



Brewster's story

Spine athlete: herniated disks

MAYFIELD
Brain & Spine

Diagnosis: Herniated disk at L 4-5, with sciatica, 1987 and 2002

Treatment: Laminectomy, 1988 and 2003

Neurosurgeon: A. Lee Greiner, MD

Initial injury: I was cleaning out the garage at my wife's request. I was probably rushing, and I injured my back in some way while lifting a bag of concrete. That was probably in 1982. I was able to recover with bed rest.

Turning point: In 1987, I was at a senior staff retreat with the governor, Dick Celeste. Every year we spent a weekend at a state park, something I did for 5 years. We were playing touch foot football and I had to be the guy who caught the incredible pass the governor threw. I leaped and caught it on the edge of a cornfield and landed on my spine. It was a great catch. I landed out of bounds, and I remember running into some corn stalks. But I knew I had messed something up. I knew I had done something bad. Regardless, it was kind of funny. I'm the kind of guy who doesn't want to miss a pass from the governor. It's all about bragging rights.

I was totally incapacitated in the fall of '87, with pain shooting down my left leg. After trying to nurse myself, I was referred to Mayfield and somehow Dr. Greiner became my doctor. And in January of 1988 I had the surgery. I was in the hospital for 5 days. Isn't that crazy? I had 3 weeks of bedrest. I couldn't drive for 3 weeks. It was a totally different experience from what



"Paddling builds core muscles. It's also great to be out in nature, seeing the sky line, the water line, the fish jump."

~ Brewster Rhoads

people have today. But it was great, and I totally regained my life.

Second injury: My wife, Ann, recalls that I was moving a number of boxes after a campaign in November 2002, and I came home in agony. I suffered for almost 6 months with bad sciatica and was almost immobile, with a sharp pain going down my left leg. Psychologically, it was very frustrating that I couldn't be active physically. It was killing me that I couldn't go paddling. That's when I started Paddlefest.

Turning point: I had non-surgical procedures in my spine [epidural steroid injections], and they didn't work. Dr. Greiner said, "I'm afraid we really need to do this again," and in March 2003 I had surgery. It was the exact L 4-5, only it was complicated by the presence of scar tissue. This time I was in the hospital 2 or 3 days instead of 5 nights. And I was paddling 2 weeks later.

Being a spine athlete: I married into a family that lived and breathed paddling. I was not a paddler until I met Ann in the late '70s. Ann's youngest brother was on the U.S. Olympic whitewater slalom racing team, and her next youngest brother coached the U.S. Olympic 2-person canoe team. I married into the sport.

I've been paddling regularly since 1980. Thankfully, paddling is an ideal sport because it builds core strength. Dr. Greiner said that it is one of the best activities for people with lower back problems because it builds up your stomach and back muscles. He encouraged me to keep paddling after my incision healed.

The year following my second surgery, I set a personal record by paddling 326 days. That included paddling in Florida when I was on vacation, but I also paddled in 35 degrees on the Ohio River in a wetsuit. I was bound and determined not let back issues beat me.

Today, I'm cycling a lot more, and I've cut back my paddling to 2 or 3 times a week. I also do stand-up paddle boarding, which uses different muscles. Also very important: I'm now very careful about lifting.

-- *Cindy Starr*



Hope Story Disclaimer - "Brewster's story" is about one patient's health-care experience. Please bear in mind that because every patient is unique, individual patients may respond to treatment in different ways. Results are influenced by many factors and may vary from patient to patient.