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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## What Would Andy Do?

Emily Beers tells the story of the man behind the Hero WOD Nutts.

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By **Emily Beers** CrossFit Vancouver

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Nutts

Nutts was first posted May 28, 2010:

- 10 handstand push-ups
- 15 deadlifts (250 lb.)
- 25 box jumps (30 inches)
- 50 pull-ups
- 100 wall-balls (20 lb. to 10 feet)
- 200 double-unders
- Run 400 meters with a 45-lb. plate.

This is the story of the man behind the Hero WOD, Lt. Andrew Nuttall.

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### Andrew the Son

Richard and Jane Nuttall sit at their dining room table in their four-bedroom home in Victoria, B.C.

A year and a half has passed since their son, Andrew Nuttall, was killed in Afghanistan while serving with the Canadian military. He was 30.

Today, pictures of Andrew and military paraphernalia dominate the Nuttall home. On the mantle above the fireplace, on the walls in the living room, computer room, and dining room ... evidence of the fallen officer can be seen everywhere.

"These are some of Andrew's medals," says Richard, a semi-retired doctor, pointing to a framed box on the mantle that proudly displays two medals Andrew earned with the military. "This one here is called a 'sacrifice medal,'" he says. "It's a hard one to get."

"We wish he didn't earn that one," adds Jane, a former nurse.

The landing of their staircase is filled with a large picture of Andrew in uniform next to his Certificate of Service. Beside this is a Canadian flag draped over a surfboard, both of which are signed by the men who served in Andrew's platoon in Afghanistan.

"There is still dust from Afghanistan on here," says Jane, holding up the dirt-stained Canadian flag, brushing it off a bit with her hand.

Jane reaches over and picks up a picture from a side table. It was taken right after a CrossFit workout in Vancouver, back in 2007. In the photo are Andrew and five of his CrossFit friends, heads together, lying on their backs, covered in glossy sweat, smiling. The classic post-workout expression of relief and satisfaction can be seen on each face.



*Andrew Nuttall (right) and his father, Richard.*

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**“A lot of my favorite pictures of Andrew are CrossFit ones.”**

**—Jane Nuttall**

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“I just love this picture. A lot of my favorite pictures of Andrew are CrossFit ones,” says Jane. “I’m not even sure how we got this picture, but it’s just so Andrew—smiling, looking like he’s going to burst into one of his fits of giggles,” she continues.

Richard looks up from the dining-room table, where he is sitting with a notepad and pen. He’s trying to decide what to write on Andrew’s memorial trophy, a trophy the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry is donating for the Memorial Nutts Cup, an event CrossFit Vancouver is hosting Aug. 27.

Richard picks up the pen and writes: “Nutts Cup: In memory of Andrew Richard Nuttall, platoon commander, 12 Platoon, 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, killed in Afghanistan, Dec. 23, 2009.”



CrossFit Vancouver

**Richard Nuttall drinks from the cup that bears his son’s name.**

He stops and looks to his wife. “Should we say ‘in memory of’ on the cup, Jane?” he asks.

“I’m not sure,” she replies. “I don’t know what to write on these things.”

“Should we write ‘killed in Afghanistan?’” asks Jane.

“Well, that’s what happened,” says Richard. “He *was* killed in Afghanistan.”

Richard holds up the piece of paper and reads aloud what he has written. At the end of the inscription, it says, “Live life to the fullest. Make a difference.”

Richard says, “That was Andrew’s motto. He would like that to be on the trophy.”

### **Drew the Friend**

It’s July 2009, three short months before Drew, as his university friends called him, is deployed to Afghanistan.

Drew is on a short vacation from his officer training and comes home to visit his family and friends in Victoria. One of his friends picks him up from the airport. They joke about how this is the first time Drew has ever been on time in his life. It must be the discipline the army is giving him, Drew’s friend laughs.

His best friend, Scott Cressman, is stoked to finally introduce Drew to his new girlfriend. Together, they rent a house for the weekend and head to Tofino, a surfer’s paradise, on Vancouver Island, for a couple of days of surfing, drinking and many laughs.

Throughout the weekend, the group of friends have one or two serious conversations about Drew heading to Afghanistan in October, but nobody is overly concerned. It’s certainly not the focus of the weekend.

On the way back, they stop at Cameron Lake to enjoy the water and the sun and, of course, take the time to appreciate each other’s company. It’s not every day this tight-knit group gets to hang out. They’re sad the perfect weekend has come to an end, a weekend that reminds them all of the countless road trips they experienced together when they were students at the University of Victoria.

Drew hops into a car with two friends, and they head back to Victoria. Cressman says his goodbyes and watches the car drive away.



With Drew heading off and the war on his mind, Cressman takes an extra good look at his best friend driving away. He's unable to stop an ominous thought from entering his mind: "This could be the last time I see him," he thinks.

His chest tightens, and he brushes off the disturbing thought as quickly as it enters his mind.

### **Nutts the CrossFitter**

Andrew, who was known to CrossFitters as "Andy Nutts," or just "Nutts," walked into CrossFit Vancouver in 2006.

He immediately took to the sport.

"He was making \$10 an hour working as a painter at the time. He didn't have a car. He was sleeping on someone's couch. He was broke as fuck. He would ride his bike everywhere, all winter, even in the pouring rain," remembers Craig Patterson, owner of CrossFit Vancouver. "But somehow he still paid me \$65 an hour for his training without complaining."

Originally, Andy moved to Vancouver from Victoria to attend the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), but finding CrossFit soon sidetracked him from his studies.

A few months after moving to Vancouver, he started coaching at CrossFit Vancouver.

"We spent a lot of time together, Andy and I. Once a week, we'd head out to New West to train military guys at the Royal New Westminster Regiment," Patterson says. "I was grooming him to be a coach in those days."

Richard and Jane clearly remember how their son took to CrossFit, and to Patterson.

"I remember him saying, 'Patty thinks I could start my own gym one day,' he would tell us excitedly. He just loved CrossFit. It focused him. He had all the tools, but he needed focus. CrossFit was a big answer for him," Richard says.

He continues: "It brought people together with a healthy attitude. Everything about it—the diet, the physical side, the camaraderie, the parties even."



Nutts

*Nutts meets Coach.*

Jane agrees: "It was the social side that really grabbed him."

Patterson says it was Andy's social side that made him so magnetic. "He was funny and charming and was always positive, but he wasn't afraid to call a spade a spade," he says.

Sitting with Patterson over drinks, he shares some of his favorite Andy anecdotes: "Two of his earliest CrossFit clients were this gay guy—a super-soft feminine dude—who brought this woman along with him. This woman was nothing short of a crackpot.

"She used to pay Andy in hot stone massages because she couldn't afford the training ... I'd get one massage for every three massages Andy got.

"I remember one time Andy was in there for over three hours, and he came out just cursing, 'Jesus Christ, I'm too young for this. I don't need another hot-stone massage,' he said."

Patterson takes a sip from his drink and grins.



*Nutts is a sorely missed member of the CrossFit Vancouver crew.*

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**"One of my favorite Andy memories was when about five of us decided to take a month off drinking ... ."**

**—Craig "Patty" Patterson**

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"One of my favorite Andy memories was when about five of us decided to take a month off drinking. It was February 2007. We were about two weeks into the no-drinking commitment. We were trying to do all these sober activities to keep busy. We went sober bowling and sober bike riding ... . Then one night, we went over to T-Bear's (Trevor Lindwall's) place, and when we got there Bear was sitting there drinking a scotch.

"Andy looks at T-Bear drinking a scotch and says, 'Patty, this was the worst idea you've ever had. I'm getting on my bike and going to get a drink.' Then he storms out of the house.

"Two minutes later, he comes back. 'My bike was stolen,' he says ... . I don't even think it was his bike."

Patterson laughs.

### **The Decision**

It's 2007.

Drew heads to his Kitsilano, Vancouver, to Cressman's house. They sit around having a few drinks, and he breaks the news that he's joining the military.

His friends are blindsided. None of them expected this.

"His parents won't go for this, especially his mom," Cressman thinks.

He tells his university friends his plan. He tells the CrossFit crew his plan. Patterson can't understand why Nutts would want to leave the fun life as a CrossFit coach to put himself in so much danger.

"CrossFit is just too easy. It's just too easy," Andy keeps saying.

And, of course, Andrew tells his parents.

Richard is more than a little bit surprised, and nervous.

"The army will pay for me to finish my degree, and it will give me a great career," insists Andrew.

After many conversations and much explanation, Andy's friends and family eventually started to see Andy's point of view.

"He told me he needed to do more, to make a difference. He told me he wanted to lead men in battle ... that he wanted a bigger challenge than coaching CrossFit," Patterson remembers.

Cressman adds: "We never staged an intervention or anything, but everyone who sat down and talked to him, they tried to warn him of the dangers ... And selfishly, a lot of us didn't want him to go anywhere."

He continues: "But after a couple conversations with him, I got his reasons, and I respected them. He finally found his passion."

Even Jane and Richard started to embrace their son's wishes.

"It wasn't what we had in mind, but we were supportive," Richard says.

"Could have I convinced him not to join the military? I think I could have. But would have I wanted to? Probably not," Jane admits.

"He wholeheartedly believed in what he was doing," adds Richard.

### The Night Before

It's October 2009, the evening before Andrew leaves for Afghanistan.

Jane is in the kitchen doing dishes. Andrew is sitting at the table talking, but the sound of the running water is muffling his voice.

"Mom, are you listening to me?" asks Andrew, frustrated.

"Ya, ya, ya I'm listening," says Jane.

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**"I might not come home,  
but every single one of my  
men will come home."**

**—Andrew Nuttall**

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"No mom. I want you to really listen to this."

She recognizes the urgency in her son's tone. She stops.

"OK," she says. "What is it?"

"I hope you realize that I might not come home," Andrew says. "I might not come home, but every single one of my men will come home."

"Oh, Andrew," Jane gasps. "You wouldn't do anything crazy there, would you?"

"No, no, no. Of course not," Andrew says.

"I just want you to know that every single one of my men is coming home," he repeats.

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A year and a half later, this conversation still replays over and over in Jane's mind.

"That conversation, it still gives me chills," Jane says. "But he was right. All his men did come home. Andrew was the only one in his platoon who was killed."

She pauses for a moment.

"All his men came home," she says, her eyes swelling with tears.

She takes a breath.

"I know it might sound crazy, but in my own way, I like to believe that Andrew was with them after he was killed. It gives me a little bit of comfort," she says.

### Born to Lead

Neither Jane nor Richard nor Cressman nor Patterson was able to watch Andrew lead men in battle, but they've all spent time with and listened to stories from men who were with Lt. Nuttall, men who worked closely with him and even men who served in his platoon.

"He was in charge of almost 50 men in Afghanistan, and he thrived in that environment," Richard says. "His job as a platoon commander, it's the job everyone wants. All of the hormone-driven young men strive to be an officer."

"He was really good at it," Cressman says. "All his military men, they all said the same thing. They said he was highly respected, but he didn't do it through fear and intimidation. He was unique. He acted like they were all a team. So they all loved and respected him, which isn't really common in the military, I don't think."

"These men, when they told me what Drew was like as an officer, you could hear in their voices that they were genuine. They weren't bullshitters," he continues.

One thing Cressman will always remember about Drew was how unselfish he was.

"He would miss his final exam to drive you to the ferry," said Cressman. "That's just the type of guy he was. He was so selfless ... and sometimes it was to his detriment."

Ironically, this is ultimately the reason he was killed.

Patterson points out that Andy was a selfless leader, even in death.

"He could have sent one of his men out there, but Andy led from the front. He put himself in harm's way. Whatever the most dangerous position was, Andy would take it on. And in the end, he was the one killed by the explosion," said Patterson.

### Dec. 23, 2009

It was 7 a.m.

Jane was upstairs when the two military men knocked on the family's home to bring them the news of their son's death. John, Andrew's brother, was visiting from Calgary for Christmas.

"I remember hearing the knock, and because it was Christmas, I thought it was just a delivery. I remember thinking, 'They're starting deliveries early today,'" Jane says.

Richard, who was downstairs, opened the front door.

"It goes through my mind all the time ... that day, that moment," says Richard, who immediately called for his wife to join him.

Jane could hear something was wrong in her husband's voice.

"Richard told me, 'Jane, you better come down.'"

This is the moment Jane remembers the most clearly.

"I told her, 'Andrew has been killed,'" Richard says.

"I actually couldn't breathe. I sat down because I could feel I was going to pass out," she recalls. "My heart was pounding."

"The men were talking, and I remember all I could think was, 'I need to get John.' I didn't want the men to say anything else until John was there," says Jane, who hurried upstairs to break the news to John.

"In that moment, I don't necessarily remember everything. I don't remember seeing the guys. I mostly just remember the voices," Jane says.

### Finding a Way to Remember

Last year, CrossFit Vancouver hosted the first Memorial Nutts Cup.

Keeping the spirit of Andy alive, it was mostly a recreational CrossFit event, a chance for current members to bring newbies into the CrossFit fold.

Close to 150 people, all dressed in red and white to support the Canadian troops, completed the morning workout. Then, in the afternoon, veteran CrossFitters tackled the Nutts Hero WOD. 2010 Games competitor Garth Prouse took it down, winning the Nutts Cup, a metal cup with two silver balls hanging off it.

This year, Aug. 27 is the date of the second annual Nutts Cup. It's a team competition, where teams will be made up of two men and one woman. There is \$3,000 up for grabs for the winning team, with cash prizes for second and third as well. And Fitness Town and Reebok have both committed to donate prizes for the event.



CrossFit Vancouver

**The Nutts Cup features a pair of silver balls in honor of its namesake.**



**The Andy Nutts Award goes to the person who can handle not only the physical workouts but also possesses the staying power to party until all hours of the night.**

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Patterson is also organizing an Andy Nutts Award, which will be awarded to the person who can handle not only the physical workouts but also possesses the staying power to party until all hours of the night at the after-party.

"I remember at his funeral. We all stayed up and drank until all hours of the morning to honor Nutts. We kept saying, 'What would Andy do?' Would Nutts stay up until 7 a.m. drinking? Yes, he would. Would Nutts pick up that fat chick over there? Yes, he would," said Patterson.

"What would Andy do?" has become a motto among Andy's CrossFit friends ever since.

For Richard, the Nutts Cup is special because it captures who his son really was.

"It's not some artificial memorial event. It's him. It's CrossFit. There's the party after. It's Andrew. It's who he was," Richard says.

"You don't get over this. People say time will heal, but no, you won't heal. You don't heal from this ... . Andrew said to me once, 'If anything should happen, it's going to be a lot rougher on you than on me. And ... and it's rough,'" he said.

"But events like this, they help. They allow us to meet other people who knew him. It gives us strength."

### **Finding a Way to Cope**

It's June 2011.

Richard holds up a picture and stares at it. In the picture are Andrew and his major, Wayne Niven. Andrew towers over Niven by a good half a foot. Both men look like they're genuinely having fun, all the while maintaining a certain degree of focus.



*Lt. Nuttall shortly before he died in Afghanistan.*

"This one is my favorite. It was taken in Afghanistan. You can see that Andrew has a full moustache here. This means he has been there for a while already. So this must have been about a week before he dies," says Richard.

"I have titled this picture, 'A man in full.' You can see that in this picture, can't you? Andrew felt so good about what he was doing there. I'm so glad he made it to that place in life, a place where he was a man in his full power."

He pauses.

"A lot of people never get that opportunity," he says.

He picks up a small black leather notebook from his desk. He flips it open.

"These are Andrew's notes from Afghanistan."

He reads from the book:

"Dec. 23. 16:12 o'clock—discovered shells ... ."

"This was the day. At 16 o'clock, Andrew discovers some shells. Then, two hours later, an IED. Bang," says Richard, clapping his hands together to make a loud noise. "He is killed."

Nutts





Nutts

***"I might not come home, but every single one of my men will come home."—Lt. Andrew Nuttall***

He puts the book down. The room is quiet

I wonder how many hours Richard and Jane have spent staring at their son's pictures, memorizing the tiny details—the expressions on his face, the length of his moustache. I wonder how much time they've spent reading, committing to memory the notes Andrew wrote in his little black book, how much time they've spent staring at the Canadian flag and running their hands across the surfboard from Andrew's friends, how much time they've spent replaying their last conversation with their son.

"The last time he phoned was about a week before he died. I couldn't get him off the phone. We had a really long chat. We talked for an hour," Richard says. "That last conversation with him, I remember we talked about his return home. And he asked me about the sign at our ranch."

For as long as Richard can remember, Andrew had been bugging him to put a sign up at the family ranch, a property in what looks like the middle of nowhere, just outside of William's Lake, in the interior of British Columbia.

"He wanted to put a sign near the little dirt path that leads to the ranch. 'Cayoosh Ranch' is what we named it. 'Cayoosh' means 'wild horse,'" explains Richard.

"Dad, I'll pay for it," he would say. He was always wanting to pay for things, to take you out, but then he'd have no money once you got there," says Richard, laughing faintly.

So when Andrew's platoon came back from Afghanistan last summer, the 30-plus platoon members made the trek to the Nuttall family ranch to meet the Nuttalls and hang the sign that had finally been made.

While they were at the ranch, the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) arrived with their cameras to gather footage of the event for a documentary that aired last Nov. 11 called "We Will Remember Them."

"I want to show you the documentary," says Richard, sitting down at the computer to pull up the online documentary.

## The Documentary

The setting is the Nuttalls' ranch.

Birds are chirping, and the wind is softly blowing in the perfectly blue sky. The Nuttalls and countless men in military uniform are there, all surrounded by an ocean of tall green trees and the lush B.C. mountains. There's not a sign of civilization. It's a place of pure solitude and untouched wilderness.

They hold a formal service for Andrew at the ranch.

One of Andrew's platoon men gives a speech. Fighting back tears, he says, "Andrew always had a smile on his face ... no matter how miserable we became, his smile helped give us that extra push to get us through."

He resumes his place among his peers.

Then Richard speaks: "In his last call from Afghanistan, he asked about the sign ... so we're going to do it," he says before Andrew's men raise the giant carved wooden sign that says "Cayoosh Ranch" in deep yellow letters.

Music plays softly in the background.

Jane expresses what the weekend means to her: "We are with people who were with him when we couldn't be ... it's been very special," she says.

"It's a huge chunk of your life that is gone. It won't ever be the same, so you have to figure out a new life. And that hasn't begun to happen yet for me."

The camera fades.

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The CBC footage from that documentary was taken one year ago.

Today, in the family's home in Victoria, Jane looks up from the computer screen. She turns to me. Tears stream from her face. Unmistakable hurt radiates from her eyes.

"That hasn't happened yet," she says quietly.

She wipes her eyes, forces a weak smile and reaches for a hug.



CrossFit Vancouver

## About the Author

*Emily Beers finished a master's degree in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in the spring of 2009. Upon graduation, she worked as a sportswriter at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, where she covered figure skating and short-track speed skating. Currently, she hosts WOD HOG ([www.wodhog.ca](http://www.wodhog.ca)), a not-always-PG publication featuring the CrossFit community in Canada West.*

*As an athlete and CrossFitter, Beers started out as a gymnast, competing to the national level. After growing too tall for gymnastics, she played NCAA Division 1 basketball for the University of Idaho, then returned home and played for the University of British Columbia. After three years of playing basketball, she started rowing, competing at the varsity level at the University of Western Ontario for two years. While trying to make the National Rowing Team in 2009, she discovered CrossFit and became utterly addicted. Soon, CrossFit was meant to be a way to cross-train for rowing but became her greatest passion. She moved back to Vancouver in September 2009 and found CrossFit Vancouver, where she now both trains and works as an apprentice coach.*

*In her first season competing in CrossFit she won the B.C. Sectional in 2010. Regionals were less kind to her, but that's only made her more determined to get to the Games. She ruptured her Achilles tendon in December 2010 and served as the Canada West Regional media director while recovering from Achilles surgery. She competed in the 2011 CrossFit Games with CrossFit Vancouver, finishing 19th.*