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Guest Post: Debbie Rosas, Co-Founder of Nia Technique

by Amanda

*Here is a wonderful guest post and interview with **Debbie Rosas**, a Health Activist who has received many WEGO Health Activist Award nominations for her work in creating the **Nia Technique**. We thought this would be an opportunity to learn more about what the Nia Technique is and get to know a bit more about why Debbie is such an inspiration to her community. Thanks to Jenny Block for writing this post – it was fascinating to hear about Debbie's journey toward advocacy and this new way to seek healing and self-empowerment. –Amanda*

Debbie Rosas, Co-founder of Nia Technique

By Jenny Block

Debbie Rosas spent her childhood plagued by illness – eye, ear, nose, and throat infections; severe allergies; debilitating migraines; psoriasis and eczema from under her arms to her hands; a tumor that required removal when she just two months old. She could go weeks on end without being able to see, hear, smell, or taste.

She was diagnosed with learning disabilities, a speech impediment, dyslexia, and labeled "slow" when it came to learning. She didn't want anyone to touch her. She grew to feel out of touch with her body and even disgusted at the sound of her name, which she associated with being called out of class for "special" classes.

It's hard to imagine that if you meet Rosas now. Teaching, training, writing, speaking, and impossibly in shape. What changed for Rosas? Getting in touch with her body through movement. It started with a class in an all women's exercise studio, which inspired her to design an aerobics program of her own and start Bod Squad, which ultimately led to her co-founding the Nia Technique.

Her early health issues, Rosas said, is "why it became so important for me to design Nia in a fluid, body centered, sensory based, creative way. Why it was so important to me that Nia leave people feeling good about themselves, not only good about their body, but good about who they are, excited about the possibilities available to them. I can feel now, all of my feelings. I can use my mind, my body, my emotions, and most of all, my spirit."

Maybe there was something better that wouldn't injure people, Rosas thought. Maybe there was something that would actually give people more than a physical workout. Plus, she says, "I wanted to take off my shoes, so that the movement could be better grounded and the feet could benefit."

The turning point was a visit to a dojo where Rosas realized that she didn't really know how to move her body. Co-founding Nia was all about discovering what movement really means – to our bodies, to our minds, and to our spirits.

"Nia is founded in the idea that fitness meant not only physical but emotional and spiritual well-being, and that pleasure and joy rather than pain and guilt produce lasting results, NIA carved new ground in the field of fitness by combining aerobic movements with T'ai Chi and other martial arts, ballet, modern and ethnic dance, and yoga. It's the antithesis of slaving at the gym."

Here's Rosas on being a health advocate.

What's the best part about leading your community?

Debbie: I think the best part is the opportunity to embody somatic leadership. Everything that I do in Nia is meant to enhance the physical experience. Leading from the head or the emotions is one thing. But leading somatically is a very different experience. I have to perceive body language, what I conceive, thoughts I have. I have to separate my emotions from the people I'm leading. The have the

conceive, thoughts I have, I have to separate my emotions from the people I'm leading. The have the opportunity to work on this in all aspects in my life. To lead the body's way is the most imp thing. I know how to do that on the dance floor. But to do that in an interview or in front of a camera, I et to apply all my sensations scientist knowledge. My body leads me.

What has been your proudest moment as a Health Activist?

The moment I realized that I was smart that my body was smart, that I could read the body, that I could comprehend sensation in my body, that was a proud moment for my body. I grew up thinking I wasn't very smart. My spirit had been beaten down so much. I had such a loss of self-esteem and self-respect. I had to reclaim it after I left High School by figuring out how I learned. There was an intelligence no one had taught me to listen to – my body

What has been your most challenging?

Dealing with people's concrete attitudes and beliefs about the body, about their body, and about the potential of the human body. It takes a lot to move a mountain when people's attitudes and beliefs are that people can't heal. Or they practice self- degradation.

It takes a lot to shift that. People dedicated to live in pain instead of choosing pleasure, that's a big mountain. People conditioned to not express themselves emotionally, that's a big mountain. Being expressive and having the body heal itself, all of those things are taken away from people depending how we grew up.

We feed the brain information and that's what the brain relies on. The problem then is that we always respond in the same way. People are afraid of something new and that becomes a poison.

Is there anything you wish the general public knew about your health community?

I wish they knew that we're not woo woo and we're not silly and crazy because we want to have a good time and follow pleasure not pain. From the outside something that looks easy just shows the power of the body. I wish people knew how intelligent and deep this work is.

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People need tools to deal with stress. The way of the body is now to do that. The way of the body and of the human spirit. Sadly we need disasters to bring that out. We've forgotten the goodness. When we say no to pain and yes to pleasure, we find the path of least resistance.

How do you raise awareness?

You need to educate people that the way of the body is to be aware. It's not about raising awareness as it is about bringing people into the body. Awareness means when you connect people to sensation, when people live in their body as their laboratory, then people are using the gift of the body, the ability to be aware, to notice. We call that body literacy. Read sensations of the body and make healthy choices.

What can others do to get involved?

Go to a Nia class so that you have a sensory experience of what the Nia program is about. Go online and sign up for the newsletter to get access to a class and the workshop every month. Go online and look for any one of the special workshops that provide more than the class. Purchase a DVD to try it out on your own. Search nianow.com and read the personal stories to see how Nia can add meaning and purpose in your life. And if Nia's not for you, you'll know and you can seek something else out. Take one minute a day and do a movement.

What's next for your community?

The expansion of the training staff from 14 to 60 trainers so more people worldwide can offer Nia. The trainings are great not just for teachers but also for people who want to learn about the body.

And in January 2013, we're launching a new training program called The Body's Way designed to provide people somatic understanding of their body

In February 2013, we're launching an hour-long workout called 52 Moves, based on 60 second intervals to improve movement skills and enhance conditioning. It's perfect for the beginner as well as an accomplished athlete.

What are your goals for your organization and what are you most looking forward to?

The long-term goal is to expand the special application of this work for healing, short and long-term illnesses. Nia will be 30 in 2013. Over the past 30 years we have used this work with children and

people with cancer, MD MS, arthritis. Since it's self directed, it can be applied to almost anything. It creates an improvement in function for almost everything.

What do you do when you're not advocating?

I explore what it means to live my life in a body as a spiritual, creative being. I really seek to reach a potential that allows me to feel like I am using every single day and moment for evolving myself into the best human bring I can be. I apply all the things I talk about into my life. I'm dealing with something now that could put some in a tailspin, but it gives me a chance to live my faith without worrying about tomorrow.

For more information about Nia, visit www.nianow.com and follow Nia on Facebook and on Twitter @niatechnique.