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Merry feet
Line Dance

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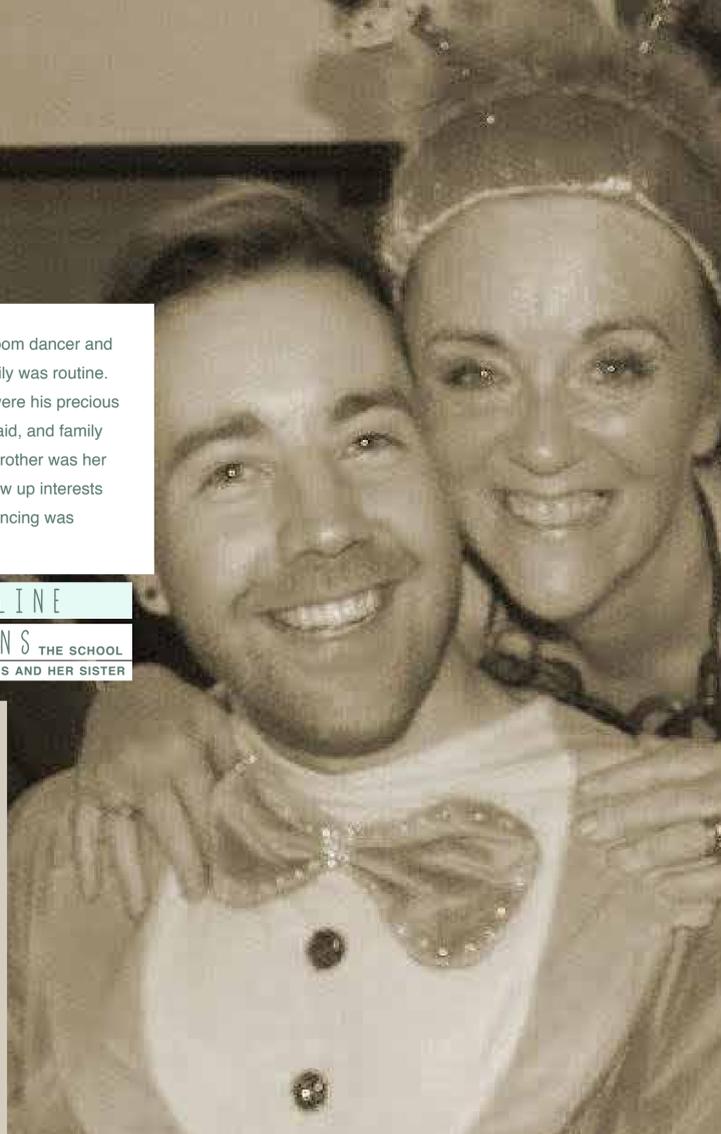
You are invited to Helen's Hug Fest soon after lockdown is over. Please book your places, because we are already reaching full capacity. This time when she calls you, fear not, it is for the warmest hug challenge. She will not make you jump off buildings.

Her family and friends make her the happiest. With six grandchildren she has discovered a new kind of happiness and love in her. Three of her grandchildren and her daughter live two minutes away, after they made the big move of selling the Dublin home to live in the countryside. A waterway runs in her backyard and she is happy that her husband and she can do the things they have always wanted to do together.

Helen's father was a ballroom dancer and dancing together as a family was routine. His children and his wife were his precious gems, her father always said, and family values, their gems... Her brother was her dance partner. As they grew up interests and priorities changed. Dancing was shelved for some years.

RHYTHM IN LINE
NASH-VILLAINS THE SCHOOL
SHE RAN WITH HER BROTHERS AND HER SISTER

HELEN O'MALLEY



This part came later in our conversation, and I have to mention it here because when she says, 'life's too short to take too seriously, take life as it is and embrace it,' she has walked the talk. With her hips replaced, and two surgeries for her spine, one ineffective and the other successful, Helen told her husband he would find it difficult to stop her when she recovered. While he was shouldering the shift of her lifestyle, she gave him hope.

She says that life is to be embraced and too short to be wasted in crying over your mistakes. 'Just make sure it's a good mistake'. Now Helen, you put me in deep thought. I have been wondering what my good mistakes are. Chatting with you is one, because I realise how hard I must work before I can begin to make a difference in peoples' lives. You have.

There is always something good out of something bad'. Helen is positive that the pandemic has raised the profile of the LDF. The work is endless and it is wonderful. She loves the challenge. She has worked for various charities, but the bonhomie in the Line Dance world, never ceases to dazzle her. An idea is dispatched and our folks step up and step forward.

Her decision to join LDF was taken instantly, on an offer when Betty, Steve and she met at an annual pamper weekend. She has loved the challenge and though the work is endless, she enjoys it and hopes to continue to add value.

Last year when she announced the Reach Out initiative at an LDF event, you could hear a pin drop. It resonated with everybody sitting in the audience. She won the 'love of dance' award. 'Getting an award for something I love' gives her the opportunity to put out the name, and gather help for the Reach Out program. 'My focus is to raise awareness about the work we are doing'.

Line Dance came to Ireland in 1991. She enrolled her family and friends and this activity became an integral part of their lives and she started teaching dance again. It was a big wave and she loved it. Her students from then are her friends now and they have been together, through thick and thin. Line Dance connects hearts in a different way. People go away only to come back to this comfortable space. For her dance is enjoyment and togetherness. And I love what she says, "walking to music is what dancing is and everybody walks a bit different.' Helen, may I steal this for my students?

'DEAREST TO MY HEART' IS THE MOMENT WHEN 'BLACK COFFEE' WAS AWARDED THE BEST CHOREOGRAPHY AT THE CRYSTAL BOOT AWARDS. AND GUESS WHO WAS INVITED TO GIVE IT AWAY? HER DAD. SHE HAD LOST HER MOTHER THE SAME YEAR. SHE TELLS ME THIS IN OUR CHAT, WITH ME SITTING YEARS AND MILES AWAY, AND I FEEL THE WARMTH OF THE EVENING. 'THERE WASN'T A DRY EYE THERE AT THE EVENT' SHE CRIED THAT WHOLE NIGHT.

In conversation with Helen, I understand how the 26th September Reach Out resonates with the time we have slipped into. Though this was launched last year, separateness, loneliness owing to the pandemic has given the initiative more relevance. 'Talk to your neighbours, people are the best medicine for people', she says. When turning away from one another has become a reality, the line dance world moves towards you, to be there for you.



PEOPLE ARE THE BEST

MEDICINE FOR PEOPLE



Though the social aspect of line dance is what brings people together, she commends the contribution of the World Dance Masters who devote themselves to reimagining and reapplying style, technique, and genre to reinvent dance styles for us. Musicology and competitions have reached new levels. They have done an immense amount of good work. And line dance is the one dance form, where instructors, choreographers, and dancers can be on the same floor and enjoy being together. As long as the music is not offensive, she enjoys every kind of line dance. She speaks fondly of Rob Fowler and she, going a long way back. She tells me how people like him and the others have worked tirelessly for the line dance community. And of course he has stories to tell like none other. I look forward to our chat, Rob.

She, at one point sitting in a hotel in the UK, decided she had to choose between the two landscapes, her very hectic class to city toevent life, and her family. In retrospect she knows she would make the same choice again. She had called up Betty and told her that she wished to retire from touring. Sometimes she did wonder if the decision was hasty. Her annual meetings at the Crystal Boot Awards kept her connected with the line dance family, though, and she was happy about that.

Last year she ideated for the Pieta House in Dublin to organise a dance marathon called 'From Darkness Until Light' from 10 pm to 7 am. Three hundred and fifty dancers participated and they collected forty four thousand pounds for the benefit of the society that was addressing suicidal and depressed cases. In 1994 she had done a similar exercise by organising an international dance marathon. They managed to bring in a quarter of a million over some years. "No charity is bad", she says.

WHEN ARE YOU RESUMING
..YOUR TREKS HELEN
BRAZIL.SOUTH AFRICA
..VIETNAM.ALL DONE
HOW ABOUT COMING
DOWN TO THE HIMALAYAS?