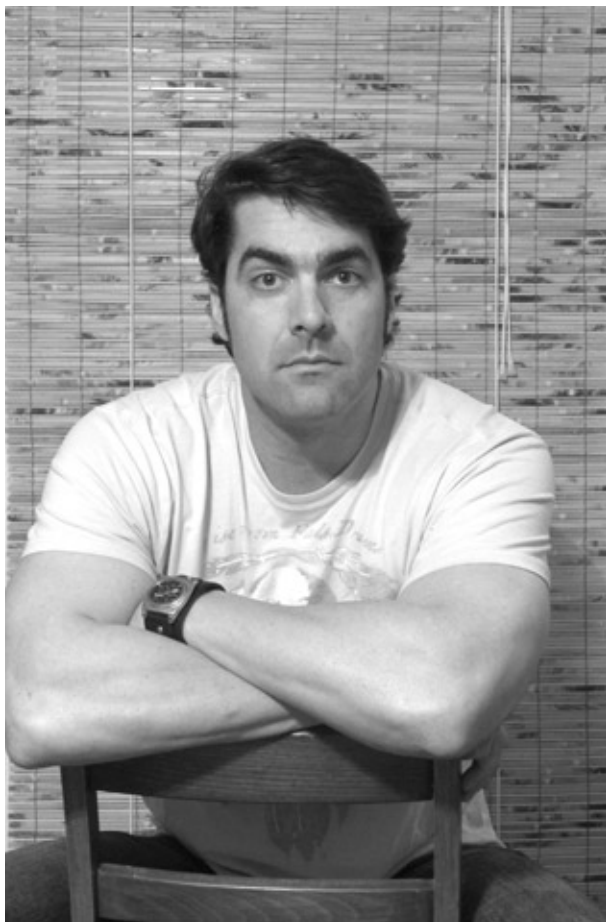


An Open Letter from Jesse Yodice



On days when I couldn't sleep or function, I'd work out in the gym. I'd work to get rid of the stress, and to work my way out of the chasm of depression.

Most readers of *Natural Awakenings* know Jesse Yodice as a certified personal trainer and licensed massage therapist in Little River. An article in February's edition of *Natural Awakenings* prompted him to share his very personal story of battle and triumph in the quest for emotional health. This is Jesse's story.

Jesse has been practicing personal training and massage along the Grand Strand for a number of years, building a solid reputation of professionalism and reliability. After years of hard work, Jesse was able to open his own private personal training studio, with a second studio opening in Wilmington just last year. This level of professionalism involved energy, reliability, tenacity, and an ever-ready smile. For his developing client base, it meant thinking positively and supporting his clients, who often endured tough times of their own, both emotionally and physically. Jesse always seemed up to the challenges placed before him, but in the midst of it all, he had a secret.

I felt like such a fraud.

I felt like I couldn't go on with my own life, after giving all day. I locked myself up at home and didn't want to see anyone if it meant having to paint another smile across my face. With me, my defense was isolation—"just go away and leave me alone." I wouldn't answer the phone or the door, because I couldn't do the "fake it 'til you make it" anymore. Sleep also became a huge issue, and one I'd never had before. I would lay awake at night like it was the middle of the day, and if I got two hours of sleep a night I was lucky. I found myself staring at the ceiling thinking, "what the hell is wrong with me?"

The hardest thing in my life.

Some of the reasons behind how I felt are very personal: divorce, separation from my daughter, and then depression set in. I had been with my ex-wife since we were seventeen, and we were together for seventeen years, but people change, grow as individuals, and grow separately. She and I are not the same seventeen year olds anymore, and we had grown apart. Still, for me, a divorce was the hardest thing I had had to face so far in life.

Being a personal trainer and massage therapist, I've heard it all from clients—everyone has something to deal with. In this job you are a healer and a giver, and giving is a natural thing for me because I like to help people feel better. I am a good listener, and I've always had a lot of empathy, which makes it easier to advise people on training and health-related stuff. Still, I guess I'm reluctant to take my own advice—kind of like the mechanic who can't seem to fix the family car. What do you do when your emotional strength is broken? You'd think I'd know how to fix it myself, just get the tools out and get to work, right?

Pretending to be okay.

It's a hard thing to do, pretending to be okay day after day. Sometimes, I wished that I had an office job, that I worked in a cubicle somewhere and didn't have to pretend to be happy. I couldn't smile or fake happiness. I was handing out

advice to others, but I realized that I wasn't following that same advice myself. I didn't realize how important emotional health was until I couldn't function anymore. That is what finally opened my eyes.

Commit to heal.

Once I made the commitment to getting back on track, there were still good and bad days. On days when I couldn't sleep or function, I'd work out in the gym. I'd work to get rid of the stress, and to work my way out of the chasm of depression. It's a Zen thing for me now, to "chill out and work out" while listening to John Mayer music. This is much different from my bodybuilding days, when I'd listen to Metallica and pound away at the weights. My attitude is completely different now. More balanced.

Massage was really important to my healing too. I began trading bodywork with other massage therapists, marking appointments on a calendar as I would any other time commitment. I like yoga, but it was too slow for me. I needed the gym, where I could get that feeling of exertion and hard work that comes with weights.

I even tried an old Native American tradition, where you write down your feelings on a piece of paper, fold it up and burn it, then watch the smoke fade away. It was a very helpful technique for me.

Thankfully, I didn't fall into eating problems. I force myself to eat right—and have all along—maybe because it was trained into me from body building. I'm not disconnected from my body, the way some people can be from stress—I can sense my physical needs even when my emotions are confused. Others might need more support in the areas of food and nutrition when they're fighting their way out of depression.

Along with all of this, I did visualization and other alternative therapies. I even tried an old Native American tradition, where you write down your feelings on a piece of paper, fold it up and burn it, then watch the smoke fade away. It was a very helpful technique for me.

Many times, when we feel depressed, we get stuck in a couple traps. Worrying about what we look like seems to be one of the most common, and people become obsessed with it. They start to think that working out is about what you look like in the mirror, but the wellness benefits get lost in the reflection. Another

trap is looking for quick solutions through medication. I hope that someone dealing with depression will read my story and try some other techniques before they start taking pills or slip deeper into that deep hole. Get counseling and supplement those efforts with a workout, with massage and with other alternative therapies. I did it for myself, but it took effort—I worked on it every day.

Getting through it.

Today, I'm getting a good six or seven hours of sleep and waking up just seconds before the alarm goes off. I have begun to feel more positive, and my self-esteem is slowly beginning to improve. I feel more like a better, happier person, and I'm not sure when it happened, but just finding that again was a joy. It took taking my own advice and looking for natural ways to help myself heal.

Many times, we feel like we don't have time for ourselves, but if we do take care of ourselves, we become better people, better wives, better husbands, and better parents. Get a trainer, even if it's only one time per week. Go to church, and surround yourself with positive people and a supportive environment. Get a massage, go to a licensed counselor, and try different therapies and alternative health techniques to work through your issues. Most of all, don't let problems run your life, and don't waste another day buried in negative emotions. You only get one life, and it is filled with time you can only spend once, so make it count. Meditate, breathe deeply, love, and smile. Healing and growing never stop.

Healthy ways of healing can help with any kind of trouble you are going through. Working out is one of those. I've seen changes in clients that were going through depression or similar things, seen them break down in tears when talking about what they thought was the reason they were working out. All that time between sets become personal time to talk, and a lot of talking happens then. People go through a training session, then give me a hug when they go out the door because they needed the workout (and the talk) that much. That hug is the biggest reward for my work, and you can't put a price on making such a difference in someone's life. So, if there is anyone who is going through something that is stealing away their life, call me. I'll give you a free training session, we will get right to work on it.

Maintaining emotional health is as important as staying physically healthy during both the good times and hard times of your life. You have to look at all the positive things, and for me it's my daughter – that's my life right there.

Jesse Yodice can be reached at The Urban Studio, Little River and Wilmington, at 602-3330. See ad page 35.