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The Nia Technique: How The Dance Craze Helped Jenny Love Exercising Again

Posted on May 3rd 2011 11:57AM by [That's Fit Editors](#)

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By **Jenny Block**



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I used to do Jazzercise. Religiously. I had the thong leotards with Jazzercise splashed across the front in rhinestones. I had the wristbands. I had the monthly punch card and I kicked and jumped and stepped my way into a pretty darn good shape, if I do say so myself. I hate exercising. But Jazzercise was the closest thing I could find to not exercising but still getting the results I wanted. So, there I was, front and center (ok, more like middle and center), whooping at the top of my devoted little lungs at class three, four, sometimes five times a week come hell or high water.

Eventually I just couldn't do it anymore. My ankles and knees were pleading with me to give it up and jumping up and down and yelling, as much fun as it sometimes could be, just didn't keep my attention any more. And so for years I floundered, doing the New York City Ballet Workout on VHS and Jane Fonda and step aerobics at my law school gym. I never liked any of it and I never lasted very long doing any of it. But I did it because it was all I knew to do.

If I could have conjured up the perfect exercise, it would have real dancing, thoughtful choreography, movements that were mindful about how the body, about how my body works, fantastic music, and some sort of healing and meditative aspects as well. Nuts, huh? Nope, Nia.

Nia is the brainchild of then married couple, Debbie Rosas and Carlos Ayarosas. It was thirty years ago now. And

it was in response to seeing their own fitness instructors getting injured, their own students dropping out, their own interests fizzling. And they were at the top of the aerobics game, running a fitness empire right there with Jazzercise and Jane.

Talk to Debbie and Carlos and they won't tell you about "inventing" Nia. Instead they'll tell you about Nia coming to or being revealed to them. It makes sense, seeing as it's a somatic practice based in the body, the body's way, the way we all want and need to move. And a vision was born and breathed into life and an idea became a dance and then many dances. The two of them danced it into being, first two dancers, and now millions. Millions of dancers all over the world. And more than 2,500 instructors worldwide.

I might tell you I came to Nia by accident. But I don't believe that to be true, because I don't really believe in accidents. All I know is that I drove by the same dance studio day in and day out before I finally wandered into MoveStudio (in Dallas, Texas), bought a week long pass, and wandered into Studio D where Jule Aguirre was teaching Nia. I believe I know what it is to be in love. But, that was my first experience with love at first sight. Or, in this case I suppose, love at first move.

It was my very first class and I consider myself an able enough dancer, but in Nia, I could fly from the moment I slipped into the choreography. I didn't know until later that that was because it was crafted to make its practitioners fly. It's incredible what the body is capable of when one works with it instead of against it. Fitness is traditionally a battle between you and your body. Not so with Nia.

Instead, it brings together body, mind, and spirit, through 52 moves from the dance arts, the healing arts, and the martial arts to create not an exercise program, but a life practice. Although, in case you're wondering (and as Debbie always says), "You will get a great ass doing Nia." But that's just one part of the deal.

Nia is based on a belt system White, Green, Blue, Brown, and Black. They are intended for both instructors and those wanting to deepen their practice (although Green is designed solely for instructors). After completing the White Belt, a practitioner can become licensed to teach. Nia Technique is headquartered in Portland, Oregon, and provides shockingly comprehensive continuing education for its instructors, which explains why they're so good.

I have my White Belt and my Blue Belt, which involved one incredibly intensive week of training for each. I'm talking ten-hour days full of dancing and presentations. And although I could "do" Nia just fine before becoming a White or a Blue Belt, learning all of the philosophy and reasoning and science behind Nia has benefited my practice ten-fold. I don't know if I'll ever teach. But I plan to earn all of my belts regardless.

I practice three to five days a week when I can. And I am thrilled to report that there are no longer any thong leotards or wristbands in my wardrobe. I've traded them in for brightly colored tanks; bell bottomed pants; and other flowy or yoga type clothes from Nia Wear, Margarita, Tdama, Ipseity, Melodia, and others. You can wear whatever you like. But, I have to admit, I do love getting dressed for class. And I love the way the clothes look in motion when I see my reflection in the studio mirror. It reminds me of playing dressing up and dancing around the living room when I was a kid. Anything goes, you know?

Nia, in its simplest form, is a dance class, a truly fun, "anyone can do it" dance class. But in its entirety, it is so much more. In Debbie's words, it's about becoming a "sensation scientist." It's about listening to your body and its needs and moving according to that instead of simply according to the instructor. He or she will give you the moves. But your body will dictate how you do them. High kicks or low? Plank or hands and knees? Full out or mellow? And it can change from song to song, day to day, class to class. It's not about mimicking the teacher. It's about getting what you need. It's about the joy of movement.

And that is what keeps me going back to class day after day. My body craves that hour when it gets to be in charge. It hates sitting in a chair and being forced to type for hours on end. It hates high heels. It hates waiting in line. So, it loves when it gets to be in charge and it rewards me by not causing me pain when I do have to make it do some of the activities that it would prefer not to do. I love my body. That's why I do Nia.

A former college English instructor, [Jenny Block](#) is a freelance writer for numerous print and online publications and the author of [Open: Love, Sex, and Life in an Open Marriage](#). She is also the bi-monthly sex columnist for FoxNews.com. Read her blog on [Red Room](#).

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Brilliant description, Jenny. My experience exactly. Love at first move...and just what I had been yearning for over many years of no longer regularly moving my dance-starved body.

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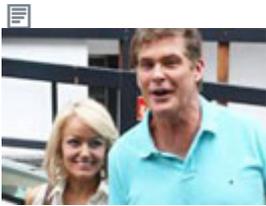
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