

BLACK WEDNESDAY

#CLTINSPRENEURS: LIZ AND CLARY HILLIARD GRAY

corri smith | October 25 / 2017 | Uncategorized

#CLTInspreneurs

Meet Liz and Clary Hilliard Gray, fitness studio owners



Liz Hilliard is the Creator + Co-Owner of Hilliard Studio Method and HSM | Core in Charlotte, NC and the Author of *Be Powerful: Find Your Strength at Any Age*. She started her fitness career as a certified Pilates trainer and created her signature HSM workout in 2007 as an improvement and extension of my traditional training. Her purpose was to create a challenging and fun workout that changes the body in the most efficient, safe and effective way with fast and lasting results. Her competitive edge pushed me to incorporate non-traditional Pilates equipment like free weights, gliders, weighted balls and resistance bands to help her clients achieve results they had never before found with any other workout. The results of her workout have been proven time and again by the client testimonials that have found positive changes not only in their bodies but minds as well. Her goal is to continue to create a workout and lifestyle that empowers women and men to be their best and find joie de vivre at any age and any stage of life. Her latest offering, HSM Live Class Streaming Platform, has been a huge hit as it allows anyone anywhere to do a live class on their own schedule! The key to happiness and success in my business as well as in my life is to keep moving, keep evolving and to not only stay ahead of the curve, but to bend the curve and work to my edge!

Clary Hilliard Grey helps people find their most powerful selves through fitness. She started Hilliard Studio Method with her mom, Liz Hilliard, a revolutionary workout Method in 2008. They've grown into three physical locations in the Charlotte area, streaming workouts, including live classes, a book, lifestyle products and a soon-to-be-launched apparel line! When you challenge yourself physically – something you didn't think you could do — that translates to other aspects of your life. It's slow at first, maybe you begin thinking yes you can do something not too far out of your comfort zone. But as you gain strength physically, your emotional and mental strength flourish right along with the physical and before you know it you're making the tough changes, answering the tough questions—you ask for a raise, leave a destructive relationship, start a business. Fill in the blank here on what deep down you know you need to do but can't quite find the strength. Helping people find that strength is what I do.

Owners of:

Hilliard Studio Method HSM | Core – Midtown and Stonecrest

Hilliardstudiomethod.com and Hsmcore.com

About:

Liz: I knew that 2008 was a risky year to start a business during a financial crisis, and especially one that falls into the category of a luxury item. But after my daughter and now business partner Clary came to me head over heels in love and said she was getting married in one year and needed my help getting her body into shape for her wedding, I made it my business to step outside of my own personal training experience and box to discover and create something brand new. Clary had been running four days a week and doing yoga almost every day, but it simply wasn't cutting it. Meanwhile, I was in the beginning stages of menopause and was seeing my body plateau with my Pilates workout. So of course I did what any good mother would do; I accepted the challenge and dove in head first to learn the latest and most cutting-edge techniques in shaping the body. I discovered through my research of and experimentation with different types of exercise, that heavy resistance training was the key to sculpting the physique and creating a healthy body. I gave my traditional Pilates moves a new, more radical and super efficient spin by using different modes of resistance to produce faster, lasting results. While I thought I was already in great shape, my new method further sculpted my body and helped me drop a dress size. I also felt stronger physically and mentally at an age when most women tend to slow down. Clary's results left her as a stunning bride who went from a size 10 to a size 4 (at 6'1" tall mind you), and the rest is history!

Clary: Mom created Hilliard Studio Method in 2007 when I was a bride-to-be. I was spending sometimes over two hours a day running and practicing hot yoga with the goal for myself at 25, to be lean and toned. The problem was, I was putting in all that time and the only result I was seeing was a lot of sweat. No

change whatsoever to my body composition.

Frustrated and out of my own ideas, I went to my mom who did what any amazing mother would do, she designed a workout Method for me! Mom was already a successful Pilates personal trainer (I couldn't get in with her—that's how booked she was!). She took her expertise in Pilates, where all exercises begin with core connection and healthy alignment of the spine, and added heavy resistance and balance challenges. The new Method, not yet named, was radical and produced immediate results, not just on myself, but on my 30-something workout partner and my mom who was at the time 53 and in menopause.

The difference between our workout and others is that ours works. No matter your age or stage of life, it promotes a healthy, mind-body transformational experience. We treat everyone like family and in the HSM Family that means tough love — we will nurture you through that umpteenth pushup, always keeping your body in safe, healthy alignment. We help you find the power that's already inside you... and you create for yourself a smokin' hot body along the way.

What is a typical day like for you?

Liz: My days start around 6am with my standard pre-breakfast wake up food; 1 cup Matcha tea and an apple, and then I whip up our Hilliard Studio Method Signature Smoothie along with another cup of tea to put me into jet drive! I'm in the studio by 8am to take and then teach class. Our Fenton Place studio is bustling in the mornings with as many as 75 clients chatting, checking in and talking to the trainers during class transitions. It's a fun, high-energy atmosphere that I thrive on, and I love interacting with our clients. My afternoons are spent creating the next best HSM move and latest version of class for Hilliard Studio Method and HSM | Core. When I'm not in the studio creating workouts I'm in business meetings and appointments. We are partnering with other local entrepreneurs to create and brand of our very own Hilliard Studio Method activewear line as well as a new jewelry line. Running two businesses is a full time 24/7 job that I live and breathe and love, but I always save plenty of energy for my grandchildren who I get to see several times a week! They are my indescribable joys and help me keep everything in

perspective. Walking into Clary's house after a long days' work and getting smothered by my little blonde munchkins is the greatest reward of all! Most nights I wind down with a glass of wine and a healthy dinner with my husband Aubrey. That is, when Clary and I are not attending a variety of philanthropic, charitable and networking events. Clary and I always manage to have fun no matter what the obligation because together business is pleasure!

Clary: 6-7am wakeup (sometimes from my iPhone clock, often from my four and six year old children snuggling into the bed with me—the latter's my preference!)

AM: Make smoothie and matcha tea. Try to sit for 30 minutes to enjoy said smoothie and matcha while catching up on Slack channels, email, IG and world news. Kids and myself dressed and out the door and it's on to the studio!

WORKOUT: I think most people think that since I'm in fitness, that's all I do all day. Wrong. I have to schedule my workout just like everybody else and aim for four a week.

RUN THESE BUSINESSES: Officially I'm the Director of Marketing for Hilliard Studio Method and HSM | Core, but as any business owner knows, you never do just one thing. Luckily for me I have the support of my business partner mom and our wonderful executive team, trainers and coaches, and desk support employees, without which, we could never produce the high-quality experience that we do. My days are spent meeting with team members, vendors, potential collaborators, service providers, taking photos, posing for photos, approving marketing materials, creating new exercises, talking with clients, and oh, yeah, teaching workout classes (that's the highlight of my workday!)

SCHOOL PICKUP: I try to pick up my daughter who just started kindergarten every day because it's important to her. After school, often she and her brother end up in one of the studios rolling towels, practicing their HSM moves and learning the ropes of the family business.

PM: Many evenings are spent at charity events and HSM brand events. We are involved in local charities like Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center, The Children's Home Society, The American Heart Association, The Jeff Gordon Children's Foundation and many more. In our business, getting facetime in the community is crucial. With people so busy, it's imperative to stay in the forefront of their minds, and we do that through community involvement in the form of pop-up classes, events with other local businesses and parties (we'll take any excuse to party). At these events we always have fun and usually end the night with a delicious dinner and glass of wine at one of our favorite spots! It's part of the HSM lifestyle and joie de vivre.

9PM BEDTIME! I require a lot of sleep

Favorite part about being an entrepreneur?

Liz: I get my masters degree in business every single day! I'm not sure any business school can teach entrepreneurial skills. You've got to embrace feeling fearless and scared shitless at the same time and learn to be ok with it! I'm spontaneous, creative and fearless. Those are three seriously important skills to have in order to be successful on your own. Oh, and you also need to be willing to accept that you may not take a paycheck until your vision comes to fruition. In order to do so, you need to hire the very best, detail-oriented people to get all the moving parts working seamlessly. So, my favorite part about being an entrepreneur? Seeing my vision take root, come alive and grow and feeling that who I am matters and that my creation leaves a positive mark on the world or at least on the people who walk into my studio and then walk away happier, healthier and stronger. I'm reminded every day that my successes and or failures don't define me. What defines me is my commitment to spreading the good news about health and fitness and sharing my sense of joy with all those who come in contact with me, or my business.

My imagination is endless and my joy is as deep as the sea. The more I give, the more I have, because both are infinite.

Thanks Shakespeare! “My bounty is as boundless as the sea, My love as deep; the more I give to thee, The more I have, for both are infinite.” – Romeo & Juliet

Clary: The excitement! The freedom! The growth potential! The ability to act fast and make changes to the business quickly as opposed to a large company that can't move as swiftly. I love being in a position I can inspire other women to follow their dreams of entrepreneurship. Do it, girl!

Least favorite?

Liz: Sometimes the long hours can feel lonely, and some days you'd really just as soon let someone else make the decisions. But only for a split second do my doubts creep in. When I'm creating and working on all cylinders, it feels like my soul catches fire and takes over my doubts and my work becomes play. And then I remember that this is exactly what I'm suppose to be doing and nothing seems trivial or hard.

Clary: Multitasking overload. And the feeling you can never unplug because you will miss something. I've found that I am not in fact a great multitasker and I have to unplug so I can keep the quality of my work high.

What did you do before you went out on your own?

Liz: It feels like I've always been on my own. Right out of college I was a dental hygienist working on straight commission for two separate dentists. When Clary was a baby I started modeling with an agency in Charlotte for about a year before I struck out on my own and started representing other models as well as myself. In 2001 I decided to pursue a Stott Pilates trainer certification and rediscovered my love for physical movement. I also realized how fulfilling and inspiring it felt to

help my clients become healthy and strong. I was able to join all of those passions into one when I developed Hilliard Studio Method in 2007.

Clary: I was the Pro Bono and Community Relations Coordinator for Moore & Van Allen. It was such a fun job—I was literally paid to give the attorneys’ time and company’s money to causes that improved the Charlotte Community. We had weekly reading programs at low income elementary schools, fundraising campaigns for laudable non-profits and partnerships with legal non-profits to assist children and adults living in Mecklenburg County who needed but couldn’t afford legal representation. Plus I was a freelance fashion writer and had just started dating the man who is now my husband.

Why did you pick Charlotte as the home of your business?

Liz: Charlotte is my home and one of the great progressive cities in the country! People here are smart and for the most part health conscious. We don’t blend in or fit into the mold of the rest of the Carolinas. We’re the “hornet’s nest.” Our heritage is rebellious. Our state declaration of independence from Britain came in 1768 before the United States gained independence. I kind of love that and feel that energy still!

Clary: CLT is my home! Born and raised and fourth generation!

What inspired you to go out on your own?

Liz: I simply wanted a workout that produced results and not yawns. I was bored with gimmicky, uninspired workout classes and found a niche. No one else was combining the best of all the workout methods into a results oriented way. My goal

in life and business is to combine efficiency, results and fun, and if any of those three elements are missing, I'm not interested.

Clary: After receiving the ultimate wedding present (Hilliard Studio Method) from my mom, I was so inspired by my own metamorphosis that I decided to pursue a career in fitness. Timing worked well—after the wedding we were moving to Cambridge, MA for my husband's graduate school. Looking back, the time felt right to make a change. At the time, I was scared s***less—how could I tell all of my well-educated friends, and even worse, Robert's new Harvard friends—that I was pursuing a career in fitness?! It honestly took me about six months (while I interviewed for corporate jobs in Boston—nothing felt right) to wrestle with the thoughts in my head of making this leap before I was able to own it, say it, be it. I am going to be a fitness expert.

What do you do when you're not working?

Liz: I'm always working, but sometimes on Sunday afternoon you'll find me in a dark movie theater drinking wine and eating popcorn. The previews provide a good twenty to thirty minutes for answering emails!

Clary: All entrepreneurs are always working! But in my case, I love what I'm doing so I rarely feel like I'm working. But things I like to do include leisurely bike rides to restaurants, sporting events, and really anywhere, I love to bike! It's so much more relaxing than driving. I love to enjoy delicious dinners with my besties—delicious dinner = salad of all kinds of veggies and herbs in season, salmon or another fresh fish, popcorn popped on the stove and some really good wine! When I can't socialize anymore, there's nothing better than escaping to a dark movie theater! Mom and I have been known to go to the movies on the most beautiful of afternoons.

What is the biggest lesson you've learned from being out on your own?

Liz: Have courage in the face of failure and fearlessness in the face of fear. When you own your own business there are a lot of walls and obstacles to overcome. Learning to negotiate and move through these obstacles with grace and determination is essential.

My biggest challenge has been learning how to grow without losing control of the quality of my business. With three studios and a developing lifestyle brand, I cannot be everywhere at once. I've built a strong team that I can trust to get the job done while I'm looking forward to the next new thing.

I feel our biggest success was launching our flagship studio in 2013, and now that we've launched streaming Live Classes I am able to reach an audience worldwide. I can't wait for the launch of our activewear and jewelry lines schedule to be released later this year!

Clary: "Success is not final and failure is not fatal." – Liz Hilliard, *Be Powerful, Find Your Strength at Any Age*

Talk about a time you failed big time and what you did next.

Liz: As an adult I have failed many times in many ways but nothing seems to stick in my mind. Failure and success are just two sides of the same coin that I try not to take too much to heart. In my book I say, "Success is not final and failure is not fatal." The failure that affected me most happened when I was only eight years old when I was not able to decipher between my own shortcomings and those of another. I almost failed third grade, and as a matter of fact, I just got through it by the skin of my teeth! What remained from that year was a very sore hand from my

teacher's paddlings and a severely bruised sense of self-worth by her repeated announcements that I was stupid. Even though now I recognize it was she who failed me, I took my failure to heart and learned the powerful implication of words and the resulting feelings of helplessness. I harbored that feeling of stupidity until I was an adult, but eventually it led me to a life of empowerment for myself and in turn for others. I've written a book called *Be Powerful: Find Your Strength at Any Age* where I cite her as being my greatest teacher because she was.

Clary: I've failed too many times to count. With every project we start, we take chances. And when we fail we take a close look at what went wrong and how we can avoid that in the future. And then we move on, quickly. As mom wrote, "failure is not fatal," but sitting and wallowing in it can be.

Who do you look up to or look to for inspiration/advice?

Liz: In a world of fake celebrity, I look up to those who exhibit a sense of authenticity. Or simply anyone who tries their best.

Clary: So Siri always gives me the fastest advice on how to...
Mom tells me what I need to hear, but I'm not always ready to hear it...
Ashley Longshore reminds me if you're not having fun with it, it's not worth it...
And our clients inspire me EVERY DAY.

What's your motto, or some words you live by?

Liz: *Be Powerful* is my motto and the title of my book! Those words are also written on my studio wall. There's power in every person, and I strive to help them

connect to it. There's power in every moment and I want to always remember to embrace it and live it.

Clary: “Re-examine all you have been told. Dismiss what insults your soul.” -Walt Whitman... I think I got the eye roll from teachers in high school when I included this in my senior stream. I still love it.

What advice would you offer to someone who wants to be an entrepreneur?

Liz: Know your passion, and this better be it. You will run into walls and challenges you haven't even considered, but those challenges are the pathways to your next greatest success. Know your strengths and your weaknesses and surround yourself with a team of supportive, detail-oriented people who share your passion...and get a damn good accountant!

Clary: Would you do it for free? If so, you're ready to start your business. (Cause you'll likely be doing it for free for a while even after you do!)

Where can people stalk ya?

[@hilliardstudiomethod](#) and [@hsmcore](#)

What's your “power color”?

Liz: Dragon Blue

Clary: Tall – not a color but that’s sorta my thing at 6’1” and I feel powerful standing up straight and tall... in heels.

A Note from BW on Liz + Clary...

We chose the gals from Hilliard Studio Method to represent the entrepreneurial FITNESS space. When you meet people who emanate power, radiate grace and share their light with you from the first second you talk to them, you need to keep them as friends. These ladies empower others, inside and outside the gym, and truly serve as pillars (literally – have you seen how tall they are?) of the strength it takes to survive and THRIVE in the entrepreneurial world. Oh and the cherry on top? If you didn’t catch it: they’re mother and daughter; we’re offering the highest level of kudos on this one... can you imagine working with YOUR mom? (We can’t! Sorry, Chrissy!)