

Remembering BOB LIEKENS



Bob Liekens passed away on November 27, 2018 at the age of 63 in Florence, Italy. A protégé of Romana Kryzanowska and a co-author of her first training manual, Liekens was a much-loved instructor who had a major impact on two generations of Pilates teachers.

By Anne Marie O'Connor



A NATIVE OF BELGIUM, BOB LIEKENS MOVED TO NEW YORK IN 1983 TO PURSUE A CAREER IN DANCE. Soon after, he began training with Romana Kryzanowska, with whom he would work for 17 years. He was a teacher trainer for many years at Kryzanowska's studio, and also worked with her on the manual for her teacher training program.

In early 2001, he joined Power Pilates and helped develop its teacher training program, along with Howard Sichel, Phoebe Higgins and Susan Moran. Then in 2014, he left Power Pilates and created a school called The Pilates Standard with Petra Karlsson and Juliana Afram.

A visual artist as well as a dancer and movement teacher, Bob had recently moved to Florence to take art classes and to be closer to his family. Sadly, he passed away shortly afterwards. Here, his friends and colleagues recall their favorite memories of him.

CARY REGAN, master instructor at *Uptown Pilates* in New York

I've known Bob since 1983—I was one of his teachers back at the [original] Pilates Studio. Bob was an amazing student and later grew into a wise and wonderful master teacher! He always kept the purity of Joe's method and reached so many over the years. He will be missed by myself and by so many in the Pilates world! May we all remember all he taught us.

JUAN ESTRADA, lead trainer and teacher trainer at *Alycea Ungaro's Real Pilates NYC*

I had the pleasure of meeting Bob in Chicago in 2002. I was teaching a client and he was teaching a workshop. Even listening from a distance, I was so drawn to his energy. What got me even more was his flow. I was already certified but was interested in studying with him, so in 2004 I decided to move to New York City to do the bridge program at Power Pilates. I was fortunate to have shared the floor with Bob and other great instructors and teacher trainers. In 2007, I became a teacher trainer and was honored to have him as my mentor.

Throughout the years, Bob became more than a mentor, but a true friend. After his exit from Power Pilates, I followed him to three other Manhattan studios to continue studying with him until his move to Italy. We had our last dinner on October 10, 2018, when he was last in New York. I love and miss you dearly, Bob.

SHARI BERKOWITZ, MS, founder of *The Vertical Workshop*

It's remarkable how relationships change over time....

My first vision of Bob is with his strong posture, commanding voice and mustache...I was pretty scared of him.

Then he became a dear friend, and I could only see him as a sweet, little bear of a man playing with his Pilates students, colleagues and friends as we drank wine at dinners full of his beloved (and mine) oysters!

His sense of humor was very very Bob Liekens. He had a seriousness to him that was sort of funny the more you knew him. And when it came to Pilates,

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he was very serious. I remember once I was doing Snake on the Reformer at the pace [at which] I had learned it. Well, Bob comes up and whispers in my ear, "Slow and sexy." I couldn't believe it—Bob just whispered "slow and sexy" in my ear!! I couldn't believe my ears! I don't know how I ever stayed on the Reformer after he said that. It was utterly uncharacteristic and yet the perfect cue for me. After that, I never rushed Snake again.

I'll miss Bob, but I know he is with me and us all! He loved his Pilates community!

BRETT HOWARD, owner of the *Pilates Haus* in Jersey City, NJ, and director of education for the *United States Pilates Association*

I first started training under Bob in the fall of 1997. I was one of four young dancers from SUNY Purchase College in an apprentice group to learn the Pilates method. Bob came up to Purchase on six consecutive weekends to teach us our modules. He was a true professional; he was strict but fair and had a wonderfully clear approach to teaching the material.

Bob had such a reverence for the work. Our student-teacher roles were definite but there was a level of mutual respect. Although we were there to learn, we still had a great deal of fun and laughter. One time, while exhaling during one of the exercises I over-accentuated my exhale with a loud sigh (postmodern dance was the rage at the time) and a stunned Bob said to me, "What is with all of these dramatics, Brett? This is not acting class!"

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP RIGHT: BOB'S FINAL RESTING PLACE; HIS ASHES WERE SCATTERED IN THE ARNO RIVER IN FLORENCE.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JUAN ESTRADA, HOWARD SICHEL, JUNGHEE WON AND BOB LIEKENS; ESTRADA AND LIEKENS IN THEIR LAST PHOTO TOGETHER, IN OCTOBER 2018; SHARI BERKOWITZ AND ONE OF THE COOKIES SHE HAD MADE WITH BOB'S PICTURE FOR HIS MEMORIAL SERVICE.



Over the years, I continued learning from him, first as an apprentice, then as a co-worker and later as a friend. I am grateful for the years of having him in my life. He left a large impact and legacy on the Pilates world. He continues to have an impact on me: **I still hear him in my head, daily, when I am teaching.** —*Brett*

Another weekend, during a break, while Bob was in the restroom, my fellow apprentices and I thought it would be a great idea to all hang on the side bar of the Cadillac like four little monkeys. Little did we know that our weight would tip the Cadillac over with a loud bang. We frantically put it back in place and waited quietly for Bob to return. In retrospect, I'm sure Bob heard it fall, but when he returned, he allowed us to keep up the appearance of being angelic students. It was a gift to have had the opportunity to learn from him in such an intimate, experiential environment for those weekends.

Over the years, I continued learning from him, first as an apprentice, then as a co-worker and later as a friend. I am grateful for the years of having him in my life. He left a large impact and legacy on the Pilates world. He continues to have an impact on me: I still hear him in my head, daily, when I am teaching. Bob will be missed by many.

LESLEY LEVY, senior teacher for Uptown Pilates in New York

I first met Bob shortly after he came to Power Pilates. I had received my initial certification a

few years before from a different program. I was thirsty to learn more and had heard about Power's continuing education program. The workshop I took from Bob was the second that I took there and I was blown away by Bob's ability to effectively teach. He had a way about him that was confident, commanding and clear, yet also compassionate and fun.

After the workshop, I went up to him and asked if there was any way that I could book a session with him. I wanted to embrace this skill he possessed and learn all he was willing to share, and share he did. He told me that there was a semi that I could join if I wanted to—all I had to do was contact the studio. I was pleasantly surprised and humbled that he would take me on as a student. A few months into our workouts, Bob told those of us in the semi that he was changing his schedule and would no longer be teaching at that Equinox at that time, but that there were many good instructors to work with. Before we left that day, however, he pulled me aside and offered me a private time with him each week. He knew I was a serious student and was open to his instruction.

For the next ten years, I continued my studies with this masterful teacher who willingly taught

me all he knew with commanding kindness. Bob's compassion for the work and ability to connect with people was unsurpassed. I consider myself lucky and honored to have known Bob Liekens.

PETRA KARLSSON, *The Pilates Standard in Helsingborg, Sweden*

I met Bob in 2003, but really got to know him during Power Pilates' first comprehensive program in Madrid in 2004. Even that first time I met him, I knew he was one to follow, to have as the teacher. We quit our contracts with Power Pilates about the same time. Juliana Afram [a Pilates teacher in Germany] and I asked Bob if we could do something together, he said yes, so we became business partners and started the process of creating a new classical school, The Pilates Standard, and developed a comprehensive training program. We also created a mentor program, LEA—as in a leap of faith, a leap to your next level! (Unfortunately Juliana had to leave the partnership for personal reasons after a year or two.)

Over the past five years, I have had the opportunity to work very closely with Bob. We've spent many hours together—probably the same way he sat with Romana to write all her knowledge down. I know he was very proud of this work and that he finely got all of it on paper so the work can go on. I'm really

thankful for what we accomplished, and of course, the chance to get to know this warm and generous person who really enjoyed the best things in life.

For a number of years, Bob had taken art classes in Florence every summer and always felt so much at home there every time he visited. Last year when he was there, the person who rented him the apartment where he stayed told him that she was moving back home, so he asked if it was possible for him to take it over. It was, so he moved to Florence, which also allowed him to be closer to his brother and sister and their families.

Our last talk was the evening before he passed away. He felt happiness, joy and inspiration that he had made the decision to move to Italy, to be able to be close to “both” his families and that the response from the LEAP participants, who were mostly old colleagues, had been a great success. The ones who did it really said they liked it, and that they learned a lot even if they already had a lot of experience before entering the program.

Now it was his time to relax a little, paint and enjoy life. He actually told me, “I’m so happy.” And he was very proud. He

said, “Petra, now I know the work will continue, you better be prepared, I won’t be here forever.” (He said that sometimes, though not often.) Right then I laughed and said, “Yes, I know, but we still have time.” He responded hopefully, “Yes!”

When we started our journey together five years ago, I made him one promise: to insure the legacy. So this is what I, together with the team of The Pilates Standard, intend to do! **PS**

OPPOSITE PAGE: BRETT HOWARD (RIGHT) WITH TETSUO YOSHIDA (LEFT), A TEACHER AT PILATES HAUS AND HOWARD'S HUSBAND, POSE WITH LIEKENS.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: LIEKENS AND LONGTIME STUDENT AND COLLEAGUE LESLY LEVY; LIEKENS AND HIS PILATES STANDARD CO-FOUNDER, PETRA KARLSSON.

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