

MEMORY WORK

ESSAYS



LB LEE

MEMORY WORK ESSAYS

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WHAT IS MEMORY WORK?

Other works by LB Lee:

The Homeless Year
Alter Boys in Love
Cultiples: the Complete Series
Flights of Reality
Infinity Smashed: Heart Sparks Beat
All in the Family: the Complete Series



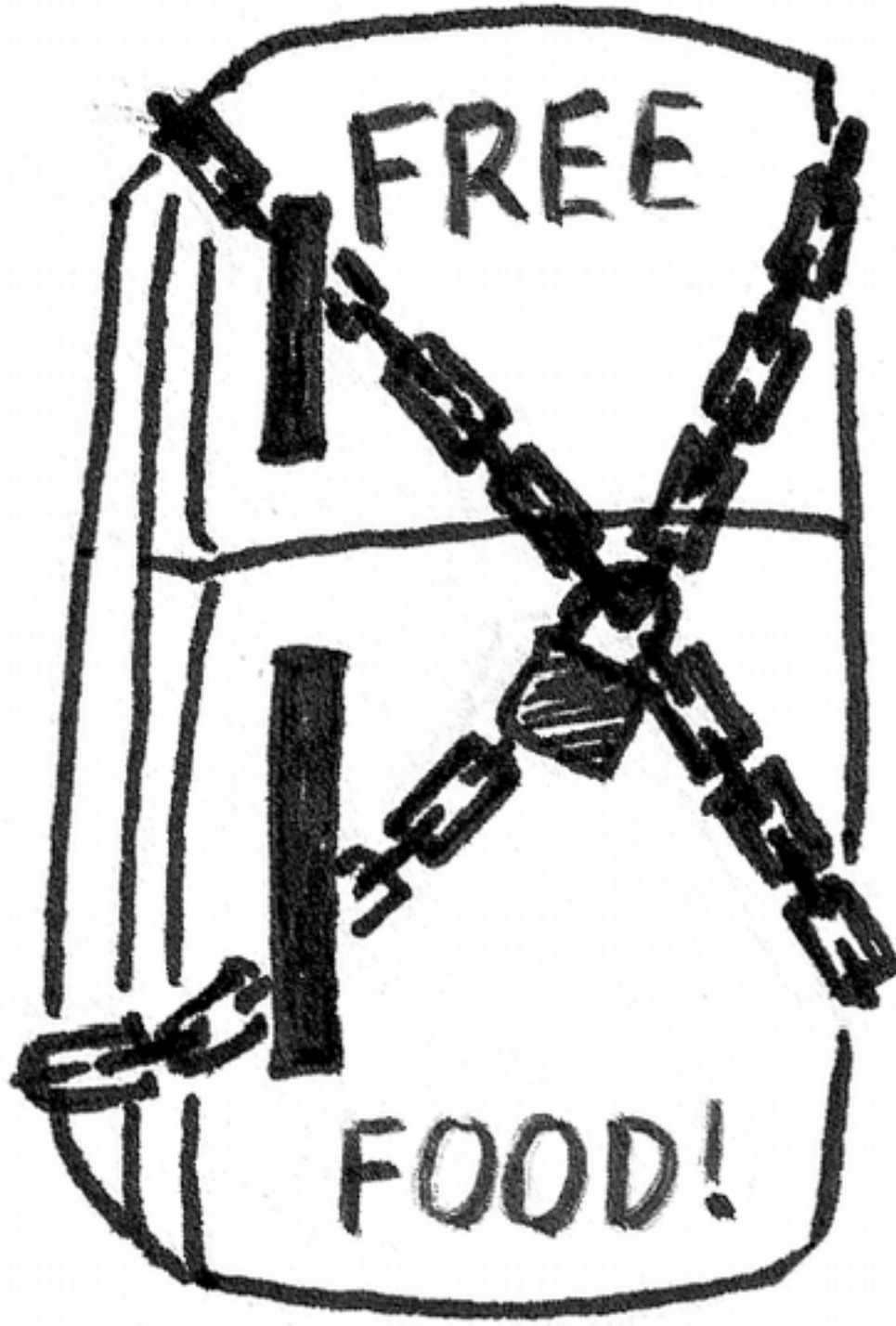
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WHAT IS MEMORY WORK?

Put succinctly: it is dealing with lost memories, or parts of them, to deal with bad stuff and make them painless to remember. Our best metaphor is the humble Katrina Fridge.



See, Hurricane Katrina hit during high summer, and with months-long power outages, fridge contents rotted into massive biohazards. They required special disposal but the authorities failed to show up. Folks were stuck with their fridges for weeks or months, trying (praying) to keep them shut. Folks took to decorating them, or adding slogans like, "mail to [insert politician here]".

Memory work is opening the Katrina Fridge and cleaning it out. It is gross, unpleasant, sometimes dangerous, and never to be undertaken lightly.

TYPES OF MEMORY WORK

There are different types of memory, and thus different types of memory work. The memory most people think of is narrative—the ability to recall events as a linear story:

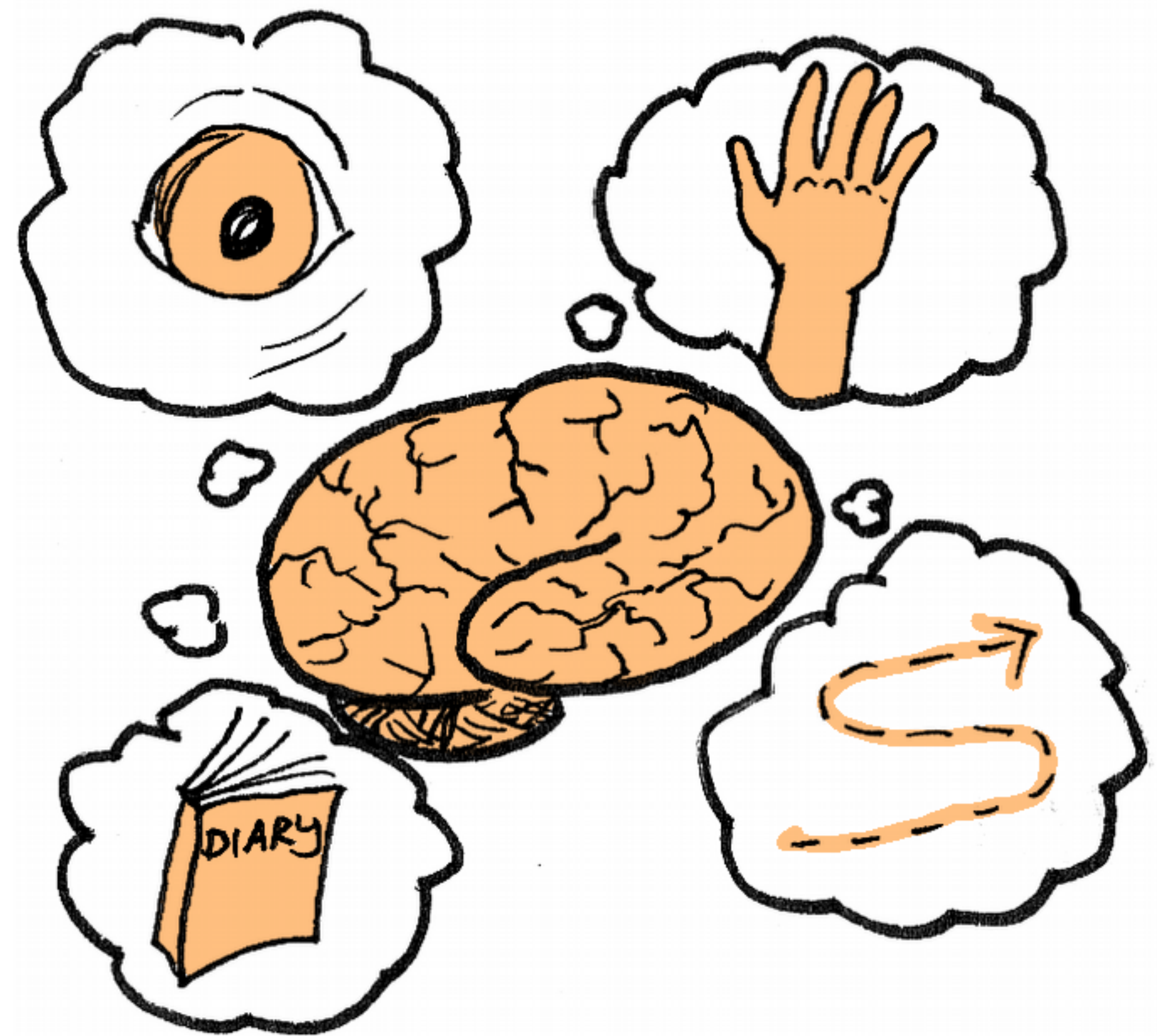
"I met my spouse when we bumped into each other at the grocery store. I dropped my bags, and they helped me pick it all up, and I was impressed by their kindness." But there are other

kinds of memory, like muscle memory or spatial memory. We may know how

to ride a bicycle, or how to get to the store, but be unable to explain it to others.

The "met my spouse" memory may actually be many types together: narrative (the story), spatial (how to navigate the store's aisles), emotional (frustration, then being won over), sensory (the feel of the bags, the smell of the food), etc.

Since there are different aspects and types of memory, there are also



different kind of memory loss—and often more survives than you’d expect. Even the famous Henry Molaison, who developed permanent anterograde amnesia after an epilepsy surgery, was able to remember the Kennedy assassination and learn new skills.

Similarly, traumagenic amnesia can block out all conscious memory of a horrible event, but it doesn’t erase the horror; it just contains it, like the Katrina Fridge. (And like the Katrina Fridge, there’s often leaking.) The effects linger on in other forms of memory: an amnesiac veteran may still be jittery, jump at loud noises, or have nightmares. He likely still has the muscle memory required to use and maintain his equipment. And it will be obvious to his loved ones that losing his memory of the war has not magically returned him to the man he was before.

That’s an extreme example. There are other, more subtle forms of memory loss or degradation, such as:

- Partial narrative memory loss. The soldier may remember everything but the worst parts of the war.
- Emotional memory loss. The soldier may be able to recount his awful experience in a POW camp but can’t feel anything about it.
- Decontextualization. The soldier might remember his experiences in the war, but can’t make sense of it or realize the context or implications... for instance, that perhaps he was betrayed by his comrades or government. Even if he has suspicions, or other people outright tell him, the thoughts fall out of his head, and he can’t hold onto them, leading him to get “stuck.”

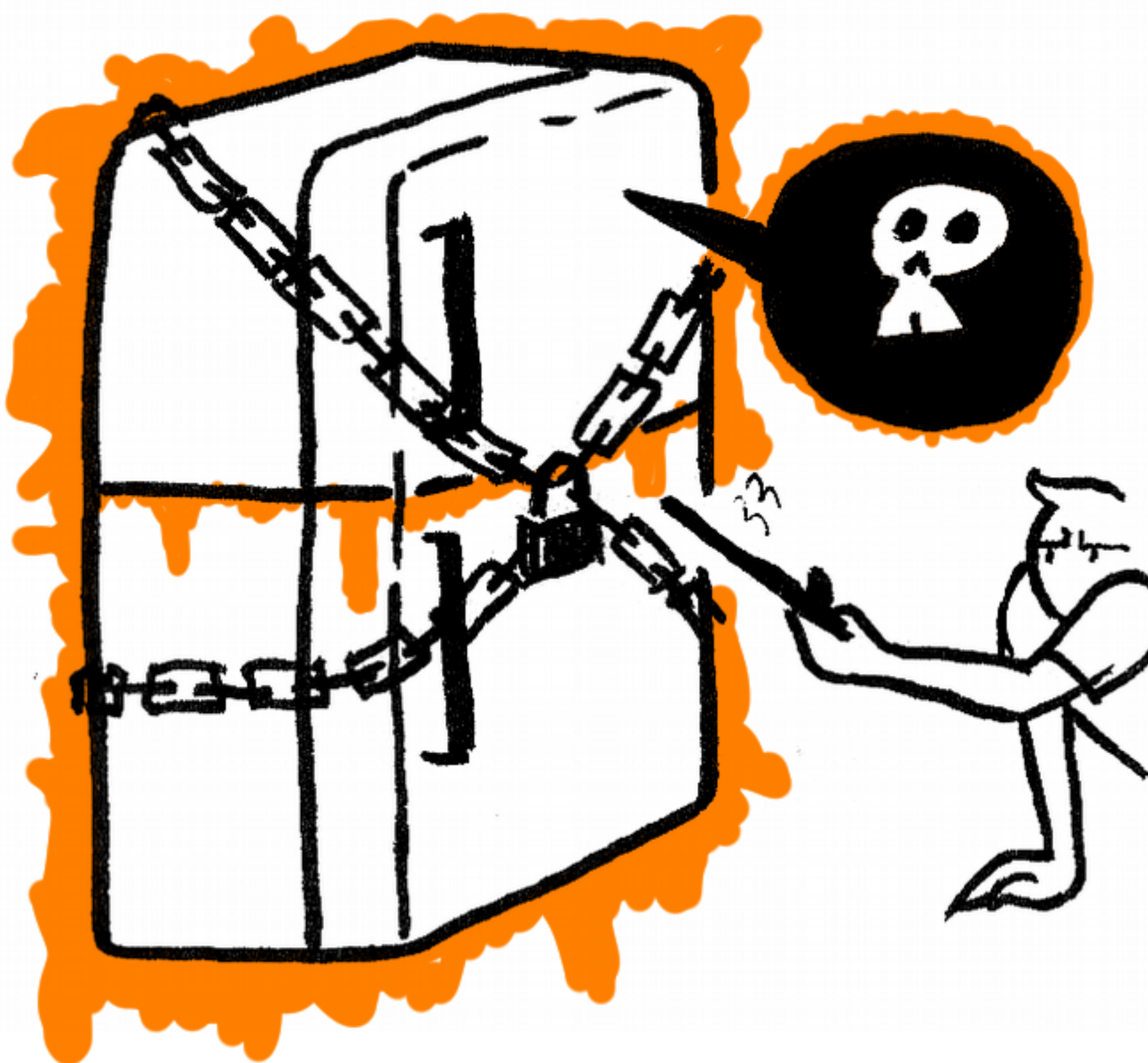
We were doing emotional and contextual memory work for years prior to *All in the Family*, and on the whole, it was tough but manageable. (Though we still recommend doing the prep work; better safe than sorry.) Narrative memory work, though, was a reality-breaker. We could no longer trust even the most basic aspects of our memory, and that was terrifying enough, even without the memories contents of unspeakable horror.

These essays focus on narrative memory work, since that’s what’s most taboo to discuss and where we felt most at sea, but we hope our techniques will be useful in other forms too.

PREP WORK

This is the part everybody skips. Don't be a fool. If you're determined to open the Katrina Fridge, at least put on a hazmat suit first. And there are some things you should *never* do, in our opinion:

- Do not start with narrative memory work. Start with lighter fare first—contextual memory work can be as simple as going over your records, asking questions, and putting pieces together. In our opinion, you shouldn't even be thinking about narrative memory work for at least a year or two.
- Do not expect speedy results. This is a process that takes years; for us, dealing with one memory takes two months of work, on average. Really grueling ones have lasted five!
- Never use memory work to "just see" if trauma or lost memories exist. That's like undergoing major surgery to see if you're pregnant—even if it gets you your answer, it'll leave a lot of carnage in the process. Focus instead on building your records and use those instead.



RECORDS

Records are an invaluable part of memory work. They can give context and corroboration, help prove and disprove things, and jog your memory. Plus, it's just way less life-derailing to read an old journal than it is to go psyche-spelunking.

Things we have used for records include:

- Journals
- Artwork
- Fiction writing
- School assignments
- Marginalia of all of the above
- Online activity (old websites, forum posts)
- Interviews with relatives and friends

- Digital chat logs
- Stuff we read and watched as kids—books, movies, etc.
- Medical records
- Photos (invaluable
- when all we had to go on for a memory's time period was clothes or hair length)Calendars



Even if you've lost most of these, you probably still have *something*. Scrape together what you have, and at worst case, you can

write down what you remember with your best guess as to when it happened and in what order. As you learn or find more, add it to your stockpile.

Organize or manage it however you like; we use a few handwritten graph paper timelines and an annotated digital document called "System History." Created in the first month of our becoming selves-aware, it's now about 100 pages, a distillation of everything our records have to say, no matter how trivial. On a day when we are drained and incapable of clever thought, it can be weirdly soothing to go through our records and date old photographs.

Records aren't a silver bullet. Mostly, they provide circumstantial evidence—though surprises do happen sometimes! (A stray apostil in a writing spiral was how we found out that Mac was a headmate a year before any of us, including him, remembered. None of us would've believed it if it hadn't been right there on paper.) And even if memory work turns out not to be the thing for you, there's no harm in having a way to fact-check.

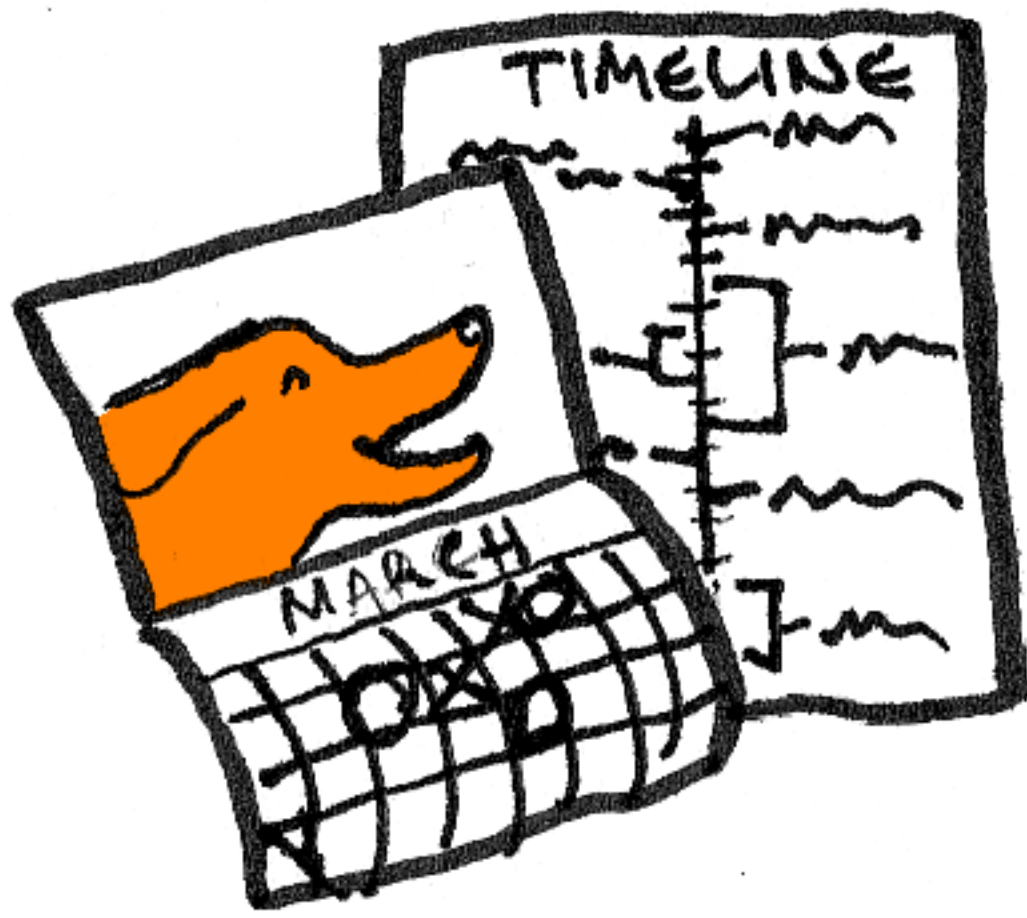
TAKING NOTES

Having notes on your memory work cycle is invaluable. If you can chart it, you can predict it; if you can predict it, you can prepare for it. As horrible as this process may be, there is something comforting in being able to prove that this is something you've experienced and survived before.

We ourself use an old-fashioned paper calendar, our journal, and a spreadsheet, and we keep simple notes:

- Nightmares: when they happen, what they're about
- Memory chunks: when they come up, always what they say
- Memories: how long they take to deal with, when they got made, and any headmate happenings that were involved (ex: roster changes).

- General trends: how many memory chunks per month, per year, and averages of both. (This helps us predict when a new freak-out is likely to bite us, so we can schedule stuff accordingly.)



You'll figure out how you like to chart things, and what's worth charting over time. Everyone probably has different criteria and methods. Bullet journals, phone apps, a bunch of papers in a binder, whatever works and whatever you can organize. If you're completely stumped as to how to start, flip to the back and try the self-monitoring form our shrink gave us; it's pretty thorough but simple.

IS YOUR BRAIN TRYING TO SAY IT'S TIME?

This probably ranges wildly from person to person. With us, it was a sense that something wasn't right, that something was on the tip of our tongue, something big. It was an unbearable mental itch that we just couldn't scratch, and our records were showing weird gaps in our memory and internal workings that we couldn't explain. It was godawful.

If you feel memory work is on the horizon, why? What are your symptoms? Is it external stuff, like records or documented evidence? Internal stuff, like mental itching, nightmares, or a gut feeling of wrongness? Both?

If your brain is giving you no internal symptoms, (that is, if your fridge isn't leaking) then regardless of external stuff, leave it alone and just stick with records work. Sometimes there's nothing to remember, or there is but it never comes back, and that's just the way it goes sometimes. Brains are a pound of electric jelly formed by billions of years of random dice throws; they are not magic wish-granting machines. Make your peace with that.

IS IT A GOOD IDEA?

So you have raging internal symptoms, something is clearly rotten in the state of Denmark, you've spent a year or two doing emotional and/or contextual memory work, and you're champing at the bit to embark on narrative memory work. Our first advice: don't do it yet.

When we got on this crazy train back in 2014, we thought we were

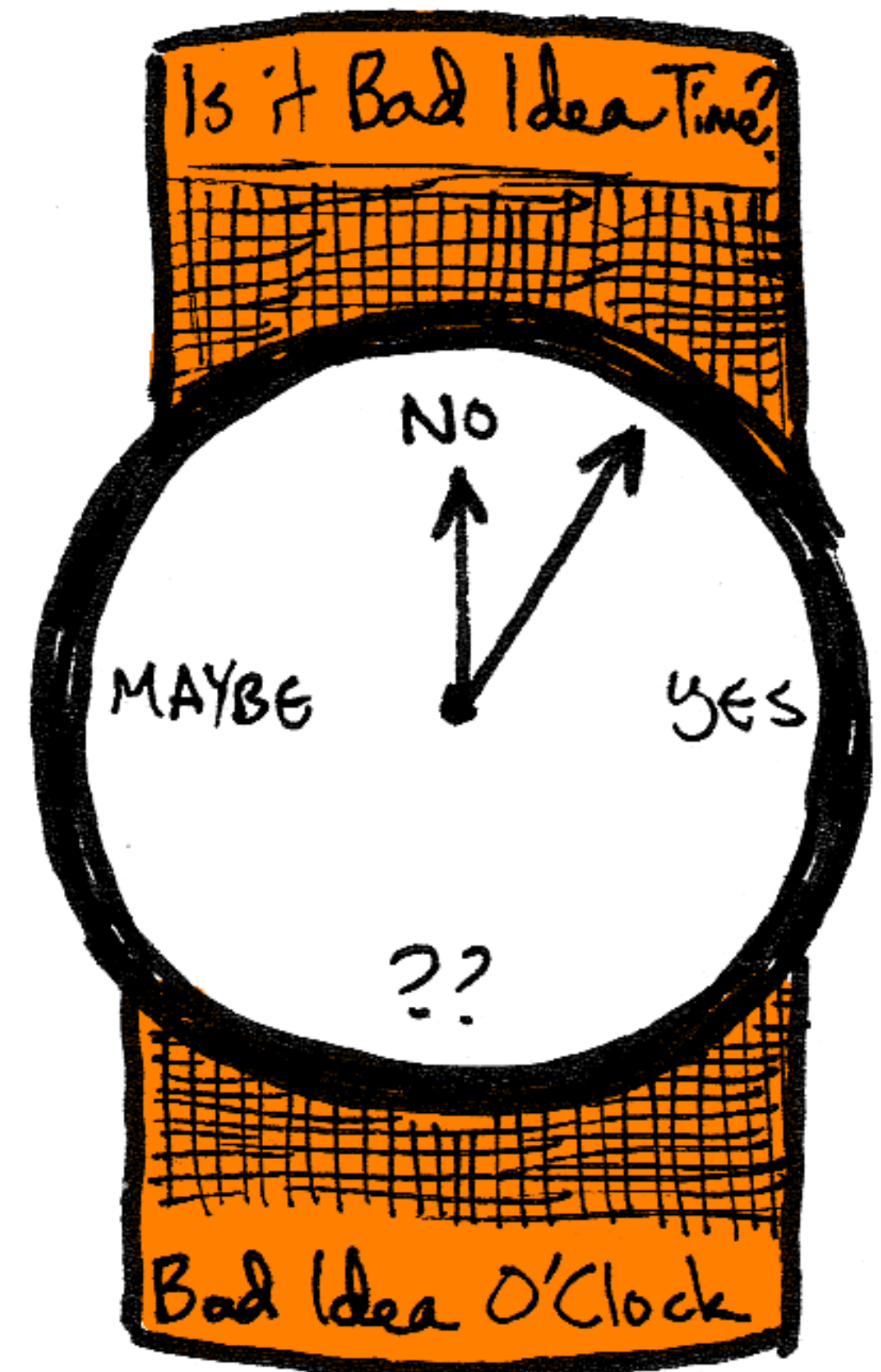
missing maybe three memories. Roughly five years, thirty memories, and three hundred episodes later, we have only gotten one of those original three. During that time, we have been unable to function in the traditional workplace, have had to completely arrange our life around maintaining mental stability, and lost housing twice. Other memory work multis we know have managed to stay housed and employed, but at a cost of being regularly suicidal. Are you financially, psychologically, and socially prepared for that level of impairment for years on end? (If the answer is, "no, but I'm not getting a choice in the matter," then you have our sympathy. Skip to the next section, and we hope it helps you triage until you have better odds.)

If narrative memory work is something you are choosing to do (rather than being forced upon you), think very hard about why. Are you hoping that memory work will help you prove that you really are multiple or abused or whatever? Memory work won't help. By its nature, it requires you be able to handle bone-deep uncertainty and confusion. It will make denial *worse*, not better. And if you're facing this pressure from someone else (including shrinks, spouses, friends, or family), then they're a jerk who isn't worth your time. Memory work undertaken due to peer pressure is doomed to distortion and failure.

If you are holding yourself hostage, refusing to do something unless memory work magically delivers on a silver platter, then you're putting yourself in an unwinnable situation. A situation doesn't have to be abusive to be worth leaving, and if memory work *does* deliver, it will knock you flat in the process. Good luck making major life changes then.

Narrative memory work is a brain-breaker. It casts your memory, sanity, and relationships into doubt. It hurts, a lot. It lasts for years, maybe decades. Even for us, when we were relatively ready and prepared, it acted like a forest fire, blazing through our life. Do you really need to know that badly?

If so, well. Let's get you ready for the blaze.

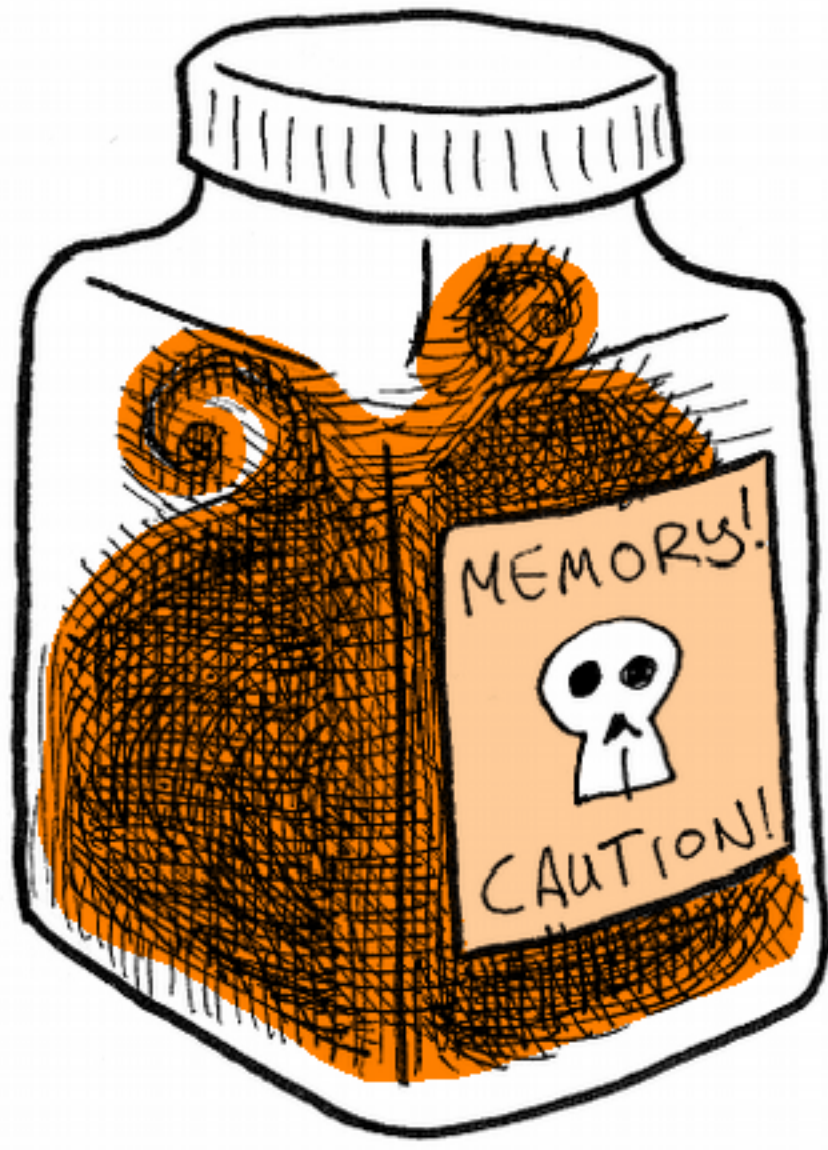


SEALING OR DELAYING MEMORIES

If your fridge is leaking horrors and you just can't afford that, here are a few strategies you can try to seal it up again. But a word of warning: at best, these are snooze buttons. If there's a way to permanently stop memory work once it's started, we don't know it. Brains have minds of their own, and

sometimes they're determined to pursue their own agendas, no matter the cost. If that's the case, we're sorry. Hold on tight and fall back on your crisis plan," which is discussed in the next chapter.

CONTAINMENT



This has been used by plurals for years, often without formal training or discussion. We ourselves have used it, though it never worked very well and made our brain retaliate, so now we don't use it at all if we can help it. It's basically putting more duct tape on your fridge.

A plural going by "Ashley's gang" reports using the following method: "We put all our scary thoughts, memories and feelings in a mason [sic] jar with a screw-down lid and leave it in our therapist's office. If we try to ignore it, it will leak, but as long as we remember it's there, it stays put until it's really time to deal with it. It may sound corny, but it really works!" (Many Voices Press, 1992, pg. 3).

Vickis describe using a similar concept for flashbacks: "First you notice where in your body the feelings/sensations are. Then you imagine that the feelings are a piece of clothing. Like if you're flash[back]ing on something around your neck, then maybe that's a scarf; or if you feel something on your arms, then maybe it is a shirt. There can be more than 1 piece of clothing.

"Then, you take the clothing off, and the feelings go with it. You fold it up and put it away somewhere safe. The first time I did this, I put it in a (imaginary) box, and locked the box up with a chain, and put it in the way back of my bureau drawer, and closed the drawer. Since then, we've built a deep safe into the wall at the entrance of our inside place [headspace] that is especially for deferred memories.

"It is important to put the memory somewhere safe where you know where it is, because then when you are in a safe place and it is a good time, what you do is you take it back out, and put the clothing back on, to finish processing the memory.

"I find this works best if I physically go through the motions of taking the clothing off & folding it up. And I was astonished at how well it worked to put it back _on_ once I got into therapy."

EMDR



Our friend Zyfron claimed that EMDR helped their memories slow down, for a bit anyway. I (Rogan) only did a little of it myself, way back in '07, '08, so can't say whether it did that for us, but I can say it helped make a couple triggers more manageable, for a little while anyway. My knowledge is likely way out of date, but our shrink at the time did tell us that EMDR was a bad idea for dissociatives; be sure to do your research and be cautious! (The only negative effect it had on us was making us sleepy, but other people we've talked to apparently had really intense emotional reactions.)

HEADSPACE

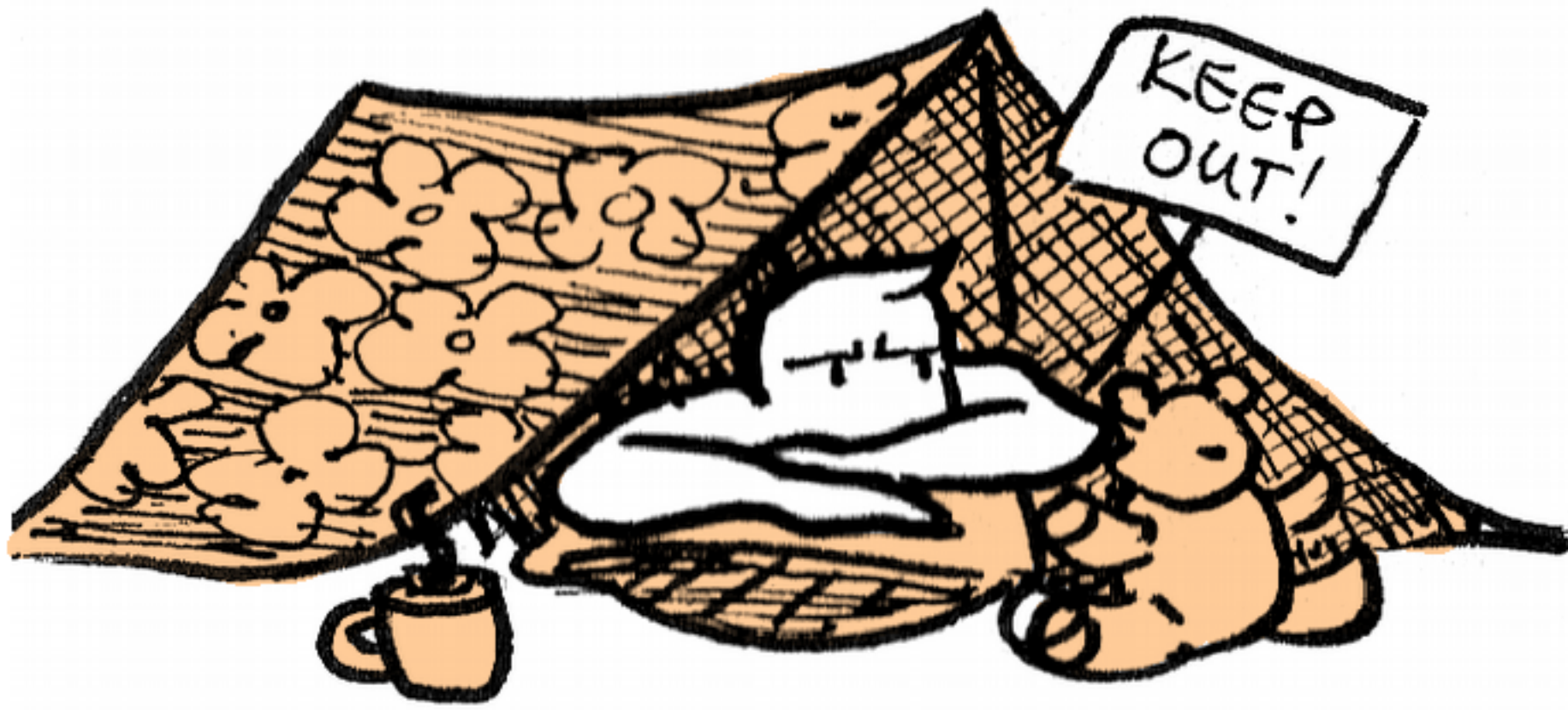
Our preferred method, ourself, has been to use our headspace—the internal landscape between our ears where we interact. Ours is also alive and willful, and our relationship with it is good enough these days that we just walk into our internal basement, wade into the pool there, and say, "Hey, I need two weeks. Can you hold off for that amount of time?" and it will do its best. Before that, when we had less trust and fought more, we would use fortifications (walls, locks) or "magic" wards to keep things from bubbling up, which just seems to be a more elaborate version of the containment rituals described earlier.

If you too have a headspace that reflects your memory work in this way (and not everybody does; lots of people have no headspace at all!), then use whatever rituals or actions "feel right" for this purpose. This is a real personal thing; experiment and see what works for you. Some folks seem to really like using ceremonial magic, prayer, or other forms of ritual; others favor the "build a wall!" method. It will probably take you a while to figure out what methods (or combos of methods) will work best for you, and different headmates may

have different preferences.

(If you do not have a headspace, but want one, see ATW or our "[Headspace Discovery and Defense](#)" in the Recommended Reading section.)

AVOIDANCE



If none of these tactics are doable, you can try to arrange your life to avoid as many triggers as possible, but it's chancy. It requires an iron-fisted control of your environment: who you see, what you do, where you

go, even what movies you watch or books you read. Many people can't do that. All it takes is the maintenance guy showing up to overturn the apple cart.

Even if you do pull it off, it won't work forever, anymore than you can solve a Katrina Fridge by avoiding it. Triggers are your brain's way of saying, "pay attention to this! Deal with this!" and if you just try to avoid them, they will get bigger and meaner—just like the fridge gets stinkier and grosser. In the end, it's best to use this method only sparingly, temporarily, and in conjunction with other methods.

IF YOU MUST

Another way to seal back memories (though the least desirable) is relying on coping mechanisms that slaughter your long-term health for your short-term survival. Drinking. Cutting. Starving. You know what your version is. It won't solve your Katrina Fridge; all it will do is make you not care that it's there. We really, really hope you don't have to do this, but if you've tried everything else and are at the end of your rope, it is at least better than dying. But try everything else first. (We, at least, tend to reach straight for those tricks first. Took years to unlearn.)

CRISIS PLANNING AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT

What is your mind's mega-crash state? Do you plummet into self-annihilatory despair? Explode in homicidal rage? Sink so deep into dissociative fog that nothing matters or means anything? If you don't know

how your mind reacts to intense pain or how it breaks down, well, memory work will teach you, but better to know beforehand.

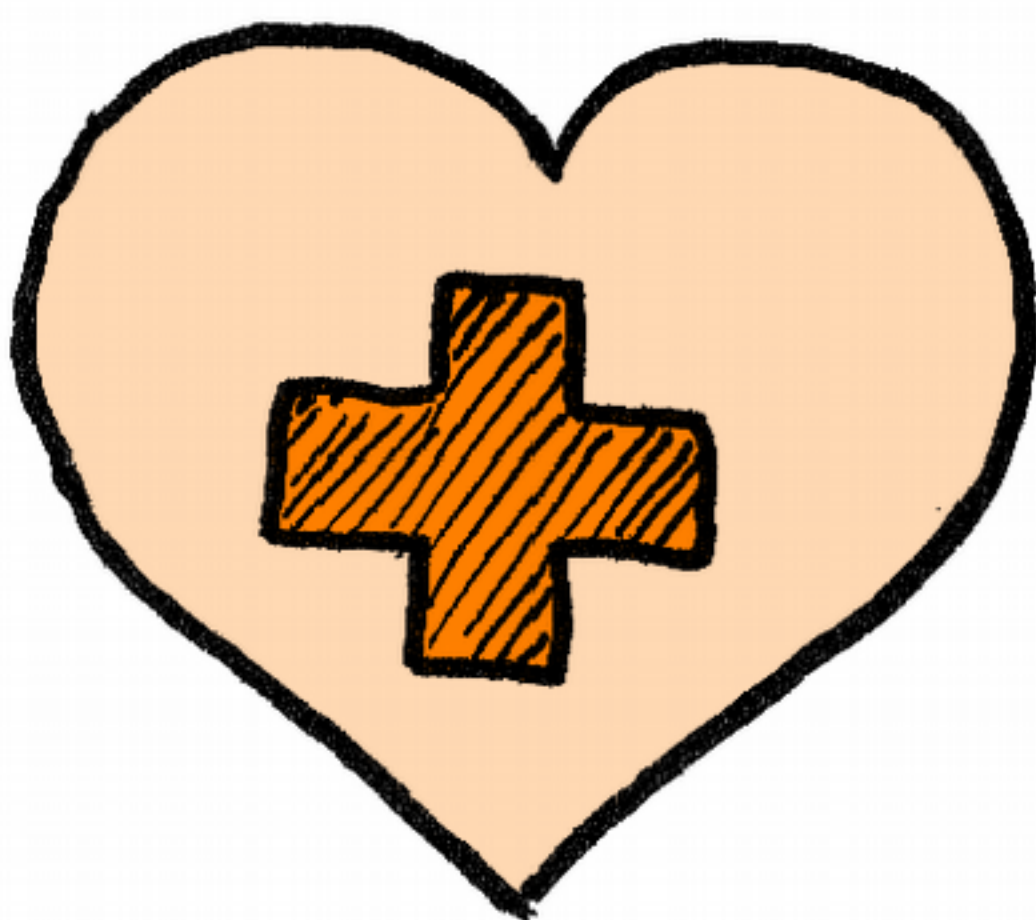
We homebrewed our own individual scale of psychological badness, a mental equivalent of those pain scales used by chronic pain associations. (Our scale is in the back; you can find others by searching online under the name "universal pain scale.") We highly recommend that you build your own, since everyone's brain reacts differently to soul-crushing agony. Trust us, you won't be in much shape to figure it out when the pain hits, and it's imperative you have a way to differentiate between manageable (however painful) and crisis.



So, as you build your psychological pain scale and learn to chart your distress, what is manageable, and what is crisis? What is a sign for you that things have gone off the rails and you need help? (For us, it's when we stop feeling or minding pain.) If your distress is ticking up, how can you halt things before they get too bad? What things help, and what things hurt (and which are either/or, depending)?

For some folks, there is a masochistic pride in hitting maximum agony over and over again; they think it proves their toughness or importance, or that they don't deserve help unless they're about to die. If this is a problem for you, time to let go of the hair shirt. Go work on that before you try narrative memory work.

If you do go into crisis (and just assume that you will), what is your plan? If you are a danger to yourself or others, or completely unable to care for yourself, what should be done? Is there a mental hospital you have had a good experience with or that's been recommended by someone you trust? If so, make sure you and your trusted helpers (headmates included) have the name, number, and location, in case you need it. Make sure everyone's on the same page as to when it's time to tap out! When people are uncertain, they freeze or flail, and no need to make a bad situation worse.



If hospitalization isn't an option, are there people who can help you, who you can stay with? Are they actually up to that task, physically, emotionally, financially? Do you have others in line in case one gets the flu, goes through a messy divorce, or is otherwise incapacitated? When we went into crisis in 2012, it took us a few days before we could get ourselves into the hospital.

During that time, roughly half a dozen friends, in person or by phone,

alternated checking in on us, feeding us, or keeping us company while we slept on the couch. It was a jury-rigged improvisation, but we got lucky; we had great friends, and they managed to bear up under the strain.

We lucked out, but better to plan this in advance. Talk to these friends, families, or loved ones and ask if they're up to helping out, and if so, in what ways. If you go into crisis, can you trust yourself to contact them, and if not, what are the signs they should be aware of? See the "Get A Spotter" section on questions to ask and ways to talk about this.

Do you have a trusted healthcare team to help you on this journey into hell? A good solid therapist is worth investing in, if possible. They have skills and emotional distance that your loved ones don't. They also might be able to help you seal back memories that are beyond your ability to deal with alone, and a brain-meds doctor can also prescribe things that might take the edge off, though no medication will "fix" memory work, far as we know.

(Apparently there is some new research in using hallucinogenic drugs in the treatment of PTSD, but that's all on singlets, and good luck getting into clinical trials for one of them. We certainly don't know enough to have an informed opinion, and since what little we *have* read suggests that we would be the worst possible candidate for that kind of medicine, we'll never know firsthand.)

If you don't have a healthcare team but can afford or access one, get it *before* you start memory work. Nobody wants to interview doctors and harangue health insurance with a screaming Tartarus brain. Do it while you're stable, or as close as possible. (For help, check out polyfrazzlemented's blog post in the Recommend Reading section.)

If your medical team is your only support system, or you have absolutely no way to afford emergency healthcare, we can not recommend memory work. Seal your fridge until you've got more back-up.

BUILDING HEADMATE TRUST



That's your external support. Let's talk internal.

Are you on good terms with your headmates? If you're out of commission, can and will folks take care of things without you? Do you have ways of handling conflict or disagreement that don't involve threat, scapegoating, being

a jerk, or violence? Do you have a good idea who all's in there with you, how they feel about memory work, and how they handle intense pain and stress? Are y'all in agreement about memory work and willing to go through it together?

If you answered "no" to any of those questions, try to seal those memories until you fix things. Y'all can't afford to go *Lord of the Flies*.

Getting your group together and becoming a team is beyond the scope of this essay; entire books and websites are devoted to it. If you want to do that, check out Crisses or ATW in the Recommended Reading section. However, a few pointers:

- Old bad habits may resurface under the stress of memory work—addictions, denial, self-destructive behavior, stuff like that. It's how you kept yourself from caring about the Katrina Fridge in the past, and it's natural that you'll want to go back to that. Prepare for this, and if you don't feel you can get these habits under control, try and halt memory work until you're more prepared.
- Try to remember that y'all are in this together. Y'all are a team, and united is the only way you'll succeed. Keep that in mind, because over the course of memory work, violent acting out is likely to happen. When it does, how will y'all defuse the situation? Can so-and-so be talked down? Do they need a hug, or to be left alone for a while? At worst, can they be contained without making the situation even worse? (And if *you're* the one who goes ape, how would you like your headmates to deal with you? Always remember to say sorry and make amends after you've calmed down.)
- Don't just avoid the unpleasantness. Talk about this and make a plan together. If y'all agree in advance and everyone has a say in it, y'all can avoid a lot of anger and resentment. Write it down so y'all can amend it as needed, and also so nobody can argue or forget later; even with the best of memory and intentions, group agreements get fuzzy after a couple weeks. Keep in mind that lashing out is a common response to overwhelming pain, and try not to take it personally.

Okay! You're as ready as you're going to be! Let's get on with it!

MEMORY WORK PROPER

All right, you've prepared. You've been doing lighter memory work for a year or two, you've built your crisis plan, your support team is ready, your headmates are all on the same page, and you know enough about how you handle pain and stress to feel as ready as you're going to be. But what do you do next?

Sometimes, memory work just starts on its own, and you don't have to do anything. If so, (dubious) congratulations! Now it's just a matter of riding that rodeo bull and trying not to fall off. We'd say have fun, but you won't.



However, sometimes you're having symptoms, want to do this, have prepared within an inch of your life... and nothing happens. Then you have to make an unpleasant choice: wait and hope it works itself out, or try to open the fridge yourself.

While we don't recommend it, we chose to open the fridge in 2014. We couldn't not; solid months of nightmares, mental itching, and internal pressure was way worse than pain.

BEFORE YOU PUSH, GET A SPOTTER

A spotter at the gym is there in case you take on more than you can handle. A memory work spotter does the same thing, intervening should things go off the rails, maybe helping you come back to yourself using gentle conversation or hugs. (See DreamWriters in the Rec Reading section for ideas.)

So. Who do you trust to see you at your most vulnerable and miserable, to keep their head and be able to differentiate between pain and crisis? Time to have a hard conversation with them and see if they're up for it.

We prefer headmate spotters; they're more available, and they can cart folks off front or out of headspace



danger, if need be. Other folks seem to prefer corporeal spotters. Whoever it is, choose someone you trust to ground you and *not* try to guide the process (and yes, that goes for therapists too; this is *your* memory work, not theirs). In this state, you will be extremely vulnerable and you don't want someone taking advantage of you.

Whoever your spotter is, discuss some things beforehand. Namely:

- How can the spotter check in? (For us, a simple, "you okay?" or "who's talking to me?" works.)
- How can the memory worker respond, if they can't speak? (Biff taps out, like in wrestling. Our nonverbal headspace communicates with bubbles.)
- How does the spotter know when it's time to intervene? ("I don't know who I am" is a crisis phrase coming from us, as is trying to abruptly leave the space we're in.)
- What's the best way to help? (When we're in crisis, it's important we not go outside or into unfamiliar space without supervision. However, physically grabbing us is a terrible idea and will make us wig out. An offer of a distraction usually works great: "hey, want to watch a movie with me inside?")

SAFE PLACE

This is both a prep measure *and* a way to try and give your brain a nudge. For us at least, our memories "prefer" to come up in places where our brain feels safe. Therefore, we can sometimes stave off a memory until we get to the safe place, or alternately, encourage one to come up by going there. Maybe you'll even get lucky and the place itself will jump-start things.

So, what places feel safe for your brain? What about them makes them safe? Note that your brain might not go for cozy blankets or herbal tea; our brain thinks home is dangerous and prefers subway cars, cemeteries, and libraries. When your brain gets really bad, where do you instinctively head? What make you feel safe, even if it isn't conventionally comforting? Do you know what about it helps? Maybe you have a positive association there (nothing bad has ever happened to us in a library), or it gives you solitude, or it's near someone or something you trust. Or maybe your brain just really likes



graveyards for some reason.

(Note: for this exercise, you want to avoid places that are comforting through distraction. Don't go to a loud concert; you want to tune into what's inside you, not drown it out. Also, if your crisis state is the sort of thing that gets the cops called, plan accordingly!)

If you don't have a ready-made space like this (maybe you've just moved), you can make one. Try to figure out what your brain's safety criteria are, and go hunting for a place that fits. When we were suddenly shoved out of state for a month, we tracked down the local library and cemetery, and then we would visit and find our favorite places within them. Good feelings can be built in a surprisingly short time, just by exploring. (For instance, we set ourselves to hunting down the oldest tombstone in the cemetery, getting familiar with where certain people were buried, and the chronology of headstone art.)

Once you've found or built a space that feels safe and where you won't bother anyone or be bothered in turn, pack yourself a couple meals and something quiet to do, grab your spotter, and just take a day to go there and see what happens. (Or, if it's at home, just stay in.) Worse comes to worse, you'll have a nice quiet day where nothing really happens, and you'll have this space to turn to again if need be.

If going to this safe space makes your symptoms increase, you may indeed be on to something. But if trying this a few times *still* doesn't work... well, it might be time for tougher measures.

FORCING OPEN THE FRIDGE

We really don't like doing this, ourself, because the more force we use, the more likely we are to get memory distortion and false positives. This is something only to try if you've done all the prep work up to this point, your internal symptoms are utterly unbearable, and have remained so for long enough that you're at your wits' end.

The methods are listed in order of how well they worked for us (though what worked for us may not work for you).

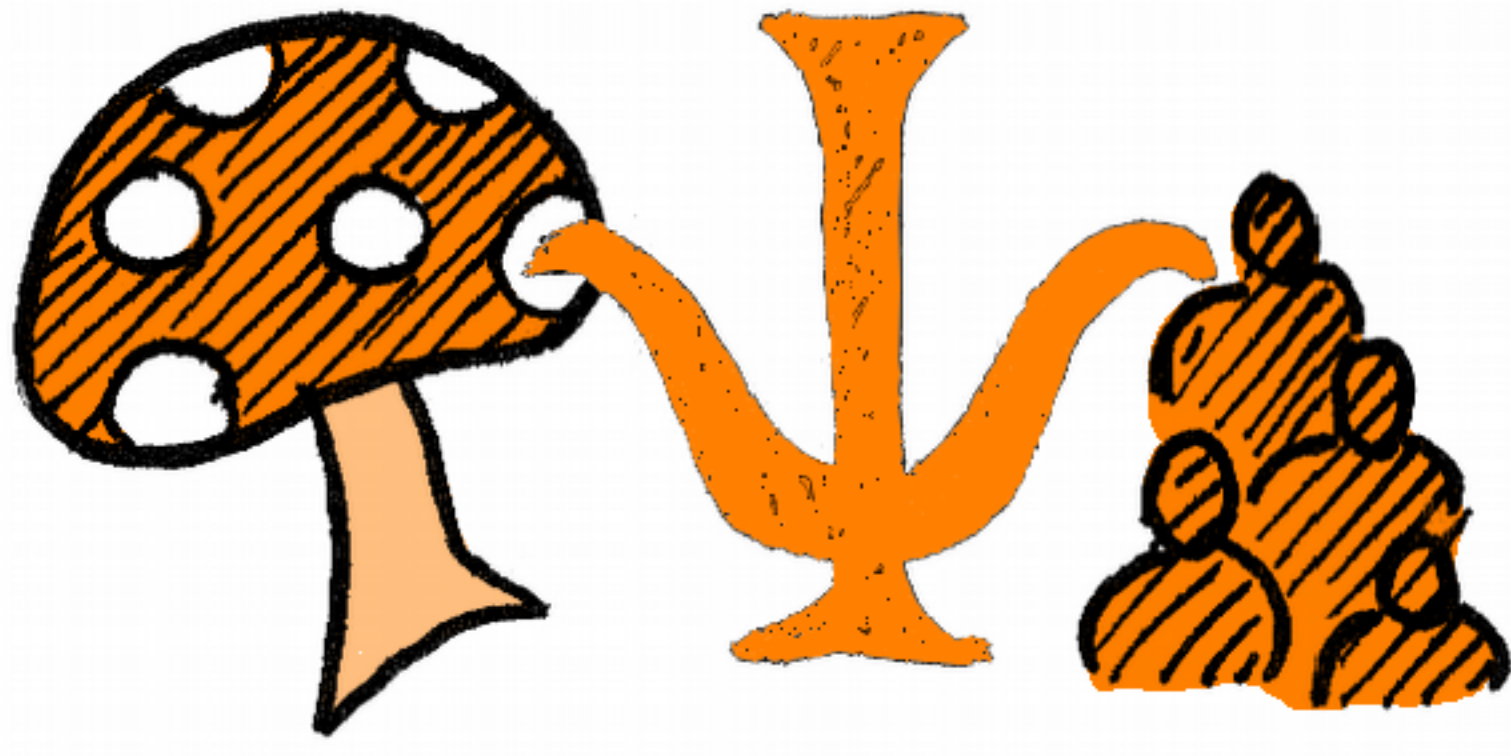
1. Using headspace. This is our favorite method, because our memories manifest there, originally as ghosts, now as water or goop. Engage with the ghost or the goop, and engage with the memory. (Also, our headspace has ways to tell us, "no, you're wrong, that didn't happen, stop bothering me!" which is super important. If you're going to dig into your brain like that, you need a method that can tell you yes *and* no, not just yes.)



2. If your headspace doesn't play that role, or doesn't exist at all, you can try using "guided visualization," which is a fancy way of saying "imagination that doesn't go how you want it to." (Our headspace, after all, is basically a decades-long communal act of imagination that's been run for so long that it's taken on its own life.) This gets a bad rap as wish-fulfillment, so it's vital that if you do this, your brain or imagination has a way of telling you no, or other things you don't want to hear. If your imagination never does anything you don't want, then don't use it.
3. If these tactics don't work, stream-of-consciousness writing or art sometimes helps. Some people apparently use their non-dominant hand for this; we used our dominant hand, but a means of writing that felt safe. (Also, back in our ghost period, ghosts would sometimes be compelled to write down what they contained, usually in rambling scrawling horror movie gibberish.) Whatever you end up making, even if it makes no sense to you or upsets you, *don't throw it out*. Just put it somewhere you don't have to look at it, and let it be for a while. Worse comes to worse, you'll have records for later. (Especially handy since our memory tends to get cloudy on stuff we make while in this state.)
4. There's also the classic trick of plowing into as many of your worst triggers as possible in hopes of jarring something loose, but it doesn't always work, and it's the equivalent of doing a tap dance in a minefield. We don't recommend it if you have anything better. If you must, try to use Staci Haines' *Healing Sex*'s chapter on dealing with triggers as a guide.

DO NOT USE THESE METHODS

Some people have done some really stupid things in the pursuit of getting memories up. Under no circumstances do we advise using these methods:



- **Drugs known for making you loopy, goofy, or messing with your memory or concentration (including enhancing it).** This gets a special mention because of its infamous history in memory work.

There's a reason Sibyl's sodium

pentathol/amytal treatments became infamous during the Memory Wars. We've also known folks who self-medicated and put themselves into the deep end, convinced that chemicals were the only way to get memories up, and believing increasingly improbable things as they took more and more. We have seen no convincing evidence that any drug will directly help memory work at this time.

- **Anything known for making you loopy, goofy, or messing with your memory or concentration:** hypnosis, fasting/starvation/diet manipulation, sleep deprivation, repetitive music/movement combos, and certain kinds of breathing exercises. Some people think drugs are bad, but "natural" things are harmless, and that's not true. For this process, you want to be on stable ground, physiologically and psychologically, as much as you can. Though it's unavoidable, we don't even like it when our brain horks something up in our sleep, because when we're groggy, we're far more credulous, and the memory seems more likely to be distorted. If it puts you in a state you shouldn't drive in, don't use it for memory work.
- **Doing memory work in corporeal groups.** I've seen folks do this to "prove" their past life memories were real, as kink play, or with some religious or social group they were a part of. Don't. Don't don't don't. Even in the best case scenario, where everyone has good intentions and pure motives, that is a level of influence nobody should have on your inner workings. Worst case, you're having your psyche broken down. This is a personal journey, and it's best done with as little outside influence and interference as possible.

While it's not on the bullet list of "never ever," we also want to bring up the role of therapy in memory work. A lot of multiples seem to prefer digging up memories while in their therapist's office and nowhere else. We deeply disagree, but we also seem to be unusual for that, so here's our explanation and you can make your own choice.

Our healthcare team is an invaluable resource. They prescribe us meds to help us stay stable. They give us a sounding board to help make sense

of memories after they've come up, and when we need a second opinion, they can help. We would not recommend embarking on memory work without a healthcare team, at least in reserve.

However. We avoid digging up memories or reliving them while in their office. For us, a memory is most uncertain and prone to tampering when it's coming up. It is also when we are most emotional, most overwhelmed, and least able to have a productive conversation with our therapist. (We only get one hour with him a week; we don't want to spend it crying uncontrollably!) In our case, it really is best that we discuss the memories with our therapist only after we've come down and kicked the tires a bit.

Multiples have a history of getting way too close to their therapists: seeing them as substitute parents, living with them, and generally outsourcing all their stability and critical thinking to them. A few folks claim this is a good thing, but mostly, it's a disaster.

Putting your memory work in the hands of a therapist gives them power that we think nobody should have. They can be your spotter, they can help give second opinions or helpful meds, but under no circumstances should they be the ones in charge of your memory work. They are your employee, not your parent, and they should be neither your sole support nor irreplaceable. At the end of the day, *you* have to be the one modeling love and care to yourselves, and nobody else can do it for y'all. If you don't feel safe doing memory work outside your therapist's office, maybe you shouldn't be doing it at all until you've got more people to rely on.

DEALING WITH MEMORIES

However you try and get a memory up, preparing is roughly the same. Take care of food, drink, and bathroom; turn off your phone and computer. Find your spotter and go to your safe place where you won't be disturbed for a while. Plunk yourself down and focus your attention on the memory.

Right now, let whatever comes up come up. Judgment and critical analysis will come later—you won't be able to do both at the same time, not at first anyway. Treat your mind as though it were a beloved, freaked out friend: you may not believe what it's telling you, but you can still listen, be kind, and not act like a jerk.

Why does it matter? Because if you're going to do this without wrecking hard, you *must* build trust between you and your mind. You have to make friends with it, and real friends tell you hard things, be that "something terrible happened" or "nothing happened" or "something did happen, but you

don't get to know what it is." You don't necessarily have to *agree* with those answers, but you do have to accept them and not shoot the messenger.

So, if you're using art or writing, just go with the urge and create. Try not to judge or edit what you're doing; just do it in whatever way feels right. When you're done, maybe take a good look at it, then put it away and let it be. (If you end up stuck, unable to make anything, skip to the next section.)

If you're using headspace, turn your focus to the memory. How does it appear? Try not to enforce a shape on it; just take what comes to you naturally. Is it a landmark, a living thing, weather, something else?

If it's obviously dangerous (like an angry tiger), build some headspace or imaginary defense—a suit of armor, a safety line, magical wards, whatever works. *Do not use aggressive means.* Don't go building tiger traps!

If the memory takes a non-aggressive, impregnable form that says, "this is not for you" (say, a locked fridge), resist the urge to smash it open. That's the wrong attitude. Don't go on the offensive.

Whatever it is, go gently—it's your friend, and it's hurting. If it's locked, see if you can gently nudge it open, with will or persuasion. Is it covered with chains or duct tape? Try to take them off, gently. It sounds corny, but asking, "Are you okay? What do you want?" might get the ball rolling.

The memory container might try to drive you off. It might attack, blast you with pain and agony, look and act scary, or just throw a ton of nonsense at you. Don't get mad or fight back. Remember, this is your beloved friend. You're not here to fight; you're here to listen, *really* listen, so it opens up on its own. (Or, alternately, so it can say, "there's nothing here," or "there is, but you don't get to have it.") However bad things used to be, they are safe and okay now. (And if they're not, you have no business doing memory work.)



Whatever method you use, it's likely to be frustrating and weird. You might get disturbing, uncontrollable visions or feelings—or you might get nothing at all. Whatever happens, try to keep your balance, listen, and feel whatever you're feeling. Lean into the experience, even when you're sure it can't be true.

Keep an eye on the clock, though. The longer you're dealing with a memory chunk (or trying to), the more draining it is; we usually can't keep it up for more than half an hour, and then need a day or two to recuperate. Try to learn your stamina and plan accordingly. If things go on for too long and you can't pull out, it might be time for your spotter to intervene.

We tend to get garbled, intense emotions and sensations first and narrative info later, but other plurals are the other way around. If you're an info-first feelings-later type, one method we haven't used (but which multiples and therapists alike have mentioned) is going to the safe place, getting your spotter, and playing a memory on a mental projector screen or TV. This allows info to come up, with a more manageable level of emotion or sensation. (And apparently some folks are able to use things like remote controls to press pause or turn down the emotional "volume." We're jealous!) Just know that this is not a "get out of agony free" card! Eventually, the pain and emotions *will* come. Be ready, and fall back on spotter, safe place, and crisis plan when necessary.

IF NOTHING HAPPENS

This happens. When it does, don't get frustrated. Instead, try to pay attention to exactly *how* that nothing is happening. Chart it; write it down. Are you spacing out? Is something coming up but it makes no sense? Are weird emotions drowning everything out? Is there just plain nothing there?

Sometimes it's just not your day. Maybe you tried the wrong tactic, or you're not in the right mind frame, or the memory just doesn't feel like chatting. Give it the good old college try, and if nothing happens after a few minutes or you find yourself straining and trying to force it, just stop. Put it down. Walk away.



As maddening and boggling as "something is here, but it makes no sense" can be, this is actually the best-case scenario. Just make some record of what comes up, no matter how weird or irrelevant or impossible it seems ("I keep feeling a burning in my wrists, and I don't understand why"), and then put it aside and come back to it later. Sometimes even the weirdest, most surreal

details come to make sense later; you just have to wait. (In our case, the weird wrist burning prefaced a dead headmate, M.D., returning; she was a cutter. Took us a year to figure that one out!)

Other times, you might need to learn some other skills before tackling memory work, and the "nothing happening" can tell you exactly what needs work. If a weird perfectionism is taking hold, paralyzing you with, "what if I'm wrong?" or, "unless this goes exactly how I want it to, it's useless," then of course it won't go well! In that case, you need to learn your way through those issues, and shouldn't try memory work until that's done.

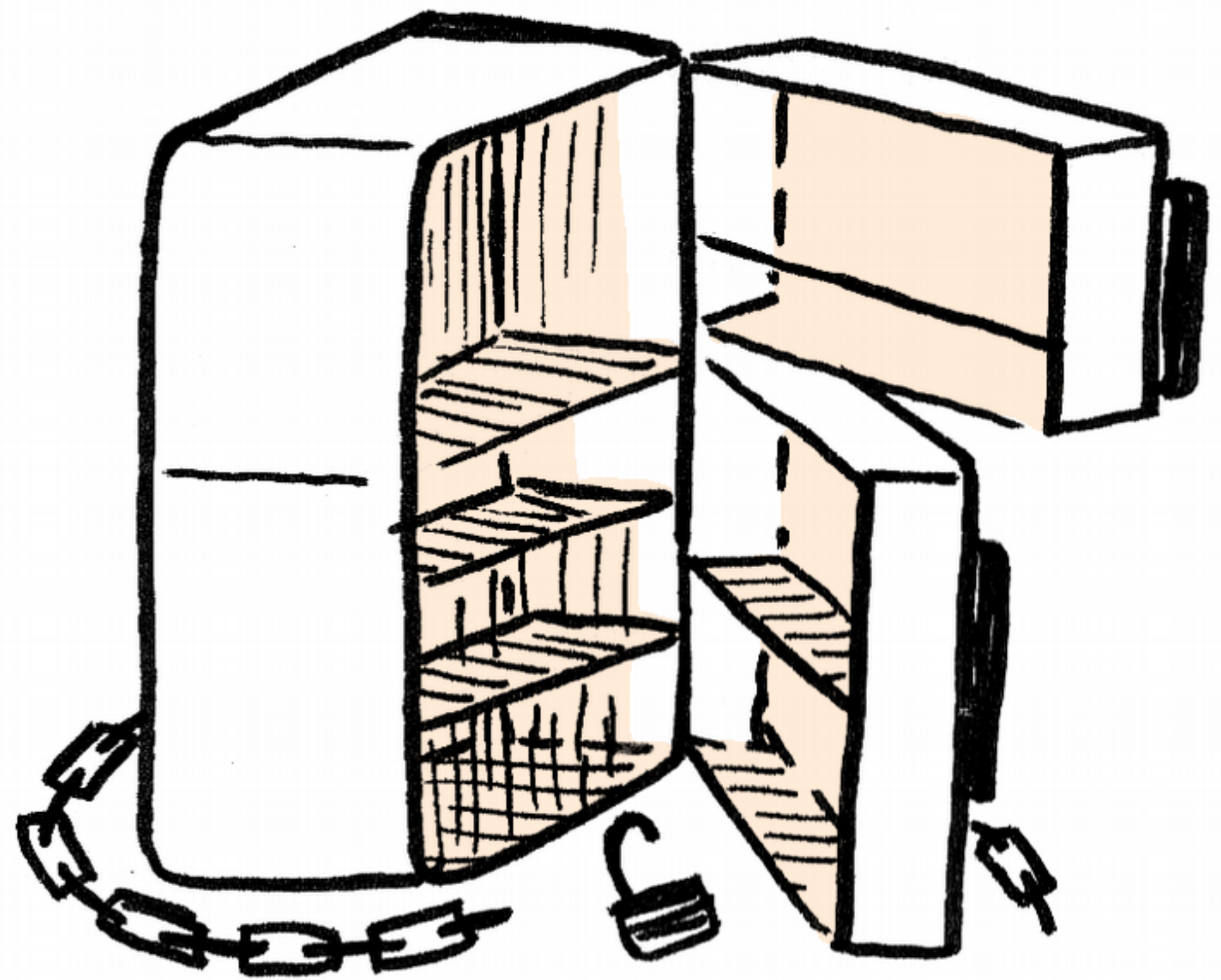
Similarly, if you're spacing out or dissociating, go back to working on that and leave memory work alone until you can stay rooted; otherwise you'll just get trapped in a cycle of remembering, blanking out, and re-forgetting. Learning other coping skills takes a lot of practice and time, but memory work can't progress without them. When the only tool you have is a hammer, everything's a nail.

NO, REALLY, NOTHING HAPPENED

Another possibility: is your mind just telling you no, nothing happened? How do you tell the difference between "there's nothing here" and "something is here, but now is not the time"?

It takes a lot of self-knowledge and internal trust and communication to learn, but it's well worth it for the knowledge that your brain will tell you to buzz off if you're barking up the wrong tree or banging your head against a wall. We sadly only know how to get this kind of communication via headspace; we talk about it in our "Discovering and Defending Headspace" essay.

For instance, at one point Rogan was worried someone else had attacked us. He was getting recurring nightmares about this one relative and all our usual memory symptoms. Finally, he went to our headspace and asked it what'd happened. It replied with a memory that showed no, this relative had done nothing wrong. On the contrary, he had protected us; that was why we were getting all these symptoms—he was involved in a lost memory of violence, but not as an attacker! What a relief!



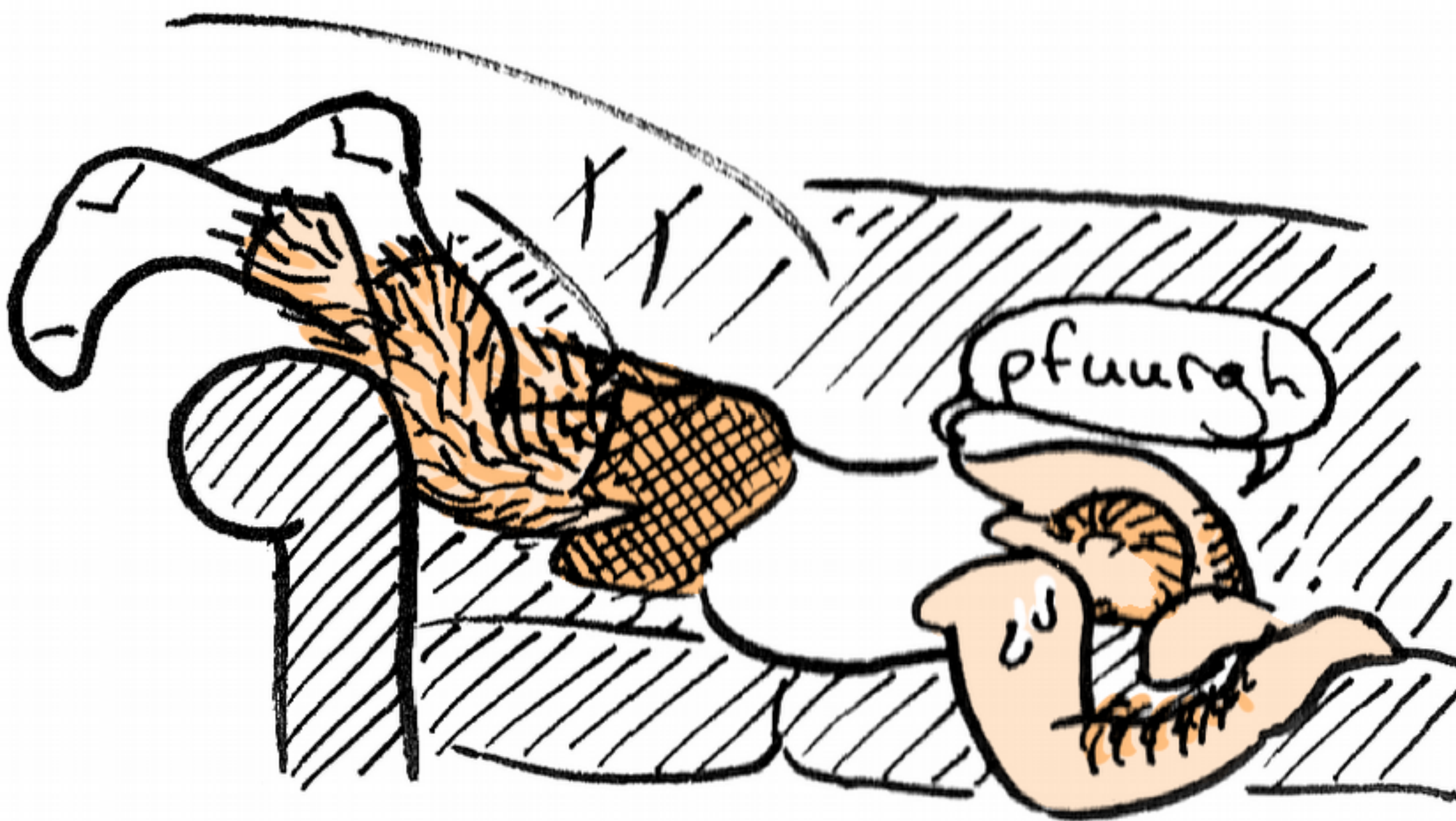
Another time, we found records that Mac had been a headmate a year earlier than we'd thought. Mac went to our headspace, but it gently pushed him away as though to say, "not now." It turned out that we'd accidentally jumped too far ahead, and so our brain had to tell us no until we dealt with other memories that explained the context. It was a pretty tense nine months, but we finally got our answers!

Your mind has its own ways of saying different kinds of "no." Keep your eyes open, build that trust, and hopefully you can learn it together.

And finally, sometimes something did happen... but there is no narrative memory to recover. Lynn Wasniak, the founder of the multi newsletter *Many Voices*, writes, "maybe, the memories really were *not* stored... or at least weren't coded in a way that they could be retrieved. [...] I've really fought this explanation. I keep hoping there's just some massive thick barrier separating me from the 'real past'... that someday it will open and I'll know what happened for sure. But as time goes by, I am becoming to accept the possibility that I will *never* know, that I *can't* know because the record isn't there." (Many Voices press, pg. 3)

AFTER THE MEMORY PASSES

Even when nothing happens, memory work is *exhausting*. When a memory chunk passes (or doesn't), give yourself a lot of rest and recovery time. (We usually need anywhere from a couple days to a couple weeks, and we cry a lot that whole time.) Make your life as gentle and stress-free as possible: Disney movies, favorite books and video games, herbal tea, whatever. Have your coping skills and psychological pain scale ready; trust me, you'll need them.



While you are resting, *leave the memory alone*. Take a few notes as to what you felt and saw, and how bad it was, and then put it down and let it be. Give it at least a couple days to scab over and go do something else for a while. Hug your kids.

Walk your dog. Go to your knitting club. Work on a project. Remind yourself that you have more to your life than memory work. The memory's not going anywhere; it's waited this long, it can wait a little longer.

Patience is vital. With us, at least, memories rarely come up in one go. Even if we don't get a "not yet," they can take up to five months and usually come up in bits and pieces—sensory details, emotions, and narrative memory all split apart. Things rarely make sense until everything gets knitted together at the end, and no amount of wracking our brain changes that.

TAKING STOCK & MEMORY DISTORTIONS

Once you've had some time for things to settle, when you're no longer distraught, exhausted, or distracted by corporeal matters, you can try taking stock of the memory info you've gotten.

Go through your records. They probably won't deliver on a silver platter, but they can at least help give context or a sense of time or place. You might find things that jog your memory—our seventh grade composition book held a bounty of information, including early references of our little brother sexually harassing us. Records like this can help a memory seem more or less credible, or at least give a paper trail to compare things to later.

If records aren't available or don't help one way or the other, take a look at the memory. Try to think critically about it, without lapsing into denial. (Easier said than done, we know.) Does the memory make sense? If multiple memories have come up, are they contiguous with each other? Is there anything that strikes you as really out-of-character or unlikely, requiring further explanation or less credulity? Does the memory explain anything you didn't understand before? (Our memory work has spent a lot of time answering questions like why our headspace and headmates are the way they are.)

In the heat of the moment, you might believe things that now you're not so certain about. (This is especially true for us if memories come up when we're groggy or asleep.) You might find yourself thinking, "no, no, I really don't think that's true. It just doesn't feel right." This does happen! Memories get distorted and confused! Here are some ways they can happen:

- **Time dilation or compression.** Intense experiences can seem to last forever, or be over in a flash.
- **Size confusion.** Our attackers tend to loom huge in our memory, especially when we were very small ourselves.
- **Squishing similar events together.** We spent thousands of days at school, but we remember that one time the classroom flooded with sewage *way* clearer than any given ordinary day. The normal days just all blur together. So do nigh-identical attacks.

- Person confusion. Our brain often waits to tell us the identity of our attacker. Instead, it just leaves person shaped shadows, placeholders, and sometimes these placeholders are the wrong shape and size for who they prove to be. Memories that come up through nightmares often use substitutes—random strangers, or different people we knew.
- **Headspace confused with corporeal.** Headspace injuries still hurt, and sometimes we feel the ghosts of those sensations completely independently of the memory they're attached to.
- **Symbolic confused with literal.** See above.
- **Suggestion.** Sometimes, we remember something that didn't happen because we expected it to happen, or because someone we trust tells us it happened. (Lynn Wasniak writes about her own experiences with high suggestibility and memory distortion in *Many Voices*.)



Maybe some people's memories are always clean and perfect. Ours aren't. At first, this caused us a lot of consternation, but then we realized that we were being unreasonable. These memories were years or decades old. They'd been shattered and scattered all over the place. Did we really expect we could just put them back together like a puzzle fresh out of the box? We had to let go of our hopes for a strict "this is true, this is false" binary. Some memories seem clear; others are too fragmentary or incoherent to make much sense of. Sometimes, that's just the way it goes.



One thing that has given us cold comfort is that no matter what happens, the memories continue. Whether we fight or not, believe or not, are in therapy or not, the steamroller chugs on. Eventually, we just had to accept that whatever their veracity, the memories were here and we had to deal with them.

BUT WHAT IF IT DIDN'T HAPPEN?

We've spoken to people, singlet and plural alike, who have memories of things they know didn't or couldn't have happened in "reality". Sometimes they see it as "another life," or it's a headspace event. (For example, we've had headmates who died in headspace; those deaths were still awful and needed to be dealt with.) These things cause mega anxiety: how to deal with them? *Should*

folks deal with them?

At its most basic, what matters most is: does dealing with these memories make things better, or worse? And we don't mean short-term highs and lows that befall everybody sometimes, or are just part of the process. Over the long term, are triggers breaking down? Are you able to overcome things that you couldn't before? Are you and your headmates generally feeling better over time? If those questions are too abstract, try using your psychological badness scale and plotting your distress numbers on a calendar. As the years pass, are those numbers getting better or worse?

Memory work is useless if it's not making things better, and that's true regardless of whether the memories are. If you find yourself getting hospitalized more and more, becoming more dependent on fewer and fewer people, or your distress numbers are getting worse and worse, then memory work is not the answer to whatever it is you're dealing with. Something else needs taking care of, be it a physical illness, an addiction, other mental stuff; life transitions (death, homelessness, children); or something else. The whole point of remembering is to heal, not gouge open all your old wounds and leave them to fester.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, you're going to have to come to your own conclusions about what's real and what's not. You're going to have to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, and make your decisions accordingly. That's painful and hard, and nobody else can do it for you.

All things end, and that includes memories. It may not be now, or even years from now, but one day, you will be okay. It will not last forever.

Good luck.

MEMORY WORK, FIVE YEARS LATER

THE DATA

It's been five years since the first AllFam strip, and we've dealt with roughly 30 memories, smashed into roughly 300 chunks and assimilated one by one. The process has changed barely at all since March 2013:

6 DAYS WITH LB



Back then, we were only dealing with contextual and emotional memory work, but little has changed. Just now, the average cycle lasts four and a half days instead of six, and the memory content has grown more grotesque. But the cycle itself has stayed the same:

- 1. We feel increasingly tense and antsy.
- 2. We relive a memory chunk and cry a lot.
- 3. We are mentally drained and hungover.
- 4. We gain more energy... but also more tension.
- 5. We start again.

In the short-term, there’s some variation; a month can have anywhere from 2 to 12 memory chunks. More than 8 and we fall over; we just don’t have the time to recover in-between.

Having grown up during the Memory Wars, we worried that we were auto-suggesting false memories to ourself (that is, making it up without realizing it), and ached to find some way to test them. Organizations like the False Memory Syndrome Foundation did diddly on that front; they implied that if we just stopped seeing our therapist and believing we were abused, then we’d be miraculously cured. If only! Homeless or housed, in therapy or out, credulous or skeptical, our memory steamroller chugs on. The only way to slow it down even temporarily are extreme stress or begging for a break. Even then, the reprieve only lasts a couple weeks; then, once the choke point passes, we get bulldozed. Most of the time, it’s better to just take our lickings and let our brain set the pace.

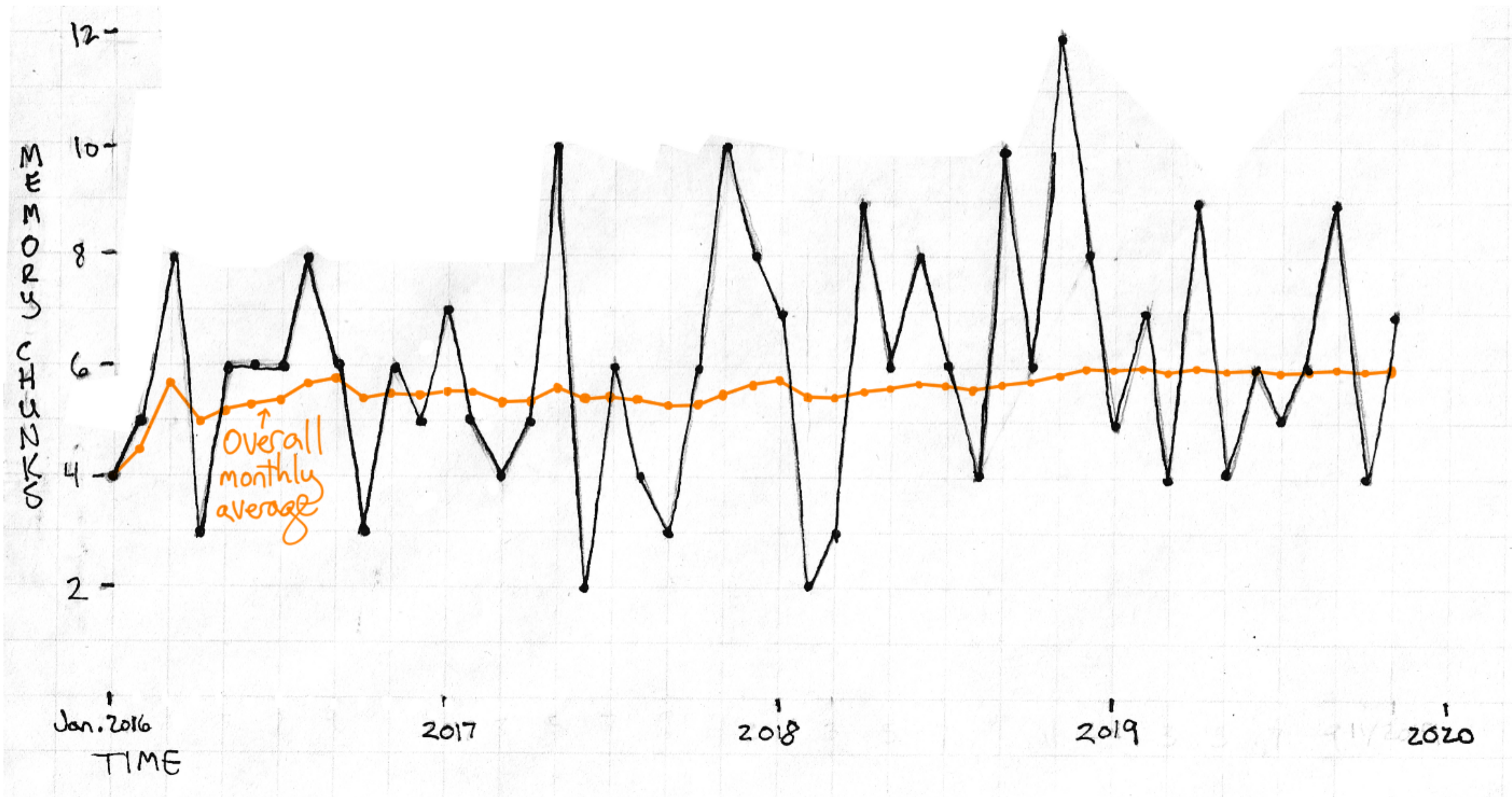
At the start of 2016, we started keeping obsessive records of the process. For the math whizzes, here are our numbers:

Month	Memory Chunks		
Jan-'16	4	Nov-'16	6
Feb-'16	5	Dec-'16	5
Mar-'16	8	2016 Sum	66
Apr-'16	3	Monthly Average	5.5
May-'16	6	Jan-'17	7
Jun-'16	6	Feb-'17	5
Jul-'16	6	Mar-'17	4
Aug-'16	8	Apr-'17	5
Sep-'16	6	May-'17	10
Oct-'16	3	Jun-'17	2
		Jul-'17	6

MEMORY WORK, FIVE YEARS IN

Aug-'17	4	Sep-'18	10
Sep-'17	3	Oct-'18	6
Oct-'17	6	Nov-'18	12
Nov-'17	10	Dec-'18	8
Dec-'17	8	2018 Sum	81
2017 Sum	70	Monthly Average	6.75
Monthly Average	5 5/6	Jan-'19	5
Jan-'18	7	Feb-'19	7
Feb-'18	2	Mar-'19	4
Mar-'18	3	Apr-'19	9
Apr-'18	9	May-'19	4
May-'18	6	Jun-'19	6
Jun-'18	8	Jul-'19	5
Jul-'18	6	Aug-'19	6
Aug-'18	4	Sep-'19	8

Or if you prefer, a graph:



Sure it's morbid, but having numbers on our memory work cycle has been invaluable. The scary, seemingly uncontrollable process is now predictable (unpleasant) routine. We still sometimes stagger through work punch-drunk, but we've only rarely had to cancel. As long as memory work rules our schedule, we can mostly do what we need to, in our limited way. (Though we'll probably be stuck as a welfare rat for a long time.)



MEMORY CHUNK TRIGGERS

Triggers summon memory chunks. They're both gate and guardsmen.

Most of Rogan's triggers are sexual, even if a memory isn't. Sucks to be him, but at least it gives him something to try when he needs to set off a memory chunk. (If we have a comics convention on Saturday, he'll usually try and set off a memory chunk on Thursday or so, insuring he'll be in working condition.)



As time has gone on, though, we don't need to set ourselves off as much; even the silver bullets work less. Instead, we go to our headspace and ask for a memory chunk, and it will try to deliver... or tell us when that isn't possible.

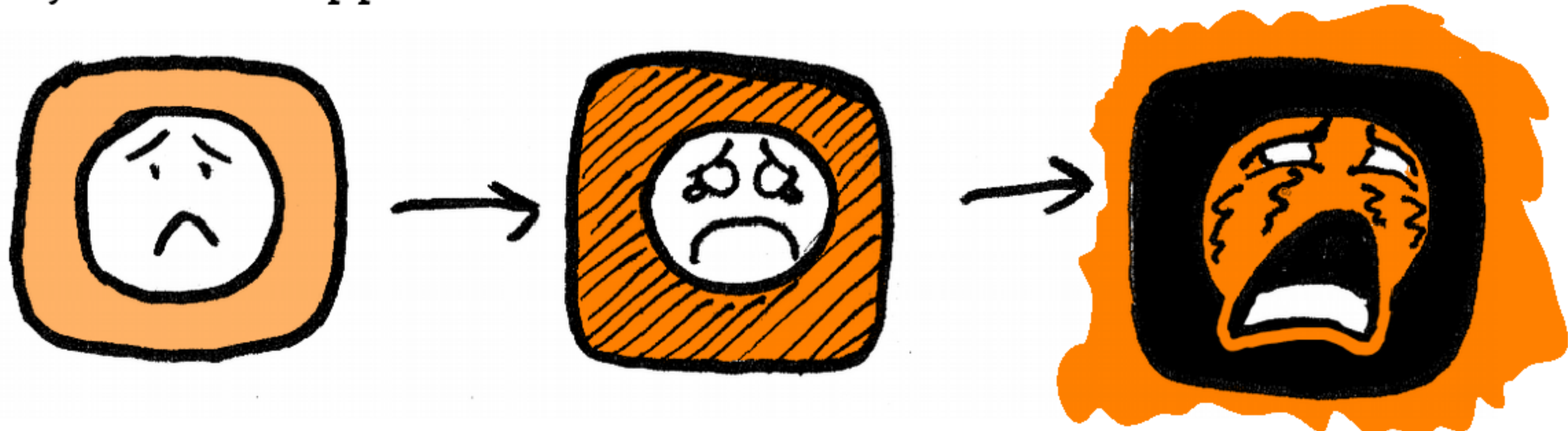
MEMORY ORDER

With few exceptions, we process one memory at a time, working our way from "easiest" to "hardest" for each perpetrator, who are also dealt with in the same order. (And, once we finish each individual, we start dealing with group attacks.)

Our brain doesn't see eye to eye with most folks as to what's "easy" and "hard." In its mind, even the ghastliest actions are "easier" with outside

corroboration. And among the factors that make things harder:

- Mortal terror.
- Complications--an interruption, things going wrong, more than one person being involved even if they're not attackers.
- Betrayal and disappointment.



That last one in particular seems to be the big kahuna. Being choked to unconsciousness is scary, but nowhere near as bad as realizing that Mommy hates you so much that she *wants* to choke you. And our little brother was the least violent and least competent of our familial attackers, but he's so far been the hardest, just because of the heartbreak. Even a failed rape, coming from a person we wanted to protect or keep safe, was far more devastating than our grandfather's worst depredations, whose cruelty was easy to take for granted.

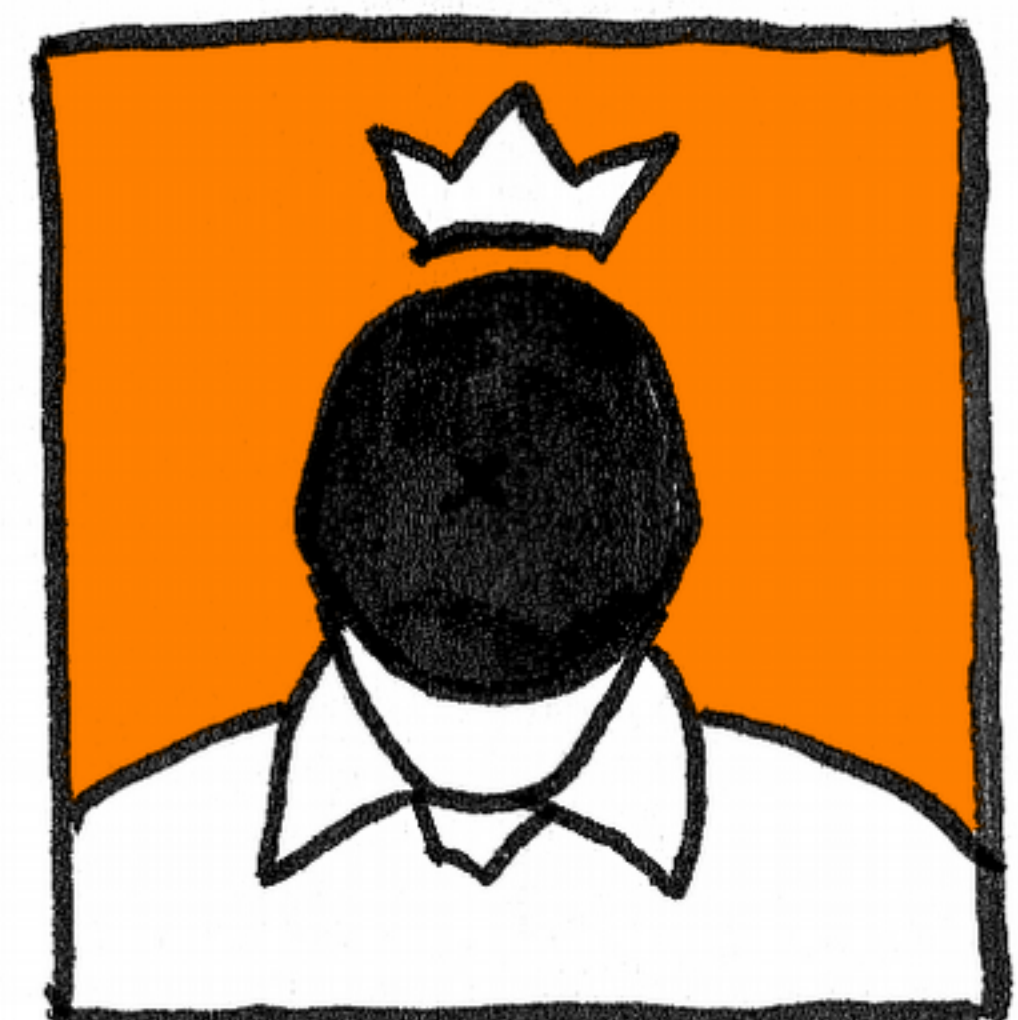
PERPETRATORS

When we ended *All in the Family*, we had only just started dealing with memories involving assaults from Dad. Since then, we've moved past him to our mother and little brother, and now we're dealing with complicated group attacks where all sorts of things didn't go according to plan.

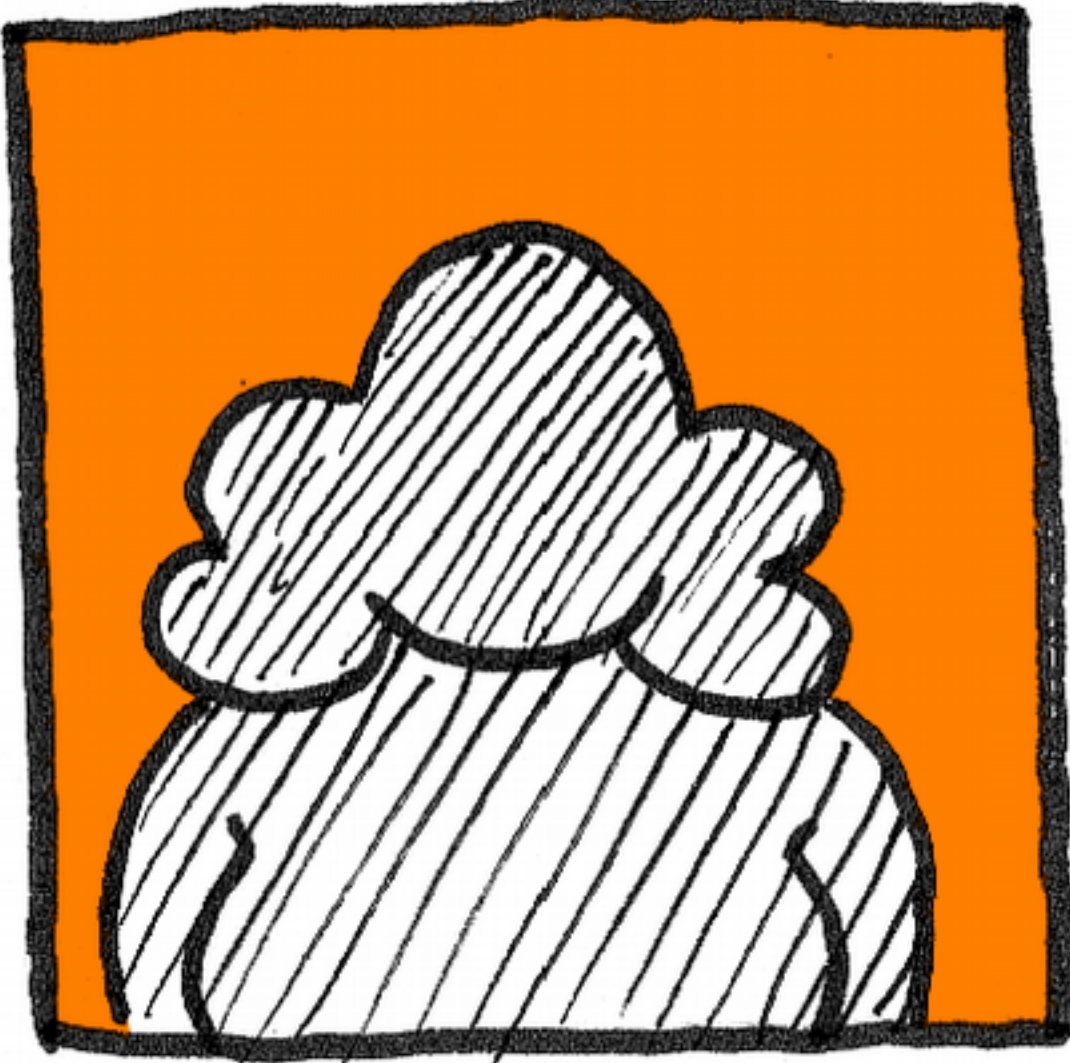


Jeff was never forgotten, because not only was he never physically violent or threatening, but he had the least betrayal associated with him. None of our family or friends liked him, and he lived in a different part of town and went to different schools, so excising him from our life was low-risk and relatively painless. He was a straightforward case of an independent bad apple.

Grampa was the easiest familial abuser to deal with, because we had records and corroboration over the years of our parents (and other relatives) telling us he was a pedophile. It was an open family secret. The hard part wasn't actually dealing with his behavior on its own, but the nagging questions like,



"why did our family keep bringing us to his house?"



Lois wasn't "as bad" as Grampa, on the surface—she only attacked us under his command, never alone, and she never seemed enthusiastic. However, she was our favorite aunt growing up, so our brain found her "harder." Everyone knew Grampa was a pedophile but Lois was supposed to be better than that!

Dad, however nasty, was still the least painful of our immediate family to deal with; we already kind of knew he was a prick, and his sadism never overcame his caution. He always tried to remain in control of himself, used condoms, tried not to leave marks, and if he thought he might get caught, he wouldn't attack us. This made his limits and behavior far more predictable, and thus less scary.



Mom was terrifying, but she was also a victim like us; Grampa had abused her, Dad treated her badly, and we harbored hopes of saving her. For her to attack us herself felt like a terrible betrayal. She mostly focused on the physical, rather than the sexual, and she preferred forms of asphyxiation, since that left few marks and easily terrified us. She'd put on raving performances that gave the impression that she had

totally lost her mind, and that unpredictability made her a holy terror. (However, seeing as she somehow never lost control in front of other people or asphyxiated us hard enough to cause us major damage, it seems likely that this was a performance, rather than the real thing.) She also did some weird pseudo-religious stuff and seemed compelled to repeat it even when it didn't serve her, which makes us wonder whether she was reenacting something that was done to her. We'll never know.

And finally, there was Bro, who was the least violent, the least competent, and by far the hardest. He was younger than us and had once been much smaller; we felt that we had failed him as a big sister, especially once memories started coming up that stated Mom was sexually abusing him, and in a way that seemed far more monstrous than her attacks on us. She probably started attacking him when he was



still in elementary school, if not before, and he got more and more sexually aggressive towards us from the age of ten on. He was most frightening due to his carelessness—he never used condoms, and Rogan had to do some pretty degrading things to save us from impregnation. (Since, as a teen growing up in Texas, we had no access to birth control and wouldn't have been able to get an abortion without our parents' consent. Imagine *that* conversation!)

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?

Some people may be staggered by the idea that one family could harbor so much rape. In their minds, rapists are a special kind of evil, and to have so many in one family defies probability. But this isn't how rape works, not in our family anyway. Our entire family tree was rotten, not because it was stuffed with an improbable allotment of supervillains, but because *our family rules said cruelty and violence were okay, if you used it on the right people.*

We were not special in our family. Everyone could abuse everyone below them in the hierarchy, and the hierarchy was organized by generation and (more loosely) gender. Grampa abused his children, and they went and abused other children in turn. Dad abused Mom and his kids, and Mom abused her kids. That was just the privilege of being higher on the totem pole, as natural as parents' desires trumping that of their children or pets.

That hierarchy was corrosive and corrupting; it made you a worse person just being in it, and that included us. Because part of holding your rank was beating on those who might challenge you for it.

When we were a child, we beat up our little brother because Dad said we could. We don't remember how old we were—somewhere between seven and ten. We don't remember the argument that started the whole thing either, only that us and Bro went to Dad to settle it.

Our father, being himself, told us to go into the backyard and duke it out, winner take all. Might made right.



This was no fair fight. Our little brother, besides being younger, was tiny for his age; we were large. There was no question how it would end and indeed, we beat our little brother to tears. He ran crying to our father, but to no sympathy. Bro knew the rules. He lost.

(A few years later, Bro got his revenge; he put a bunch of pool balls in a sock and beat us with it, raising bruises on our back. That was just

how it worked in our family: beat or be beaten.)

The really awful part, though, isn't either of those things. It's the memory of the sheer vicious sadism we felt in hurting him. There was a rush of euphoria and power, a feeling that we could do *whatever we wanted*, and there was nothing Bro could do, because *it was the right thing to do*. If the rules said we could, then it was okay. There was this twisted sense of triumph, like we'd gotten the cheat code to life, the secret that would let us do whatever we wanted to whoever we wanted and still be a good person. All it required was the right victim, and we would not only get away with it, but be absolved of caring.

That is a power that no one should have. But in our family, everyone but the ultimate loser had it. Everyone in the hierarchy except that one poor schmuck would have nigh-absolute power over *somebody* (and us and Bro switched places enough that we could be kept at each other's throats, fighting not to be on the bottom).

Evil in stories has a core of tragedy and motive, but in reality, it's a screamingly frustrating emptiness. Maybe when you read about us beating up our brother, you thought we were doing it because we'd been brutalized ourselves, we did it to get control, or because Dad made us, or any one of a million things that could make it comprehensible and less awful.

But that's not why we did it. We did it because it was easier. It was easier to beat up our little brother than it was to question our family rules, say, "no," or even think for ourselves. We could've easily walked away; Bro was too small to run the fight himself. But we didn't, because that required effort.

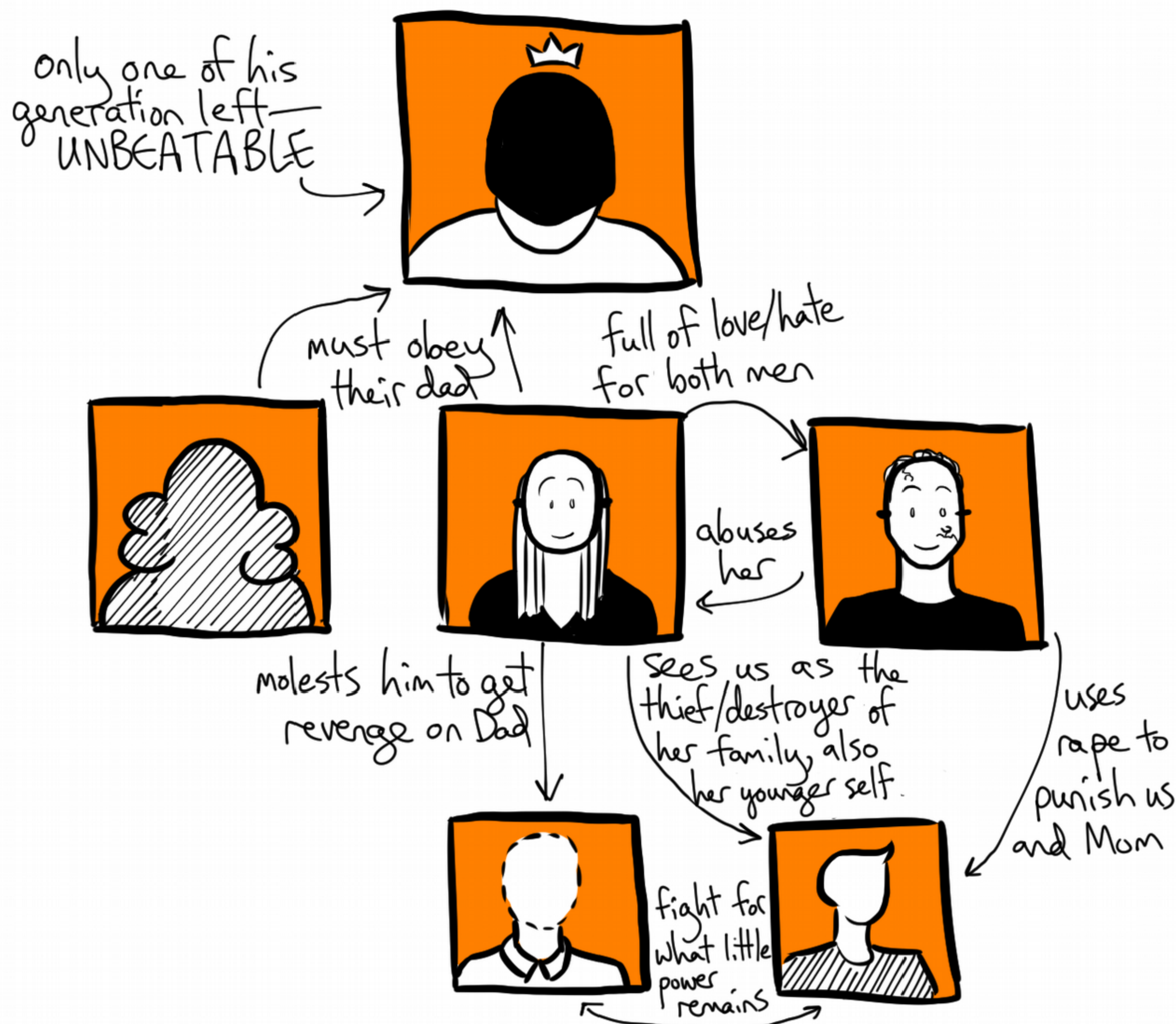
In our family, evil is effortless, an intense moral laziness, refusing to look too carefully at one's actions or motives. It defies all attempts at rationalizing and justification, because it is based on avoidance of both. I doubt our parents thought about what they were doing much at all, as long as their positions were secure.

It is not at all hard to find groups of people in history who rigged their rules to make violence okay, and then persuaded other people to go along with it. If you're interested in learning about folks who managed it in other contexts, and often on a way larger scale than our family, check out McGuire, the Investigative Staff at the Boston Globe, and Scully and Marola in the Recommended Reading Section in the back.

Another thing to remember: our family was rewarded for their behavior. It benefited them. Our father and grandfather got to rape whoever couldn't stop them, however they wanted. They never had to compromise, experience rejection, or be decent. Our mother got to have similar privileges with her children, if not her spouse. All three got to vent their spleens at the

lower-downs whenever they wanted, however they felt like. They didn't have to show self-control at home, the way other people do. And everyone below them coddled their every whim, knowing the penalty should they stop.

And as for us and Bro... we got to brutalize each other and rest easy in the assurance that if we just waited until we got old enough, soon we would be the top dogs, and we too would get all those privileges. We could even pretend we'd earned them, by virtue of nobly climbing through the ranks over the years.



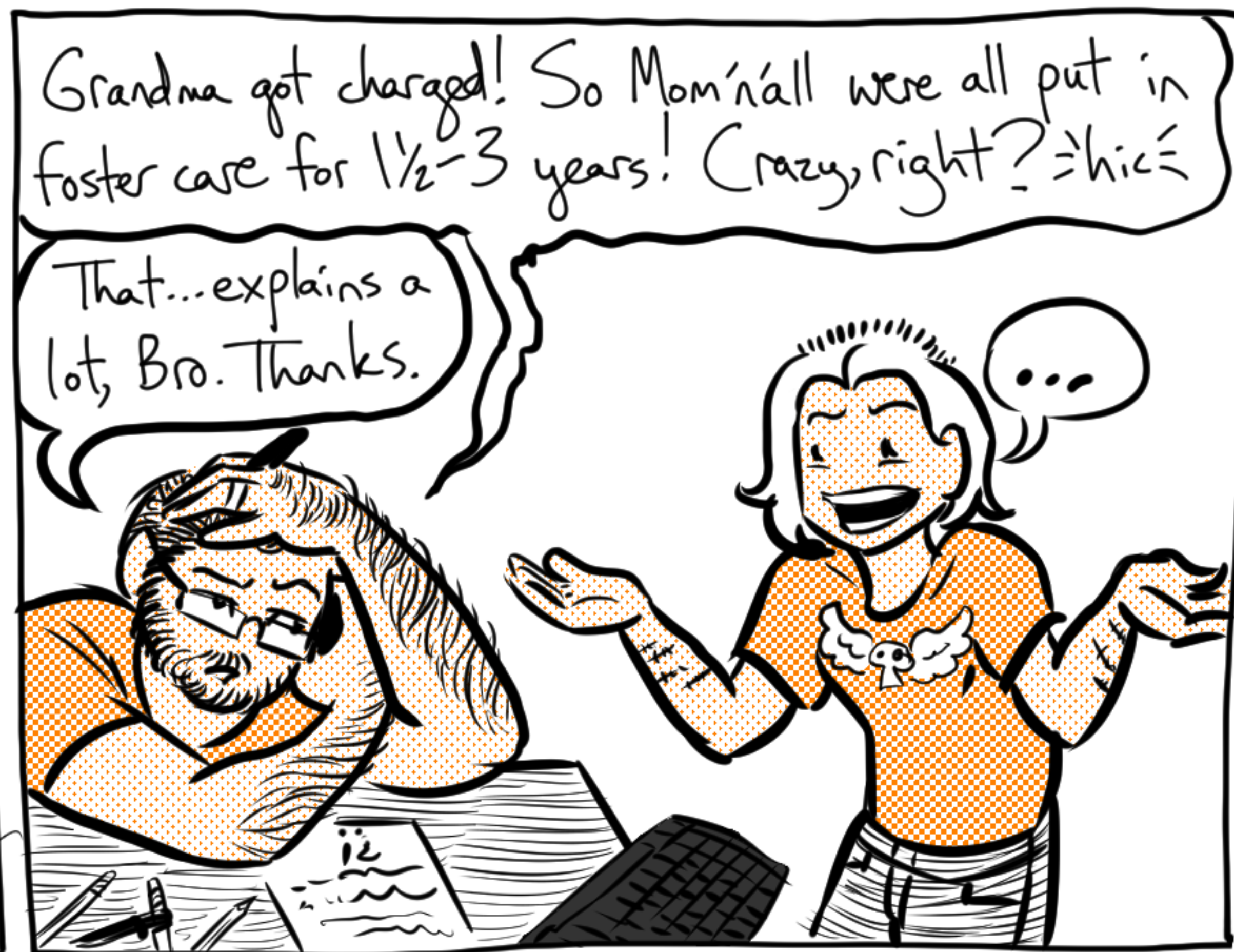
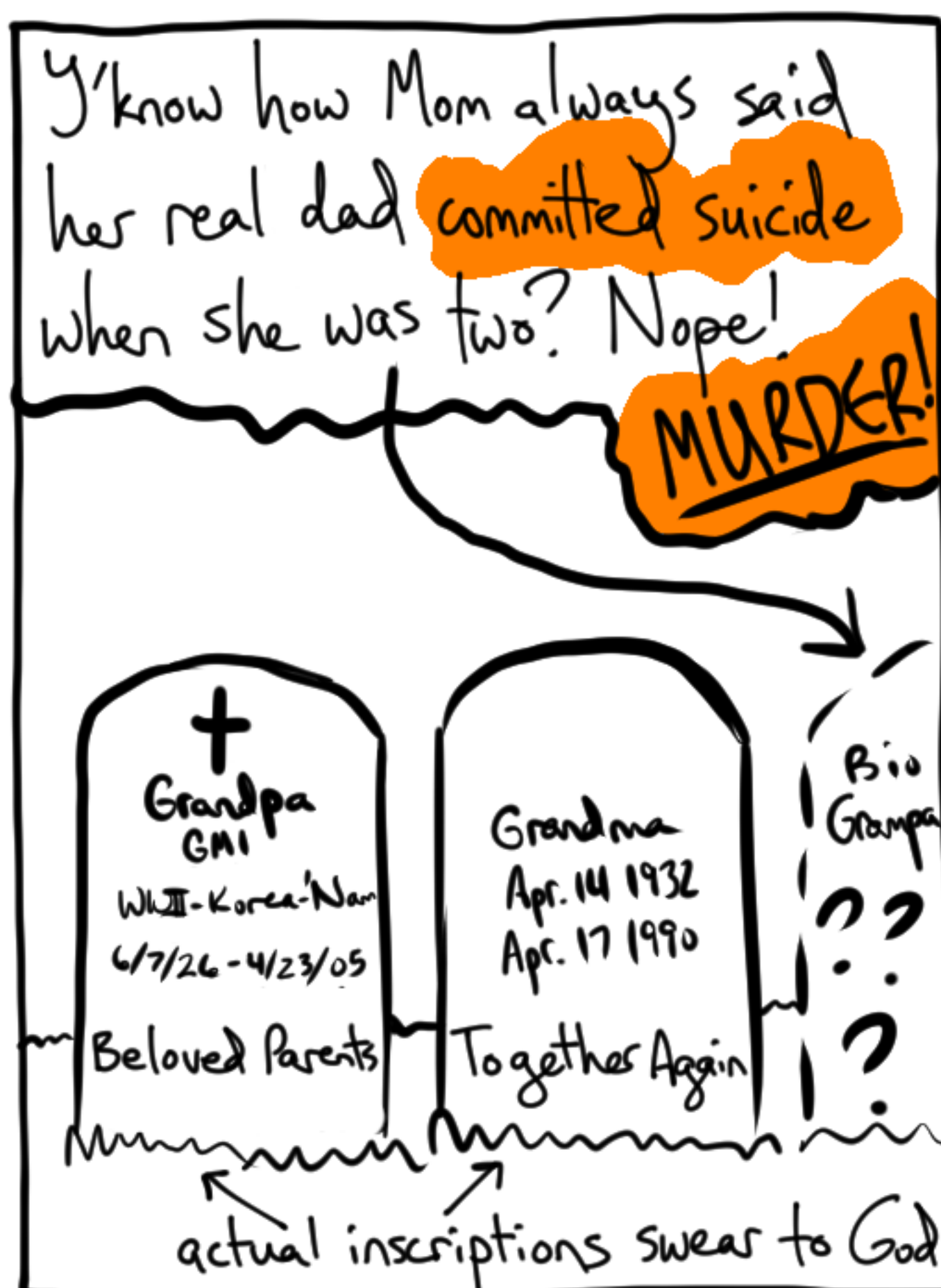
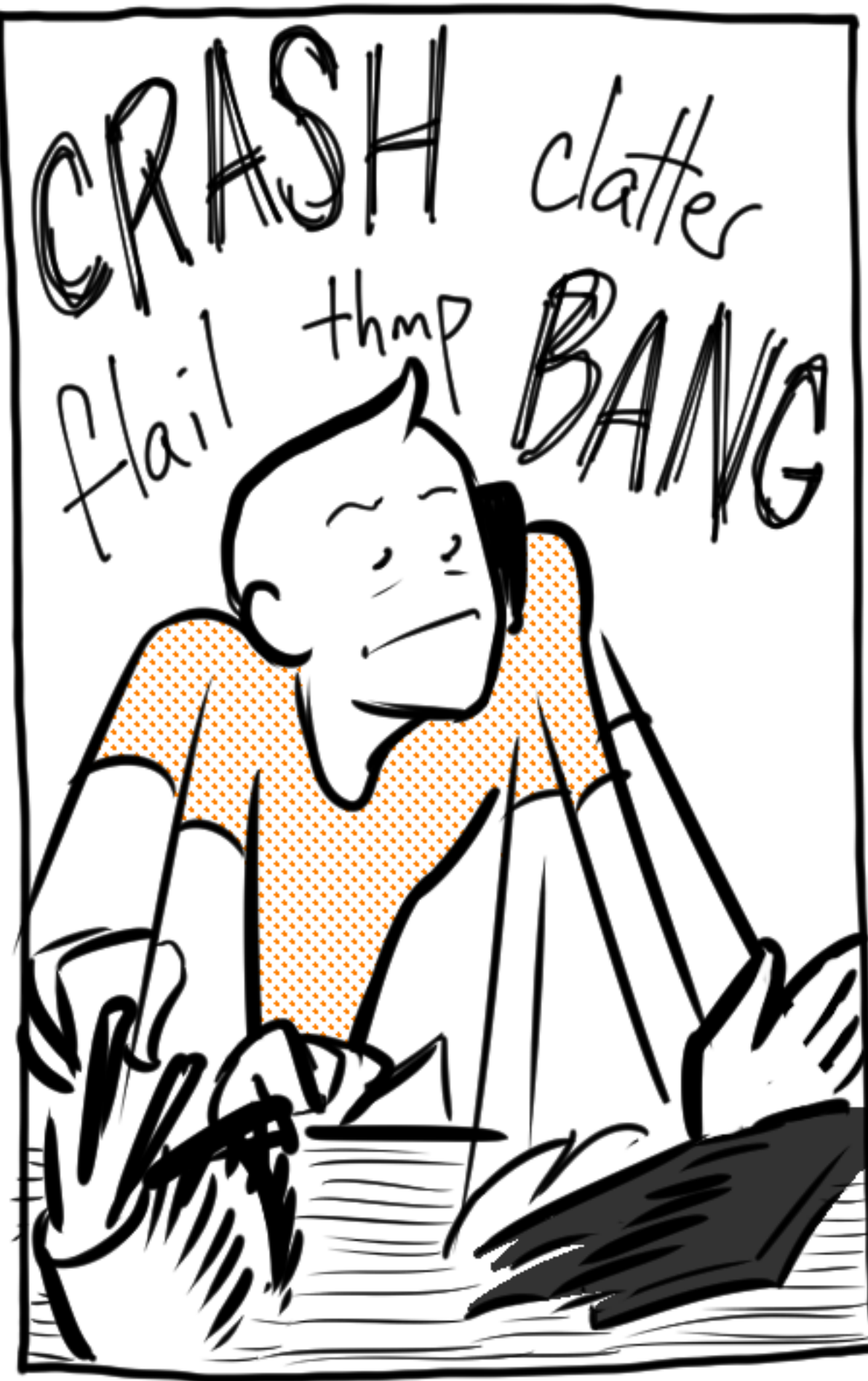
When we think of our little brother breaking into our room at night, once he got bigger and stronger than us, part of us thinks that he did it because we taught him. We chose to hurt him and in the process, we taught him that the hierarchy was right—that it was beat or be beaten, rape or be raped.

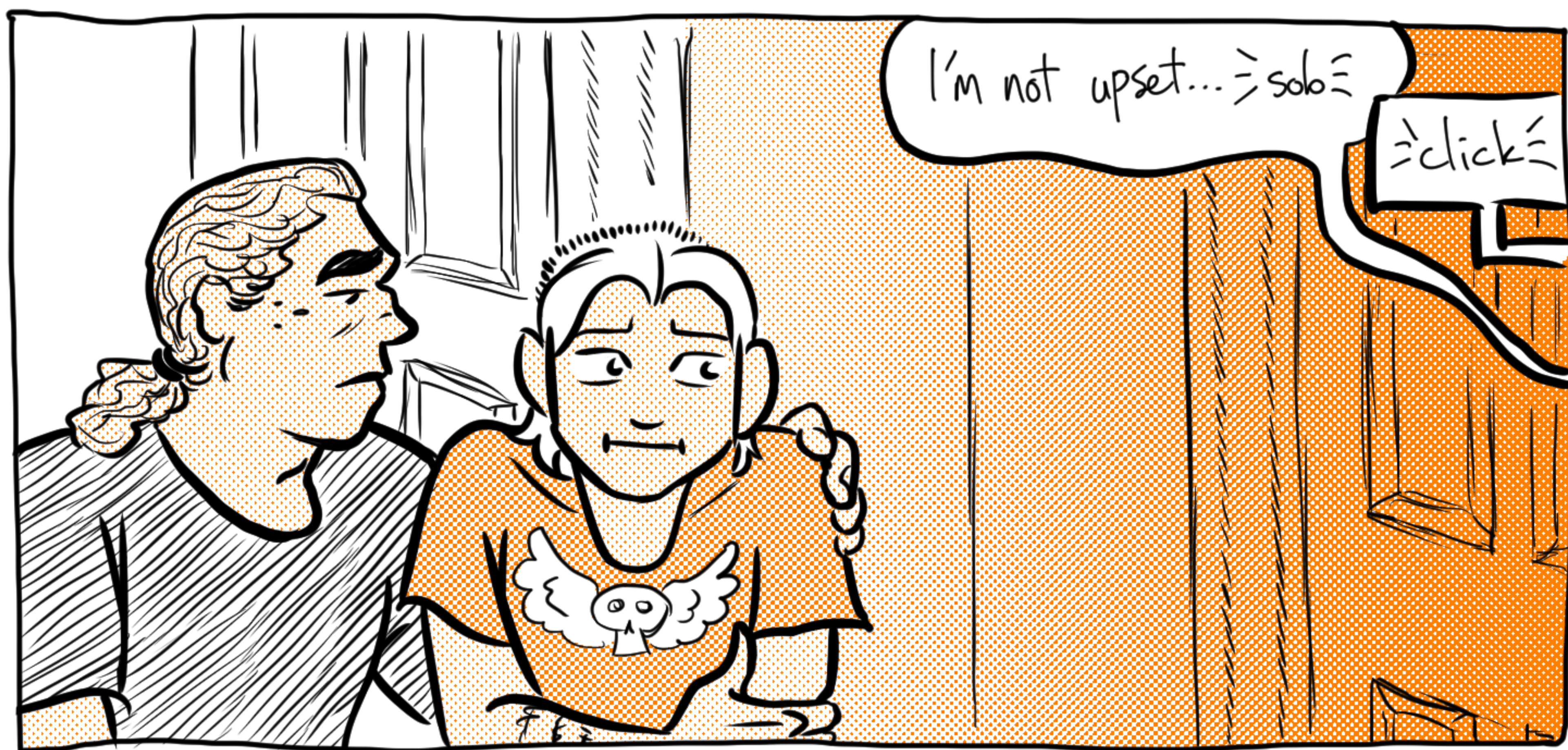
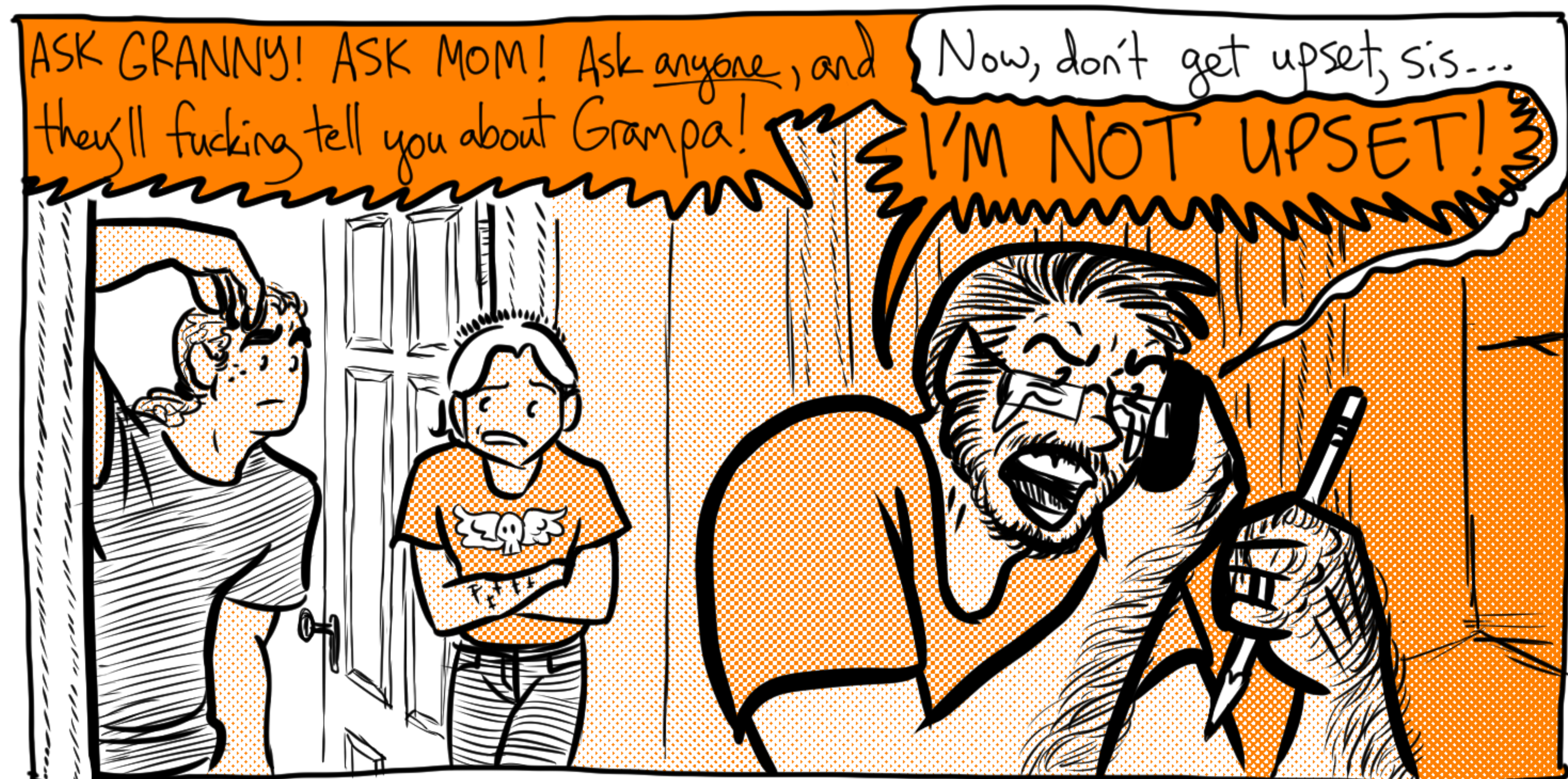
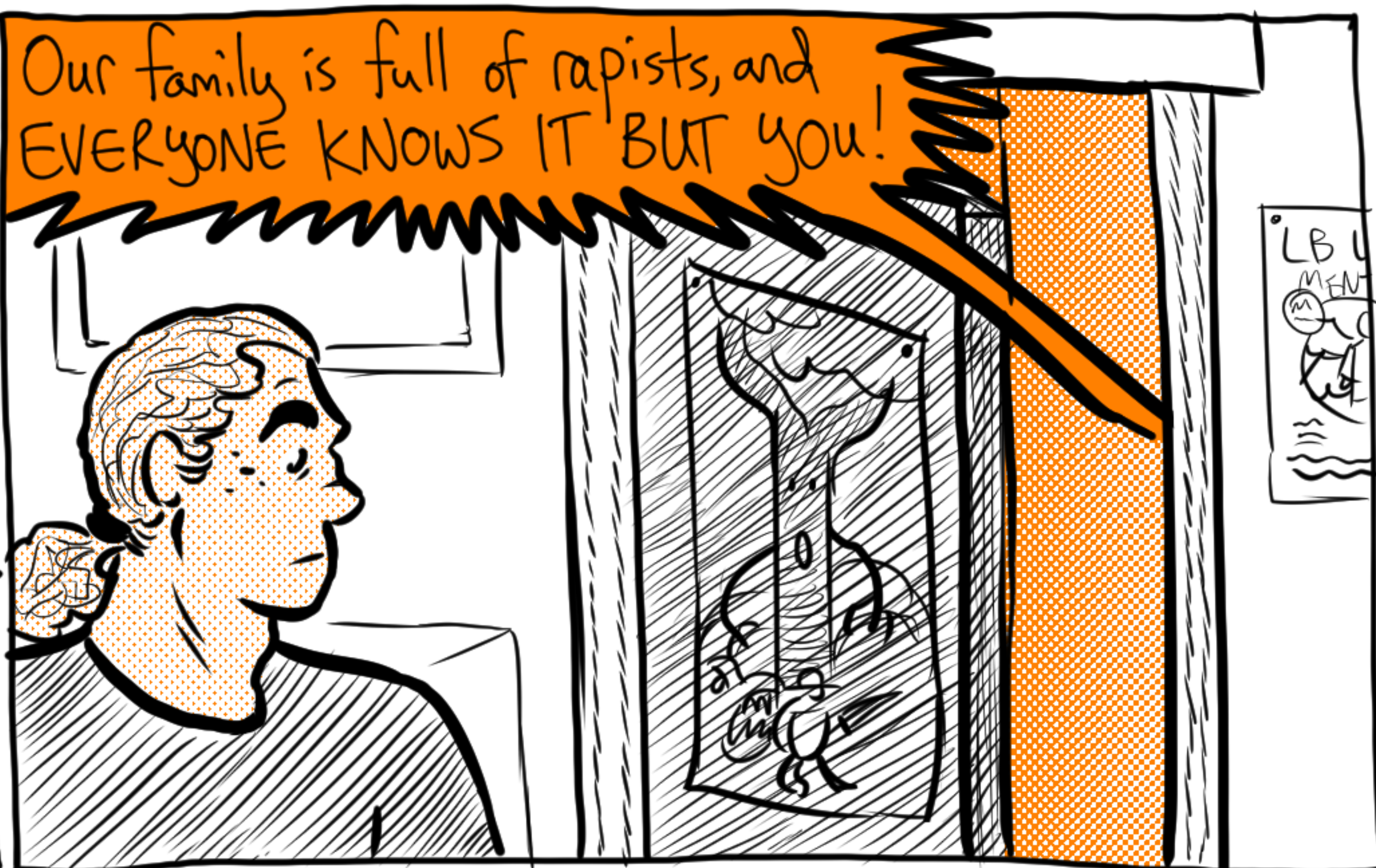
We made that choice as children. Now we're adults, and all we can do is make choices to insure we never, ever become that person again.

THE TRAGEDY OF OUR FAMILY

We are only one small part of a much greater tragedy that we'll never know. Though after AllFam ended, we did get to learn one thing:

DRUNK DIAL 2016-2-3





So, that might explain why our mother's family never turned on Grampa. *He was their savior.* Grandma was sick, so not only was he their sole breadwinner, he was also their sole protection from foster care. Child Services may have only given the kids back because they thought he would keep alleged-murderess Grandma in line! (Which begs the question: how bad was she? Bio-Grampa died of carbon monoxide poisoning. Grampa made Lois choke us, and Mom had a fetish for asphyxia. Did they learn it from Grandma?) Even Grampa may have been fleeing violence—family legend had it that he lied about his age to fight in World War II, so his home life was probably awful too.

As monstrous as our mother became, she's a tragedy. She went from one abuser to another, became one herself, she's miserable, and she's never going to escape or change. She knew the effects of brutalizing a child... and she did it anyway. So did Lois, and Uncle J, and Bro, and on and on and on. It's like our family is cursed to eternally cannibalize itself, violence all the way down.

OUR FAMILY AND THEIR RESPONSE

LOIS AND MOM'S FAMILY

Lois left teaching a few months after AllFam 4 came out, despite being too young to take retirement. She moved to Hawaii. (Though from what I can tell, her house, which she inherited from Grampa, is still in the family's possession, if not hers.)

We have no idea if she left due to AllFam. We'll never know. But we're glad that she's no longer working with children. We don't know if she was dangerous without Grampa's influence, but we're pretty sure that she fed some of her students to him. White women are rarely considered sexually dangerous, and she taught underprivileged, mostly immigrant children, who are more culturally acceptable targets and have more to fear from going to the police. Her public persona of "super teacher" would've made her seem less likely an attacker. And those children's shorts she and Grampa just happened to have on hand came from *somewhere*; none of our relatives were the right size, but her students would've been... and they also would've been squarely in Grampa's preferred victim age. (She taught mostly third and fourth graders, and he attacked us during those grades.)

None of our relatives on Mom's side have attempted to contact us. Why would they?



MOM

Mom continued sending us text messages on our birthday and holidays until Thanksgiving 2017, when Rogan lost his temper and texted back, "Please stop contacting me. If you don't I will respond with stuff grandpa did to me and ask if he did it to you too."

We never heard from her again.



DAD



Dad continued texting, calling, and emailing us until January 2018, mostly angry declarations of his innocence (or Mom and Bro's... before we ever mentioned them; we guess he never realized that we're amnesiac). He read our blog obsessively, looking for anything regarding him, and eventually, we gave him what we wanted: we made a public statement that for years, we had been auto-

forwarding every email he sent us, unread, to our trusted friends. They'd been giving us the Cliff's Notes.

He hasn't contacted us since.

BRO

We tried to stay in contact with our brother, but after that drunk-dial in February 2016, we had to cut ties. After some sporadic flaccid attempts to guilt-trip us about it, he has made no attempt to contact us. We got our first memories involving him a month later.



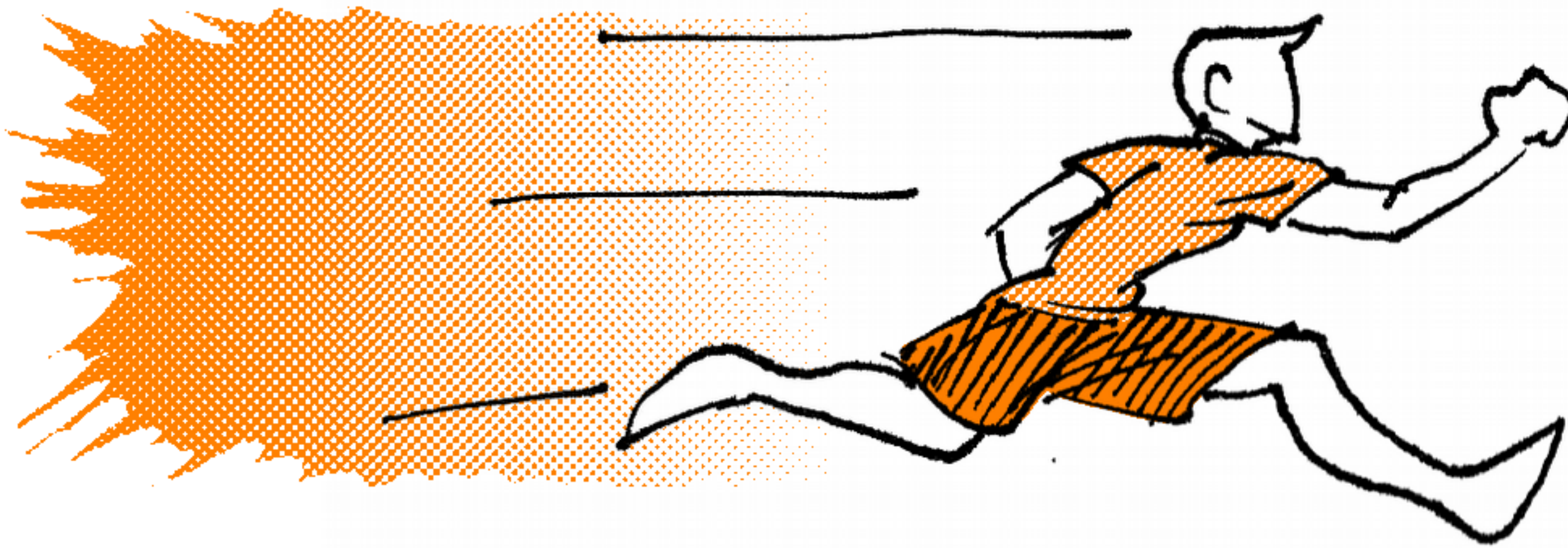
WHY DID WE ESCAPE?

Our sole distinction in the family is that we escaped. We still don't really know why. Getting far away helped... but our brother did too and stayed in. Going crazy helped, but our mother is a dissociative too and she stayed in. Our best guess right now is that on top of those other two factors, we had one

thing that nobody else in the family had: our headmates.

Our family is locked in constant power struggle; it keeps everyone together, at each other's throats. But when we became multiple, we broke the rules of the game. Our folks didn't know about us, so they couldn't turn us against each other. We built trust and alliances, tried to protect and help each other. Rogan and M.D. took a million rapes and asphyxias to protect the rest of us. Sneak and Gigi ran interference so they could recover without triggering Mom (who was most dangerous when we were newly, visibly traumatized). Miranda and Lollyanna could mimic normalcy well enough to pass for long periods of time, while Biff and Falcon and Mac gave much-needed support. Even when we didn't get along, we had a sense that we were all in it together.

When we came out, Dad tried to use the old family tactics and turn us against each other. But by that point, we'd been thick as thieves for years. He couldn't break our bonds with each other, and in the course of trying, he made himself look like a jerk. Mom might've salvaged the situation, but slipped up and admitted that she saw us as not her children, but the murderers of her real child.



If anything saved us, it was our multiplicity. Not smarts. Not bravery. Not strength of character. It was luck. A freak roll of the dice that gave us an unusual flavor of batshittery that our family wasn't prepared for.

That's it.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

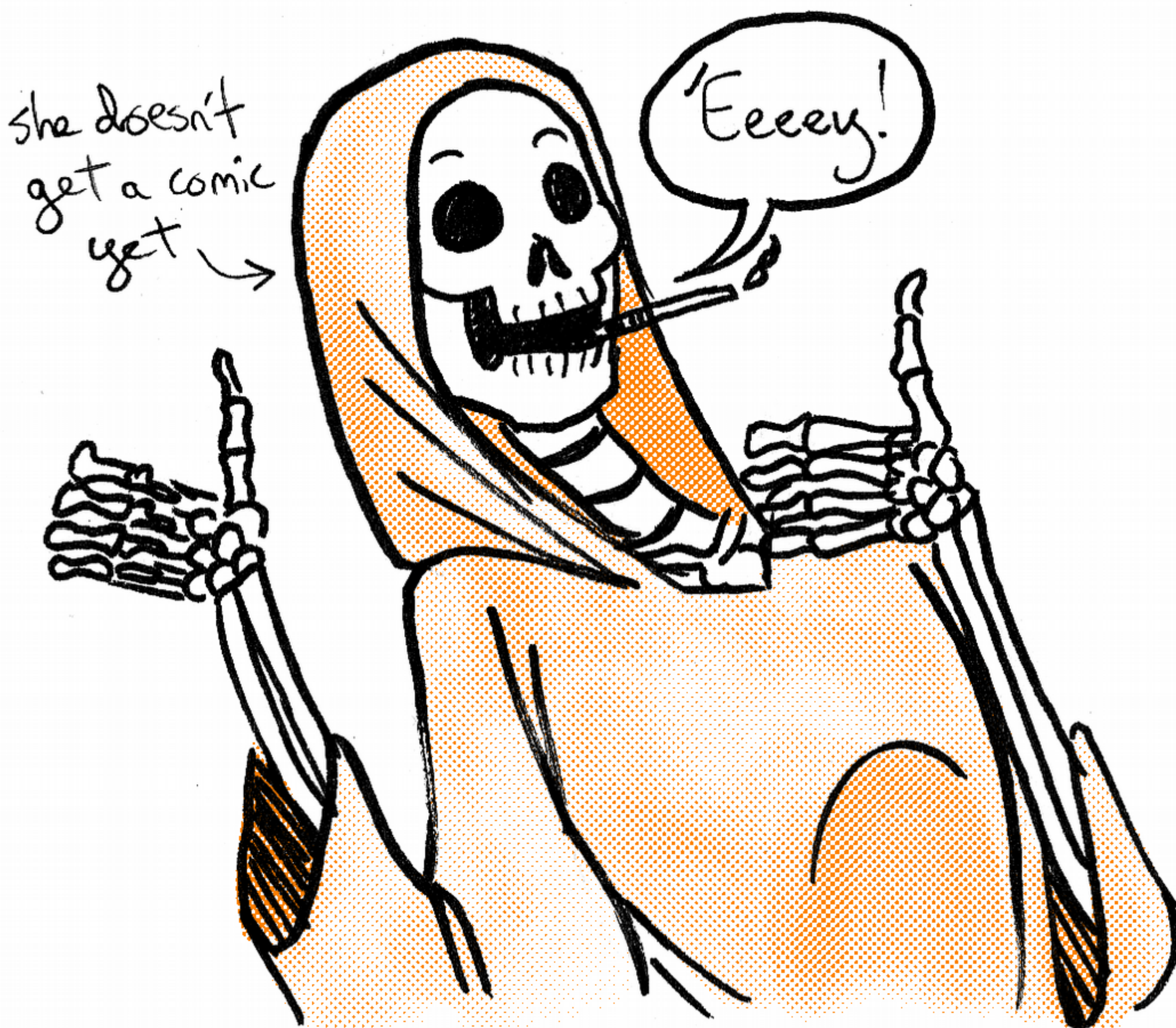
At this point, we've been doing memory work long enough to see some major improvements in our life. Ironclad hang-ups that wouldn't budge under medication, therapy, or intense introspection are finally giving way. Our relationships with the people around us are flourishing, and we're able to handle arguments and anger a lot better than we used to (though there's still a long way to go).

And all of us just... feel better. M.D. hasn't self-harmed in years. Biff

got sober and quit smoking. Rogan can get laid and only get sandbagged 30% of the time, instead of 100%.

All that is to be expected. What we didn't expect was getting answers to questions we never even thought to ask. All this time, we assumed that crazy brains didn't make sense, but it turns out no; they simply follow their own logic. Suddenly we were getting deep structural information about our mind, our system, why and how it was the way it was. At this point, the abuse content is the least interesting part of memory work!

Since June 2018, memory work has started getting trippy, taking on a religious, almost metaphysical bent. It's been really strange. We hope to make comics about it, but it's been hard to express, because we don't understand what's going on.



So far, though, our brain always delivers eventually. Hopefully, if we are patient and see this through, it'll all come clean in the wash someday.

And then, maybe, we can finally leave all the awfulness behind.

How Crazy Are You?

(LB's personal scale of Brain Pain)

0 ↑ No problems. Everything is hunky-dory.

1 → "Hmm. I think something might be bothering me?"
Mild discomfort, easily compensated for.

2 → "Something is definitely bothering me, but I'm okay."
Can still compensate and do things normally.

3 → "I need a break."
Maxing out ability to fully compensate.

4 → "Well, this is a bummer."
Can't do everything, but still stable and okayish.

5 → "Okay, this is getting bad now." Can still say what's wrong and look sane-ish around others.

6 → Maxxing out ability to compensate at all. Barely able to manage basic passing for sane or basic tasks.

7 → Able to do basic tasks with prompting, nothing else.
Start acting majorly "not right."

8 → Memory chunk. Total mental agony, can barely be reasoned with, but able to stay put.

9 → Mega-bats. Can't be reasoned with, can't compensate, can't be trusted, still fears death/pain.

10 ↓ Crisis. High likelihood of death or disaster.

SELF-MONITORING FORM - TARGET BEHAVIOR:

DATE TIME	DESCRIBE SITUATION	SUDS (0-10)	PHYSICAL SENSATIONS	EMOTIONS/ FEELINGS	AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS	COPING STRATEGIES

RECOMMENDED READING

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REMEMBERING SAFELY

Memory work has become a taboo subject since the '90s, but it still happens. Here, LB Lee collects everything they've learned in the six-ish years they've been going through it, including:

- Things to do BEFORE memory work.
- Tactics to avoid.
- Building a crisis plan, measuring distress, and taking notes.
- Handling memories as they come up, and making the process as manageable as possible.
- Dealing with memory distortion and memories of events that could not have corporeally happened.
- How things have gone in the years since All in the Family ended!



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