

Lizzie Clarke

Well here goes, hopefully not a too long winded story of my Line Dance years as an instructor/choreographer for the past 30 years.

I had always loved Country Music and use to listen to Tommy Truesdale on West Sound Radio.

My Line Dancing all started in the year of 1985/1986. We decided to go to a Country New Year Event at Pontins Holiday Camp in Prestatyn, where I first seen Dick & Geneva Matteis giving a demonstration of Western Dance, both couples, partner & linedancing and thought gosh that looks great fun, there we also met up with Jim & Margaret and many of their friends from Ayr. Some of us went to a wee workshop where Dick & Geneva showed us a Linedance called (wait for it) Elvira, we must have danced it over and over again during the event, was great fun, knowing we could all dance this dance.

Early in 1986 we decided to go to the Southern Star in Ayr where I also met Brigitte the Editor of this magazine. We became members of the Southern Star and travelled down there every week. We also visited different clubs including the Southern Comfort in Kilwinning.

Whilst at another Country Music Event at Camber Sands in Sussex where I then met up again with Dick & Geneva and just loved learning from them, I think we then did County Line Cha, Tush Push & also learned a partner dance called Ten Step. They also showed us how to do the Two Step couple dance, all in all great times.

Dick & Geneva then asked me if I would like to join the D&G School of Western Dance and 'think' about becoming an instructor for the school. Was a long process, had to learn all the technique of dancing, i.e foot positions, terminology, BPM (beats per minute) of all the different genre of music, this was all linked to the National Teachers Association of Dance which was based in the USA. They then sent me 'tapes' with lots of instructions to learn on how to become a teacher, I travelled south a few times to meet up with D&G and learn more & more stuff and eventually exam time came, yes of course I was nervous but thankfully I passed all the exams with flying colours, but the lady who examined me Kelly Gellette from Las Vegas said if I didn't 'slow' down on my teaching, I would never become an instructor, to this day I still teach at 100mph lol.

In 1987 at the Southern Star I met Jelly Bean (Grace) who was a member of the Yellow Rose in Johnstone and she asked if I would come along and help out with their dancers doing festivals & charity events one being for the Erskine Hospital.

So off I went with my 'record player' and LP's to help the Yellow Rose dancers, I did then move on to pre-recorded 10 minute tapes to help make my teaching a wee bit

easier, on one side a practice speed and on the other side proper speed for the dances I had taught.

In November 1988 I attended a competition & social dancing event at Barton Hall in Torquay and thought the Scottish Dancers could do this so in the following years we put a wee group together and all travelled by bus to the events, I think they wondered what had hit them as all of our dancers danced at 100mph and laughed and smiled all the way through their competition dances. Willie Brown & other dancers from the Alamo and other clubs also competed at Barton Hall.

I continued to teach all over the country, and one of my early memories was meeting a chap on the paddle steamer Waverley when I was coming back from a festival in Rothesay called Danny Kerr & he introduced me later to Billy Kelly who was organising the Big Big Country Festival in the Fruit Market in Glasgow in 1996 and he asked if I could bring along a group of dancers to perform at this event. This is when I started teaching at Woodside Halls in Glasgow (Oct'1995) to get a group of dancers together to go along to the Festival, Billy very kindly bought me my first Head Microphone and in return I wrote Kelly's Kannibals with my daughter Beverley, which was dedicated to Billy.

The Festival was a great success and I thought 'right don't need to be at Woodside Halls anymore', job done, oh no the dancers wanted to carry on and in those days I could have between afternoon and evening classes 200 hundred dancers through the door. This is where I met so many of the folks who I am still in contact to this day, happy, happy times.

I was asked in 1997 by D&G if I would become a Training Officer for the D&G school, most of the trainees called me an Auntie, that is much nicer, all of the trainees worked so hard to gain their Instructors Certificates, months of dedication and studying, and delighted to say some of our great choreographers & teachers in Scotland and are still going strong and doing a great job of promoting Western Dance also other Instructors in Scotland are doing great, so pleased for them all, must keep encouraging our up and coming instructors and choreographers. Well done to you all.

Also in 1997 Roger & I were asked by D&G if we would become fellow directors of the Scottish UCWDC sanctioning competition event which became known as Scottish Gathering of Country Western Dance, these events were a great success for 6 years, hard work but very satisfying and produced some great Scottish Champions who attended the finals in the USA & Europe. About this time I started my judging exams, another long process, but worth it in the end, as I then judged (also did guest instruction) all over the UK & Ireland, Europe and the USA & Canada. Don't know how many times I travelled the world over the years but it was a lot.

We also did themed parties at the Normandy, Erskine Bridge & Rob Roy for a numbers of years, which were always a sell out and so many happy and Fun loving folks enjoying themselves.

I have also over the years been invited to Teach at numerous events again in Ireland, Europe, USA & Canada, doing at least 6Years at the JG2 Marathon in North Carolina, where we travelled with friends and had a wee holiday after it visiting numerous place including Nashville (where we had been before for the UCWDC Championships) amazing place, and of course the home of Country Music, we have also been at Fan Fair, great memories. My memories of Canada were fabulous working for Judy McDonald in Toronto & Vivienne Scott also in Toronto. Have done numerous States in USA and also nearly every country in the Continent. Also was invited to do a tour aboard the QE2 (that was an amazing experience), crossing the Bay of Biscay in a storm so my teaching went something like this 'vine to the right & run like hell to the left', but great fun.

Talking about the Continent I also started taking groups of dancers from all over the UK on Line dancing holidays abroad (did 19 all told), my first one being with Bill Black & the Dez Walters Band to Santa Ponsa in Majorca, we did another one the following year to Spain with the Andrew Henry Band. Unfortunately it was getting too expensive for the Tour Companies to keep taking bands (excess baggage etc)., so I was asked if I would carry on doing them just with CD's etc., so carried on, huge flight cases full of CD's amplifiers, microphones and of course enormous speakers, as the years went on the hotels abroad were contacted and we hired the sound equipment & all I had to carry was a laptop & microphone but... of course an extra bag of themed accessories, couldn't have a holiday without a theme. All of these holidays were fabulous, hard work, not a lot of time off, but all the dancers loved them so made all of the hard work worthwhile I loved them, thanks for the memories We had holidays in Spain, Majorca, Portugal, Cyprus & Tenerife, don't think I have missed any, and always an average of 100 dancers having FUN and enjoying the sunny weather.

During the years I have attended the Line Dancing Magazine's Crystal Boot Awards and have been honoured to have been Awarded Female Personality in 1999 and also the same Year Dance of the Year with Scotia Samba which was co-written with my Bev, I was sent the Mavericks music Dance the Night Away, it arrived in the first post one morning and within half an hour Scotia Samba was written, one of these pieces of music that just hits you on the back of the head. I was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2004, which was such a surprise, story behind that, beautiful evening dress bought, (laid on floor) , in the changing rooms getting ready to do a Sister Act routine and everyone was calling my name, so was inducted into the Hall of Fame dressed as a Nun!!! Could only happen to me, but hey ho that was the FUN side of yours truly.

Looking at the years of my diaries, we were astounded by the amount of travelling the length & breadth of the country teaching & and playing the music (i.e as a DJ) which involved thousands of miles by car on the infamous M6 motorway.

I am now off the circuit (tried to say retired), but someone said lately, Liz will never retire "dancing is in her blood", I suppose that is right still have a couple of wee classes, doing the old standards. (a quote from Max Perry, "to be good at any sport you must do it for at least a hundred times"), hence why we remember all the original dances, yeh we probably did do them a hundred times. Also doing some of the newer dances, there are some fabulous choreographers out there and we must move on and keep our love of dance going.

I am still going to the odd event with my pal Laney & some of the Mad folks who like to have a fun time, I am enjoying being on the outside looking in and having a relaxing time. Hopefully Roger & I will get back to visiting some of the clubs in the near future.

Finally got to say a HUGE Big Thank You to my family who have been there for me throughout my 30 years of having FUN, my husband Roger & my lovely daughter Beverley, without their love & support I couldn't have done what I have loved doing.

Last but by no means least, thank you to all the organisers and most importantly all of the folks who have joined me on my wonderful journey, you are the ones who have made it all worthwhile and helped me have so much FUN, keep dancing keep smiling and most importantly keep having FUN.

Luv n hugs Mad Lizzie xxx