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HARD QUESTIONS: Interview with David Lawrence

Pat Berryhill · Thursday, October 20th, 2016

David Lawrence is a man who has a reputation of speaking his mind, going after what he wants and being fearless in the face of adversity. He made this clear in business when he took an insurance company out of failure into multi-million dollar status. He began his boxing career in his mid-thirties and fought into his early forties, which is unheard of in the sport. His poetry and political commentary doesn't pull punches either. His conservative and other controversial views proliferate in his King of White Collar Boxing and he states exactly how he feels.

During a time when being a conservative, straight, white male isn't always popular, Lawrence doesn't shy away from his convictions despite the fact it may not make him popular. Reading his work, I had questions that I wanted to ask, not only as a journalist, but as someone who leans to the political left. Looking into past interviews, I couldn't find any where he was asked the hard questions. I had no doubt in my mind that Lawrence was up to the task, just as was for everything else in his life.

Pat Berryhill: Your book opens on the first page with the statement that you like the idea of being brain damaged. That is a strong and unusual statement. Can you expound on what you mean by that statement and what about brain damage appeals to you?

David Lawrence: Brain damage makes me special, different. It scrambles my thoughts in an expensive omelet. I become precious. I feel magnificent.

PB: There is a huge shift in how you feel about Gleason's gym from the beginning of your book to the end. I know that you are currently a coach there. What would you say is the one thing that has remained with you from the first day until now?

DL: Gleason's is home. I have been there for thirty years. A lot of people get attached to it. It is violent yet friendly. From Gleason's I go to my ritzy home on Madison Ave. They both are the same to me. I can't tell the difference.

PB: You speak a lot of poetry in your memoir. I was drawn to a statement you made about boxing. "Getting hit in the head rattles your brain and makes you think more creatively. It's a purifier. It lays waste to superficial concerns like money and clothes." Do you think you were driven to boxing for the experience as a muse for writing?

DL: I wanted to get hurt in boxing the way poetry cuts into me deeply. I wanted to bleed emotionally. I love boxing and I love my wife.

King of White Collar Boxing David Lawrence from iki nakagawa on Vimeo.

PB: "I wanted to die doing something careless. There was nothing as beautiful as suicide." That is a strong and controversial statement to make. Can you explain why you were drawn to it at that point in your life? Do you still feel that way?

DL: Death is complete. I will finish with the loveliness of this world. Maybe there is loveliness on

the other side. I doubt it but I am open-minded. We come and go. Was it Eliot who referred to Michelangelo?

PB: "I liked getting hurt. It made me feel closer to myself." What is it you mean by "closer to yourself?" Was this something that was instrumental in your writing?

DL: Yes, I want to disappear into myself. It's a kind of narcissism.

PB: "I was in love with the sorrow of a punch." What is "the sorrow of a punch?" Did it improve your performance in the ring? Now that you are coaching, is this something you strive to teach?

DL: There is sadness and courage in getting hurt. Yes, I try to teach the totality of my psyche.

PB: "Respect is magical and violence is more powerful than romance. It's better than sex. It's more emotionally involving. When the world goes up in a nuclear bang, it will be like we are all getting laid for eternity." This was published in 2012. After all that has transpired with recent rise in terrorism and recent rise in domestic violence, do you still believe this? If you were going to rephrase the statement another way, in a different context with another analogy, what would you say?

DL: It's the sexiness of violence that attracts morons to it. I only half believe it. I don't recommend it. I think terrorism is cowardice and the besmirching of innocence.

PB: When you were faced with the truth and reality of why you were being investigated for the money laundering and found out about the gay escort service, you said it was a "Homophobic's nightmare." When Kelly told you things were even worse, you made the comment "You're a woman?" You are blatant about your views and vices in your memoir. You admit to using cocaine. You speak frankly, open and honest in a manner that is bold. You even make statements like "To be told by a Panamanian that you had a big heart was like being told by a Black that you had a big dick…" In this era, where the moral majority strives to be politically correct, have you received any backlash due to your memoir?

DL: Not really on the memoir. I get backlash on my comments and failure to be politically correct. I don't give a shit about modern liberalism. I'm a thinker not an appeaser.

PB: When you got out of prison, you mention that your wife only told you you could come home if you gave boxing up. You wouldn't do that. To make your way, you did modeling that was less than flattering compared to your previous life as a highly successful business mogul. You were in Photos for STD ads and photographed as a homeless man. All this for the love of boxing and until your wife would let you come back home. How did that time and those experiences change you?

DL: I loved them. I love everything. I am an enthusiast about life. I am more than my compromises.

PB: Near the end of the book, you state you are seeing a psychopharmacologist and a neurologist. You do admit to the brain damage. You say it gives you an edge above others because you no longer think linearly. What advantages does this give you and how does this manifest?

DL: My mind juggles. My thoughts are fun.

PB: Several times throughout the book, you mention bipolar disorder or "manic-depression" and you don't feel it is an accurate diagnosis. Many advances have been made in the treatment of bipolar disorder as well as acceptance within mainstream society. Do you still feel like it is an inaccurate diagnosis and are against trying medications?

DL: I'm sorry. I've been on lithium for fifteen years.

PB: Your poetry is very politically charged as well as your blog. You mention poetry and writing as an integral part of your being. Your PhD is in literature. You also mention two novels you have written. Do you even see yourself publishing them? Are there things you write that are just for you and not intended for the public eye?

DL: I plan to publish all my memoirs. My novels are not quite that good.

PB: I know that you have several Rap albums, one that made number 2 on the top 40 in 1992

under the name Awesome D. Do you foresee yourself ever being engaged in the music business again?

DL: No, my sense of rhythm isn't that good. I'll stick to poetry.

PB: What is the focus of your career now? Is it solely training? Do you plan to make any changes in the near future or have any upcoming books or projects we should be watching for?

DL: I'm writing blogs and poems. Whatever will be will be.

PB: I watched a video interview with you and the man I saw on the video was very engaged with the community and humble. Honestly, it was difficult for me to believe that the same man I saw on the video was the man that wrote the memoir. Your personally on the video seemed to be in such a stark contrast to what I had read. Why do you think the two come across so differently?

DL: Because I am both. I was liberal. Now I've learned to hate the arrogance of progressivism.

In the end, I was left with more questions than I was satisfaction, but I felt as if I had a better concept of David Lawrence as a person, between the lines. In reflection, I guess that is the case for all those that write fearlessly. Hunter S. Thompson was a man of many convictions and vices equally. He was often misunderstood and was one of those people who would embrace humanity one day and shun them the next. Bukowski is another that comes to mind. I am not saying David Lawrence is a Hunter S. or Bukowski, but then again… who am I to say he isn't? His work holds your attention from beginning to end, if for no other reason, to see what the hell he might have the balls to say next.

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