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## Tropical Life

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### Protege of Pilates keeps the dream alive

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Romana Kryzanowska droops her shoulders, hunches her back, sticks her butt out and takes a few steps. "Today's girl walking on the street," she says. "You see? Bad on your back. Just walking from here to here, very painful."

Kryzanowska knows bad posture when she sees it. After all, she was the protégé of bodybuilder Joseph Pilates, "a very strong, sweet man" who, with his wife Clara, developed the Art of Contrology, a system of exercises geared toward strength, flexibility and grace. Today it's simply called Pilates. "Uncle Joe," as Kryzanowska refers to him, helped heal her ankle when she was a ballet dancer, and he helped her toddler son recover from polio. After he died in 1967, Kryzanowska continued his legacy.

Leading seminars and certifying instructors, she travels the globe from her home in Arlington, Texas, near Dallas. Recently she was in Fort Lauderdale, directing a master class at Karen Winselmann's Pure Pilates studio.

"It was fabulous," says Catherine MacAskill, a Pilates instructor Kryzanowska certified in 2002. "She's like the epitome of grace. You always know that you're in the presence of someone great."

With long, flowing hair, the petite Kryzanowska walks with confidence, speaks with authority. "I don't like short hair any more. It makes you look older. *C'est la vie*." As this reporter reaches out for a handshake, she grabs and pulls hard. "Am I bad? I want you to know that I'm strong. I like to show off." Not bad for an 84-year-old who, as a child, liked to play Tarzan, swinging "from one tree to another tree into a lake" on her family's orange grove between New Smyrna Beach and Daytona Beach.

That's her "powerhouse," instructor Bridget Hagood explains. "When Romana teaches she uses her powerhouse. You try to push her over, and you can't because she's so tight."

Kryzanowska has been following Pilates for six decades. "I do a lesson when I feel like it," she says. "Actually I'm dancing with my pupils. . . . The men are much easier to teach. The women are, 'Nyah, nyeh, nyeh, nyeh, nyeh.' I have to put up with that."

Her story began in 1941 when she hurt her ankle. "George Balanchine, ballet, blah blah blah, said, 'Romana, I'm going to take you to my 'doctor' because I think he will fix your ankle.'" Joseph Pilates prescribed an exercise called "Footwork on the 2-by-4." He gave her the wood, and she exercised five times a day, strengthening her metatarsal and heel. "I've been with [Pilates] ever since."

Kryzanowska got her baby boy involved, too, after she married a South American who whisked her away from New York to Peru for 15 years. Paul, then 2 or 3, had a mild case of polio. "My husband had every human being attempt to help. Well, I said, 'The only person I think would be helpful to him is Mr. Pilates.'" After a few long-distance calls, Pilates mailed her illustrated exercises, and Paul "got better and better and better." He grew up to be a choreographer. Daughter Sari teaches Pilates.

Kryzanowska eventually returned to New York and continued her ballet career. When Uncle Joe died in 1967, she juggled ballet and Pilates, helping Clara run the studio. Soon, Clara retired, and Kryzanowska took over. What does this mean financially? "All I know is once in a while I get a check in the mail."

"The most wonderful thing is how I like to start a brand new person," she says, once again using this reporter as an example, ordering me to stand against a wall with my feet a few inches in front of me. The goal is to push the small of your back against the wall while keeping your shoulders straight and relaxed. "Do that every day two or three times," she advises. "What are you learning? How to stand. And then walk out of it. Look up. When you walk down the street, look up. Did you feel something? Don't wiggle your hips. Much nicer."

Hagood, a Pilates instructor since 1999, understands the impact of good posture. "The first time that I really felt like I had good posture . . . I went to get my mail, and people stopped to look at me and I thought, 'Oh, my God, I forgot to put my shirt on or something.'"

Although Pilates has grown from about 1.7 million participants in 2000 to more than 10 million today, according to American Sports Data, Kryzanowska hopes it hasn't devolved into a fad. "It's very followed. I have people who have studied it before Pilates died. It's part of my life."

Therefore it's easy for her to point out people who don't practice Pilates. "This person came in. . . ." She gets up from her chair, slumps her shoulders and stumbles a few steps. "Hello. How are you?" she slurs.

"I mean, I have clients who put life into your fingers, put life into your teeth. . . . Pilates is for your mind to tell your body how to behave."



ANDREW ULOZA / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Romana Kryzanowska teaches a master's class at the Pure Pilates studio in Fort Lauderdale.

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#### IF YOU GO

Try a single lesson or observe a class to find out if Pilates is right for you. A private session costs from \$75 to \$85. A few studios to consider:

##### Pilates South

2831 E. Oakland Park Blvd.  
Suite 10  
Fort Lauderdale 954-630-1619  
[www.pilates-south.com](http://www.pilates-south.com)

##### Pilates Miami

3936 N. Miami Ave.  
Miami  
305-573-4430  
[www.pilatesmiami.com](http://www.pilatesmiami.com)

##### Pure Pilates

6451 N. Federal Hwy.  
Suite 127  
Fort Lauderdale  
954-804-8450  
[www.purepilates.net](http://www.purepilates.net)

##### Pilates South Beach

1680 Michigan Ave.  
Suite 1107  
Miami Beach  
305-672-6616  
[www.pilatesouthbeach.com](http://www.pilatesouthbeach.com)

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