

Nia instructor inspired by the benefits of exercise

By VALARIE SCHWARTZ

The older we get, the more we rue that three-syllable word: exercise.

Kate Finlayson of Pittsboro knows the feeling. She had exercised all her life until an injury laid her up for several years. Now, at 50, she's a Nia instructor and invites anybody looking for a closer connection to their body to attend Nia Jam from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Friday in Carrboro Century Center. She will join three other local Nia instructors to provide 90 minutes of movement, giving folks an idea of what a Nia class could bring them.

Nia combines martial arts, yoga, dance and spiritual self healing.

Finlayson learned some things first-hand about self healing a few years ago.

A native of Tyler, Texas, she headed to Los Angeles in 1982 with a degree in broadcast communications and joined the throngs of actors looking for work. She found work in theater, television and film. In 1991, she moved to the Chapel Hill area after marrying Chris Canfield, now executive director of Audubon North Carolina; he has spent great energy during the past few years fighting the Navy's proposal to "share" a landing field in eastern North Carolina with thousands of migratory birds.

Finlayson continued her acting work, performing locally as well as teaching acting.

Life continued a pretty groovy refrain until she was in her 40s and her body began to act its age.

After years of aerobics, weight training and sports, she experienced her first injury and the discombobulation that can bring.

"I had developed an injury in my right shoulder," Finlayson said. "I ignored it." The "no pain no gain" mantra pushed her to continue even though the pain got worse, until her shoulder froze up. Then she saw a doctor.

"I was living with the chronic pain and the doctor saying it would be two years before it unfreezes," she said.

Finlayson could no longer exercise in any of her former ways and became disillusioned with a career that required so much self-focus.

"I quit everything," she said. "I wanted to do something to give back to society, but I didn't have any skills except waiting tables and acting."

Physical therapy became her main activity as she began work at Outdoor Bird in Raleigh a few days a week. There, she met someone who invited her to look at opportunities at the N.C. Museum of Natural Science. Following her love for nature, she became a certified North Carolina environmental educator and taught hour-long nature programs as an outreach educator.

In 1998 her shoulder felt better, so she took a class at what was then the Women's Club in Chapel Hill. It was her first experience with Nia.

"It's the joy of movement," Finlayson said. "We were meant to move. I took the class and laughed out loud."

But she didn't take another Nia class for five years.

"My other shoulder froze," she said. "It led me to really look at my health and start finding ways to heal myself, listening to my body."

But fear of more injury kept her from exercising. After her injuries healed and her dress size increased, she went to a second Nia class, this one at Millennium in Cole Park Plaza.

"I had the same teacher from five years before," Finlayson said.

This time she knew that Nia was what she needed, so she pursued training as an instructor. She has been teaching it since August and brings the method to Carrboro with classes from 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesdays, starting Oct. 5. The classes run through Nov. 9 (followed by a second session), cost \$33 and are given in Century Hall (where there are no mirrors).

Finlayson insists that anyone who can move can do Nia.

"Nia is all about being more conscious of your body. It forces you to be present and listen to your body. If it hurts, don't do it; move in a way that's pleasurable," she said. There are certain motions that she has to modify to compensate for her shoulders and knees, but nobody would know it to look at her. She has learned 35 routines. When she turns on soothing yet motivating international music, her demeanor changes; she's giving her body what it needs, a safe, total body cardiovascular workout.

"It's not about doing it right, but doing what feels right to YOUR body," she said.

Call 918-7364 or see <http://www.townofcarrboro.org/RP> to register. For more on Nia, see <http://www.nia-nia.com/>.