



An Isolated Routine of Boxing to Work out Worry

Description

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Author's Memo

In January 2020, I took kickboxing classes because I wanted to get in shape. In February, I couldn't go anymore because of COVID, so I bought a boxing bag and placed it in the garage. And so the isolated routine of kicking and punching the bag 4 days a week began during the year of sheltering in place and all the awful events.

The Awful Events: Wondering How to Exist

The year 2020 was also the time I started the MFA-Low Residency program at Converse University in South Carolina. The institution, like many colleges, was unsure if they should proceed with an in-person residency, go online, or simply postpone it. I lived in Miami, Florida, at the time. I didn't want to start my master's program online. Still, I also had reservations about flying during a pandemic and driving in the South as a Black woman. George Floyd had been murdered in the street by policemen. Ahmad Aubrey had been hunted down and shot to death, and nothing was being done, it seemed, about Breonna Taylor's death from a home invasion by cops.

My husband said he'd drive me to school, but during that political climate, I wasn't sure his white skin would be safe driving in the South with a Black woman. I was having sinister thoughts about what I might have to do—what my husband might have to do if we had to defend my skin color. This kind of thinking didn't give me peace.

Working Out My Peace

Going out into the garage to beat up on a bag and scream at the top of my lungs while music blasted on high volume alleviated all my stress and pinned-up frustrations. I discovered exercise—specifically,

kickboxing served as therapy, or so I thought. It's said that the best way to handle stressful situations is to stay calm. I'm pretty good at it—so good, I don't always realize how traumatic a situation is—because I have to stay so calm. Being in a state of calm doesn't allow much room for terrifying realities. There's no time to wallow in the situation. I just have to deal with it—another isolated routine that I'm used to.

How I Dealt With My Assignment

This poem, entitled "Work Out," is about how I dealt with 2020. It's a writing exercise I didn't realize I needed to do. My university decided to conduct the first two residencies online. I had my first in-person residency in the third semester. It was the year of my second concentration: Creative Non-fiction. My first concentration was Poetry. The government finally created a vaccine; it was the first time many of us had been out and about since the initial two-week quarantine. My first in-class writing assignment: Write a story based on a ritual. I chose the isolated routine of kickboxing a punching bag.

This poem, entitled "Work Out," is about how I dealt with 2020. It's a writing exercise I didn't realize I needed to do.

The AutoEthnographer





By Mick Haupt for Unsplash

The broadcast repeats. In and out the shower. Same news. Different channels. Different spin. An infinite loop of chaos. I prefer tea, but it's a coffee kind of morning. Hands numb. Tips bound too tight. My rings dig into my fingers. I hate when this happens. I unwrap then rewrap like I'm pampering a baby. The president tweets: "When the looting starts, the shooting starts." Now, this repeats. I grab my Kindle and boxing gloves, shutting the news and the garage door behind me.

***Jab, cross, kick. Up. Kick. Weave!
Up, hook. Up hook.
Cross and kick.
Repeat.***

The news repeats. Protestors repeat: "I can't breathe."

Don't forget to breathe.

You have to breathe.

It's hard to think of anything else to stick to this routine. I like it this way. The screen on my Kindle turns red. The numbers read: "0:60." One minute to rest. To breathe. I stand in front of the air conditioner but can't cool off my indignation. My heart breaks. It races from the routine. From the burning precinct. From that boy who shot and killed a protestor in the street. The fucking news repeats.

***Jab, cross, kick. Up. Kick. Weave!
Up, hook. Up hook.
Cross and kick.
Repeat.***

Breathe! You have to breathe. Repeat.

The news repeats.

Half of America wants to own us again. They're hunting us again. They want us in the fields again: they want the right to rape us again. They want to sell us again. They're breaking into our homes again. They're lynching again. (Did that ever stop?)

We're not taking this shit again. We'll Watts Riots, MLK, Rodney King this thing again! Raise their children again? Nurse their babies again? Grab a gun. They have pistols, rifles, semi-automatics and tactical gear wielding American, Trump and Confederate flags.

The Kindle screen turns green. This is the hard part. Push-ups. Knee up. Sit-ups. Crunches. Squats. Lunges. This, for three minutes. Feels like a long time. Eight minutes, 48 seconds. Longer. The president repeats, "They choke." He thinks it's a joke. Like Kung Flu. Condoning. Pardoning. Plotting.

A taser. A bat. A pistol. Not them. For me. Rifle? Semi-automatic? Why am I thinking like this? In

defense like prey. Will I have to kill?

Pondering civil war on American soil because the Capitol is run over. The president observes on multiple screens under a tent singing “Gloria”, but my spirit isn’t dancing. He says we love you.

Shut up, man! You’re disturbing my peace by making me think about getting a piece of heat.

The red Kindle screen wants me to rest for another minute.

**Cross, Jab, Cross, Jab, Cross, Jab, Cross,
SCREAM!**

BREATHE!

PRAY!

And pray! Then, PRAY!

Run, or stay?

Kick. Breathe!

March. Breathe.

March! And Scream!

The news repeats.

Don’t forget to breathe.

You have to breathe.

The AutoEthnographer

About the Author

Zorina Exie Frey is a Pushcart Prize Winner, Adjunct English Instructor, and spoken word poet. Her poetry is featured in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: I’m Speaking Now, Glassworks Magazine, *and* swamp pink. Her essays are published in Shondaland, Filter, and Converse University.* Zorina has taught workshops at the National Association for Poetry as Therapy Conference, the Maryland Writers’ Association’ From Brain to Bookshelf Conference, and the South Florida Writers’ Association. She has presented academic papers at The National Council of Black Studies and the International Conference on Poetry Studies. She is the recipient of the Palm Beach Poetry Festival Langston Hughes Fellow and Martha’s Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing Voices of Color Fellow. Her screenplay, Harley Quinn Origin, received an honorable mention at the Birmingham Film Festival in the UK; she was one of the semi-finalists in the TV pilot America’s Next Greatest Author.

Zorina Exie J. Frey <https://zorina-frey.com/>
Writer. Author. Performer. Publisher.
IWA Publications <https://iwapublications.wordpress.com/>
45 Magazine Literary Journal <https://45magazineiwa.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/zorinaexie/>
<https://twitter.com/ZExie>
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/zorinafrey/>
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Author

zorinaexie
