

# Taking Back My Life

As a college student, I never thought seriously about my health. I had been overweight for most of my life, and had chronic low back pain because of it, but I kept thinking I was too young to have to deal with it seriously.



Amanda in session with Erin

## A wake-up call

I got a wakeup call at the age of 20. My doctors said my high glucose levels meant that I would soon be diabetic. I also had high cholesterol levels, and my back was getting worse. I couldn't stand up straight without agonizing pain, and had to rely on anti-inflammatories and pain killers just to get through the day. I kept hearing one common solution: Get active.

I had tried many fitness regimens in my young life, but none ever "stuck." As an undergraduate student at Vanderbilt University it was too easy to say that I had bigger priorities like school and other commitments.

But I knew I had to do something

I had read about Pilates in magazines and had tried yoga. I knew a little about working the core and that Pilates had something to do with that. Then I heard it could potentially stop back pain, and decided it was worth a try.

I started doing Pilates in California while on summer vacation, and continued when I got back to Nashville for school. I chose Simply Pilates because it was conveniently close to Vanderbilt, but I stayed because I formed a great

relationship with owner Erin Weston-Meyers. I learned to trust her with my body, and, soon enough, I started to feel better than I ever had in my life.

## An immediate difference

Two things jumped out at me when I started working with Erin. One, my back stopped hurting when I did Pilates regularly. Erin taught me how to really support my back using my core. I also realized this was the first health initiative I had ever gotten really involved with, because I could see results. It wasn't about losing "x" number of pounds in a certain time frame. I just felt better and stronger. For the first time I could walk up the stairs to my dorm without losing my breath. Things like that mattered a lot. I could tell that I was doing something really good for myself.

And I didn't dread going, because Erin made it so much fun. She never made it seem like the exercises were something I could not do. She never told me that I was doing the "easiest version" of an exercise – she just wanted me to know it was great that I was doing it. She made everything accessible, and I began feeling like I could be as successful as a healthier person.

**"Pilates has just become too important in my life – for my life."**

I also discovered what Erin and I joke about as "the five day rule," which meant I could go five days without Pilates before my back pain returned. When you can see that kind of concrete proof in your life, you realize how much it has made a difference. Now I go 3-4 times per week. I have lost weight and my glucose and cholesterol are now in more normal ranges. I am actually being told that I'm in good health. It's incredible!

## An urge to teach

As I became immersed in Pilates it dawned on me that I would like to be an instructor. But I had a deep-seated fear that I could not be a fitness instructor if I didn't look the part. However, I'm a teacher by nature; my degree is Early Childhood Education. I am also a very passionate person. And to teach something that I am passionate about that can help people live better lives – well, what could be better than that?

I finally approached Erin, who also trains and certifies Pilates instructors for Balanced Body University, and asked her, "What do you think about me teaching?" I believe her words were: "I've been waiting for you to ask."

So I started my teacher training in June. My plan is to finish my training in October and my teaching hours by January before grad school starts. It's a tall order but I am loving every minute of it and I will do it. Pilates has just become too important in my life – for my life.

## A new perspective

I want to create an intelligent exercise program for children in the future. While student-teaching for my degree, I saw too many kids on the same path as my own. If I can help combat a child's unhealthy habits – the same unhealthy habits I had – I will feel successful.

The "old me" would think that sounds too ambitious, but I'm a different person than before I began practicing Pilates. I have a much healthier outlook on life, with better priorities.

I have a long way to go in weight loss, but my first priority was to get holistically healthier. My weight troubles brought inner demons to my life, but Pilates and my motivation to get healthier have put my life in a new perspective. I've learned the importance of taking care of myself. For me, for anyone, that's monumental.

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