

# Living Fit: Mowing Down Back Pain

## *Ed McCampbell's Personal Journey*

This is a story about my husband Ed McCampbell. It starts as a frustrating story, but I'm happy to say, has a happy ending that involves mowing our lawn. The story begins 30 years ago.

**1974:** Ed was 17-years old, working in an appliance warehouse when three gas ranges tumbled off a high fork lift, landing on his back. In those days workers compensation was not what it is today. No report was filed; no doctor was called. And, life went on as usual — at least for a short time.

**1976:** At 19 years of age, Ed woke up one morning startled by his own screams and suffering severe back pain. The medical examination showed that Ed had ruptured a disc in his lower back as well as other back injuries that had gone undetected and untreated for the past two years. Doctors told Ed that by the time he was forty he'd be in a wheel chair. Nice way to start your twenties!

With chiropractic care and physical therapy, Ed spent the next 22 years with manageable pain. There were brief episodes of more severe pain, but for the most part Ed lived a normal life and the 40-year "wheel chair" prognosis faded in time.

**1998:** Ed was 41. Following a couple of sets of tennis with friends, Ed and I decided to spend the afternoon on a nature trail, just enjoying each other's company and the beautiful Florida day. On the backside of the trail, that now almost forgotten scream of pain abruptly ended our outing. As I helped Ed limp slowly back to our car, we remembered the 40-year prediction, but neither of us understood the extent of the damage, or the long, hard road that stretched before us. Twenty-four years of calcification, due to the accident in 1974, had so compressed his spinal cord that there was now irreparable nerve damage.

For the next six years Ed endured excruciating pain, operations, procedures, therapy and drugs. I did the best I could to support him in all of these futile attempts to find freedom from what was now constant back pain. We had always been active — playing tennis, riding bikes, walking, taking trips with our children and doing projects around the house. Over the years,

Ed had even restored several classic cars. All that came to a screeching halt that afternoon spent in the park.

**2004:** Ed was now 47. "There is nothing more I can do for you Mr. McCampbell," said his doctor. "You let me know what you need and I will provide you with pain control, but that's all I can do now. I'm sorry, there really is no hope", he said, "and this is how you will have to live the rest of your life."

Well, all things are possible to those who believe and we believed there had to be another way. That was the last time we saw that doctor and we went looking for more advice.

**January 2005:** Following the suggestion of a dear friend, we finally met with a doctor who gave us the advice that literally saved Ed's life. "You must get off the pain pills — they are killing you; and start to rehab yourself through exercise."

Ed was concerned that exercise would hurt, but the doctor assured my husband that he certainly wasn't getting better resting. So that visit and the doctor's strong advice started our journey back to life.

I am always amazed at how good things happen if you maintain your faith and never give up. That's what happened to us. I am a certified personal trainer and as luck (fate) would have it, about the same time we received the last doctor's advice, I answered an ad in the paper for a training position at a place advertised as a "unique, new strength training studio located in Lakewood Ranch." As I learned more about the benefits of this "slow movement" strength-training program, I realized that this was exactly what Ed needed. I knew he could do this. I couldn't wait to get home and tell him what I had just learned.

**April 2005:** I started working as a trainer and Ed started working out as a client. It was hard for him at first, but the rewards have been many. The high intensity, slow movements are safe for him while conditioning his muscles. The equipment used in the studio allows him to lift weights without triggering nerve pain, as happens with many traditional modes of exercise. He has become stronger and more active than he's been in years.

Many things in life are out of our control, but many times we have choices. Ed and I learned that through many years of searching for the right answer. We have found through Ed's personal experience that exercise is one choice we can make to help us live healthy, energetic, pain free lives. The benefits of weight training are many and varied. One of them includes relief from severe debilitating pain.

We tend to think that if something hurts, the right thing to do is rest. That may well be true in some cases, such as rest immediately following an injury. But even as rest aids the healing process, pain does not always completely dissipate. It is when the structural healing has taken its course that exercise can and does improve the quality of life and serves to prevent further injury. And strength training in particular carries many significant benefits, not only in assisting our body in recovery from an injury, but also in protecting us from injury. Unfortunately for many of us, we are not prepared when debilitating accidents happen. In Ed's case, the accident did happen — but so did the cure!

Now back to my mowing story. Recently, I came home late from work to find Ed eagerly waiting for me at the door with a big smile on his face. He pushed me back out the door to the front lawn. "Notice anything special?" he asked. Concerned that he might be losing his mind, I replied, "Yes, it's dark!"

He kept insisting that I look at the front lawn. And I then noticed that it had been freshly mowed. "Yes," Ed said, "I mowed the lawn today and I feel great!"

For that moment — that wonderful moment on our front lawn — the earth stood still. My husband was back!

*Sharon McCampbell is a nationally certified Personal Fitness Coach at 20 Minutes to Fitness ®, a private high intensity strength training studio located in Lakewood Ranch. Training sessions are by appointment only and are individually supervised by a team of certified personal trainers. Phone: 309-8989. Web site: [www.20minutestofitness.com](http://www.20minutestofitness.com).*