

When I was still in short pants (what is the equivalent measurement for girls? Is there even one?), I was a sporty child.

And my sport of choice was gymnastics. The proper one, not the rhythmic thing. I was quite good, too, making it all the way to the provincial team. Parallel bars? I could spin and twist and swing and bash myself blue with the best of them. Floor? Somersaults R Us*. Beam was as easy as the floor.

I was rubbish at vaulting, though; we later found out that it was my eyesight. I couldn't see the damn thing and would power along quick as you like and then suddenly actually see the horse just before smashing right into it.

Along with gymnastics went dancing for rhythm and flow for your floor routines, and yoga for strength and flexibility. Running for cardio. I spent hours every day on my sport, and I was as strong and fit as a girl could be. I took this business seriously.

I am a daughter among several sons and in my spare minutes I climbed trees, rode my bike and did tricks on my skateboard. Even handstands.

And then I discovered other ways to fill my time. Ways that did not always include academics. Ahem.

So it came to pass that I grew older, started wearing skirts and frocks and bikinis. I still wore short pants, but now very short and for an entirely different reason.

Days and months and years went by. I managed to stay in reasonable shape, though I think that was more residual from my youth than actual exercise. And then, one morning, I woke up and touching my toes was tough; climbing the hill made me pant; picking up anything heavier than a glass of wine was a stretch. Suddenly. Just like that (let this be a warning, kids!)

Enter CrossFit, the fastest way to get it all back, I was informed. And lots of the exercises came straight out of the gymnastics of my youth. Easy, I thought. I can do this. Muscle memory.

What they don't tell you is that muscles do not have the memory of elephants.

I joined a box, which is a gym in the arcane language of CrossFit. There is an instructor, though torturer

is more accurate an epithet. And there is equipment familiar to me: bars, pommels, rings. There is also equipment unfamiliar to me: large – very large – tyres, for instance.

No point in changing the habit of a lifetime and I did what I always do for everything. Jump right in. Except this is not a good strategy at CrossFit. There is a sign on the wall saying 'If you don't vomit you're not working hard enough' for a reason (to be clear, I only visited one box so I have no idea if this kind of all-in insanity is uniform across the CrossFit board).

And so off I went, balls to the wall, so to speak. I jumped, I ran, I did chin-ups, I carried heavy things. Snatch, clean and jerk. I threw up and got a high-five. That was day one.

Day two and three followed. By day four, I could actually physically see a difference in my body, as could my husband. It worked that quickly.

I quit on day five. It was just too damn hard. And my body was just too damn sore. A quiet little life seemed so much nicer. Does anyone have an exercise class that fits that description? Sign me up.

**On the subject of somersaults, I once went to a fancy dress party and one girl turned up in her swimsuit and sarong, clutching a container of Cerebos. I still think about that decades later. Best fancy dress costume ever.*

THAT TIME I STEPPED into the box

Let this be a cautionary tale: if you don't keep exercising, your body might forget how to

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