



Julie loves to dance

Julie Lockton would describe herself as a happy Line dancer in the sun. Though she lives in Benidorm, Julie originates from Sidcup and made a life for herself in Spain some years ago. She tells Linedancer how she trips the light fantastic every day of the year.



Julie moved with Mick, her husband and son Josh, aged eight, in 2003. She laughs: "It was a rather rash decision I think, looking back now. Mick and I ran a driving school at the time and in a nutshell after many sleepless nights and months of wondering if we were doing the right thing, sold up everything and took the plunge." There were some family members living close and after getting Josh into school all fell into place. Julie says: "Seems like a lifetime ago, now." The couple eventually divorced and Joshua who is 20 now lives with his dad in Kent after finishing his studies in the UK.

In 2007, Julie met her partner Manfred and has lived with him ever since. She discovers Line dance totally by chance in 1996. "My ex-husband had family in Texas and during a visit we went to a real Dallas American Bar, the type you see in movies! It was so cool! They had a band on and 'real cowboys' were Line dancing! Stetsons, Wrangler Jeans, thumbs in belts... and that was me hooked!

Once home, even before I unpacked the cases, I was on the phone to find a local club...."

Three weeks later Julie starts her Line dance journey. It was 1996. It was

at Temple Hill Community Centre in Dartford, at the Temple Hillbillies club and it was with instructors, mum and daughter duo, Barbara Clements and Karen Morgan. "I slid in the back and watched and thought "I can do that". Boy did I get a shock when I tried to learn my first dance! It was, I'm sure, Cowboy Twist, followed by Cowgirl Charlston, Honky Tonk Stomp, Black Coffee and Hillbilly Rock, Hillbilly Roll." It was then that Julie met Laura Bates (aka Laura Sway) and the two women bonded. "Laura taught me how to applejack, in a Britney Spears T-shirt and pigtails."

So many happy memories... Julie's love of dance does not begin in 1996 however. "I always loved dancing as a little girl. I was active to say the least and did well in gymnastics and ISTD Ballroom and Latin!" Line dance however was something else and it was love at first step. Julie admits that it was akin to an addiction. "I went out and bought my white leather tassled Boots, frilly blouses and tassled shirts. In around 1998/1999 our teachers did our ISTD medals. I went for bronze, silver and gold in the C/W category and passed with honours in all three. I remember feeling so proud. I did Coasting on one and Quando When Quando was in there too somewhere."

Choreographing comes to Julie much later. "I was actually on a Flybe flight from Alicante and listening to my favourite 70's and 80's tracks on my ipod, all of a sudden my feet were tapping and my fingers counting." Before Julie reached the UK she had put together her first ever little dance called Tra La La La La to Boney M's, Brown Girl In The Ring. "It wasn't planned, it kind of just happened. I am a very creative person, always making things, taking photos, making videos, all sorts, so this really suited me. I was thrilled to bits."

Julie's own favourite dances are Physical, co-written with Pat Stott and her second was, My Biscuit which Ria Vos and Craig Bennett helped in making a hit. Julie adds: "Leighann Loves To Dance is my own favourite so far because I loved the catchy track straight away. I asked myself when it was finished whether I would teach that dance if it was someone else's and yes, I felt proud enough to think I would."

As far as favourite choreographers are concerned Rob Fowler is the man to beat for Julie. "My all time favourites... I have three really and two are Rob's, Deeply Completely and Syncopated Rhythm. I also love Esmeralda van de Pol's, Saved My Soul." >

And if Julie has one role model, it is Maggie G. "What a woman! She juggles her Line dance life with her family life and commitments as a mum to her children. She has produced some amazing dances over the years. At the Crystal Boot Awards this year she was so kind and nice to me and the other 'newbies' at the Nominee's dance rehearsals and practice. I admire her very much." But Julie also admits having a soft spot for Neville and Julie, "These two are amazing in what they have achieved and the dances they have produced, even more so recently. They just keep getting better!"

Julie is a shrewd businesswoman, looking after her holiday property rentals agency and also running her own events successfully via her website www.linedance-international.com. She says, "Going to the CBA this year I can only say "WOW". Whoever is at the back of this event works their socks off and I should know!" The first event Julie was involved with was in Spain with A & J and that year they welcomed Alison and Peter at the Hotel Sandos Monaco. Willie Brown followed soon after and then Rob Fowler and Daniel Whittaker. Julie recalls: "Those events were a sell out and I learnt a lot then about the importance of marketing and social networking." Julie is a keen user of Facebook and Twitter and encourages anyone to contact her via the website or social media. "I reply pretty quickly as most people will tell you," she laughs. The CBA was also when Julie achieved that very important first boot for My Guy. "My word, what a moment that was. I still can't get over it six months down the line!"

Her best achievement remains the birth of her son whom she describes as an "amazing young man and a lovely, adorable child." But THAT boot, in terms of Line dance, is her own milestone. This has also helped Julie in wanting to do more teaching during events, starting with her own and is also available for anyone else who may like to use her talents, she is not letting the grass grow under her feet. "I know I did say at the CBA that I was no instructor but hey! changes in life make things interesting. So watch this space."

Life in Spain is not always what people think. "It is a hard working life, for sure. Between my business, Line dance and life itself, I don't seem to have time to pause for breath." She admits that she can just about get by in Spanish but has never completely integrated with the Spanish as such. "Benidorm is such an eclectic crowd, and my business centres around Brits, customers and dancers on the main. I am not as fluent as I should be. Perhaps I should have done better but I know enough I guess." Just don't ask Julie to get you a knife, a fork or a spoon in Spanish. Mental block on those three words. "Josh despairs of me," she laughs. She adds more seriously: "Life here is not the sun sea and sangria you often see depicted. Not when you work and we do." She looks back at the UK and admits in missing some parts of it. "My parents and some of my family live there so the heartache is part of my life and theirs too. And I miss silly things too like shops and restaurants..." Has she plans to come back one day? "I would never say no, but I have not worked in the UK for so long now and my business

here is good. Maybe one day, who knows?"

Line dance in Spain is also something that has worked well for Julie, "I got back into Line dancing after being here for around two years and that is when I met Marie Monk. I remember learning Robert Lindsay's, Firecracker, with her, a popular dance here then." And Julie has gone full circle today. "Yep, I dance with Marie now but at her venue, the Albir Garden apartment complex, slightly out of Benidorm. She's a great gal and we love what we do."

Julie is having a very good 2015 and 2016 is looking fine too. "We have many events for 2016. And many are booking really well too. They are all on the website and Facebook too. 2017 is also set to see new faces and I am hoping these two years will also further my own dance career in other people's events. So yes, I am really excited!"

Julie is thankful. Thankful for her life, thankful for her friends. "I am so lucky to have this amazing network of friends (you know who you are). My family is everything to me and as for Fred (Manfred), he is the love of my life. We are a solid team and he supports me in every way he can. As I say I am lucky."

And if the future is as good as the present Julie will be thrilled. "Linedance is a world of music, dance, friendship, encouragement, dedication, loyalty and fun and has been my life for 20 years now. I can only hope it will be for another 20, as long as the knees and hips allow!"



