


I'll Do Anything Once: Pole dancing

Published: Friday, July 25, 2008 - 2:03 pm

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I don't know what made me more apprehensive about pole dancing class: Telling my father that I would be published, complete with pictures, chronicling my attendance at an exotic dance class; the potential of presenting myself to new acquaintances as an uncoordinated scrub that might fall off the pole and face plant; or the awkwardness that might ensue when the photographer, whom I work with every day, showed up to photograph me "getting my sexy on" in black Nike spandex and matching stilettos.

Probably the largest source of my concern was that I had no idea what I was in for. I genuinely had no idea if it was going to be a downright humiliating experience.

My father chuckled when I told him about my plans to attend pole-dancing class, which really set the stage for the light-heartedness that everyone at West End Dance Company approaches the class with.

When I showed up and saw a table in the corner of the studio set with three bottles of Merlot and some cups, I knew my evening wasn't going to be too uptight despite the fierce intimidation I get from organized dance classes.

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The wine was also evidence that I wasn't the only person might be a little shy about imitating the type of movements typically confined to dark, windowless gentlemen's clubs.

It just so happens that these classes are like a new-millennium, just-for-ladies book club social hour, only with a pole, abundant laughter and sparkly, break-neck platforms in place of a book and tea sandwiches.

The women in attendance meet each other at the studio every week at the same time, catching up on what has happened since their last meeting, telling jokes and letting loose.

It's hard not to quickly develop a bond with those that have grown accustomed to seeing you in compromising positions.

There are three levels of exotic dance classes at West End Dance Company: the exotic portion that doesn't yet incorporate a pole; a beginner pole course and then intermediate/expert pole.

The way the classes work is that they run in eight-week sessions (you pay \$50 per eight-week session), and as a student you must attend the majority of the one-night-a-week classes to graduate to the next level.

They even dub you with an exotic dancer name upon arrival. I was "Ariana" for the night, and if you ask me, I did a fearless job of fulfilling the role.

I attended both the exotic portion and beginner pole, spending two straight hours of my Monday evening being instructed by an ex-exotic dancer on how to gracefully crawl across the floor and arch my back just so in a choreographed dance segment to En Vogue's "My Man" and also getting a fierce work out.

At the beginning of both classes, the owner of the studio, Anna "Savvi" Stankiewicz, directed us in a very thorough stretching routine that included multiple push-ups, a painfully intense abs work out and squats.

I was expecting to leave that night and go straight to the gym, but I nixed that idea when I was busy doing plank for a seemingly endless amount of time while sweat steadily dripped off the end of my nose. (She later explained to me she was a personal trainer by day, which really put things into perspective).

Then we all donned our high heels. And by high heels, I need to specify that several ladies donned some serious eight-inch shoes in black patent or gold that are not sold in most stores and probably wouldn't ever be worn with their Sunday best.



 **zoom**


Emily Price took a pole dancing class for her "I'll Do Anything Once" assignment and found that it was a great workout.

MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/Staff

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Assignment: Pole dance at the West End Dance Studio

Scariness factor: 3

In a sentence: My name is now Ariana and they made us do lots of push ups.

Interesting in exotic dancing yourself?

Registration for winter 2008 classes is open. West End Dance Company

928 S. Main St.

864.320.2754

Classes will be held 7:30-8:30 p.m. Mondays. You must be 21 years old.

They also offer adult classes in hip-hop, tap and jazz.

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One woman's shoes had straps reminiscent of bondage that reached knees and involved no less than ten buckles. I was a little envious I didn't more look the part myself.

That's when instructor Nelinda Crider, also known as "London," took over. In the exotic class, she skillfully guiding us through eight-counts of hip-swiveling, thigh-rubbing, dropping-it-to-the-floor moves that we had to later perform ourselves in front of the class, just to ensure we were getting it all down pat.

When it was time for beginner pole class, I met a fresh batch of fun women (who, by the way, ranged in age by about 25 years) and had to endure yet another introductory workout before it was time to take a swing on the pole that had been installed just prior to class by "Sarvi."

She uses a removable pole in the studio because she teaches lots of children's classes and well, they just might ask some questions she could have a hard time answering.

Then "London" led us individually through another eight-count choreographed routine involving twisting and turning around the pole, throwing back our heads while holding on and gyrating against it in general.


It was probably a good thing that the class hadn't yet begun to learn how to scurry up the pole and hang upside down.

I managed to altogether avoid the risk of trying to claim worker's compensation from breaking a bone while pole dancing. I'm not sure my employer would have been too happy with that report.

My evening of exotica was a blast, and I have never been so thankful that I have some sort of natural mastery for handling myself in high heels. It really came in handy. I was also grateful for the fact that when it comes down to it, I'm not too bashful about things.

These women were so warm and welcoming that I had no problem dropping it like it was hot, because in truth it really was hot in all senses of the word.

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