

Adventures in Bodybuilding: One Woman's Journey into CrossFit

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In mid-July, 2008, I found myself standing on a stage, wearing nothing more than a bikini, covered in oil from head to toe, staring out into a sea of bright lights. I was giving the best damn rear-double-biceps pose I could muster, under increasing levels of dehydration, low blood sugar, and utter exhaustion. Somehow, I had ventured

back into a world where no self-respecting CrossFitter should care to go: the world of competitive bodybuilding. How could this have happened? Or more to the point, how could I be in the middle of a pose-down when just 72 hours earlier I was attempting a PR deadlift to keep my CrossFit Total up to par?

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First, let me justify using the term "CrossFitter" to describe myself, as it is a fairly recent development in my storied fitness journey. I have been involved with, and working in, the fitness industry for almost 15 years. Fitness, though, was not always a major part of my life. Growing up, I was more interested in textbooks than dumbbells, and found the pursuit of academics much more engaging than anything physical. I would've gladly taken Shakespeare over Rippetoe any day of the week.

At the age of 18, I found myself away at college, engrossed in studies. I was also facing a grave situation that would change not just the course of my life, but the person I became. I had been diagnosed with scleroderma, a chronic, auto-immune disease that is potentially fatal. Freshman year was riddled with doctors' visits, medications, lethargy, and confusion about my condition and whether or not I would ever recover. One medication caused me to develop an unflattering layer of peach-fuzz on my face, to which the doctor asked, "Are the women in your family unusually hairy?" This was not a particularly happy chapter in my life.

With time, my condition improved. Eventually, I showed little sign of ever having had a life-threatening illness. But, years of medication had left me with a very unwelcome side-effect: 30 extra pounds. Tired, frustrated, and overweight, I decided to take control of my health. I joined my first gym. I didn't have the courage to go into the local Gold's Gym with its bright lights, loud music and infinite number of mirrors. I chose the smaller, women-only club, and started the process of transforming myself.

After six months of consistent exercise and calorie-counting, I lost close to 35 lbs. and began to develop some half-way decent muscle definition. I also gained enough confidence to step into Gold's and see how I stacked up against the local "buff bods." Apparently, I stacked up pretty well as I quickly received the attention of a trainer who had experience with bodybuilders. He believed I had what it took to compete, and urged me to give it a shot. I did. Before long, I became obsessed with my training and the pursuit of bodily perfection.

Being a newbie to the competitive bodybuilding arena, I took whatever training advice I could get. How I felt was not an issue anymore; how I looked in the mirror became all-consuming.

My workouts were standard issue for the time, place and mindset that I was in. I did thousands upon thousands of cable crossovers, leg extensions, preacher curls, and lateral raises conducted with the sole intention of feeling



"the pump," and confident that this was the most direct path toward my goal. I spent endless hours slogging along on an elliptical machine or step mill, knowing that fat cells couldn't possibly withstand 60 minutes of cardio in my "fat burning zone." Split routines, pyramid schemes, rest-pause, drop sets, super sets, compound sets - you name the Weider principle and I can assure you at least one of them popped up in every one of my workouts.

I took my training very seriously, perhaps more seriously than anyone else in the gym. I trained for up to three hours a day. Predictably, my diet followed the bodybuilding prescription: A LOT of protein, moderate amounts of complex carbohydrates, and little, if any, dietary fat. And of course, daily pre- and post-workout protein shakes. I can tell you that I will never consume another can of dry tuna fish for as long as I live!

I finally decided to enter my first competition in 1998, after a year of very dedicated preparation. However, nothing could have prepared me for the amount of physical and psychological abuse that those final few days before the competition required.

I was a full time graduate student and working two part time jobs while I was training for my first show. All the stress I was putting on my body and my mind was coming to a head fast. I started having fainting spells from the carb depletion. I was irritable, cranky and not too much fun to be around.

All of my hard work and effort seemed to have paid off.

I was awarded 1st place overall in my first show: Women's Open Novice. I went on to compete in several more shows and Ms. Fitness Competitions as well. I also

Journey into CrossFit... (continued)

developed overuse injuries from the training, intestinal distress from constant dieting, and unpredictable mood swings. My primary physician strongly suggested that I give up on bodybuilding because I could do some real damage to my body from the constant dieting.

It became increasingly more difficult to keep the weight off after each show, and I also became frustrated with the sport. I finally took a break from competing six years ago. I was worn down, and tired of going up against women that were not natural.

Fast forward to 2006 when my boyfriend (now fiancé) Dennis Marshall told me about the most effective fitness program ever: CrossFit. Honestly, I was hesitant at first because I was still training like a bodybuilder. More is always better. I started with a few occasional workouts and then amazing things started to happen. My knees didn't bother me anymore, my shoulders were stronger, and I looked and felt better than ever. I was hooked.

I've been doing CrossFit consistently ever since, and became a Level 1 certified CrossFit instructor in May 2008. It was one of the best experiences of my life. Ironically, it was during that weekend that I came up with an idea: Would it be possible for me to compete again effectively doing only CrossFit and the Paleo Diet, which I had been loosely following for a couple of months? I also didn't want to spend a lot of money.

So began my experiment. I dusted off my old suits and entered the Colorado State Championship with one bottle of Pro Tan. I simply followed the main page WOD, and tightened up my diet during the last two weeks. I weighed in at 120lbs the night before the show, which put me in the middleweight Class.

The day of the competition I weighed in at 118 and, by the time the night was over, I had placed first in the Women's Open Middle Weight Class. I also won best poser.

CrossFit is the real deal. The difference between daily life and competition is little more than the number of fries I allow myself.

Will I ever compete again? The jury is still out. Will I continue to do CrossFit? You bet.



I grew up the daughter of a Lt. Colonel in the Army. As a result, I found myself calling a different place home every few years. The majority of my childhood was spent in Germany, but over the years I have called Georgia, Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania and Colorado home. I currently live in Denver, CO but will be moving to Long Island, NY in October. My fiancé, Dennis Marshall, and I are both CrossFit Level I certified and will be attending the Level II certification in Golden in October. We are getting married in November and will be looking to open our own affiliate on Long Island once we get settled in there.

I have my Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and am an actress by trade. In between acting jobs, I work as personal trainer and yoga & pilates instructor to pay the bills.

