

Austin Pace
2/17/2016

An Open Letter to My Friend the Barbell

Dear Barbell,

We casually met on several occasions. Hence, I knew of you, but I didn't truly understand the power you had and how you would change my life. We didn't start out as good friends; in fact I dreaded our interactions and sometimes feared you at first. Our bond took time to mold.

My journey to you began when I was a sophomore in high school. A good friend of mine died when I was sixteen years old. She was followed by seven more. In just two short years, eight of my close friends passed away due to tragic accidents. The pain was too much to handle. As a means to escape my emotions and the reality of what had happened, I turned to a life of substance abuse. I partied every night as if I would die tomorrow because truly, I really didn't care if I did. Eventually this lifestyle caught up with me. I got in trouble with the law, and as a result, I had drug charges, heavy fines to pay, and worst of all, I disappointed my family.

At this low point in my life, a good friend of mine told me about a private gym he went to called Conditioning for Optimum Results (COR). He explained to me how great it was and the type of fitness training services they provided. I was impressed with what he told me, and decided to go and check it out for myself. I had a really good feeling about the trainers and the overall facility. The environment there felt very positive and uplifting. I just knew this is what I needed. I had to train there!

This is where our true relationship began. You were daunting at first but there was something about you that kept me coming back. Your primal simplicity yet complex design is what kept my attention and intrigued me. There were times when I felt I lacked the strength to resist temptation, but you gave me physical and emotional fortitude which motivated me to fight back and refrain from relapsing. We trained together three days a week for six years. During our sessions, I threw you, dropped you, sweat on you and bled on you, but you stuck with me. As I let go of my troubled past, I willingly let you force your friendship upon me which has now become an unbreakable bond between man and metal. You gave me the strength to rise above the wreckage of my past and see the potential of my future. The challenge you posed to me was really the drug I needed.

At times it was brutal facing my demons, but the more I lifted, the stronger I became. The renowned singer/songwriter Tori Amos summed it up well when she said,

Some people are afraid of what they might find if they try to analyze themselves too much, but you have to crawl into your wounds to discover where your fears are. Once the bleeding starts, the cleansing can begin.

You are no respecter of persons. You have taught legends and rookies alike, the power of an iron mind and an iron will. You have taught me that nothing is more powerful than determination and a vision of success. I will never forget the turning point in my relationship with you. I was doing an Olympic deep squat and you put 215 kg of your weight on my shoulders. I felt strong and squatted so deep that my butt touched my heels. I felt fused to you and found myself in what I call "the void". This is a state of mind where nothing else exists

except you and me; all stress, pain, and worries are gone. As I arose from the squat, I knew I could do anything. I could overcome any obstacle and conquer all my fears.

Author Brian Koslow said, "If you nurture your mind, body, and spirit, your time will expand. You will gain a new perspective that will allow you to accomplish much more." The time I have spent with you has built me spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. It has provided me with the skills to face life's challenges with greater confidence.

You introduced me to lifelong friends who will always be there during the best and worst of times. Many of them have had similar experiences and have gained both physical and emotional strength from you. You motivate them the same way you motivate me; by baiting us with a vision of conquering plateaus and setting personal records (PR's).

You have taught me the value of personal integrity. If I was to claim that I lifted more weight than I actually did, I would only be cheating myself and dishonoring you. In life, it is the same. We may be able to get away with cheating, but the reality is we are damaging our own character. It is not always easy to display integrity, but it is always worth it. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge".

I wish we would have become friends sooner, yet if we had, I don't know if our friendship would be the same as it is today. It was my difficult journey that led me to you. As I walk through the doorway to meet you at COR each day, I touch the sign which reads "As you sow, so shall you reap". This represents a promise to myself and to you, that I'll be going all-out

on every rep and every set, and in return, I know you will do the same. Theodore Roosevelt said,

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and come up short again and again because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotion, spends himself in a worthy cause; who at his best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold timid souls who have never tasted victory or defeat.

You are just like life. You weigh me down with stress and tremendous force, but the struggles and hard work make those who use you, stronger and ready for more. I hope people can find someone positive like you to help them through the tough times.

Sincerely,

Your Friend Austin Pace

P.S. See you in the morning!