



Lisa Coleman moves to front after solving back problems

By Fiona Green

The female overall winner of the UCP Life Without Limits 5K in Dallas on Saturday (August 15) was Masters runner Lisa Coleman of Cedar Hill. Even more impressive than the fact that Lisa is 46 years old is that two years ago, after suffering from back pain on-and-off for 15 years, she discovered she had four herniated discs and one torn disc in her back.

Lisa had always loved running but only started racing five years ago when she turned 41. Her annual race schedule consisted mainly of 5Ks, a couple of half marathons and a full marathon. A tomboy while growing up who always liked to "outdo" the boys in her neighborhood, Lisa is clearly one tough lady. It is therefore no surprise that, despite her back pain, she continued to train and compete. However, when in addition to this pain, she began to have issues with her sciatic nerve and then developed knee pain, she reckoned it was time to get things checked out.

The diagnosis that she had four herniated discs and one torn disc did not faze her. "At first I thought we will just overcome it. I will do everything right to make it heal. As time went on, I learned that there was no earthly way for my torn disc to heal. I was upset, but in my heart I knew I would still be running again."

She developed what she called a "silly walk," where her left leg would move faster than her right, making her gait somewhat unbalanced. She lost some control on the top part of her left foot, which would turn inward. On top of that, she was always tripping on stairs. While many people might have given up all hope of returning to competition, Lisa persevered.

For two years, she underwent therapy for her back but noticed no significant improvement and even a slight worsening of her symptoms. She later discovered that the doctor she had chosen to help her regain her active lifestyle was not in fact a licensed professional and that her treatment, instead of alleviating her problem, was aggravating it and weakening her back. On the advice of a friend, she switched doctors and the results speak for themselves. She is fast!

She now trains on a state of the art, low gravity treadmill, which allows her to enjoy a quality workout with little impact on her joints. Dr. Stray Gunderson's Alter G treadmill looks like a regular treadmill, which is attached to a computer and a flat screen. Runners don special shorts, step onto the belt, then pull up a type of tent that extends as far as the hips. They then lock themselves in and zip their shorts onto it. The machine pressurizes, taking the required amount of body weight off. This is selected by runners who simply touch arrows on a screen. The fact that Lisa has now progressed from her "silly walk" to winning an overall title speaks volumes, not only for the machine but for her tenacity and courage.

Her future goals include running a sub-20 5K, returning to the New York City Marathon and qualifying for Boston. Having recently watched Lisa effortlessly run a 20:38 5K on a warm, muggy morning in Arlington, there is no doubt that her dream of running a sub-20 5K in the fall will become a reality. With her courage and determination, there's no stopping her.