

The Sport That Made Me

Imagine waking up in pain, the physical and mental kind, just to go through it again the next and each day after. It is like walking into the same battle with sweaty palms and calloused hands, ripping to expose the red, throbbing flesh bleeding underneath. . .the cracking of your joints with every move becomes the background noise to the burning in your lungs.

Tears of pain cascading down your face blending in with the beads of sweat. Your body contorts in ways that shouldn't be humanly possible, but are made possible. A new muscle aches every day - it's abuse that you willingly sign up for.

One wrong foot or hand placement could be the difference between going home or to the hospital. The sound of bodies hitting mats with breaking bones and perfect form is a tune all too familiar. When your lungs are set on fire and you want to drop to the floor, you keep going that extra 30 seconds. Your legs project you high into the air, doing moves some only dream about. The equipment snaps and cracks with your weight, all while you put your life in the hands of a piece of wood.

You strap leather to your wrist, watching it take away what's left of your skin every time you move. Being latched to the bar with plastic no bigger than a pen is what keeps you alive.

You are a broken puzzle held together by pieces of tape.

Sweat constantly drips down your body, creating a glossy shine as the salt drips into your eyes. The feeling of nausea becomes normal and expected. The air is foggy and thick, full of chalk that clings to your sweat-drenched body. Your mouth is sandpaper, begging for water to fill the cracks. Every day your body goes through the same cycle, but the mental battle is a different story.

You play these mind games with yourself knowing that every moment could be the last. That stress is enough to exhaust even the toughest man. You try and tell yourself that you're not afraid, but you can't trick yourself that easily.

No matter how hard you try and push the fear to the depths of your soul, it crawls its way back up every time, making you doubt yourself and if you are ever going to be good enough.

It's worth it because when you are standing on top, even if only once, the long, hard days seem bearable.

It's in that moment you realize that all the times your body was screaming to stop were worth it. The mornings of getting up before the sun had risen and the earth had awakened were worth it. The pain you felt rushing from your toes to your head when you moved didn't seem so bad. The hours you let go to spend in the gym don't seem wasted. You knew why you never gave up every time you swore you would. You realized you have to give everything you have to get what you want.

This is gymnastics.

