



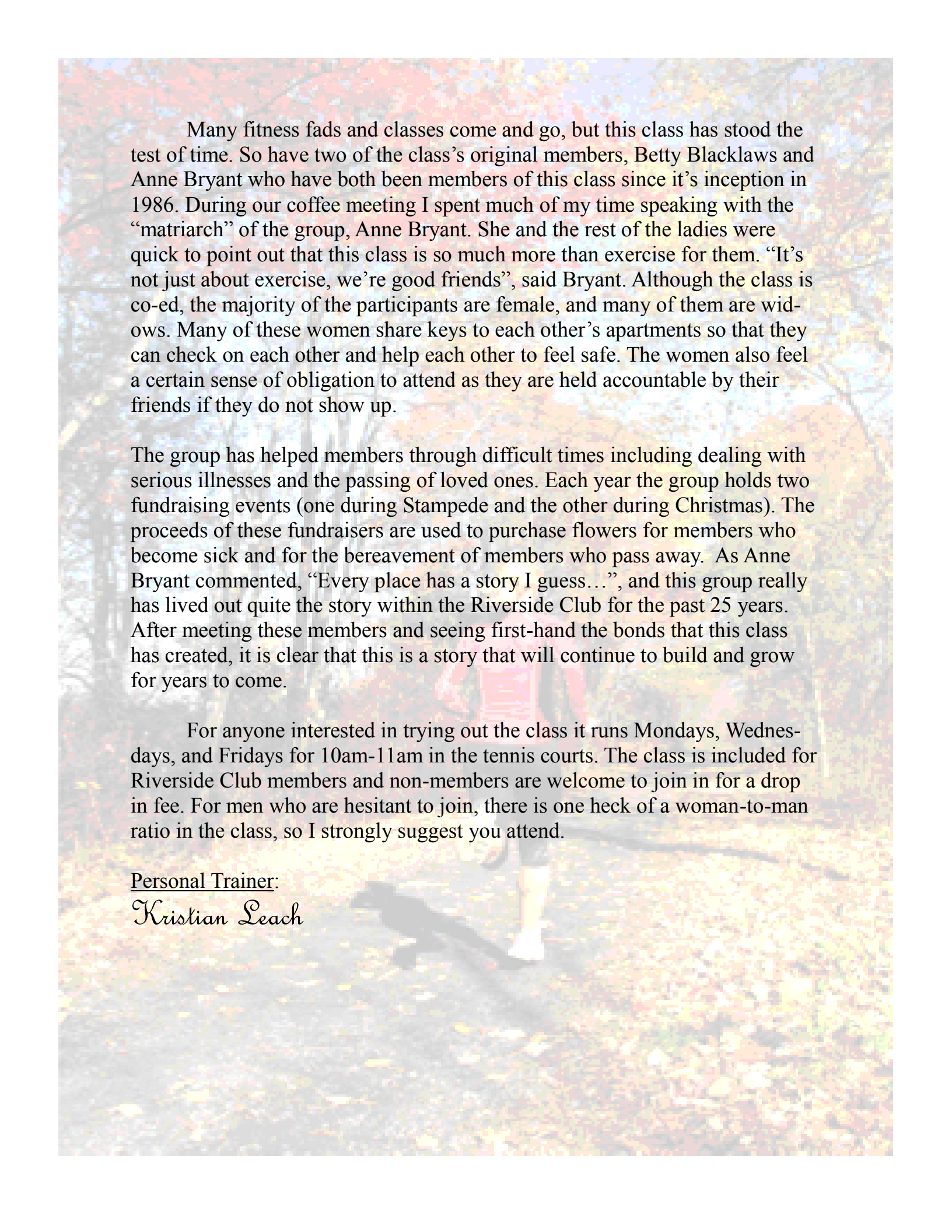
**Riverside Club**  
FITNESS • SPORTS • WELLNESS

A couple of weeks ago, The Riverside Club Manager Vicky Shields invited me to participate in the Wednesday morning session of “Gentle Fit” (formerly know as “Fit after Fifty”) . Having been a trainer at this club for three years, I realized that it was time to experience this fitness class first-hand. Given that the class is designed for senior aged participants, I appreciated the fact that the class members allowed my participation despite me being a few years shy of the age requirement.

Within minutes of beginning the class, I was humbled and surprised at the things that the Gentle Fit members could do, that I was physically unable to do. Vicky started off the class with a gentle walking warm-up and then turned up the volume on her boom-box for a variety of dance moves, including some rock n’ roll steps and polka. I was probably the only person in the class that couldn’t match my steps with the beat of the music. The rest of the class was movin’ and groovin’ like it was second nature. I looked across the room to see a couple of female participants trying very hard to contain their laughter after catching a glimpse of my unique dancing footwork.

After the warm-up, the class got right down to business by performing a series of lunges which incorporated all three planes of motion. Then as a class we selected our dumbbells and went through a full-body program of integrated resistance movements such as a squat with a biceps curl and a reverse lunge with a lateral dumbbell raise. I was extremely impressed with the class participant’s abilities to perform these complex movements. One participant who handled these movements very well, Mattie, will be celebrating her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in August of this year. The class finished up with some isolation work and stretching on the mats and I couldn’t help but feel impressed with the overall fitness level and abilities of the class.

After each Gentle Fit Class the class meets in The Calgary Golf Academy for coffee, and again, they were kind enough to let me join. After sitting and chatting with some of the ladies from the class I soon began to realize how very special this group is and how amazing their story is. The class was started at The Riverside Club by fitness instructor Sue Ogilvy, in February of 1986. This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the class. One of the class’s fitness instructors, Cathy Gerritsen has been instructing with the group for 20 years.



Many fitness fads and classes come and go, but this class has stood the test of time. So have two of the class's original members, Betty Blacklaws and Anne Bryant who have both been members of this class since its inception in 1986. During our coffee meeting I spent much of my time speaking with the "matriarch" of the group, Anne Bryant. She and the rest of the ladies were quick to point out that this class is so much more than exercise for them. "It's not just about exercise, we're good friends", said Bryant. Although the class is co-ed, the majority of the participants are female, and many of them are widows. Many of these women share keys to each other's apartments so that they can check on each other and help each other to feel safe. The women also feel a certain sense of obligation to attend as they are held accountable by their friends if they do not show up.

The group has helped members through difficult times including dealing with serious illnesses and the passing of loved ones. Each year the group holds two fundraising events (one during Stampede and the other during Christmas). The proceeds of these fundraisers are used to purchase flowers for members who become sick and for the bereavement of members who pass away. As Anne Bryant commented, "Every place has a story I guess...", and this group really has lived out quite the story within the Riverside Club for the past 25 years. After meeting these members and seeing first-hand the bonds that this class has created, it is clear that this is a story that will continue to build and grow for years to come.

For anyone interested in trying out the class it runs Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for 10am-11am in the tennis courts. The class is included for Riverside Club members and non-members are welcome to join in for a drop in fee. For men who are hesitant to join, there is one heck of a woman-to-man ratio in the class, so I strongly suggest you attend.

Personal Trainer:

*Kristian Leach*