

Sweat

By Lesa Knollenberg

I was nude when I decided to write this column. I've had the idea for a fitness/human interest column for a long while, and was pondering it recently while eavesdropping in the locker room of my local health club. (Here's the secret to locker room research: Face your locker, take an excruciatingly long time to put on your deodorant, and listen to the rich conversation of women around you who are naked and sometimes sharing their naked truths, as well). Last week I was listening to a conversation about a woman named Heidi who has lost 51 pounds:

"Heidi looks great!"

"I know. She is so inspiring. I haven't wanted to ask her about her weight, but I'd love to know her story."

"She's really working hard. She told her family that her exercise is non-negotiable. Nothing comes between her and TurboKick."

"There are some really great stories out there. Someone should write them down."

Seriously? I turned around to see if it was a joke. Just when I'm thinking about a human interest/fitness column, I'm overhearing this? Hey, this isn't my first rodeo. I know a sign when I see one. I took the sign to mean that if *I* like thinking about fitness and human strength, maybe *other people* do, too.

Just so you know, I've been there: I started my love of movement with, of course, Jane Fonda. We felt the burn. I wore my striped toe socks, leotards and headband during the '80s. I have my own Firm step, stability ball and medicine ball in the basement, and use them all. I like Pilates but struggle with yoga. It's a constant pursuit, this attempt to get fit.

On the nutrition side, I've tried eating gluten-free food and low glycemic food. I can tell you how many Weight Watchers points are in a Happy Meal. Some things work for awhile, and some things work so well that they have been added to my daily repertoire. I've run a 5K, 10K and am considering something longer. I'm always a person in training. Training is where I do all my learning.

Some of us are visual learners, some are hands-on learners, and some of us (ahem) need to be "physical" for knowledge to sink in. I lean toward *kinesthetic learning* style, where a person processes information better if his or her muscles are involved. If the muscles are engaged, the brain functions better, takes information and shifts it into place, like a small, less colorful Rubik's Cube of the noggin. For me, tapping into my "muscle memory" gives me an almost primal sense of getting down to the core of things.

The Japanese writer Haruki Murakami put in words what I've often wondered about. "I'm a physical, not intellectual type person ... Only when I'm given an actual physical burden and my muscles start to groan — and sometimes scream — does my comprehension meter shoot upward and I'm finally able to grasp something. Needless to say, it takes quite a bit of time plus effort to go through each stage step by step and arrive at a conclusion. Sometimes it takes too long, and by the time I'm convinced it's already too late. But what are you going to do? That's the kind of person I am."

Beautifully put. I just thought that I couldn't think straight unless sweat was dripping down my gluteus maximus.

I've learned so much during my fitness training. I started working out to lose weight, but realized long ago that my brain also feels healthy if I exercise each day. I'm a different animal when I've started the day with heavy breathing, a chance to shake off self-doubt and breathe in fresh air. My family recently acquired a black lab, and I see the same thing in him. He's a mess if he doesn't get to run each day. The author Joyce Carol Oates joins our sweat society, too: "On days when I can't run, I don't feel myself, and whoever the self is I feel, I don't like nearly so much as the other."

Wise woman. She must have thought of that with sweat crawling down her backside.

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