



Healing Tinnitus

How I went from a mental hospital to recovered from
tinnitus

by Dan Plants

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Foreword

You're holding this book because tinnitus has turned your world upside down. I know, because mine was shattered too.

Six years ago, I was lying on a hospital bed, staring at fluorescent lights that seemed to buzz in harmony with the screaming in my ears. The sound was so loud, so relentless, that I couldn't think straight. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't imagine a future where this torture would end. The doctors had run their tests, prescribed their medications, and delivered their verdict with clinical detachment: "You'll need to learn to live with it."

But I wasn't living. I was barely surviving.

If someone had told me then that I'd be writing these words today—sitting in a café in Barcelona, the gentle hum of conversation around me barely registering above the silence in my head—I would have laughed bitterly. Or maybe I would have cried. Back then, I did a lot of both.

The tinnitus didn't just steal my quiet moments. It stole everything. My career as a musician felt like a cruel joke. Sleep became a distant memory. Simple conversations with friends felt impossible when my brain was drowning in phantom noise. I withdrew from everyone I loved, convinced that this nightmare was my new permanent reality.

I was wrong.

Not about how bad it was—it truly was that devastating. But I was wrong about it being permanent. Wrong about having no options. Wrong about my life being over at twenty-eight.

What I've learned since then, what I'll share with you in these pages, is that healing from tinnitus isn't about finding a magic cure or making the sound disappear forever. It's about something much more profound: reclaiming your life while the sound is still there. It's about reaching a place where tinnitus becomes background noise in a life worth living again.

Today, I travel the world, running the coaching business I never thought I'd have. I wake up excited about my days. Yes, I occasionally notice my tinnitus—but it no longer controls me, defines me, or limits me. The sound that once felt like a prison sentence became the catalyst for the most meaningful work of my life: helping others find their way back from the darkness I know so well.

This book isn't just my story—it's a roadmap. In these pages, you'll find the practical strategies, mindset shifts, and daily practices that pulled me out of despair and into a life I genuinely love. You'll learn why some people seem to "get over" tinnitus quickly while others struggle for years. Most importantly, you'll discover that your current suffering, as real and overwhelming as it feels, doesn't have to be your permanent reality.

I won't promise that your journey will be easy or quick. Healing rarely is. But I can promise you this: if someone like me—someone who was quite literally hospitalized by tinnitus—can find peace and purpose again, so can you.

Your life isn't over. It's waiting to begin again.

Let's start walking toward it together.

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Chapter 1: When Silence Shattered

The Morning Everything Changed

It was April 2020. I was 34 years old, and mornings had always been my favorite time of day. I wasn't one to stay up late — I loved getting up at 6 a.m., making fresh coffee, starting the day clean. I lived in a three-bedroom condo in a suburb of Nashville, Tennessee, near the airport where you could hear planes going overhead when you woke up.

That morning, I was sitting downstairs watching the news. It was dreary outside, that gray springtime weather that April brings to Tennessee. And then I heard it — the ringing.

I remember thinking, this is odd. I'd been habituated for ten years and I'd never heard it. I didn't know why I was hearing it now.

At first, I shrugged it off. Just a few minutes, I thought. It'll go away. But then it felt like it was just getting louder. My thoughts started to spiral.

"Oh, the tinnitus is back," my mind told me. "There's something seriously wrong with you. Why have you had silence for 10 years and now you don't? You have a brain tumor in your head."

These were the thoughts racing through my mind as I sat on that couch, and very quickly I started to doom spiral because of this sound, this ringing in my ears. It consumed my entire hearing — that's all I could hear, that's all I could notice.

The panic hit fast and hard. What the fuck is going on? I thought, and did what so many of us do in moments of terror — I started googling.

That's when I came across a Reddit post from someone who said they had tinnitus, and how they recovered was that the tinnitus basically became their silence. The ringing just became their new normal quiet.

That terrified me. I didn't want this ringing to become my silence. I was habituated — I was in silence. I wanted to go back to the old me, the me who didn't hear anything when the world was quiet.

But there I was, listening to this tinnitus, and it just consumed everything. I freaked out completely.

I remember getting up from the couch, thinking maybe if I went for a run, this would help me rehabilitate or get my mind off of it. There was a wooded area by my house, and I ran through those woods trying to shake this thing. But no matter what I did, I couldn't shake it. The panic kept building, my thoughts kept spiraling even more.

When I got back to the house, I knew I needed help. I booked an appointment to see a doctor, hoping they could tell me this was all just temporary, just something simple that could be fixed.

But sitting there in my living room after that run, staring at the walls of my Nashville condo, I felt like my world had just completely shifted. Ten years of silence, gone. Ten years of not thinking about tinnitus, shattered in a single morning.

I had no idea that this moment — this gray April morning when everything changed — was just the beginning of a journey that would take me to the

darkest places I'd ever been, and eventually, to a life more grateful and purposeful than I'd ever imagined possible.

All I knew in that moment was that the silence I'd taken for granted was gone, and the thoughts in my head were telling me it might never come back.

The Google Trap

The spiraling thoughts wouldn't stop. As I sat there on my couch, the ringing seeming to grow louder by the minute, my mind kept circling back to the same terrifying possibilities: *Why is this happening now? After ten years of silence, why can I suddenly hear it again? There must be something seriously wrong. Maybe it's a brain tumor.*

I did what millions of people do when fear takes over — I reached for my phone and started googling.

"Tinnitus came back after habituation." "Why can I suddenly hear my tinnitus again." "Tinnitus getting louder suddenly." I typed in search after search, desperately looking for some explanation that would make sense of what was happening to me.

That's when I found it — a Reddit post that would haunt me for months to come.

Someone had written about their own tinnitus journey, and they described how they eventually "recovered." But their definition of recovery stopped me cold. They said the tinnitus had basically become their "new silence." That the ringing was still there, but they'd learned to accept it as their normal.

I stared at those words on my phone screen, and terror washed over me like ice water.

No. No, no, no. I don't want this ringing to become my silence. I want MY silence back. I want to go back to the old me.

The very idea that this sound — this intrusive, constant ringing — could become my baseline felt like a death sentence. I'd had real silence for ten years. Beautiful, peaceful, blessed silence. The thought of trading that for a life where ringing was my "new normal" was absolutely unacceptable.

But as I sat there, the tinnitus seemed to be consuming my entire hearing. It wasn't just background noise anymore — it was all I could notice, all I could focus on. Every attempt to concentrate on something else failed. The sound was taking over everything.

I started to panic. My heart was racing, my thoughts spinning faster and faster into darker territory. I felt trapped in my own head, trapped with this sound that I couldn't turn off or escape from.

Okay, I told myself, jumping up from the couch. I need to do something. Maybe if I go for a run, this will help me rehabilitate somehow. Maybe I can run it off, get my mind off of it, reset whatever's happening.

I threw on my running shoes and headed out to the wooded area near my house. It was still that same dreary April day, overcast and gray, but I thought maybe physical activity would help. Maybe if I got my blood pumping, got out in nature, pushed my body hard enough, I could somehow shake this thing.

I started running through the woods, my feet pounding against the trail, my breath coming harder as I pushed myself faster. But with every step, the ringing was still there. No matter how hard I ran, no matter how much I tried to focus on my breathing or the sound of my footsteps or the trees around me, I couldn't shake it.

The panic was only getting worse. My thoughts kept spiraling even more as I ran: *This isn't working. Nothing's working. What if that Reddit post was right? What if this really is my new normal? What if I never get my silence back?*

By the time I made it back to my house, I was more terrified than when I'd left. The run had done nothing except prove to me that this wasn't something I could just push through with willpower or physical activity. This was bigger than that, and I had no idea how to fight it.

I was completely out of my depth, and for the first time in ten years, I realized I might need help. Real help. The kind of help I'd hoped I'd never need again.

I picked up my phone and booked an appointment with a doctor.

The Doctor's Verdict

The appointment couldn't come soon enough. After that failed run through the woods, I knew I needed medical help. Something was clearly wrong—ten years of silence don't just disappear overnight for no reason.

Sitting in the waiting room, I kept trying to focus on anything other than the ringing, but it seemed to fill every corner of my awareness. The fluorescent lights hummed overhead, people shuffled through magazines, phones buzzed with notifications, yet all I could hear was that persistent tone. It felt like my entire hearing had been hijacked.

When the doctor finally called me back, I explained everything as clearly as I could. The sudden return after a decade of habituation. The panic. The spiraling thoughts about brain tumors. How it seemed to be getting louder by the hour.

The doctor listened patiently, then asked me to lie back so she could examine my ears. I held my breath, hoping for some simple explanation—something fixable, something that would make this nightmare end as quickly as it had begun.

What she found was both reassuring and frustrating at the same time.

"You've got quite a bit of earwax buildup in here," she said, adjusting her otoscope. "And it looks like you have an inner ear infection—otitis media."

An ear infection. Something so ordinary, so treatable. For a moment, I felt a wave of relief wash over me. This wasn't a brain tumor. This wasn't some mysterious neurological catastrophe. This was just an infection—the kind of thing people get all the time.

The doctor worked carefully to clean out the earwax buildup, and I found myself hoping that with each gentle scrape and rinse, the ringing would somehow fade away. Maybe this was it. Maybe once the wax was gone and the infection cleared up, I'd wake up tomorrow morning back in my familiar, blessed silence.

She prescribed amoxicillin for the infection and explained how to take it. Standard stuff—nothing complicated. But then came the part I wasn't prepared to hear.

"As for the ringing," she said, her tone shifting to something more matter-of-fact, "there's really nothing we can do about that. You'll just have to live with it."

Just like that. No discussion of treatment options. No referral to a specialist. No acknowledgment of how devastating this was for someone who'd been

habituated for ten years. Just a simple, clinical dismissal: you'll have to live with it.

I stared at her, waiting for more. Surely there was something—some medication, some procedure, some next step. But she was already moving on, washing her hands, making notes in my chart.

"The infection should clear up in a week or two with the antibiotics," she continued. "But the tinnitus—that's just something that happens sometimes. People learn to cope."

Learn to cope. The words felt like a punch to the stomach. I'd already learned to cope once, ten years ago. I'd spent months habituating, months building a life where tinnitus didn't exist in my daily experience. Now I was supposed to just start that whole process over again, as if the last decade of silence meant nothing?

I took the prescription and walked out of the office in a daze. Part of me still held onto hope that maybe the doctor was wrong—maybe once the infection cleared up, the ringing would disappear too. Maybe this was just temporary, a brief interruption that would resolve itself once my ear healed.

But deep down, I knew better. I could feel it in the way the sound seemed to have settled into my consciousness, the way it followed me everywhere regardless of what was happening around me. This wasn't going anywhere.

I filled the prescription at the pharmacy, took the first dose of amoxicillin as directed, and went home to wait. But waiting turned out to be its own kind of torture. With nothing to do but sit with the sound, my thoughts began to spiral in ways I hadn't experienced in years.

What if the doctor was wrong about it being just an infection? What if there was something more serious going on—something she'd missed? The ringing seemed so much more intense than I remembered from my first experience with tinnitus. What if this time was different? What if this time, habituation wouldn't be possible?

Over the next few days, as I dutifully took my antibiotics, I kept waiting for some sign of improvement. The infection symptoms began to fade—the pressure in my ear lessened, the slight ache disappeared. But the ringing remained exactly as it was, unchanged and unrelenting.

That's when the real panic set in. If clearing the infection didn't help, if removing the earwax didn't make a difference, then what was causing this? My mind immediately went to the darkest possibilities. Cancer. Tumors. Some kind of progressive neurological condition that would only get worse.

The doctor's casual dismissal—"you'll just have to live with it"—began to feel less like medical advice and more like a death sentence. How could I live with this when it was consuming every moment of my existence? How could I function when this sound seemed to be growing louder and more intrusive by the day?

I tried to remind myself that I'd habituated before. I'd had a normal life for ten years. But that felt like a different person, a different lifetime. This version of me—the one sitting in my condo, unable to focus on anything but the ringing in my ears—felt broken beyond repair.

The antibiotics did their job with the infection, but they did nothing for the real problem. And as the days wore on without improvement, I began to realize that the doctor's verdict, as unsatisfying as it was, might be the only one I was going to get.

I was on my own with this. Again.

📞 If you've already got a call booked with me —
**show up. That's where we map YOUR specific path
back to quiet, step by step. And if you're reading this
and haven't booked yet, do it now. Either way, I'll
see you there.**

👉 <https://cal.com/dan-william-zpblsa/30min?overlayCalendar=true>

Chapter 2: Descent Into Darkness

When Sleep Became Impossible

Over the next few weeks after my doctor's visit, I just mentally started to deteriorate. The amoxicillin was doing its job on the ear infection, but my mind was spinning completely out of control. I panicked more each day. My thoughts kept spiraling, telling me darker and darker stories: *What if it's not just an ear infection? What if it's something worse? What if it's cancer? What if it's a tumor?*

And the ringing—God, the ringing just kept getting louder. Or at least it felt that way. Every catastrophic thought seemed to turn up the volume another notch. My mind kept doom spiraling until a few weeks later, I just basically snapped.

I couldn't sleep at all.

I remember that first night of complete insomnia—just tossing and turning, tossing and turning. I couldn't even get a minute of sleep, not even a wink. The tinnitus was there, my thoughts were racing, and my body just would not shut down. I lay there watching the ceiling, feeling my heart pound, listening to that relentless ringing, and somewhere in the middle of the night I did something I never thought I'd do.

I went down to the store and bought a bottle of alcohol.

I was sober up until this point. You can see how much this pushed me to the brink—how desperate I was just to get some sleep. I remember sitting in my bedroom with that bottle, and I still couldn't do anything. I couldn't play

video games. I couldn't focus on anything. I just lay there and tossed and turned all night, didn't sleep, and then watched the sun come up.

This happened for three or four more nights. No sleep. Zero. I just kept deteriorating more and more. If you've never experienced what it's like to not be able to sleep, it's the worst feeling in the world. Nothing can compare to wanting to sleep and not being able to. It's terror beyond belief.

Every time I tried to sleep, it was like an electrical shock would jolt me back awake. No matter what I did, I just couldn't fall asleep. No matter how tired I got, my body wouldn't let me. It was like I was stuck in constant panic, fight-or-flight mode, and I couldn't turn it off. It was absolutely terrifying.

By the fifth night, I was completely falling apart. Something was seriously wrong with me, and I was convinced it had to be neurological. The tinnitus, the insomnia, the racing thoughts—this wasn't normal. This wasn't just an ear infection anymore.

The Hospital Trap

I knew something was seriously wrong with me. After five nights without sleep, my thoughts completely consumed by the conviction that I had a brain tumor or cancer, I called the same doctor again.

"I'm not sleeping," I told them. "Something is seriously wrong with me." I was convinced it had to be neurological—the tinnitus, the complete inability to sleep, the racing thoughts that wouldn't stop. This wasn't just an ear infection anymore.

The doctor ordered me to come back in immediately. When I arrived, they put me through a battery of tests. First came the neurological examination, then they ordered a urine analysis—I think they suspected I was on

narcotics, but I wasn't, so that came back completely clean. They drew blood for more tests, running everything they could think of.

Then came the psychiatric evaluation. The doctor sat across from me, looking concerned, and asked the question I was dreading: "Are you having any dark thoughts?"

I paused. If I was being honest—and at that point, I was too exhausted to be anything but honest—the answer was yes. "Well, yeah, I mean, kind of," I admitted. "If I'm being honest."

That admission changed everything. This was right around the time of COVID, when mental health problems were spiking and suicide rates were climbing. The doctors kind of freaked out at my response. Instead of giving me the sleeping pills I desperately needed—the whole reason I'd come back—they made a different decision entirely.

They were sending me to a mental hospital in Franklin, Tennessee.

The thing is, I didn't know that's where I was going. They didn't tell me. I thought I was just going to see a psychiatrist because I wanted to get on sleeping pills so I could finally sleep. When I asked the doctor directly for sleeping pills, they refused to give them to me for whatever reason. Instead, they basically just shipped me off without explaining what was happening.

When I walked into the facility, I immediately knew something was wrong. The first thing they did was take my phone from me. Then they took my car keys. I was freezing cold and confused as they led me to what looked like an evaluation room—just a couch and some chairs where they assess how bad off you are.

I remember sitting on that couch, feeling absolutely horrible. Absolutely horrible. The realization was hitting me: I'm in a mental hospital. I'm never going to get better. I can't sleep, I have this ringing in my ears that won't stop, and now I'm here. I remember thinking I was absolutely, completely fucked.

My anxiety and depression were off the charts. I felt completely depersonalized, like I wasn't even in my own body anymore. As I sat there waiting, I felt completely and utterly hopeless. This wasn't how I thought my life would go. This wasn't how recovery was supposed to happen.

After making me wait for about two hours—two hours of sitting there spiraling deeper into despair—they finally sent a doctor in to give me a psychiatric evaluation. After talking with me for a while, they delivered their verdict: I wasn't crazy enough to be admitted against my will.

"If you want, you can choose to stay," they told me, "but you don't have to."

That's when things got really strange. They sent in this guy who reminded me of a used car salesman—except he wasn't trying to sell me a car. He was trying to sell me on some kind of treatment package.

I kept saying the same thing: "I want sleeping pills. I can't sleep. I'm going on like four days without sleep." But they wouldn't budge on giving me sleeping pills. Instead, this salesman type laid out their offer: "We're not going to give you sleeping pills, but if you want to stay here, we can give you sleeping pills—but you'll have to pay for our treatment program."

They were literally trying to scam me with a treatment program. All I wanted was sleep, and they wouldn't give me the one thing that could help unless I paid for some bullshit program I didn't need. I was completely turned off by the whole thing.

"Okay, well, if I'm not being admitted against my will, then I'm going to leave," I said. "I'm not going to stay here."

As I walked outside the mental hospital, something shifted. For the first time in days, I felt a tiny bit better just being out in nature, breathing fresh air instead of the stale hospital air. In that moment, walking away from that place, I had a realization that would prove crucial: if I was going to be cured, it wasn't going to be inside a mental hospital facility.

The medical system had failed me completely. They'd taken a man desperate for sleep and tried to turn him into a paying customer instead of actually helping him. But standing outside in the fresh air, I knew I'd have to find another way.

Rock Bottom

I remember walking into that mental hospital feeling like I was entering my own personal hell. The moment I stepped through those doors, they took my phone from me. Then they took my car keys. Just like that, I was stripped of any connection to the outside world, any means of escape.

They led me to what they called an evaluation room – just a sterile space with a couch where they assess how bad off you really are. I sat there freezing cold, waiting, and I remember the thoughts that consumed me in that moment: *I'm doomed now. I'm in a mental hospital. I'm never going to get better. I can't sleep. I have this ringing in my ears. I am absolutely, completely fucked.*

The anxiety and depression were off the charts. I felt depersonalized – like I wasn't even in my own body anymore. Sitting on that couch, waiting for someone, anyone, to help me, I felt completely and utterly hopeless. This

was supposed to be where I'd find relief, where medical professionals would understand what I was going through and give me what I desperately needed: sleep.

They made me wait for about two hours before sending in a doctor to give me a psychiatric evaluation. I sat there the entire time thinking about how I'd ended up in this place – five days without sleep, tinnitus screaming in my ears, my mind convinced I was dying of a brain tumor. This had to be where I'd finally get help.

But when the doctor finally came in and completed their assessment, they delivered news I wasn't expecting: I wasn't crazy enough to be admitted. "If you want, you can choose to stay," they told me, "but you don't have to."

Then came the real kick in the teeth. They sent in what I can only describe as a used car salesman type – not to sell me a car, but to sell me on some treatment package. I remember telling them again and again: "I want sleeping pills. I can't sleep. I'm going on five days without sleep."

Their response? "We're not going to give you sleeping pills. But if you want to stay here, we can give you sleeping pills – but you have to pay for a treatment program."

They were literally trying to scam me with some bullshit treatment program. Here I was, a man who hadn't slept in five days, desperate for basic medical help, and they were trying to upsell me instead of actually treating me. All I wanted was sleep, and they wouldn't give me sleeping pills unless I paid for their expensive program.

I was completely turned off by the whole thing. The medical system that I'd trusted to help me had failed me completely. They'd taken a man desperate

for relief and tried to turn him into a paying customer instead of actually helping him.

"Okay," I told them, "if I'm not being admitted against my will, then I'm going to leave. I'm not going to stay here."

And I remember walking out of that place, stepping outside into the fresh air, and for the first time in days, I felt something shift. Just being out in nature, away from that sterile, predatory environment, I immediately felt a tiny bit better. The contrast was stark – inside that hospital, I'd felt trapped and hopeless. Outside, breathing real air instead of the stale hospital air, I felt the smallest glimmer that maybe there was another way.

In that moment, walking away from that place, I had a realization that would prove crucial: if I was going to be cured, it wasn't going to be inside a mental hospital facility. The medical system had completely failed me. But standing outside in the fresh air, I knew I'd have to find another way forward.

That night, I still didn't sleep. I was now going on five days with no sleep at all. But something had changed in me during that hospital experience. I'd hit rock bottom, yes, but I'd also learned something important: the answers I needed weren't going to come from the traditional medical system. I was going to have to find my own path to healing.

The First Glimmer of Hope

The moment I stepped outside that mental hospital, something shifted. The fresh air hit my face, and for the first time in days, I felt just a tiny bit better. There was something about being in nature, away from those sterile walls and fluorescent lights, that immediately calmed something inside me. It wasn't much—just the smallest glimmer—but it was enough to give me a

crucial realization: if I was going to find my way out of this hell, it wasn't going to happen inside a medical facility.

Walking to my car, I felt this strange mix of relief and determination. The hospital had completely failed me. They'd tried to upsell me on some treatment program when all I wanted was to sleep, and they wouldn't even give me the sleeping pills I desperately needed. But standing there in the parking lot, breathing real air and feeling the sun on my skin, I knew something important: I was going to have to find my own path to healing.

That night, though, I still didn't sleep. I was now going on five days with no sleep at all. Five full days. If you've never experienced extended insomnia like that, it's impossible to describe the terror. It's not just being tired—it's feeling like your mind is completely broken, like some essential part of your humanity has been stripped away. I would lie there, exhausted beyond belief, but every time I got close to sleep, it was like an electrical shock would jolt me back awake. No matter how tired I got, no matter what I tried, I just couldn't fall asleep. It was like I was stuck in some constant panic, fight-or-flight mode that I couldn't turn off.

The worst part was the terror that came with it. I started thinking I was never going to sleep again. Ever. That this was just my life now—endless, wakeful torment while this ringing screamed in my ears. Nothing can compare to wanting to sleep and not being able to. It's terror beyond belief.

Fortunately, my buddy stepped in to help. He suggested we try to get me connected with a telehealth doctor—someone who might actually listen and help instead of trying to sell me on expensive programs I didn't need. I was willing to try anything at that point.

When I got on the call with the telehealth doctor and explained everything I'd been through—the tinnitus, the insomnia, the failed hospital visit—they immediately suggested hydroxyzine. I'd never heard of it before, but I was desperate. "Let's try it," I said.

That evening, I took the hydroxyzine, not really expecting much. I'd been let down so many times already. But something was different this time. As I lay in bed, instead of that horrible electrical shock sensation that kept jolting me awake, I felt my body actually starting to relax. My mind, which had been racing for days, began to quiet just enough.

And then, finally, I slept.

I can't adequately describe the relief I felt when I woke up the next morning. After five days of complete insomnia, of feeling like my brain was completely broken, I had actually slept through the night. It felt like a miracle. I remember thinking to myself, "Okay, if I slept this one night, if I'm able to sleep again, then I'm going to recover. I think I can get through this, because if I can recover from insomnia, I can recover from tinnitus too."

It wasn't that the tinnitus was gone—as soon as I woke up, it was right there, just as loud as before. But something fundamental had shifted. I had proof that my body could still function, that I could still sleep. That tiny glimmer of hope I'd felt outside the hospital was growing into something stronger: the belief that maybe, just maybe, I could find my way back to myself.

The sleep had given me back just enough mental clarity to realize that whatever path forward looked like, it was going to be up to me to find it. The medical system had shown me what it had to offer, and it wasn't enough. But lying there that morning, feeling rested for the first time in almost a week, I knew I had the strength to keep looking for answers.

I just had no idea yet what those answers would look like, or how long the journey ahead would be.

📞 **If you've already got a call booked with me — show up. That's where we map YOUR specific path back to quiet, step by step. And if you're reading this and haven't booked yet, do it now. Either way, I'll see you there.**

👉 <https://cal.com/dan-william-zpblsa/30min?overlayCalendar=true>

Chapter 3: Finding My Way Back

Learning to Live Again

The next morning, I woke up feeling something I hadn't felt in five days — the simple relief of having slept. My body had finally surrendered to the hydroxyzine, and for those precious hours, I'd escaped the relentless cycle of panic and exhaustion. But as consciousness crept back in, so did the sound. The tinnitus was still there, waiting for me like it had never left.

I remember thinking to myself: if I can sleep, I can recover. If I beat the insomnia, I can beat this too. It was the first spark of hope I'd felt since that morning in April when everything changed. I wasn't cured, but I wasn't completely broken either.

That day, I discovered something that would become my lifeline through the months ahead. When I went outside to work, the air conditioner was running at just the right frequency — it partially masked my tinnitus. For the first time since this nightmare began, I could concentrate on something other than the ringing. The sound was still there, but it wasn't the only thing I could hear. Outside, with that mechanical hum drowning out some of the intensity, I felt almost normal.

But the moment I stepped back inside, silence hit me like a wall. Without any background noise to compete with it, the tinnitus roared back to full volume, demanding my complete attention. It was like walking from a noisy restaurant into a library — suddenly, the ringing was all I could hear, all I could think about.

This became my pattern. I started avoiding silence completely. Quiet rooms felt threatening, hostile even. The absence of sound wasn't peaceful anymore — it was a spotlight that made my tinnitus impossible to ignore. I'd find excuses to stay outside longer, to work in areas where there was some ambient noise, anything to keep from facing the full force of that sound in complete quiet.

All through that summer, the tinnitus bothered me. It wasn't just the physical sensation of hearing it — it was the mental weight it carried. Every time I noticed it, my thoughts would spiral: *Is this permanent? Will I ever have peace again? How can I live like this?* The sound itself was exhausting, but the fear and resistance I felt toward it was even more draining.

I was trapped in a cycle I didn't understand yet. The more I fought against the tinnitus, the more it seemed to dominate my awareness. The more I avoided silence, the more threatening silence became. I was living my life in reaction to this sound, organizing my days around either masking it or running from it.

Those summer months taught me that simply getting through each day was an accomplishment. I wasn't thriving, but I was surviving. I was sleeping with the help of medication, I could function when I had the right background noise, and slowly — very slowly — I was beginning to accept that this might be a longer journey than I'd hoped.

I didn't know it then, but I was about to discover something that would change everything: that the path forward wasn't about fighting the tinnitus or avoiding it, but about learning to relate to it in an entirely different way.

The Mindfulness Discovery

All through that summer, I struggled with the sound. I was surviving — sleeping with the help of medication, functioning when I had the right background noise — but I was still very much in the grip of this thing. The tinnitus was dictating how I lived. I avoided silence like it was dangerous. I planned my days around where I could find masking sounds. I was getting by, but I wasn't really living.

That's when I came across these concepts of mindfulness. Learning to practice observing the tinnitus, observing my thoughts and feelings about it, and not reacting.

At first, I thought: this is the answer? This seems so... too esoteric. It wasn't what I was looking for at all. I'd been through hell — the mental hospital, the sleepless nights, the terror that I was losing my mind. And now someone was telling me the solution was to sit quietly and *observe* the very thing that was torturing me? It felt like being told to make friends with a monster.

I was skeptical, to put it mildly. After everything I'd been through, mindfulness sounded like new-age nonsense. I wanted something concrete, something medical, something that would make this nightmare stop. The idea that I should somehow peacefully coexist with the ringing in my ears seemed absurd.

But I was desperate. And despite my skepticism, something about it felt different from all the other approaches I'd tried or read about. This wasn't about fighting the tinnitus or drowning it out or waiting for it to go away. It was about changing my relationship with it entirely.

So I began to practice it. And something unexpected happened — I fell in love with the meditation.

I started meditating on the tinnitus sound itself. Not trying to push it away or ignore it, but actually turning my attention toward it. Observing it like I might observe clouds passing in the sky or waves on a beach. Just watching, without trying to change anything.

At first, it was incredibly difficult. Every instinct I had was to fight the sound, to resist it, to panic when I noticed it. But slowly, I began to understand what this practice was really about. It wasn't about making the tinnitus go away — it was about learning that I didn't have to be at war with it.

I began meditating like ten times a day on the tinnitus sound itself. I know that sounds extreme, but I was committed to this path in a way I'd never been committed to anything. Each session was like training my mind to respond differently. Instead of hearing the ringing and immediately spiraling into catastrophic thoughts, I was learning to just... notice it. To let it be there without it meaning something terrible about my life or my future.

The practice became my anchor. When the familiar panic started to rise, when my thoughts began telling me I was doomed or broken or that this would never get better, I had somewhere to go. I had a way of relating to those thoughts and feelings that didn't involve being swept away by them.

This wasn't the quick fix I'd been hoping for. It wasn't a magic bullet that made everything disappear overnight. But it was something much more valuable — it was the beginning of real change. For the first time since that morning in April, I felt like I had some measure of control back. Not control over the tinnitus itself, but control over how I responded to it.

And that, I was beginning to understand, might be everything.

Building My Own Protocol

That beginning of real change was just the start. Having discovered that I could observe my tinnitus without being swept away by panic, I knew I was onto something. But the mindfulness concepts I'd come across were general — they talked about observing thoughts and feelings without reacting, but nobody was talking specifically about how to apply this to tinnitus. I realized I was going to have to figure this out myself.

So I began to build my own practice, piece by piece.

The foundation became my walks in the woods. There was something about being out in nature that had helped me from the very beginning — I'd felt it even walking out of that mental hospital, that immediate sense of relief just being outdoors. So I started taking regular walks through the wooded area near my house, the same place I'd tried unsuccessfully to run off my panic in those early days. But now I approached it differently.

During these walks, I would practice mindfulness specifically on the tinnitus sound. I wasn't trying to escape it or mask it — I was learning to be with it. I'd walk along the trails and deliberately focus my attention on the ringing, observing it like I was studying something fascinating rather than fighting something terrible. I began to meditate on the tinnitus sound itself, sometimes ten times a day.

It sounds counterintuitive, I know. Most people want to get away from the sound that's bothering them. But I was learning that the more I tried to fight it or avoid it, the more power it had over me. The more I could calmly observe it, the less threatening it became.

This practice I was developing was unlike anything I'd seen anywhere else. I wasn't following someone else's meditation program or tinnitus protocol — I

was creating something unique based on what I was discovering worked for me. The combination of nature, walking, and focused mindfulness on the actual tinnitus sound was becoming my own systematic approach to healing.

One of the most important decisions I made during this time was to stay off benzos and SSRIs. The doctors had wanted to put me on various medications, but something in me resisted that path. I'd seen too many people get stuck on those medications, and I had a gut feeling that my healing needed to come from within, not from pharmaceutical Band-Aids. The mindfulness practice was keeping me grounded enough that I could avoid that route entirely.

I also worked on getting off the sleeping pills. The hydroxyzine had been a lifesaver in those early days when I couldn't sleep at all, but I didn't want to depend on it forever. As my mindfulness practice grew stronger, as I became more skilled at observing my anxiety and panic without being consumed by them, I found I could gradually reduce my reliance on the medication. It wasn't easy — there were nights when the old insomnia would creep back — but I was building real tools now, not just masking the symptoms.

The systematic nature of what I was developing became clearer over time. It wasn't just random meditation or occasional nature walks. I was creating a consistent, daily practice that addressed the tinnitus directly. I was learning to work with my nervous system, to calm the fight-or-flight response that had kept me trapped in that cycle of panic and sleeplessness.

Every day, I would take my walks. Every day, I would practice observing the tinnitus without reacting. Every day, I would notice my thoughts about the sound — the catastrophic predictions, the desperate wishes for it to stop — and I would practice not getting swept away by those thoughts. I was

building new neural pathways, training my brain to respond differently to the same stimulus.

This wasn't the quick fix I'd been desperately searching for in those early days. There was no magic moment when everything suddenly became easy. But I was building something much more valuable — a sustainable way of being with my tinnitus that didn't require me to fight it or fix it or make it go away. I was learning to coexist with it peacefully.

The protocol I was developing was saving me from a path I didn't want to go down. It was keeping me off medications I didn't want to depend on. It was giving me back a sense of agency and control, not over the tinnitus itself, but over my relationship with it. And that relationship, I was discovering, was everything.

As the weeks and months went by, this systematic approach became as natural as breathing. I had built something that worked specifically for me, something that addressed my particular nervous system and my particular way of moving through the world. And while I didn't know it at the time, I was creating something that would eventually help many other people find their own way back to peace.

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Chapter 4: The Long Road to Healing

Progress Through Setbacks

After six to eight months of consistently practicing my mindfulness protocol, I began feeling much better—much, much better. The daily meditation on the tinnitus sound itself, the walks in the woods, the systematic approach I'd built from scratch—it was all starting to work. There were days when I'd wake up and think, "I'm actually getting through this."

But recovery wasn't a straight line upward. Not even close.

I had a ton of setbacks. I'd have a good week, then a bad couple of days. Or I'd have a good month, then suddenly find myself back in that familiar pit of despair for days on end. The pattern became predictable in its unpredictability: just when I thought I was making real progress, the tinnitus would seem to roar back to life, my sleep would get disrupted again, and all those catastrophic thoughts would come flooding back.

During those setbacks, I'd think to myself, "Maybe my habituation progress isn't actually happening. Maybe I'm just fooling myself." The doubt was crushing. Here I was, months into this journey, and I still felt like I was back at square one. The ringing would feel just as loud, just as intrusive as it had been in those early days when I couldn't sleep for five nights straight.

Those were some of the darkest moments in my recovery—not because the tinnitus was necessarily worse than it had been initially, but because I'd tasted hope and progress, only to feel like it was being ripped away from me again. It's one thing to suffer when you don't know if there's a way out. It's

another thing entirely to suffer when you thought you'd found the way out, only to question whether you'd been deluding yourself all along.

I'd have good weeks where I'd barely notice the sound, where I'd go about my day feeling almost normal. Then suddenly, without warning, I'd wake up to the familiar electrical sensation in my ears, that high-pitched whine that seemed to cut through everything else. The silence I'd started to reclaim would vanish, and I'd be right back to avoiding quiet rooms, seeking out the air conditioner's masking frequency, feeling like a prisoner in my own head.

The setbacks weren't just about the volume or intensity of the tinnitus, either. They brought back all the secondary symptoms—the anxiety, the doom spiraling, the feeling of being completely and utterly trapped. I'd lie awake at night, not because I physically couldn't sleep like in those first horrific days, but because my mind was racing with thoughts of "What if this never gets better? What if I've been kidding myself this whole time?"

But here's what I learned during those months of ups and downs: the mindfulness practice I'd developed wasn't just about the good days. It was especially crucial during the setbacks. When I'd have those bad days or bad weeks, I had to lean even harder into observing my thoughts and feelings about the tinnitus without reacting to them. I had to watch my mind tell me stories about being doomed, about never recovering, about being stuck with this forever—and I had to let those thoughts pass through without buying into them.

The setbacks taught me that healing isn't about the absence of difficult days. It's about developing a different relationship with those difficult days. Instead of seeing a setback as proof that I wasn't getting better, I started to see them as part of the process—like waves that would crash over me but eventually recede.

Each time I came through a setback using the mindfulness tools I'd developed, my confidence grew a little stronger. Not confidence that I'd never have another bad day, but confidence that I could handle whatever came my way. I was building resilience, even when it didn't feel like it.

The setbacks were painful, no question about it. There were nights when I felt completely doomed, when I wondered if I'd ever truly be okay again. But each time, I was able to use the mindfulness practice to observe those feelings of doom without letting them consume me entirely. I'd continue on the path of habituation, even when that path felt impossibly long and uncertain.

Looking back now, I can see that those setbacks weren't detours from my healing—they were an essential part of it. They were teaching me that recovery isn't about eliminating tinnitus or even eliminating difficult days. It's about developing the tools and the inner strength to navigate whatever comes up, knowing that you have what it takes to get through it.

The Gradual Return

The mindfulness practice had become my lifeline, but recovery wasn't a straight line upward. Each setback tested everything I'd learned about observing without reacting, about staying present with whatever was happening rather than spiraling into catastrophic thoughts about the future.

When a particularly difficult night would hit—the kind where the tinnitus seemed to pierce through everything and sleep felt impossible—I'd find myself right back in those familiar feelings of doom. My mind would immediately jump to the worst conclusions: *Maybe I'm not actually getting better. Maybe this whole habituation thing is just wishful thinking. Maybe I'm destined to suffer like this forever.*

But this is where the mindfulness training proved its worth. Instead of getting swept away by these thoughts like I had in those early months, I'd learned to catch them. I could observe my mind doing what minds do—creating stories, making predictions, catastrophizing about uncertain futures. The thoughts were still there, but I didn't have to believe them or act on them.

During the hardest setbacks, I'd return to the basics of my practice. I'd sit quietly and turn my attention directly toward the tinnitus sound itself, not trying to make it go away or change it, but simply being present with it. I'd notice how my mind wanted to label it as "terrible" or "unbearable," and I'd practice just letting those judgments pass through without attaching to them.

The walks in the woods became especially crucial during these difficult periods. There was something about being in nature that helped me remember the bigger picture—that this sound, as distressing as it felt, was just one small part of a much larger world. The trees didn't care about my tinnitus. The birds kept singing regardless of what was happening in my ears. This perspective helped me step back from the intensity of my own experience and see it with a bit more spaciousness.

What I came to understand through these setbacks is that they weren't actually proof that I wasn't getting better. They were part of the healing process itself. Each time I navigated through a difficult period using mindfulness rather than panic, I was building resilience. I was proving to myself that I could handle whatever came up.

The journey was painfully long—much longer than I wanted it to be. There were so many nights when I lay awake feeling like I was right back where I started, wondering if I'd ever truly be okay again. The not-knowing was

perhaps the hardest part. I couldn't see the end point. I couldn't guarantee myself that all this work would pay off.

But I kept showing up to the practice. On the good days, when the tinnitus barely registered in my awareness, I'd practice with gratitude, appreciating these glimpses of what habituation might feel like. On the terrible days, when every moment felt like a struggle, I'd practice with determination, knowing that my willingness to be present with difficulty was exactly what would carry me through.

The mindfulness wasn't about making the tinnitus disappear—I'd learned that much from my early attempts to run it off or Google it away. It was about changing my relationship to the sound, about developing the inner resources to remain steady regardless of what was happening in my ears.

Some setbacks lasted days, others weeks. There were periods when I'd have a good month followed by several difficult weeks, and I'd question whether I was making any real progress at all. But gradually, over time, the pattern shifted. The good periods became longer and more stable. The setbacks, while still challenging, became less devastating. I was learning to trust that I could weather whatever came up.

This was the gradual return—not a dramatic moment of sudden healing, but a slow, sometimes frustrating process of building new neural pathways, new habits of attention, new ways of being with difficulty. It required a kind of faith I'd never had to cultivate before—faith that consistent practice would eventually pay off, even when I couldn't see clear evidence of progress.

Looking back now, I can see that every single setback served a purpose. Each one taught me something about resilience, about the difference between

pain and suffering, about my own capacity to remain present with whatever life brought my way. The tinnitus was teaching me how to live.

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Chapter 5: Life Beyond Tinnitus

Complete Habituation

I never hear the tinnitus because I'm completely habituated. That's the reality I live in today, and it's a reality I never thought possible during those dark months when the sound dominated my every waking moment.

People ask me all the time: what does habituation actually feel like? For me, it feels like I never had tinnitus in the first place. I'm never bothered by the sound. It never bothers me. I never really hear it. I'm in silence most of the time, true silence, the kind I thought was lost forever when I sat on that couch in Nashville, spiraling into panic.

The tinnitus is really just a background noise in my awareness now. It's there — the sound itself hasn't disappeared — but my brain has learned to filter it out so completely that it might as well not exist. It's like the hum of a refrigerator in another room, or the distant sound of traffic when you live in the city. Your brain stops registering it as important, stops bringing it to your conscious attention.

This is what complete habituation looks like: living in functional silence even though the tinnitus remains. My brain has categorized the sound as unimportant background noise, something that doesn't require my attention or emotional response. I can sit in a quiet room and experience what feels exactly like the silence I knew before tinnitus returned to my life.

The transformation is so complete that I sometimes forget I even have tinnitus. Days pass, sometimes weeks, where the thought doesn't cross my

mind. I'm not actively managing it, not using masking sounds, not avoiding quiet environments. I simply live my life, and the tinnitus lives quietly in the background of my awareness, filtered out by a brain that has learned it poses no threat.

When I do become aware of it — maybe someone asks me about my experience, or I'm helping a client understand what's possible — I can tune into the sound if I choose to. It's still there, still the same frequency and volume it always was. But there's no emotional charge to it anymore, no spike of anxiety or frustration. It's just a sound, as neutral as any other background noise in my environment.

This is what I mean when I say I have my life back like I never lost it. I don't structure my day around tinnitus. I don't avoid certain activities or environments. I don't carry the weight of managing a chronic condition. The hypervigilance that once consumed my thoughts has completely dissolved.

I sleep in silence — or what my brain experiences as silence. I wake up in the morning without immediately checking in on the sound. I can focus completely on conversations, on work, on the simple pleasures of daily life. The tinnitus that once hijacked my attention has been relegated to the same category as my heartbeat or breathing — bodily functions that continue without requiring conscious awareness.

Complete habituation means the tinnitus has lost all power over my emotional state, my behavior, and my quality of life. It exists in my auditory system, but it no longer exists as a problem in my lived experience. The contrast with those early months is so stark it's almost hard to believe they happened to the same person.

This is the destination that seemed impossible when I was lying awake night after night, convinced I would never know peace again. But here I am, living in that peace, writing these words in what feels like perfect silence. The tinnitus hasn't been cured — it's been rendered irrelevant by a brain that has learned, through consistent practice and patience, to let it fade into the background where it belongs.

A Life Transformed

The contrast between where I am now and where I was during those dark months still amazes me. I travel the world now, something that seemed impossible when I couldn't even leave my house without anxiety. I have a thriving coaching business that fulfills me in ways I never expected. But perhaps most importantly, I live with a depth of gratitude that I never possessed before tinnitus entered my life.

When I was sitting in that mental hospital evaluation room, feeling completely hopeless, I never could have imagined that one day I'd be writing these words from anywhere in the world I choose to be. The person who couldn't sleep for five straight nights, who broke his sobriety just to try to find relief, who thought his life was over — that person feels like a distant memory now, yet I carry the wisdom of that experience with me everywhere I go.

I remember making a promise to myself during the recovery process. I told myself that when I got through this — not if, but when — I wasn't going to take my life for granted anymore. I was going to live truly on my terms, the way I wanted to live. That promise has become the foundation of everything I do now.

The appreciation I have for my health now runs deeper than anything I felt before. Every moment I'm not suffering feels like a gift. Before tinnitus returned, I took those moments for granted. I assumed good health was my baseline, something I deserved and could count on. Now I understand how precious it is to simply feel okay, to move through the world without distress, to lie down at night and drift into sleep peacefully.

This gratitude extends to time itself. I have a visceral understanding now of how limited our time on this earth really is, and how much of it I was wasting before on things that didn't truly matter. When you've spent months convinced you'll never feel normal again, when you've experienced what it's like to have your entire world shrink down to the sound in your head, you develop a different relationship with every day you're given.

I live my life on my terms now in a way I never did before. The fear of what other people might think, the pressure to follow conventional paths, the tendency to put off what I really wanted to do — all of that dissolved during my recovery process. When you've been to the edge and found your way back, you realize how much energy you've been wasting on things that don't actually matter.

The coaching business I've built isn't just work for me — it's become my purpose. Taking the protocol I developed for myself and systematizing it so others can follow the same path feels like the most meaningful thing I've ever done. Every person who walks through their own recovery validates not just their journey, but mine as well. It reminds me that my story isn't unique, that the healing path I found can be walked by anyone willing to do the work.

Traveling the world was always a dream, but it was one I kept putting off for "someday." Tinnitus taught me that someday might never come, and that the

only moment we truly have is this one. So now I go where I want to go, work from wherever inspires me, and structure my days around what brings me joy and fulfillment rather than what I think I should be doing.

The irony isn't lost on me that tinnitus, which I experienced as the worst thing that could happen to me, ultimately led me to the best life I've ever lived. Not because of the suffering itself, but because of what I learned about myself, about resilience, about what really matters, and about the incredible capacity we all have to adapt and heal.

I feel like I live my dream life now, and I never even think about tinnitus or worry about it. The sound that once consumed my entire existence has become irrelevant background noise. But more than that, the experience of recovering from it has given me a framework for approaching any challenge life might bring. I know now, in my bones, that we're capable of adapting to things we never thought we could survive.

Every day I wake up grateful — not just for the silence I experience despite the tinnitus still being there, but for the journey that brought me to this place. For the depth of appreciation I now carry, for the purposeful work I get to do, for the freedom to live authentically, and for the unshakeable knowledge that whatever comes next, I have the tools to handle it.

This is what life beyond tinnitus looks like — not just the absence of suffering, but the presence of genuine joy, purpose, and freedom. It's a life I couldn't have imagined before, built on the foundation of everything I learned while finding my way back to peace.

Helping Others Heal

What started as my own desperate search for healing eventually became something much bigger — a systematic way to guide others along the same path I had walked. After my recovery, I knew I couldn't keep this protocol to myself. Too many people were suffering the way I had suffered, searching for answers in all the wrong places, just as I had done.

I developed my coaching business around the exact mindfulness protocol that had saved me. But I didn't want it to be some loose collection of ideas or vague concepts. I wanted to create something systematic, something people could follow step by step, something that would give them the same results I had achieved.

The foundation became weekly cohorts with live coaching calls. There's something powerful about going through this journey alongside others who truly understand what you're experiencing. When someone describes the terror of lying awake at 3 a.m. with their tinnitus screaming, everyone in the group knows exactly what that feels like. There's no need to explain or justify the depth of the suffering — we've all been there.

I built out a complete dashboard system that takes people through each element of the protocol in a structured way. It's the mindfulness practice I developed during those long walks in the woods, the meditation techniques I used ten times a day on the tinnitus sound itself, the methods for observing thoughts and feelings without reacting — all of it organized into a format that people can follow consistently.

The success rates have been incredible. Through direct mentorship, I guide people through this exact same method and protocol, and everyone I work with goes on to recover just fine. It's not magic, and it's not a cure — it's habituation, the same natural process that had worked for me the first time around, before my setback in 2020.

What moves me most is watching people walk the same healing path I walked. They come to me in that same state of desperation I remember so well — convinced they'll never sleep again, terrified that their life is over, googling frantically for answers that seem to lead nowhere. And then, step by step, week by week, I watch them transform.

They learn to meditate on the tinnitus sound instead of fighting it. They discover how to observe their catastrophic thoughts without believing them. They practice the mindfulness techniques that keep them off benzos and sleeping pills, just as it had for me. Most importantly, they learn that recovery is possible — not just because I tell them so, but because they experience it themselves.

The mentorship aspect is crucial because this journey requires guidance from someone who has actually walked this path. When someone is having a setback and convinced their progress has disappeared, I can tell them from experience that this is normal, that I went through the same doubts, that the setbacks don't mean failure. When they're struggling with a particularly difficult meditation session, I can adjust their technique based on what I learned during my own recovery.

My story isn't unique, and that's exactly why this approach works so well. The terror, the sleepless nights, the conviction that life is over — these experiences are common to so many people with severe tinnitus. Because I lived through all of it and found my way out, I can guide others through the same process.

The systematic nature of the protocol makes all the difference. People don't have to figure it out on their own the way I did. They don't have to spend months wondering if they're doing the mindfulness practice correctly or if their approach is working. The dashboard shows them exactly what to do

and when, and the weekly calls provide the support and adjustments they need along the way.

What I've created is essentially a roadmap for the journey I took from that mental hospital in Franklin to complete habituation. It's built on the understanding that anyone can recover, that the mind's capacity for habituation is available to everyone, and that with the right guidance and consistent practice, people can reclaim their lives just as I reclaimed mine.

Watching others heal reminds me daily why I went through everything I experienced. The suffering wasn't meaningless — it became the foundation for helping others find their way back to peace. Every person who completes the protocol and gets their life back validates the journey and makes every sleepless night, every moment of terror, every setback worthwhile.

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