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Sharing the Joy: The Nia St. Louis Newsletter

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Dear Friend,

Welcome to Nia St. Louis' e-newsletter launch! We are honored and excited to share our passion for Nia with you, and are thrilled to be dancing our way onto your computer.

Nia St Louis has a lot to celebrate this January as we ring in 2008, and we hope you will join us.

To help us kick off a Joyful January, we invite you to Jam with us on Friday, January 11th at 6:30 PM at the Center of Clayton. Our quarterly Jams are a way for us to celebrate the St. Louis Nia community by bringing together teachers and students from various venues for a fun and festive Friday evening class. Details are posted on our website. [www.niastlouis.com](http://www.niastlouis.com)

Looking ahead, we are overjoyed to be bringing Nia Black Belt and Trainer Winalee Zeeb to town in July for a White Belt Training. The White Belt is an amazing week-long intensive designed both for students who want to deepen their personal Nia practice, and for those who would like to become certified Instructors. We look forward to welcoming new teachers into our community. Want to know more? Read about it here.

So to help spread the Joy, several area Nia Instructors share their experiences of Nia's first celebrated principle, The Joy of Movement in this newsletter. Enjoy!

Nia St. Louis

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The Joy of Movement by Karol McNutt

Making me feel alive.

I touch the Divine through Joy.
Expressing gratitude and appreciation for the miracle of the body.
Expressing emotion through the forms and planes of movement
Clearing the mind
Opening and feeding the spirit
Dance allows me to knit my body with my soul.

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Finding Joy by Kris Johnson

As I look back on my life journey from this distant vantage point, I realize that I came into this world with an intense, internally driven desire to move. Sitting still has never been an option. From the earliest moment, a message surfaced, informing me that moving my body just made me feel better. Eventually, I discovered that all that nervous energy that continuously bounced around at excessive rates of speed inside my tiny body, could somehow be tamed and calmed by an inordinate amount of running, jumping, climbing, and biking. The Joy of Movement was my friend and constant companion.

Seeking a way to perhaps channel some of that boundless energy into a more purposeful activity, my exhausted mother decided to enroll her hyperactive four year old daughter in dance lessons. Immediately, I discovered that moving one's body to music and in precise patterns was infinitely more challenging and rewarding. With more than 200 bones and 700 plus muscles in the body, the possibilities for creative movement were endless. From these simple beginnings, the journey into Joy began, for some 55 years later, I am still dancing and still enthralled with the pleasure created by the simple activity of moving.

As I matured and ventured out into the world, I began to explore other forms of movement. Dance lessons led to high impact aerobics; step and spinning classes, pumping weights and any new fitness craze to hit the gym. Increasingly intense workouts tightened my core, increased the strength in my biceps, enlarged my quads, and made me feel strong and powerful. Yet somewhere in midst of this pursuit of the perfect body, there was this lingering feeling that something was missing. I just wasn't enjoying the workouts as much as I had in the past--burnout was setting in.

Then one day, quite by accident, if there is such a thing, I came across an article on a new and different type of aerobic dance class called Nia and decided to give it a try. In one short hour, I rediscovered the precious gift, long forgotten, that had been tucked away under hundreds of ab crunches. Somewhere in the middle of this unusual dance class, sensations surfaced; reminding my body and mind how pleasurable it was to just set my spirit free to go in search of hidden joys.

The teacher spoke of dancing intrinsic muscles, of releasing emotions held deep inside. She invited our fingers, elbows and knees to join the dance. She informed the dancers that our bodies held an innate knowledge of just how it needed to move. She cautioned us not to rely on her, as teacher, for every movement pattern, but instead to trust ourselves to move in ways that would honor our body and our spirit. She introduced me to Freedance, the ultimate in joyful movement, and invited us to go within to discover what it meant to dance our own unique dance. This amazing class stirred long hidden memories, allowing me to once again reconnect to the Joy of Movement, thereby changing my life in ways I could never have imagined. I'd found my Joy.

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Befriending Joy by Tracy Stamper

I first met Joy 13 years ago. She was in the first Nia class I ever took. She arrived dressed all in pearls, dancing beautifully and fluidly with a confidence and knowing that seemed to dance within every cell of her body. I caught a glimpse of her and danced with her for the briefest and sweetest of moments. I didn't yet know her name. Then, several months later when I arrived for my White Belt Training, I was delighted to find Joy there to greet me. She sat with me, inviting and encouraging me to learn and receive her gifts. We spent a blissful week forming a friendship.

Weeks later, I found I needed to call on her. As I sat watching my beloved 4-legged companion slip away, I remembered my trainers saying that Joy would be there for us always. I recalled reading Debbie Rosas' and Carlos Rosas' words on Nia's foundational principle, The Joy of Movement: "This Joy can alter your attitude and response to any experience. This Joy is an energy that can sit right next to or in the middle of sadness or anger. This Joy doesn't repress negative emotions, it invites them in to learn from them. It respects the truth of what is real for you. It is not just for when things in life are going well. It is an open accepting energy that welcomes whatever comes its way. Joy is a conscious choice. Choose Joy. Sense Joy. If you lose your connection with Joy, let sensation show you the way back.

"Well, things were not going well. As frantic worry and encompassing grief beckoned, I knew this was a test of my relationship with Joy. Was she more than a fair-weather friend? I called on her, and she was immediately there, gently coaching me. She reminded me to tune in and feel the breath moving through my body. So, I felt my belly rise and fall as the cool air moved in and the warm air moved out of my nose. And as I connected to my breath, I noticed a remarkable shift. While I was still worried and deeply sad, I was no longer panicked and diving into an emotional downward spiral. I was sitting with my grief while feeling at home in my body. I felt grounded. This was a new place for me. It was a place of empowerment. Over the years, Joy and I have deepened our relationship. I have learned and am learning to call on her when I need to, trusting that I can rely on her. She is my trusted companion, mother, anchor, guide, and

support. She has been there with me in times of celebration, and has held me in times of sadness. With her I feel strong. She has helped me find my bravery, whether consciously testing it while challenging myself to fly through the air (and through my fear of heights) on a trapeze, or while having it tested for me by a stern Russian judge in the stressful court adoption proceedings of my son. Joy is willing to take every step with me. What a welcomed relief to have her as a companion. Sometimes she settles around me like a warm, cozy blanket. Sometimes I drink her in like a calming sip of peppermint tea. Sometimes she is the steadfast rock I stand on while looking out over a frenzied sea. Always, she is there to remind me to embrace the gift of my body.

The Joy of Movement and being in a relationship with Nia St. Louis by Jeanne Carter

To me The Joy of Movement comes to full light when I am totally in the zone of dancing. I sometimes get so lost in dance that I totally forget who or where I am and experience Joy and life in the moment. This happens for me most often when I am having the pleasure of dancing with others. Dancing at the many Jams with my sister Nia St Louis teachers and friends brings a huge surge of Joy.

This past year has offered incredible opportunities to dance with many new wonderful people. Last January the Delectable Denise Medved, Black Belt and international trainer, came to introduce Nia to the Illinois community of Edwardsville. She showed us dancing and taught us Ageless Grace. People from all over the Midwest came and joined us in the dance and the learning. It was a spectacular opening. In February I danced with Carlos Rosas and 40 other people in Chicago when I audited a White Belt session. Tracy Stamper and Robin Bach have both permitted the rest of us to be with their Beautiful Black Belt Boogie to dance and learn in different master classes and workshops. Tracy taught us the "beginning of cueing between 3 and 6" and jumped in many times to cover when our masters were stuck in traffic. Robin gave us "creating our own routine", "organic strength training" and "learning how to teach the routine Mandala". The gifts they have offered us include the true development of the Nia St Louis group and ongoing continuing education opportunities.

In July the wild and whimsical Winalee Zeeb gathered us to dance and learn the routine Opal. In addition to learning how to teach Opal we were able to be with her for several master classes. I must say that incredibly, I was able to teach Opal the next day after her training. I was so in the zone that night I kicked my own butt. Sally Burgess, Reneigh DeBoer and I were fortunate to get to dance by the Aegean Sea in Greece with people from all over the world! We danced morning and evening for an entire week! Our accommodations were the beautiful Rosey's Little Village on Agistri Island. Speaking of being in the zone, for my birthday in November I was able to take Blue Belt training at Nia Headquarters and dance with both Carlos Rosas and Debbie Rosas at different classes. Along with about 50 of their trainees and students!!!!!!

And the icing on my cake came with Nia Headquarters' release of Unplugged, a routine to live drumming that's available to the public. I had the Joy of dancing with my students at the YMCA and at St Alexius Hospital. Nia has taught me to find the Joy in all movements and opened up the door for that Joy to be keenly available when I get to dance with others. Nia St Louis has bought me the camaraderie of others who are seeking the same Joy. Hope that I get to dance with you this year. :-)

Have you visited our website yet? You will find it at www.niastlouis.com.

There you can meet your area teachers, find classes and events, read more student stories, check out the photo gallery, and learn more about The Nia Technique.

Each of us at Nia St. Louis wish you a truly Joy-full 2008!

Cheers,
The Nia St. Louis Community