

CrossFit Rope

Heart pounding, hands blistered and a sharpie in my mouth, I slowly climbed the twenty feet of rope to the ceiling of my gym, CrossFit Seattle. The words “free t-shirt” repeatedly rang in my head. I had to do it!

I tentatively raised a trembling hand, grabbed the sharpie from my mouth, uncapped the pen, and reached for the ceiling.

“Come on Rachel!” I heard from below.

Come on, hand! I chanted in my mind, willing my hand to be steady as I reached towards the ceiling.

Unfortunately my hand had a mind of its own and I couldn’t get it to cooperate. As the pen touched the ceiling, my hand jerked slightly, scrawling swirling black scribbles across the white ceiling. Then the fingers twitched and the pen fell far below. Failure.

“It’s ok Rachel, try it again!” my trainers Nancy, Dave, and Scott encouraged me as I climbed down the rope, feeling slightly defeated.

Attempt number two. I regained my strength and began the ascent. *This* time was different. I knew this would be it; I had uncapped the sharpie *before* climbing. As I neared the top of the rope, my hands began to shake even harder. *No!* I cried in my head. Again, I reached for the ceiling, fingers shaking, pen wobbling. The tip of the sharpie gently touched the surface, and for a second, I thought, “*What should I write?*”

I-Z-Z-O.

I scrawled it fast across the ceiling and immediately dropped the pen to the floor. Success!

I quickly slipped down the rope, smiling.

Scott and Dave looked up at the ceiling. “What does that say?” they asked.

You’ve got to be kidding me, I thought. “I-Z-Z-O!” I announced, proudly. “My last name ... “

“You can barely read it!” Dave replied.

“Don’t make me do it again,” I said, warningly.

Looking from one to the other, I gave a helpless shrug, grabbed the pen from the floor, and tried to regain my strength for my third and final attempt.

This time, as I reached the top of the rope, I thought, “My hands will *not* be able to manage this.” Slowly, inch by inch, I crept closer to the top.

“Come on, Rachel!” I again heard from far below.

My trembling hand reached for the ceiling yet again; one finger slipped. *No! I can't lose the pen!* I regained my grip, held the point of the sharpie to the already-scribbled-on surface, and willed my wrist to make the movements of my name.

R-A-C-H-E-L. *Yes!*

The pen fell to the floor, and I gave a whoop of delight as I slid down the rope, sure that this was success at last!

“Looks like you get your shirt now!” Nancy said, as she went to the back of the room to get my shirt.

Although climbing a rope might seem an unnecessary way to prove yourself, that arduous experience truly crowned the time I have spent at CrossFit Seattle, and I realize how difficult it will be to leave one of the many places I truly call “home.” I first came to the gym as an injured, freshman gymnast, expecting to receive a good workout, but nothing more. I was wrong. Over the past three years, I gained much more than good workouts and a stronger build. For one thing, CrossFit has given me a new sense of self-confidence. People of all ages and sizes flock to this gym; for the first time in my life, I do not have to worry about what I look like, what I wear, how I compare to everyone else. Sure, everyone “competes” against each other during timed workouts ... but this is a friendly competition, one where everyone is in it together. No matter how strong or weak a person is, she can do the workout, and accomplish an enormous amount in the process.

I now know how important it is to be a part of a team, and the enormous difference it makes in a person's workout when someone is there to cheer you on. Even if I come in last place, there is always a smiling “congratulations” to reward me at the end. This encouragement, in turn, has taught me to be as positive as I possibly can in any activity I do. If someone is having a difficult time, a simple “You can do it! You're doing a great job!” can do wonders. The sense of community and family is truly evident in this place as well – I genuinely view many members as part of my family, and I know that

they would say the same of me. As one of my trainers says, ““When you're all working out in a group, and when you're all suffering as a group, you become one with each other,” and it’s true. No matter how short lived the “suffering” is, even if it’s only suffering through a difficult workout, the sense of community created is really unlike anything I have ever experienced.

Through CrossFit, I have come to realize that I flourish most in a tight-knit community, which is why I hope to spend the next four years at Pomona. Pomona has the perfect environment for me – small classes, interactions with a variety of people, challenging material, the sense of family. I know that I thrive in these types of environments, and I can bring an enormous amount of positive energy to it. No matter how long, high, or slippery the challenge is, or how blistered my hands become, I will always attempt to reach the top, and leave my mark on every rope that life throws at me.

Rachel Izzo

October 2007