

## ANNA GNEGY – THE RETURN

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*The road of life twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet our lessons come from the journey, not the destination.”*

*Don Williams, Jr. (American Novelist and Poet, b.1968)*

I sat down to type this article and the above quote came to mind. I am returning back to [Bob White's Kenpo Karate](#) for the third or fourth or maybe fifth time to finally get my black belt. As I pulled out my old karate notebook it made me stop and think about what a journey this has been. This notebook, filled with handwritten techniques, forms, and drawings, collected over the last 15 years, from various people along the way, was not just an ordinary notebook but rather a diary in its own right.

### **Recovery: My Turbulent 20s**

I started karate in my early 20s. Having barely escaped my late teenage life, I was still a little rough around the edges. I had worked through a little meth addiction but still drank whiskey like a pirate, loved to burn and cut myself for fun, had terrible body image issues and the confidence level of a fly. The day I walked into the studio I felt I was home. I dove head first into karate. Four to five days a week you would find me there. I would go to the beginner class then the advanced class and sometimes stay for sparring. I would like to say I worked so hard because I was dedicated but truth be told it simply helped me drink less. It also seemed that it was more acceptable to come home with bruises from karate rather than from myself.

The white gi somehow made me pure. No one could see all my tattoos or scars for that matter. The pain was hidden and I could just be Anna. It was a feeling so unfamiliar to me that sometimes I would go home and drink because at the time I just couldn't accept that my life could change. The people at the studio are not just students and teachers. They are a family. They love each other. They talked about things like loyalty and honor. And they lived it. They treated me with the same love and respect...and slowly I settled in.

## **Exploration: My Expanding 30s**

I met and started dating my husband 10 years ago at [Bob White's Karate Studio](#). I was a bold new 27! Looking back on me now I often ask him what was the attraction. I still would see myself as messed up. Brad always smiles and says because I was a diamond in the rough and that just like a diamond in coal, he could see my inner beauty. Over the last ten years Brad has helped me peel off more layers to discover the real, true Anna underneath. I learned how to be confident, proud and unashamed. He took me to places I have never seen before. I had never seen the snow or Hawaii or even Havasu for that matter. Karate sort of took the back seat. I was too busy with this new found life.

I went back a few years ago and started taking privates with Mr White. I told him I was ready to get serious and I wouldn't waste his time. Yet as we approached the start of writing my thesis and black belt form panic arose in my stomach. That old Anna crept on up and said, YOU CANT DO IT! YOU WILL FAIL! YOU NEVER FINISH ANYTHING! I let that voice win. I couldn't even face Mr White. I sent him an email informing him that I was quitting and then proceeded to throw out everything karate related. Bye bye uniforms, belts, awards! Bye bye karate! Bye fear, and guilt. I threw my karate notebook up on an old shelf in our garage and thought phew, I'm free!

My mom very quietly asked the other day but you kept the notebook eh? Yup...because deep down the real Anna always knew she would be back.

## **Completion: My Soon to be fabulous 40s**

Today I am 37 but I imagine it will take me a few years to catch up and be ready to test. As I type this, I think of the fragile girl who walked into the studio 15 years ago. I have miraculously grown into this strong, confident woman. I own my own business. I am a wife, a grandmother, a daughter and a sister. I have gotten over my fear of completing things. When I look back at that fear I chuckle. I have completed all sorts of things! Massage school took a year, personal training took a year, my black belt will take a few more years. What was I afraid of? I no longer know. Having run a successful business for 4 years, I take risks every day. I have learned to think on my feet and fake it until I make it. Having been with my husband for 10 years, I have

learned to adapt, compromise and express myself to make it work. I have learned it takes passion, dedication and trust in myself to succeed. Finishing my black belt will use all the same skills and finally I am ready.

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