

PUZZLES, PUNCHING AND EXCUSE MY SPANISH

They say as you get older you should engage the head in activities that stimulate and keep the brain fresh such as Sudoku or maybe Pictionary. I am not sure my brain has many cells left after a lifetime of tequila and kids driving me mad but I do believe in the philosophy.

My Grandpa Kat was a puzzle man and as kids it always gave us great pleasure to try to stump him with the most challenging puzzles we could find; the best one, as I remember, was Spilt Milk. He completed it with ease, and we never managed to rattle him. He had great patience to deal with dozens of grandchildren and to complete even the most brain busting game.



Adventurer
Layna Segall
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In Singapore, because it is difficult for expat spouses to work, we are always searching for new ideas on how to keep the cerebellum on an upward spiral so we don't become complacent and die of boredom in the heat. Yes, "wah, wah," says the expat wife, and I will forgive you if you don't feel sorry for me.

My latest pursuits are a little off the beaten track when you think of Asia. This continent conjures up the idea of the mysterious Orient, heavenly spices, mythical creatures, bizarre medicinal remedies and exotic ladies dressed in Cheongsams. None of that nonsense for me, though. I have decided to take a self-defence class while here to keep my muscles confused.

Before I came to Singapore, I spent half of my life in a sweaty, testosterone gym. Since leaving, I have turned into gelatinous goo. I do bike but I can only ride so many kilometres before I fall off the island and end up in Indonesia. I thought self-defence would be a great way to keep mentally alert and toned at the same time.

When you think of Asia, you think Mr. Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*, graceful tai chi, or ear piercing "hi-yahs" in judo. Not my bag. I decided to take an Israeli self-defence class called Krav Maga that is comprised of kicking, biting and punching your way out of any situation, including a paper bag. What Israel has to do with Singapore, I have no idea, but I am never the one to take the traditional route.

There is nothing sexy about Krav Maga. It isn't for show, belts or the fighting ring like Muay Thai. It is just to survive in case of an attack. The only problem with taking the class: as much as I enjoy hitting the instructors and breaking free from a choke hold, is that I am now looking for people on the MRT or the bus to nail after the class is finished at 10:00 p.m.

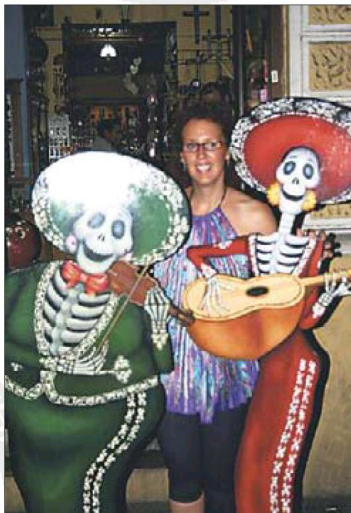
I walk away from the class with bruises, and cuts, so whilst on the subway home, I am begging people to mug me or get frisky with an outrage-of-moderesty incident. No such luck. I have taken to walking down dark alleys but Singapore is one of the safest countries in the world, so the chance of any type of attack is less than zero.

I will have to suffice with punching the bags, beating the pads or giving my instructors a good smack now and then. I have noticed that when I arrive home, both R2 and Man are safely tucked into their beds for fear I want to show them a newly-learned technique.

The other activity that I have taken up, which makes no sense in Asia, is Spanish. I pay a private tutor more money than my son's college tuition to teach me "hola, dos cervezas, por favor." I can't be satisfied to learn Malay, Mandarin or even Singlish for that matter.

I can't say "lah" at the end of every sentence or cut phrases to a minimum by saying "can, can," or "can not" as they say in Singapore.

I had to hire an expensive tutor from Spain to teach me Latin American lingo. You must re-



me. For some reason, I pick up these words like a duck to water, I can prattle them off at any situation.

I am not sure why I am so fluent in expletives but it might have something to do with the fact that every time there is a futbol game on the computer I hear words that would make a Mex-

was more interested in handing out chocolate bars when we won French bingo and having the students make "snack runs" to the local store than teaching us anything useful.

Had I only known how to conjugate French verbs and understood the masculine/feminine thing that goes on in languages not called English, I might be a wee bit more successful at Spanish.

We are on countdown mode to leave Asia and we have no idea where we will end up. For four years, the Canadian government has held up R2's residency for reasons we will never understand. I have come to learn that Mexicans, even well-educated, highly sought-after professionals, face great discrimination across the world, and Canada is no different.

You never know how handy my Spanish will turn out to be while living in Mexico, and my Krav Maga, well, that will keep the banditos at bay while we wait to return to Canada. Meanwhile, these new activities may or may not be keeping me on my toes, but I know my body and my brain need a constant diet of Tylenol.

Originally from Moose Jaw, Layna Segall de Velez still calls the Friendly City her home. At the beginning of 2012, she took a sabbatical from her government job in Regina to follow her Spanish spouse, known as R2 to her audience, to live in Singapore and travel Asia, blogging about her humorous experiences.

In less than three months, Segall de Velez was picked up by a local Singaporean blogging site as a feature writer. This site, Not a Tourist Singapore (www.notatourist.sg) is read by thousands of expatriate and local readers. She is also writing for a website in Mexico that caters to ex-pats called Mexico on My Mind — mexicoonmymind.com.

All this writing stemmed from Segall de Velez's own amusing blogsite Layna in Asia (www.laynainasia.blogspot.com) which has thousands of readers, recounting the hilarious situations Layna and R2 find themselves in all over Asia and abroad.

IN PHOTOS FROM TOP

- Take that girlie man!
- I can speak Spanish to Catrina.
- A few of my Spanish textbooks. Submitted photos

member, I live with two Spanish men but they seem to forget they are Spanish speakers when I enter the room. That is why I pay the hefty fee, do a ton of Spanish homework, and hope one day I can survive in a Latin country without sounding like a complete hick town girl from Canada. "Mi nombre es Dora la Explorer" ... well, you get the picture.

I mustn't be too hard on R2 and his lack of language teaching skills. I have, for a fact, become incredibly adept at swearing and blasphemy with every combination of sinful words available to

ican bandido blush coming from the office, where R2 is holed up trying to get any soccer news from home.

I am not sure where Krav Maga and Spanish will take me. I know that I am frustrated that I am not as agile as I used to be, as it makes Krav Maga more difficult. But to date, all of my pearly whites are still intact, and I do come home with some skin left on my arms, so that is a bonus.

Spanish: well, that is another story. I guess I should have paid more attention in Grade 9, 10 and 11 French class but our 300-pound teacher