By the time he was referred to Troy Munson, M.D., in the fall 2016 for intense lower back pain, Michael Papian was at the end of his rope.

“I told Dr. Munson, I don’t care if I live or if I die, but I can’t live with this pain anymore,” Michael says.

The pain had started about two years ago and kept worsening. Worried about the risk of addiction, Michael refused to take opioids. Two epidurals didn’t help at all. For pain so severe that he rated it at 10 on a scale of 1 to 10, the Windsor Heights man took only over-the-counter anti-inflammatories.

“I couldn’t bend over at all, and I could barely get out of the house and go anywhere because it hurt so much to walk. I had to hire people to mow my lawn and take care of the snow. I slept in a recliner every night and spent most of my day sitting in it, too. I had to count on my wife, Janet, to put my socks on! God love her, I couldn’t have lived through this without her.”

Dr. Munson ordered an MRI, which showed that one of Michael’s disks had collapsed on top of the rod from a previous spinal fusion surgery in 2000, and the vertebra just above the fusion was fractured.

“He told me surgery could help with the collapsed disk, but he didn’t know if it would totally relieve my pain,” Michael says.

Working with Dr. Natisha Jensen, M.D., F.A.C.S., Dr. Munson performed oblique lumbar interbody fusion surgery at Mercy to build up the collapsed disk (like the human equivalent of concrete-jacking a sunken sidewalk) and to implant an internal brace to keep the vertebrae from collapsing.

“He told me it might be six months to a year before I noticed a big difference in my pain level—but after 30 days, it was already down to an eight instead of a 10. And today, six months after the surgery, it’s a one or a two!” Michael says with delight.

“I’m back on my lawn tractor cutting my own grass, and at Easter brunch this year I could get up and get my own stuff. I can drive my car and go where I want. I got my life back!”

Michael has already referred one friend to Dr. Munson and describes himself as “very, very, very happy” with the care he received.

“I have high praise for him. He’s absolutely good at communicating, and I know he was happy to hear that my pain is almost 100 percent gone. I have zero pain except when I bend over, and I can put my own socks on again!”