

Grandmother becomes personal trainer

By **BARBARA SILVERSTEIN**

Special to The CJN

Edna Levitt says she's proof that it's never too late to start something new. The 69-year grandmother of two became a personal trainer at the age of 65.

Today, Levitt specializes in fitness training for people 50 and older (www.50plus-fitness.ca).

She does one-on-one resistance training for individuals and small groups in private homes. In collaboration with motivational speaker Susan Sommers, Levitt also does wellness seminars on fitness for people over 50. Her presentations focus on the benefits of strength training.

Levitt describes her foray into the fitness business as "totally serendipitous." She says she got the idea after a stranger commented on how fit she looked. "She said, 'I can tell you work out by the shape of your arms.'"

Relating the story to a friend, Levitt mused about becoming a certified personal trainer "My friend said, 'That's a good idea.'"

Levitt subsequently enrolled in a professional training program. It took her two tries to pass the written exam for certification, she confesses. "I was 65. I had never taken a science course before.

"I had to have a tutor in biomechanics of the human body, among other science topics. It was brutal."

Levitt had faced other difficult challenges before. She immigrated to Canada from Scotland in 1983 with her son, Michael, following the sudden death of her husband.

"I needed a fresh start," she says.

Before moving to Canada, she had never worked. Shortly after her arrival in Toronto, she enrolled at York University. "I felt I could never attempt to do anything professional unless I got educated."

Graduating at the age 50, she became a profes-

sional fundraiser. Her first job was at Baycrest.

That year, her son urged her to improve her level of fitness, she recalls. "He said, 'Mom, you're middle-aged now. It's time for you to join a gym.'"

When they went south for the winter break, Levitt, who had never exercised, took her son's advice. She went out walking every morning. When she returned from her vacation, she joined the YMCA. "I went at 6 in the morning, Monday to Friday. I can't tell you what got me committed, but within six months, I felt the difference."

Levitt held a number of fundraising and marketing jobs in the community before switching careers, and she says she has no plans to retire. "I started working so late in life, so at age 69, I don't feel burned out yet."

She says the work is very gratifying. Indeed, she recounts how she helped a grandmother who could barely walk dance at her grandson's wedding.

"I got a call last June. The woman said, 'My son's getting married in November and I'd like my 87-year-old mother to walk down the aisle.' The woman used a walker and she shuffled. She didn't lift her feet."

Levitt worked with her twice a week for an hour over five months. She says she taught her to do squats and lunges, first holding on to the table to build up confidence and strength.

By the fall, the woman was able to do the same moves with a three-pound medicine-ball. They even practised dancing, says Levitt. "My son was at the same wedding, and the woman said to him, 'Tell your mother I did the horah.'"

"It just shows you that you're never too old to do strength training. We're all a work in progress, but I'm not planning to reinvent myself again.

"I see what fitness has done for me and I see how I've helped others. I'm passionate about what I do."