Dear Stranger

A Journey of Youth Mental Health
Diana Chao
“How could someone so sad be so young?”

- **50%** of all lifetime cases of mental illness begins by age 14 and **75%** by age 24
- **20%** of youth aged 13-18 live with a mental health condition
- **37%** of students aged 14 and up with a mental health condition drop out of school—the highest dropout rate of any disability group
- Suicide is the **2nd** leading cause of death in the U.S. between ages 15-34
- **80%** of American youths are left with no or insufficient treatment

The FOMO Is Real: How Social Media Increases Depression and Loneliness

Social media linked to rise in mental health disorders in teens, survey finds

Social Media Linked to Increase in Depression Among Teens, Young Adults

The last ten years built a different world.
In clinical practice settings, minorities are less likely than whites to receive treatment that adheres to treatment guidelines.

Ethnic minority and immigrant clients have been found to suspend trust of providers who are ethnically dissimilar from them until they are proven trustworthy.

Asian-Americans use mental health services at about 1/3 the rate of White Americans.

Past sin. Doesn’t exist. Ungrateful. Spoiled. Disrespect. Herbal Tea. The pain is in the body, not the mind... It’s a White People Thing.
In writing letters to strangers, I found comfort. In words, I began to discover the miracle of life. I realized for the first time that I never was alone.

Writing is humanity distilled into ink
Letter Writing

Peer Education

Policy-based Advocacy
Bipolar Balloons

Rubber B@anded
Vertigo

Masked Malady
“ATTENTION-SEEKING YELLOW B*TCH. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS?”

My world is not your black and white. It is my own to lead.
THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS THROUGH EXPERIENCE.

In the midst of exhaustion, medication, and epiphanies, I internalized that
What’s your pain language?

Begin by EMPATHIZING.

Eat
Mind distractions (personal, social)
Pride (ego, denial, affirmation)
Anger
Tears
Hurting Self (verbal, physical)
Insomnia/Hypersomnia
Zany (humor, character, façade)
Imprudent behavior
Not present (silence, absences, drifting)
Gross productivity
How do we navigate the journey to heal?

It’s **SIMPLE**.

- **Self-advocate**
- **Increment**
- **Meditate**
- **Patience**
- **Listen**
- **Educate**
My Grounding Philosophies

WORK
When your brain outpaces your heart, stop. There will be time for sacrifices, but now is not it.

THINKING
Don’t be afraid of daydreaming. Don’t shut up your heart. You are full of wonders—don’t hoard them!

EXPLORE

CHALLENGE
Find the coffee routine, then change it. Settle, sure. But you are not a kettle. You do more than boil.

CHIT-CHAT
Some people will chit-chat about you, so sing back. Louder. Prouder. You don’t need wings or vibratos. Just a melody.

BODY
Move to land rumbles and ocean waves. You dance between the earth and the sky, so wave your hands, touch the clouds.
Thanks for Listening!

You can find me at:

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