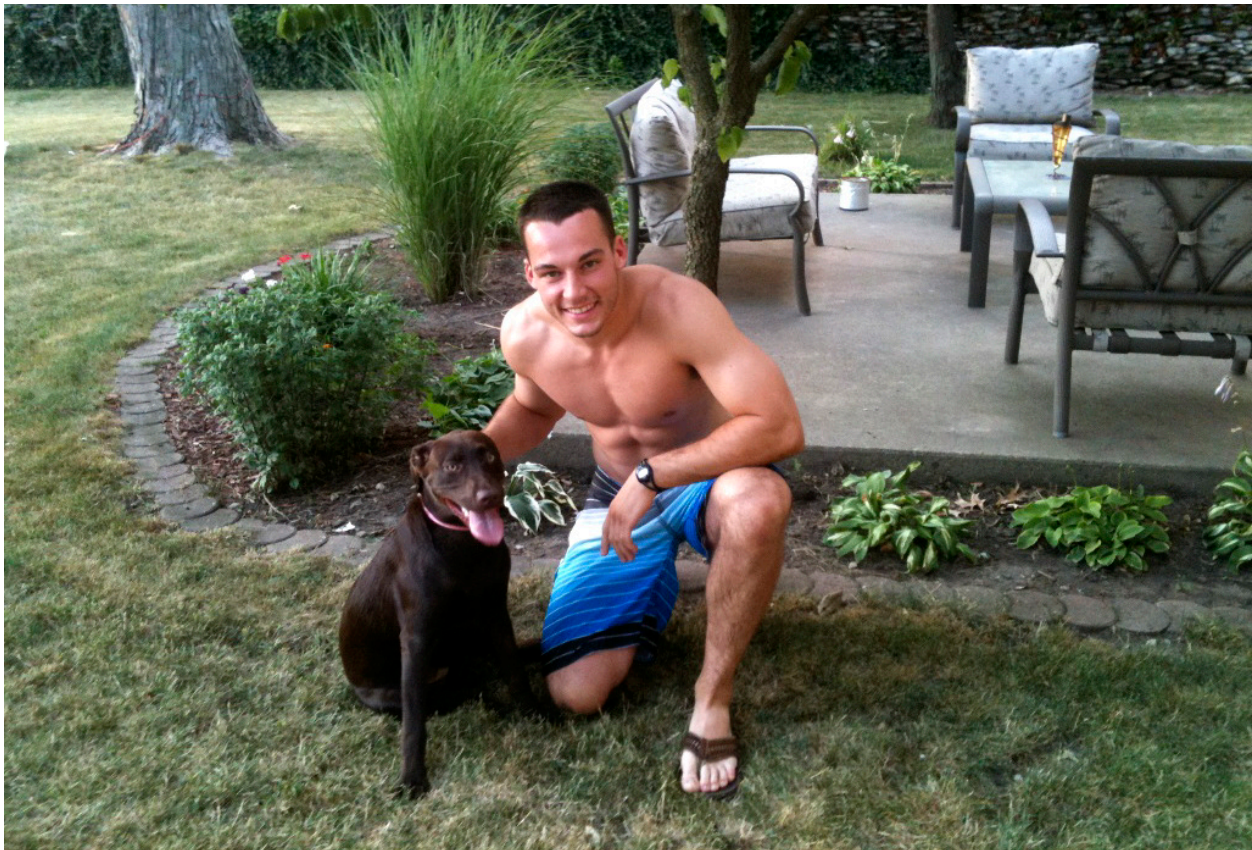

THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Destiny, Choice and Struggle

Patrick Miller is a typical kid from a working-class Midwestern town. This is his coming-of-age story—and the ending has yet to be determined.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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Courtesy of Gerry Miller

I am writing this brief article for a writing class that I am taking through a community college in my home town of Pontiac, Illinois. This is somewhat of a brief insight to the love and (passion) for the sport I have, but unfortunately this is all the time I have to complete this assignment on time.

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I currently work forty plus hours a week for my father cleaning carpets at his professional floor care business and have been doing so for the past three years. Honestly, my life is a little overwhelming at times, being a 23 year old young man, owning a car, renting a house, raising a dog, and most importantly making it all worth my while, while continuing my education so I do not have to keep cleaning carpets for the rest of my life and do something that I love and have a true passion for.

CrossFit fires me up inside, and pushes me like nothing else has ever done, and it is truly my passion and something that I want to have part in for the rest of my life.

—Patrick Miller, October 2012

A Humble Life

You could describe it as a quintessential American blue-collar town.

Pontiac, Ill., sits less than 100 miles southwest of Chicago and is the seat of agriculture-heavy Livingston County. Historic Route 66 runs right through the city of 12,000; the Route 66 Association of Illinois calls Pontiac home.

"Everybody knows everybody, which sometimes is good, sometimes is bad. It's a farming town. It's a worker's town," 25-year resident Gerry Miller said. "It's definitely not big-city living."

Caterpillar, the maximum-security prison, RR Donnelley and the new medical center are where most people work. Everyone else has jobs at retirement communities and nursing homes.

"It's pretty much those major businesses, and we have a Wal-Mart. And other than that, there's not much," said Miller's son, Patrick.

Cheri Lambert, president and CEO of the Pontiac Chamber of Commerce, described the town as "small" and "quaint" with a vibrant downtown that attracts tourists.

"We certainly are doing well when it comes to a community. We are a very supportive community of each other," she noted. "It's normal to walk into a place and people are asking about your kids—by name."

Yes, most who are born in Pontiac stay in Pontiac.

Patrick Miller has worked with his dad cleaning floors since he was 10.

"It's some long days, and there's got to be easier ways out



Courtesy of Gerry Miller

Patrick Miller (left) grew up helping his father clean carpets but is now dreaming of something more.

there than killing yourself every day," Gerry said. "I knew it was never his passion."

Patrick knew it, too. The problem is he didn't know what his passion was.

After making a name for himself playing high-school football in Pontiac, he went on to receive a partial scholarship to Monmouth College. The Division III school is roughly 200 miles southwest of downtown Chicago. There, he played football for one school year—until he was "academically dismissed."

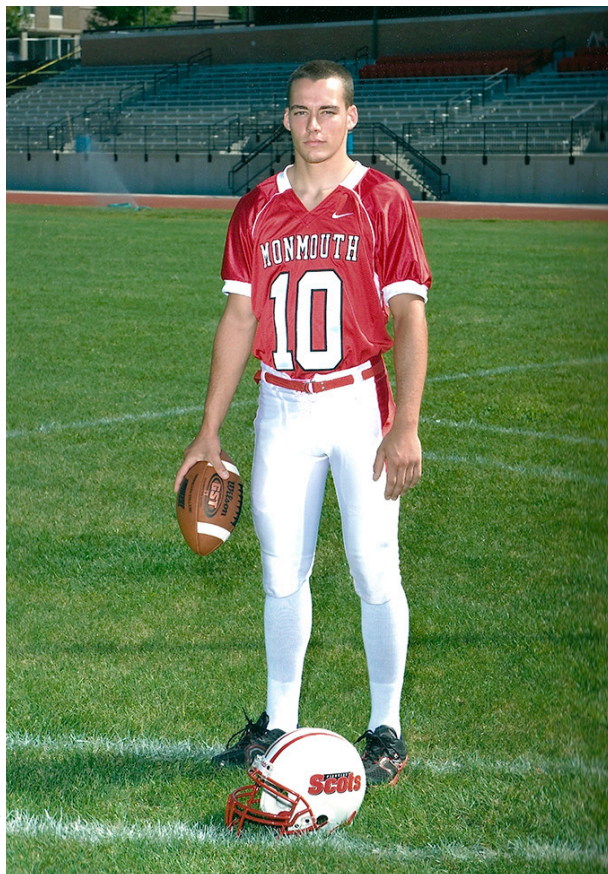
"My grades the first semester, they were pretty decent, and the second semester I was kind of trying to find myself and didn't take school very seriously, and my grades fell below where I needed to be," he said.

He added: "For the most part ... school was something that wasn't for me. I figured I was just gonna stay in Pontiac and take over my father's business."

But Gerry had advice for his son. He needed to be "showing people to do stuff."



Courtesy of Kelli Trainor



Courtesy of Kelli Trainor

Patrick grew up playing sports and received a partial scholarship to Monmouth College.

"I told him, 'Patrick, you're so much smarter than I am. I'm just a doer. I'm lucky I got out of college,'" Gerry said.

Still, Patrick seemed destined for an almost identical path.

"When I graduated high school, I loved sports and I loved business, so I went to Monmouth to play sports and study business as well. ... that didn't really work out with me," he said. "I didn't really know what I wanted to major in."

After leaving Monmouth at the end of the 2008-2009 school year, Patrick was back in Pontiac. He started working for his buddy who had just opened a food stand called Chillin' n Grillin'. He also kept working with his dad. Later in the year, he became a student at Heartland Community College's Pontiac campus. His education can best be described as fits and starts.

"I enrolled in classes and dropped classes and enrolled in classes and dropped classes," he explained. "It was kind of rocky."

Patrick's main objective was to get back to school to play football. Then he and his Chillin' n Grillin' buddy thought about buying a van and driving around to college campuses as food-truck vendors. The idea didn't take off.

"I was making good money with my dad. I was thinking I didn't need to go to school because I could make good money with my dad," Patrick said.

He could take over his dad's business and then comfortably retire in Pontiac to live a perfectly fine, normal, unadventurous life in his hometown.

Lost, Found and Lost Again

Then, as most twentysomethings are prone to do, he started partying a lot. He was drinking more and hitting the gym less, and for a year this was life.

Eventually sense caught up to Patrick.

"Man, what am I doing with my life? I'm 21 years old, I'm not going to school, I'm not working out," he thought.

That's when he found Six Pack Shortcuts, a workout program that promises to burn belly fat and build abs by "maximizing" the so-called "afterburn effect." Mike Chang, identified as its creator, hawks the program in an infomercial style on YouTube.

Patrick bought six months of the program, dedicating himself religiously.



Courtesy of Gerry Miller



Courtesy of Patrick Miller

After a year of heavy drinking and partying, Patrick rediscovered fitness.

When a friend told him in August 2012 about CrossFit, he found CrossFit.com, read all about it and wasn't particularly impressed.

"I can do this. Whatever."

Patrick's first workout was seven rounds for time of:

- 7 handstand push-ups
- 7 135-lb. thrusters
- 7 knees-to-elbows
- 7 245-lb. deadlifts
- 7 burpees
- 7 1.5-pood kettlebell swings
- 7 muscle-ups

He did it at Champion Fitness, a local gym in Pontiac.

"I almost died," he joked.

But that's where Patrick's seemingly typical CrossFit story ends.

He continued following main-site programming at Champion Fitness without any coaching experience and

without anyone's trained eye. Four months later, he took the CrossFit Level 1 Seminar.

"I kind of threw myself into CrossFit," he said. "I thought, 'Man, I can just take the test. It's not that hard.'"

Patrick failed the test by two questions.

Before the year ended, he took it a second time and failed again.

Patrick blames his poor study habits.

"For me, everything was pretty much new and it was just kind of confusing because I'd never been coached on the movement," he said.

But this story isn't about failure. Patrick started studying. Like a distant parent whose lessons are heeded from afar, CrossFit provided an intangible discipline Patrick hadn't known before.

"I've never really studied until now," he said.



Courtesy of Gerry Miller

Patrick's future is full of uncertainty. It's also full of hope.

A Path to Somewhere

Patrick's newfound confidence was a game changer.

"He was always telling me during work all about it and what he's going to do to change his life," recounted Gerry. "It's changed him 180 degrees."

Not only did Patrick change the way he thought about fitness and nutrition, but he also started to change his attitude. He began, in earnest, working toward his associate of arts degree at Heartland.

"He's in a better frame of mind," Gerry said. "This has really put him on a course of what he really wants to get into. He's matured. His time-management skills have kicked in because of this."

And then Patrick met a girl. Kathryn Golden was the University of Illinois veterinary student assigned to the case of his dog, Gracie. The chocolate lab needed surgery on both of her hind legs. The chance meeting would end up taking Patrick more than 700 miles away from Pontiac.

After Kathryn graduated from veterinary school in May, the couple of about nine months drove to North Carolina. Kathryn had an internship there, and Patrick planned to apply to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to pursue a bachelor's degree in kinesiology.

"We're extremely proud of him for figuring out what he wants to do for life. He's on the road for very good success," Gerry said as Patrick and Kathryn were en route to their new home state.

"Between CrossFit and Kathryn, I think that's ... really helped him get motivated with life."

CrossFit, he said, pointed Patrick in the right direction. Kathryn did, too.

"She just finished up her doctorate. She's been going to college for eight years. If it wasn't for CrossFit ... he probably would not have met her," Gerry said. "Before, he'd work, didn't really care about a lot of stuff. He didn't really know what he wanted to do. He was lost."

Kathryn was happy, too.

"I'm feeling really good," she said while driving to North Carolina. "I'm mostly excited. It's an honor to be able to get the position that I have gotten out here and I'm really excited that Patrick's coming with me."

Life, finally, was perfect.

But weeks after Patrick and Kathryn arrived on the East Coast, the couple parted ways. And in the last weekend of June, Patrick and Gracie found themselves living alone with no income.

"My life is kind of spinning around right now," Patrick said after the breakup.

As for CrossFit, it may or may not be in his life in the future, he said. With no Level 1 Certificate, no regular training routine and no money for joining an affiliate or paying a coach, creating a career out of CrossFit seems unlikely.

Still, Patrick has been accepted to UNC-Greensboro and will begin the road to his kinesiology degree in August. And although life—right now—is not what he had hoped, he concedes that both CrossFit and Kathryn served their purposes.

"Without CrossFit, per se, I wouldn't be where I'm at right now."



About the Author

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