

Whistling in the dark



One of my inspirations for true courage is my BFF Kerri, who is a survivor of stage four breast cancer.

I used to think I was pretty fearless. Until I was thrown into a boxing ring for *Fighting Fit Dubai*. It was my first time *ever* fighting in a ring, and as my friend Matt (who is also taking part) puts it, it's "like nothing else you have ever experienced, ever." Prior to this, most of my fears hadn't really been on the physical side. I've never freaked out too much about ziplining or swimming in the open sea (even if it was a little jarring the first time I swam with a shark, even if it was a tiny, harmless reef one!). I'm actually somewhat afraid of heights, and despite the fact that I'm a true lover of the ocean, the creatures of the deep sea have always scared me a little—yet, odd as it may sound, that's also probably a key reason why I've jumped heedlessly into the waters of Sumatra, or climbed up about 660 feet to the top of Sri Lanka's Sigiriya Rock: If I'm afraid of something, I want to confront it, because how else am I going to learn how to conquer it? After all, it's why our brains are hard-wired with a "fight or flight" response system—from an

evolutionary perspective, experiencing fear is what helps to protect us from predators and other threats to our survival. To never feel that emotion would be more of a shortcoming than a strength, since we would thus never undergo the adaptive and transformative process that it triggers, in the

hopes of eventually making us stronger. The key is in learning to face it, rather than let it dominate you. Unfortunately, in the modern day, our fears tend to come in more shapes than the primitive versions, and fighting certain fears, like the lingering and often soul-destroying worry of financial strain, the pressure of a bad work environment, or suffering from the complexities of a negative relationship, can be a lot harder on our primal instincts than, say, facing a sabre-toothed tiger. We often forget that our emotional threats can be just as scary, if not altogether more terrifying, since they're so intangible. Personally, I've always been more afraid of the dark places my mind can take me than the physical, be it the thought of letting people in past the barriers I've spent years building up, watching people I love suffer when I feel powerless to help or change it, or even admitting some feelings to myself, like how I really feel about certain people. But like everything else that gives us the heebie-jeebies, even when it comes to our emotions, it's important to feel the fear and do it anyway, in order to overcome and conquer. And while I don't always subscribe to the "Fake it til you make it" school of thought—I'm a stickler for authenticity—this is one situation in life where I can fully get behind that idea. It's how I do it anyway—I tell myself I'm not afraid, again and again, until I can psych myself up enough to get through whatever it is that scares me—and hopefully, if I do that enough times, I won't be afraid of it any more. As Breast Cancer Awareness Month, October is a month synonymous with courage to me: I can only imagine how tough it must be to stay strong, in every way, while you're fighting any kind of disease where your body feels like it's betraying you, and I'm in awe of anyone doing so. And as for that boxing ring—I'm still wincing for days every time I'm punched in the face at a sparring session or worse, the fight showdowns; but just like my other fears, I've just got to suck it up and face it. Literally, in this case. What makes you feel ferocious? Tell us about it online at @womenshealthme, and we'll catch you in November!

Yi-hwa

YI-HWA HANNA
Editor-in-Chief
yihwa.hanna@itp.com

TIME FOR A CHANGE

IF YOU HAVE...

15 SECONDS

Chuck some flax seeds into your breakfast, be it your morning smoothie, or even the batter for your protein pancakes, for a kick of Omega-3s and more, then mark these recipes for later. "Flax and Figures," p.82

5 MINUTES

Spend a few extra minutes in front of the mirror when you're getting ready, giving yourself a power brow with these clever products for an instantly more youthful look. "Bold and Beautiful," p.28

15 MINUTES

Grab a pair of weights and get ready to work up a sweat doing this quickie circuit that will work your core and your stamina, and leaving you more toned and taut. "Breaking? Bad," p.63

30 MINUTES

Next time you look at your phone, hold it higher up so it's in line with your face, then try these simple moves to ease stress and strain, neck pain and more. "Do You Have Tech Neck?," p.72

60 MINUTES

Making the most of the cooler weather's return by throwing an outdoor party? Try these tips to spruce up your next get-together, while saving cash to boot. "Girl, Chill" p.96

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