

Why Do We Fight?

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In my hands was a worn out, beaten-in sixteen ounce white pair of boxing gloves that had been sitting on my desk for months. Those gloves were a gift from a close friend of mine. In my time of need, they literally went to war with me, as I shed my blood, sweat and tears. On my lonely nights, those gloves were a friend where I could tell them all my secrets from deep within, as well as all my happy moments and my sins, and although they couldn't understand, at least I could pretend. In my senior year of high school, I'd stopped all communication with any and everybody, and substituted them with drugs and alcohol. From any point of view, I was broken. The fire and desire to live was put out, and even from a physical point of view, I lost myself and gained forty pounds, but I overcame that. This is my journey through hell: how a pair of boxing gloves upset my depression and struggles over drugs and alcoholism.

Throughout high school, I had always been quite the optimistic lad. I finished top ten percent of my graduating class without really putting much effort. After graduation, I sought after my own maturation by reflecting on my past, as well as the decisions I'd made. I started to be less active throughout the winter, and would stay home sleeping and listening to music rather than making plans to see people. Throughout the entirety of January 2018, I made no effort to communicate or seek anyone's time. I really began to distance myself from the world because I realized that some people come into your life for a season and that others come for a reason.

You won't always find the latter, but when you do, you'll know.

I began to feel the first real stages of depression (sleepiness and lack of energy) setting in, and the isolation, as well as my dependence on drugs, added more to the fire. I refused to surround myself with anyone, as I felt remote from any typical humor or emotions. I couldn't feel anything when I was all the way up in the clouds, but as soon as sobriety came around the corner, it had felt like I hit rock bottom. I began to need something else in my life that the narcotics couldn't do, and that's when I began to abuse alcohol. Just like drugs, it would feel as if I would hit rock bottom once I was sober. I began to drink more and more, and I fell deeper and deeper into the hole I dug myself into. After approximately half a year passed, something inside of me just went dull; that will and desire to live was put out like a fire in the dark. I knew I wanted to put an end to all the suffering by ending my life there, but before I could pull the plug on myself, I had remembered the ten years I had spent in Catholic school.

This pivotal moment is what led me to my renewed religious beliefs and finally had me put down the drugs and alcohol, believing I had a bigger purpose in my life. I found my faith in God, comprehending that only His strongest soldiers get the worst missions; God never challenges you to do anything you are not capable of overcoming, and finally realizing that is what brought me over my hump. I used to feel alone, but knowing God is always by my side, watching me from above was a

wake up call to do more with my life that I was blessed to have. That fire began to light again right before the year came to a close. What I did, changing my lifestyle and making better decisions, wasn't for anyone else, but it was for me.

I finally sought the help I desperately needed and began to talk about my problems. I told myself that, after having such a downward year, no matter what, 2019 would only go up from there. I began to see small improvements from the daily progress I was seeing from myself in the mirror, and slowly dig myself out of the tunnel I dug myself into. People always tend to neglect mental health, but that's what will make or break you. The physical aspect of my journey was the easy part, because the body is built to adapt. Everyday, I'd try to push my limits to make myself a better person than the one I was the day before. I began to get up in the morning and run, even when the pain wanted me to stop. I felt my lungs winded, and my legs dragged like anchors on a ship. Running is more of a mental obstacle than people believe. Running is simply putting one foot in front of the other, but when you're five, six, or even seven miles in, each step feels like an eternity, and each leg tries to drag you down and pull you back as they become heavier and heavier.

Even in those moments, I knew this was only going to get more and more difficult, but I strived to achieve more and become someone I could be proud of. I eventually decided to challenge myself in a way I had never done before. I joined Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn, home of some of the most iconic boxers to ever set foot in the ring: Mike Tyson, Muhammad Ali, and many more. Seeing the history of the sport displayed by the newspapers plastered on those walls inspired me to keep fighting, both physically and mentally. Seeing the sweat and the hard work put in by each fighter every single day taught me to take things one step, one punch, and one round at a time. Even when the odds were stacked against my favor, I knew that if I fell nine times, I had to get up ten times. Those gloves began to symbolize the will and desire to continuously try to fight whatever I'm faced against, whether or not the odds are stacked against me. I'm constantly fighting, whether it be another man stepping foot in the ring with me, or my own mind. Through it all, I've grown to realize that life's toughest battles are fought daily in your own mind.

I view sobriety from drugs and alcohol, as well as my battle against my own mind, as my greatest opponent. I've sparred against professional fighters, but at the end of the day, my task was to get them out of the way, because it's me against myself. With all the trash talk and mental games I've experienced in boxing, nothing compares to the mental challenges I've faced abstaining from the substances I was once hooked on. I used to feel as if I was fighting a losing battle, losing round after round, one round to substances and another to depression. I felt the weight of the world pressing down on me whenever I would try to move a single muscle in my body merely an inch. I felt as if my soul had left my body and that I no longer saw any reason to continue living. Those gloves had me pushing and pushing; even though I was constantly facing one obstacle after another, I learned to be persistent. Today, I'm proud to say that I have won my battle against substances and depression, as this time last year was when I decided to turn my life around for the better.

Despite everything that I've faced, I'm glad to have went through my trials and tribulations. Those gloves began to inspire me every morning to run, hit the heavy bag, or step foot in the weight room. I enjoyed the process more and more as I

began to savor the moment and appreciate the journey, rather than focus solely on the destination. I think about how far I've come, not only as a boxer, but as a person. By picking up those white gloves up off my desk, I learned more about myself and sprouted my wings, to achieve new heights I once deemed impossible. I've learned to kill my demons and to not let my past entangled with drugs and alcohol affect the person I am today. I've learned to take care of myself, learned the value of my body, my mind, and my soul.