

Taking back what time took from me.

By George Gordon

I am staring my 55th birthday in the face and for the first time in many years don't feel like mortality is speeding toward me. For that, thanks must go to fate, my doctor and a wonderful group of people who make CitaHealth one of Vancouver's top preventative health organizations. Allow me to back up 15 years when a disc in my lower back twisted ending my ability to run or play squash. Chiropractic adjustments eventually allowed me to do most things but not my two greatest workout passions. With out those calorie burning activities and with my appetite for good food and drink unabated, the pounds began to pile up. Despite walking regimens and several diets, the belt sizes got bigger. The big wake up call came in January 2002 when, after months of fighting fatigue, my doctor diagnosed me as a Type 2 diabetic.

By this time my weight had reached 255 pounds. Not good on a 5'7" body. My eating habits changed drastically and beer companies began losing revenue. Increased exercise and reducing calories helped but the spare tire was still there. Limited in my ability to work the abdominal muscles, the CORE was getting mushy.

As the morning anchor for NEWS1130 radio in Vancouver much of my workday is sitting behind a microphone and working with a computer screen.

Tension headaches and neck muscle spasms started getting worse. Chiropractor visits had to be increased and registered massage therapy sessions became necessary.

Back aches and hip pain meant few nights with a good sleep. When you get up at 2am to start your day, something else is going to give.

Last November the doctor noticed my blood pressure starting to rise. Already taking a pill for diabetes and another for cholesterol, a third medication to control hypertension seemed inevitable. For some one who resents having to take even a headache tablet this seemed like one more step down the slope to "getting older."

On the same day as the doctor's warning my radio station got a call from CitaHealth, a co-sponsor of the "Great Wall Climb for the Lung Association." They were offering to train an on air personality to do the 48 flights. I was going to emcee this charity event anyway, and thought why not.

Fate had just intervened in my "slide" down that slope.

After a Silver* Fitness appraisal it was clear my CORE was in terrible shape. Of course I told Health and Fitness manager, Milwina Guzman; my bad back would not allow me to do a number of things. My education was about to get started.

The elliptical, rowing , and tread mill machines, the stability ball, the Bosu, the tubes, and the cable pulls became part of a three day a week routine that left me soaking in sweat, but feeling better. and stronger.

In training for the climb Mil, Asha and Alea had me running up the nine flights of stairs in the building at 890 West Pender. My best time was 56 seconds.

At all times these trained kinesiologists were guiding my routine, making sure of the right stance and alignment of the back. Gently pushing, always, encouraging, it's still a great source of wonder how these professional trainers can find so many different ways to work the same muscle group. I did the 793 stairs at Vancouver's Wall Centre this year in just over 8 ½ minutes, not such a big deal when the fastest time was 4:29, but a big deal for me because it was four minutes faster than my time a year ago.

Then they gave me a nutritional analysis. There is nothing more eye opening than to write down everything you eat and at what times, for five days. While I thought my sugar and fat intake was pretty good, the analysis showed differently. Perhaps the biggest eye opener was my salt intake. Until you start checking the food packaging labels, you'll never know how much sodium you are ingesting everyday. Because it is a preservative, salt is used in almost any processed food from lunchmeat to cereals. Canned soup is brutal but it is also shocking to see how much you will find in cereals, even ones recommended for diabetics. Salt is a curse if you are watching blood pressure.

It takes a lot more label reading but careful product selection has lowered my sodium intake. And it doesn't mean eating bland.

The most important difference in all this is feeling better. The stronger my CORE has become the less my back and neck bother me. Sleep, glorious sleep is mine again. My blood pressure is down substantially and while that "pill" may still be in my future it's much further away.

My weight is down 12 pounds, and my pants are two sizes smaller.

I continue my workouts at CitaHealth, setting new goals. For the first time in 15 years running is part of my regimen. It's not real pretty to watch but I can do it and that's all that matters. In this years Vancouver SUN RUN my time was 83minutes 19 seconds for the 10 K and I finished the last K running.

It struck me one day leaving the work out centre, seeing my reflection in the window that I do look better, feel better and that I am healthier. It is a powerful personal moment to understand that you can take back what time has taken from you.

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of Vancouver's All News Radio News1130.*