



Retired physical therapist finds way back to gardening

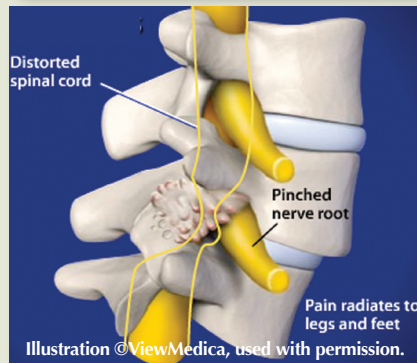
Beth enjoys gardening, sewing and cooking. As a retired physical therapist, she is familiar with the care of sore elbows, shoulders, hips and backs.

When she started having low back and leg pain, Beth tried some special stretching exercises to help relieve her pain. When her symptoms did not go away after a couple weeks, she made an appointment to see her orthopedic physician.

The physician examined Beth and ordered diagnostics, the results showed that Beth had spinal osteoarthritis. Her physician encouraged her to try conservative care to help relieve her symptoms, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) and home exercises. He also referred her to fellowship-trained spine surgeon, Dr. Nicholas Wills at Summit Spinecare. Beth tried the nonsurgical care and found that her pain symptoms did improve, at least for a while.

In May 2010, while traveling, Beth once again started having low back and leg pain. This time her symptoms were radiating down into her knee. Beth tried doing some stretching exercises for her spine and core muscles. She also took some anti-inflammatories to help relieve her pain. But nothing seemed to work. Her pain was worse than before, to the point she had difficulty even walking. Everyday activities like cooking or gardening were impossible.

Beth made an appointment to see spine specialist Dr. Nicholas Wills. During her appointment, Dr. Wills ordered an MRI of Beth's spine, the results showed that she had spondylolisthesis. Beth's vertebrae was out of alignment and because of the



Spondylolisthesis occurs when the joints weaken and the vertebrae slides forward out of its correct position. Dr. Wills performed the spine surgery necessary to relieve pressure on Beth's pinched nerve root. Today, Beth is pain free and back to summer gardening.

vertebrae shifting and bone growths on the affected vertebrae, her nerve roots were compressed and causing her pain.

Spondylolisthesis is caused by joint instability in the low back. The rear part of spinal vertebrae has facet joints that act as hinges, allowing our spines to twist and bend. Either from heredity or wear and tear, the joint weakens causing the vertebrae to slip forward out of its correct position.

Dr. Wills explained the treatment options to Beth, both nonsurgical and surgical. After weighing her options, Beth decided that surgery was the best way for her to return to her active lifestyle. In June 2010, Dr. Wills performed the lumbar surgery and fusion to remove pressure on the nerve roots.

Beth felt immediate relief from her low back and leg pain. She was able to get out of bed and walk with assistance the same day of her surgery. Beth was careful to follow the post surgery care instructions and she wore a brace to help support her spine for six weeks after her surgery. She gradually started walking longer distances until she was up to two miles. Beth also incorporated special stretches and exercises to help strengthen her core and spine muscles. She was happy to return to some of her favorite activities including gardening and sewing.

"Before my surgery, I could not stand or sit for any length of time, I'm thankful to be back to my normal activities," remarks Beth. "Dr. Wills and his physician assistant, Matthew, made sure all of my questions were answered, before and after my surgery." Today, Beth is pain free and enjoying gardening and hobbies like making 50 cot covers for her church's daycare.

Nicholas J. Wills, M.D.

Board-Certified Orthopedic Surgeon, Fellowship-Trained Spine Surgeon

Dr. Nicholas Wills specializes in complex cervical, thoracic and lumbar spinal disorders, with an emphasis on cervical spine disorders and minimally invasive spine surgery. He received his undergraduate degree from University of Notre Dame. Dr. Wills was awarded his medical degree from University of Minnesota. While at the University of Minnesota, he was awarded the Richard C Horns Award and Scholarship for Outstanding Clinical Performance. Dr. Wills completed a general surgery internship and an orthopaedic surgery residency at the University of Minnesota. He continued his training by completing a Spine fellowship at the Twin Cities Spine Center. Dr. Wills has presented nationally and internationally on the subject of minimally invasive spine surgery. He evaluates patients at the Summit clinics in Downtown Saint Paul, Woodlake and Eagan Minnesota.

