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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Tested by Fire

Peter Trapp survives one of Australia's worst bushfires—and he believes CrossFit helped him do it.

By Peter Trapp

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Courtesy of Peter Trapp

*"On the hottest day ever recorded in Melbourne and across the state of Victoria, a bushfire fanned by strong winds is second only to hell itself."*

—David A. Johns, "A Day like no other"

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In 2009, CrossFit training saved my life when the physical fitness and mental fortitude developed through countless WODs helped me survive Australia's worst-ever bushfires.

In January of that year, as Melbourne sweltered under daily temperatures as high as 42 C, I continued to do my daily WODs much to the dismay of my non-CrossFitting family and friends. I had been following CrossFit principles for about two years by then, and I had made mistakes along the way but continued to learn and progress. I was 41 years of age and had been training pretty hard—or so I thought—since the age of 15.

Every WOD I did had that moment where I asked myself why the hell I was punishing my mind and body like that. Often I came close to quitting, but for some reason I never did. I always reminded myself of that exquisite moment where I could collapse to the ground knowing I had given my all, and the hope of getting a personal best kept me going.

Twelve months earlier and with the help of two other partners, I had opened my first “box” through CrossFit Victoria. Fast-forward to Feb. 7, 2009, a Saturday. After teaching our 9 a.m. class, which had been full of great energy as usual, I supervised our “open gym” session, offering coaching advice and generally shooting the breeze. I had grave reservations about the mood of the weather that day. The sky looked different and menacing, the wind swirled much more than usual, and it was already very hot. I was conscious of the fact that I should leave work soon. Colleagues and clients thought the same. I began the one-hour drive home.

In the car, I immediately put the radio on to check the news. According to reports, there was a bushfire about 30 kilometers from my home. As I drove up the mountain, I could see smoke in the far distance. Arriving home, all seemed fine. My heavily pregnant wife and three-year-old son slept peacefully. Suddenly, one of my neighbours knocked on the door and told me the fire would be at our place soon.



*When he was battling bushfires in Australia, Peter Trapp was thankful he'd learned to persevere while battling challenging CrossFit workouts.*

## Wall of Fire

It was time to evacuate the home. Taking the photo albums and not much else, my family nervously drove off.

I was confident I could fight the fire; I had rehearsed a few times for this. I was prepared: water pump, buckets, hoses, fire clothes, radio ... I felt terrified and very alone.

The radio assured me the fire was still far away. Ten minutes later, the sky turned black, then red. I could hear it coming. Imagine standing next to a jumbo jet. Then I saw the flames: hundreds of metres in length and over three stories high. This was no normal fire. My land exploded into flames fuelled by 160-kilometer-an-hour winds. As I rushed to the fire pump, I felt calm and ready.

The pump didn't start. Almost surrounded by flames, I fled into the house to get my two dogs. The house started burning. I put a blanket over myself and, clutching the hysterical dogs, went outside. *The heat!* Everything was on fire—even my driveway. I had to run through the flames. Rushing to my neighbor's property, which was my only sanctuary, I could feel myself burning. At this precise time, 21 people were burning to death 100 meters up the road.

Twenty meters on, I lost all visibility. The smoke blinded me. I stumbled into a ditch and twisted my ankle. I could not find my neighbour's gate. It was then I decided it was my time to die. But then a desperate desire to live for my family took hold, and all the memories of painful, gut-wrenching WODs came flooding back.

I vividly remember screaming to myself, "Come on! Go! Go faster! Push! Don't give up! Go!"

I blindly felt for the gate and found it. I sprinted up the neighbor's steep driveway. Dogs in the house, I jumped into his swimming pool, then spent an hour helping him save his house and us. I then collapsed to the ground.

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## Recovery and Refocusing

After leaving hospital, it took a while to realize I had lost everything. I began to despair, and dark thoughts entered my mind. My CrossFit community rallied behind me and my family big time. Fundraising CrossFit T-shirts were produced by my supporters, and they were called "Pete's Pain" in honour of the first WOD I would give the group when I got back. These ended up selling across Australia, the U.S.A. and the U.K.

Three weeks after the fire, I traveled to Sydney to do my first Level 1 Certification. Unable to do most of the fundamental movements or WODs because of my burns, I mainly watched. I met Coach Glassman, and he showed me great kindness and offered much encouragement. I cried when I watched my friends do Fran. Before the fire, I had trained very hard for that moment by practicing my woeful thrusters. I had been determined to beat my personal best of 10:28 and avoid the dreaded 10-minute cut-off time.

Four weeks after this, I did my first WOD. With six people screaming encouragement, I did a very slow Christine and vomited afterwards. Progressing very slowly, I went back to coaching, and my workouts continued.

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In August 2009, I attended the Level 1 Certification again, which our box was hosting. I did Fran in 7:15. Up until October, every WOD became a PB. On Oct. 11—my 42nd birthday—I ran the 42km Melbourne Marathon to celebrate. The media enjoyed that story. I did it for me.



After that, I felt burned out and decided I needed to spend some down time with my family and new baby, so I resigned from CrossFit Victoria. After a break, I set up a training business specializing in fighter strength and conditioning, and it's doing very well. I am the proud trainer of numerous state champions, four Australian champions and a world title holder.

But I missed CrossFit. I missed it a lot. I felt a need to start up a new box. I missed the satisfaction of helping people learn how to move and exercise properly. I missed encouraging people to push harder to see what they are capable of. I also missed the CrossFit family. That's why I did the "essay" to become an affiliate.

On the 12th of June, a dream came true for me. Six years after I discovered CrossFit and came to the realization that I, Peter Trapp, wanted my own affiliate, I received confirmation that I was now a member of the CrossFit Family.

### A New Passion

Now I can do things on my terms and set up a CrossFit box the way it should be set up. I am in charge of my own destiny. I have planned the layout and logistics, and I've teamed up with two former clients. Together, we hope to create something special.

I genuinely hope that my practical CrossFit training, coaching and life experiences combined with those of my partners will make our affiliation a valuable addition to the CrossFit Family as a whole.

I intend to be a CrossFit athlete for as long as I am able to. I want to keep improving!

It is my deepest desire to constantly improve as a coach. One of my mentors years ago, strength coach Barry Conlin, never lost enthusiasm for new information and knowledge. I still remember that after 50 years in the game and thousands of athletes later, the highlight of his week was when I gave him a pile of articles to read. I want to be like that. If I can change people's attitudes to exercise or influence a handful of young people, then I will be happy. What's better than that?

And in life I am never going to give up.

Thank you to my family and friends for your belief in me. Thank you CrossFit. It will never be forgotten.



### About the Author

*Peter Trapp has been training seriously for over 25 years. He started off as a middle-distance runner, reaching national standard before injuries curtailed his career. He has been training people for 20 years and is currently preparing for the Australian weightlifting championships in the masters division. He intends to undertake further CrossFit certifications when he visits the United States and Canada later this year.*

*He holds the following qualifications: Crossfit Level 1, CrossFit Gymnastics, strength and conditioning coach (Australia Strength and Conditioning Association), track and field coach level 2 (Australia Track and Field Coaches Association), olympic weightlifting coach level 1 (Weightlifting Australia), certified boxing trainer (Punch), cert IV fitness trainer-personal trainer (Fitness Australia). Peter is the owner of [Full Contact Fitness](#)/Specialist Fighter Strength and Conditioning, and he is the former owner/director of [CrossFit Victoria](#).*