

JULIA SPICHER KASDORF

Cardio-kickboxing in a Town of 6,000

Protect your chest, protect your chest! Beth screams,
 meaning hold your fists above your breasts. *Weave*
or I'll hit your head. We duck and sway

as she swings where our faces had been.
This isn't Jane Fonda. This isn't the '80s.
No dancing in here, she commands in the YMCA

my dad painted in 1956—boards strung
 between scaffolding under 30-foot ceilings,
 saw dust added to stretch the boss's paint.

All summer he drove over the mountains
 to this foundry town with a big Catholic church
 and taverns on the tiny-house side of the diamond.

Two women stock the pain relief aisle at CVS:
When my son got back, he went straight to Vegas;
uniforms drink free, and no one carded him.

Look, when my boy came home, I gave him a beer.
He said, Mom, you know you're breaking the law?
Hey, you're old enough to die like a dog over there,

you're old enough to drink on my front porch.
 Our boys in Fallujah, our boys back for another tour
 or is it a third? Our pizza shop sells cold beer to go;

by the register a jar for loose change is taped
 with two photos: prom shot and the boy
 in a wheel chair. When my farm boy father

got called for Korea, he told the draft board—

with all due respect—he hoped he could do more
good finishing college. In the grave yard

across from my porch, new flags pin the stones
and Vets at attention bugle taps then shoot
a round on Memorial Day. *Flurry, flurry! Harder!*

That isn't a flurry, that's a hand job! Beth screams,
though she's softened since the men with short hair
quit coming to class. When they deployed,

kids in red, white, and blue waved flags and sang
down Bishop Street on a school day, then speeches
at the park where the trains used to stop.

The reserves left by bus. A contractor who lost
his farm to divorce says *It's piss poor*
some of our high school kids can't even pass

the test to enlist, not that it's such a great job.

He thaws pipes under my porch, no charge,
until he crawls into the insulation and spots a leak.

It takes all afternoon to replace the pipes, sixty bucks
plus a six pack of Yeungling for the Steelers game.
In Penn's Valley, signs along Route 45 say

The Purple Heart Highway, but no one here
calls it that. *Do we need a wake up call?* Beth screams.

We drop for squat thrusts: *1-2-3-1, 1-2-3-2.*

The retired game warden, back from heart attack,
paces behind us, red-faced. I strap on gloves,
hot and wet with someone else's sweat. Jab cross,

jab cross, jab cross hook into Beth's mitt.

Harder, harder! she screams. *I know you can*
hit harder than that! She's a third grade teacher

and mother of four. *Yes! That's better, now*
give me your upper cut. Swing from your legs!
Harder! Whatever you got, I can take.