

Success Story

Making a Difference Around the World



What better way to celebrate Merrithew's 30th anniversary than by spotlighting four of the Toronto-based company's most inspiring Pilates success stories?

By Beth Johnson



TOP TO BOTTOM: JAVIER HUETE WITH TEACHER MARTA YUSTE VAQUERIZO; SIDE-LYING LEG WORK WITH THE JUMPBOARD HELPED HUETE GAIN THE ENDURANCE NEEDED TO WALK TO THE STUDIO ON HIS OWN; AN X-RAY OF HIS LEG POST-CRASH

JAVIER HUETE, 45, TOLEDO, SPAIN

After a devastating car accident, Javier Huete discovered Joseph Pilates' promise of "return to life" with a devoted teacher.

TWO YEARS AGO, MY LIFE CHANGED IRREVOCABLY.

After spending the weekend in the mountains with my wife and our two young sons—they were eight and six at the time—we were heading home to Toledo. Suddenly another car slid around a curve, crashed into our car and forced us off the road.

When I woke up in the hospital, I found out to my horror that my wife had been killed instantly, one son had lost his sight in one eye and the other had fractured his leg. I had broken both my femurs (thigh bones), cracked three ribs and had fractures in my left heel and ankle. I was in the hospital for three months, and underwent several surgeries.

A DARK TIME

After I was released, I did rehab, mostly in the hospital pool, for six months. I needed crutches to

walk, and I couldn't stay on my feet for very long. My right femur was now an inch and a half shorter than my left, and my hips, right knee and foot were very weak. I also had a lot of pain in my lumbar region. The doctors told me that I wouldn't recover any further, and that I should accept my physical state and be grateful to be alive.

I was very depressed—grieving for my wife, worrying about my children, not sleeping well and experiencing post-traumatic flashbacks. I knew I needed more physical therapy if there was any chance of getting better. Then a year ago, I made an appointment at Akrostudio in Toledo.

REHABBING WITH PILATES

I assumed that more physical therapy meant more pain in order to improve. So I was surprised when my teacher, Marta Yuste Vaquerizo, a Merrithew instructor trainer specializing in STOTT PILATES® and Halo® Training, began rehabbing me with Pilates. I'd never heard of it.

For the first month, I went four days a week. Within the first week, I knew that Pilates was going to help me. We'd do leg work on the Long Box and Footwork on the Chair. After class I felt so good! Marta was very encouraging and careful.

We'd do adductor stretches on the Reformer with the straps on my knees, the Midback Series on the

Reformer and Knee Stretches. But doing Leg Springs on the Reformer and Cadillac was the real key to my recovery: Within two months, I had recovered so much mobility in my hips and foot that I could sit comfortably with my right knee semiflexed. The most important moment for me was when, after four months of doing Pilates, I could walk to the studio on my own. I realized then that I could continue living my life, and be self-sufficient.

A NEW LIFE

Now, after a year of Pilates, my whole perspective on my health has changed. I feel so much more optimistic! Pilates has helped me feel so much better physically, and sleep better as well. My PTSD has also really lessened. Sure, I still have discomfort, and some days are just hard—but I can walk. I can drive and have returned to work part-time. No one can truly understand what Pilates has meant for me and my children.

EVA MACLOWRY, 82, PORTLAND, OR

After two bouts with cancer, Eva MacLowry is in the best shape of her life...at 82. "Doing Pilates is my present to myself," she says.

WHEN I WAS 44, I WAS DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER. Back then, in 1979, doctors removed a lot of muscle tissue when doing a mastectomy. It left me with a much weaker left arm. I did some physical therapy, but to be honest, I was never super athletic. So I pushed on with life, raising our four sons and working as an artist.

A NEW HOME, A NEW PASSION

Fast-forward to 1999. We moved to Portland, OR, for my husband's job. We were empty-nesters, so when a new acquaintance invited me to a mat class, I quickly said, "Sure!" From day one I loved how it worked out my whole body. I was soon a regular at Pacific NW Pilates.

When I first met Melanie Byford-Young, my longtime instructor and a Merrithew master instructor trainer specializing in STOTT PILATES Rehab, I stood in a sway back position with a left pelvic rotation. I had spinal stenosis and some arthritis in my lower lumbar area, which caused a lot of discomfort. So Melanie, who is also a physical therapist, began by working on my back strength and stability, doing Spinal Rotation, Swan Dive Prep and Breaststroke Prep on the Reformer, and Roll-Down and Port de Bras on the Cadillac.

To strengthen my arms, I'd use the standing arm springs on the Cadillac, and do prone arm work on the Reformer.

FINDING A COMMUNITY

I loved Pilates and the supportive friendships that I developed through the studio. I also loved how Pilates helped me in my "real" life. If I'd been painting a lot or had a long plane flight, Melanie and my other instructor, Janet Nordlund, would help me work through my inevitable lower lumbar pain.

Then five years ago, I was diagnosed with



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endometrial cancer. At such an upsetting time, it was amazing for me to see what a caring community I had developed through Pilates. After my surgery, my teachers put their heads together to figure out which exercises would help most to regain my abdominal strength. I was so touched by their thoughtfulness.

Melanie helped me do gentle segmental rotation with my leg on a foam roller. We used the Arc Barrel to support my pelvis in an inverted position for Toe Taps and Leg Lifts. Thanks to Pilates, I rebounded very quickly.

Now I can even do Upside-Down Pull-Ups on the Cadillac! I'll never do a perfect Teaser—that one is hard for me—but I'm really good at Plank!

READY FOR NEW ADVENTURES

What I also love about Pilates is that it keeps me prepped for new challenges. For my 80th

TOP TO BOTTOM: EVA MACLOWRY STANDING TALL, DOING SIDE SPLITS ON THE REFORMER; WITH LONGTIME TEACHER MELANIE BYFORD-YOUNG.

JAVIER PHOTOS COURTESY OF AKROSTUDIO; X-RAY COURTESY OF JAVIER HUETE; EVA PHOTOS COURTESY OF PACIFIC NORTHWEST PILATES

birthday, I decided to hike the Narrows at Zion National Park. Janet helped me prepare by doing extra balance work with me. She set out some discs and told me to pretend they were slippery rocks! I could not have done the hike—a strenuous 16 miles—without Janet.

I've been doing Pilates now for nearly 20 years, and it's remarkable to me how active I still am. I have a full life of painting, hiking, family, stair workouts and regular Pilates. At 82, I'm the strongest I've ever been! For my birthday, I did 10 Pull-Ups and 10 Pushups with my feet in the Trapeze—how incredible is that?

MOSES GO, JR., 42, MAKATI, PHILIPPINES

After injuring his back on the job, Moses Go thought he might always have a bad back. Then he discovered Pilates.

MY JOURNEY TO PILATES STARTED IN 2008 WHEN I STARTED EXPERIENCING LOWER-BACK PAIN.

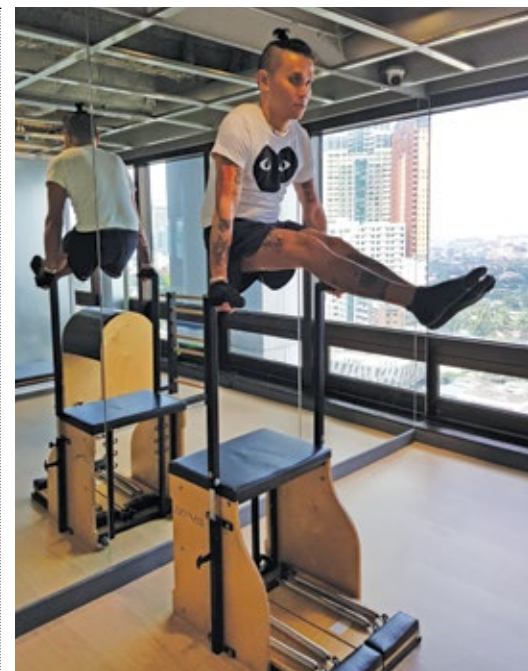
I work in the food industry, and part of my job then was carrying heavy loads of produce. When my back acted up, I'd just rub in some Bengay.

Then in early 2009, I woke up with extreme pain running down my left leg. I went to the ER, where they gave me some strong painkillers and advised me to go see an orthopedist.

DEALING WITH THE PAIN

An MRI revealed that I had herniated discs in my lower back, on my L4 and L5 lumbar spine. I was

I'm amazed with what I can do with my body now—especially considering that I could barely move just three years ago. Without a doubt, the best advice I've ever been given is...try Pilates!



LEFT TO RIGHT: MOSES GO DOING LEG RAISES ON THE CHAIR; DOING SPREAD EAGLE ON THE CADILLAC WITH INSTRUCTOR JAMIE RIDGE ALCANTARA LOOKING ON.

told to do physical therapy three times a week, and was prescribed Arcoxia (a COX-2 inhibitor) and Neurontin (which targets nerve pain). I'd limp to the hospital for physical therapy, and then head back to bed. After three months, the pain subsided enough that I could go back to work, but I felt very weak and the slightest effort would make my back ache.

I was reassigned to office work because my doctor said I couldn't lift more than 15 pounds. I'd also gained 25 pounds from being so immobile. Over eight months, I managed to lose the weight.

TRYING ANOTHER ROUTE

But by 2014, I was fed up. My frequent back pain limited my life and made me feel so much older than I was. I went to a rehab doctor and he prescribed Lyrica for the pain. He also suggested I try Pilates; he thought my back was giving out because I had a weak core. He recommended the Vivian Zapanta Pilates Studio in Makati.

At my first session in October 2014, my teacher Jamie Ridge Alcantara, a certified Stott Pilates instructor, was careful not to strain my back. Initially, I just did some basic stretches and a lot of abdominal work as well as Hip Rolls and Toe Taps. After about three months, I realized, "Hey, my back doesn't hurt, and my belly has more muscle than flab!"

From then on, I started pushing myself. After a year, I was using the trapeze on the Cadillac, and doing handstands on the Ladder Barrel!

FLYING HIGH WITH PILATES

Jamie really knows how to challenge me. It's like having a workout buddy and trainer at the same time. These days, I still have a bit of a hard time with balance, so doing the Splits on the Reformer is scary for me. But I love "flying" on the trapeze and doing acrobatic stuff. It makes me feel like I'm auditioning for Cirque du Soleil! I'm amazed with what I can do with my body now—especially considering that I could barely move just three



years ago. Without a doubt, the best advice I've ever been given is...try Pilates!

RIE YAMAGISHI, 40, TORONTO

After a lifetime of discomfort, Pilates is giving Rie Yamagishi relief from cerebral palsy that she never thought possible.

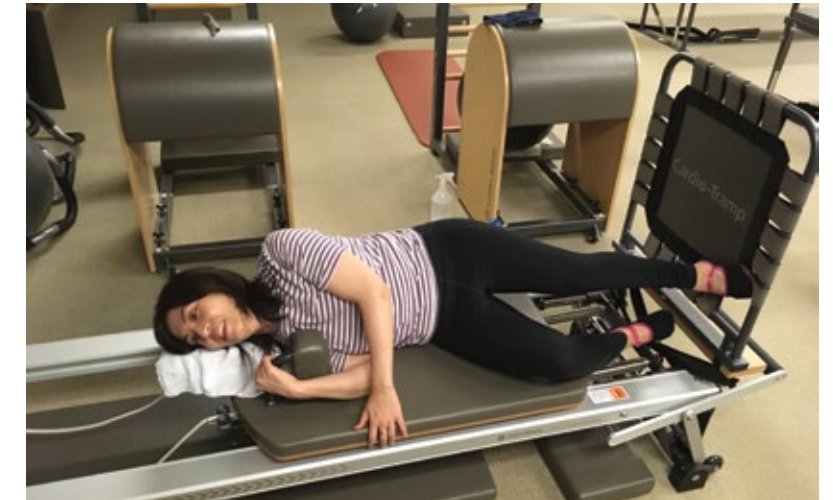
I was born with cerebral palsy; my muscles, especially my lower extremities, have always been uncomfortably tight-feeling. I'm especially affected on my left side, and I had three surgeries by the time I was 18 to lengthen my Achilles tendons.

After my last surgery, I worked with a physical therapist and chiropractor for a bit, but then became quite sedentary once I graduated from college and starting working a desk job. I could get around okay unassisted, so I didn't push myself further. But a few years ago, I decided I needed to be more proactive. I started doing yoga and tai chi, and they did help. But what really made a difference was starting Pilates in January 2016.

A LIFE-CHANGER

I was intrigued after seeing an article on Pilates, but I worried it would be too hard. At the Merrithew Corporate Training Center in Toronto, Stott Pilates-certified instructor Lisa Kojola was very reassuring. She even read up on cerebral palsy before my first lesson—I was very impressed by that.

At my first lesson with her, we did Spinal Twist on the Reformer. I got a stretch and worked my muscles simultaneously. Lisa noticed that I was



holding a lot of tension in my neck and shoulders that caused me to hunch over, so we also worked on aligning my shoulders.

The worst part of cerebral palsy for me has always been the incredibly uncomfortable tightness in my legs. Working with my feet in the straps on the Reformer has really helped to open up my hips and strengthen my legs, plus it gave me relief from muscle tightness and discomfort for the first time in my life.

HITTING MY STRIDE

It was a revelation that breathing into my abs would help me hold my balance, so I work on that every day. Now my hips are also looser, and the muscles around them are stronger, so I have a longer, more stable stride—unlike the small, unbalanced steps I took before Pilates! Recently I went on a trail walk, and there were some logs that had fallen across the path. Sure, I needed someone to hold my hand, but I could step over the logs much more easily than in the past.

GAINING CONFIDENCE

I find myself benefiting from Pilates even at home. Now I can carry heavier dishes, whereas before I was shaky and would often spill things. My arms, shoulders and back are getting stronger, too, which helps me support myself on stair railings. Because I'm steadier, I'm also more confident getting around town, and getting on and off the subway.

Even when the changes seem small, the cumulative effect is powerful. I really hope someone with cerebral palsy will read this and think, *I should try Pilates!* I think it can help everyone with cerebral palsy experience improvements in their daily lives! People are noticing the changes in my strength and balance, which is very exciting! **PS**

LEFT TO RIGHT: YAMAGISHI WORKING ON A MODIFIED SINGLE THIGH STRETCH ON THE LADDER BARREL; DOING THE SIDE LEG SERIES ON THE REFORMER.

MOSES PHOTOS BY LYNN LIMCUMPAO; RIE PHOTOS BY LISA KOJOLA