

This 80-year-old fisherman hooked on chiropractic care

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It happened in an instant.

That it happened was not totally unexpected.

The intensity of the pain, however, was a surprise, an agonizing surprise.

“It was excruciating,” he recalls, “like a knife stuck in my back.”

The armful of wood he was carrying fell to the steps of the landing to his house.

‘My wife said it as the first time she had ever heard me scream.’

Chuck Prah! turned 80 on April 12. A resident of Cambridge since 1978, he is a legend of sorts, in these parts, among those who fancy themselves fishermen.

He has been, in the past, a charter boat captain for 20 years out of Annapolis, the co-owner of a bait and tackle store there and a sports fishing columnist for local Dorchester weekly newspaper and other publications.

Now he keeps his boat - “a little one – aluminum,” he explained - at the Cambridge Marina, a mere three blocks from his home on Willis Street, and invites friends and fellow fishermen to join him whenever the weather is fair and the fish are moving.

One of those friends, fellow fishermen and fellow member of the Coastal Conservation Association is Easton chiropractor Dr. Christopher Cianci.

It was February of this year. Chuck Prah! heats his Cambridge home with wood, which he not only cuts, but splits, with a maul mind you, by hand.

Still, it was not the felling of trees – dead ones only, in the wood lot of a tree-loving friend – or the cutting and the splitting of the wood, which had been bothering his back. Rather, it was the bending over and lifting and stacking the logs which aggravated and nagged at him with increasing frequency.

On that day when, Prah! said, a lifelong lack of attention to his back “came to a head,” he had bent over and lifted some logs from the wheelbarrow and started into the house.

With his screams, his wife, Mary Elizabeth, and his daughter, Ashlie, came running to his aid and helped him to a chair in the living room of the home.

Absolutely dreading the thought of that horrible pain returning, Prah1 hesitated to move.

“I stayed in that chair for two days,” he said. He also asked Mary Elizabeth to put the wood in the stove.”I didn’t want that pain to come back,” he said.

He realized then it was time to call his fishing buddy, Chris Cianci.

“I told him, ‘Look, this isn’t an invitation to go fishing. I need to see you professionally.”

A few days later, as the stabbing pain in his back slowly subsided, he found himself on his way to the Cianci Chiropractic Center in Easton.

“I drove, but I was careful,” Prah1 said. “Chris squared with me. He said he’d help me if he could. He did an evaluation. He said he could help. And he did.

“It was amazing,” he said. “After a lifetime of discomfort, the pain disappeared.”

Dr. Cianci is familiar with that scenario. “Chuck is like a lot of my patients,” he said. “They work hard, put a lot of stress on their body and finally the body just can’t take it any longer.

“Often patients will come in and say, ‘I just bent over and my back went out.’ The reality is that their back has been ‘out’ for years and a seemingly insignificant action causes intense pain.”

The body does not forget the stresses and strains of everyday life. They are cumulative, Dr. Cianci says, and later in life, the body often reminds us of past abuse and spinal neglect.

“Life is not a toughness test,” says Dr. Cianci. “If you get your spine fixed, you can get back to living like Chuck Prah1 Active, healthy and able to enjoy the wonders of the Eastern Shore.”

Looking back on that February back attack, Prah1, a U.S. Navy veteran who served on a destroyer in Korea and is the retired supervisor of the Cambridge water production plant, realizes that it was the cumulative result of what he calls “80 years of the misuse of my spine.”

With Dr. Cianci’s continuing care and no longer fearful of the return of that stabbing pain, Prah1 is back in the little aluminum boat every chance he gets and back cutting and splitting wood in preparation for the coming winter.

“I’ve got four cords cut out back,” he said. He figures that’s a good head start on the winter supply, unless, he adds, “we get another winter like the last one.”