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PAGE 44

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PAGE 68

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AGING
FOODS**

PAGE 36

**PILATES
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YOGA:**

**SECRETS
TO ENHANCING
YOUR
FLEXIBILITY**

PAGE 60

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52

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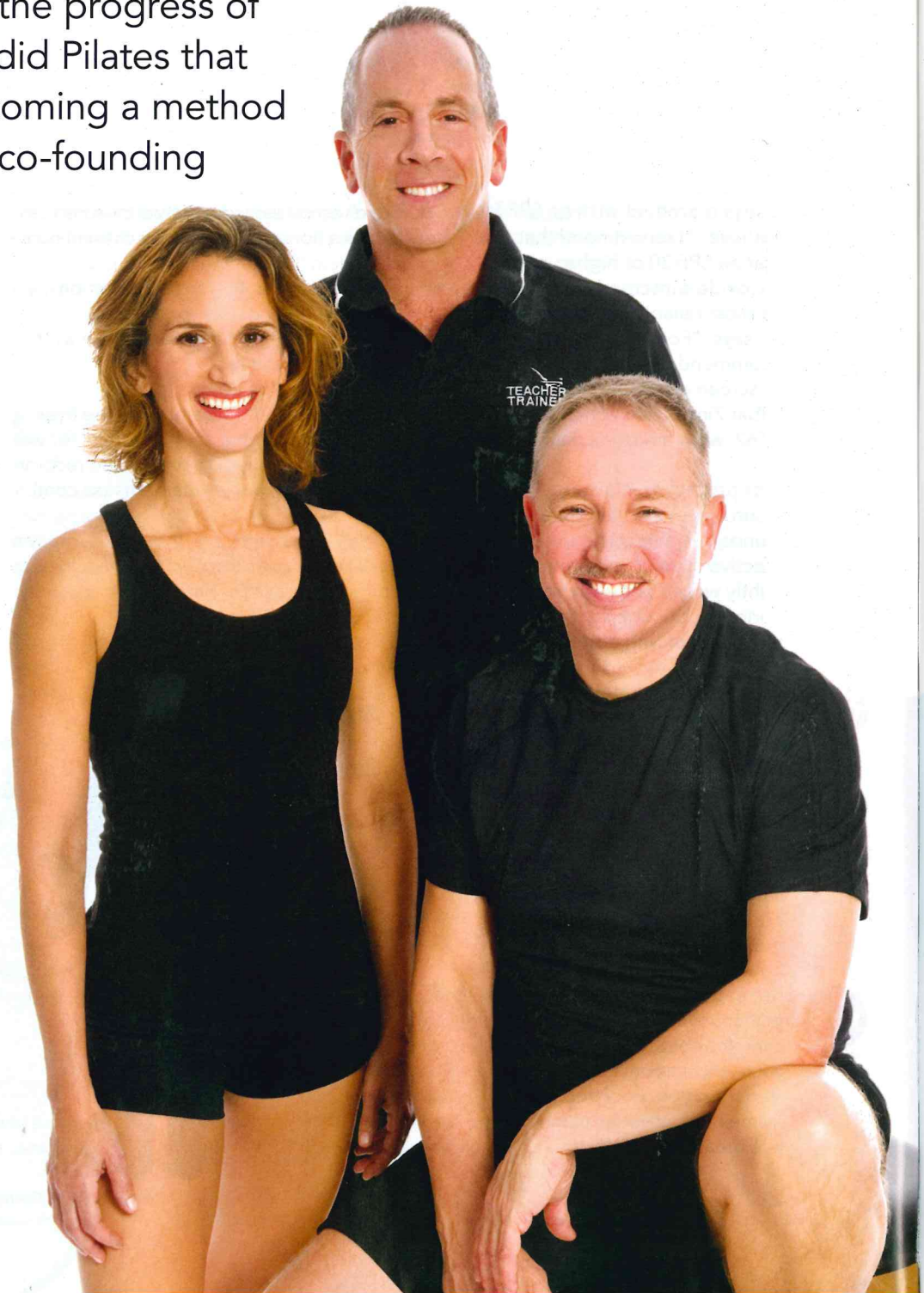
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STAYING POWER

Trained as a chiropractor, Howard Sichel was so impressed by the progress of his patients who did Pilates that he ended up becoming a method man himself and co-founding Power Pilates.

by Anne Marie O'Connor



FROM LEFT: SUSAN MORAN, DR. HOWARD SICHEL, AND BOB LIEKENS IN THE POWER PILATES CHELSEA STUDIO.

Pilates Style: TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD.

Howard Sichel: I grew up on Long Island, NY. Growing up, I was very athletic—I played varsity soccer, basketball and just about every other sport. My other love was the beach, where I spent many of my summers working at various jobs (parking cars, running the snack bar, lifeguarding) at local beach clubs with my friends. The best times of my life!

PS: WHERE DID YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

HS: I went to University of Hartford, where I got a BA in communications and minored in biology.

PS: HOW DID YOU GET INTERESTED IN THE CHIROPRACTIC FIELD?

HS: My junior year in college, I started thinking about what I wanted to do with my life. I asked my father, Rudolph Daniel Sichel, who was in the dress business, to introduce me to the buyer at Macy's, where he worked.

For him, it was very important that I be in control of my destiny; he didn't want me to have to answer to anyone. He was a Holocaust survivor. He watched as his parents' businesses and all their property were taken from them by the Nazis in Germany. He managed to get his parents out of a camp and brought them to the U.S. He then enlisted in the U.S. Army and was given the rank of first lieutenant in intelligence. He helped liberate the concentration camps and interrogate German officers. He received the Bronze Star for his service. While there, he kept a log and took pictures of the atrocities he witnessed.

Years later, we went through all of the pictures of the victims; he explained what it was like and why he wanted to make sure he documented the events. He said that the world must always remember that these things happened and that they must never happen again. We, as a family, have donated all those materials to the Holocaust Museum.

PS: IS YOUR DAD THE ONE WHO STEERED YOU TOWARD BECOMING A CHIROPRACTOR?

HS: When I was young, my mother had a slipped disc and had been treated by Dr. Julius Dintenfass, the first licensed chiropractor in the state of New York. My father suggested I go meet Dr. Dintenfass. I worked in his office for a couple of weeks and liked it, so I applied to New York Chiropractic College. I graduated in 1980, and then took the state and national boards.

After working in another chiropractor's office for about a year, I opened my own practice on 56th Street between Lexington and Third in New York in 1981.

PS: AND YOU STARTED TREATING A LOT OF DANCERS?

HS: I was lucky enough when I opened my practice to be introduced to the dance community through Lynn Simanoff, Diane McCarthy and Laurie Devito. Dancers liked me

because of my technique, which involved Applied Kinesiology and Directional Non-Force Work. It involved treating and manipulating people utilizing the least amount of force, which allowed them to heal faster.

My frustration in chiropractic was the lack of long-term correction I could offer. I could relieve their pain but in order for someone to cure themselves, they need to exercise and do something on their own. Because of my personality, I wanted to be part of a solution.

PS: HOW DID YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT PILATES?

HS: I was introduced to Pilates by a patient named Marjorie Perces in 1982. She was a master teacher of the Horton Dance technique. She was this beautiful woman in her late 60s who had come to me with problems with her neck. Her X-rays showed her to be severely osteo-arthritic and osteoporotic, but when I looked at her, she had perfect posture.

Normally, for someone with her X-rays, I'd have recommended modified exercise and movement, but she already was working out four to five times a week and living a vibrant life. So I asked her, how do you take care of yourself? It turned out she was a student of Romana Kryzanowska. I'd never heard of Pilates before but I was intrigued.

I asked Marjorie to introduce me to Romana. Romana and I talked on the phone, and I started referring a lot of patients to her. I would give her recommendations for the patient's specific condition, but I think Romana knew better and just did what she always did, which was Pilates. She just moved people.

I saw that the people who went to her—and could survive the poor customer service at the original studio—healed themselves and didn't have the exacerbations that patients who didn't do Pilates had.

Then, in the mid-80s, Romana and Wee Tai Hom moved their studio right next door to me at 160 East 56th Street (I was at 150 East). I started referring my entire practice to them.

PS: HOW DID YOU START DOING PILATES YOURSELF?

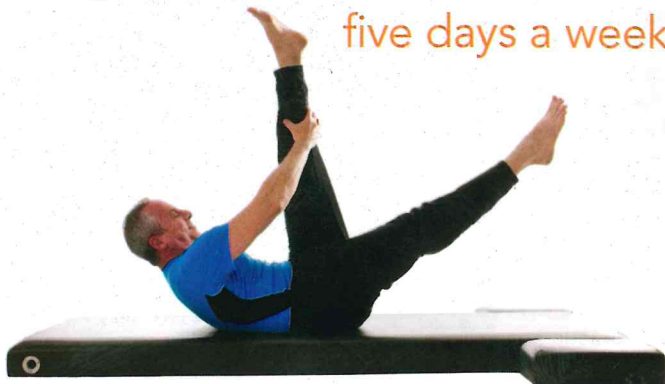
HS: In 1986, I looked at my posture in a picture of myself holding my daughter on her first birthday, and said, I better start doing Pilates! So I started doing sessions with Romana three days a week and then it went to five days a week.



DR. HOWARD SICHEL AND HIS PARENTS ON THE STEPS OF THEIR HOME IN LONG ISLAND, 1972.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF POWER PILATES

I started doing sessions with Romana three days a week and then it went to five days a week.



SICHEL PERFORMING
SCISSORS/SINGLE
STRAIGHT LEG STRETCH.

PS: WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS?

HS: The first session, she threw me in between two Graham dancers. I didn't know what I was doing, I had no body awareness, I was just a jock! But Romana and I had a very good banter and we developed a very good relationship.

Slowly, with her cues—and one of her best cues was a fist in my gut—I started to get pretty proficient. She didn't offer any explanation or talk about the benefits of Pilates, but I was seeing the benefits and was processing it on my own.

PS: HOW DID YOU END UP GETTING INTO THE PILATES BUSINESS?

HS: In 1989, Wee Tai and Romana decided to close the studio. Wee Tai called me one Friday night and asked if he could store some equipment in my office.

So Phoebe Higgins [who studied under the tutelage of Romana Kryzanowski] and I decided to transform one of the rooms in my chiropractic office into a studio. We had two Reformers, a Tower and two Chairs in this 12-by-12 room. There were always two teachers, four to five students, plus the apprentices who were coming from Romana in this tiny space. That's when Susan Moran [now the Senior Vice President of Power Pilates] started teaching there, too.

PS: I ASSUME YOU EVENTUALLY OUTGREW YOUR SPACE.

HS: Yes, we opened a second studio in 1997 on Fifth and 19th and then one on 57th Street. Now, we're on 23rd Street, where we've been for 10-plus years.

PS: HOW DID YOU START YOUR TEACHER-TRAINER PROGRAM?

HS: Susan, Phoebe and I started to develop our own program, Power Pilates, in 1997, out of a need for teachers. In 1999, Bob Liekens, who had been a patient of mine for years when he was a Graham dancer and was working at a Pilates studio with Sean Gallagher and Romana, joined Susan and myself. Susan and Bob co-created the Power Pilates program

that is taught by our brilliant group of teacher trainers around the world.

Before that, there was no organized, systematic program or deep understanding of what Pilates was doing to the human frame; it was listen to me, follow me and don't ask questions as to why. We filled in the whys. Because of my understanding of biomechanics and what Pilates does to the human body and the spine, I could articulate to new teachers what the classical system was doing and how it heals our bodies.

One innovation in our program, called The Art of Teaching, is also a big part of Power Pilates. We teach our students how to communicate to clients and motivate and inspire them. We also teach leadership and communication skills.

PS: HOW IS YOUR PROGRAM STRUCTURED?

HS: We organized the classical Pilates work into beginner, intermediate and advanced systems. The program takes six to nine months with apprenticeship hours to complete and it can be taken all over the world.

PS: HOW DID YOUR TEACHER-TRAINER PROGRAM COME ABOUT?

HS: Eventually, we created a program where once someone was certified and had been teaching for five years, they could undergo training to become a teacher trainer. It's a year-long process; they audit the same curriculum, do supplementary coursework and take workshops. Finally, there's a three-day teacher-trainer seminar.

Every year, all of our teacher trainers get together for a Teacher Trainer Enhancement. At that enhancement, we dive deeper into the classical work of Joe. We have leadership training, seminars on injury protocol and we invite other professionals to teach. We've even shown videos of hip and knee surgery and spoken to surgeons.

PS: HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE YOU TRAINED?

HS: We've trained approximately 10,000 teachers, 92 of whom are teacher trainers.

PS: YOU'VE ALSO CREATED PILATES PROGRAMS FOR HEALTH CLUBS?

HS: Yes, in 1997 we partnered with Equinox to create their mat and equipment program and helped open 11 of their studios in New York, Chicago and California.

Now, we have an education partnership with Town Sports International [which owns the New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Boston Sports Clubs]. Its CEO, Bob Giardina, believes in partnering with someone who has Pilates education expertise rather than doing it on their own.

PS: SO YOU ALSO, MERGED WITH APOGEE LIFESTYLE TWO YEARS AGO. HAS THAT HELPED YOUR BUSINESS?

HS: Absolutely. Apogee is owned by Jon Prusmack, who has a vision to assist people

We've trained approximately 10,000 teachers, 92 of whom are teacher trainers... We want to create a legacy.



in their attempt to live a better life through movement, nutrition and giving back: an Apogee Lifestyle. We're bringing in other health and wellness modalities and helping them enhance their educational process for professionals and consumers. We're also helping create the Apogee Institute, which will provide streaming content online in all of these modalities.

PS: WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAJOR ISSUES THAT THE PILATES INDUSTRY IS CURRENTLY FACING?

HS: We want to create a legacy; we want the next generation to know the brilliance of this work. This is a health-care modality, it's not just exercise. It heals people. The leaders need to be equipped to teach the next generation.

Pilates teachers are going to be in even more demand. The real issue is, where are people receiving their education? There are a lot of great programs and great leaders that I respect tremendously. We need to work together to ensure that quality education is what drives everything, which is why we're involved with the PMA.

PS: HOW ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH THE PMA?

HS: The first gathering of the PMA happened at our studio! We believe in the PMA mission. We'd rather be self-regulated than government-regulated.

We were also one of the first schools involved in supporting the PMA's Fostering Future Professionals program [which establishes cooperative relationships between the PMA and Pilates teacher training organizations].

PS: AND YOU'VE ALSO BEEN INVOLVED WITH BRINGING PILATES TO KIDS?

HS: Over the past three years, we've done a pilot after-school program through the nonprofit New York City Service. We've taught Pilates classes twice a week to groups of 40 children ranging in age from 4 to 14. The difference you see in the kids from the beginning of the program to the end is pretty astounding. At first, it's 40 kids running all around the room. Their attention span, their

focus and their ability to do the moves are so improved by the end of the session. We actually got an award for the program. We're hoping to launch it nationwide in the near future.

PS: HOW ARE CHIROPRACTIC AND PILATES COMPLEMENTARY?

HS: Chiropractic is a brilliant form of spinal manipulation that helps restore people to optimal health. It falls short, though, because like physical therapy, people need a "well" program.

Consumers need to have something that restores balance, stability and strength to their bodies so they don't have to keep seeing a chiropractor. And Pilates fills that need. Pilates eases all the chronic weaknesses and compensatory changes that our bodies go through over the years. Compensation is a tremendous tool our bodies possess to deal with life's stresses, but if you don't address what's causing the body to compensate, eventually we will become osteo-arthritic or completely break down.

PS: HOW OFTEN DO YOU DO PILATES?

HS: I have a 10-minute mat program I do every day since my back surgery in 1997. I do the apparatus twice a week. I also lift weights, play golf, bike and hike with my dogs. How else could I still look so good?

PS: TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

HS: I've been married to my wife Caren for 28 years. I have a daughter, Lauren, who's 27 and is getting married in July, and is a fifth-grade special-education teacher. My two sons are in college—Jordan's a senior and Jared's a junior. They are also both volunteer firemen. And I also love my dogs—two Labradors and a Wheaton terrier.

PS: WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT BEING IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS AND PILATES?

HS: The friendships I have made with teachers, clients and other leaders in this great industry. **PS**

SICHEL WITH POWER PILATES TEACHER TRAINERS AT THE TELOS FITNESS CENTER IN DALLAS, TEXAS.

We can heal the world!