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# JOSEPH PILATES

Der Mann, dessen Name  
Programm wurde BIOGRAFIE

**HERDER**

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## **Excerpt: JOSEPH PILATES. DER MANN, DESSEN NAME PROGRAMM WURDE**

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German edition will be published: September 12, 2015

English translation: Esther Ziegler

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[http://www.herder.de/buecher/kultur\\_geschichte/detailseiten/Joseph-Pilates.31295.html](http://www.herder.de/buecher/kultur_geschichte/detailseiten/Joseph-Pilates.31295.html)

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*The excerpt contains a translation of the first chapter THE UNDER DOG. Growing up in poverty (1883-1901) and a translation of a part of the sixth chapter THE BODY EXPERT. "Uncle Joe" can heal every injury (1929-1941).*

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## **THE UNDER DOG**

### **Growing up in poverty (1883-1901)**

*“Perfecting the knee bend and many things to commend,  
his youth was gymnastic to the end.”*

*Joachim Ringelnatz, Setting up the Equipment (First Draft)*

There is a copy of an old photograph at the city archives in Monchengladbach showing a group of gymnasts in front of the Gladbach city hall. In the foreground the men are holding barbells and long wooden poles for pole-vaulting. Those in the background are sitting on gymnastic equipment: two are on the parallel bars and two are on the pommel horse. Their carriage is erect as they proudly pose for the camera. In the middle of the group is a well-built, middle-aged man with a moustache leaning on a large iron bar with weights on both ends. It is Friedrich Pilates, Joseph’s father.<sup>i</sup>

The photo got to the city archives in a roundabout way. In the 1980’s an American couple were at a garage sale in St. Louis and found the picture. Their surname was Gladbach and they recognized the Gladbach city hall after having visited it on a trip to Europe. They sent their find to the mayor of Gladbach who then gave it to the city archives. When Pilates got popular in Germany and it came out that the method’s creator was from Monchengladbach, suddenly the photograph was of interest to all of the Pilates enthusiasts in the world. His fans started to pilgrim to Monchengladbach to see where their idol had his roots.<sup>ii</sup>

When Joseph Pilates was born on December 9, 1883, Gladbach was a small industrial town in the west of the Prussian kingdom near the Belgian border. The cotton yarn and textile manufacturers that had settled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century around the center of the town and the abbey, both dating from the Middle Ages, gave the town its nickname “Rheinisches Manchester” or Manchester on the Rhine. The textile industry was profitable and many suppliers started up there allowing the area to flourish economically. Craftsmen such as Friedrich Pilates found work in the factories for textile machines and in the smaller workshops that serviced and repaired the

mechanical looms and spinning machines for the larger factories. However, the workers and their families only profited somewhat from the rapid growth of the area. Ten to 12 hour days were the rule and it was difficult for the men to support a large family on the low wages paid. Friedrich Pilates was a metal worker who was not able to afford a life in comfort for his son Joseph.

Joseph was Friedrich and Helena Pilates' second child. In the years that followed, the family continued to grow with Helena giving birth to nine children altogether.<sup>iii</sup> His parents were from the Gladbach region and his ancestry can be traced to the area for many centuries. The surname Pilates comes from a homestead, the "Plates-Gut", from which the owner took the name in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since then many surnames have developed: Pilatus, Platis, Pylatus, Plate, Plattus and Pilates. Many of the Pilates descendants lived in Gladbach and in the surrounding towns and counties.<sup>iv</sup>

Joseph's family left the rooms in the Waldhausener Strasse 20, where Joseph was born, a year later. Many more moves were to come with the family changing its residence almost once a year. They had to get by with little space. They usually had one or two bedrooms and one further room, the living area, in which they cooked, ate and did their washing. They usually moved within the Gladbach town limits and lived only once for a short time in the county Gladbach-Land.<sup>v</sup>

Affordable living quarters were often musty and dank and were difficult to air because they had small windows. They got practically no daylight and mildew developed easily. The apartments which were especially low-priced were newly built and still had damp floors and walls. Poor families were able to rent these cheaper living quarters and lived in them until they were dry. Once the dampness had left the rooms and the living environment was acceptable the rents were raised and better paying tenants moved in. This practice was not allowed officially because of the health problems resulting from it and yet it still took place. The apartments were also infested with pests. Bedbugs were the worst problem; they built their nests in bed frames, behind wallpaper and in cracks in the walls. There were no water closets or bathrooms

but rather privies or outhouses found on the landings or in the yard that were used by all the tenants who lived in the house.

Joseph's mother Helena, née Hahn, worked in the factory before she married Friedrich Pilates. As was the norm for the mainly unmarried female workers who worked in the Gladbach textile industry, she earned less than the male workers. Once she married she was expected to give up employment in order to take care of her husband and family, however the life of a housewife was not easy. When Helena Pilates washed clothing and sheets it took her two days. First she had to scrub the laundry in different tubs with oil soap, and cold and hot suds. It was then heated then put back in the suds. Finally it was bleached, rinsed and starched. The following day it was put through the mangle and ironed. She cooked on a stove in the living room which was also where she heated water for washing and bathing. The family bathed once a week at the most in the living room as well, and all of the children bathed in the same water in one tub, one after the other.

It was difficult to bring a child through the first year of life in these conditions. In Prussia at the turn of the century one fifth of all children died before their first birthday. Diseases such as diphtheria, scarlet fever and various intestinal infections often took the lives of small children. Many vaccinations were just beginning to be developed while others were not yet administered throughout all of Prussia. Penicillin began being used as an antibiotic to heal bacterial infections 60 years after Joseph Pilates' birth. And yet both Joseph and his older sister Maria survived the critical first year of life. Their siblings were Helena, Friedrich, Aloysia, Elisabeth, Getrud, Wilhelm and Anton.

Joseph began school at the age of six. In Prussia all children were required to attend eight years of school, even those from poor families. Only a few decades prior it was normal for children to work in factories or at home at the loom for up to 12 hours a day in up-and-coming industrial towns such as Gladbach. However in the 1870's the authorities began to enforce compulsory education for all children and ended child labor.

Joseph Pilates didn't feel very comfortable at school. Changing schools so often, a result from moving, made it difficult for him to make friends in his class and feel at home. Instead of playing with the other children in the school yard he usually sat on the side and watched them. He was not interested in their games. They usually ran around wildly or threw a self-made ball of rags or paper back and forth. But he observed them closely. His schoolmates wore the same kind of patched-up clothing made of cheap fabric that he did. They wore shoes that were either too big or too small for them. Their faces were dirty and they had runny noses and were as skinny as beanpoles. Still they were adept. Their steps were light and agile. Sometimes a child would stop in the middle of a game and stretch or would jump up in the air. Joseph Pilates noticed that they breathed more deeply and quickly when they played but that it was never irregular. They did not treat their bodies as if they were cumbersome, unfamiliar things the way most adults and especially his teachers did. The other children reminded him of animals, however he preferred animals.

When his classmates weren't running around, jumping up and down or throwing each other into the dirt they were usually teasing, annoying or taunting each other. They sang jibing songs and rhymes to each other. They also enjoyed singing about strict teachers who usually suffered great misfortune in their songs. The children knew a lot of traditional material, picking up rhymes from their older siblings or making them up themselves. They thought up nicknames for people, made fun of pointed noses, fat bellies and freckles. And they made fun of the introvert Joseph Pilates.

On his way home from school they would call after him, "Pontius Pilate, killer of Christ". That really got to him. He would walk faster and duck into alleyways to get away from them. He usually tried to run home as soon as the bell rang in order to avoid his persecutors. One time he couldn't escape them and he was so furious that he decided to fight back – it was an uneven fight.<sup>vi</sup>

When he couldn't take it anymore Joseph would go into the woods instead of to school. He was glad to get away from the stench of garbage and excrement, from horse manure, bleach and rotten food that hung over the

town. When he directed his footsteps out of the city and into the Hardt forest he was able to leave behind the rumbling wheels of wagons, the adults' loud talking and the constant, high-pitched buzz of children's voices. He liked the sounds of the woods, the cracking of branches and the rustling of small animals in the underbrush. He liked the scents that changed with the seasons, mossy or sweet, or slightly fermented when wild fruits were left on the ground in the fall. But what he liked most of all was to observe the animals in the woods.

Whenever he saw an animal, he would watch its movements as if magnetized. He had even found his own blind, a blind that had not been kept up, the wood rotting, two rungs missing in the ladder and a hole in the floor of the platform. He would go there again and again and wait for deer. He never got bored, even when there were no deer. He would detect squirrels, rabbits, fox and birds: jaybirds, wood pigeons, blackbirds and tits, woodpeckers and magpies. He would watch for animals and would observe them, deeply engaged, for hours on end. He was impressed at how silently and elegantly they got about. They never made an unneeded movement, their gait was not stiff. The way a squirrel would tense its entire body when it made ready to jump, the distance it would jump and how accurately it would land. He admired their effortlessness, how they lolled about or stretched, how they were at one with their bodies.<sup>vii</sup>

Alongside his secret outings into the woods, the only other thing Joseph Pilates enjoyed doing was gymnastics. Joseph's father was an enthusiastic gymnast and took his son with him to the gymnastics club early on. Friedrich Pilates was a member of the Gladbach gymnastic club "*Eintracht*" and for many years was in charge of keeping the equipment in order. He succeeded in getting both of his sons, Joseph and the six year younger Friedrich, interested in gymnastics. At that time gymnastics was a blanket term for a variety of disciplines such as floor exercises and apparatus gymnastics. There were also additional exercises done "standing, walking, hopping, jumping, running and turning", as well as exercises done "hanging, climbing, pull-ups and weight lifting [...] rope walking and rope skipping, jumping over ditches, exercises on

the flying carrousel, marching, sprinting, duration running and running in a line, wrestling and other different games”.<sup>viii</sup>

Joseph Pilates was devoted to gymnastics. When his father showed him a new exercise on the floor or the bars or the pommel horse he practiced the movement until he could do it without a mistake. He often accompanied his father when he went to adult practice. The lank boy admired the men’s muscular bodies and dreamed of being strong himself.

“To allow conscious effort to be at work together with aesthetic movement, so that the gymnast is filled with spirit” was one of the demands of the Swiss gymnastic legend Adolf Spieß.<sup>ix</sup> Doing individual exercises mindfully, that is using both body and mind equally, was something that Joseph Pilates learned as a boy. When a gym leader demonstrated a new exercise Joseph Pilates watched him closely. He studied the adult gymnast long enough to be able to understand which part of the body the exercise was meant to strengthen. He admired the elegance with which his father did the exercises. However, he had to inwardly smile at some of the other adults who were so stiff and awkward in their movements although they thought their movements were especially aesthetic.

Joseph Pilates did the exercises exactly as his father told him to, even when some of the movements seemed awkward to him: too stiff, too unnatural. Yet he would never have told his father what he thought. Friedrich Pilates demanded complete obedience from his children. Talking back was strictly forbidden and a questioning of the perfection of an individual exercise would have been understood as such. Joseph copied the movements as told but secretly thought up his own variations.

Joseph’s father Friedrich thought that boxing was beneficial and taught it to both of his sons. Traditionally a part of gymnastics were working with barbells and weights and wrestling but only a few gymnastic clubs included boxing. Boxing was illegal in Prussia as well as in all of the German Reich. Up until 1908 public boxing matches had to be given permission by the local chief of police but were just as often prohibited, sometimes even at the last minute. So the circle of German boxers was small.

Gymnasts such as Friedrich Pilates simply saw boxing as a further kind of physical exercise, the strengthening of both body and spirit. The gymnastic movement was still associated with the militant ideals propagated by “Turnvater” Friedrich Ludwig Jahn who set up the first open-air gymnasium in 1811 in the Hasenheide in Berlin. Jahn’s aim was to physically prepare the students for a war of independence from Napoleon. When gymnastics began to receive support from the Prussian state in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – both in clubs as well as in the schools – the goal was not only an improvement of health in individuals but also to prepare the young men for service in the army. For that reason it was no problem to see boxing as another gymnastic discipline. Reservation came mainly from those nationalistic gymnasts who rejected boxing because of its popularity in England.

Joseph Pilates studied boxing technique with its complex steps coordinating the hands and the feet with the same intensity that he studied gymnastic movements. He practiced and practiced, repeating the individual steps without getting bored. The moves became more and more a part of him with every repetition. He felt comfortable with them. His ability to control his body in a natural way helped him with the gymnastic movements on the floor and equipment as well as with boxing.

When Joseph Pilates was 12 years old Gertrud, the seventh child in the Pilates family, died. She was only two months old. His mother had to bear the pain of her loss and still continue to take care of the family. It was not possible for her to take a break.<sup>x</sup>

The doctor who took care of the infant in its last days of life noticed the serious adolescent with the alert gaze. Joseph had watched with a relentless astuteness, without saying a word, while the doctor examined the baby. This was a quality that was not often seen in boys his age. He felt sorry for Joseph, well knowing that because he came from a poor background nothing would become of his talent. As a small compensation he brought the youth an old anatomy book.

Joseph Pilates devoured the book. It contained texts and illustrations that explained every part of the body, from bones to arteries. It showed where each

bone was found in the skeleton and how breathing worked, how the lungs absorbed oxygen with every breath and then carried it to different parts of the body through the arteries. What he found most interesting, however, were the muscles. He studied their construction and felt around in his body and tried different movements and positions until he found the muscles that were illustrated in the book. Then he practiced tensing each muscle individually and discovered that by doing so he could better control them.<sup>xi</sup> The anatomy book was a refuge for Joseph Pilates. When he was immersed in the words and the pictures he was able to flee from the depressing atmosphere at home after the loss of his baby sister.

When Joseph was 13 or 14 years old his untiring practice finally began to pay off. Doing gymnastics, boxing and weight training turned the lanky boy into a strong young man. Now he could put his classmates in their place. Transforming his body with intentional training was a decisive experience for Joseph Pilates. He witnessed on himself what could be achieved with specific exercises and how profitably he could put his talents, his intuitive understanding of the body and his perseverance to use.<sup>xii</sup>

Joseph Pilates' new body meant a lot to him. It was a kind of personal triumph. It was also important for him to have found this source of strength inside himself, especially since the situation at home was so difficult for him in those years. His mother was doing very poorly. Helena Pilates was still mourning over the death of her daughter and physically she had great pain in her knees. Joseph had seen how crooked and hunched his mother's back was. He noticed how she hesitated before she bent over to stir the fire in the oven, how she winced when she knelt down and the grim expression she wore in order to hide her suffering. Joseph was well aware of her pain before she began to complain about it. When he watched his mother he could practically feel the pain himself. When she finally began to express it, he tentatively suggested that he could help her.

Reluctantly, and perhaps only to appease her quiet son, she accepted the offer. Joseph tried to feel where her limbs were stiff and the muscles were swollen. He thought about which movements his mother needed in order to

ease the blockade. He showed her a few, mainly stretching exercises on the floor that he knew from his gymnastic training. When her pain began to subside as a result of the exercises, he was just about as surprised about it as she was.<sup>xiii</sup>

In the summer of 1900 Joseph Pilates, then 16, moved away from his family. He moved to nearby Neuwerk – today a district of Monchengladbach – where he learned to be a brewer. He probably lived at his employer’s residence since there was an inn with a brewery at the address that he was registered at.<sup>xiv</sup> His mother was forty years old. Following Gertrud’s death she gave birth to two more children: Wilhelm and Anton. Wilhelm died at the age of three in October of 1900, shortly after Joseph had moved out. In November Anton died at the age of ten months. And not long after, in March of 1901, Helena Pilates died.<sup>xv</sup>

The family broke apart when Joseph’s mother died. Two months after the death of his wife Friedrich Pilates, Joseph’s father, left Gladbach and moved to Gelsenkirchen without his children. Maria, the oldest child who was 19, took a situation as a servant. In September of the same year she married a Belgian named Carl Schnock. The younger siblings, Helena, Friedrich, Aloysia and Elisabeth were sent to live with different relatives.<sup>xvi</sup> Joseph Pilates, who then lived in Dremmen near Heinsberg, had to deal with the loss of his mother alone. All he had was gymnastics and boxing.

## **THE BODY EXPERT**

### **“Uncle Joe” can heal every injury (1929-1941)**

*“He wants the whole human race to be beautiful and healthy – and barring acts of God, he can tell them how.”*

*Marie Beynon Ray, Cutting a Fine Figure*

The report of the robust German who was able to make the weak strong and the overweight thin with his strange equipment and who could heal all kinds of injuries went through the grapevine in Manhattan fast. One day in 1929, a lady came into the Pilates studio on Eighth Avenue who dressed in billowing garments and had the electric presence that comes with years of work on the stage: it was Ruth St. Denis, a true diva.

She came to Joseph Pilates with a knee injury. The pioneer of modern dance in the United States was 50 years old. She was worried that the injury could mean the end of her career. The pain that had been plaguing her for years was so severe that she could not kneel down. It greatly hindered her ability to practice and for that reason she suffered from swollen ankles and was slightly overweight. Joseph Pilates did not take Ruth St. Denis into the large studio but led her to a small room on the other side of the hallway which he reserved for individual in-depth work on clients who had severe injuries. He began with stretching exercises and then let her start some initial strengthening exercises. He worked with her on his massage table which he simply called “the table” and which later became known as the Cadillac. The pain eased somewhat. Ruth St. Denis saw a shimmer of hope and from then on came to the studio three times a week. Joseph Pilates was able to continually help Ruth St. Denis. The method worked so well for her that she kept with it. She came to the studio regularly for months and after a year of training there not only were her knee pains gone but she was as slender as she was before and “she had ankles like a young girl.”<sup>xvii</sup>

By 1929 Ruth St. Denis had had an impressive career beginning in the 1890’s when she had danced in small rolls on Broadway and in Vaudeville shows as a teenager. However, fame first came to her in 1905 when she

presented her first solo program “Radha”, a free dance program inspired by Indian dance. In order to make her name, Ruth Denis, sound more glamorous she added a “St.” to it. Following that she toured throughout the USA and Europe where she was well received and greatly admired. Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote a tribute to her in the essay “The Incomparable Dancer”. He describes her dancing so:h

“It is on the point of sensuality and yet chaste. It surrenders itself to the senses and is focused on higher things. It is wild and subordinate to eternal laws. It could not be any different than it is. Everything takes place in it. I watched her for a quarter of an hour and I remember movements of falling down, kissing her own finger, imbibing from a drinking vessel which are engraved in my memory in the same place that the perfect artistic details of Elgin Marble, or the colors of Giorgione are.

It is indescribably beautiful. But I do not know if people will like it.”<sup>xviii</sup>

In 1914 Ruth St. Denis met the young dancer Ted Shawn and married him in the same year. Soon thereafter they founded the dance school “Ruth St. Denis School of Dancing and its Related Arts” which became known as “Denishawn”. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman, three of the “Big Four” of American modern dance, studied here.

However, since 1920 the marriage as well as the collaboration between Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn had been having problems. While they officially stayed a couple they developed themselves further in different directions.

Ruth had been trained as a child by her mother in the Delsarte System of aesthetic gymnastics developed by Genevieve Stebbins. In 1882 Ruth saw Genevieve Stebbins in a production at Madison Square Theatre in New York. She was so overwhelmed by the performance that she decided then and there that she would become a dancer. In her autobiography she recounts that for the first time, while watching Stebbins’ performance, she recognized the human body’s individuality of expression, dignity and truth.<sup>xix</sup>

The Delsarte System gave Ruth St. Denis and Joseph Pilates a foundation to work with. Joseph Pilates had already been exposed to the Delsarte-System in Germany through the writings of Bess Mensendieck. In the USA he began to read Genevieve Stebbins' "Delsarte System of Expression" in English. Relaxation, energizing and conscious breathing: Ruth St. Denis felt at home in Joseph Pilates' studio, as if she had returned to her roots. Joseph Pilates showed her movements that were both new and familiar.

Ruth St. Denis continued to visit the Studio even after her injury had been remedied. She became friends with Joe and Clara. Joseph Pilates and Ruth St. Denis both had strong, opinionated characters which put them on the same wavelength. Their friendship lasted for decades.

Joseph Pilates' ability to help the legendary Ruth St. Denis and the fact that she valued his work was of great importance to the survival and success of the studio in the years following. Ruth St. Denis had an incomparable network in modern dance built up through the "Denishawn" school. Practically every active modern dancer had studied with her at some point or had been to one of her workshops, everyone knew someone who knew her. The success of Ruth's treatment with Joseph Pilates quickly spread throughout the American dance scene.

What made the studio so attractive to dancers, alongside the successful treatments and the famous client, was its proximity to Broadway. Broadway, with its hundreds of musical theaters and vaudeville halls, was the biggest employer of dancers in New York. It was here that the many female dancers and their few male counterparts performed in a great variety of shows, here were the rehearsal studios for new shows, here the different dance ensembles trained for their road tours. Broadway runs through Manhattan diagonally, cutting through the blocks of accurately spaced north-south running avenues and east-west running streets. Joseph Pilates' studio was located on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue between 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> street, just three blocks away from the intersection of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Broadway at Columbus Circle on the lower end of Central Park. It was only because of this proximity that the dancers could work a training or rehab session into their busy schedules.

[...]

In 1934 Marie Beynon Ray, a journalist, approached Joseph Pilates in order to write an article about him. Marie Beynon Ray was an eclectic woman; she had been an editor of the American issue of “Vogue” and the fashion magazine “Harper’s Bazaar” as well as vice-president of a cosmetic company. In the meantime she was working freelance as a journalist and author and was interested in fitness and health topics. But she was also a night owl and hated mornings, she loved cocktail parties and as a matter of principle started her work day after lunch.<sup>xx</sup> She was writing the article on Joseph Pilates for “Collier’s. A National Weekly”, an influential magazine with over one million readers which was famous for its investigative journalism and witty cartoons.

Joseph Pilates was called to Marie Beynon Ray’s attention by the noticeable rejuvenation of a friend. When she found out that her friend had been training in Joseph Pilates’ studio she had to go and see it and him for herself.<sup>xxi</sup>

In the summer of 1934 Joseph Pilates received the journalist in his studio. As was his habit, he was wearing swim trunks. Marie Beynon Ray had seen a lot during her time as a fashion editor. She was not daunted by this but impressed. She eyed him up and down, scanning his muscular body: his broad, upright chest, his upper arms and forearms, his flat stomach, thighs, lower legs, feet. Joseph Pilates was not a tall man, about 5 feet 6 inches, but he had muscles everywhere. He looked good. His body looked like that of a twenty year-old, and yet Joseph Pilates was 54, so he said. He had spontaneously upped his age four years for the journalist. In truth he had celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday the previous winter.

Joseph Pilates showed Marie Beynon Ray his studio and the equipment he had invented: the Reformer, the Cadillac and the Wunda Chair. Then they went into the small room on the other side of the hallway, the room where he had worked with Ruth St. Denis, and Marie Beynon Ray interviewed him.

She was most interested in how the body could retain its youthfulness the longest and once she had witnessed the effects of his method on her friend and

on Joseph Pilates himself she was determined to get to his secret. Joseph Pilates did his best to explain to her how his method differed from other sports.

“Sports are wonderful for the constitution generally, but they are of little value for correcting what's wrong with you - and there's something wrong with almost everyone. Corrective exercise is a nasty pill to most people, but it's the only way to build a beautiful, strong, youthful and one hundred per cent healthy body.”

Marie Beynon Ray wanted the details. It was not enough for her to hear that the exercises helped, she wanted to know how they helped and she wanted to try them herself. She asked what was the most important thing a person could do in order to have a beautiful body and Joseph Pilates said to pull in the belly. He told her that the cause of most of the pain that aging adults have to deal with comes from poor posture. Even the unattractive slumping that many bodies have – crooked backs, lopsided shoulders, fat, protruding bellies – could all be avoided if one kept the spine erect and flexible.

And all one had to do was pull in the belly? Joseph Pilates explained what he meant: to push the hips forward and at the same time pull in the lower abdomen, the chest and head are raised and the shoulders fall. This stance should be practiced many times a day. He really got going and showed the journalist a simple exercise that could be done every day. He lay down on the massage table. He had chosen an exercise involving rolling up and rolling down starting from a position lying down. It was an exercise that contained the essence of his method, an exercise that rejuvenates. Marie Beynon Ray was good at finding the right words and so her article contains the very first instructions for a Pilates exercise.

“Lie down and try to make the whole length of the spine touch the floor, likewise the shoulders and arms, stretched above the head. Of course you can't do it, but trying is what counts – one day you may unexpectedly succeed. Mark that day with a gold star. With the arms stretched above the head, raise the torso slowly, but s-l-o-w-l-y from the floor, keeping the legs on the floor and the knees unbending. As you raise, the arms come slowly at right angles to the torso, the toes are pointed forward, the chin comes down on the chest. The

exercise loses all value if the legs are bent, so just at first you might get someone to hold them down for you. Now, sitting up, still with the legs stiff, try to touch the toes with the fingers. Keep on trying. Eventually you should be able to touch the wrists to the toes and the forehead to the knees. Now go slowly backward, chin down, arms rising. The whole thing is a slow rolling movement — and it will not only correct sway-back but will reduce the abdomen and poise the head correctly.”

Joseph Pilates was able to converse with Marie constructively. He saw that she had realized as he had how important a healthy body is for a happy life. She took him seriously. Joseph Pilates seized this opportunity to tell the people out there how they could improve their everyday lives, how many ways they could do something good for their bodies.

“Say you're at the movies, all you have to do is to sit as far back as possible, spine upright, feet flat on the floor, knees bent at right angles, and every so often say to yourself, 'Pull your abdomen in.', and do it, and hold it as long as you can.”

He thought up so many different ways and chances for improvement. For example, when window shopping:

“Glance in the shop windows, not to lower your sales resistance, but to observe your posture (...) In most cases the posture won't be right from one window to the next. But correct it every time – by pulling in the abdomen and holding it in as long as you can. Time yourself. It will be only a few seconds to begin with but hold it a few counts longer each time until you work up to a hundred. With each effort the muscles will become stronger and 'standing up tall' will become a habit.”

Or when commuting:

“You're waiting for a trolley. This need not be time wasted. You can do your exercises without attracting the attention of the police. [...] try this: rest the weight on both feet equally, heels together, toes apart, neither allowing the knees to sag nor pressing them backward. Then sway like a flagpole, shifting the weight slowly from one foot to the other without thrusting the hip out.

Occasionally raise the released foot from the ground and swing it about a bit, but always, always pulling the abdomen in.”

And at the beach:

“How much can be accomplished by daily habit is shown by those peoples of the East who habitually sit cross-legged on the ground (the best of all sitting postures) [...] They have straight backs and beautiful carriages. At the beach is an excellent place to practice corrective postures. Sit cross-legged in the sand, back straight, and try raising from this position dozens of times without touching the ground with the hands but holding them out straight in front of you.”

Marie Beynon Ray was able to bring together what Joseph Pilates said and what he showed her with his hands, feet and entire body into an understandable text. She was successful at putting the essence of the Pilates Method into words, and the exercises that Joseph Pilates was better able to show than explain she presented in such a way so that readers who had never seen Pilates’ studio could picture what he meant. On August 18, 1934 the article appeared in “Collier’s” and it was so well received that two months after its initial publishing a slightly shorter version of it appeared in “Reader’s Digest”.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, image 10/34201.
- <sup>ii</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, reference source for the image 10/34201, verbal information from the registrar Gerd Lamers and archive entry on Hubertus Joseph Pilates in: „Stadtgeschichte: Beiträge, Aufsätze, Notizen“, p. 1.
- <sup>iii</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, registration card: Heinrich Friedrich Pilates.
- <sup>iv</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, Gerd Lamers, archive entry on Hubertus Joseph Pilates, see above, p. 2 ff.
- <sup>v</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, Registration card: Heinrich Friedrich Pilates.
- <sup>vi</sup> Doris Hering, They all go to Joe's, *Dance Magazine*, February 1956, p. 76.
- <sup>vii</sup> Robert Wernick “To Keep in Shape: Act like an animal”, *Sports Illustrated*, February 12, 1962; Evelyn Ringold, “The Eighth Avenue Contrologist”, *New York Herald Tribune*, January 5, 1964 and “...a reformer's progress”, in: Joseph Pilates / Frederick Rand Rogers, Return to life through Contrology (brochure), 1957 (NYPL, Fern Helscher Papers, Box 8, Folder 9).
- <sup>viii</sup> Adolf Spieß, Gedanken über die Einordnung des Turnwesens in das Ganze der Volkserziehung, p. 8.
- <sup>ix</sup> Adolf Spieß, Gedanken über die Einordnung des Turnwesens in das Ganze der Volkserziehung, p. 8 ff.
- <sup>x</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, Registration card: Heinrich Friedrich Pilates.
- <sup>xi</sup> Evelyn Ringold, The Eighth Avenue Contrologist, *New York Herald Tribune*, January 5, 1964: “The family physician gave him a discarded anatomy book. ‘I learned every page, every part of the body. I would move each part as I memorized. I learned control here – like Contrology.’”
- <sup>xii</sup> Doris Hering, They all go to Joe's, *Dance Magazine*, February 1956, p. 76 und Evelyn Ringold, “The Eighth Avenue Contrologist”, *New York Herald Tribune*, January 5, 1964
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bethia Caffery, “Letting your mind control your body”, *The Evening Independent*, September 9, 1980.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, Registration book for Neuwerk district and Gerd Lamers' archive entry on Hubertus Joseph Pilates in: „Stadtgeschichte: Beiträge, Aufsätze, Notizen“, p. 2.
- <sup>xv</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, Registration card: Heinrich Friedrich Pilates and Certificate of Death for Helena Pilates.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Stadtarchiv Monchengladbach, Registration cards: Heinrich Friedrich Pilates, Clemens Friedrich Pilates, Anna Helena Pilates, Anna Maria Gertrud Pilates.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Archive Jacob's Pillow, Ted Shawn, unpublished manuscript of the memoirs “Ten Thousand and One Night Stands” and “It's fun to be 74!”, *Empire State Mason*, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 1955, p. 12.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die unvergleichliche Tänzerin*, in: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Reden und Aufsätze 1902-1909, p. 119.
- <sup>xix</sup> Mary Simonson, *Body Knowledge*, p. 68 ff.
- <sup>xx</sup> The artist Ruth Ray's Memoires on her mother: <http://www.ruthrayartist.com/ruthslife.htm>.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Marie Beynon Ray, Cutting a Fine Figure, *Collier's. The National Weekly*, August 18, 1934, pp. 21 and 30.