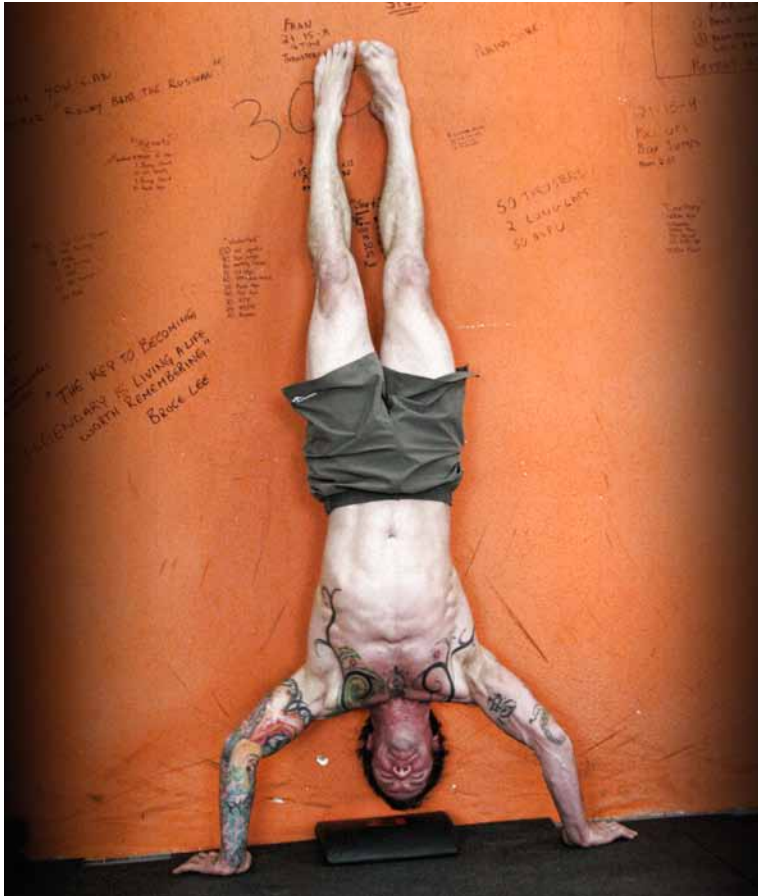

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Adrift—Then Came CrossFit

Long-time alcoholic Christian Wood came close to death in one of three car accidents in a year and decided it was time to change. CrossFit was his answer. Andréa Maria Cecil reports.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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All images: Kate Berschauer

Had his co-workers just stopped to look, they might have noticed Christian Wood drinking beer and vodka from the ice chest in the back of his truck.

Had his friends just stopped to think, they might have noticed their friend's three car accidents in one year were no coincidence.

"I managed to hide it for 10 years," Wood said.

Alcoholism. The career construction worker concealed his addiction from his co-workers, from his friends. His wife, he said, always knew but didn't want to face the reality of her husband being like her father.

Then it happened—the accident that almost killed him.

"(It) was head-on with a semi on a windy path, and how we did not kill each other or how I did not kill both of us, I do not know," Wood said. "That's what started opening my eyes. (I said to myself), 'Dude, you need to change your life.'"

That was August 2009.

"I quit drinking, but I always found myself in stressful situations and I wanted a drink. Then I found CrossFit."

—Christian Wood

Today, the 39-year-old is a CrossFitter of more than one year who completed the Level 1 course in January.

"I quit drinking, but I always found myself in stressful situations and I wanted a drink. Then I found CrossFit," said Wood, who works out at CrossFit Cashmere in Washington state. "All want, will and desire for alcohol was gone. I don't know how to explain it, and I don't know why. I don't know if it's because it was something new and that's all I could think about."

The timing was right, said his wife, Dawn.

"I don't think he would have been as successful quitting drinking had he not had CrossFit available for him," she said.

Two Histories

Christian and Dawn got married when they were teenagers.

"He just turned 19 when our son was born," she said. "It hasn't been easy. He worked his butt off while I quit working and went back to school. He supported a family of four on next to nothing."

"There was always a beer on the nightstand; there were always empties on the floor."

—Christian Wood

The couple has been together for 23 years. Their oldest son is 20, their daughter is 18, and their youngest son is 11.

"He's definitely had a rough road," Dawn said of her husband. "On his mother's side of the family, he's got a cousin that's been in prison for dealing drugs. He's got uncles and cousins that have committed suicide that have been drug related. He's definitely had some of that stuff in his past."

She added: "He just happened to marry a girl who had some history as well."

Nearly seven years ago, she threatened to leave her husband.



Working out regularly has helped Wood make major changes in his life.



Wood says he replaced drinking with CrossFit.

"The arguments were frequent when I was drinking. She didn't want to deal with it, so it was easier for her to let it go. She became an enabler," Wood said.

"I would do really good for a month or two, and then it would slowly show itself again," he explained. "There was always a beer on the nightstand; there were always empties on the floor. She knew about it and she did not approve at all."

Wood told his wife he quit. What he meant was he quit drinking in the house. In his workshop out back, he fed his addiction, strategically placing cans and bottles where she wouldn't easily spot them on a surprise visit.

After he stopped drinking, "we haven't been in an argument since," he proudly said in early April.

Don't Quit—Replace.

Wood will be quick to tell you he didn't quit drinking. He simply replaced it with CrossFit.

"The replacement is really, really important. Not quitting but replacing," he said. "If all you can think about is ice cream, then replace it with a long walk. Eat some apples and almonds."

Wood added: "On a second note, don't quit ice cream. Ice cream can be good."

The avid runner has started his own construction company and makes a point of teaching his employees how to lift heavy materials on the job.

Being a business owner has allowed him time—"time with my kids, time with my wife and time with my gym," Wood said. That gym, by the way, is about an hour away from his house.

"I drive through three towns to get to CrossFit Cashmere," he said.

So much time spent on WODs has been difficult for Dawn.

"His free time is spent doing CrossFit, so it's not really free time. He's putting so much into CrossFit," she said, adding, "But what would I rather have? I'd rather him be around longer and healthy and (enjoying) life than killing himself."

"Just the way the CrossFit program works was exactly what he needed."

—Jenny Colella

Jenny Colella, who co-owns CrossFit Cashmere with her husband, Marco, met Wood through mutual friends.

"I met him, gosh, it had to have been ... right when he quit drinking," she said.

At a holiday party, Colella said she started talking to Wood about "the CrossFit program, the whole program, community, the whole community, keeping yourself accountable."

"Just the way the CrossFit program works was exactly what he needed," she said. "Then he started coming down to the gym. He started hitting the workouts hard. I started nailing him on flexibility and form. He started learning stuff and getting better at stuff."

But white-water kayaking and about 20 years of 50-plus-hour work weeks in construction had taken a toll on Wood's body. Over the summer, he discovered a loss of strength and motor skills in his left hand.

"I saw a doctor who wanted to prescribe pills and told me that I would probably have the problem for the rest of my life," Wood said.

Instead, he went to a chiropractor and an acupuncturist.

"Within a month, I began to see progress," he said. "It took about (four) months of seeing them both on a weekly basis before I had full strength back in my hand. I was also CrossFitting through this whole time—that's how I could tell that I was making progress on my recovery. Pull-ups were my test."

Now a Games Contender

Today, Wood is known at his box for his skills off the ground.

"Any body-weight aerial, Christian's the guy," Colella said.

"He's amazing. He's got it. He's got it all. I encouraged him to go to the (CrossFit Games) Open this year. ... That guy can run, that's for sure."

Wood follows main-site programming "to a T," he said. Three days on, one off is his regimen.

"From the time I was in about eighth grade until recently, I was 160 lb.," said the 5-foot-10 Wood. "I weighed myself today. I weighed 170 and my pant size is going down."



At CrossFit Cashmere, Wood is now the recognized king of body-weight movements.

He's gone from 10 consecutive pull-ups when he started to 41 today, from one muscle-up in January to 19 today.

And he's now taking what he's learned and applying it elsewhere.

His town of Malaga this year started a roller-derby team he's coaching.

"Some of the stories that I hear from the women he's working with (are) amazing," Colella said. "(He's) helping them to get on the right life track—just like he did."

**“CrossFit has given me
the knowledge to correct.
(It's) given me the knowledge
to change.”**

—Christian Wood

Colella continued: "He loves CrossFit so much that he's teaching it to these women. The whole thing is all about spreading the love He's a huge advocate of it. That's what I see in him the most is his excitement level. He's so positive ... it lifts me up. It keeps me excited about CrossFit because he's so excited about CrossFit."

Aside from continuing running and coaching, Wood said he doesn't see himself getting involved in other sports.

"I CrossFit to CrossFit. CrossFit is my sport. CrossFit is my thing," he said. "Now with my certification, that just gives me the ability to tell people what I think. CrossFit has given me the knowledge to correct. (It's) given me the knowledge to change."

For her husband to be at a point in his life where he's happy and feeling successful "is really something," Dawn said.

Wood said CrossFit has given him confidence.

"It's helped me stand up straight, and it's helped me deal with life," he said. "It's just made me a better person. I don't know how to explain it. I don't know how to put it in words. It's taught me a lot of humility."

He concluded: "It doesn't matter who you are—it's heart. You get out of it what you put into it. That's true for life, your marriage, your children. ... That's what CrossFit has given to me. And a beautiful body."



Courtesy of Andreea Maria Cecil

About the Author

*Andreea Maria Cecil, 32, is managing editor at the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. Andreea is a native of New Orleans who lives in York County, Pa. There, she's been doing CrossFit since 2008 at [CrossFit York](#). She dedicates three days a week to training in Olympic weightlifting at [McKenna's Gym](#).*