

# the life you save...

**It's never too late to realize the importance of living a healthy lifestyle.**

by Seth Margolies

It is rare when an individual is afforded the opportunity to save a life, but to save the life of the person who gave you your life is quite unique indeed. Such was the chance given to Stephen Gourlay, Jr., elite sports conditioning and wellness expert to many professional athletes, when it was discovered that his father and best friend, Stephen Gourlay, Sr. a former world class soccer player was stricken with severe diabetes as a result of a poor nutritional lifestyle and obesity. To understand Stephen, well, you have to understand Stephen.

Stephen Jr. represents so many of the immigrant stories coming to the United States. His parents emigrated from their native Scotland to escape the effects that were still being felt in their hometown from World War II. To provide better opportunities for their young son, they moved to America, finally settling in Long Island, New York, because they knew people who were caregivers. The Gourlay's, like a sundry of immigrants, took various and often multiple jobs to make ends meet. Stephen Sr. rose from a caregiver on a Long Island estate to eventually running the service department at one of the most prestigious BMW dealerships in the country.

The Gourlays were able to provide a better life and education for their son, Stephen Jr., who eventually went on to study biochemistry at a university. But, Stephen Jr. was like his father and wanted to play professional soccer. Realizing that America did not offer him the chance to play world class soccer, Stephen Jr., with the blessing of his parents, left school twelve credits away from graduating and went over to England. He tried out and made the team in a professional league. For most Americans soccer is not even considered a top sport in terms of fan following, but in Europe and the rest of the world, it is not only the top sport but a way of life. Stephen Jr. was pursuing his dream and sharing the stage with world-class athletes. His dream turned into a nightmare when he was seriously injured and was no longer able to compete professionally.



Depressed and dejected, Stephen Jr. returned stateside. He did not want to finish school, and kicked around from job to job realizing that he was not cut out for a nine to five job behind a cubicle in an office. He was a people person with experience in competing as a world-class athlete. Once again, with the blessing of his father, he decided to get certified as a personal trainer and open his own gym. He had a natural gift of being able to work with laymen as well as professional athletes. His style is unique, even unorthodox, and his motivational skills help athletes from all backgrounds to achieve realistic goals and bring out their inner best self. Stephen Jr.'s gym was gaining a strong reputation and his skills were sought out by major league baseball players, professional hockey players and professional boxers.

While all this was going on, Stephen Jr. maintained a close bond with his father. But, while he was training people to achieve feats they only once dreamed of, he was watching his father lose all sense of athleticism and balloon to a dangerous



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weight of 325 pounds. In fact, he is the first to admit that he was enabling his father by providing him with all the goodies his father craved. “I just wanted to see him happy and I knew chocolate made him happy so I brought it to him. I was happy to see him happy, he is my best friend. I didn’t realize I was poisoning him and slowly killing him. Sometimes you overlook loved ones faults and don’t always see the real picture.”

Stephen Jr. recalls that his father, a former great soccer player, could not even walk a block without huffing and puffing. He never pressured his father to work out or eat differently. He respected his life choices. Then Stephen Sr.’s health took a turn for the worse. He noticed his calf was swollen and it was becoming more and more uncomfortable to do simple things, such as sleep. He thought it might be a pulled muscle.

Stephen Jr. immediately had his father checked out at the hospital. As it turns out, it saved his life. His father had a blood clot the length of his leg. The doctors also discovered hundreds of pulmonary embolisms in his lungs that could have killed him at any point. How he was alive was a miracle. To make the situation worse, the doctors discovered that Stephen Sr. had a blood sugar level of over 500. A level they never saw before. It was off the charts.

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Stephen Jr. immediately worked on a nutritional plan that

his father could live with and enjoy. He also helped motivate his father to walk. Sun, rain, or snow Stephen Sr. was out walking at five in the morning before work and was determined and motivated to get his life back. Stephen Sr. was losing weight, doing activities he hadn’t done in forty years and, more importantly, getting off medications.

Today, the two best friends are training for Stephen Sr.’s first century ride, which is a hundred mile bike ride in a day. Stephen Sr. is seventy-five pounds down and graduated from walking into endurance athletics. The two drive each other to be better athletes and better people.

Stephen Jr. is hopeful that he will continue his philanthropic work with the Brooke Jackman Foundation ([www.brookejackmanfoundation.org](http://www.brookejackmanfoundation.org)) to help promote literacy, as well as inspire to bring out the best in people. He hopes that his father’s story will help people to realize the importance of health and realize that it is never too late to get back into shape if you apply yourself. You just need a little inspiration and motivation. ♦



**about seth...**

Seth Margolies is a bariatric patient. Since his surgery in September of 2003, he has become an advocate for fitness in the bariatric world. Seth is an actor, writer and motivational speaker. He has completed a cross-country bike tour across America to promote healthy living. He is also the producer of *Weigh2Win*, a bariatric fitness support video ([bariatricdvd.com](http://bariatricdvd.com)), and a regular contributor to *WLS Lifestyles* magazine.