



## We Could All Use a Little Maury Time

By Debbie Waitkus, Golf for Cause

Have you ever watched an elderly couple make their way to the dance floor at, say, a 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary party? They get there with some effort but, once on the ballroom floor and in the embrace of the music, they move with greater ease, stepping backward and forward, left and right, whirling, swaying and sweeping away the years. Freed of the day for a moment they are 20? — no, 30 years younger with not a care in the world and no aches nor pains. There is a name for this: *transformation*.



We are at the golf course. I am keeping an eye on Maury as we make our way to the teeing ground. Maury is 90 now (Maury would tell you he is 90 *and*  $\frac{3}{4}$ ). He doesn't always trust his balance, and shuffles a bit more than he walks. He is quick to grab a handrail if one is handy, or a shoulder for support. But it isn't just out of concern that I keep an eye on Maury at the golf course. Watching Maury teaches me things.

According to Europe's leading medical research institute, playing golf can add up to five years to one's life. The *Karolinska Institutet* in Sweden studied 300,000 golfers and concluded that 40 percent of them were less likely to die at a given age than those who did not play. By my calculation, that means that if you play golf there's a 60 percent

likelihood you'll outlive your life expectancy. I like those odds. The study also revealed that the best players — as measured by handicaps — were the healthiest. Practice, anyone?

The study revealed other things. Golfers who play a single round of 18 holes typically walk more than 6 km (3.96 mi). Golfers have a lower death rate no matter the golfer's sex, age or social group. The study's lead researcher, Professor Anders Ahlbom, said that while not all golfers have a healthy lifestyle, it is reasonable to believe playing the game has a significant impact on health. "Maintaining a low handicap involves playing a lot, so it supports the idea that it is largely the game that is good for the health." Imagine how good John Daly could be if he'd improve his lifestyle a little!

Maury plays from the forward tees. I watch as he bends over to put the tee in the ground; then, the ball on the tee. He is methodical and steady about this. *Smooth, effortless*. Balance trouble? *Get out!* Maury is efficient and resource-conscious, too — while he's down there, he checks for other tees lying on the ground to see whether there are any keepers. It always makes me smile when I see him doing this — it is Maury being a kid. *Transformation*.

I think about a lot of things when I play golf with Maury. I think about how free of ego and everyday concerns he seems to be. If only all golfers would play the tees appropriate to their skill level instead of playing the tees that satisfy their ego. So often we see people playing from the back

tees when it is obvious to everyone that moving forward a tee or two would help them immensely. It would help every foursome behind them, too, because a foursome playing from the wrong tees slows the pace of play for every other golfer. Some of the more expensive daily fee courses suggest which teeing ground is appropriate after asking golfers for their handicaps. Golfers are not told they *have to* play from the appropriate tees, but most do — after gentle encouragement from the starter.

Maury has hit his ball slightly into the rough and mutters something about it. He hoped for a fairway landing, of course, but I know he is not entirely disappointed with his shot. I might even say he is not disappointed at all, because Maury is a ball bird dog. He loves finding balls — his ball, my ball, anyone's ball, even balls that groups playing the next fairway over are looking for.

Playing golf is a way to carve out a little time for yourself, an opportunity to get away from politics and petty matters and the pressures of everyday life. You don't need anyone to do it with, and you can do it at any age.

Maury is lining up his putt on our 9<sup>th</sup> and finishing hole. He'll be excited and happy if it goes in, but sinking it doesn't really matter. He is on the golf course. That is what matters. I look at my mother. She is watching Maury. It is such a blessing for her to see him in this setting, a reprieve from the unspoken worry and concern that is the quiet province of the caretaker.

His putt rolls toward the hole and already I am thinking about our next outing and how wonderful it will be once again to bring them to the dance floor and set them free to roll back the years.

There are many reasons we play golf, and the reasons change with the years. If I were asked

to list mine, I'm not sure what I'd say is Number One. But I do know what it is *today*.

You live longer.

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