
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

VIRTUOSITY

Virtuosity 9: Heroes

Sgt. Shawn Wray explains how CrossFit allowed him to share a dying friend's last moments.

By Shawn Wray

July 2015



Courtesy of Sammy Keener and Heather Peterson

Shawn Wray has done 136 Hero workouts in honor of the fallen.

It's an honor to be present for someone's final moments, and CrossFit enabled me to share the last few minutes of a dying cop's life. For that I will be forever indebted.

Feb. 28, 2010, about 2 a.m. on a cold, rainy night in East County, San Diego, California. My friend and partner Deputy Sheriff Kenneth James Collier of the San Diego County Sheriff's Department had responded to a call of a drunk driver going the wrong way on the freeway. Ken was trying to intercept the drunk when wet and foggy conditions caused

1 of 2

him to drive his patrol SUV over a steep cliff. Ken was ejected and lay gravely injured. A fellow deputy found Ken and called out “11-99” (officer needs help!). Everyone answered the call, and some of us climbed down to Ken to begin the rescue.

When I first got to Ken, he was alert, and he spoke to me in crystal-clear words. Ken related to me that he loved his fiancée, Karen, very much. Ken spoke about Karen with carefully chosen words, and it was an honor to hear them.

Ken was lying on his back, and from my vantage point he looked a little banged up but OK. I thought he was going to be fine, but Ken knew different. I later learned his skull was crushed on the back side and he had been mortally wounded.

The 45-minute climb out of the canyon with Ken was awful; it was steep, slippery and exhausting. Ken was a huge man, and footing was impossible, especially with your hands on a gurney. For most of the ascent, we had to hold Ken overhead and take large steps on wet, slippery, steep ground. It was comparable to body-weight overhead lunges at incline on ice.

I comforted Ken the best I could. We continued to talk, but his speech got slower and he began falling asleep as we neared the top of the canyon. Ken passed away just after we got him out.

The poignancy of the last few moments of his life is chiseled into my mind forever. I replay those moments each and every time I hit a Hero workout. I’m at 136 RX’d Hero workouts and counting.

I owe each one of those moments to CrossFit because my fitness allowed me to carry on. My coach at CrossFit Pride, Caren Stewart, was there for me. She prepared me for those moments, comforted me after they happened and encouraged me through all the Hero workouts I’ve done to honor Ken.

When other deputies and fire personnel needed relief during the ascent, I was able to continue and spend the entire time with Ken. I believe that’s because of CrossFit. I cashed in every minute of gym time that night. I pushed through because I had experienced discomfort in the gym and prepared myself for it in the real world.

CrossFit prepares you for life—for the best and hardest parts of it.



Submission Guidelines

To be considered for publication, authors must satisfy the following:

1. Articles must be original, unpublished works. Authors of selected submissions will be supplied with legal documents to be filled out prior to publication.
2. Articles must be submitted in Word documents attached to an email. Documents should not contain bolding, italics or other formatting. Please submit in Arial font.
3. Articles can be 500 words maximum.
4. Each article must be accompanied by at least one high-resolution photograph to illustrate the story. The photo can feature the coach, the affiliate, the community—anything that illustrates the article. Photo guidelines are as follows:

- A. Photos must be original and owned by the person submitting. Photos taken by others may be submitted provided the owner has given permission.
- B. Photos must be in focus, well lit and free of watermarks. Minimum file size is 1 MB. Please review your camera’s settings to ensure you are shooting high-resolution images. Cell-phone photos and thumbnails are not accepted.
- C. Photos must be attached to the email as JPEG files. Do not embed files in Word documents. Photo file names should list both the name of the subject and the name of the photographer in this format: SubjectName-PhotographerName.jpg. Examples: JohnSmith-JaneDoe.jpg or CrossFitAnyTown-JimJohnson.jpg.

Virtuosity@crossfit.com is open for submissions. Tell us why you train where you train, and do it uncommonly well.