



PRESS INFORMATION

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Seok's Story

My mother was a lawyer so it was natural that I also studied law at Bristol University, UK, graduating in the summer of 1992. I was called to the English Bar in 1993, and came home to Singapore to practice and was called to the Singapore Bar in 1994, after which I joined my mother's law firm.

I was preparing to perform in my first full length ballet "The Sleeping Beauty" at the ripe old age of 25 in 1995, whilst at the same time holding down a full time day job as a lawyer. Not being the ideal build for a classical ballet dancer, I was struggling with the demands of the various roles. My fellow dancer and now my colleague and mentor, Geraldine Nonis, told me she had a machine at home which might help strengthen my body. I was very skeptical when I first saw the Reformer, as I only lay down on it sliding back and forth doing what looked like simple movements, but required such concentration and precision. In about 10 sessions or so, I could really feel the difference in my body, and went on to successfully perform in the ballet, the highlight of and a fitting end to my 20 years as a student of ballet.

When Geri started out teaching at one of the first Pilates studios in Singapore (Ivana Daniell Pilates Studio) in 1998, she contacted me and I resumed my Pilates classes with her. A few years later, I decided to cease practicing as a lawyer (I was one for seven years) as the work no longer felt meaningful and clients were only concerned about which firm could quote the lowest for a job and not the quality of the work done. During my hiatus, at Geri's encouragement, I decided to join Ivana's studio as an apprentice teacher.

It might seem a huge shift to many, and it was in many ways for me personally, but I had been dancing since I was five and so movement was innate and natural to me. I was fascinated by how Pilates could change one's body so quickly and dramatically, yet so subtly because it had to happen from the inside out. I did my first Pilates training with Polestar Pilates, and have had the privilege of learning from a true master these past 10 years, Dawnna Wayburne, an Educator with Polestar Pilates, as well as many other fascinating teachers. It is with Dawnna's support and inspiration that I have ended up on the route of being an Educator, and it is a continuous journey of learning.

I never looked upon my career shift as "giving up" on law. I chose to exit the profession without knowing what my next step would be. It was a time of deep personal reflection, for I realized once I no longer had "lawyer" as my tag, I had to re-discover who I really was and what made me tick, and re-earn the respect of people in my own right, not just because I was (or used to be) a lawyer. The person hardest hit by all this was probably my mother, since I worked for her and she hoped I would eventually take over her firm when she retired. In an Asian society, that is quite a huge blow and quite unheard of in my time. Now, 10 years on, it is much more common to see lawyers leaving the profession and taking up completely unrelated careers. My mum has handled it very well and to her credit has not reminded me of what I "gave up", and my husband was supportive throughout. I believe being a Pilates instructor and a lawyer are quite similar: I act as a counselor in my client's best interest, I am there to help, they are both "service industry" jobs. My legal training has been invaluable all these years and will continue to stand me in good stead for the future. It really is a very good foundation for life, and not the least bit "wasted" as many perceive it to be.

My peers were rather shocked at my decision, like I said; it was fairly unheard of in those days. There are many peers these days who now say I did the right thing or the smart thing, and some of them find themselves stuck because to make a big change and start anew can be quite difficult at this stage in their life - With every choice there are consequences I remind them. I see more young mid-career professionals choosing alternative lifestyles during their "quarter-life crisis", more are choosing to train as Pilates instructors. I often joke with my clients that I am a "bad Asian role model" for their kids (whom I teach too) who are considering what to pursue in university; I often tell them that their degree is just the start and not the be all and end all that it was during my parents' generation. Ten years down the road, I am glad I chose the route I have, and hope to inspire others to follow their heart. I have learnt to be more intuitive and I remain open to where my journey next takes me.

Ruth's Story:

After graduating from University I took up a post in Local Government as a Trainee Accountant. Three years later I qualified and started to climb the career ladder. I was very clear that I didn't want kids and that my career came first. All my sense of the value of myself came from the size of my salary and the grandeur of my job title. I felt I could hold my head high knowing I was earning more than most of my friends. I was delighted when my salary crossed the threshold that triggered compulsory self-assessment tax returns! But all that was being fed was my ego and over time this started to wear thin. I noticed that I was becoming increasingly hard-nosed. My nickname at work was the Ice Queen - it was apt. I started to notice that the people above me in the hierarchy were grey - suits, hair and skin! - They all looked just a few short months away from a heart attack. I began to question why I was modelling myself on them.

From early in my 20s (ie early in my career) I was suffering from backache. Constant low level pain. Eventually, on the advice of a friend, I joined a Pilates class. In months the problem was resolved and I was hooked. My Pilates class became the second biggest commitment in my life - I never missed it. My Pilates teacher was the model of good health - physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Finally I took the plunge. I quit my job and spent a year in Spain teaching English. I discovered that I had a talent for teaching and that it was a talent I could use without compromising my sense of self or my health.

When I returned to England I decided to put the two together and trained to teach Pilates. It was the best decision I've ever made. I don't earn as much as I did. But it doesn't matter as that's not how I measure my self-worth. My goals in life are more about achieving a sense of serenity and being in tune with my body. When I compare myself to my peers I am looking at relative health, movement quality, ease of breath patterns etc.

I've made massive progress in the five years since I decided to live my life in a different way. It was my Mum's 70th birthday this month and my method of celebrating with her seemed to sum up how my attitude has changed. For her 60th I spent lots of money but very little of my time. She got impersonal presents. For her 70th I spend a year investigating her family tree, contacting remote parts of the family for photos stories and anecdotes, so that I could produce a book celebrating her life and her ancestry. It didn't cost a lot of money but I invested masses of emotional energy. My Mum was speechless. It was marvellous. That's how I want to engage in life.