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CITY EXERCISES BY KELLY CHRIST

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Since I've bought a home in the suburbs, I feel like a dog, leashed on one of those metal spikes in the ground. I miss my exercise routines. When I got an iPod, I made a walking playlist entitled Walk On By. It started with The Gap Band's, "You Dropped the Bomb on Me" and followed with "All I Do" by Stevie Wonder, "The Girl is Mine" by Paul McCartney and Michael Jackson, "I Love You" and "I'm Going Down" by Mary J. Blige, "Bananeira" by Emilio Santiago, and "Take It Easy My Brother Charlie" by Jorge Ben.

I'd relish Baltimore on my evening walks. I'd listen to Stevie, Mary, Grandmaster Flash, and strut to the beat through Butchers Hill and Patterson Park, dancing my way through the paved walkways, past playgrounds, ponds, playing fields, in tune with the melody playing from my iPod, and waving to dog walkers during my musical jaunts. On my less aerobic walks I'd slowly sneak past the Fleet Street front window of the now relocated Dangerously Delicious Pies, hoping to spot one of its dangerously delicious owners in his dangerously delicious tattoos.

I recognized Rodney Henry, longtime front man for Baltimore based rock-a-billy band The Glenmont Popes, from my swing dancing days at The Vault in the late 90's. Two dollars would get you in and dancing, and on special nights the organizers, John and Samantha would book mainstream hopefuls like The Atomic Fireballs, The Big Six, and The Glenmont Popes.

Rodney hasn't stopped playing music, but pies are his priority these days. The red and white striped Fleet Street awning remains, but the black sign bearing the moniker with a dangerously delicious pie for the skull above a set of crossbones is gone. Dangerously Delicious Pies has expanded and moved across the harbor to the south side in Federal Hill on Light Street.

I'd prowl past Fleet Street Cycles; I came to know the owner Donald, when he put together my beach cruiser. He'd fix my flat tires for free. He charged Josh, my version of a boyfriend at the time, who rode a BMX bike, ten dollars when he went in with a flat.

Past the Full Moon Saloon, where Jim C. is the bartender: I was Jim's tutor when we were in high school. Now he serves me Blue Moons for free.

Black and White, now Fells Point Chess, is where my stride was broken for a conversation with the resident grandmaster, Wilbert-- or Sid, another chess mastermind who recreationally smoked crack. Sid was 63 and had a seven-year old son. I first met him during my chess playing days. He'd walk me through games and genuinely talk me through the Saturday chess puzzle in The Baltimore Sun in a delightfully tragic performance. I moved to San Diego and when I moved back year later to the Bond Street row house, Sid lived in the front studio apartment, three houses down at 727 S. Bond. My first inkling of his recreational drug use was when walking to my car at six in the morning on my way to school, I saw Sid rounding the corner of Bond and Lancaster. It was not the Sid I had known from Black and White. This was some other possessed Sid; his breath was short and he kept

looking over his shoulder.

I'd complete my Fells Point loop and on the way home I'd pass the Patterson Park Duckpin Bowling Lanes, where BYOB stood for Bring Your Own Boh. Natty Boh. You couldn't drink anything else while bowling downstairs on a Saturday night! Patterson Lanes had an upstairs you could rent for private parties...bowling, on the second floor!

I'd often finish my rounds at the stone entrance to the easternmost corner of Patterson Park on Ellwood and Eastern. There was a one-foot drop off where I'd squat and lunge to Stevie Wonder before I'd head home to my basement apartment at 504 S. Ellwood.

Now I walk the track at the Bel Air Athletic Club--twelve times equal a mile--listening to the NPR Podcast of This American Life. I can't strut to Stevie on the track of Bel Air Athletic Club; I gaze out the windows circling the track into the overcast of Office Depot, Pet Smart and Best Buy, the English Country Manor Condominiums, Curves, and Weight Watchers. Ira Glass of NPR gives me hope for another America, one with characters and themes, while I circle and circle the track, and circle and circle the track.

When Midtown Yoga opened up a studio in the third floor corner row home at the intersection of Fell and Thames Street in Fells Point, I had practically reached nirvana. I was practicing Yoga three to four times a week at the studio. I regularly took the Vinyasa Flow classes in a 95 degree room for an hour and a half at a time, slowly improved my form on downward dog, getting my heels to the mat, really flowing with my breathing during the sun salutations A and B, and finally was able to hold Sirshasana, headstand, with strength, form, and balance. I'd spend complete Saturdays in practice, stopping for my own solitary yoga sessions at the highest part of the Patterson Park, on a patch of flat grass below the pagoda.

Charlie was the yoga instructor at the Merritt Athletic Club in Canton. His features were mystical and his limbs were slender. He charmed us into unnatural laughter at the beginning of the practice: "You need to put laughter in your life every day." He'd chuckle, guffaw, snort, and hoot; experiment with his laugh, transitioning from Boris Karloff to Beavis and Butthead impressions. It was painfully awkward, but it was fun watching Charlie contort his face in attempts to make us laugh.

"He he he." That's the best I could ever do. He played his recorder or sang along with his ukulele as we laid in Shavasana, corpse pose.

Now I practice yoga in my basement to a Podcast with one space heater aimed at my mat. I tried using two but it blows the fuse.

Iwould swim laps regularly at the Merritt. Peter Attia, a surgical resident at Johns Hopkins, would swim in the lane next to me. His tanned, solid, strapping figure would undulate perfectly, rhythmically, musically, as my form would tire and worsen with each lap. I kept up with him when I used my training fins. "It gives my legs a better workout; I'm pushing more water with my legs," I told myself. My flippers were pushing the water, not me. Nevertheless, I had someone to motivate me as I swam laps.

I'd ferociously swim at the tanned sunbathers on Saturday afternoons as they sipped frozen drinks from the pool bar. They'd wade in the water, never getting their hair wet. Ha! I would tan and work out at the same time; but I could never swim as long as Peter. I'd turn in when the smoke from the pool bar grill would waft into my alternating side breathing. Peter was preparing for a marathon swim of the Pacific's Catalina Channel. His swim would benefit the amputee runner Terri Fox's Foundation for cancer research.

There is poop in the pool at the Bel Air Athletic Club. The bottom is polluted and grimy. The swim team takes up four of the six lanes from 3:30-9:00PM, Monday through Friday. Someone in the 6-8 age group has been pooping in the pool. They've had to cancel pool activities weekly. Signs read: "Pool closed today. We apologize for the inconvenience. BAAC Staff."

Lori Lacombe, the Funk teacher at The Merritt is an insatiable dancer. She also makes an award-winning hot sauce, according to Baltimore Magazine's Best of Baltimore. You can tell she was professionally trained, and she executes her choreography with an unleashed energy, like her hot sauce. I wanted to dance just like her. I worked hard to in that class.

I take aerobics classes from moms at the BAAC. They drop their kids off at the Kid Sports while they teach Body Jam, the canned aerobics class that's pawned off as a hip-hop class because it's set to The Pussycat Dolls, "Buttons" or Fergie's "London Bridge." Women this age are supposed to think Fergie is a Duchess, not a former Black Eyed Pea turned solo.

I teach five hip-hop dance classes a week. I saw Rob Base and DJ E-Z Rock, Tone Loc, and Public Enemy at the Rams Head Live in the downtown Power Plant. I grew up with the birth of hip-hop music--Dr. Dre, Run DMC. These moms think Public Enemy is a new Denzel Washington movie.

In the Body Jam class at the Bel Air Athletic Club I yawn obnoxiously when the instructor looks at me, roll my eyes at their attempt to "groove," "let loose," and "shake it" like they tell me to. The instructors are women who only dance at weddings and Bull Roasts; they don't own a dance floor like I do. The dance floor in the basement of Lithuanian Hall on the last Friday of every month belongs to me.

"I don't know if you want to go out there," I say to Will, my rapping, rhyming, ex-Jehovah's witness Daily Grind employee/friend with whom I have a regular date at the Charm City Soul Club. "The dance floor is pretty torn up."

I dance at Charm City Soul Club like it's my job. I've also learned to dress for sweat. I monitor my shake sessions by taking a break every few songs to keep the sweat from seeping through my cotton outfits. It can get pretty violent on the dance floor. My hair gets soaking wet and sweat drips down my legs. During bathroom breaks I wipe down and towel off with the brown paper towels I crank from the chrome paper towel box.

There's not much ventilation in the basement of Lithuanian Hall; the dim, paneled and carpeted bar keeps the air stagnant. Despite the pair of ceiling fans hung over the dance floor, my clothes and hair still reek of cigarette smoke when I wake up the next morning with a stiff neck and sore quadriceps. It's a workout out there.

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Kelly Christ writes, dances, and teaches in the Baltimore area while pursuing her MFA at Creative Nonfiction from Goucher College. Her essays "Chesscapades" and "Blue-Eyed Soul" have appeared online, and she is currently working on a manuscript set in Baltimore at the O'Donnell Square Laundromat from where she ventures to explore the people and places of Charm City.