



Pilates is my Life

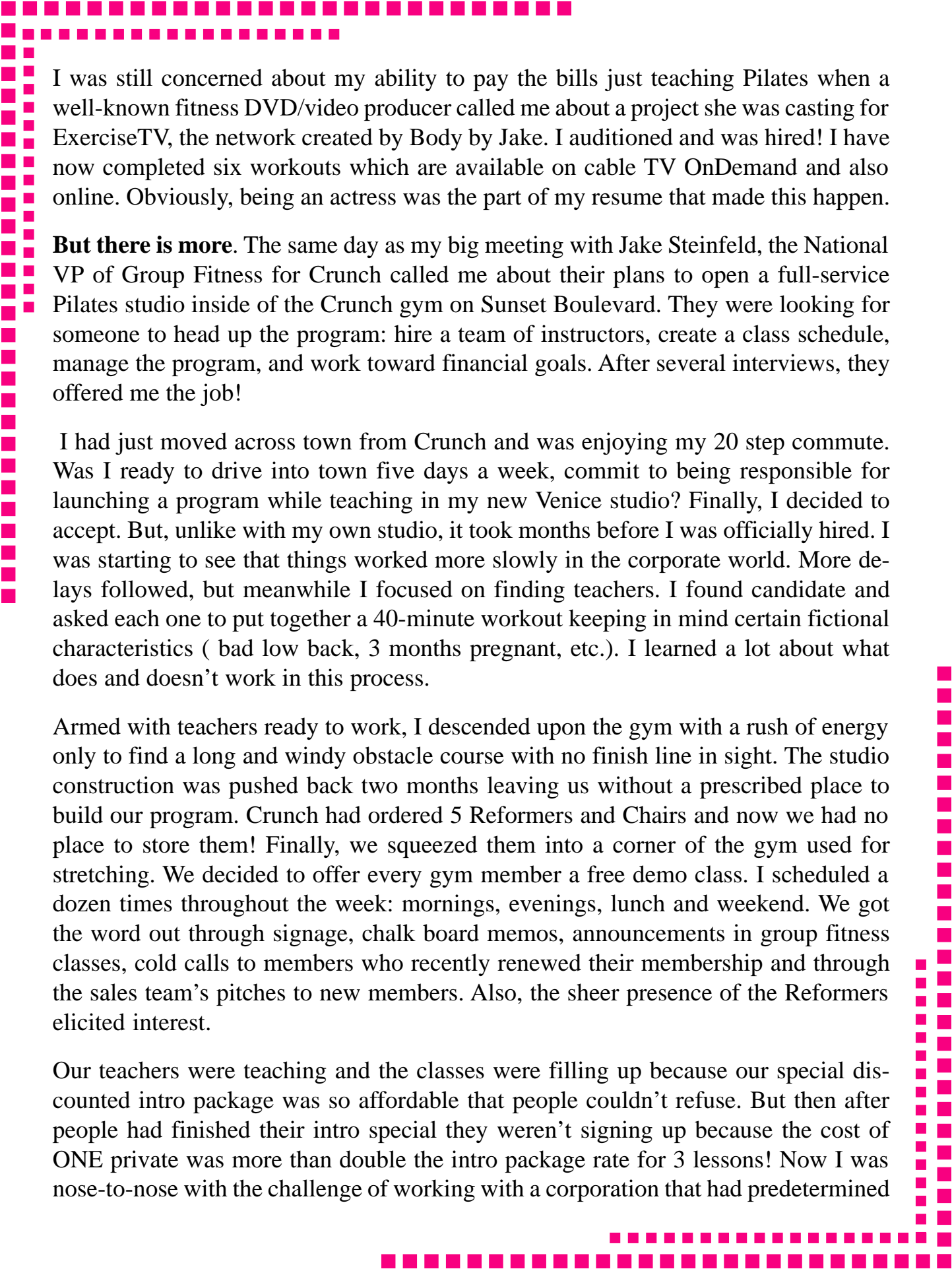
by Nicole Stewart

In 2006, a year after completing my training with Maria Leone of Bodyline Studio and then receiving my PhysicalMind Apparatus Certification, I started my own little practice. I designed a website; a “Pilates with Nicole” logo; and some business cards. Very quickly, I found myself driving around West Hollywood LA teaching clients in their homes, renting studio space for privates and classes, subbing at gyms and studios and teaching Mat classes at Crunch Fitness. When I could find time, I was also auditioning for acting roles in television and films. And most exciting of all, *I was falling in love!*

By the end of the year, I was feeling tired, but also more confident in my teaching. It seemed that everywhere I went I met someone who had heard about Pilates and who felt comfortable to try it with me. When my beau and I decided to purchase a house, I knew that I wanted it to include a space for my teaching. Within weeks, we found our dream in Venice: a charming Spanish-style home with a freestanding studio space in the backyard, complete with a separate entrance and buzzer/intercom system. Wow!

And so I began the process of shifting energies from one side of town to the other. Venice is a good half hour’s drive from West Hollywood (*without traffic*). Some of my clients followed me out to my new studio and some I continued to see on their side of town. As I repainted my Venice space, purchased my first Reformer, and created a soothing and energizing design scheme, I was a bouncing ball between my old life and the new one I was creating. Financially, it was a challenging time as anyone who has bought a home knows. There were unforeseen expenses coming at me from every angle. Plus my weekly earning hours were greatly reduced. Money was flowing right *out* and *trickling* in.

To make matters more intense, my agents in television and film decided to discontinue their representation thereby making Pilates my only source of income. By the summer of 2007, the studio was fully ready and I set a goal for myself of adding 10 hours of new local Venice private clients. To my amazement, within two months, *I reached my goal*. Again, every client resulted from meeting them in a relaxed, social situation. They liked me and wanted to know what I did for a living. I offered them a special, affordable Introductory Package, long enough so that they could feel and see results in their body and get to know me.



I was still concerned about my ability to pay the bills just teaching Pilates when a well-known fitness DVD/video producer called me about a project she was casting for ExerciseTV, the network created by Body by Jake. I auditioned and was hired! I have now completed six workouts which are available on cable TV OnDemand and also online. Obviously, being an actress was the part of my resume that made this happen.

But there is more. The same day as my big meeting with Jake Steinfeld, the National VP of Group Fitness for Crunch called me about their plans to open a full-service Pilates studio inside of the Crunch gym on Sunset Boulevard. They were looking for someone to head up the program: hire a team of instructors, create a class schedule, manage the program, and work toward financial goals. After several interviews, they offered me the job!

I had just moved across town from Crunch and was enjoying my 20 step commute. Was I ready to drive into town five days a week, commit to being responsible for launching a program while teaching in my new Venice studio? Finally, I decided to accept. But, unlike with my own studio, it took months before I was officially hired. I was starting to see that things worked more slowly in the corporate world. More delays followed, but meanwhile I focused on finding teachers. I found candidate and asked each one to put together a 40-minute workout keeping in mind certain fictional characteristics (bad low back, 3 months pregnant, etc.). I learned a lot about what does and doesn't work in this process.

Armed with teachers ready to work, I descended upon the gym with a rush of energy only to find a long and windy obstacle course with no finish line in sight. The studio construction was pushed back two months leaving us without a prescribed place to build our program. Crunch had ordered 5 Reformers and Chairs and now we had no place to store them! Finally, we squeezed them into a corner of the gym used for stretching. We decided to offer every gym member a free demo class. I scheduled a dozen times throughout the week: mornings, evenings, lunch and weekend. We got the word out through signage, chalk board memos, announcements in group fitness classes, cold calls to members who recently renewed their membership and through the sales team's pitches to new members. Also, the sheer presence of the Reformers elicited interest.

Our teachers were teaching and the classes were filling up because our special discounted intro package was so affordable that people couldn't refuse. But then after people had finished their intro special they weren't signing up because the cost of ONE private was more than double the intro package rate for 3 lessons! Now I was nose-to-nose with the challenge of working with a corporation that had predetermined

its rates. Crunch, having set up studios in three other markets at those prices, does not want to change the structure, but I'm determined to work along with the corporate executives and convince them later.

As I wait for the endless construction to be over, I've got time to focus on my private clientele and write this article. I never imagined that getting Pilates certified would lead to so many challenges. Still, *teaching Pilates is about assisting clients and seeing them get stronger, leaner, and more flexible*. As 2008 begins, I breathe deeply with anticipation and excitement as to what new opportunities may come my way.



And as always,

I bow my head in gratitude for the presence of Pilates in my life.