

To: Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund (LUTSF)
From: Fiona Winter
Date: 6th June 2004

Nia Brown Belt Intensive Training Course
Portland Oregon, USA
3rd to 9th April 2004

I am enclosing my report, as requested, on the course that I undertook with my travel costs supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund. The trip was a unique opportunity to immerse myself in the Nia Technique at the source, as Portland is where the creators of Nia teach their regular classes, and I was able to meet many experienced Nia teachers.

Since my return I have been able to incorporate many aspects of the course into my teaching of Nia and into my daily life. I have co-presented three Nia workshops, and presented Nia at the Mind Cymru conference as an activity for people with mental health issues. I will be hosting and attending Nia White Belt Intensive training in July in Wales, where I will be able to establish contact with new Nia teachers and offer my services as a mentor to them. Whilst in America, I started my intention to continue my training to Black Belt level and apply to become a teacher trainer, to Debbie and Carlos Rosas, the creators of Nia, and plan to keep them up-to-date with all my work in the U.K.

May I once again thank the Fund for sponsoring my travel. I would be happy to present a workshop or Nia masterclass to anyone who would find it of interest.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Winter

The Nia Technique ... through movement we find health

Fiona Winter, Brown Belt Certified Nia Teacher

Nia might be a girls name in Wales, where I live, but it is also an expressive movement form, which combines dance, martial arts and body integration therapies, into a unique blend. Nia originated in the U.S.A. in the early 1980's, when Debbie and Carlos Rosas began to question the need for the regimented style of fitness training that was then prevalent. They began to search for a technique that incorporated mind, body and spirit. Nia does just that in a way that allows each individual to vary the movements to suit their own needs, respecting the individual's ability and experience. In a Nia class you experience a fusion of movement styles, from the expressiveness of dance, the power and explosiveness of martial arts and the softer and more subtle movements of the healing arts.

I came across Nia in September 2000 at a Fitness Convention in Birmingham. After an earlier career as a professional actress and dancer, I had moved into the fitness industry in 1982 and established myself as an innovative educator, training and inspiring teachers within the fields of activity and exercise.

My first Nia session felt like coming alive again. Each piece of music that was played was a perfect fit for the chosen move, and I sensed myself working at an intensity level that would normally leave me feeling drained, but I seemed to be gaining energy. The movement and the music touched emotions that I hadn't been in touch with as fully for many years and I knew that I had to experience more of this! A brief conversation afterwards with the presenter Helen Terry, reassured me that this was not a formatted franchise programme and within days I had booked to go to Houston in December 2000 to do my White Belt Intensive Training. White Belt covered the development of the 13 principles of Nia, the basic technique of the 52 core movements and the nine movement forms, Tai Chi, Tae Kwon-do, Aikido, Jazz Dance, Modern Dance and Duncan Dance, Yoga, Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais.

I began teaching Nia in September 2001 and I have taught in community settings, with children and young adults, in private classes and worked with dance students and professional dancers. I am a freelance teacher to several Healthy Living Centre projects including 'Inside Out', an arts project providing workshops for the community but especially welcoming those who may have suffered from depression, anxiety attacks or loneliness.

I returned to Houston in February 2002 for my Blue Belt Intensive Training. Blue Belt focused on communication and teaching, developing the skills of listening and speaking, gaining awareness, insight and clarity through communication.

Nia Brown Belt Intensive Training which I attended in April 2004 with help from the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund, builds on the previous belt levels: focusing on energy as another way to deepen the Nia practice both at a professional and a personal level; energy that will enhance and expand the results and benefits for the teacher and the participants; the opportunity to experience and

understand energy creation, circulation and utilization; ultimately incorporating energy principles into teaching skills, developing tools to attain personal growth, voice and body language as energy tools, releasing blocked energy, blending energy into movement and gaining awareness of self through monitoring energy levels, perceiving Nia and life through energy.

The four energy areas that Brown Belt works with are:

- Physical, the body, sense and sensation
- Mental, the mind, cognitive, imaginative, conscious and intuitive
- Emotional, the emotions, all feelings
- Spiritual, the individual spirit, the relationship you have to something you view as greater, divine, something outside of yourself.

All Nia intensives use cognitive and experiential processes that include daily Nia classes and specific exercises, discussions and lectures to give the somatic and mental knowledge behind the science, craft and art of Nia. Each process is designed to transmit the conceptual information energetically, placing it in the cellular memory and in the mind. Each process is designed to stimulate the curiosity and to awaken the individual's own unique way of learning and seeking answers.

My preparation for the Brown Belt Intensive Training included twelve weeks of pre-training study. The study was broken down into cognitive, experiential and reflective activities. It was designed to be used in conjunction with Nia routines either as part of my regular teaching or my own personal use of Nia training videos. I was invited to work at my own pace as I opened to a new awareness of the feeling of energy in and around me. Journaling my discoveries was an important part for me of recognising that which I was already integrating into my teaching and new areas of knowledge and experience. We were encouraged to read an extensive range of books covering such diverse subjects as Chinese Medicine, Healing, Emotional Anatomy, Five Rhythms, and Experiential Anatomy. I found this range of subjects stimulating and thought provoking if a little daunting when viewed in their entirety.

The training course took place at the Nia central movement space, Body Moves, in Portland, Oregon. Daily classes were included in the training which were open to the regular Body Moves participants. This provided a unique opportunity to dance with other Nia teachers and experienced Nia participants who are regularly taught by Debbie and Carlos Rosas, the creators of Nia. The energy of the regular class was also enhanced by the energy of the thirteen Brown Belt participants.

During the course we were encouraged to skim over the next day's material in the manual. Reading without trying to remember, allowing the information to flow into and through ourselves, allowing small bits of information accumulate into greater knowledge. It was emphasised that the training would be a personal journey for each of us and that we should allow the learning to unfold at a speed appropriate for us, to become fascinated with ourselves and the process of discovery and how we each learn through our own body. All Nia training uses a body centred and mindful approach to embody and learn new material. This requires the participants to be present and mindful in each activity, blending both sides of the brain, the rational and the intuitive to make sense of the material, consciously being in the body and staying there. Becoming aware of the information as sensations that can be felt in the body, including emotional feelings, thoughts and desires. Using somatic ways of thinking and perceiving awareness by using senses and emotions to help decode new information, the language the body understands most, the language of sensation and feelings.

At the introductory session on the first evening of the course we were encouraged to use the 'The Four Energy Allies'

- Speak with impeccability
- Don't assume anything
- Don't take anything personally
- Always do your best

and use them to bring us energy. We then spent a day on each of the four energy realms, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, with two days experiencing the integration of energy in all realms. Each day concluded with an 'open' class in which Debbie or Carlos skilfully integrated the theme of the day into the focus of the class. As the course progressed I became more aware of each of the energy realms, and how I could increase, circulate and utilise energy, by such methods as monitoring the food and water I took onboard, by the use of breathing and meditation and of the value of sleep in the creation of energy. I also became aware of how in a class situation I could provide opportunities for participants to increase and circulate their energy. We were encouraged to invest energy at times, such as keeping our mental awareness engaged in order to take on board new information, or investing in our physical energy in the class at the end of the day in order to build our physical stamina. I also began to reflect on situations and people that drain my energy at times and started to acknowledge ways of preventing this.

One particularly important aspect of the course that I have been immediately able to apply in my classes since completing the course is the concept of how we use energy in the components of physical fitness. This concept is being explored in a book on Nia which is

due to be published in December 2004. It looks at the language of physical sensation when we use positive tension.

- Strength, when energy is moving inward
- Flexibility, when energy is moving outward
- Mobility when energy is in constant motion
- Agility, when we shift energy, stopping and starting movement
- Stability when energy is equalised, inward and outward

This has brought a new focus to my teaching enabling my class participants to really connect to these sensations in their Nia class. I have also used a three-step process of learning the 52 core moves, which help the class participants to learn the moves, personalise them and bring them to life.

- Learn the Move. Do each move in isolation, one at a time with conscious thought.
- Move the Move. Gain a feeling for the move as you perform it, involving the whole body.
- Energise the Move. After mastering the move, integrate the energy of one of the nine movement forms into the move, bringing it to life.

Attending the course also gave me the opportunity to network with the other participants from all parts of the world, with a vast combined teaching experience. We were able to experiences and exchange ideas regarding a huge variety of target groups. As a group we are continuing to study the new material that was shown us at Brown Belt, by using an e-mail study group.

Some of the benefits of the course since my return have been an increased ability to increase and circulate my own energy which has in turn given me greater energy when teaching. I am also able to explain a whole variety of Nia concepts and aspects of the work with greater clarity, through having experienced being taught by the creators of the technique. I have increased confidence in my ability to deliver Nia to a range of participants.

Since my return I have co-presented three Nia workshops and also presented Nia at the Mind Cymru conference. This summer I will be hosting and auditing a Nia White Belt Intensive Training in Wales, and will be able to personally connect to the participants and create a mentoring relationship with them for their journey as Nia teachers. I am currently setting up a programme of Nia workshops for the autumn and winter, which will provide opportunities for teachers and participants to come together and explore Nia in greater depth.

I plan to return to Portland in November to take part in the first Nia Intensive open to all Belt Levels. This will be just before the launch of the Nia book, and will provide an opportunity to explore the look, feel and language of the book as it is presented to the public and meet and dance with Nia teachers from all over the world. I know that I will continue to reap the benefits of my training trip over the next few years as I work with the Brown Belt principles and integrate them with the White and Blue Belt principles that I already understand.