

My Personal Pilates Story

Today there are thousands of certified Pilates instructors in private studios, health clubs, physical therapy offices, hospitals, YMCAs, universities, dance studios, and spas—everywhere that people gather to gain better bodies. But when I began in the mid-sixties, there were only three Pilates studios in the world, all within a few blocks of one another in Manhattan. They were practically identical: the exercises, the equipment, the technique, and even the fees.

Despite its limited availability, Pilates had good press. There were major articles about Joseph Pilates in national magazines and New York newspapers. Joe's opinions in such quotes such as "Physical fitness is the first requisite for happiness," and "There is no hope for world peace if the members of the United Nations cannot do my first five mat exercises," were controversial, which attracted me. I decided to try Pilates, even though "working out" wasn't even a term back then. During the subsequent decades, I sampled the popular fitness trends: running, Jazzercise, Nautilus, and even killer aerobics classes. Although I knew nothing about functional anatomy or correct biomechanics (and neither did the instructors), I never felt that the popular go-for-the-burn exercise mantra made sense.

I was still a Pilates fan when, in 1988, my family moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. I had heard that there were some Pilates studios outside of New York,

in California and London, but it was still such a secret. Pilates clients liked it that way, too. But at that time, leaving New York meant that I would have to leave Pilates.

Three years later, I was enjoying Santa Fe, but my body, particularly my neck and shoulders, definitely missed Pilates. A chiropractor told me that my neck was too “locked up” to release, but recommended a woman who did body miracles and had this funny exercise equipment. I called her immediately.

Her name was Eve Gentry and she had taught Pilates for Joe in his original studio since the mid-forties. After Joe’s death in 1967, she had moved to Santa Fe and opened a Pilates practice with equipment that Clara, Joe’s wife, had built especially for her. When I walked to her studio the next day, I had to go only three blocks. I had lived in Santa Fe for three years and she had been in my backyard!

Soon I was feeling good again and I began to think about how Pilates was so special and why no one knew about it. Between February and April 1991, I toyed with the idea of starting a professional organization to train instructors in the Pilates method. But I was on the fence until mid-April.

As I was reading the Sunday *New York Times*, an article by Penelope Green about exercise got my attention. It suggested that we had all tired of trying to be Jane Fonda and Arnold Schwarzenegger and maybe we should go back to the real stuff, Pilates. I took that as a sign that I should go ahead: April 14, 1991, was my fiftieth birthday.

The next day Eve Gentry and her associate, Michele Larsson, and I started the Institute for the Pilates Method. In that year we would publish the *Pilates Forum* and the first Pilates Reformer encyclopedia; create the Pilates video, *Working Out the Pilates Way*; and teach the first Pilates Certification Conference.

In 2001, I returned to New York. I replaced a car with my feet for transportation. I found my legs again. This was a big shift in awareness, which was the impetus to evolve Pilates.