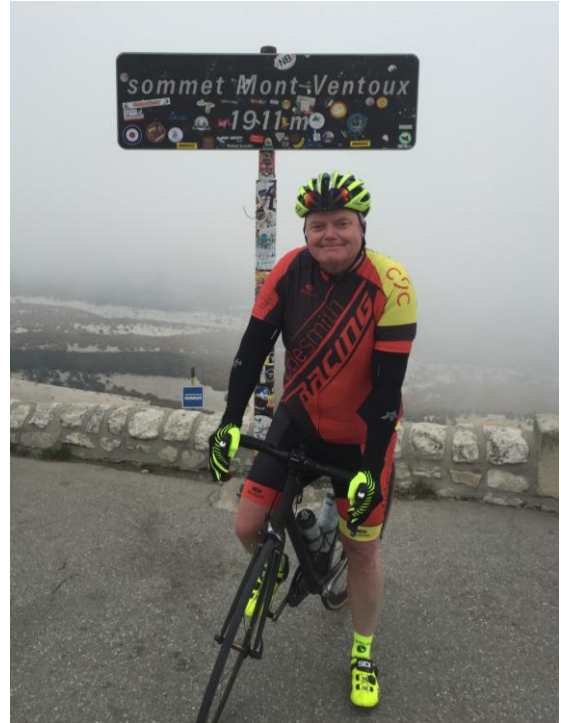


Gavin Giles, Q.C. – April, 2017

As a 60-year-old man who, with brief periods of exception, has been overweight for most of the last five decades, it is difficult to believe that I could offer any kind of article about fitness, let alone a compelling one. And let's face it; sharing publicly about such things can be more than just a bit revealing; and embarrassing. But here I am; with my own story. Some of it has been stated time and again by others with experiences similar to mine. And the future will no doubt include other submissions from other people whose circumstances will be comparable.

The fact is that there are many who are not at all happy about their weight, size, shape, endurance and levels of "body confidence" (just ask me how freely I take off my shirt in public). And I am just one of many who have struggled with these realities for many years but who has nevertheless kept right on struggling. It's a good thing that I have had help along the way.

Though the wonderfully trained, talented, motivating and kind folks at Purdy's Wharf Fitness are but a part of the equation; they are a very important part. And as much as I dedicate this article to myself and to others with similar experiences and to my and their fitness efforts over the years, I really dedicate it to Tammy Berendsen and to all she has done in recent years to advance my fitness levels and goals. I also do not discount the efforts made by Darryl Council (assessment and advice), Dominic Matti (resistance training), Jodi Brake (Wednesday high test half-hour) and Greg Simmons. I have just found everyone at Purdy's Wharf Fitness to be so dedicated to the Members' objectives and to their well-beings. These folks deliver results!



Like many such stories, mine doesn't start out much differently than any others. I was not born overweight. I had an active childhood, full of outside activities: football, baseball, dodge ball, soccer baseball, skating, shinny, running and jumping and a regular gym class at school. By the time I was 9 years old, I was also a pretty fair hockey player, playing for rep teams and a reliable goal scorer. I was strong skater and the other kids had difficulty knocking me off the puck. I also had parents and a brother who were reasonably fit. And who were reasonably careful with their diets. My mother was a good cook. She subscribed to the Canada Food Guide before it was popular. Our meals were high in protein and fibre. There was meat, fish, poultry and eggs. There were lots of vegetables: green and orange especially. Our meals were low in fats and sugars. There were no take-away meals or eating out. Desserts, when we had them, were more likely to be fruit, or something made from fruit. There were cookies, cakes and pies from time-to-time, but always homemade; and never too often. My parents also exercised; they walked and they swam.

But by the age of 12, my interest in hockey had waned. I had moved to a new community. I didn't know many people. It seemed easy not to investigate the recreational programs and facilities available. I took up scuba diving when in Grade 9; a pretty neat sport though not one adept at building and defining muscle and facilitating cardiovascular endurance. And I started a paper route; one that paid me money; and gave me the financial freedom to invest in junk food; the kind my parents, and particularly my mother, abhorred. It was then that my diet took a turn. It was a turn for the worse. With lots of sugary drinks, especially Pepsi, chips, cookies, cakes, pizzas, burgers, fries and onion rings. If it wasn't good for me, I ate it; and in abundance too.

In a few short years I gained 50 pounds. Still fine at 5'11" and less than 170 pounds; but gone was the lean wiriness which I had earlier. And though "still fine", the bad habits had become ingrained. They were only to get worse as the years wore on. I only had myself to blame.

By my late teens, I was working almost full-time as an on-ice official in the American Hockey League (AHL); mainly as a Linesman but sometimes as a Referee. It was a pastime and an employment which was extremely important to me (principally to my ego). And it gave me the impetus to get into shape. But that's easy for a man in his late teens and early twenties. It just doesn't stay easy. Especially for someone who tears up his knee as I did and took almost six months to get better. I was 24 and by the time I got back to anything physical. And I weighed almost 220 pounds.

Startled by this weight gain, I decided to "get serious"; as in get serious again. I started running. I stopped eating junk food. I reduced to 168 pounds in three months. I celebrated by running two marathons. "This is easy", I said to myself. "I can do it any time I want", I also said. But then along came the rest of university, law school, career and marriage. And though I always had an excuse not to exercise, I never had an excuse not to eat. When I "woke up" in my early 40s, I was 133 kilograms – just shy of 295 pounds. It was shocking. Even to me. And it would never again be easy.

Since then, I have tried all kinds of exercises; all kinds of programs. I have worked with trainers; both alone and in small groups. I have done aerobics. I have swung Kettlebells. I bought a bike; several bikes actually. I started riding around the block, the neighbourhood, the Herring Cove loop, the Basin loop, the Sambro loop. I got to the point that I could ride to Truro and back on a summer's evening; and eventually around the Cabot Trail. In one day. Then I started to race my bike; winning the Bicycle Nova Scotia points series in 2014 for the Category "D" road riders. And I have ridden Mont Ventoux, Col du Tormalet, the Aubisque, Col du Solor, Hautacam, Luz Ardiden and many of the other famous climbs of the Tour de France. It wasn't always pretty but it still was. And it most often took the efforts of others to persuade me that I could do it.

But despite these efforts, I was still overweight; and I was not seeing the incremental increases in strength and endurance to which I thought I was entitled. Enter Purdy's Wharf Fitness, Tammy Berendsen and her "No Mercy" bootcamps, backstopped occasionally by Darryl Council, Dominic Matti, Jodi Brake and Greg Simmons. I was reluctantly talked into these bootcamps. I doubted they were for me. Cycling was all about endurance and cardiovascular fitness. I just didn't see bootcamps as providing a lot of that. How wrong I was. The bootcamps were heavily structured. They were consistent. They were frequent. They packed a lot of variable effort into a short period of time. Their intensity continued to increase as my ability to keep up increased. And more than anything, they were organized by Tammy Berendsen, and occasionally by the others, to keep me motivated and to keep me safe from overuse or other injury. I soon saw them as a fun way to aggressively, and within a defined structure, increase my strength and cardiovascular endurance in the "off season" when I wasn't cycling.

So, what did I mean when I wrote above that "these folks deliver result". Well, take the gym's most recent 90-day fitness challenge, buttressed as it was by comprehensive assessments on either end: balance, flexibility, overall VO₂ max, agility, and upper body strength. After the 90 days, my balance was about even. Oh well. My flexibility (measured full squat) was deeper and more erect, with my weight on my heels and toes off the floor. I couldn't do that before. VO₂ max was up as well; from average to above average. I was 15% more agile. And best of all, my upper body strength, measured by standard military push-up, scored a 30% increase. 30%! As I wrote above, twice: "*these folks deliver results*"!! At the same time my weight loss, whilst slow, has remained steady. Best of all, I will soon be less than 200 pounds for the first time in almost three decades. Other bootcampers have noticed. They have been complimentary and encouraging; and they have permitted me to feed off of their energies.

Regardless of whom we are and how fit we are, we can all admit that exercise is hard; on the body and on the head. It takes a particular type of fortitude to stick with an exercise program. Much easier it is to rely on someone else for the plan, the organization, the execution, the persuasion and the motivation. I am so thankful that I get all of these things at Purdy's Wharf Fitness. Take a bow, all of you; my success has been your success. And I am very thankful to you all.