



SPLAT!

ORANGETHEORY FITNESS BEGINNERS *for*

JOURNEY OF A
RELUCTANT
COUCH
POTATO

MINDY CRARY

Copyright

Kindle Publishing Package

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Introduction

Full disclosure: I didn't really know what I was getting into.

I started on the rower because I had never rowed before . . . I knew roughly what the tread and weight room had in store for me, but the rower was the big mystery. It's not like I had ever actively sought out rowing; hell, I wasn't even row-curious. Very quickly—*moments* into the warmup—I could tell that rowing was *not* going to be my thing. For the warmup, we rowed for two to three minutes, and I was already exhausted. Thank goodness we were moving into the weight room.

Push-ups . . . I was not crazy about those. Upper body strength had never really been a priority for me. We did some stuff I was sort of familiar with, like a chest press and a tricep thing, but we were supposed to be increasing reps as we went along, and I was barely getting the minimum done. Luckily, no one was sitting there monitoring my rep count, so I just went with it until my muscles started to burn.

Squat jacks?! Nope, nope . . . nope. I would not hop around like an idiot. Luckily, I didn't have to: I did the modified, squat-steppified version. I was feeling pretty good about myself until we went *back* to the rowers. Dammit, I thought we were done with the rower! Why do forty-five seconds seem like forever when you're rowing, but then a thirty-second recovery seems like *nothing*? This workout exists outside of normal space and time.

Thank *GOD* we went back to the weight room. This time we did leg stuff and used this TRX thing; I was suspicious that it wouldn't hold my weight, but it did. It was sort of a mixed blessing, I suppose, because then I had to do the exercises that went with it.

Finally: the treadmills! I had used treadmills in the past, so I was feeling pretty confident for the first minute—maybe I'd be a power walker (PW)! But then I lost ALL confidence. First of all, my fastest walking speed wasn't even listed on the guide that was posted on the treadmill. I was walking, like, just a little over half the speed of the slowest speed listed. And then, oh my gosh, what is even happening?! You have to pay attention to the coach as she calls out the workout minute-by-minute and second-by-

second. We only did things for one minute, then forty-five seconds, then thirty seconds—the whole time, I had to punch my incline up and down!

Between the treadmill blocks we could get these things called walking recoveries, which meant that, just as I was about to have a heart attack, I could slow down for a bit. For the entire minute recovery, I was gulping air and trying to pull myself together. I wasn't quite recovered enough to take a sip of water but was just getting there when we were thrust back into it again. And why were the all-outs (AO) longer than the pushes? Shouldn't the harder thing have been shorter?

I am not a violent person, but I started feeling violent. Maybe I was just angry with myself, but in my head, I was hulking out over my annoyance with this coach WHO WOULDN'T LET US BREATHE'. What was the coach even telling us?! I know she was trying to be inspiring, because she was saying things like:

"Don't let your mind get in the way of what your body can do!"

"If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't CHANGE you!"

"You can do anything for thirty seconds!" (Can I, though?).

And, finally:

"This is your last thirty-second all-out: fifteen seconds left. If you've got a bump, take the bump, you've got this . . . Hold onto it for ten more seconds . . . and three, two, one, we're done!"

Oh my gosh . . . I punched the down arrow on my treadmill until I was going slowly enough that it didn't feel like I would fly off the back of the treadmill if I let go. I mean, honestly, I was going so, SO slowly compared to everyone else that the treadmill probably would have just gently deposited me off the back.

That was quite possibly the most difficult twenty-four minutes of cardio I had ever done on a treadmill. Okay: anywhere. There's a lake near my house that I can walk around in roughly forty-five minutes, so I wasn't *inert* or anything before this workout. But HOLY COW.

Sweat was pouring out of me; I didn't know I could sweat so much. I looked like I'd just taken a shower fully clothed. My only consolation was that everyone looked as thrashed as I did.

What was I doing? Where the hell was I? Who were these people high-fiving each other and (I kid you not) looking happy as they killed themselves on the treadmill? What just happened?

I'd just completed my first Orangetheory Fitness workout, that's what.

This isn't a book about weight loss. I mean, based on my body composition, it totally *should* be about weight loss, but that came later—much later.

This isn't a book about self-actualizing into your absolute best. I am not going to Oprah, Tony Robbins, or Eckhart Tolle you into suddenly loving exercise and, when you look up six months from now, you probably won't find yourself Instafamous and shopping for a new wardrobe.

This isn't that kind of a book because, for the majority of us, real life doesn't actually work that way.

This book is about that mental inner dialogue that we all carry around with us when we try to do something difficult or physically hard. Because guess what? Your workouts never stop being hard, but with each one, you start to accomplish more and more.

Change is hard. We have room for maybe two or three priorities in our lives and everything else just doesn't get our A+ effort.

This is about someone who accidentally stumbled into somehow giving her best.

This is a book for people who have a lot going on in their lives. This is for all of those people who might feel intimidated by the thought of getting out there and trying something new (goodness knows I

was). This book is for people of all shapes and sizes and backgrounds and ideas . . . people who are looking for a way to get healthier. Sure, it might turn into something more at some point, but right now, I get it; as important as your personal health and wellness are, at this moment, they might just be yet another plate you keep spinning in the air alongside six others.

This is a book about starting where you're at and being okay with that.

Oh, and BTW, I am not telling you how to actually *do it*—that looks a little different for each of us. This book is a compilation of my Facebook posts about my particular process. They show how much I struggled, but the real reason I am making them available to a wider audience is because I discovered that, regardless of where you're at in your fitness journey, you will struggle. You will have negative thoughts about your workout. And that perfect person you see next to you on the treadmill? They have negative thoughts too. They struggle too.

And that is okay.

Not a doctor

This is my official “If you go and get yourself killed, don't come running to me!” disclosure. I'm not a doctor, nor am I any kind of healthcare professional. You should never, *ever* take my word for anything health-related. Seriously, I have no idea.

One of the most valuable things you can do in our crazy world of healthcare is find a doctor who will care enough about your health to be your advocate. I was lucky in 2017 to find that person, and she made me strong enough (caring for my low thyroid issue) that I was able to think about doing more physically for the first time in several years.

Without that support? I'd still be stumbling around, spending 100 percent of my energy trying to keep those plates spinning, not even thinking about adding new ones.

Where I started

January 2018: I felt DONE with everything I had tried in the exercise and weight-loss world. I had tried the 10,000 steps; I'd tried the food programs, diets, keto, intermittent fasting, mindfulness . . . and nothing had been sustainable for me. Whenever I lost weight, I was petrified that I'd gain it back; my mood was tied to the scale. I had been exercising (well, what I'd *thought* was exercising before I met Orangetheory) but I was still obese and nothing was really changing for me. I wasn't sticking with anything consistently because I wasn't seeing results.

Another big revelation for me, learned from years of failure: I need a group exercise program. I need the accountability of showing up at specific times and getting it done. On top of that, I need to get it done in the morning, before I get worn out from my other daily obligations. Everybody has their own parameters and personality but, for me, finally accepting this about myself took care of 50 percent of the reasons for my past failures. If I don't build it into my schedule, it doesn't happen. It's as simple as that.

Oddly, finding a group exercise class first thing in the morning was sort of hard. I first looked to the local YMCA, looking for Zumba classes and a few other similar options, but there was nothing offered early enough in the morning. I knew I didn't have the motivation to go after work.

As I was talking this over with my friend Sarah toward the end of 2017, she encouraged me to check out Orangetheory Fitness (OTF). She was and is what I call a freak of nature—she goes to OTF every day. A superuser, if you will. But, as gorgeous as Sarah is, I could relate to her because she doesn't come off like a gym rat or a fitness buff who spends hours and hours working out. She's real, in the best possible way. She recommended OTF because she said, "It keeps me consistent."

I thought at the time that it sounded interesting. I'd seen the fitness people on Instagram who looked as if they worked out constantly. Even Sarah's habit of going seven days a week seemed inconceivable to me. But I did like the idea of consistency . . . my own consistency didn't need to look like Sarah's. I decided at that moment that, for me, consistency was a three-days-per-week schedule. I mean, the perfectionist in me totally screamed, "That's not enough!" but when had my crazy-ass

perfectionist brain ever been right? Three times per week was three more times per week than I had been exercising!

Why Orangetheory Fitness

After hearing about OTF from Sarah, I checked it out online. It seemed . . . intense. There were some science-y explanations that I didn't really care about. The core concept is that you wear their heart rate monitor and, when your heart rate is above a certain level, you get a splat point. To quote from its website:

Orangetheory Fitness is a 5-zone heart rate-based interval training class comprised of both cardio and strength training. During a workout, members focus on Zones 3 (challenging but doable), 4 (uncomfortable), and 5 (all-out/sprint effort). These are individually calculated for each Orangetheory Fitness member before class. The workouts are designed to produce 12 minutes or more in Zones 4 and 5 combined during the workout. The goal of this is to achieve EPOC (Excess Post-Exercise Oxygen Consumption).¹

Part of the workout is on a rower, part on a treadmill, and part of it involves lifting weights and completing bodyweight exercises. Vaguely, I wondered if there was any way I would ever enjoy rowing? Eh.

It seemed like maybe it wasn't for me because I am not very athletic. (I mean, let's be real . . . is NEGATIVE ATHLETIC a thing? If there was a continuum of behavior, I would be 100 miles past Couch Potato).

However, OTF had both cardio and strength training elements, which I knew was a good thing (even in my limited knowledge of fitness). In case you don't know anything about OTF, they have *rowers, weights, and treadmills*, and each workout is split between those three elements in varied and creative ways *<insert evil laugh here>*.

¹ <https://www.orangetheoryfitness.com/faq>

And you have to understand my state of mind. My health has always been important to me, but due to several chronic conditions, it was a constant battle that I was endlessly losing. When you've been failing at the two most fundamental paths to good health—eating right and moving consistently—and you *know* you need to do *something*, you become a bit desperate.

I already knew that, philosophically, I wasn't going to get weight loss surgery or embark upon yet another drastic diet. I knew that, unless I was willing to alter my lifestyle, nothing was going to work long term. Was I willing to alter my lifestyle? I didn't know . . . because who knew what it would take? I sure didn't. I just knew I couldn't keep doing what I was doing.

I had already given up on changing my life drastically; I was just looking to be more physically fit and healthier, even if weight loss was a nonstarter. I was also highly suspicious of anything described as “life-changing.” At this point, I was thinking, “Eff it, I might as well try this and see how it goes—anything is better than everything staying the same.”

So really, with the knowledge that my local OTF 1) had a schedule of classes I could plug into and 2) would meet my basic need for cardio and weights, I went for my first class. Their studio was literally minutes from my home (in Seattle, Washington, United States).

WTF?

That first session—the one I described earlier—was . . . interesting. The location manager was super nice, and really helped me get organized and ready for my first class. The coach took over before class and made sure I understood how to use the rower and the treadmill. She explained the layout and how all of the stations were numbered. *Here's your heart rate monitor.* Very straightforward.

But OH MY GOD. THE WORKOUT. Do I know how to row without smooshing my belly? No, no I don't. Can I do squat jacks? What's a freaking burpee? Wait, WHUT are we supposed to be doing on the treadmill? Inclines? What are those?

The coach was very helpful: she demonstrated ways of modifying each exercise and checked in a lot, even though during the cardio portions of the workout I could barely speak. I was clinging onto the

treadmill for dear life as the coach gently told me I could slow it down if it was going too fast for me. It was humiliating personally, but she said it in such a way that I knew she wasn't talking down to me, she was just . . . giving me options.

I am not even sure I was conscious for that first class. I remember thinking, "This-is-only-an-hour-this-is-only-an-hour" the entire time. I have no idea how many splat points I got that first time because I was so overwhelmed by everything we were doing that I didn't keep score. I couldn't do even half of it, but I kept going.

The cool part of it? Everyone was off in their own little world doing their own workout. No one watched me or even cared what I was doing. We were together in a group, but each of us was totally focused on our own thing.

Later, my OTF friend Pia, who was also there for my first class, told me, "I don't know why you came back; on your first day, that was a really, *really* hard workout. If it had been me, I never would have come back!"

But I did. It was the hardest workout I had ever done, but . . . *I did it*. They allowed me to modify weight room exercises and I could be a power walker on the treads (and go slow enough that I didn't have to hang on when the incline went too high). I could slow down and do less when it came to reps of different exercises. I could go lighter on weights. There were people in the class with injuries who required even more modifications and adjustments. The rowers . . . well, the rowers and I have a complicated relationship.

The point was, I could, in theory, physically do everything they were asking of me; my fitness level was the only barrier. For the first time, I was intrigued by the idea of accomplishing something physical. Previously, I'd seen exercise only as a tool for weight control. I wouldn't say I was motivated by the idea of lifting heavier or getting better on the rower or treadmill, but I knew from this point forward that it would never be as hard as it was that first time. So, if, "Please God, let this never be as hard as it was today," counts as motivation, so be it.

I signed up that very same day (a little afraid that if I thought too hard about it, I might not come back). I made it my goal to not prejudge or expect anything except for personal consistency: I would go three days per week. I figured if I only focused on consistency instead of specific results, that would help me detach from the outcome. Since I knew that OTF was good for me, regardless of my ultimate weight or any specific physical achievement, I felt like it was important to only focus on showing up.

The first six months

Looking back, I can't even tell you about the progress or ideas I had in those first months because I was committed to only one goal: going three times per week. I admit I didn't progress as quickly as I wanted to in any particular area. I knew that I liked Station 10 the best because it was in the corner, so if I needed an extra rest break, I could lie back there behind my weight bench in my own private little nook and no one was the wiser. Actually, no . . . the coach was probably onto me but let it slide; she knew I was giving it my best.

I didn't weigh myself those first six months either, because again, that number was not relevant to my commitment of going *three times per week*. See what I did there? I only had one thing I had to do each week . . . or, rather, three things. Eh. I was afraid weighing myself would send me in the wrong direction. However, I did notice that my clothes were fitting better—or, rather, looser.

Another thing that I have come to realize about those first six months or so: that was the slog. You know how sometimes you have to do something and just get it done whether you like it or not? But then, after a while, you get to a point where you can do it and not have as many feelings about it? I think, in retrospect, it was good that I didn't really assess or judge or decide anything in those first six months.

I admit I didn't really get to know many people during those first six months. I'm shy and an introvert at the best of times; I am the dork who, when someone says "Hi," responds with "Fine!" That's right: because I'm so frequently surprised by human interaction, I mentally jump past greetings to the part of the conversation where they ask me how I am. Yeah, I am super cool. So, to navigate my social awkwardness and make sure it didn't interfere with my schedule, I didn't participate in any of the OTF

monthly challenges. Everything was subordinate to going three days per week. Did I mention three days per week?

That said, I am pathologically incapable of not showing up to things early, so I was usually the first there for my 7:30 AM class, chatting (awkwardly) with the front desk people and smiling like a dork at all of the people coming and going. I got to know a few regulars (like Pia) who were there on the same schedule I was, but I wasn't going out of my way to get to know anyone and I certainly didn't post in the Facebook group! Instead, I lurked. I tried to understand what people were talking about. I felt like I was going through something unusual and I didn't have many people in my life to share that with. Mostly, friends wondered why I put myself through it (and probably wondered why I was spending all of this energy doing something that wasn't helping me lose weight—because, clearly, that should have been the priority).

July and August 2018 were bad months for me. In spite of my agreement with myself to not worry about what the scale said, I felt that I would be rewarded if I *did* sneak a peek at the scale. So, I weighed myself . . . and I had lost *nothing*. I had actually gained five pounds. Damn it. I went into a bit of a tailspin, thinking, “How could I have worked so hard and not lost anything?” The fact that my clothes were fitting looser didn't help me feel better. I mean, they weren't *that* much looser.

I fell back into my old ways. I immediately went into starvation-diet mode, upped my workouts to four days per week . . . and, after four weeks of super-limited calories and increased exercise, I crashed. Oh, and I didn't lose any weight.

I actually didn't go to OTF for a few weeks in August for the first time in over seven months, thus breaking my three-times-per-week objective. I felt like I was working out harder than I *ever* had; why wasn't this translating into weight loss? I felt a bit betrayed—I'd made the unholy contract, agreeing to not worry about weight loss while I worked on getting this OTF thing down, but then I felt like I was supposed to be rewarded for my lack of emphasis on weight loss with . . . weight loss.

Then I got mad at myself. I'd told myself from the beginning that OTF was more than a way to lose weight. Besides, wasn't I stronger? Yes. Couldn't I actually do the entire tread block (albeit slowly) without dying? Affirmative. Didn't I take that four flights of stairs like a champ last week? Absolutely.

Could I carry twelve grocery bags on six of my fingers, a personal record? Yaaas. Were my clothes looser? Yup. So . . . mission accomplished. OTF had made me healthier than I had been six months earlier. And, before my whacked-out July starvation plan, I had lost all of my food obsessions that one usually gets when they are constantly limiting calories and trying to lose weight. Grudgingly, I accepted that, even if I didn't lose weight, OTF was still really good for me.

This isn't a weight-loss story. Not yet. This is about committing to the process. And I realized that part of that process was, for me, to make *more* of a commitment. I was showing up but I felt like I needed to do more.

I think that, when we try something new, sometimes we try to be casual about it. "Yeah, I guess I'll swing by OTF and do my workout, no big deal, it's not like I'm obsessed or anything." This protects us from failure because, if we then fail, we can say that we didn't really give it 100 percent. But this *was* a big deal . . . it was the longest I had ever gone in *years* committing to an exercise schedule.

I needed to do a better job of acknowledging my own efforts, even if it wasn't pretty (ha, like it *was ever* pretty). Because, let's face it, going from zero to three days a week of OTF is *not nothing*. I started writing about the workouts. And then I started posting in the Facebook group. And that is when my commitment really started to change things.

People began telling me how much they appreciated my posts. I was saying what everyone was thinking (Was I? I thought I was the only one suffering). Suddenly I was connecting with people, both online and at OTF classes.

Making these posts into a book that other OTFers (and potential OTFers!) can access is an experiment. If you're a newbie, you can see that even though I show up, I am not necessarily positive about every workout. You don't have to be hyper positive about everything all of the time to get results. Sometimes, you have to embrace the slog. You don't have to plug into the OTF community to get what you need but, for me and many OTFers, it's about committing to and contributing to a community of people that has made this about more than just health. It's the idea that if you give a little bit of yourself, you get that back and you get support when you need it. I am hoping that this book can help

people who might not have as strong a community as we do at my home studio. Maybe I can be your community. I think OTF is totally worth it.

And so it begins . . .

I was somewhat familiar with online communities because, in my “real” job, I have belonged to many Facebook and Slack groups over the years. But that only meant that I was a bit jaded about showing my face in the OTF Facebook group. Remember how I said that I am an introvert? That means that I never really connect well with people in online groups—and that, quite honestly, can be crushing. I mean, sometimes it can feel like high school, with the popular kids talking, and then you make a comment but no one likes or responds . . . awkward.

That was why I lurked for so many months—I really, *really* didn’t want to belong to a community that rejected me or already had drama. I was trying to get the lay of the land and see who were the players. What I found, however, was that there really wasn’t a hierarchy (this, I think, could be a whole other social media book: the dynamics of online communities based on mission). Maybe it was different because we not only met online but also in person, or maybe people who exercise regularly have a lot more endorphins running around so are just naturally nicer? Maybe. But I digress.

At first, I threw out some test balloons, so to speak. During the month where different workouts earned you a stamp on your bingo card, I posted:

August 14, 2018

I think there should be a spot on the Bingo Board for when you have a huge zit on your nose and show up to class anyway.

I got a lot of likes and a few comments, but, let’s face it, people didn’t really know me. And honestly, early on, I didn’t have an objective or any idea of what I would post or not. Extroverts probably think I sound like a weirdo right now . . . for them, making friends and socializing is as easy as breathing. I was looking for, hoping for, more connection and support, but I am also an emotionally unavailable introvert, so it wasn’t like I could just *ask* for it. From strangers, no less!

When my mom was alive, she was one of those engaging people who would become your friend within fifteen minutes. Everyone who knew her would drop everything they were doing to help her. When I first moved to Seattle, she came up for a long weekend. She loved animals and, by the end of that first weekend, she had met and memorized the names of all of the dogs and owners within four city blocks. She had this . . . purity of connection. It was who she was.

I knew what she would tell me: *stop overthinking it*. She would have said, “If you think that posting in the community about your workouts will be good for you and help you stay committed to OTF then you should do it. If you change your mind later then you can stop.” Whatever, *Mom* . . . things are so easy for you, being *dead* and all . . .

I didn’t think of a lot to say at first, just the rare one-off like:

August 27, 2018

I guess I really can’t say I’m “stretching out at home” after my OTF workout if I wake up a half-hour later passed out on the floor . . .

And then, on my birthday, I actually opened up a bit about how I feel when I am working out:

August 29, 2018

I always wonder, when there are a bunch of really steep 15 percent ninety-second inclines like in today’s workout, do people get all Game of Thrones in their head and want to yell things like, “I’LL SEE YOU IN HELL!” and then imagine the coach yelling back, “TELL THEM WHO SENT YOU!!” . . . or is that just me?

I realized that the coaches are somewhat required-but-not-really to like or comment on your post if you tag them. Not because there was an official policy, but because, if you care about the community, you’re in there participating and responding, and the OTF coaches and team at my home studio *do* care. So, I started to pay attention to who was coaching my classes and who was managing the front desk when I came for my workouts.

September 12, 2018

During Benchmark Row, I kept my eyes closed and pretended there was a meg shark chasing me and that's why I needed to row so hard . . . but, midway through, I decided that I was okay getting eaten by a shark, until Coach Dru said, "C'mon Mindy!" and then I grudgingly accepted that Dru didn't want me to get eaten by the shark and that I should probably keep on rowing hard. So, I guess thanks Dru for not letting me get eaten by a shark. I know I should be more enthusiastic than this, but . . . rowing. :)

September 14, 2018

Had a great class with Coach Paige—had not seen her in a while because she attended a conference hosted by OTF where she learned some new techniques to better . . . well, *better torture us* is the phrase that comes to mind. :) I might just still be bitter about the rowing today . . . and this is likely an example of what NOT to think to be successful, so let me try that again:

Coach Paige learned some Jedi mind tricks while she was away to help us work harder and get more out of our workouts and it helped me get many more red splats than usual, so the Force is strong within her. Now if she could just get me to believe I like rowing . . .

October 1, 2018

Today was a long row, but it wasn't an all-out, fast-as-you-can row—you could take as long as seven minutes to finish up . . . so, instead of the urgency of imagining that I was getting chased by a shark that wants to eat me, I imagined that I was being chased by an old, snaggle-toothed, senile shark with cataracts. Really, you could just bump him with your toe and he'd become disoriented, forget he's chasing you, and swim off. I still got my splat points and all, just with a lot less stress.

October 3, 2018

I tend not to have facial expressions in the morning until my face wakes up, usually at about 11:00 AM or after sixteen ounces of coffee, whichever comes first . . . but today I could not keep the smile from spreading across my face before the 7:30 AM class when Coach Dru announced that today's workout has MINIMAL ROWING!

I was SO excited, knowing my warm-up on the rower might be the only time I saw it today. My excitement lasted until I saw what was happening in the weight room today . . .

BEWARE the Seven-Layer Burrito of Fitness.

October 5, 2018

Today was a partner workout so I didn't have to imagine a shark chasing me on the rower; I had my own badass mermaid named Sarah who chased them away (she could sprout legs when she needed to, like Darryl Hannah in *Splash*).

Also today, the incomparable Coach Paige unapologetically played and danced to Tiffany during our workout . . . and I don't care which team you bat for, that was some magical booty shaking happening there . . . my own booty has been involuntarily twitching in response, almost like there is some gluteus maximus sonar capability between coaches and OTF members that was activated when in close proximity to the alpha booty shaker. Or maybe Paige's dancing called upon the dark forces that will awaken, rise, and culminate in Hell Week . . . then the Tiffany song makes more sense, because she is totally a minion of hell if I ever heard one :)

Members still didn't really know who this Mindy person writing posts was (even if they were liking said posts) but the coaches whose classes I went to regularly (Dru, Paige, and Kat) knew who I was, and I started getting good online support from them.

I admit, if the other members had gone on without recognizing that connection between Mindy-online and Mindy-in-person, I might have dropped the posting. But it was doing exactly what I had hoped it would—I was feeling *more* seen by this community within which I was already expending tremendous energy just by showing up three times per week. I mean, the coaches always made me feel seen in class by noticing that I was stronger or better at something since the last benchmark. But that was two-dimensional because they only saw me through the lens of my suffering . . . er, I mean my workout.

I admit, some of these thoughts about my posting are retrospective. Did I really have a plan going in? Not really. But how much of our motivation is ever really based 100 percent on conscious thought? You tell me. But what I *do* know is that posting things kicked up from here on out.