

Kathleen Hopkins and the legacy of a book bag

BY DR. CHRISTOPHER CIANCI

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Growing up in Wheaton, Md., Kathleen Hopkins, by her own admission was “a skinny little kid.”

That was manageable except that, in those days, she explained, all the kids carried their book bags on one shoulder. “I had a bag full of heavy books,” she said, twisting her right shoulder downward as to demonstrate the pull of the bag, “but toting it on your back, in those days, simply wasn’t cool.”

Now 43 years old, Hopkins, a St. Michaels business woman, is correcting, with the help of Easton chiropractor Dr. Christopher Cianci, a spinal misalignment for which the book-laden bag may have been a contributing cause.

Kathleen and her husband, David, after long careers in pharmacy on the Western Shore – he as a pharmacist and she was a pharmacy technician – came to Talbot County 11 years ago, establishing The Medicine Shoppe, a pharmacy on Talbot Street in St. Michaels.

Restricted from putting an old-fashioned ice cream counter in the drug store, they opened one immediately next door.

It is called “Papper’s.” named in memory of Lawrence Roe, David’s grandfather, a St. Michaels native better known locally as “Head Roe”, but known to his grandchildren as Papper.

Then came, for Kathleen, another next door business called Shutter Guppy’s, devoted to the photographic coverage of youth sports teams and activities.

All of that activity could have come to a halt in the early summer of 2010 when excruciating pain in the right side of her neck propelled her into Dr. Cianci’s office.

“I walked in like this,” she said, throwing her head back uncomfortably to the right, as if it was impossible to look straight ahead.

The choice of chiropractic care was not accidental. She had had “a good experience” with prior chiropractic care in years before coming to the Eastern Shore and as a pharmacist’s technician, “I knew that drugs were not going to help.”

There was this, too. Her son, Christopher, 13, attends Easton’s Sts. Peter and Paul School with Dr. Cianci’s daughter, Julia. Naturally, as parents, they were acquainted.

Her first appointment with Dr, Cianci was last June 21.

The long-ago origin of Kathleen's pain and discomfort is not unusual, Dr. Cianci said.

"I am amazed," he said, "that, in an age where the tiniest iPod can hold hundreds of songs, relegating the CD to obscurity, that kids are still not discouraged from carrying backpacks on their spines throughout most of their formative years."

One shoulder, two shoulders, it really doesn't matter, Dr. Cianci said.

"From carrying significant weight on their spines through their development years, these kids are developing spinal issues that are all too often written off as 'growing pains.' And we will continue to see these problems until we come up with a better way, perhaps by relying, for the kids' homework, on the broad spectrum of new technology"

Back to Kathleen Hopkins, it wasn't totally the backpack. "She was broadsided in a car accident some years ago," Dr. Cianci said, "and considering the active life she was leading – multiple businesses, two kids – she wrote off her discomfort.

"The last thing a young, active person needs is her health to slow her down."

The tendency for people like Kathleen is to put off getting health issues checked out. "They say, 'I'll get around to it' or 'maybe next week won't be as crazy'", but, added Dr. Cianci, "all too often 'next week' never comes."

Eventually, said Dr. Cianci, based on his chiropractic experience, the tide runs out and the health condition, whatever its cause and whatever its ramifications, "becomes a vicious cycle and impacts life enough that the person gives in and seeks help."

It's all about wellness, Dr. Cianci said. "When those who suffer finally realize the stranglehold that health issues have had on their lives and their productivity, and they reach out for help, their joy in life returns."

Now, Kathleen says that not only is her pain gone, but "I am not the same person."

The chiropractic care, she says, has fixed "a lot of things," for example, "I have already lost 10 pounds and I just really all-around feel good."

A final note: On a recent day, she changed her appointment with Dr. Cianci from her normal 8:45 a.m. to 9:15.

No problem, as far as Cianci's office was concerned, but the question was why.

At Sts. Peter and Paul School that morning, daughter Erin, 9, was in a little play as part of the Lenten observance.

"She had the lead," her mother said, "and I couldn't miss that."

First things first, of course.