

TRANSCRIPT

I'm here with Margy Verba

Hi!

And you want to tell us why you're...

I'm sitting here with my leg elevated because Monday, today is Saturday, and Monday will be week 5 of total knee replacement.

You and I met in 2013... that was...

2013 or 12 I can't remember

I think it was 13, that was when I moved to OR. So we were in a Neurokinetic therapy level 1 training. You said that you played violin...

I play fiddle and cello...

ok, do you still play?

I remember that we were talking about dysfunction at the time. The violin... position... and all of that... do you struggle with that nowadays?

Not so much, but I do work with a lot of musicians. Basically there's an inherent asymmetry built in to a lot of musical, you know, flute, violin... just like a sport, anything where there's an inherent asymmetry I think it needs to be addressed in the person's movement practice, or they have a potential for some kind of repetitive stress injury, so I think of it as preventative, but also when people come to me, with inherent asymmetry, I often, and I'm not alone, and I don't think I learned this from anyone else, it's sort of one of those intuitive logical things a lot of people do is, I make my people do, even if they can't really play, fake playing and switch sides. I see...

But the other thing is, with a lot of musicians, and myself included I can catch myself probably more than your average musician, people get lost in the music and they might not realize that they're like, you know, they're so happy in their playing, and when people have developed a really bad pattern, they are incredible proficient musician but then they start having, but my shoulder is killing me and I'm getting tingling in my fingers, it's really hard to get people to change their pattern to sort of regress a little bit .

I can imagine that there's also a concern like what if I change my pattern and that will affect my performance?

Oh course! Yeah But sometimes they are so desperate because they can't play anymore, so they kind of have to.

I'm going to jump ahead a little...

Absolutely ... rrsrrs

I read that you created a Pilates program for the women's and men's ski team, US ski team right?

That was quite a while ago, yes, so they do training in mammoth lakes, at the time I had a studio there, basically one of the local orthopedic surgeons got in touch with me that they wanted to do some Pilates training, so, or to incorporate Pilates into their dry training. And they warned me too, you know these were guys that were like maybe between 18 and 22. And then I had also the women's team they warned me, I am not going to give them a feel the burn workout because that's not what I do I don't believe that's going to benefit them I don't think they are going to get the most out Pilates if I just give them something feel the burn. One of

their trainers they are totally add you're going to lose them if they don't feel the burn, and I'm like... ok... I need to put something in this program, at the time I was maybe 50, I can't remember exactly, that a fifty year old woman can do pretty easily and they can't, so I did the side plank when you lift the leg and swing it forward and back, and they couldn't do it to save their LIVES and it was pretty easy for me. And the interesting thing too they warned me these guys are totally ADD you're gonna lose them, the women maybe, well it was the exact opposite, the women were the ones who were like if i don't feel the burn I'm not getting anything, when the guys were coming up to me and were like could you check my ribs, am I in the right position? You know as far as neutral spine or wake up the core. I think I sort of gave u the fight with the women, I'm just like ok, we're just going to do a kick butt workout, if that's what they, you know, because you don't want to lose them, and I didn't have unlimited time to work with them.

And you want to be able to throw the important things at some point and not lose them.

Exactly, right!

You were a teacher! you were a teacher!

Basically we developed a program and they left with a manual with a program they could take on the road and that was the idea, so. It wasn't completely standard mat Pilates, but it was a basic mat Pilates but then I related everything back to, like I chose this exercise because you emphasize this contralateral rotation, and I picked this exercise because they wear these shells on their backs so they are kind of in flexion, so we picked a lot of extension, just relating everything back to their skiing basically.

So how did you get to... I read that in the 90s you figured out what Pilates was or you encountered Pilates for the first time, how was that?

So I grew up taking dance, pretty much since I was 5, I was never a professional dancer, anything like that, but a very serious amateur, I spent a lot of time in the dance studio, taught dance in the adult education program, nothing fancy or anything like that, so I've always heard of Pilates, specially on the east coast. I think it was already in California back then. Then before it was popular, I was working in downtown SFO, it was before the class action law suit so not many people were saying they were teaching Pilates. Madonna wasn't doing anything, it was early 90s. and I was walking down the street downtowns SFO when literally somebody had a flyer "come take a free class" and back then it was part of the gym.

Did the flyer say Pilates?

Yeah! It said Pilates, come take a free class. In fact, there were two different people... I went and took lessons from two different teachers who are now pretty famous actually but it was in a gym setting, but then a separate room with all the Pilates equipment and it was like a paid a monthly fee and ended up being two doors down from where I worked I had flex time I could make my own hours, and it turned out to be, I could take a small group class with only four people with all of the equipment for 12 dollars a class and the membership whatever monthly fee I was paying included a half hour private every month. I was not the type of person that would spend 80 dollars or 60 dollars on a private for myself, if that had been my exposure to Pilates I would never gotten into it but 12 dollars a class, 2 doors down from where I worked? I started going at lunch 3 times a week, and I just never felt better. I would have been like mid 30s back then, I was just at that age where I was just starting to get my first little injuries, and when I went and took my first private, you know the free private, they said, what do you want

to get out of this? I said I want to age gracefully, I mean I didn't even know important Pilates could be for aging, I just had this feeling. She gave me my free lesson, put my legs in the leg straps and I did those circles and I'm like OMG just loved the way it felt instantly.

You were sold!

Absolutely!

And I kind of always had this idea, I was not a city person, that I was someday move out to the boonies, and there wouldn't be any Pilates. Where I was taking classes they had teacher training, I kind of thought... someday I'll take the teacher training program. Because I had taught dance, I had taught aerobics in college, I had a background teaching and I mentioned it to my teacher that someday I would take the training here and she said, well there's one starting in two months you should do it... wait ... I was thinking like 3 years from now... I said I'm not ready and she goes you're ready...

SO you had been practicing for how long?

I think maybe only a year, but going 3 times a year and if you have a dance background you pick up Pilates really quickly. You're really used to those kind of movements, watch your big toe, all the little fine tuning adjustments, she already had me substitute teach a class for her. I already taught aerobics, I worked in a figure saloon in college, so now I know I'm totally dating myself, it was a figure saloon.

What does that mean?

It's basically a gym just for women and they had a mascot culturally shaped with this, cartoon character with huge boobs and a tiny little waste, it was a figure saloon, we'd measure the women and go "oh Jen lost 3 inches" but it's a job during college, they trained us to teach aerobics and calisthenics and stuff like that.

But then the training was going to start in 2 months.

I did the Pilates teacher training.

In San Francisco?

In San Francisco, at the studio where I was taking classes

Who was the teacher?

It was Carol Appel... so she's Romana trained, it was classical, but for some reason and I'm not sure why, when they were going around, looking for people, she had a good relationship with Romana, I'm not exactly sure why but they didn't go after her, even though she wasn't Pilates guild, you know I don't really remember the politics, but for whatever reason they weren't going after her. I didn't even know anything about the class suit until later.

<http://petalumapilates.com/staff.html>

So probably the people who learned under her could also say that they were teaching Pilates?

I guess so, eventually

You know there is a lot of controversies, politics and all that, many of the teachers that she trained, I wouldn't say many, but definitely some of them ended up going the direction of Pilates Guild which was Sean Gallagher, or maybe still is, it was Romana's studio, and they went and they trained with Romana. So it was very classical, it was definitely you worked in lumbar flexion and a little bit of posterior tilt. And I remember the first time somebody tried to instruct me to have a little bit of neutral spine and a little bit of lumbar extension, and I'm like, she's wrong, I'm supposed to be... this is wrong!

Do you remember how many years after that person tried to teach you that?

It wasn't that long because then, and I don't even remember because, I actually then started teaching Pilates part-time and still doing software part-time and then eventually I did another Pilates teacher training with Madeline Black, which is quote on quote, evolved, you know, if you want to look at classical versus evolved, whatever terminology you want to use. And Madeline Black's orientation was completely different from classical Pilates, and I'm so glad I have both, I am so glad I have both, really.

I imagine!

And I can tell you that even though maybe philosophically and sort of intellectually I don't agree with every cue in the classical training, all I can tell you is that when I was doing it 3 times a week I felt incredible, like, you know now I can't imagine how did I do that the same exercises and the same sequence and not be bored out of my mind... but I did and I felt great.

So Madeline Black, are you familiar?

A little bit... I'm still learning!

It was very different, and her whole thing, and there were a number of physical therapists in the Pilates teacher training. So, one immediately there was somewhat of a therapeutic orientation, you know, you're going to get people with back pain, you're going to get people with incontinence, you're going to get people with hip pain. And people would say: I saw somebody doing this in the Pilates studio, and she would go, how's that functional? And that was her thing, how is it functional? Like how is this what I'm teaching you going to translate to you getting up off my table and walking out the door getting in your car, whatever you're doing, playing hockey, driving a car, playing a instrument, everything, so she started getting me thinking... ohhh how is this functional? If I were studying over and wanted to get Pilates... I love Madeline and I love Carol, I'm so glad I studied with them I'm just going to say that I think Brent Anderson walks on water. If you got an opportunity he's got on line courses and I just find absolute pearls coming out of his mouth, what he says really resonates.

So I had a business partners, who had a very different training than I had, I'm telling you this because this was probably the biggest most profound leap in all of my training. I don't want to say foundation but it's a critical component of how I cue and teach and think. Many teachers teach with a lot of engagement, like tight here, squeeze here, you know. I had this business partner and she was like... no... you can't cue the muscles, you can only cue the bones. So if the bones are doing the right things, then the muscles will. And of course I was like, no... of course you cue the butt muscles. And I would be like inhale, start your exhale pull your belly to your spine tighten your pelvic floor and then move your leg, you know. And I came around. And I don't even know the process was to coming around to only cue the bones. You can't cue the muscles, the brain doesn't think in terms of like, I need a little more bicep in here, I need a little more glutes. You can cue the bones, the brain does think and work in terms of I want my arm to go from here to here. It doesn't think I need a little more deltoid. In fact there's a quote, it's an Erick Franklin quote, and I'm not going to get it exactly right, something like, the command to lift one's hand to mouth is very simple but if you were to break it down to individual actions, you know, a little more of anterior deltoid, release the fibers of the posterior deltoid, engage the serratus anterior, release something... you know... we'd take a half hour to take our hand to our mouth and we would all have to get used to cold coffee! But if I just say bend your elbow... Just call the action!

So I totally agree... you can cue the bones, I can say if somebody does this, don't elevate the shoulder rotate the palm up, whatever, I can cue the bones and if the bones are doing the right thing the muscles are doing the right thing.

It's very interesting you're saying this. Remember I was saying I was writing about not cueing the scoop of the belly, and the person said, how do you teach? I said that to her... cue through the bones. If you cue through the bones will just have to keep the bones in place or not!

Exactly. I totally 500% agree, and now last time I saw Brent Anderson teaching, he said the exactly same thing.

How interesting!

And I'm like...Yeahhhh

Have you ever cued from the viscera? Organs

There's a cue I got from Madeline I kind of like where she would cue for people for rotating their ribs, where she would say bring the right kidney forward and the left kidney back. Or something like that. But I always worry, what if the person donated a kidney?

You know Katy Bowman? She talks very clearly about how cueing scoop the belly how we might be making things worse. During gait the muscle will engage and it has to happen reflexively, and we might be altering how the brain associates with that part of the body. So do you remember, if back when you did your training, you know your Pilates training, was scooping the belly...

Oh Absolutely, pull the navel to spine, and Madeline's cues were, you pretend you have, and I actually go back and use this occasionally, her cue was you visualize buttons on buttons down jeans, she'd say you have 2 extra navels, like buttons on buttons down jeans, your real navel and 2 other navels so she would say pull all 3 of your navels to your spine. So after saying that I never use that, if I have somebody who absolutely cannot find it reflexively I may go to a place where they engage voluntarily and then go back once they've done that, wake it up.

So they get the feeling...

So they get the feeling and then go back and do it reflexively.

I went to my first PMA... Sherry Betz, but then there's somebody else in Virginia, who is a professor at Virginia Tech and is participating with Sheri Betz a lot right now. And she was very clear saying that there's no research proving that Pilates does any better to LBP

I think that, first of all some of the research on LBP and core stabilization and I'm like, they are not cueing the way I am cueing, I don't care what the research says I know the way I am cueing is helping people, just getting them to turn on reflexively, so when they do a study, there are so many ways of teaching Pilates, maybe they are teaching pull your belly to your spine and I'm not. And I think the one thing that there is some general consensus in improving LBP is movement variability. Exposing the body. And in fact I listened to a podcast recently of Diane Lee, she said that one of the things that they found lately in the research is that we try to have people to have one strategy to use and that the people who actually do the best and recover the best are the people who don't do the movement with the same muscle recruitment pattern every time, they have a wide variety of strategies.

So we think about Pilates helping people with back pain because of the stability component, really... what other modality focuses on spinal articulation in all three planes, that you don't get stuck, in fact I have an image I could go grab it... This is one of the things to me that distinguishes Pilates from any other than jazz dancing and belly dancing. I have a prop that I use with my clients, I have one of those little Chinese, you know, I should get the prop too. In

Pilates we're either focusing on spinal stability or spinal mobility, and what the snakes represents is, you've got all these bones in your back, all these vertebrae, the between any two vertebrae there's not a lot of movement, there's more than this more there's not a lot, but your combined motion your spine is meant to move in all three planes. Ok, so this is to me what distinguishes Pilates is that we focus on this intervertebral articulation, keeping the motion at every single level, because this is why people get injured. You get stuck, you can't move, you lose intervertebral mobility, say between these three I've lost intervertebral mobility because life patterns, I never move here, so sitting too much, you know people tend to bend where they like to bend, you know if you go into a big huge Yoga back bend you often see a hinge in the spine instead of a curve the spine doesn't like hinges, it likes curves. But this is what happens when you lose the intervertebral mobility and you try to bend you're going to get excessive motion at the first available place where there's motion, where they like, exactly, to motion to be, and that's setting you up for an injury. So what other exercise form or practice do you know of where there's that articulation and then I go into, there's all three planes, the forward and back, there's the rotational plane, and there's the side to side plane and in real life, you know I'm changing a light bulb, so I'm in a back bend I'm in a rotation, I'm in a side bend, like really motion is tri-planar, so to me, that's how I help people keep their spines healthy, maintaining that intervertebral articulation. How many people have come to me and said all I did was turn around and pick up a piece of paper at the back seat of my car and my back went out. I'm like your back is not supposed to go out by turning around and picking up a piece of paper out of the back seat of your car, it's because it wasn't prepared in all three planes to articulate between the vertebrae.

What was your mindset when you decided to do Madeline's training?

Did you want something different, or new, what was the reasoning behind it?

I wanted to get exposure to something... she had a reputation... a little more functional, therapeutic. The other huge influence on my practice, probably the biggest besides anatomy in motion I just started a couple of years ago, have you heard of Jean Claude West?

Ok, so I would consider him, sort of my primary teacher. You learn biomechanics in a perspective that you can visualize every joint, what it's doing what it's supposed to do, what it looks like under the covers, he used to break it down, he does a little differently now sort of by region like upper quadrant, lower quadrant, pelvis, spine, whatever but... so you learn the biomechanics, you learn assessment both visual and tactile sort of listening with your hands what are the bones doing what are they supposed to be doing, he was Baryshnikov's practitioner. He was working in NY with dancers he got a reputation and one day he got a call from American ballet theater back when Baryshnikov was dancing, they travel with their own staff of physical therapists, he got a call from where they were somewhere in the south and they said would you come work with Misha? Well he had enough of a reputation, he thought of that for half a second so he was Baryshnikov's practitioner, he's just a genius of a person, he teaches biomechanics, different kinds of assessments visual, tactile, and then manual corrective, for anything you're doing, MET a lot of MET, I never thought about scope of practice nobody kind of talked about it, Madeline taught us MET back then. A lot of Pilates teacher training teach energy muscle technique, she's not the only one. I was doing spinal mobilization when I was studying with Jean-Claude and I've worked on a lot of Physical Therapists and they are all like oh you know what you are doing. I actually to be legal, I went to massage school,

which I hated, uh sorry, trying not to be negative... so I can legally touch people and I can sleep at night!

So we're certainly allowed to touch people as a Pilates instructor, you can do tactile cueing and I would make a distinction that you can touch somebody to educate the body but not to "treat" the body, and I could make a good argument that the Muscle Energy Technique is educating the body not treating the body.

You're definitely doing a tactile cue to just direct, it makes sense.

Exactly. I didn't really need to go to massage school but once I started doing NKT I just felt like, you know what... I want to get the insurance that covers me for touch and teaching movement. I can see maybe the relation of Jean Claude and AIM, the way that you described Jean-Claude's work.

I think because from what I learned with Jean-Claude that I could take NKT and AIM. So then Jean-Claude was my primary teacher, he would teach 2 workshops a year we also study in our studio, we'd study with him privately, skype with him and bring an actual client he could assess them over the internet, over skype and we would be like how did he see that? and give correctives.

I'm here and I didn't!

It was awesome! He's just amazing! He was in a really bad Mountain Bike accident, he severed his spinal cord and didn't teach for many years now he's teaching again. And I was like hummm I need a teacher now that's how I found David Weinstock and NKT.

It's interesting you say you were looking for a new teacher, It's very inspiring to me! And in your blog you mentioned being a patient's of David's too, right? When you find somebody, do you tend to follow them more, do you have a mindset towards that way?

Yeah, absolutely! I have certain people that I really want to study with that I've sort of have studied with virtually on line for example, I'm really interested in pelvic floor stuff so Julie Wieb has a blog, she has a lot of online courses I've taken all of her online courses have a lot of correspondence with her just one-on-one.

It happens organically.

But I'm like... I follow her.

You're focused.

Anything Diane Lee publishes I'm going to read, certain people, you know.

Anatomy in Motion just really resonated with me. He calls me a serial AIMER because I went for my third time and I'm going again for my fourth time. You get something different out of it every time also just to watch. There are two teacher, Gary the founder, and then he has a co teacher, Chris.

Isn't Gary the...

Guy who wrote the book and the founder

Doesn't he have a book

WTF - What the Foot

So how would you define your work nowadays?

Oh, that's a good question! A very good question! I think both my husband and my parents have finally caught on... this is Margy she's a Pilates teacher... I'm not a Pilates teacher...

nothing against Pilates teachers it's just not I would define myself, and I remember, I don't know what to call myself, so remember watching somebody, the woman who does the Pilates

Anytime, she's been archiving... Kristi Cooper... she's got Jean-Claude on there and interviewed him. She asked what do you call yourself? And he goes like I don't know, I don't know what to call myself, and I'm like YES! So what I've settled on, I have sort of two parts of my practice one is seeing people one-on-one and I'm only doing therapeutic work at this point, people come to me with chronic pain, and I'm a rural area so I'm getting the people that are kind of like: I've been to the chiropractor, I've been to the physical therapist, I've been to the podiatrist, they've been to see everybody and the last resort, and the other thing that I've started doing, because part of my personal mission is I never wanted to have a profession where I only served wealthy people, like even my Pilates studio I kind of modeled it on, I'm going to have classes with equipment for \$12 a class if they come 3 times, price rewarding frequency, I wanted Pilates for the people, like I wanted to make it affordable, I did not become a Pilates teacher to help really wealthy woman look younger or thinner, or whatever. I want to serve my community, and my community are park rangers, school teachers, artists, musicians, people who work for environmental no profits. The way I do that... you know if you've worked with people therapeutically you're going to start seeing patterns, OMG I just taught the same corrective for 8 different people this week, for the shoulder, scapula, whatever. What I've done is I've developed a series of self-care workshops. I was going to call them like: foot, ankle, biomechanics: restoration maintenance, and my friends and like NO happy, healthy, feet! I'm actually going in the opposite direction, I'm absolutely embracing my geekiness, I don't dumb it down, I'm getting the people who were like I've had this foot problem for years nobody can help me I want to understand what's going on in my foot, I'm going to teach them this is how your foot works, this is how it relates to the rest of the body, we get the skeleton out and then I'll teach a self assessment and a self corrective. So I've got a series of self care workshops. So when I teach one of those workshops I use the tittle rehabilitative movement specialist, that's what I call myself and when I work one-on- one I call myself a neuro muscular therapist, because I want to get the neuron in there, body related.

The idea for making people responsible for their self-care.

Absolutely! If you're looking for somebody to take responsibility for your body or fix you you've come to the wrong person, but I will teach you how to take responsibility for your own body.

And I'm also very clear with people, you're going to get homework, it might only be 5 minutes a day, we'll work with what's realistic for your life. Expect homework, and if you're not willing to do homework, don't come to see me.

Pilates is not for everyone. What would you have to say?

Oh I totally disagree. I do think that everybody could benefit from it because of the spinal mobility that we talked about, the joint mobility. I'm more of a fan of joint mobility than stretching per se, I'm not anti-stretching though, I know it's really popular to be anti stretching these days, I think if stretching makes you feel good, go for it! I don't have these rules, but I stretch but I also really like moving your joints in full range of motion. I can modify it you can make it kick butt, I can get professional athletes trunbling and sweating and I can also take my sweet old lady that can barely stand up out of a chair and find something for her to do.

But I feel so lucky that I'm in this profession that I'm never going to stop learning, it's so interesting to me!