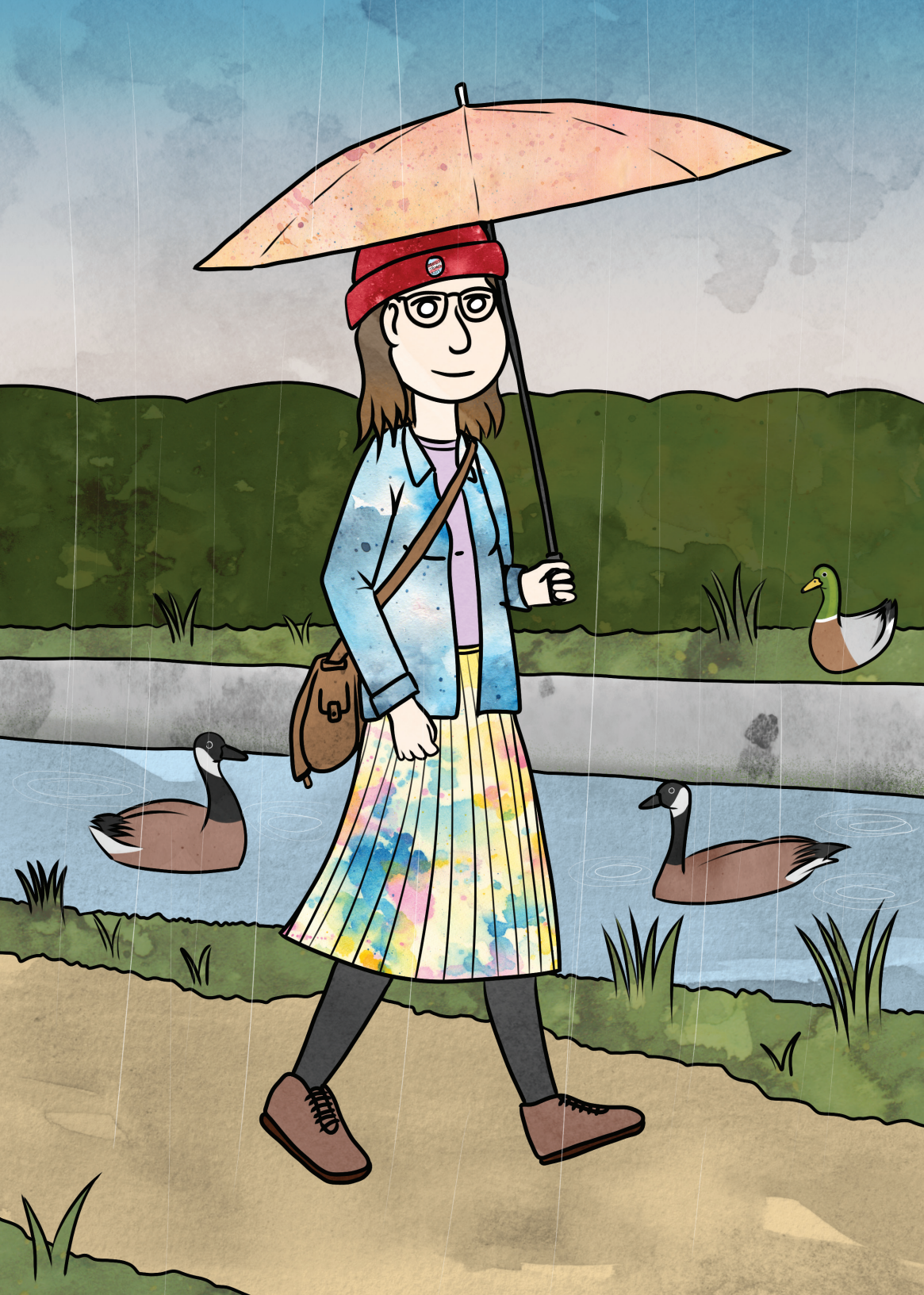
You can't always wear big (not weather proof) headphones, so reusable silicone ear plugs are an excellent backup. Pocket sized and discreet.

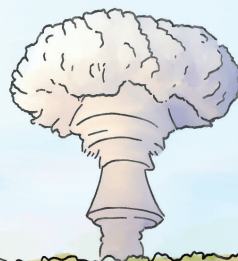
- » Mini writing tablet

<https://shop.hearingdogs.org.uk/products/lcd-ewriter>

Occasionally, my emotions can be so intense that I lose my voice. My brain is racing, but my mouth can't make any words. This little writing tablet has come in helpful to communicate my needs when I couldn't do it verbally.







MARGRIE'S *of Hertfordshire*

# ANXIE- TEA

Let's have  
a panic attack

