

Get in SHAPE (a story from the dark side)

One, two, three, four. Work it out. Work it out. One, two, three, four. Get in SHAPE, Get in SHAPE. One, two, three, four. Are you fit? Are you fit? One, two, three, four. Help yourself. Get in SHAPE. Work it out. Please allow me to introduce myself, I'm a man of health and fame. Ralph Underwood Fit is my name. My students know me as RU Fit, your personal trainer for the 'Get in SHAPE' program. Try to see it my way and we can work it out. Get it? Here's the deal – with my four-part system, I'm here to help you help yourself with the 'Self Help Assessment Plan Evaluation' system. That's SHAPE, for short. Now I know you've seen those TV bunko artists with the perfect hair and perfect teeth pacing the stage with a headset-microphone pitching all kinds of self-improvement programs – save your money, eat wholesome food, follow my exercise program, learn to bowl or save your soul. With our SHAPE system you'll have the tools in the palm of your hand to empower your life. The cost to you, the dinner theater audience, is absolutely free and if you're not satisfied, we will provide a money back-guarantee. As I like to tell my students, there's something lost and something gained in living every day. So let's get on with the show.

Living here in the Rocky Mountains, Colorado country, we are at the center of the fitness universe. Folks move here from around the world to find a self-improvement training program of choice. It might be body-shaping, cross-fit training aerobics, pilates, weight training, or the extreme sports like ultrarunning, alpine climbing, high altitude trail running, mountain biking, parachuting, colour skiing, free-soloing, mountaineering, cross-country skiing, downhill racing and the like. To be clear, our program is about none of that stuff. The X-Games are not Y-U-R-Here. RU Fit's 'Get in SHAPE' program starts with one basic assumption – 'I still haven't found, what I'm looking for'. Here's the deal.

We all remember the characters in the Wizard of Oz, right? The Scarecrow who lacks a brain and desires above all else to have one; the Cowardly Lion, king of the jungle, who looks for courage and nerve to conquer his fear and finally the Tin Woodman who states that he has neither heart nor brain, but cares nothing for the loss of his brain. As the song goes ...

I could while away the hours, conferrin' with the flowers
Consultin' with the rain.
And my head I'd be scratchin' while
my thoughts were busy hatchin'
If I only had a brain.

When a man's an empty kettle he should be on his mettle,
And yet I'm torn apart.
Just because I'm presumin' that I could be kind-a-human,
If I only had heart.

Life is sad, believe me, Missy,
When you're born to be a sissy
Without the vim and verve.

But I could change my habits, never more be scared of rabbits
If I only had the nerve.

The RU Fit SHAPE system began with a similar set of problems. In my case, it was helplessness, and lots of it. Hence the desire to be helpful. Now you didn't come here tonight to hear about my problems, right? Just the other way around.

Perhaps. To get the heart of the matter, the SHAPE program developed from a strong desire to help people help themselves. In junior high it was raising money, the Toys for Tots program providing the Marine Corps recruiters with gifts for the young victims of the Vietnam war. In high school it was another fund drive for the US AID program providing protein powder food supplements to the starving Ibo population suffering malnutrition and genocide in the Nigerian Biafran war. In the college years, it was helping a Mexican family reunite across the US border and later, it was combat duty as an inner city bilingual school teacher in South Center Los Angeles – a war zone in an urban barrio. At some point during those teaching years RU Fit got the message, 'help yourself Mr. Teacher man" we've got to get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do.

Fast forward a few decades and let's take a close look at the SHAPE program in action. The case study involves a program called 'Christmas in April' (or Sukkot in April for Jewish congregants sponsored by a local area temple).

The raison d'être behind Sukkot in April is a good will, volunteer effort to provide home improvement services to families or individuals in need of assistance. Similar to the 'Habitat for Humanity', this effort is the nation's largest home/community repair program with thousands of projects across the country. In one day, houses are made into homes, racial, social and religious barriers are broken and lives are transformed. Back in the Washington DC area, our temple volunteered one year to the next either painting, scraping, hauling or hammering to put a new look on an old home.

In the early '90s, we met a man who had certainly helped himself in Life. Warner was as 80-year old black man

living alone in a 3-story townhouse off Florida Ave in DC Northeast. As a proud army veteran, he had marched into Berlin at the end of WWII as part of the liberation forces. His distinguished military career lasted another 30 years and in the early '70s he was discharged with honors from the service. His home was decorated with medals and commendations and yet he had been living alone for many years, a ward of his church, with no immediate family to care for him. Although blind in one eye, Warner could take care of himself, and he liked to cook. To improve his home, a project was planned to remodel the kitchen and the Sukkot in April team began work on a Saturday with a tear-out of the old cabinet and countertop fixtures. In the corner of his kitchen, our crew piled boxes and food products into a corner so everything was ready for the remodeling job the next day.

On Sunday morning, our crew, Larry and I parked in the alley behind Warner's home. It was early in the day, an hour or so before the remodeling volunteers were scheduled to arrive. "You know Larry, I'd be relieved if you go to meet Warner. It's early enough and chaos is about to descend on his home. . You might want to see if he's still expecting us to invade his home to pound nails, scrape paint and make noise on this early Sunday morning".

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your personal trainer for the 'Get in SHAPE' program. Try to see it my way and we can work it out. Get it? Here's the deal – with my four-part system, I'm here to help you help yourself with the 'Self Help Assessment Plan Evaluation' system. That's SHAPE, for short. Now I know you've seen those TV bunko artists with the perfect hair and perfect teeth pacing the stage with a headset-microphone pitching all kinds of self-improvement programs – save your money, eat wholesome food, follow my exercise program, learn to bowl or save your soul. With our SHAPE system you'll have the tools in the palm of your hand to empower your life. The cost to you, the dinner theater audience, is absolutely free and if you're not satisfied, we will provide a money back-guarantee. As I like to tell my students, there's something lost and something gained in living every day so let's get on with the show.

If I wanted your assistance
I'd offer no resistance
Trying never to escape

I would take your help on Sunday
To my office on the Monday
And work to get in SHAPE.