

"I'd just stare. I didn't laugh, I didn't cry," says Judd (on tour with Wynonna in 2010, below) of her darkest days.

NAOMI JUDD

My Battle with Depression

IN A NEW MEMOIR, THE SINGER DETAILS HER 2011 DESCENT INTO SUICIDAL DESPAIR AND THE LONG, HARD ROAD BACK TO HEALTH **By EILEEN FINAN**





PAINFUL PAST
“I’d rhapsodize about my childhood,” says Judd (at home on her porch in 1979). In reality, “it was hideous.” Her earliest memory: being sexually abused by her great-uncle (inset, with Judd and her grandmother ca. 1950).



In the fall of 2011, after mother-daughter country duo the Judds wrapped a reunion tour, Naomi Judd returned home to her farm in Leiper’s Fork, Tenn., feeling empty. She and daughter Wynonna had decided to end the musical partnership that had earned them five Grammys since their first album in 1983. “I lost my purpose,” Naomi tells People writer Eileen Finan. With time hanging heavy, long-repressed memories of childhood trauma began haunting her: her mother’s distance; her father’s alcoholism; sexual abuse at the hands of a great-uncle. The singer was no stranger to adversity—she raised daughters Wynonna, now 51, and actress Ashley, 48, on food stamps and welfare before finding success in Nashville, and she fought back after a potentially fatal diagnosis of hepatitis C in 1990—but by 2012 she was imprisoned by severe depression and panic attacks. “I’d be in a fetal position on the couch for weeks,” says Judd, 70. “I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t sleep. I wouldn’t get out of my pajamas. I felt like I was dying and there was no way I could save myself.”

In River of Time, excerpted below, Judd chronicles her three-year battle with mental illness. She contemplated suicide, developed an addiction to prescription

drugs and was twice placed in psychiatric hospitals before finding a combination of therapies and medications that helped. Today, she says, “I’m still recovering. I’m fragile, and I cry a lot. But I’m thankful.”

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Wynonna and I are like moths, dancing around each other’s bright flames. There is always the energy of the mother-daughter spark between us, yet the flammability of our emotions can burn. During our final tour together we each came home with singed wings.

At home, a feeling of heavy dread wrapped around me. I thought I was going to experience the post-tour blues, because I always miss the fans and their joy. I didn’t yet suspect that this time was different.

Her life was changing—her children were grown, performing requests were fewer, and her husband, singer Larry Strickland, was often away.

You are on your own now, I thought. What in the world are you going to do? I began sinking deeper and deeper into despair. I rambled through the days in exhaustion from countless sleepless nights and tear-filled hours.

“I don’t recognize you anymore,” Lar-

I was scared. I had nothing left. Whatever I had tried had failed, and I thought I was going to die’

—NAOMI JUDD

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BEHIND THE SMILE
1. "I was hiding my own mess, but I wanted fans to see me with my perfect hair. I wanted to be an inspiration," says Judd (with friend Dolly Parton). 2. Daughters Ashley and Wynonna (in 2002) "wanted to help. And they couldn't." 3. Husband Larry is "my warrior."



despair that I decided to take Larry's guns for a test drive. I walked into our valley and fired six bullets into a dead tree. The noise made my brain feel truly alert for the first time in a year.

Soon Larry came racing over. He took the gun from my hands and led me gently back to the house.

Her friend George Jones's death in 2013 made her sink further. She stopped eating, wouldn't get out of bed and began hallucinating. Larry and Ashley took her to the ER; from there she was admitted to Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital.

I was absolutely terrified I was having a psychotic breakdown. I was so completely out of it that I was babbling and gesturing, trying to communicate that I didn't want to be there. I was afraid and ashamed.

After nine days she moved to an outpatient therapy center where she finally addressed the traumas of her childhood. Still suffering from panic attacks, she began relying on Klonopin and ended up in rehab. She was in free fall. After another visit to a psychiatric ward failed to lift the despair, she underwent electroconvulsive therapy. The treatment took away her sense of taste.

About a month after the ECT treatments ended, I could tell I was falling back into thoughts of suicide. After hospitalizations, a



Judd says she was "terrified" to open up, but "I want this book to help others."

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: KEVIN WINTER/IMAGEDIRECT/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY NAOMI JUDD; DEVON LANCASTER; R. (BOOK) BRIEN FOX

cavalcade of medicines, and twenty-four ECT treatments, I didn't see that I had gained much ground at all.

She tried a new behavioral therapy, spent more time with Ashley and slowly started to emerge from the darkness. Acupuncture and Pilates also helped.

"Wynonna's coming over for dinner tomorrow night," Larry said almost nonchalantly one day.

"She hasn't come over in almost a year," I said, stunned.

Larry took my hands. "Being estranged from Wy has played a big part in your depression. It's time for things to get better between you two."

The following evening I cooked Wy's favorite meal of chicken "Continental." When she arrived, we hugged. By the end of the evening, I had a deeper understanding of why our relationship has had its bumps and bruises.

Since then I have come to a place of self-forgiveness for the mistakes I most likely made as a very young single

mother who didn't have the resources to make great choices. I hope someday both of my daughters will remember the good days as outweighing the bad.

Depression can feel like riding a runaway train. Heart pounding, full speed ahead, with sudden stops, unpredictable curves. After the worst three years of my complicated life, I've finally gotten off the train. ●

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