

The Walk

An Unexpected Lesson in Trying *Less*

By Katie Morton

I couldn't remember the last time I had an experience that was truly pure. I mean that that kind of experience that brings you *back* into your body, and you actually experience a moment in the present - yeah, that kind. I hadn't had one of those in a long, long time. Well, that is until just recently.

It wasn't one of those "treats" that you get when you work really hard and then are subsequently rewarded for hard-pressed efforts. And it also wasn't some self-improvement revelation that that I sought out for a long time until I graduated after years of relentless focus. This moment *found* me; and it serendipitously found me when I wasn't looking for anything or even *trying* to do anything in particular at all.

Golf has a way of seducing me; you see I find solace in the focus of a task, and golf is a breeding ground for "tasks". So naturally, whenever I feel overwhelmed or that I'm lacking control of my life, I gravitate towards golf. Now why in the *hell* would I, a self-proclaimed sane person, reach towards *golf of all things unyielding* for a sense of calmness and control? Golf. Fights. Back. Dumbass. You're having a shit day? What in the world makes you think you're not also going to have a shit day on the course? Now, I know this may not be the same for everyone, but it is how it typically plays out for me: All I wanted was to play hooky from real life for an afternoon, and golf in all it's callous glory, just loves to hold up that dirty mirror to my face and say: "hey! Here's one more thing you can't seem to get right". Seriously? Was it so much to ask that I get like, a couple hours of respite from my hot-garbage life? (Golf laughs) – apparently it was. When taking on one menial golf task to conquer for the day in the quest for victory over the daily grind – golf has a savage way of chuckling at your meager plea for sanity and order. Golf can be cold and indifferent in your hour of need. I live in Washington State, and in my experience thus far, golf is comically *not* the "tree in a forest (so ironically) full of them". Alas, I keep coming back.

So am I still at it? What does golf give back to me? To be honest, I haven't been golfing that long, so I really don't have an answer for that, yet. But what I *will* say, is that I keep TRYING. Trying what for? I couldn't say exactly, but damnit I'm going to do this with intention. I seem to arrive at the course each time with a different goal in mind and a set intention for what I wish to get out of my experience that day. And after each round, or grind at the range– golf seems to play the most confusing game of call and response, or rather bait and switch.

Alright, Sidebar - I had a yoga instructor in college that was in a sense, fantastic. She taught with disposition of a moody housecat, and I'll never forget her "realness" in such a devoted pedagogy. She showed us many things, but one day she led us in a practice that stood out so far to me; it was so *unlike* the practice of so many other sports, arts and hobbies I had taken up in the past. In this one lesson, she taught us how to approach each session, *not* by setting a deliberate intention, but

rather letting your practice meet *you* wherever you're at that day. To truly meditate in the present state of wherever (or whatever) you were at that day; and that is enough – and it is plenty. This lesson completely re-framed the idea of 'practice' for me: it wasn't about *trying* to morph into perfection, it was about trying *not* to fight your "realness" for that day. It was about being just what you are (happy, sad, tired, pissed-off...) and letting the practice flow through exactly that. You're happy go lucky that day? Have a joyful practice. Pissed-off about something at work? Have an angry session. Hungover and just want this practice to be over as soon as possible? Flow through your poses with the laziness of a post-big mac food coma. What this taught me is that although intention can be powerful and mindful exercise, it can also be a let-down. This happens when we aren't rewarded after expelling bounds of valiant effort and aren't emotionally grounded enough to understand *why*. But in the meantime, there's a lot of life yet to be played, so how do we just exist in the moment? Why is this so difficult? More easily said than done if you ask me. This is all relevant I promise. Alright, onward -

I haven't played all of the fanciest courses yet, and although I enjoy the rare experience of dabbling in the sexy destinations that golf has to offer, I find myself more focused on getting my money's worth at those courses, rather than actually enjoying the round. So, when I find my work schedule places me out in BFE Washington one week; I grabbed my golf buddy and dragged her in the car with me to visit a couple jobsites and squeeze in 1 round and a 1 night stay at Gamble Sands. I figure: when am I going to be out there again? I might as well sneak in a round at a course I'd been wanting to visit. Truth be told I had actually tried to plan several golf trips to this exact spot over the course of this year, but each attempt had fallen through for one reason or another. So call it fate, or don't call it anything, but this place had been calling out to me. And right when I had all but given up on my *intended* golf vacation, I instead settled for a one-night pit stop, just to say I had played it.

I'll spare the pleasantries of our stimulating check in process at the resort, and roll right into the good stuff - Now I'm on the first tee box. My friend and I got paired up with a couple of older gentlemen who were nice enough. It was early September and the weather was great, albeit windy. We put on some music in the cart, grabbed some drinks and set out. It honestly didn't hit me at first, but the details of this experience would soon enough be deafening my senses in an otherwise silent place. Everything about this day was so *un-intentional*, and yet it was perfectly designed to give me exactly what I had been missing for so long. The warm sun on my skin, the chirp of a single cricket, and the spectacular views. Good Lord, those views; a sprawling high desert course reigning over acres of lush orchards grazing the banks of the Columbia River. The sky and surrounding hillsides painted in oranges, pinks, and golds. The warm breeze figuratively *blowing away* the pervasive thoughts of everyday life, (and believe me, they were doing everything they possibly could pull me away from this dreamscape) needless to say, they didn't stand a chance. There was literally nothing that could take me away from this moment. It was like the rest of the world had fallen away, and smack dab in the middle of this ubiquitous view, I found myself again. I found myself in this moment, or rather, *it* found *me*. It was like the universe singled me out and ripped the blinders off. This random whimsy decision, lacking zero intention, brought one of the most 'in-body' experiences I have ever had. A true moment of singularity when I could sense everything happening to me all at once. The sights, the sounds, the company, the smell, each of these feelings all wrapping me up in one big memory hug, that I might try to stay in forever. It was the greatest gift. I did not *set intention* on this moment or these feelings, I did not spend hours grinding at the range to "*earn*" myself a treat at this fancy

course. I certainly didn't *try* to have this experience. The universe just decided that it was my time; It was my time to come back to earth and be reminded of the beauty of "realness" that one random day at the golf course can bring. I was just a real person that day, passing through on my way to work, checking something off my list – just doing things I might have been doing on any other ordinary day; and then all at once it became *extraordinary*.

It wasn't until I got home that I learned that this kind of experience not uncommon place to the seasoned golfer. And although everyone's story is different, those who have had the pleasure of this special kind of round say that it redefines or mayhap defines why they continue to play this ridiculous sport. While unpacking my car and grabbing a much-needed bite to eat after hours in the car, my husband asked me about my round. As I am trying to describe my experience, I can see his leading questions are more subjective than usual, and his shared joy of my responses are obvious in the smile spreading across his face. We finished our conversation and I headed off to bed, writing off his excitement as genuine sympathetic joy. I would later learn that he had sensed my revelation and was conducting a harmless albeit sincere inquiry, that what I had experienced was more than just a round of golf. He later regaled my storytelling at a gathering of friends a few days later and in an excited tone he shares: "Oh, she had '*The Walk*'". So, it has a name, as simple as it is important. I will forever be changed by 'The Walk', and although one could wish this feeling for every round, I don't think I'll spend my efforts *trying* to chase this elusive dream. It is not something I was looking for to begin with. My efforts are better spent writing down this memory and trying to preserve some little piece of heaven that was given to me that day. And in the meantime, I will *try*, to *try less*.