

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW EASY YOU'VE GOT IT...

By Dave McGovern

It's a dreary day outside. It's raining, it's cold, and darkness is approaching. But I'm getting ready to head out for a 15 km workout. Why? Because Steve, Brandon and Mike are working out. Steve Gaudet, Brandon Favela and Mike McBride have been inspiring me to get out the door no matter what the weather, no matter how I feel, and no matter how busy I am ever since meeting each of them at my World Class Racewalking clinics.



STEVE

Steve suffers from severe persistent asthma. Stress, allergies, a cold or even slight changes in the weather can land him in the emergency room—or worse, a week in the ICU—yet Steve has completed five half marathons and three full marathons in the past two years. There are some days when Steve can't even walk to the bathroom, but he never, ever complains about his predicament, and on the good days he walks for miles.

BRANDON

Brandon is a former Army Ranger who has jumped out of far too many airplanes. His knees have almost no cartilage left in them and he's had just about every other running/walking injury known to medical science. After one of his 15 surgeries, doctors told him he would never run again. He didn't listen, but he did add some walking to his training program. He soon grew to love walking so much that he quit running. But by then his knees were so bad doctors advised him

against ever attempting a marathon. Of course he went right out and walked one. And then another. Then, after ending up on the wrong end of a car-bicycle collision, Brandon was absolutely, positively forbidden from ever walking another marathon. This time he managed to obey the letter, if not the spirit, of the mandate. Now he walks half marathons—sometimes on consecutive weekends. (How's that for following doctor's orders?)



Photo by Anita Cadonau-Huseby

Brandon Favela (left) and Steve Gaudet during the Portland Marathon.

MIKE

Mike suffers from severe COPD or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Have you ever tried breathing through a wet towel? That's Mike every day. Before his diagnosis Mike was relatively sedentary, but even though he has to carry oxygen tanks everywhere he goes, Mike has since become a marathon and half marathon walker. Like a SCUBA diver out of water, Mike used to carry the heavy tanks on his back when completing marathons, but he's recently constructed a wheeled cart to pull the tanks behind him as he walks. When not racing, Mike's other hobby is climbing Colorado's "14ers," or mountains over 14,000 ft. in elevation. I've climbed quite a few myself, and you know something? Even with two good lungs it's not easy!



Mike McBride constructed a wheeled cart to pull his oxygen tanks behind him as he walks.

The point is, there are people out there who have it a lot worse than I do. And more to the point, a lot worse than you do. When I'm tired or sore and feeling like sitting on the couch eating bonbons, I think about Steve, or Brandon, or Mike, or any of the many, many inspirational folks I've met at my clinics over the years. Maybe you're one of them: men and women with hip replacements who've won medals in Masters Championships, walkers with MS, cardiac patients, bariatric patients, diabetics, you name it. Every one of them is out there doing his or her best without complaining or making excuses. If a guy like Steve Gaudet with 30% of normal pulmonary capacity on a good day, whose body has been battered by years of prescribed steroids, can finish a marathon, I can go out in the rain with my two good legs and two good lungs and do a measly 15 km workout.

Like it or not, winter is here. Sometimes it can be hard to stay motivated to train with fewer hours of daylight, and in most of the country, lousy weather. That's why so many of us put on a pound or two—or 10—between Thanksgiving and New Year's. You can choose to let it get you down, or you can revel in the challenge.

Champions don't get to the top by creating the best excuses for why they succumbed to adversity; they make the best of whatever hand they are dealt and overcome whatever adversity and obstacles are put in their path. Steve, Brandon and Mike are Champions.

Compared with what they have to endure, how hard is it, really, to put on your shoes, dress for the weather, and get out and walk?♦

Already qualified for the 2008 Olympic Trials in the 50K racewalk, Dave McGovern is battling age and a Ben and Jerry's addiction to try to qualify for his sixth Olympic Trials in the 20K racewalk.