

## Reverie of a self-confessed gym adventurer

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By Kat Ricker

When I gush and glow over my life in weightlifting, I don't talk rattle off my competition stats, titles or records. Not that my modest achievements would mean much to anyone anyhow. When I want to talk lifting, I talk of my gym travels – the gyms I have known, the equipment I have used. I relate to the skiers and climbers who talk not of their high points, but the high points of where they've been. They've hit Hood and Everest; I've hit a gym in nearly every pocket of the Northwest.

I'm a junkie. When I travel on business, my idea of unwinding is to check out the local gym. I delight in seeing what kind of squatting they've got, what type of pull-up arrangement. I am gleeful when I stumble upon a chic, state-of-the-industry gym, with scalloped stainless steel wainscoting and tri-angular machines. My vista at the top of the ascent is the full-range, multi-angular, ergonomic device that most of the world only reads about in magazines. Give me eccentric loading capability and I am in heaven. If I don't have time or forbid – the energy – for a work out, I've even been known to stop into gyms just to get the tour. If I have to fake being a prospective member, I rise to the challenge. Just let me in.

I've been to Gold's Gyms and privately-owned bodyshops on the south coast, the midcoast, to the chains around Portland, to the earnest physical therapy/lifting combo outfits on the border of Idaho, to university weightrooms in Ohio, to YMCAs in Pennsylvania. I've lifted in a golf course fitness center and more hotels than I can count, from the west coast to NYC to Florida, and I've broken out my dumbbells outside my tent at sunset on windy South Dakota prairie.

I've used straight cast dumbbells, ergonomic handled dumbbells, dumbbells with rubber-coated ends and the square-plate dumbbells that can hold 2 to 100 pounds each. I am a connoisseur of cable pulleys. One look and I can tell whether the set-up is old and neglected enough to add 20 pounds to the marked weight amounts or whether it's the bliss of smooth-moving mechanical ease. I've worked out on machines like astronauts use, forcing air pressure for resistance, on digitally-controlled machines which allow me to program in what percentage of weight I load onto my eccentric versus concentric contractions. I've squatted on contraptions that load me vertically, horizontally and on a slant. And you know what? I can't get enough. At home, while channel-surfing, I pause the remote on makeover reality shows when gyms pop up in the background and subject my husband to flash reviews.

I don't know whether this addiction is shared by anyone else. With the exception of the Golds Gym on Venice Beach, there are few pilgrimages ensconced in the lifting tradition. I've yet to find anyone else to babble on with about gym travels and get drunk on equipment sightings. But I'd like the world of fringe athletes to know there is a different way of talking about one's lifting career. If surfers paint their histories in litanies of beaches and climbers of mountains, why not revere our activity of choice with the landmarks of our adventures, and show the world just how worldly we lifters can be? That it's so much more than a mirror and a trophy.

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