

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

Like a Seal

I'm not normally shy. I don't embarrass easily. I enjoy performing in front of a crowd. But I've been doing something each morning over the past three weeks that I'm so glad nobody's witnessed. I've been doing Pilates ... with my wife ... on the carpet ... in front of the television ...

She worries a lot about my weight. She tells me I'll die a horrible death if I don't exercise more regularly. She remembers a time (which actually never happened) when people would stop me in shopping malls to admire the muscles that rippled beneath my shirt.

And she's been talking to my doctor, I think, because he's also on my case.

No longer content to poke objects in my ears, nose, throat and other unmentionable places, he refuses to let me leave his clinic until I've stood on his scales and been growled at. Frankly, he was a much nicer doctor when I was young.

The Pilates idea was my wife's, of course. She ordered this DVD – a step-by-step Pilates guide that promises to “*sculpt your body slim*”. And she's been making me join her on the floor each day before breakfast – for a 20-minute “*fast, fun, nonsense workout*”.



Between you and me, I don't need it. I'm still in good shape from the chest-expanders I used before we got married. And I'm highly suspicious of any exercise programme that's not pronounced the way it's written. (I mean, Pilates sounds more like an Italian flying school, if you ask me!)

But once my wife's made up her mind ...

Each morning, she drags me from my bed, pushes 'start' on the DVD, and challenges me to keep up with the gorgeous stretchy young ladies up there on the screen.

The first exercise is easy: I get to lie

FARM ADVICE: WHEN YOU WALLOW WITH PIGS, EXPECT TO GET DIRTY.

on my back and breathe. But *“when you exhale,”* adds the instructor, *“press your bellybutton into your spine and pull your ribcage together!”* – which I’m still not sure I understand.

I’m asked to bring one knee up to my chest and *“stretch it out straight like an arrow”*. But the best arrow I can manage is very badly bent!

“Now cross the leg over the body and swing it down and up,” says the voice – warning me not to wiggle my hips. But YOU try not wiggling your hips! It simply can’t be done!

I’m told to curl myself up into a C-shaped ball, and roll back and forth *“using my powerhouse”*. But my powerhouse must have flat batteries, because rolling back and forth can only be accomplished with much loud grunting and heaving.

Twenty minutes seems an awful long time just to tone my buttocks and thighs. And by this stage I’m way ahead of the ladies. But when I try to *“squeeze my tooshie”* I almost pop a

hernia. And while *“wringing air out of my lungs”* I nearly dislocate something.

The final exercise is a killer – but if my wife can do it so can I. *“Take your hands,”* says the instructor, *“and place them inside your legs. Then curl them around and hug your ankles. Now rock back, find your balance, and clap three times with your feet – like a seal!”*

“Like a seal?” That’s an understatement! I thrash about like a frantic beached whale. And my wife has to come and untangle me.

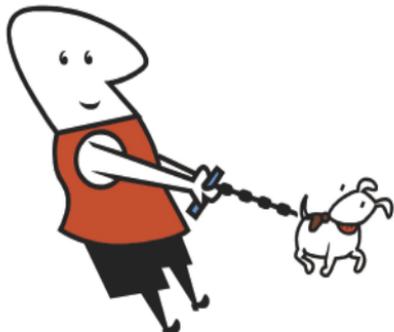
“You should now feel taller, stronger and more sculptured,” says the voice, announcing the torture is over. But she’s kidding, eh.

She must be.

I haven’t even got the strength to turn off the television ... ❁

JOHN COONEY, GRAPEVINE’S FOUNDER & EDITOR, CLAIMS HE HASN’T GOT A WEIGHT PROBLEM – HE HAS A HEIGHT PROBLEM: “I HAVE THE PERFECT BODY FOR A MAN WHO’S MUCH TALLER THAN ME!”

THORT



“I hope if dogs ever take over the world and they choose a king, they don’t just go by size, because I bet there are some Chihuahuas with really good ideas.”