

2018 Courage Award Finalist

KRISTEN BERRY

BEFORE



AFTER



I learned life's most valuable lessons from a dumbbell. When I first began working out, I didn't have the perfect body, but still garnered just enough aesthetic attention in the gym to let it go straight to my head. Superficial vanity quickly became the driving force for my fitness goals.

Subconsciously, I was unhappy and insecure because I knew I was throwing away the essence of my true self, my intelligence, and my core values. I didn't like what I had become on the inside and nothing on my outside could make up for it. I grew increasingly ashamed with every bicep curl, every tricep extension, and all the other things I was doing to honor my outside at the cost of my inside.

By 2017, I had seen enough vanity in the gym and on social media to realize that true fitness is only sustainable through a healthy mind. On that notion, I wanted to do something different that others could relate to. I wanted to create something real beyond the mirror that could help every individual get in touch with their truest self in terms of fitness.

One night, I went to bed wracking my brain for ideas, and of course, fell asleep with no great revelations. However, the morning was a true eye-opener. I woke up with the words "Real Fit Expo" on my mind. There they were, out of the blue and I liked the sound of them! To this day, I know a higher source delivered those words.

Having no experience in launching a public event, I was afraid to begin the endeavor, to say the least. An acquaintance in the gym recommended a man named Richard Basantes, whom I was told might be able to

help me. I met with Mr. Basantes and we quickly went to work on my concept for Real Fit Expo. I wrote the website, he put it together, and before long, it was up and running. But the real work was yet to come.

My fears were huge when I first set out to find sponsors and exhibitors. All I knew was that I believed in my concept! At this point, my reasons for working out became more centered on who I am as a person. I began to worry less about looking perfect and more about helping others realize that fitness needs to be so much more than what we see in the mirror. I began to look at the dumbbells and the squat rack as extensions of my life, not anchors to my self-esteem. Along the way, I learned that courage is not solitary. It comes with being open to others' ideas and advice. Mr. Basantes taught me so much about courage and faith along the way, even during times when I was extremely worried and intolerably demanding. He became, and remains a mentor to me.

I am not the same person I was in 2017. For me, courage and true fitness happened when I faced my deepest truths. Is my body better? Maybe so, but my transformation came from much more than just picking up dumbbells. It came from the inside, where true power and courage resides in every one of us.

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