

Local family living life after spinal MILD procedure

By Gerard Flanagan

Wednesday, November 11, 2020 at 5:00 am (Updated: November 11, 5:01 am)

Martha Ballard thought cooking, one of her favorite pastimes, was a thing of the past.



Gerard Flanagan

From left, Stephen Ballard, Martha Ballard and Kenny Ballard all had a procedure known as the spinal MILD procedure, which they say has drastically improved their quality of life.

Ballard, 69, had developed lower back pain that had become so excruciating she was unable to enjoy many of her favorite pastimes.

One day, Martha's son, Jay, mentioned a procedure known as the spinal MILD procedure.

The minimally invasive procedure, requiring only an incision the size of a baby aspirin, had the potential to give Martha her life back.

In September of 2019, Martha had the procedure done. And, the results speak for themselves.

"When I got out of outpatient, I took two Tylenol," she said. "I wasn't having any pain. I came home and took it easy. My friend called and said, 'How are you?' I said I was sitting here, waiting for the pain to start. Next morning, I woke up, and there was still no pain. I didn't feel the first pain from that procedure."

Martha had only a mild inconvenience from the procedure. She couldn't get the incision area wet for 10 days.

"That was the most discomfort I had, because I like to take a bath," she said.

Martha was hesitant at first to get the procedure done.

"It took [my son] probably a year to convince me, because I had in my mind back surgery, and I didn't want any back surgery," Martha said.

After the procedure, Martha could finally enjoy doing the things she loves, such as cooking. Martha typically cooks a large meal at the holidays. But, around Christmas in 2018, she had reached her breaking point, with the pain getting worse.

"The big meals at Christmas and Easter, I told my kids, unless something changed, the Christmas dinner of 2018 would be last one," Martha said. "I struggled on through Easter, and then I said we won't do Christmas."

For Martha, the pain became a depressing thing to deal with, day in and day out.

"You couldn't do what you wanted to do," she said. "On a scale of one to 10, it had gotten to about a nine."

Even walking, a simple task, was painful.

"I couldn't walk very long," she said. "I couldn't stand. If I were standing, I'd have to get some place to sit down. If I went shopping, the first thing I did is look for a shopping cart to give me some relief."

After seeing Ballard's remarkable transformation, her husband and brother-in-law, who also dealt with pains of their own, had the MILD procedure done.

"Walking to the mailbox was quite a job for me," said Stephen Ballard, Martha's husband. "I was in quite a bit of pain. I'd come back in, and I had to sit down."

In June of this year, Stephen and his brother, Kenny, both had the MILD procedure done. For Stephen, the procedure has radically transformed his life.

"You can't do something, and then you can, it's a pretty good feeling," he said. "I'm walking up to two miles now."

Stephen, an avid hunter, can also get back into the woods, without pain.

"I love to walk and hunting, and I couldn't do it very long back in the day," said Stephen, 69. "I can walk and go hunting for as long as I want."

Kenny, 66, said he had developed severe pain in his lower back and legs.

"I had no strength in my legs," Kenny said. "Getting up and down was hard."

As a result, his social life was negatively impacted.

"You can't get out and do much," Kenny said. "My wife and I, we like to dance, but that was done. We're very social people. I was sad for myself, but sad for my wife, too. It affects everybody."

After receiving the MILD procedure, Kenny can dance as long as he wishes.

"I can have a social life," Kenny said. It's just tremendously better from what it was. I couldn't have a social life. It's changed my life."