

# Del Mar VILLAGE VOICE

*Where the Turf Meets the Surf*

# Carmel VALLEY NEWS

The newspaper that Carmel Valley Depends upon

## **Former Martha Graham Dance Company principal brings unique expertise to therapeutic method of Pilates fitness training**

*By Diane Welch*

Julian Littleford has danced his way to success. A former principal dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company, where he worked with dance icons Mikhail Baryshnikov and the late Rudolf Nureyev, Littleford now uses his former professional dance expertise in teaching the therapeutic method of Pilates fitness training.



Julian Littleford

In his Del Mar village-based studio, J.L. Body Conditioning, Littleford is able to incorporate the focus, strength, and artistry of dance into the discipline of mind and body fitness. His unique teaching methods, a trained team of instructors, and full Pilates training equipment, are the three elements that create this successful program.

“We use repetitive motion, repetitive exercise for a short period of time, and with good corrections. We adapt the program once we see the body reach a plateau, and then move forward with a more advanced program,” explained Littleford in a recent interview.

Pilates was founded as a health and fitness program by German-born Joseph Pilates in the 1920s. A child plagued by rickets, asthma and rheumatic fever, he designed an exercise system to heal himself. It incorporates a specialized system of equipment which aids in the alignment of the spine, strengthens deep torso muscles, and alleviates and prevents back pain. Awareness of breath and mind control are also major aspects of the system.

Littleford's Pilates' credentials are many. He is a founding member of the Physical Mind Institute in New York City and gold certified through the Pilates Method Alliance. He directs the Pilates training at Pilates de Mexico, in Mexico City,

and is a former director of Pilates for the San Diego Padres baseball team as well as serving as the athletic trainer for Cirque du Soleil's Dralion touring show in Southern California.

A native of England, Littleford started instructing Pilates 30 years ago, he said. He was one of Alan Herdman's original teachers in his London studio during the late 1970s while training concurrently to be a professional dancer at the London School of Contemporary Dance. Pilates was a cutting edge fitness program then, and Littleford became aware of it when he received therapy for a painful condition. "I was introduced to Alan because I had a congenital hip problem," Littleford explained. "After just one session with him, I was hooked."

From his work with Herdman in London, Littleford went to Canada in 1977 where he performed with the Toronto Dance Theater and taught a variety of classes, including Pilates and aerobics, which was just becoming popular. Then in 1980 Littleford moved to New York when he was hired as a principal with the famed Martha Graham Dance Company. "At that time New York was the home of Pilates and that was when I met and started working for Deborah Lessen at the Greene Street Studio."

The lifestyle of touring with a professional dance company, with the prestige of Martha Graham, brought Littleford to some high class environs. "We were ambassadors for America, really. I have had dinner with kings and queens, and have attended embassy parties in different countries where I met high level officials and celebrities," Littleford recalled.

In the United States Littleford was shoulder to shoulder with some of the biggest names in entertainment during the 1980s. "The Graham board of directors at that time had everyone from Gregory Peck, to Andy Warhol, Bianca Jagger and Elizabeth Taylor involved," he said. "It was commonplace to have someone like Liza Minnelli sitting in on our dance rehearsals."

Breaking into the glamorous world of dance bucked the trend of Littleford's high school peer group. "Where I come from becoming a dancer was not a cool thing," joked Littleford who grew up in rural Hertfordshire, just 22 miles north of London. Although his focus through high school was on rugby and swimming, a fascination with pop idol David Bowie, led Littleford down a unique path. "I thought that I wanted to be a mime artist and work professionally with Lindsey Kemp, but my drama teacher at school arranged an audition for me with Ballet Rambert and the London Contemporary Dance Theater." Littleford was accepted into both of these prestigious schools but chose the latter and became a professional dancer.

A career in dance has its limitations. "As an art form it's probably the most difficult when compared to other arts. With fine art you can continue to paint, and with acting you can continue to act throughout your life, but with dance you have a very short career and you have to deal with injuries along the way."

Retirement from the rigors of performing with the Graham Company, after a decade of touring, brought Littleford to set down roots in Del Mar, then in 1992 he opened his studio on Camino Del Mar. And in an interesting twist, it was his personal injuries that he faced that brought Littleford to appreciate the Pilates method, and helped facilitate a sincere empathy toward his clients.

Littleford's client base is varied; the youngest is 8 and his most senior is 89; and their backgrounds range from pro-athletes to the recreational fitness enthusiasts, to those in pre- and post- surgery recovery. Through word of mouth referrals, and professional referrals from doctors, Littleford has been successful in his unique approach to Pilates.

"We are very serious about what we do in the studio, we get results and people recommend us to others."

A family man, Littleford is married to Carole, a former professional dancer, who until recently ran the dance program at the Bishop's School in La Jolla. She is now full-time mom to their two children, a daughter, 12, and a son, 7. Littleford continues to guest teach throughout the world and is a regular presenter for Balanced Body University, and takes part in several dance teacher and Pilates conferences each year. He has been featured in numerous regional and international fitness and health magazines, and television shows, and has been an instructor to several professional athletes.

To find out more about Julian Littleford's Pilates individualized fitness programs visit his Web site at [www.jlbodyconditioning.com](http://www.jlbodyconditioning.com) The studio located at 1412 Camino Del Mar, in the Del Mar Village, currently operates six days a week, from 6 a.m to 7 p.m. A special offer of a 30 percent discount for new clients is now available. Contact Julian at 858-259-1682 for more information.

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