

"Playing" My Way Back to Being Fit

by Kerri Lee Halkett, FOX 29 News Anchor



Whenever I see it, I always have to take a look-- there is something so exciting about opening the latest edition of Phillyfit Magazine! Not only is it fun to flip through the pages to see if there is anyone I know being featured, but also it's a way to learn more about the people that make up the fitness scene in the Delaware Valley. I don't mean professional athletes and personal trainers necessarily, I mean average folks like you and me who enjoy staying fit and feeling good about ourselves. I also look forward to reading the stories behind the pictures, here's mine...

A tomboy growing up, sports and athleticism has always been a part of my life. I've spent years trying just about anything and everything to get in shape, and perhaps the best fitness lesson I ever learned came from my ninth grade Physical Education teacher, Miss Pepperdine, who said, "Exercising is especially



important as adults because as we grow up, we forget how to "play." It comes so naturally to us as kids, and we do it because we love it and we just can't help ourselves. What feels better than breaking into a run across a wide open, field with the sun in our eyes, the wind in our face, and the grass between our toes? Then we grow up, and we exchange those unrestricted bursts of energy for stress and responsibilities, long hours at work and even longer hours driving to get there." Play? Who's got time for it? And this might be when we need it the most. So my mission has been to find different ways to stay young by finding ways to play, and as my life has changed, so have the games I've played.

I've trained for long distance runs, joined tennis leagues, or dusted off my ice skates to rekindle figure skating routines done long ago. I even Highland Danced growing up-- talk about an unusual way to get in shape! Dancing around swords is not only dangerous but it's a tough workout. It is amazing the incentive you have to get good at it, when weapons and injury are at stake! Unusual workouts have always been something I've enjoyed. Thank goodness for that, because life was about to change dramatically so my workouts were about to change right along with it. I was pregnant!

The first phone call I made when I found out was to my mom, the second one was to a personal trainer. I was so worried to lose control of my weight and appetite that I figured it would be best for me to be accountable to someone. My doctor gave me recommended workouts, and my trainer adjusted my exercises according to the trimester, and it worked very well for the first couple of months. Then came my third-trimester and things started to change. My larger mass suddenly became cum-

bersome to drag to the gym, not to mention I could barely see my toes let alone touch them. My spandex didn't quite fit like it used to, to say the least. Add to that, my increasing need to get as much sleep as possible, and soon I wasn't exactly a personal trainer's dream student. I wanted to sleep and eat, not go to the gym. Finally my doctor said I was too far along to continue doing what I was doing, so I settled back with my bag of BBQ Fritos (I craved them CONSTANTLY) and took a little break. Well sort of, I had to get through childbirth first. And any mother will tell you, that is the greatest workout of them all!

I had my son in the winter of 2005. Shortly after recovering, my doctor gave me permission to slowly start exercising again. I began walking with my son bundled in his stroller, and I reluctantly traded in the BBQ Fritos for lighter, more healthful options like veggies with fat free dip, or fruit, and lots of water. The pounds began to come off, and by the time I returned to work that May, I was within ten pounds of my pre-baby weight. However, my suits still didn't fit right, so it was time to kick it up another notch, but how?

My job, as an anchor on "Good Day Philadelphia," allowed me to propose new segments and try new things, so I thought with summer only weeks away, and with me and so many others looking to minimize a little, it might be fun to explore new and unusual ways to get fit. That's when "Healthy Living" was born and one of my first guests was, Phillyfit's own Jami Appenzeller. What a burst of energy! Talk about someone who knows how to "play" and feel good, and inspire others! I was an instant fan. She came on to talk about the first annual Phillyfit Bash, something that I thought was such a great idea, not only for the fitness community to get to know one another, but for families to learn more about opportunities out there for them, in their neighborhoods. It was an enormous success, and since then, Jami and I have become friends. I helped her with her most recent Bash, and plan to be on hand to help put together the Bash in the fall being held at Villanova University on the Mainline. I'm such a huge supporter of her campaign to put Philadelphia on the map as a "fit city," not a "fat city," because we all know we've made those lists before. Sure we like our cheese steaks, but we like to take care of ourselves too.

Other segments featured belly dancing workouts, interesting ways to eat to achieve better health, and then one of the FOX producers informed me I just HAD to feature her yoga instructor, he was THAT good. That led me to Philadelphia's Balance Studios, and my first taste of Ashtanga Yoga. What was it? I had no idea, all I knew was Madonna took it up after she had her first baby, and her body was amazing. Hey, if it helped me get even a fraction as fit as her, I was willing to try.

When I met owner and Master Yogi, Phil Migliarese, I got right away that there was something to this "celebrity yoga" that had attracted Gwyneth Paltrow, Sting, and Paul Simon to name a few. I admit, I was a little skeptical at first. I wasn't convinced you could really get a workout from the poses, that is, until I



tried them. WOW! Not only was I bending in ways I hadn't bent in years, if ever, I was being required to use strength and endurance I didn't expect the poses to require. Phil was a great teacher and another inspiration. He had been in a serious car accident when he was a teen, and spent months on his back recovering with the knowledge he may never fully recover. He took up yoga and eventually traveled to India to learn from the top Yogi's in the world. He eventually recovered and became a world-class athlete, and brought the teachings from his yoga and Martial arts back to Philadelphia for all of us to benefit. As a Brazilian Jiu Jitsu black belt, he isn't exactly what you picture when you think of someone that does yoga, but his fighter's have followed suit, and it isn't unusual to see big tough guys at Balance doing the same bending and twisting poses that I do!

"Healthy Living" continued to allow me to meet amazing local trainers, athletes and regular people like me, and together, they have encouraged me to stay inspired and committed to getting as fit as I can. Guess what? I've never felt better! The ten pounds are gone, the abs are coming back, and I have a new love for forms of exercise I never would have otherwise tried. So Miss Pepperdine, I just want you to know, I was down at the shore recently and out of nowhere, decided to break into a sudden sprint on the boardwalk just because. I promise you, even though it is many years later, I have not forgotten how to "play". Only now I can do it with my son who too, will learn the benefits of the lesson you taught me so many years ago.