

Trading a wedding ring for a boxing ring

Story by Marty Gervais

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She practically left the guy at the altar: She had sensed something had gone awry in their relationship.

And so she called off the wedding. Took everyone by surprise, only a week and a half before she was to walk up to the altar, only a week and a half before she was to be feted at the Ciciario Club.

She called it off.

Two month later Claudia Renkwitz discovered her fiancé had been carrying on with someone else while she was engaged.

That was nearly two year ago. And there she was in her car one afternoon driving and smarting over his infidelities, smarting over her naivete, yet sensing she had done the right thing, but never realizing how much her life was about to change..

Silver Medal

How this would lead her to the boxing ring, to winning a silver medal at the nationals, to working out her demons, to dealing with that whole business of loyalty and trust and honesty, and the things she grew up believing in , and knowing to be right.

I caught Claudia sparring in the ring one night. The sweat ran down her face. She smiled. Leaned on the ropes to catch her breath. Her brown eyes glistened and brightened as she told me why se got into boxing. How on afternoon as she drove by the Windsor Amateur Boxing Club on Grove Ave., and had been fuming bout her ex, she decided to step inside and meet Charlie Stewart.

Something told her to strap on the gloves and get into the ring.

Stewart figured Claudia wouldn't last. He then watched in awe as she worked the heavy bag as if it were the body bag of her ex. All that pent-up fury, sweat pouring off her, eyes flashing.

"I had to work out all my frustrations"

And when Stewart tossed her in the ring to spar with a title holder, he figured that would scare her off. "She really beat me up, and my nose was bloody," Claudia told me.

In a curious way, it also relieved her of the demons that tormented her.

"I got this rush and each time I go in there now, I feel the same thing... It's like life in a small way, with all its ups and downs..."

For Claudia, boxing is that dance for life, that dance in the ring, the microcosm of the bigger things going on in her life, that place to work out the problems, to dream, to come alive in a new way.

"It's also that rush - I love it."

A little bruised

Stewart, who has coached many local boxers to championships, was surprised Claudia returned the following day. Albeit a little bruised maybe, but nonetheless energized, eager to take on the world.

Claudia looks back at two years of fighting. She's now 10 and 5. Never ben KO'd. And still has managed to keep her nose from being broken.

However, her mother still isn't entirely convinced. She still disapproves of her daughter boxing. That's why it wasn't until after her first fight did Claudia finally tell her parents.

And last December when Claudia won the silver medal in the bantam weight in British Columbia, her mother finally went to watch her daughter box.

However she saw very little of the fight. Most of the time she was cringing and sliding down in her seat because she couldn't stand seeing someone hitting her daughter.

So comical was her mother's behaviour that a Vancouver newspaper photographer that day captured not Claudia boxing, but her mother sinking lower and lower in a ringside seat.

Red blur

Claudia's father on the other hand is always there. Perhaps recognizing a little of himself in his daughter, and remembering his own youthful battles in the ring in Quebec where he grew up.

I watched Claudia working the speed bag - how it became red blur, as her hands pummeled it.

I saw this little bit of irony in her life.

Here was a young woman, 26 years old, with fist that can slam against you like cement blocks.

Here was a woman with an iron will, enough to leave a man at the altar. A woman with enough resolve to turn bitterness into punches, into a career of beating up opponents.

Then this. Here was a boxer, opening up the most unlikely business for a fighter - a Tecumseh Road shop, The Unique Bridal Boutique,

A fitting end.