

I wanted to be skinny. That was my drive. I was tired of enduring through the pain of shopping for clothes and the self-deprecation every time I looked in the mirror. I wanted to be that person who would illicit a second glance from a passerby and for this, I faithfully dragged myself to the gym and took on an aerobics class or hopped on a machine for 45 minutes. My fitness world was dull and just one shade of grey.

I remember watching a Reebok commercial for RealFlex shoes. There were people jumping on boxes, doing burpees and working with kettlebells. "How fun this looks!" I thought to myself. "I wish there was somewhere I could do this!" Fast forward a couple of years and my brother-in-law tells me about CrossFit. Excitedly, I ask him to set me up for an initial tryout, he obliges and I am ready for my first class at CrossFit 431. Thankfully, the lunch hours were slow back then. It was just my brother-in-law, a co-worker of mine, and myself. I was introduced to my first Olympic movement, the Split Jerk. I'll never forget the feeling of ridiculousness in learning this move but managed to suppress the giggles that were dying to escape. The WOD came next. It was hard. There were banded pull-ups, air squats, and seated pistols. I suffered but suffered in many shades of colours. I was hooked. The classes were full of variety, the people were nice and the coach wasn't hard on the eyes. Not only did I drink the proverbial Kool-Aid, I dove in and happily swam in it like a pig rolling in mud on a hot day.

The next couple of months flew by with flashbulb moments of my first PRs; 100# clean and jerk in my first open; 185# back squat; 135# front squat. I also fell in love with Olympic lifting. To my children's dismay, mom started dragging them to the gym on Saturdays for Oly class but the story starts to change here. I always thought my kids were too involved in their iPads as they sat in the gym waiting for mom to finish. However, soon they started asking me how much weight I lifted or mimicked Olympic lifters as I streamed live competitions on the computer. They were paying attention to what mom was doing, and I became a role model. I felt that I was paving the path of physical fitness for my kids for years to come.

I continued to regularly attend classes but the internal struggle with weight was all but forgotten. By this point, I also came to the realization that I am strong. Then came the day that my weight loss struggle took on a whole new light. I was busy obsessing over my weightlifting technique when errant thought crossed my mind, "I don't want to lose weight because I love the fact that I can lift heavy." Wait. I just thought to myself that I did not want to lose weight. Do I still want to? Of course - but I had finally found a truce with my struggle. Strong IS the new beautiful.

The CrossFit journey is never an easy one but it is a never ending one and one that I proudly share with CrossFit 431. My journey would have never become a reality without the exceptional coaching, and the friendships forged at the box we call home. The best part for me is no matter how old you are, or what kind of physical shape you are in, you can always improve. I can pull my chest to a bar; I can move more weight on a barbell; and I have just completed my very first open RX'd. I am closer to 40 than I am 30 and I am still celebrating achievements. I have watched other people, young and old hit personal victories and have celebrated proudly with them. I will continue this journey looking forward to the hard work and the victories to come; but more importantly I will continue this journey loving myself the way I am supposed to be and hopefully, being a role model for generations to come.

- Irene Thiessen