

Picture this: Inside you still feel like a young woman, slender and graceful. But when you look in the mirror, you see a hippo. You feel at odds with your body; clumsy, uncoordinated. You want to dance, it calls to you, but there's nothing where you'd appear even remotely like you belonged there. Right?

Wrong. Enter burlesque. A less well-known dance class that anyone can do.

If you've ever hummed along to a song, you can learn burlesque. If you've ever danced a few steps when no-one was looking, you can learn burlesque. In short, as long as you're still breathing, you can learn burlesque!

Burlesque is more about the joy of rhythmic movement than pure accuracy. You make a wrong move in a burlesque routine and it's not wrong, it's simply your own version. And having your own version of anything is a huge uplift to how you feel inside.

There's never a wrong time to start doing it. It's a great place to learn how to feel good about your body. Follow a few simple instructions and you, too, can dance burlesque.

Each routine is learned over four weeks and, on that fourth week, we dress up. That could be anything from shirts and ties to glamorous lingerie, corsets and stockings, feather boas and fans to gloves and hats. And as for footwear - anything from dancing in socks or bare feet, to trainers or ballet pumps, or even strappy stilettos and boots. Whatever the routine calls for, or even if it doesn't. There will be a theme but after that the choice is yours!

Even us hippos can learn it, and I know this first-hand, because I have. I've been videoed doing a burlesque routine and, much as I hate seeing myself on camera, I didn't do a bad job. I've remembered big chunks of a Christmas routine twelve months after learning it because the moves embedded themselves in my head - at a time of life where other things are slipping away due to stress and hormonal issues. The routines just go with the music so well, it's easy to remember. I even managed, for a few months, to feel comfortable enough in my own skin, through dancing burlesque, to have a boudoir photo shoot. That's some achievement for a fifty-something who's abused her body for years with poor eating choices and has a BMI of "morbidly obese". But I'm sure as sh\*t not dead yet!

Burlesque gives me that little bit of confidence. It allows me to learn new routines and perform them in front of my classmates. It gives me camaraderie and new friendships. It gives me a bit more suppleness in my joints. And it gives me some time, once a week, where I know I will be amongst like-minded people, all trying to carve out an hour for ourselves just for some me-time.

It gives something back to myself which I'd lost in my twenties: a large chunk of my self-respect.

And the best bit? Even if I have to put it aside for a while, I know I can go back to it any time and be just as welcome. There's always the next routine to learn. Burlesque is all-inclusive: every shape, size, age group.

It's for everyone. Why not try it?