



The bar loaded with 500 pounds crashed to the concrete floor as Micah dropped it. The sound of iron plates meeting the cement echoed off the walls of the empty warehouse gym. Micah let out a brief scream and jumped. He grabbed his right arm. I stood in shocked silence, not knowing what to say. Micah walked calmly to the back of the gym and lay on his back. His calmness was unnerving. He was breathing deep and deliberate. He stretched his arms above his head. He looked as if he were lounging by a pool in the heat of summer. I didn't know what to do, it wasn't an emergency. No blood and no breaks. We looked at Micah's right arm. His bicep had rolled to the top of his arm. It looked like he had two deltoids side by side. His bicep had retracted. In that moment, we both knew: Micah ripped his right bicep clean off his radius. In between the quiet swears and deep breaths, Micah sat up and said, "I'm never doing that again." An understandable statement given his injury would require surgery. What followed shocked me more than Micah's injury. "And neither should you." I couldn't believe it. My workout partner for the last 3 months told me to stop powerlifting. I thought, "Is he right? Should I stop this?"



I was in shock, not from Micah's injury, but rather his declaration. I had been focusing on powerlifting for over a year now. It was one of my best friends. It was the most honest friend I had made

in years. It kept me in check. It was always there for me. I couldn't imagine turning my back on powerlifting. Then, Micah, a 10 year powerlifting veteran, told me to turn my back on my friend. But after I watched my buddy rip his bicep off the bone, I stood in my gym contemplating leaving and finding a new friend. The friend that helped me find out what strength is. Could a new routine help me the way powerlifting had? Would I be able to blow off the stress from school with a new hobby? Would I find the same joy? I knew my decision here would change my life—I was scared to make it.



I plopped down on an empty bench and thought about it. The tranquil iron Zen garden was under attack from a forest fire of doubt. Micah's injury obviously was fresh in my mind. I thought about my goals outside of powerlifting. I want to go to physical therapy school. Could I still get into my first choice of school if I was injured? Based on the physical requirements of the institution, the answer was a resounding "No." Do I have time to take off from school for my own therapy if I had to? Another no. The costs of powerlifting were starting to pile up in my mind. The weight of my thoughts was the heaviest thing in my gym. I wasn't sure if I could lift them.

The initial shock of the injury wore off for Micah before me. Micah was now pacing back and forth from the front door and the deadlift platform trying to assess how bad the tear was. I just sat on my bench and thought about the joy I found in the gym. The forest fire was being contained. My thoughts travelled to the first time I squatted with 100 pounds more than my bodyweight on my back for reps, the first time I bench pressed my body weight, my first deadlift over 400 pounds. As each memory crept into my consciousness my muscles remembered. They twitched with anticipation in an attempt to tell me more memories were to come. All the time I had given to this journey. All the time I had trained when I didn't want to. All the time I had stress from life lifted at the gym. All the time I had spent getting stronger. All the time I had suffered for my goals. I thought about my goal, and chose instead of stopping it short, I would amend it, change it into something less lofty, something I could accomplish while I stayed safe. I made a conscious decision to attack this fear Micah's injury instilled in me. If I could conquer it, it could become a reference point for the next time any fear creeps into my life.



Micah saw me thinking. He sat on another bench and asked me why I hadn't finished my workout? That shocked me again. This guy was starting to make me mad. I asked, "Stop lifting, keep lifting, what the hell Micah?"

"Who said stop lifting? I'm not using a mixed grip on deadlifts anymore, that's what I was talking about stopping," Micah replied chuckling.



My existential breakdown was all due to a miscommunication? That made me even angrier. I jumped off the bench and marched to the deadlift platform. Micah's 500 pounds were still loaded on the bar. I stripped it to 435. I dipped my hands into a barrel of chalk. I knew that my grip would have to be strong for this weight to come off the floor. I pulled my belt tight around my midsection. I stared intently at the bar. Setting my feet under bar at a comfortable and consistent width. My arms rose above my head like I was riding a roller coaster and the big start hill was coming up. I brought hands to the bar. Then with Micah looking--I turned one of my hands over. I squeezed with all my might. I took one last big breath of air, and forced my abdominals into my belt. I pushed my legs into the platform like the start of a vertical jump and exploded up, with 435 pounds in my hands. The bar moved an inch off the ground and halted. My leg pushed harder and harder. The bar slowly moved further up my shaking legs. I pulled my back tight and the bar finally reached my knees. At that moment, I knew I defeated it--

this lift was mine. I shot my hips forward and the bar came to rest on my quads. I bent my knees and set the bar down violently, my hands still in the mixed grip that had just ripped Micah's bicep. Micah walked over to the platform and offered his injured hand to me, "It's okay man, I'll be back. That was a helluva lift."



That lift did more for me than anyone will know; it was the hardest lift of my lift. It was this lift that made me want to keep powerlifting for as long as I can. It showed me something about myself. It showed me that matters of strength are more how much weight is on the bar.