

SHE - WOMAN



Interview by Jim Curley

You've been involved in strongman and powerlifting for a lot of years. Let's start with your age, height and weight.

I'll be 44 pretty soon, and I'm 5'4" and weigh 168.

What are your best lifts in powerlifting?

My best raw squat is 473 without wraps, best raw bench is 325 and best deadlift was 540 at Raw Unity less than a year ago. I competed in 181's and I've got a USPA meet coming up in a few weeks. I'll go raw in that one too.

Are you married? Kids?

I'm married to Milo Mills. We've been married for 20 years and we've got a twenty two year old daughter, a six year old son and two grandchildren. Milo was a pretty good powerlifter. He quit competing about 2003. Things were starting to change as far as gear and judging were concerned and we didn't really like the changes. Neither one of us has ever been big fans of gear, and he would put it on two weeks out from a meet after training raw the rest of the time.

What were his best lifts and at what bodyweight?

At 242 he squatted 804 with flimsy "Ace Bandage" type knee wraps. He benched a 562, and pulled an 815. He had horrible technique – it was just pure strength gutting out each lift.

How did you two meet?

We trained at the same gym and I was getting out of a bad marriage. I had married too young, so when he heard I was single he "made his move" that day!

Was he aware of just how strong you are?

I had been doing bodybuilding, I had been in the

JILL MILLS IS ONE STRONG WOMAN WHO DOES BOTH POWERLIFTING AND STRONGMAN/WOMAN.



military and fitness activities but I didn't even know about powerlifting at that point. I hated everything about bodybuilding – dieting, posing, being on stage, the whole deal. I went to a powerlifting meet to watch Milo compete and I thought, “This is it! This is what I need to be doing.” It was a slow process – I couldn't peak right, I was way overtraining. It took a while for me to get on board with the whole program.

How old were you when you entered your first powerlifting meet?

I was 23.

When did you transition to strongman? (I'll refer to it as that the rest of the interview even though it could just as easily be called strongwoman).

That happened a few years later. We were watching World's Strongest Man on TV and Milo and I said, “that

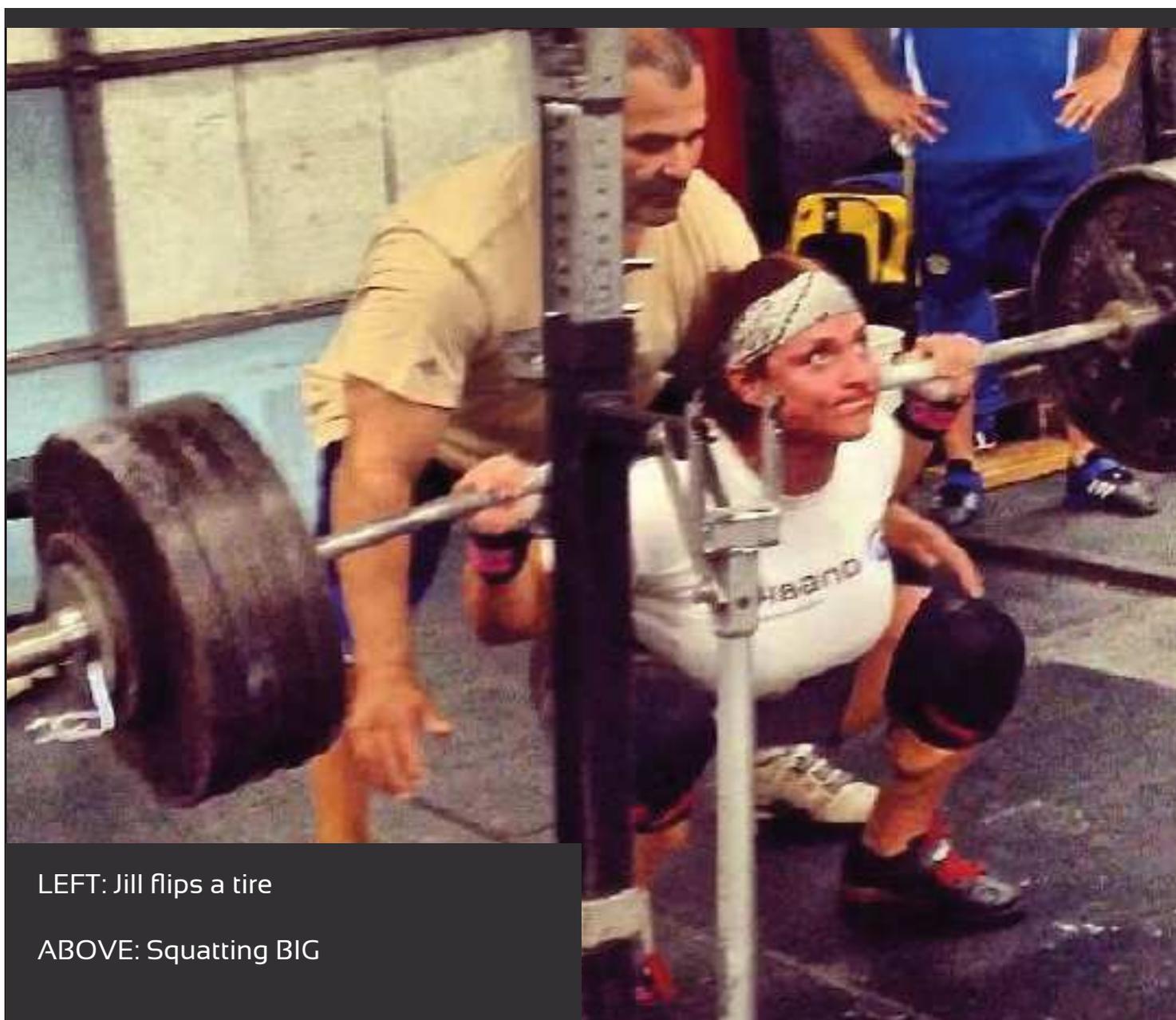
looks fun!” We'd flip tires, push our cars around and it was cool. The very first strongman event in America was in 1997 in Euless, TX.

Did they have a women's division?

They did, but no one showed up! I was used to training with guys so I just entered. Powerlifting is so one dimensional, whereas strongman has a hundred possibilities of events and you don't know what they are until you show up for the event. You can't have any weaknesses so you have to kind of train everything. It's much more demanding and challenging, and requires you to be very athletic which I like.

I used to train yoke walk, farmers walk and Hummer tire deadlift but didn't like the stones, shield carry, or actually most of it.

Exactly! The strongman events that directly transfer



LEFT: Jill flips a tire

ABOVE: Squatting BIG

to powerlifting is what powerlifters like. The sport has “evolved” to the point that you know the events beforehand, and I don’t really like it as much. Even at world level meets you never knew what events you were going to have to do; you just had to be ready for anything. Milo would always say that the cream rises to the top. If you’re ready for anything and have trained that way, you’ll usually win. Generally, strongman events involve a grip event, some sort of deadlift, an overhead press where you have to clean it from the floor, there’s always a loading event, some sort of carry and a medley of some kind. If you’ve trained those basic categories you can usually adapt to whatever they throw at you.

Is Strongwoman growing in popularity?

Oh yes, but it’s limited by sponsorship and money. Nowadays women just show up at a strongman event and compete for the fun of it.

Did you ever compete in Highland Games?

Most Scottish games are throwing events and that just never really appealed to me. Powerlifting is very linear in the movements and tightness is essential in all three lifts. There’s a lot of rotational movements in throwing events and learning that is a science in itself. Combined with lack of passion for throwing, I just never did it.

These days as a 44 year old, what is your focus? Powerlifting or Strongman, or both?

I’m just doing powerlifting. Strongwoman is so brutal I just can’t do it. If you’re just doing it for fun, or doing it occasionally to help powerlifting, that’s great. I could never do it that way because of my competitive nature. I’d push myself to the max and I’d just get too beat up. I want to keep powerlifting and at this point I just can’t do both. I really enjoy coaching more than actually competing, so I’ve got some girls I train in both powerlifting and strongwoman.

Is that what you do full time? Are you a trainer?

Yes. I train out of a private gym in San Antonio, but we have a 3,000 square foot barn that people will make the drive to train in. I live forty minutes out of San Antonio and quite a few people will make the drive.

How many clients do you have?

I have around twenty. I go for quality rather than quantity and I can pick and choose who I train. It keeps the passion there because I put a lot of myself into their training. I’m a

Below: Jill in her body building days

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nurse, massage therapist and I was in the military, so I’ve got a diverse background. Milo and I live a simple life so I can do what fulfills me, rather than being overly concerned with the money aspect. Milo is an MRI tech so we both contribute, but we both seek a balanced life. It’s important to have family time and time for my own training. I don’t



JILL SQUATTING 473 AT RAW UNITY, 2014

like being harried.

Strongman/woman/powerlifting. What's the connection?

I've always encouraged my clients to do both because they complement each other. Strongman fills in the gaps that you don't hit in the gym, and powerlifting builds the base for strongman, so my clients and I go back and forth. It keeps you well rounded. If you exclusively powerlift you start having issues over time from doing the same specific stuff. For example, the yoke walk makes me much more stable in the squat, and the strongman grip movements help deadlift. The strongman stuff hits the lower back in ways that powerlifting, even powerlifting assistance movements, never hit. If I don't keep training strongman, I can feel the glute/ham/lower back area getting weaker.

Specifically, which strongman movements help most there?

It's got to be the carries. Yoke walk, farmers walk and

stones. The way you have to tuck your hips under to extend and perform those lifts, especially at the start are great. A good deadlifter won't necessarily be good at stones or vice-versa, but getting the stone off the floor will help anyone's deadlift.

So a powerlifter who wanted to help their powerlifts but not compete in strongman could do light stone lifts?

Yes, but stones are a specialized thing to have around. Someone who just wants to help their powerlifting could use sandbags. They could do sandbag carries, sandbag lifts, farmers walks with dumbbells instead of handles and tire flips are great if done correctly. I feel like my deadlift improves a lot if I'm tire flipping.

What's the incorrect way to flip tires?

Instead of trying to curl it up, put your shoulder against the tire at the start and drive your hips into it quickly. It's actually like a 45 degree clean – get it moving, drive the hips under and extend the back to get it as high as possible.

If you're not thinking speed, it won't happen. You're not actually lifting with the arms, but the arms keep it going. It's a whole body movement. Like many lifts, it takes technique.

You're a raw powerlifter. Have you thought about going to gear?

I may have to at some point, and I did a single ply meet in 2011, but I don't like the new gear material.

What were your best lifts, both raw and geared?

In double ply, where I used a single ply shirt and deadlift suit, I got 651-391-562 weighing 173.

When you got that 651 squat, were you deep or parallel?

My depth is consistent. I don't conform to a federations depth – I squat to my standard which is WAY deep, regardless of gear. That double ply suit was a polyester Boss suit, no briefs. Whatever people like to lift in is their choice, but I just don't like tough gear and I don't think that the lift should change to conform to the gear. If





“NOWADAYS WOMEN JUST SHOW UP AT A STRONGMAN EVENT AND COMPETE FOR THE FUN OF IT.”

someone wants to have their squat measured against the greats like Coan, Goggins and Karwoski, then they need to squat the same way – DEEP! My thought is if you can’t squat deep, then put on a looser suit.

How long do you plan on continuing to compete?

I’m going in Raw Unity in about three weeks, but I just pick and choose meets now. I’ve never felt better because I’ve let my body heal and I’m taking a supplement called Play Again. It’s heavy on hyaluronic acid and it’s really helped my recovery and joint pain. I don’t make any money from this, but I own some old horses. I used to buy products for them that contained hyaluronic acid and it really helped them. I saw the improvement, and there is no placebo effect with horses! It either works or it doesn’t.

What injuries in particular did this stuff help you with?

Oh my gosh! My joints are small anyway and the things I’ve made them do is crazy. My feet have osteoarthritis, my knees and hips have stress fractures, elbows, I’ve had triceps resected. I have no pain now – I don’t even take NSAIDS.

In the upcoming Raw Unity meet, are you going to use knee wraps?

Raw is raw. I’ll use sleeves, but my thought is if you’re going to use wraps, you might as well put on a suit too. I don’t like to mess with gear at all. I had knee pain a while ago so I used wraps to work around it and when I went back to raw, I felt like I had less stability. I feel like I’ll have more knee problems.

What kind of routine do you generally put a new trainee on who wants to start powerlifting?

I stick with the old linear progression. I’ll cycle them from six weeks to ten weeks depending on their starting strength. We go four days a week – squat one day, bench the next, then deadlift day, and an accessory day.

Anything I’ve forgotten to bring up?

I’d like to promote a meet I’m running in Orlando, FL May 1st at the Europa. It’s an all female strongwoman contest called Amazons Live (www.unitedstatesstrongman.com).

Who would you like to thank or mention?

Ken Anderson for all his support, Play Again for helping recover from brutal workouts and of course my husband and clients. My training partner Phillip Delarosa. We’ve trained together off and on for ten years. **PLT**

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