The Death of My 450. Looking back now, I really should have named this "The Crushing of My Soul" as my spirit was hurt a lot more than the bike was. I suppose the best way to explain why it was so soul crushing, is to write about what I went through to get that bike.

Summer of 2012 is when the crushing of the soul took place. I hadn’t raced in nearly a decade, and had only been riding dirtbikes again for the last two or three summers. The only riding I was doing was on one of my dads two bikes (2006 RM-250 & 2003 YZ-250), or my brothers (2002 YZ-250). We weren’t riding motocross, but had gotten into single track riding in the Pickle Lake area. My Dad and Uncle Bernie had cut what seemed like a thousand kilometers of trails over the previous few years. We had the odd dirt pit that had a few sand mounds a guy could jump off, but nothing that could really take away that motocross itch. We eventually built a sixty-foot tabletop, along with a few other jumps, and widened out one of our pre-existing trail loops to make it more motocross like. That was it, after a few weeks riding our little track I had full on motocross fever… It was time to get back into racing.

During the following winter most of the Cox’s gathered in Toronto for the Supercross, it was there that I decided I was going to own a YZ-450F by riding season. The bike was in it’s fourth year of its radical, reverse engine design, and I had been reading up on it frequently at the time. During the practice while my brother was wandering around he spotted one on display, with the seat off and gas tank propped up, so as to see the air intake system underneath. They also had some of the engine covers removed. I jumped at the chance to go see one in person, and my Uncle Mike came along. After a few minuets of ogling that magnificent machine, I knew that was the bike for me. It must have been all over my face, for my Uncle Mike said something along the lines of “you’re going to own one of those in a week”, and he was right… Well, he was right that I would own that bike, but he was just a little off on the timeframe. It was a little over a month from the time I left the Rogers Centre in Toronto, to when I was the proud owner of a 2012 YZ-450F.

That month, seemed like a decade. My first step was to apply for a loan at my bank, as I was a fresh University drop-out, and did not have that kind of money lying around. My first problem was that I had no credit. I had never had anything under my own name and thus had built no credit. I was informed by my banker that they would give me a credit card with a five-hundred-dollar limit. They said after a few weeks of spending and paying it off, I would have accumulated enough credit to apply for a loan. That was untrue. After two weeks I called my banker to see how close I was to reaching my mark, at which point I was informed it would actually take months. That wasn’t the first, nor the last time I’ve been hung up on by a CIBC representative for, “verbal abuse”. Like with most things I have a love-hate relationship with CIBC. At that point I decided to find a dealership, and worry about the money part later. I went to the Yamaha Dealership in Thunder Bay, as it was the only one within a day trip driving distance. Unfortunately, they had no motocross bikes, only trail bikes. I asked if they could order one and they declined. I guess they really didn’t care for my business. At that point I started calling all the dealerships in within a twelve-hour radius, hoping to find one still in the crate that could be shipped to me. To my luck I found one in Winnipeg, and as I had two thousand dollars saved by that point for a down payment, they agreed to finance me, as long as I had a co-signer.

My final hurtle in obtaining my dream bike was to find a co-signer. My Dad’s credit was not so good at this point in time. My Uncle Bernie, who had already done a lot to support me financially throughout my life, was unable to as he was already co-signer on a truck. I then turned to my Uncle Mike, as I was sure he would help if he could. He laughed at the fact that he was right, and agreed to help. From there it was a few weeks of faxing paperwork back and forth as I was in Pickle Lake, he was in Ottawa, and the dealership was in Winnipeg. We were informed that the finance was insured and so in the event of my untimely demise, the bike would be paid off and go to my Uncle. At that point he inquired if I had ever tried crack.

Three Weeks, two days later I had my dream bike. My dad helped me assemble it, as I was still pretty green in that aspect, and we went out for a ride. I instantly fell in love with that machine. The throttle was so responsive, there was so much power right off the bottom, and it seemed to pull forever. I had never been more satisfied with a purchase in my life. A few weeks later, I would enter my first race in nearly ten years.

My first race was in Kakabeka, and it was a muddy one. I had entered the junior class, a decision which my dad protested claiming I would just get taken out. He told me I shouldn’t bother, and just go straight to the intermediate. I looked down at my fat gut, and counted the years between racing and decided I knew better than some old guy who hasn’t raced in just as long. Luckily I made it through the first race unscathed, apart from my ego. There were 22 riders in the class and I was happy with an 11th place finish my first moto, as I was out of shape and nervous. The second moto I slipped out in the mud on the last lap and placed 17th. Maybe I would push myself just a little next race, I told myself.

The second race was in Atikokan, my home turf. I got brave, entered the junior class and the open class.

I remember drawing number three for the gate pick, but it didn't matter to me what my gate pick was. I was never overly fond of starts. I would pick the gate at either far end to avoid the first turn madness. I would be happy with a mid pack start and slowly pick off other riders. I wasn't there to win, this year was practice. The gate dropped and as intended I was mid pack, about twelfth, when going around the first corner. I slowly started to get around some of the slower riders over the next few laps. There were one or two riders I had trouble passing, as I would only pass if I could do so without being aggressive. By the time I saw the white flag I had made my way to sixth place, which was better than I had intended. I was happy with this and thought I could coast my way to the finish. The guy behind me had other plans. If you haven't already watched it, watch "The Death of My 450" to see what happened.

I could feel him breathing down my neck, but I only had two corners, a whooped out downhill, and uphill to the finish. I came off a downhill jump into the outside line of the first of those last two corners. He took the inside, and I assumed, as we were nearly side by side, that he would stick to his line and take the outside in the following corner. I was confident I could outrun him on that whooped out downhill, it was one of my favourite sections of the track. Unfortunately for me, at the crest of his jump he tweaked himself over to cross over to the inside line… My line. What was only a few seconds on video was an eternity in the moment. I saw it happening, but could do nothing save but prepare myself for the inevitable crash to follow… And curse at my misfortune. I watched in stupefied as his rear tire hit my front, laying me flat out like a pancake. It was at that point that I was actually glad for the first time, that I had grown to be a rather portly fellow. It would help to soften the blow. So down I went, tried to kick the sun a few times. On my last roll I planted my feet down and was ready to launch myself towards my bike that had less than twenty hours on it. But alas, it was a blind jump and contrary to the how long the moment felt, it was all over quickly. So quickly in fact, that by the time the yellow flag was out, the next rider had already landed on my bike. We were both OK, and so we pulled our bikes apart.

After I picked up my bike and came to the full realization of the damage, and the fact that it could very well be weeks before I rode again, the rage set in. This was my dream bike. I poured my heart and soul into getting it, just to have it flattened! Even with the exhaust folded to a ninety-degree angle, that bike was still able to jump my fat ass over the finish line. As I came off the track my dad approached me joyfully, not knowing my bike had been wrecked. He was proud that I had done so well before the crash, but that pride was quickly overshadowed by my rage. I leapt from the bike cursing up and down how I would pummel the man responsible into the ground. I calmed down when someone accused me of being the cross jumper and I was forced to watch my Go-Pro footage to verify my innocence. In hindsight it was probably a good thing I was accused of being the perpetrator of the crash, otherwise I most definitely would have done some pummeling.

My dad wasn’t too big of a man to point out that he had told me this kind of thing would happen riding the junior class, which is just what I wanted to hear at that point. Thanks Captain Foresight. He redeemed himself later, but I’ll get to that shortly.

Captain Foresight and I tried to bend everything back into place, but the titanium exhaust wouldn’t give us an inch. The sub frame broke into three pieces when we tried to straighten it, and so I thought my day of racing would be over. Bob, an old racing buddy of the family and whom was ever so proud of his KX-250, jumped at the chance to have me race it. There was no way I would ride the second moto of the junior class, or enter a junior class race ever again for that matter. But there was still the open class. So I accepted his gracious offer and we used some good old electrical tape to make his number look like 41. Once again I grabbed a number, and took the gate farthest away from the other riders. This time there were only eight other riders, so it was easy to put some distance between us. The gate dropped, I was nearly dead last into the corner, and again I didn't care. I was nervous on the bike, and was only hitting the bigger jumps halfway, but it didn't matter. With so few riders it was easy to pick them off. I took third place that race. The only people whom I hadn't gotten around were Side-show-bob, the fastest pro on the circuit at the time, and one of the top three junior class riders. I knew I would not beat Bob, but just maybe I could move up a step on the podium next moto.

The final time I lined up on the starting gate that day was atop my dad's 2012 KTM-300XCW, his act of redemption. It had a wide ratio, six speed transmission, kickstand, soft suspension and a large gas tank. I don't think anybody took me seriously sitting on that thing. Again I had a poor start, and didn't care. With every lap I picked off another rider or two. My dad had position himself on one of the jumps and was ecstatically waving his hand to remind me of what position I had obtained. Fourth, then third, and finally second on the last lap. He may be able to tell it better, but I've been told it was pretty comical seeing a guy pick off 80% of the field on a trail bike, only jumping halfway.

I raced three different bikes that day, in three races, and captured two podiums. It just goes to show you; the bike doesn't make the rider.

“What was the damage?”, you may ask. The subframe was broken into three pieces, the silencer was absolutely crushed, the rear master cylinder was broken, and the pipe itself was bent in half. The old man and I Frankensteined the sub frame back together by fitting the pieces back together with pieces of an old pry bar and some bolts. We beat the silencer back into shape as best we could and bent the pipe back as well. This was just to get me through until my Dr. D full exhaust system came in. We pulled the rear master cylinder off of a 1998 CR-250, it bolted right on. I rode with the hokey sub frame, and Honda master cylinder for 3 years before replacing them.

So that’s it, that’s how my soul was crushed. I will never enter a junior class again, and I have ranted at more than one cross jumper.