

ReForm50 Memoir

Reform50+: From Pain to Freedom

Reform50+ Memoir Extended Edition (Text Only)

My Journey to Healing Body, Mind & Soul Without Pills

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Author's Note

This is my true story. I lived years trapped in pain, unable to walk more than a few minutes, and refusing to let pills define my life. What you're about to read is how I fought back , step by step, minute by minute , until I built Reform50+, a program designed to help others reclaim their freedom.

If you see yourself in these pages, know this: you are not alone. Freedom is possible. It starts with one small step.

This is the extended edition of my memoir. If you haven't read the short edition yet, start there; this extended version builds on it with deeper conversations, extra insights, and more of the real talk that helped shape Reform50+. Clients first receive the short version, and then they receive this extended edition.

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1) The Day It All Changed

I built a career I loved. I worked at a place called Wholesale Knowledge, a computer company that did credit card processing for many businesses. It was a great company. I loved it there.

My role was as a network administrator. I was the guy who supported programmers and computer analysts. I kept their computers and servers running, fixed crashes, built computers, managed databases, and even created virtual environments at home to test things before deploying them at work. I did everything tech-related , and I loved it.

A normal day started at nine. I'd check the servers, make sure Windows updates hadn't broken anything, walk the floor and help programmers with their issues. Some nights I'd stay late because my boss wanted to test new systems. I didn't complain , I thrived on the challenge. He even bought me my own iMac and MacBook Air so I

could build environments at home. I loved the problem-solving. That job was part of my identity.

Then came the Saturday that changed everything.

We had to deploy new servers, a critical job that couldn't wait. My coworker and I drove to the offsite location where our equipment was kept. When I carried one of the heavy servers, I didn't bend my knees properly. I put it down, signed in, then bent to pick it back up , again without bending my knees. That's when I felt it: my back shifted, and there was a crack.

Pain exploded through my body. It was excruciating. But we couldn't leave. The job had to be finished. My coworker did the installation while I crouched, hunched over like an old man. For two hours I stayed locked in that position, unable to stand straight. When we got back to the office, I told my boss. He took one look at me and knew something was wrong. They rushed me to the Jewish Hospital in Montreal.

There, the doctors told me I had a herniated disc. I'd need time off work. I'd have to go on CSST , worker's compensation. It was the first time I realized this wasn't just an injury. This could change my life.

The pain was relentless. Physically, I was broken. Emotionally, I felt worse , because I loved my job, loved my company, and now I couldn't do it anymore. I didn't want to cause trouble for them, but I couldn't ignore what my body was telling me.

On CSST, I had to show up daily for treatment — stretches, exercises, supervised rehab. But the pain didn't let up. Movement was slow and fearful. My social life vanished. Depression crept in. The doctors prescribed Oxycodone, but one dose was enough. It made me feel worse than the pain itself. Confused, foggy, not myself. I swore never to take it again. I refused the pill path , I wasn't going to build my life on chemicals and side effects.

Still, I didn't believe I could heal. Everyone says back pain is for life, and I felt that truth deep inside me. Even simple movements , walking to the kitchen or bathroom , became a struggle. My life had changed completely.

And I hated what it was becoming.

That was the day it all changed. The day my freedom was taken from me. The day I realized I was living in a prison called pain.

2) Living in the Prison of Pain

After the hospital, my life no longer felt like mine. I went from being a man who thrived on solving problems at work to a man who could barely move.

The pain was constant , always at a 10, always controlling everything I did. Getting up, sitting down, lying in bed , there was no position that gave relief. I was trapped in a body that no longer listened to me.

I tried to keep hope alive in those first weeks on CSST. I showed up every day for treatments, stretches, and exercises. But the truth was brutal: nothing worked. No matter what routine they gave me, the pain never eased. I couldn't run, couldn't play sports, couldn't even enjoy the simple act of walking to the kitchen without fear.

My movements became slow and calculated, like I was an old man decades ahead of my time. Every step was filled with hesitation, because I was terrified of making things worse. Pain wasn't just in my back , it was in my mind. It was always there, a voice whispering, "You're broken. You'll never be the same."

It took away more than just my career. It stole my social life. I stopped going out with friends. I stopped laughing. Even when people invited me, I'd say no , not because I didn't want to see them, but because I didn't have the energy to pretend I was okay. I was isolated, trapped inside my own suffering.

Depression took hold. And when you live with pain 24/7, depression doesn't knock , it walks straight in and makes itself at home. Every day felt heavier. The walls around me seemed closer.

Doctors tried to help in the way they knew how: with pills. They prescribed Oxycodone. I took one dose. That was all it took to know I'd never take it again. The pill made me feel worse than the pain itself , foggy, disconnected, almost like I was losing my mind. I realized quickly: if I started down that path, I'd be trapped in another prison , a chemical one.

So I refused. I chose not to take pills, no matter how much pain I was in. I didn't want to live numb. I didn't want to trade one prison for another.

But refusing pills didn't erase the reality. I didn't believe I could heal. I had always heard that back pain stays with you for life. And deep down, I believed it.

That belief crushed me. It meant every small task felt like a reminder of what I had lost. Walking to the bathroom. Standing in the shower. Sitting in a chair. Each movement reminded me that my old life was gone.

The hardest part wasn't the pain itself — it was the thought that I might never be free again. That this prison of pain might be my permanent home.

And that thought broke me.

3) The Turning Point

For months, pain was my prison guard. It dictated where I could go, how long I could stand, even how I could breathe. Every day felt like the same cruel loop: wake up in pain, move in pain, go to sleep in pain.

But then came the day that changed everything , not because the pain vanished, but because I decided to move anyway.

It started small. I told myself, "Just walk for two minutes." That was all I could imagine doing. Two minutes might sound laughable to someone healthy, but to me it felt like climbing a mountain.

So I walked. Each step was shaky. The pain screamed at me to stop. But I kept going, one foot after the other, until two minutes were done. I was exhausted, but I had done it.

That two-minute walk didn't heal me. The pain was still there, and it still felt like a ten out of ten. But something changed inside of me. For the first time since my injury, I felt a flicker of control. For two minutes, I had chosen to fight back.

The next time, I went for five minutes. My back burned, but I finished. Then ten. Then twenty. Each small increase felt like a victory, like stealing back pieces of my life.

I started to track everything: pain levels, energy, mood. At first, the numbers looked discouraging , pain 10, energy 2, mood depressed. But then slowly, painfully slowly, things began to shift.

The walks became my therapy. They weren't just about moving my body , they were about reminding myself that I wasn't done yet. Every extra step whispered: "You're still here. You still have fight in you."

For months, I had believed I'd never heal. But with every walk, I began to see cracks in that belief. Maybe I wouldn't go back to who I was before, but maybe I didn't have to. Maybe I could build something new.

The turning point wasn't about a miracle cure. It was about a decision: the decision to try.

Because once you take that first step , even if it's just for two minutes , you realize something powerful. Pain might control your body, but it doesn't have to control your future.

And that realization lit a spark in me that no pain could put out.

Extended Conversation: Walking & Commitment (with Rochelle)

In the extended edition of my story, I want to share more of the conversations I had with my cousin Rochelle during those early walks. We were both tired of repeating the same patterns and longing to change our bodies. Even though she played tennis and I walked, we both worried about falling back into old habits. We set a simple goal: 10,000 steps a day, Sunday to Sunday, and promised to hold each other accountable. Rochelle reminded me that walking was a medicine we could prescribe ourselves. She said, "Walking is such a freaking medicine. It is a drug itself." She also confessed that every time she walked home from work she ended up buying food and how she needed to break that habit. We laughed about how committing to water only would keep our finances and health in check.

As a woman walking alone, Rochelle often felt uncomfortable. Men would stare or make comments, and she didn't always feel safe. That's why she loved the idea of group walks and community accountability. "I don't mind being alone, but for this journey, I don't know what I'm doing and I need people to drag me along," she admitted. We talked about creating graduation walks where everyone in the program would meet in person to celebrate their progress. We spoke about building micro habits that turn into big habits, and how consistency—not perfection—was the real medicine for chronic pain and depression. Those conversations reminded me that the journey is easier—and more joyful—when you have a partner.

4) The Climb Back Up

Two minutes turned into five. Five into ten. Ten into thirty.

Each walk was a battle. My back still screamed. My body still resisted. But with every step, I learned something new about myself: I was stronger than the pain.

What started as a desperate attempt to move became my ritual. Walking became my medicine. It wasn't glamorous. It wasn't fast. But it was mine.

Before long, I was walking an hour. Then ninety minutes. Then two hours. Then three. And eventually, five full hours. Three times a week, I would walk for five hours straight.

That's when I started walking downtown to meet my aunt on her lunch break. At first, I did it without weight, one hour and seventeen minutes from my apartment to downtown Montreal. I did it for several weeks. Then I added the vest. The same path, the same long walk, but now with 45 extra pounds strapped to my body. I'd walk downtown, meet my aunt, then walk back home. Each time I did it, I shocked myself.

Around that time, I remembered a jump rope I had bought five years earlier. Back then, I tried it once and gave up, it was too heavy, too hard. But now something inside told me to try again.

The rope weighed 7.4 pounds. Most people can't last five minutes with it. I picked it up, thinking I'd fail. Instead, I surprised myself: 100 jumps. The next time, 500. Then 1,000. Then 2,000. Each milestone lit me up inside.

It was the same pattern I had learned from walking: small steps add up. Things that once felt impossible became my new normal.

With the vest and rope, training became more than exercise. It became transformation. The depression didn't disappear overnight. The pain never fully left. But every walk downtown, every jump of that rope, every extra pound carried on my back was proof that I wasn't broken.

I was building myself back up. Not the man I was before , a new man. Stronger. Hungrier. More determined.

Now, I train six days a week. Two hours of walking with the vest. Two hours of strength. The routine isn't punishment. It's freedom. Every step I take is a step away from the prison of pain and closer to the life I was told I'd never have again.

The climb back up wasn't easy. It wasn't fast. It wasn't clean. But it was real. And slowly, step by step, I rose from hopelessness to a place I never thought I'd reach again: freedom.

Extended Conversation: Safety & Support

During our long walks, Rochelle and I talked about more than steps and numbers. She opened up about the reality of walking as a woman. She told me how uncomfortable it can feel when men stare or make rude comments. Once, a man circled her three or four times and then asked if her chest was real. Rochelle looked him in the eye and said, "They cost \$50,000." We laughed at her quick comeback, but the truth underneath hurt. "As a woman, walking alone can feel unsafe," she said. "Some women join women-only gyms just to avoid that feeling." That's why we agreed that Reform50+ had to include community and accountability. Group walks, especially for women, are about more than motivation , they are about safety and comfort.

Rochelle also talked about the little habits that trip us up. Every time she walked home from work, she would stop and buy food. It was reflex. "I'm saving money by not

paying for taxis,” she told me, “but I spend it all on snacks on the way home.” We promised to break that habit together. When we walk, we bring water and we skip the junk. If we’re going to take back our health, we can’t sabotage ourselves along the way. Those conversations reminded me that healing isn’t just physical , it’s about mindset, safety, finances, and support. They helped shape Reform50+ into more than a workout plan. It became a community where people feel seen, protected, and encouraged.

5) God’s Medicine

I used to think healing came from hospitals, doctors, and pills. But I learned the hard way that pills didn’t heal me , they only masked the pain and threatened to trap me in a different kind of prison.

Real healing, I discovered, comes from what I call God’s Medicine: sunlight, food from the earth, water, movement, and rest. The simple things, the natural things, the things most people take for granted.

Every morning, I made sure to get sunlight. Even a short time outdoors lifted my mood. Sunlight warmed my body and reminded me I was alive. It gave me vitamin D, boosted my energy, and set my mind right for the day.

I started fasting , giving my body breaks from constant eating so it could repair itself. At first, it wasn’t easy. But soon, I noticed my energy rising and my inflammation dropping. My body felt cleaner, lighter, freer.

I began working out in a fasted state, testing whether my body could train without fuel. To my surprise, I felt sharper, lighter, and more focused. Training while fasted taught me mental toughness , it showed me I didn’t need constant comfort to grow stronger.

At one point, I even tried eating just once a day. It was difficult at first, but it gave me a new appreciation for food and discipline. Eating became intentional, not mindless. My body learned to run efficiently, and my mind felt clearer.

Food became another pillar. I started moving toward plant-based meals. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts. I wasn’t perfect, but I believed in one thing: eating natural food would never send me to the hospital. It wouldn’t give me side effects. It

would only help me heal.

Then, in October of last year, I made the full commitment: I went completely vegan. It wasn't just about food anymore. It was about taking a stand for my body and my future. My meals became my medicine, and my body thanked me for it.

And water. Simple, ordinary water became one of my most important medicines. I tracked my intake, bottle by bottle. Staying hydrated made a difference in everything, my energy, my recovery, my clarity.

But God's Medicine wasn't just physical. It was mental, too. I began journaling every day. Writing down my pain level. Writing down how much I slept. Writing down my energy and my mood. It wasn't just a log, it was proof that I was fighting. Some days the numbers looked terrible. But over time, I began to see progress. Slowly, the pain rating dropped. Slowly, the energy went up.

Journaling gave me perspective. It reminded me that I wasn't stuck forever — I was moving, even if progress was slow.

God's Medicine taught me something important: healing doesn't come from complicated systems or expensive retreats. It comes from consistency. From listening to your body. From using the natural tools God already gave us.

Walking, sunlight, fasting, plant-based food, water, journaling. Simple tools, but powerful. They didn't just heal my body, they started to heal my soul.

6) Birth of Reform50+

At first, everything I did was about survival. I walked to stay sane. I trained to prove I wasn't broken. I ate cleaner to calm my body.

But slowly, something shifted. My journey wasn't just about me anymore.

Every time I walked downtown, I noticed other people moving slowly, limping, or struggling with their own pain. Every time I refused pills, I thought about how many others were stuck in that cycle. Every time I journaled my pain, sleep, and mood, I realized there were thousands of people who could benefit from the same simple

tools.

That's when the idea of Reform50+ was born.

Reform50+ isn't just a program. It's a movement. It's proof that no matter how broken you feel, you can take back control of your life. It's for the people like me , people who felt trapped, people who had been told their best days were over, people who still had fight inside them.

I wanted to build something that gave people what I never had:

A guide who understands pain firsthand.

A program that starts small, with steps anyone can do.

A system that tracks progress , not just physically, but mentally and emotionally.

A community that cheers every little win.

The program grew out of my own steps: two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, hours, then weighted vests and heavy ropes. Not everyone will take it that far , and they don't need to. But everyone can start. Everyone can walk. Everyone can begin to heal.

And it's not just exercise. Reform50+ weaves in God's Medicine: sunlight, fasting, plant-based food, hydration, journaling. Because true healing is never just physical , it's body, mind, and soul together.

I didn't build this program in a classroom or a lab. I built it in pain. I built it on sidewalks, in parks, and in lonely nights when I wondered if life was worth living. That's why Reform50+ is different. It's real. It's lived.

When I look back, I see how far I've come: from not being able to walk two minutes, to walking downtown with a weighted vest; from depression and pills, to sunlight, plants, and freedom. Reform50+ is my gift to anyone who feels trapped in the same prison I once lived in.

This isn't about becoming who you were before. It's about becoming something greater. Stronger. Freer.

And now, it's time to invite others into that journey.

Extended Conversation: Branding & Tools

While the safety and habit conversations were vital, Rochelle also pushed me to think bigger about how to share our journey. "Nobody should be left out," she said. "If I'm in Hawaii, I should be able to walk with you live." Her idea was simple but brilliant: use a GoPro or similar camera to stream our walks so people anywhere in the world could join in real time. Not everyone can meet us in person, but technology can bridge the gap.

She also suggested recording the sounds of our walks — the crunch of leaves, the hum of traffic, the chatter of birds — because some people find comfort just listening to the outdoors while they work. A live feed with video and audio could make our community more inclusive, letting members who can't walk that day still feel connected.

Then came the branding brainstorm. Rochelle insisted we make Reform50+ tangible. "Get windbreaker jackets or sweaters and embroider the Reform50+ logo on them," she said. "Give one to your aunt, one to your mom, one to your daughter. When people see you walking, they see the brand. It becomes a movement." She was right. Uniforms aren't about ego; they're about unity. A small logo on a jacket can spark conversation, invite questions, and build recognition.

We imagined a future where group walks weren't just exercise but events: a sea of matching jackets, each person carrying their own story of pain and progress. Rochelle even joked that I should attach a QR code to my vest so passersby could scan it and learn about the program. Her ideas made me realize that Reform50+ could be more than personal coaching, it could be a social movement powered by stories and tools.

7) The Invitation

If you've read this far, you already know my story isn't just about pain. It's about freedom.

I lived years trapped inside a body that betrayed me. I lived with pain so strong I thought my life was over. I was offered pills, told to accept my limits, told to settle.

But I refused.

Step by step, minute by minute, I built my way back. Two minutes of walking became five, then ten, then hours. I carried weight on my shoulders — literally — to remind myself that pain didn't own me anymore. I jumped a rope most people can't lift, let alone swing for hours. I changed my food, my habits, my mindset. I leaned on God's Medicine: sunlight, fasting, plants, water, journaling.

And slowly, the prison doors opened.

I am not pain-free. I still carry my scars. I still live with herniated discs. But today my pain is no longer a 10, it's a 3. Today I walk two hours with a weighted vest. Today I train six days a week. Today I am free enough to live my life on my own terms.

And now, I want that for you.

Reform50+ isn't just my story, it can be yours. Whether you're fifty or sixty, whether you've lived with pain for years or just started feeling trapped, this program is designed for you. It starts small. It meets you where you are. And it builds you up, body, mind, and soul.

I won't promise miracles. I won't promise you'll be the same as you were at twenty. What I promise is this: you will feel progress. You will regain control. You will discover freedom you thought was lost forever.

You don't have to do it alone. I'll walk with you, literally. I'll guide you step by step, help you track your journey, keep you accountable, and remind you that healing is possible.

The retreats charge thousands of dollars to give you a taste of hope. Reform50+ gives you something better: real progress, in your own neighborhood, with someone who

understands.

So here's my invitation:

If you're ready to stop settling, if you're ready to stop letting pain control your life, if you're ready to fight back — join me.

Your freedom is waiting. All you have to do is take the first step.

8) Reflection Questions

Use these prompts as a journal to track your journey while reading:

What's your "two-minute walk" moment, the smallest step you can take today? What

habits keep you trapped in pain, and which one can you change right now? What

would freedom from pain look like for you?

Who could you invite to walk alongside you in this journey?

9) Closing Call to Action

This short memoir is just the beginning.

Reform50+ is more than a program — it's a movement. If you're ready to stop letting pain control your life, take the first step and join me.

Your freedom is waiting. All you have to do is start.

Humor & The Jump Rope Moment

Not every part of this journey was serious. Humor kept me sane, and some of the funniest moments came from my training. Fourteen surgeries later, I've heard a lot of things in hospitals. But I've never once heard, "Nurse, this man OD'd on spinach. Two days to live, poor guy, should've stuck to fries." That line always makes me smile, because it's true: nobody ever overdosed on vegetables. The real danger is staying stuck in old habits.

Around that time, I remembered a jump rope I had bought five years earlier — not just any rope, but a heavy 7.4■pound beast. When I first bought it, I could barely do five jumps before my body gave out. One day I said to my mother, "I wonder if I can do it now, since my body has started changing and I'm finally getting into shape." That thought stuck with me. When I finally picked up that rope and tried, I was amazed. At first, every swing felt like my body was being tested, but then it became more than exercise. It became proof. Proof that I was moving forward again, proof that I could stand again, proof that freedom was possible.

Yes, swinging a 7.4■pound rope feels like flying economy class in turbulence: you pray, you sweat, and you hope the landing is smooth. The rope taught me to laugh at myself, to celebrate progress, and to appreciate that healing doesn't have to be grim. Sometimes you have to laugh at the absurdity of swinging a rope that weighs more than a newborn baby, and then swing it again.

Commitment Letter to My Clients

Dear future Reform50+ client,

I know what it is like to feel trapped by pain. I've lived through fourteen surgeries and eight years of chronic suffering. I built Reform50+ from that place, and I want you to know that this isn't just a business, it's a promise.

I will never ask you to do anything that I am unwilling to do myself. When you commit to walking every day, I commit to walking with you. When you log your meals and hydration, I will log mine. When you fast or train with a weighted vest, I will share in the challenge. When you feel tempted to skip a habit or doubt your progress, I will be there to share my own struggles and remind you why we began.

I also commit to plant-based eating and using God's Medicine as my foundation. I will continue to journal my pain, my energy, my sleep, and my mood — just as I ask you to do. I will continue to check in with you, celebrate your wins, and support you through setbacks. The only way to build a community is by showing up as part of it. I promise to show up.

This letter is not a marketing gimmick; it is my pledge. I will sign it with my own hand, and I invite you to hold me accountable. Our journey is shared. My progress and your progress are linked. Together, we will create the freedom we both seek — step by step, habit by habit, day by day.

Sincerely,

Mark Gittens

Founder, Reform50+