



Where were you or what did you see that made you say, "I want to do that!!"

We were having a great time as couple dancers, traveling with friends and meeting folks in other towns. But we started to notice a lot of single ladies just sitting around the sidelines watching. No one was asking them to dance, which couldn't have been much fun for them, so we decided to start teaching and promoting line dancing.

How did you get started with dancing?

As couple dancers we took lessons from Barry Durand, Dave Getty, Mike Haley, Jeff Bartholomew and other headliners. James was a member of a well-known dance team in the early '90's called The Longbranch Dancers (named after a local club we danced in). It was a big team, with 40 dancers, and they took turns teaching line dance. James really got the "teaching" bug and the Longbranch decided to hire us as line dance instructors.

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A group of us always sat together when we were at the 'Branch. One weekend, at a cookout, the group decided to form a "team" and the Rhinestone Dancers were born. Mary Beal had been a champion roller skater and always put rhinestones on all her blouses. The rest of us girls decided that was what we would do too. We'd

purchase \$7 blouses and put about \$50 or \$60 worth of Austrian crystals on the blouses. And of course our guys had to have their shirts stoned! We sparkled and shined! dancing at nursing homes, in parades and festivals, in rodeo rinks (2 feet deep in soft dirt), on flat bed trucks (10' high), in the rain, in the blistering sun (coming just short of heat stroke), on asphalt, rocks. You name it, We danced on it and had a blast!

James and I also taught line dance classes in three small towns within an hour of Raleigh. He would teach (traveling all over the room) and I would stand up front. People would say to me "I can hear him, but where is he?" We also taught line dance in PE programs in NC, SC, GA, FL, VA and WV to PE teachers and received a certificate of recognition for the work we did in getting dance recognized as a legitimate curriculum in the NC school system.

The very first UCWDC event we worked was the Atlantic Seashore in Williamsburg, Va. And over the next many years, we worked very hard to help bring line dance competition into the UCWDC events.

What made you want to continue?

We were having too much fun dancing and our real jobs started to get in the way. It was nothing for us to leave after work on Thursday, and drive 8, 10, 15 hours to get to an event ready to work early Friday morning, and then drive like bats on Sunday to get home in time for work on Monday. In '95, we cashed in all our savings, deciding to be full time traveling line dance instructors. That same year, we purchased a new blue conversion van. It had 30 miles on it when we drove it off the lot. We drove all over the country to so many dance events that the odometer showed 6,600 miles before we even made the first payment.

We've had many years of fun, excitement and meeting wonderful people along the way, in addition to adventures on the highway. One year, on our way back from an event in Kentucky, we had two blowouts, one outside of Lexington and the second just before the tunnel at Exit 1 in West Virginia. James started walking to get help, leaving me to wait with the van and trailer. Luckily some very nice fellows in the tunnel office saw us and came to our rescue. Another time (on way back from Kentucky again), the transmission went out, and there we go, 75 miles an hour in 1st gear in the breakdown lane. James managed to get it to the top of a ramp before it died completely and, once again, someone came to our rescue.

James has driven through whiteouts and snow two feet deep to get us to dance events on time. One year it was so cold the wiper motor froze and we drove the whole way with no wiper blades.

Last year we were in an accident that could have turned out really bad, but James' driving skills saved our lives. (My car was another matter, but we did find out it could fly!) Through the years, we've become seasoned road warriors, getting lost more times than we can count. BUT, now I am an expert when it comes to reading a map and figuring out the mileage. We know the locations of the best rest stops, the cleanest Waffle Houses, the most reasonable motels and we have learned to never, never

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forgot to pick up those motel coupon books that you find at all of the Denny's, Shoney's, and Waffle Houses along the way.

What type of dancing/teaching do you do?

We specialize in teaching Line Dance. If James likes the dance, he teaches it. He picks fun dances that he sees on his many travels and has promoted many unknown choreographers through the years. He also enjoys taking older dances from our archives that we have collected through the years and matching them with newer music. (In the early years, we published 7 dance books, each with 120 dances from beginner to advanced and also patterned partner).

What dances have you choreographed that you are most proud of (because I know some of you will have a zillion of them)?

We haven't choreographed many dances and none in the past 5 years because there are so many really good dances out there by other choreographers that James wants to teach. However, the following are ones we're very proud of and still receive emails from folks still teaching them or just discovering them. They include:

The McGraw Stroll (pattern partner – b/i), Rockin' Josie Jo, jg2 Cha, Do What Boogie, The Fred, Whutt? Heyyyy!, Turbo Twang, Say Yes!!!, Cranberry Wine, New Country Mixer (pattern partner/i), Tricky Tricky (with Pedro) and Coyote Sing.

What has been a real thrill for you related to dancing?

Watching folks realize they don't have two left feet and become totally addicted to dancing.

What type of job do you do or dream of doing (if you would like to share it)?

Our dream came true when we created the Line Dance Marathon 13 years ago. For 3 years it was a one-day, 3-room workshop held at the Longbranch Saloon. It grew bigger, so the 4th year it was moved to Ahoskie NC, 2.5 hours east of Raleigh. The motel was wonderful, with an atrium and 100 rooms. It was located in the middle of nowhere, a corn field on one side and a poppy field on the other. There was a service station in the parking lot that stayed open 24 hours and had the best greasy sausage biscuits that my friend Speedo (from Vermont) and I have ever eaten. We stayed in Ahoskie for 2 years and moved to the Hilton in Raleigh. We outgrew the Hilton the first year and moved to the Sheraton Imperial which is now our home and has been for the last 7 years, and the entire staff is amazing! We so appreciate and are so happy with all the love and support we get each year from the dancers that travel from all over the world to come to our dance weekend. The people that come to the event every year, the instructors, our helpers, etc have become our extended line dance family.

Where do you consider "home"?

North Carolina. I was born and raised in Durham, about 20 miles west of Raleigh, moving to Raleigh in 1960 as a new bride. James grew up in Garner and farmed not far from where we live.

What hobbies and interests do you have outside of dancing?

James loves to landscape and he recently built our detached two-car garage. He also put in a lot of sweat equity when we built the addition to our home. And I love showing off our grandchildren.

Share information about your family (if you would like to share it).

To our grandbabies, I'm Mema and James is Honey.

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My son Michael lives in Raleigh with his wife Linda and daughter Claire, and 2 dogs (about 30 minutes away) and hopefully in August we will be adding a new baby girl from China.

My daughter Meredith lives in a small community just north of Durham (called Bahama) with her husband Gary and three children, Ivy, Stealth and Paige and a beautiful horse, Heart, 2 dogs Andy and Sophie and 3 cats. My oldest son Stuart passed away in 1990 after a long illness and we still miss him very much. .

I have 3 sisters Eileen, Gayle and Robin, 3 nephews and 3 nieces. (Should 3 be my lucky number?) Eileen still lives in Durham (about 40 minutes away) with our mother May, who is almost 93 and has more energy than anyone could ever hope to have. She has been attending a Duke Hospital exercise program 3 days a week for the past 25 years and just recently was interviewed by NBC.

James' brother Billy and 2 sisters, Dolores and Gail and their children (2 nieces and 3 nephews and 5 great nieces and 2 great nephews) live within 5 miles of us.

Who have been mentors in your dance career?

There have been many but the one that stands out the most is Bill Bradford of Boston, prominent in the New England Dance Educators Association. From the git go, Bill (who passed away a few years ago) and his wife Karen became our videographers (Image Makers). Bill would spend hours with James and me at our dining room table teaching us how to count, phrase music and distinguish the different rhythms. (I still have trouble distinguishing between polka and triple 2.) Bill taught James the cadence he uses when teaching and stressed that we spoon feed technique to dancers, not shove it down their throats, and above all make it fun. This education was priceless.

Just give us a general overview of you as a person and a dancer.

We have never regretted our decision to make line dancing a career. We were lucky to get involved when it was first starting out and have been watching it grow and change every year. Meeting so many wonderful people through our travels has made it all worthwhile.

