



**CrossFit**JOURNAL

# DO IT TILL YOU'RE DEAD

Feel free to ignore health warnings. You have every right to do so. BY JOSH BUNCH, CF-L3



Josh Bunch

Jim Bunch died at 58 with a pack of Marlboro Reds beside his bed. He was 58.

On a godforsaken hill in Vietnam, machine-gun fire cut the jungle's silence to pieces. A mine exploded. Tracer rounds punctured the sky like deadly lightning bugs, and green Army helmets pushed on.

Charlie started this fight, but the U.S. Army was going to finish it.

My dad, the slickest private in this man's Army, kept his trademark cool, fired without looking, notched the stock of his rifle—one more dead Viet Cong—and took a satisfying drag on a cigarette that was as much a part of his face as his blue eyes or fighter's nose. Pleased like an 18-year-old boy who just nailed the prom queen, he shut his eyes and exhaled a small smoke ring. In the distance, mortars exploded and the brave battled the oppressors.

Shooting. Fighting. Killing. Smoking. Singlehandedly winning a war through coolness.

OK, so dad didn't tell the story quite like that, but I prefer fanciful embellishments to boring facts any day: jungle hot, bugs the size of Volkswagens and rain thick as syrup. Dad would correct when I got to talking about his fighting days.

"Cigarettes," he'd say, "that's about the only thing you ever get right."

### Do as I Say, Not as I Do

I caught dad smoking weed when I was 8. At the time I didn't know what it was. It took a friend's party seven years later to make it all come rushing back: Dad smoked more than just cigarettes.

“ When you thought of Jim Bunch, you smelled smoke and coughed a little. ”

He drank a lot, too, did a mess of drugs for a while and hopped from woman to woman the way a hobo hops trains. All vices he outgrew, tired of or was forced to quit for one reason or another.

Except cigarettes. When you thought of Jim Bunch, you smelled smoke and coughed a little.

He died in 2011, taken peacefully while he slept. That's what the obituary said anyway. If I'd had it my way, he would have gone down swinging like the hero every boy imagines his father to be.

From a 3-foot nightstand beside his twin bed, I took a pocket-knife, left the digital alarm clock and overflowing ashtray, and threw away an unopened pack of Marlboro Reds. He was 58 years old, one of eight siblings to make the ripe old age of almost-a-senior-citizen. All smokers.

"Don't piss in the wind," he used to say.

"Don't fuck with Jim Bunch," he always added.

"Don't smoke. If you do, I'll beat your ass."

When I turned 16 he added, "Don't get her pregnant."

Proudly, I followed my dad's rules to the letter.

His era was tough, full of stubbornness, staunch morals and will. When he quit a 20-year love affair with Southern Comfort, he did it cold turkey. That's just what you did back then; if you wanted to get something done, you manned the hell up and did it. It's an archaic attitude that barely lives on in the survivors of a generation forgotten.

Too bad he never got so resolute about smoking. It was part of him, he said, when he failed at another half-assed attempt to quit—something his entire family did before they knew it was dangerous.

By the end he couldn't make it from his mechanical blue chair to the mailbox without a rest—or a puff.

"The next cigarette might kill you," doctors said.

"Let it," he would reply.



Big Soda's marketing has made outlandish images commonplace and obscured the true effects of sugar on health and wellness.



Josh Bunch

Jim Bunch served in Vietnam. He survived the war but not addiction.

tight jeans, pocket T-shirts and motorcycles. Not something for movie villains and foreigners only—something for everyone.

Along with an entire generation, my dad ignored the warnings and assumed everyone was overreacting.

He was wrong.

“ The goal was truth, not elimination. Let Americans smoke all they want, but make sure they know what they’re getting into. ”

When members of my dad’s generation finally discovered the truth about smoking, they acted.

In 1970, another law came into effect: Warning labels got more aggressive, and Big Tobacco was forbidden to advertise on TV or radio.

They didn’t make cigarettes illegal, and they didn’t burn Big Tobacco like so many banned books. They wanted honesty: Tell consumers your shit hurts.

Full disclosure was the first and most valuable step in the war for health. The second and more complicated step was changing the culture. And eventually they did.

The goal was truth, not elimination. Let Americans smoke all they want, but make sure they know what they’re getting into, free from pretty packaging and superstar spokesmen.

Big Tobacco is still here today, plugging along one drag at a time, and if anyone wants to light up, he or she is free to do so.

Exactly as it should be.

## Changing of the Guard

A century ago no one—least of all The Coca-Cola Co.—could predict where we’d be as a nation today: dialysis centers on every corner, rampant heart disease and more children with Type 2 diabetes than ever.

It was 1892 when Coca-Cola incorporated and started sending bottled sugar rattling off to stores, and, as painful as it sounds, we just didn’t know any better.

Things are different now.

Like nicotine, sugar is addictive and linked to a host of health concerns. Yet the branding behind it is born of focus groups and behavioral studies and full of triggers that make our mouths water every time we see a can of soda.

If that wasn’t enough, celebrity endorsers beguile us and pseudo-science obscures the truth. Big Soda knows how to peddle its products, and the global industry is measured in billions of dollars.

That’s where CrossFit and affiliate owners like me come in. It’s our duty as fitness professionals to educate, free from the tyrannical behavior and manipulated science of Big Soda and its supporters.

CrushBigSoda.com, a CrossFit-born initiative, isn’t trying to make Coke illegal or institute Pop Prohibition. We want the same thing my dad’s generation wanted all those years ago: full disclosure. A culture change.

“ If we really believe in fitness and freedom of choice for all, then it’s our responsibility as CrossFitters to champion this fight and crush Big Soda. ”

Instead of Big Soda’s paying select scientists to ignore nutrition and say “exercise is medicine,” we want studies that prove sugary beverages are hazardous to health, and we want warning labels that share the message with the people who need to hear it loud and clear.

We want to coach humans and make them fitter, exposing the dangers of sugar-filled drinks and foods along the way.

Instead of jingles, gimmicks and advertisements aimed at kids, we want honesty, science and freedom to make real choices.

If we really believe in fitness and freedom of choice for all, then it’s our responsibility as CrossFitters to champion this fight and crush Big Soda.

War, dad said, is good for two things: scars and stories. Even when you’ve had your fill of both, he said, you fight anyway. So fight for those who can’t or just don’t know, fight for full disclosure, and fight for a culture change we desperately need. ■

## About the Author

Josh Bunch, CCFT, opened Practice CrossFit in 2007. He coaches by day and writes fitness and fiction by night. He can be found at [PracticeCrossFit.com](http://PracticeCrossFit.com), [Games.CrossFit.com](http://Games.CrossFit.com) or anywhere that needs a stiff shot of CrossFit.

## Too Little too Late

Addiction wasn’t a thing when my dad was 15 years old and started smoking.

When the war ended, he came home and fought a different fight. Instead of bayonets and bullets he battled nicotine and tar. It was a war he never stopped fighting.

Back in 1965, warning labels were new, having just appeared after Congress passed the Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act. The labels didn’t carry the same weight they do today.

Americans were trusting then, the Internet was many years away, and we hadn’t been shit on and lied to for decades by every media source on the planet. Smoking was culture, complete with