



Exercising Their Options



At Hilliard Studio, This Mother-Daughter Team Mixes Business With Pleasure

By Melinda Johnston | Photos By Glenn Roberson

This Mother's Day, 6-month-old Aubrey Elizabeth Gray would like to honor her grandmother, Liz Hilliard — if only she can get her “Gandy” to sit still long enough.

Hilliard is not known for being sedentary. In addition to her role as grandmother, the 58-year-old is also a wife, mother, former model, and co-owner of Hilliard Studio Method in Myers Park, one of the most successful Pilates studios in town.

Along with her 29-year-old daughter and best friend, Clary Hilliard Gray, she has trademarked the Hilliard Studio Method, which promises to trim, sculpt, and tone like nothing else around.

“It’s a results-driven, powerful workout unparalleled by any other workout method out there,” Liz Hilliard says.

The Mother Of Invention

The unique combination of Pilates, resistance training, ballet barre work,

and cardio was developed over a period of months, as mother helped precious daughter get in shape for her wedding.

The two were already close. In fact, Clary spent much of her childhood traveling with her mother on modeling assignments.

“In the 1980s and ’90s, I worked all over the Southeast, both on the runway and in print. My little girl — my future business partner — and my mother would travel with me. By the time Clary was 9 years old, she was



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hired as my ‘dresser.’ And she was really quite good at it,” Hilliard says.

Clary attributes her mother’s success in life — no matter the arena — to her positive personality. “Mom is one of the most joyful, positive creatures you’ll find,” she says. “She is passionate for life and gives freely this positive energy to her clients, friends, and family. All of this wonderful sharing does need to be replenished, so you can usually find her recharging her battery at a movie Sunday afternoons.”

After Clary graduated from Charlotte Country Day School and headed to UNC Chapel Hill, Hilliard decided to hang up her high heels and go back to school, as well. She spent a summer and fall in Toronto studying with Moira Stott, creator of STOTT Pilates.

Upon returning to Charlotte, Hilliard opened a studio and taught traditional Pilates. Then Clary got engaged. She was

already power walking six days a week and taking hot-yoga classes, but she wasn’t getting the results she desired. Clary wanted to get in tiptop shape before her wedding day, and so she turned to her favorite Pilates instructor to fill in the blanks.

“Clary wanted to lose a few pounds. She came to me and asked if I could help. We constructed this method together, and she was my muse. We added resistance to basic Pilates moves, then integrated weight training, as well as core-centric balance and stretching,” Hilliard says.

“Clary ended up dropping two dress sizes, and we had to get her wedding dress resized several times. I thought I was in great shape, but I dropped a dress size, too. We quickly found out that was the norm. Every person who has come to us and stuck with the program for several weeks has seen dramatic results.”

All In The Family

These days, mother and daughter are in the best shape of their lives, and doing what they love — together.

Hilliard says Clary taught classes until two days before she gave birth, and returned three weeks after Aubrey Elizabeth arrived because she missed the workout so much.

“She was begging to come back to work — not because her mother made her, but because she just loves it,” Hilliard says. “Clary and I have a symbiotic relationship. We are linked at the hip. She’s my child and the CFO. I’m her mother and the CEO. We work with a baby in the room. We’re best friends. It’s the greatest way to have a business partnership.”

Clary agrees. “Now that I’m a mom myself, I have to say one of the greatest perks is to be able to run a business with the baby on my hip — or on mom’s



hip!” she says. “I feel blessed that I can be a mom and a businesswoman all at the same time.”

Later this year, the two are taking things high-tech. Through their website, the mother/daughter team plans to offer Pilates classes online, so whether you are in Australia or Alaska, you can have access to the Hilliard Studio Method through your iPad, computer, or other smart device, anytime, day or night. Eventually, they hope to offer personalized training online to help individuals focus on the issues that bug them the most, be it arms, hips, tummy, or thighs.

“We’re trying to stay ahead of the DVD market,” Hilliard says. “Technology is changing so fast, we will be able to interact with a much larger community without diluting our brand. We will still do face-to-face classes in Charlotte, but with our website, we can branch out and serve clients across the world.”

And they can do all of that together. **[TCW]**

To Learn More

Visit hilliardstudiomethod.com or call 704/236-3377.

Wise Words

Liz Hilliard offers the following advice on staying young as the years pass by:

- **Age is a badge of honor.** The older you get, the more you need to own it.
- **Get off your bottom!** Stand up, get out of your chair, and walk around. If you’re sitting down, you’re getting old.
- **Find the thing you love to do and do it.** “Quit making excuses and just do it — write, paint, travel, whatever it is,” Hilliard says. “If you do what your heart desires, it will keep you excited and young and passionate about life.”



Writer Melinda Johnston, an avid runner and grandmother, was so inspired by this story that she took Liz Hilliard’s advice to heart and wrote the entire story standing up.