

this.

this is one of the reasons why i take my job so seriously. whether we acknowledge it or not the struggle we face while training is rarely as simple as the clock or the weight on the bar. it is an analog. a stand in. there is emotion in these movements. history. there is a tangible will. there are dreams and demons inside every person who walks through our door - memories and motivations...

in the gym we can control variables. we can orchestrate stress. signals. physical and emotional, its just a matter of pressure and time. it is a composition, a musical score - a set of events to bring an individual to the right place in the right mindset to accomplish something meaningful - to do, simply - what is right.

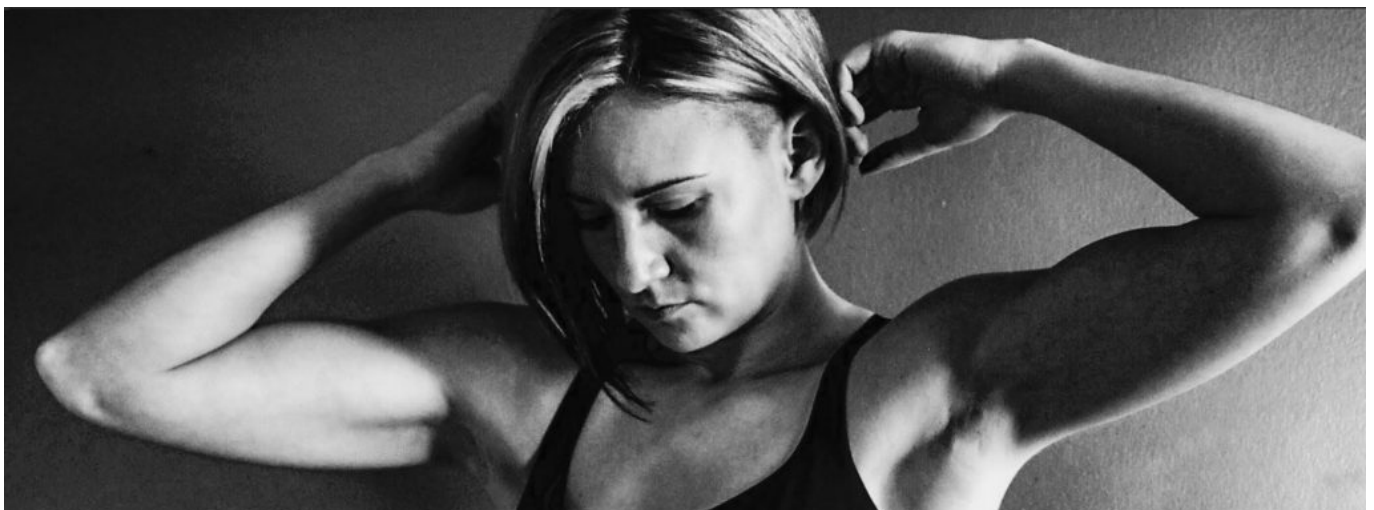
and all that setup, all that work and focus and timing is only practice...

we train like this because we want to change. change not just inside these walls but inside out heads and inside our hearts. we are courting stress, peeling back and exposing our weaknesses. we are developing a relationship with the struggle. with being *seen* struggling. with asking for help and taking bad news. we are practicing response. practicing ownership. one step at a time, we are becoming exactly who we choose to be.

i don't know Sara very well - i am not her trainer. we see each other in the gym, smile and nod and make small talk and maybe tell a story or two. but this story. this story is a beautiful glimpse into what drives her, into the stories and the fights that we all carry around with us. the fight that is always going on, beneath the surface. because it is not just our circumstance that defines us. not our doubts or or fears, but how we choose to respond to those feelings. what we choose to do.

this is also a story about how to fight back.

thank you Sara, for your fight. for your story. for your will, and your willingness to share this.



# On Strength

by [Sara Dixon](#)

*Last week, I had the opportunity to tell a personal story of change in a Story Slam. I am sharing it here because I know there are women I know with similar stories, told and untold.*

About a year ago, I decided I wanted to get serious about training.

I had been working out on my own, but I found a gym, in a family of gyms, that had started as something exclusive. You had to be accepted or invited to train there. The program had a reputation for being intense, notoriously brutal. People crumble, cry, vomit, bleed.

## **So I decide I want to do this.**

I pull up to an old warehouse to meet with my now trainer and friend, racked with anxiety.

*I'm going to say the wrong thing, I'm going to say something stupid, he's going to think I'm not serious, I'm just another dumb girl.*

We sit down. He goes through the approach, how they train, what is expected. This is fine. Then he asks:

“What’s your motivation? Why do you want to do this?”

I hadn’t planned for this question.

## **What is my motivation? Why am I here?**

My brain is racing and filing through random moments: The first time I sang karaoke. Presenting my research thesis in college. What *is* my motivation? Why do I do *anything*?

And then it’s 8 years ago. 4:30am. I’m tired, exhausted.

I’m packing my things in my car. I’m almost done, a few boxes left. I’m standing in the kitchen of a 1940s bungalow, plaster walls painted pale yellow. I think to myself: *You’ve got to focus now, this is important. He’s going to be home from work in an hour and you have to be gone.*

This is the first time in my life where I can’t see past tomorrow. Next week, next month—darkness. I don’t have much left—I’ve lost my job, friends, family, money, my voice.

I run my fingers around the decorative edge of an antique dinner plate. I put the last of my grandmother’s dishes in the box and tape it up. He comes home early.

There are only pieces to remember, because a deep part of you rises and takes over.

I get out from his hands at my neck, and I get out.

I get down the driveway, to the car. He’s chasing me, screaming. And I get out.

I pull out of the driveway and I keep driving.

### **And I get out.**

I can only imagine what this looks like as I'm sitting there in the gym, this poor guy thinking *What did I say to this girl? What is going on right now?*

He offers: "You know, most people just say they want to look better in their clothes."

You know what? Yes. That's it. Sign me up.

And I want to do push ups. "Ok."

And pull ups. "Great."

And I want to be able to run and hike and climb mountains. "Alright."

But at the core of my being, through every fiber in my body, I'm thinking:

### **I never want to feel that weak ever again.**

In the 8 years leading up to this question, I moved between cities, changed jobs, got new friends and reconnected with old ones.

I took chances when I knew the odds were in my favor.

I got good at what I was good at.

I stayed even-keel, safe and in a life that was fine, really.

### **So why was I here?**

Now, a year later, I can do push ups. I can (almost) do pull ups. I've run a half marathon, I've ice climbed in -16° and hiked through the desert in 108°.

What it really required was admitting I didn't know something. That the guy next to me was doing things I couldn't do and would never be able to do. It took being open and really listening, and taking direction, advice.

It took me falling, on the floor, on my face, in front of people. And crying about it in the car.

It took tears of pain and frustration, feeling my body physically fail despite my mind willing it forward.

For the past year, four days a week, it took feeling every burning, stinging pain of absolute weakness that I could possibly feel. And no longer avoid.

### **Because that's what I needed. Because that's what strength requires.**

