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Son of Anarchy?

Motorcycle nomad Pat Sherwood says he understands the lure of gangs—and he's proud to be a member of the CrossFit crew.

By Pat Sherwood

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All photos: Ian Wittenber

I understand why people join gangs.

In my mind, your gang is simply the crew you share common interests with. It could be as tame as your neighborhood book club or as extreme as the local chapter of the Hells Angels.

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Before anyone loses his or her shit because I've implied that I understand why someone would join a group like the Hells Angels, read my words carefully: I'm not saying that I do or do not support the activities of any particular group, crew, club or gang. I'm simply saying I get why people join various organizations. Who wouldn't want to be surrounded by likeminded individuals with whom you share a connection?

I was not sad the day I left the military. It was an amazing experience and I'm proud I served. However, anyone who has been in the military knows plenty of bullshit accompanies the good times. While I would not miss the bullshit, something about leaving the Navy scared me. I was leaving my teammates, my crew, my gang—I would no longer be surrounded by these individuals with whom I shared a common bond.

That bond was formed over days, weeks, months and years of two critical elements: suffering and laughter. We were like family. We supported each other, helped each other, quite often lived with each other, trained together, teased each other relentlessly, had each other's backs and fought together. True bonding and camaraderie are not things you find often in life. And losing them was terrifying.

I walked away from the military in 2003. I was unaware of it at the time, but I received a baptism by fire into my new gang two years later, in August of 2005, in my garage in Virginia Beach, Va. A member of my old gang in the Navy, Dave Castro, called me and said I should go to a website called CrossFit.com and start trying the workouts. Sixty minutes later, I was hyperventilating on the floor of my garage after having done Murph. I felt like I'd gotten my ass kicked. I suppose gang initiations are always a bit on the rough side—at least in the cool gangs.

From that moment forth, I was hooked.

Then, I introduced my friends to CrossFit. We began to suffer together. We began to laugh together. We bonded. We embraced challenges and supported each other. Little by little, we realized this gang was not just operating locally. This gang had members all over the world.

Do you realize how large our CrossFit family is? It stretches across the globe. A few months ago, Ian Wittenber and I left the United States on motorcycles and headed south. We are riding until our journey ends somewhere in South America. As I sit and write this, we have been through nine countries. I've never before met the majority of CrossFit athletes I've encountered. What amazes me is how quickly



Fast friends bonded by burpees.

they go from stranger to friend. Usually, it takes me a lot of time to warm up to new people; I can even be somewhat of a cold asshole in social situations. However, on this trip we are slapping each other on the back, swapping stories of our battles with WODs and laughing our asses off within 10 minutes.

I've lived long enough to know familiarity like this with people you've never met before is uncommon. Our community is simply amazing. I once again find myself a member of a brotherhood, a family (don't want to piss off the ladies). Like all families, we are a bit dysfunctional, but we are still a family. I would not have it any other way.

Sure, CrossFit has increased your physical fitness. That is the stated goal of the program, and it delivers. Perhaps after performing the workouts for a few months, you've even noticed the positive adaptations that take place between your ears. Coach Greg Glassman has stated the mental adaptations are the greatest results of the program.

But the benefits do not end there. As your physical and mental capacities increase, so does your crew—locally, nationally and globally. You have friends you've never met in every corner of the world.

Need proof? Next time you leave your local area, look up the closest CrossFit affiliate and embrace your family.



About the Author

Pat Sherwood works for CrossFit as a flowmaster and member of the Media Team. He's done just under 200 seminars all around the globe for CrossFit HQ and competed in the 2009 CrossFit Games. He hates HSPU and loves ice cream.