

# PUTTING PILATES TO THE TEST

Two *Pilates Style* staffers take on Joe's challenge: In 10 sessions, you'll feel the difference, in 20 sessions you'll see the difference, and in 30 sessions you'll have a whole new body. Spoiler alert—they're now method devotees for life.



## TIFFANY ALLEN, SAN MARCOS, CA

**ROLE AT PS:** I've had the privilege of escaping my day job of technology-software sales a few times a year to work with the *Pilates Style* team, to help manage and style photo shoots. Talk about a break from sitting behind the desk with a headset on all day! Confession, though: My sister, Bambi Abernathy, is the editor-in-chief of this magazine!

**PAST FITNESS EXPERIENCE:** Before finding Pilates, it was cardio, cardio, cardio! I was running half-marathons and spinning, and the idea that I could get a good workout at anything less than warp speed was hard to believe.

But I did have a break in my commitment to exercise a few years ago, and Bambi is the one who inspired me to take it back up. When she took over the magazine, the Pilates community was new to her. Did it scare her, yes, but did she back down, no—never. Each time I dove into the pages of her magazine, I thought about how she gets up and takes on this challenge every day. I am thrilled that she let me be a part of her journey, and I am even prouder to say that she was the, wink, push, and then shove, that convinced me to reinvest in myself—my body and my happiness.

**WHY SHE WANTED TO TRY PILATES:** After my very first shoot in Southern California, I thought, *I have got to try this!* The women and men were amazing—incredibly fit, inspiring and full of confidence, which was something that, at the time, I needed a shot of and quick. After meeting these people, I realized it was time to slow down, and focus more on individual body movements to see if I could transform key areas that were bothering me, and so many of us women in our late 30s and 40s—our thighs, buns, abs and jiggly bat wings!

**PILATES INSTRUCTORS SHE WORKED WITH:** Mariah Jones at her home studio; Courtney Miller at Courtney Miller Pilates; and Reformer classes at Club Pilates

**# OF SESSIONS SHE HAS TAKEN (AS OF PRESS TIME):** 24 private sessions and well over 100 classes!

**WHAT SHE THOUGHT AFTER HER FIRST LESSON:** After that first photo shoot, I set up my first round of privates with Mariah Jones. I remember thinking, *Dang, this is so crazy-hard, she must be joking that I will ever hold a 60-second Plank.* I was also a little intimidated by the equipment and the terminology.

**AFTER 10 SESSIONS:** Mariah gave me a fantastic introduction to Pilates. I quickly learned that, while I had endurance from all the cardio I did, I seriously lacked flexibility and core strength, and was almost like a jellyfish when it came to my upper body. But after a month with Mariah and then on to Courtney, I was excited to go to my sessions because I could tell I was getting stronger—I definitely felt more confident in my abilities! (continued on page 71)

It was after four months that I left beaming: I did lunges on the Chair without holding on. That's right—no support needed!—and I left with such confidence knowing I had created this stronger person inside and out.



**ABOVE:** "I REALLY DO LOVE THE CHAIR. HERE, I'M CLEARLY FOCUSED ON MY BREATH AND THE MOVEMENT!" SAYS ALLEN, WHO'S WORKING HARD ON BALANCED BODY'S EXO CHAIR.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROD FOSTER; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY TIFFANY LEE; ON TIFFANY: TOP BY LULULEMON, BOTTOMS BY ZOBHA; ON COURTNEY: HER OWN CLOTHES



LEFT TO RIGHT: "THIS SERIES ON THE CHAIR MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I'M CINCHING MY WAIST!"

## THE TRAINERS TELL ALL

Because sometimes it takes a village, Mariah Jones, a classically trained instructor, and Courtney Miller, the founder of Courtney Miller Pilates, spill how and why Tiffany was so successful in the studio.

**FIRST OBSERVATIONS:** "The first thing I noticed was Tiffany's amazing energy!" recalls Miller. "She was literally beaming with positivity and had an authentic excitement to make a major life change. She knew exactly what she wanted to achieve through Pilates, and was committed to do the work to get there."

**BODY ASSESSMENT NOTES:** "Physically, Tiffany had some muscle asymmetries, postural issues, and was lacking upper-body and core strength—all very typical for someone who works on a computer full time," says Miller.

**WHAT THEY DID TOGETHER:** "When we first started, I worked almost exclusively on the mind/body connection with her core. After a time, her core strength grew and she was

able to keep her abdominals engaged while thinking about what other areas of her body were doing," says Jones, who usually started Tiffany on the Reformer or mat, before moving to the Tower and finishing with standing work.

With Miller, "her workouts typically consisted of a warm-up on the Reformer. From there, we would layer in progressive sequences that would continue to build in difficulty and endurance. We would always incorporate spinal mobility, hip extension, posterior-body work and front-body lengthening. Each session would wrap up with a positive affirmation that Tiffany could take with her for the rest of her day," she says.

**TIFFANY'S STUDIO FAVORITES:** "Tiffany is one of those rare clients who is truly excited about working on all

the Pilates apparatus (even the Chair!). Round-Back Pikes on the Chair, Short Box Abdominal Series and Dynamic Planking on the Reformer, and just about anything that targets her booty are among her favorites. Hamstring stretches, and Teasers were definitely not on her top-picks list, but she always put on a smile while doing them!" recalls Miller.

**IN IT TO WIN IT:** "Tiffany is a shining example of how Pilates can change your life," says Miller. "Through her commitment to achieve the physical goals she set for herself, she created a higher level of happiness and confidence in all aspects of her life." Jones agrees: "Tiffany was always ready to put in hard work and challenge herself, which is exactly the kind of work ethic that brings the quickest changes."

Today, I feel whole again, inside and out, and that is what makes me most thankful for Pilates during one of the most challenging periods of my life.

**AFTER 20 SESSIONS:** After two months, I started sprinkling in group classes, a more affordable option, and loved the interaction with more people. I began to notice changes in my body that brought a smile to my face: My abs were noticeably flatter, and I was starting to see definition in my arms, which I never had, no matter how much I ran or went spinning! The slower, more methodical pace of Pilates was forcing me to slow my mind and focus on the work; I loved the peaceful strength that I felt after each class.

**AFTER 30 SESSIONS:** It was after four months that I left beaming: I did lunges on the Chair without holding on. That's right—no support needed!—and I left with such confidence knowing I had created this stronger person inside and out. Pilates has brought me back to an amazing confidence that was buried under an extra layer of fat and some crazy-tough times. As I embraced getting my body back, I was also trying to figure out my new life as a 40-year-old single mom. Many tearful, stressed-out-to-the-max days forced me to focus on only what I could control—myself and my attitude.

I now tackle five classes a week—it's my time to invest in just myself and my breath, to reflect and to kick ass! I have a bubbly, outgoing personality, and for quite a while, I was faking it (some days better than others). But I faked it till I made it, and I am now thankful to see that my daughters know there are highs and lows, that we can persevere and how strength can guide our lives. Today, I feel whole again, inside and out, and that is what makes me most thankful for Pilates during one of the most challenging periods of my life.

NICHOLAS NGUYEN, HOUSTON, TX



**ROLE AT PS:** I work full-time as the creative director at *Pilates Style*, where I team up with our amazing group of editors, designers and photographers to put the magazine together.

**PAST FITNESS EXPERIENCE:** A few years ago, I would go to the gym a few times a week to run on the treadmill or elliptical. I also took a "body pump" weight-lifting class for several months until I fell off the wagon. I hadn't really worked out for two years, until I started doing Pilates at the beginning of 2016.

**WHY HE WANTED TO TRY PILATES:** Honestly, I always felt a little guilty about working for a Pilates magazine and not practicing the method. Aside from seeing the incredible photos in our exercise stories and reading about the impact that Pilates can have in our "Success



THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: "HILARY ALWAYS INCORPORATES THE HUNDRED INTO OUR WORKOUTS, AND I DO THE SAME AT HOME TO KEEP UP MY PROGRESS. I ALSO ENJOY DOING THE SWAN FOR THE STRETCH AND HOW IT OPENS UP MY CHEST," SAYS NGUYEN.

**I've never stuck with exercising longer than a few months, but I'm addicted to Pilates now. I get excited to learn new things from Hilary, and feel confident about the work I can do at home on my own now. I feel like I'm getting the hang of it thanks to her careful and precise guidance.**



Stories" issue after issue, I was also inspired by the instructors at our photo shoot at the 2015 PMA conference. It was my first time seeing the movements in person, and coming home from the conference, I decided that it was finally time for me to "talk the talk" and "walk the walk."

**PILATES INSTRUCTOR HE WORKED WITH:** Hilary Opheim at WAPilates

**# OF SESSIONS HE HAS TAKEN (AS OF PRESS TIME):** 44

**WHAT HE THOUGHT AFTER HIS FIRST LESSON:** I learned just how glad I was to be finally taking the Pilates plunge! I couldn't roll up very far or touch my toes. Even though I felt a little disconnected from my body and uncertain whether I was engaging the right muscle groups, Hilary was very encouraging and said she actually thought I displayed a good mind/body construction. It boosted my confidence. Learning that I needed to do quite a bit of work motivated me to keep going, too. Even

though the wonderful instructors at our PMA shoot made it look so effortless, I quickly learned that it only looked that way because of their years and years of experience and strength.

**AFTER 10 SESSIONS:** I could finally roll up with control, a personal victory for me. I was learning a lot from Hilary in the first 10 sessions; she made it a point to let me try new apparatus early on, which was always a treat. I loved working on the Reformer and doing ab work on the Spine Corrector.

**AFTER 20 SESSIONS:** At this point, I had been stretching more, and when I rolled up, I could touch my toes. It was another milestone since my other chief reason for doing Pilates (aside from getting stronger and toning up) was to become more flexible and not groan every time I rolled out of bed or got up from hunching over the computer for hours. My sessions with Hilary became a weekly mini-event that I could look forward to, many times even more exciting than the feeling of leaving the office early on a

**My body absolutely changed in the way I could move and sit tall, thanks to classes with Hilary and the homework she gave me to do three to four times in between our meetings.**



ABOVE: "I LOVE MY SESSIONS AT THE STUDIO BECAUSE AT HOME, I'D ONLY DO THE THIGH STRETCH, BUT WITH HILARY, WE'D ADD CHEST EXPANSION INTO THE MIX ON THE BALANCED BODY CADILLAC."

Friday! My body absolutely changed in the way I could move and sit tall, thanks to classes with Hilary and the homework she gave me to do three to four times in between our sessions.

I had bought a pair of jeans at the end of 2015 around the holidays, but they wouldn't even zip. One day in February, I decided to try them on in an effort to decide what to keep in my closet or donate, and they actually fit! I was so excited about it, I texted Hilary. Although I hadn't changed my diet much or lost very much weight, I was receiving compliments on how much leaner I looked.

**AFTER 30 SESSIONS:** I've never stuck with exercising longer than a few months, but I'm addicted to Pilates now. I get excited to learn new things from Hilary, and feel confident about the work I can do at home on my own now. A few times, as Hilary was about to correct my alignment, I was one step ahead and adjusted myself before she even verbalized it; I feel like I'm getting the hang of it thanks to her careful and precise guidance. We've run a quote in the magazine attributed to Carola Trier—"Exercise. You'll feel better!"—and that's exactly how I stay motivated before and feel after a Pilates session, even if it's just 20 minutes at home.

## THE TRAINER TELLS ALL

Hilary Opheim, owner and director of WAPilates in Houston, TX, shares her insights on what it's like to work with Nicholas, and why practice makes perfect.

**FIRST OBSERVATIONS:** When I first met Nicholas, he was very quiet and had not really done Pilates, aside from a few video mat workouts. He said he didn't really work out, but was excited and seemed focused.

**BODY ASSESSMENT NOTES:** I noticed mainly two things. He had a weak core, and his left foot wanted to supinate and rotate as he moved.

**WHAT THEY DID TOGETHER:** Nicholas worked on the Cadillac, Reformer, Ladder Barrel, Spine Corrector and Wunda Chair. We also did matwork, which he would then do for his "homework" until our next session. We focused on the abdominals, specifically his obliques, as one side was weaker, and also his hamstring flexibility and pelvic stability. We also did a lot of posture work, as Nicholas was rounded from working on the computer and sitting all day.

**NICHOLAS'S PROGRESS:** A good example of how Nicholas has improved is the Hundred. The first time we did it, he had to keep his legs in tabletop or immediately felt his back. Now, he will start as Joseph Pilates taught, with his legs long and low over the footbar on the Reformer or on the mat. Nicholas is now aware when his foot starts to shift and can correct himself.

**STAR STUDENT:** Nicholas was very good about doing his homework and coming to sessions, and one day, we were on the Reformer about to do the Hundred. He asked if he could have the footbar down. So we lowered it, and he did the Hundred with perfect form. I had to take his picture to show him, and he was so pleased. I decided to post it on our Facebook page, and the next day, my longtime client Janine was going on and on about how perfect his form was and asking how long he had been doing Pilates. I told her just a few months, but he did his homework and that he had really improved. She now does her homework and has a great little competition going with Nicholas—all in fun, of course. **PS**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRACIE HENLEY/GOPICSLIVE; ON NICHOLAS: CLOTHING BY LULULEMON, SOCKS BY TOESOX; ON HILARY: TOP BY ATHLETA, BOTTOMS BY NOMI NOU