

Carla Kenworthy

Age: 55

Occupation: Group Fitness/Zumba Instructor

Education: BA English/Creative Writing,
Stanford University

Marital Status: Married

Residence: Mountain View, CA



Zumba is the new dance craze sweeping the world for all ages. Why is it so popular among the 50+?

The catch phrase for Zumba is “ditch the workout, join the party!” It truly is about the music - which is based on Latin rhythms - and about having fun. The goal, of course, is to get in a good, sweaty, calorie-burning, energizing workout but the emphasis is on having fun, fun, fun, and when that infectious salsa or samba or tango or flamenco music comes on, it’s just a go.

There are dance styles to appeal to all generations but each style has its own appeal that crosses over, too. Tango and cha-cha may be more recognizable to those of us over 50 but there’s lots to love about the more recent additions of cumbia and reggaeton.

What are the health benefits of Zumba?

Makes you happy! Of course, as in any group dance exercise class, you get a great cardiovascular workout, improved balance, flexibility, muscle toning and it can burn a good amount of calories.

My mom’s effervescent Uncle Joe is an inspiration to my family and me. He was a professional musician and had a mariachi band that performed in nightclubs for many years. Widowed in the 1960s, he never remarried but continued to find happiness in dancing. He says dancing keeps him young. At our last family wedding reception Uncle Joe had to leave early because he “had a date to dance with the ladies.”

Why did you become a fitness instructor?

I’ve been physically active all my life. At five, a childhood introduction to ballet and tap dancing, then swimming and diving for a short while. I became enamored with baton twirling and eventually became competitive in solo and team events.

During my junior year at Stanford University, I tried out to be one of the Dollies with the Band, and I made it.

So I was back to dancing and performing in front of crowds – had a blast, of course!

After marriage, I worked for two small computer start-ups until we had our son. Fast forward to the late 80s-- our daughter was entering pre-school; I was staying home to care for them while my husband worked full time.

Teaching Zumba/fitness classes isn't what I expected to be doing when I got my degree in English and Creative Writing. But it's a service I'm convinced is vitally needed for our sedentary population.

Since early 2008, I've been involved as a dance instructor to a group of elementary school girls, mostly Latina, who are part of a research study called Project ECHALE (Enhancing Culture through Healthful Activity & Lifestyle Education) through the Stanford School of Medicine.

The study focuses on how daily exercise – in this case, folklorico and Zumba-style dance coupled with watching less TV, helps prevent the onset of teenage obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

It has given the girls an exposure to both dance and a connection to Stanford with the real possibility of studying there some day. I hope that years from now some of what they've experienced through ECHALE will have infused into their adult lives so that they stay healthy, happy and in turn, pass that on to their children and/or students.

Who inspires you?

I know that it's the connection to people that inspires me. The best is to have a comment from a class member who says something like, "I wasn't sure I'd like Zumba but



now I can't stay away!" Or, "Look at me! I've lost 16 pounds since I started your class!" Or, "I just have so much fun and I think I'm just a happier person now." I like that last one the most.

You were the first of your family to go to college attending Stanford University in 1973 on a full scholarship. Any words of wisdom for young Latinas?

When I was in the 8th grade, I caught a glimpse of my math teacher's son, a quarterback on Stanford's football team at the time, who had come to visit his mom at school.

She introduced him to us, explained where he went to school, what he did and told us we could do the same. So I kept that in mind for four more years until it was time to apply to colleges.

Without the benefit of an astute high school advisor and no AP courses under my belt, I bit the bullet and applied to four schools, with Stanford being my first, albeit remote, choice. Oh such joy when I was accepted, and elated when I found out I'd been awarded a State and Stanford scholarship!

Are you really a Latina?

You wouldn't know it by my surname, but I'm 75% Mexican-American, and 25% Irish - my

maiden name is Murray. My father was one-half Irish, half Mexican-American; my mother 100% Mexican-American.

My mom was born in Los Angeles. Because her parents spoke little English, she started school speaking only Spanish at a time when there was little help for non-English speakers.

My grandparents became U.S. citizens and were determined to learn English and for their children to have a good education. With the help from my mom and her siblings, my grandparents learned English.

Who are your heroes?

- My father-- the best man who ever lived: WWII infantry veteran, first-class father and husband.
- My mom and her family for over-coming many hurdles-- language being one of them.
- My parents for instilling the necessity of happiness into my life and for letting me go in the direction that was best for me.

What was the best advice you received?

To tune out naysayers and keep putting one foot in front of the other because happiness doesn't just arrive at your door.

What are you most passionate about?

Animal cruelty. Get rid of it!

How often and where do you teach Zumba?

Come to meet me! I'm at Avenidas in downtown Palo Alto, Wednesdays, 3:30 pm for beginners, 4:30 pm for intermediate/advanced; Thursdays, 11:30 am inter/adv. And at the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center, Palo Alto, Tuesday/Thursday, 6 pm.

I also teach Zumba classes for the corporate world—Oracle, SanDisk, Google.