

Bruce King – in his own words

By

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“Joe gave me my first lesson in 1955...

I was a dancer with the Nikolai Company for five years, then the Cunningham Company. There were only six dancers at the time and it was very strenuous. I began to have back trouble. I wanted to continue to dance so I learned the Pilates work very *thoroughly*.”

Bruce began with one or two lessons a week that he felt were crucial to the continuation of his dance career. A few years later a foundation was formed to train teachers at the New York studio and Bruce was offered the opportunity to study to teach the Pilates work. Clara Pilates became his main teacher and inspiration. “She opened the doors, she kept the books, she managed the cleaning and she ran the studio. She trained me to ‘checkup’ – *where are your hands, where are your elbows, all your body parts*. You came there, you studied, you learned the exercises, and then you learned to do them with minimal supervision; you were supposed to work essentially by your self. Clara prepared me to work by myself. She was a marvelous teacher.”

In 1966 Bruce was living in the Pilates building where he had a small studio. There was a fire in the building and Joe and Clara’s studio was damaged; Bruce’s studio was destroyed. Bruce taught at the studio and after Joe’s death in 1967, he assisted Clara. He taught 3 or 4 people at a time and had to remember everyone’s sequence, which he found very difficult.

In 1972, Bruce bought a reformer from the studio and had an apartment with a professional lease so he could teach from his apartment. He was very happy teaching one-on-one. “I can do what a good teacher does – meet the person where he/she is, find out what they can do, and develop them further. You don’t just show

them the exercises. That's where the core is because there is a lot more to teaching than showing people exercises."

Bruce King had a very specific format for his lessons. He taught more posture than Joe did and found it vital to include movements for the whole body in every session. "Joe put you on the machine and helped you, but then he was a genius and you got a lot from him that did not need explanation. I'm different, I'm not a genius, I'm just pretty smart about this. Joe really had the idea that if you did his exercises well, everything would turn out all right. And it did for a lot of us. But I find that people need help applying what they learn from the machine into their postural habits."

"The Pilates system is based on the idea that you consider the whole body, which means that the routine is not just to focus on an injury or a problem; the routine uses the whole body in every exercise. That's the basis of Joe's work. That principle is what really set him apart from everybody else when he went to New York in the mid 1920's and it keeps us ahead of the game."

Bruce believed there must be dedication and mental commitment to the work as well as knowledge of the exercises. "In my experience, both in Joe's studio and in my work, the method works for the people who are willing to make a mental commitment. The principle goes back to Joe, to a contrology, which meant the mind controls the body. If a person does not want to involve the mind, they don't get much more out of it than they get out of anything else. The real benefits come to the person who is willing to make a commitment to the work. As the body improves, the whole spirit seems to improve, the whole sense of adjustment to themselves and therefore to the world, gets better."

Bruce King brought a gentle art and purity to his teaching. He strove for excellence in his life and his work. He received accolades as a dancer, choreographer and author. His book, *"Creative Dance: Experience for Learning"* and his teaching manual, *"Methods and Materials for Modern Dance"*, received national recognition.

In the 1970's he had his own *Bruce King Dance Company*. His last book, "*Rule of the Bones*", incorporates his philosophy of exercise with his abundant knowledge and intricate understanding of the Pilates Method. In it he states:

"Awareness is the path to muscular control. When you become aware that the bones move, that the muscles move the bones, and the mind controls some of the muscles, you have a path to control."

I was fortunate to have had many conversations with Bruce until his death in January 1993. He was 67 years old. His words and wisdom resonate through my teaching and have become a part of my path.