

The Coventry Lady who taught the City to dance

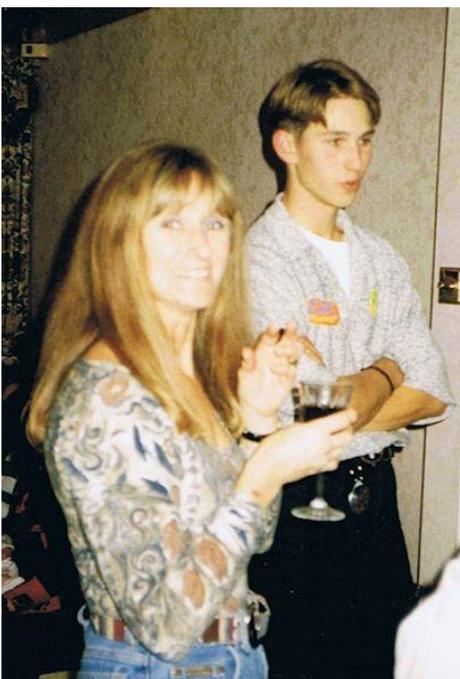


Susan West would have been 65 on 2nd October 2014 had she not succumbed to Alzheimer's, a condition she suffered for over a decade. Her life was cruelly cut short in her prime, a life dedicated to the dance, teaching and raising funds for a variety of charities.

Susan West School of Dance inspired generations of pupils who learned to express themselves through dance and musical theatre and raised tens of thousands of pounds for charity through her annual dance shows. *Miss Susan* was remembered by hundreds on Monday 19th May at the Church of the Risen Christ, Wyken Croft and laid to rest at St Paul's Church Yard after a blessed release.

Daughter of Brenda and Leonard West, Grand-Daughter of Edward and Hannah Ferguson of Longford and Great-Niece of 'Crack' Adams, Susan was a pupil and later teaching assistant at Myrna School of Dance where she qualified as a dancer in tap ballet and acrobatics. Against much opposition from staff at Foxford School Susan insisted on leaving age 16 and after a brief career on the stage, mainly in pantomime, in the mid-1960s she returned to Coventry to establish the highly successful Susan West School of Dance. She taught hundreds of pupils from toddlers to teenagers and in time the daughters of former pupils. Her students achieved excellent examination success with the Association of American Tap and Dance, where she became progressively examiner, judge and board member.

During the early years as she established her school, she was a receptionist for Salmons the Opticians, first in the Precinct and later in Ball Lane where, as Councillor Tim Sawdon fondly remembered, 'Sue and I worked together in the early 1970s. In theory I was her boss but suspect in practice it was often the other way around! We should have been renamed 'Salmon Opticians & Susan West School of Dance' as the two were sometimes indistinguishable. Still it was good for business as it brought in patients so we never complained.' Tim recalled her lovely personality, 'who always put people at their ease and her charitable work an inspiration to us all.'



To show-window the quality of her students' talents Susan put on annual dance shows at the Methodist Central Hall and later the Butts Theatre. Performances were well received and eventually included both her daughter Carrie-Ann and her son, Jon-Scott who demonstrated his athletic martial arts prowess accompanying a dance routine to the song *Kung Fu Fighting*. In almost forty years the shows raised tens of thousands of pounds for her preferred charities, mainly research into cancer and motor-neurone disease. On 28th November 2012 Susan's charity work was recognised in a letter from Her Majesty the Queen, and the same year a Civic Citation by the Mayor of Coventry, Councillor Tim Sawdon but sadly, was unable to receive either in person.

Susan leaves husband Neil, loving son Jon-Scott, Christine and family, daughter Carrie-Ann, Edwin and son Jude. She is sorely

missed by her mother, Brenda West, (92), Aunt Nelly, (101), Brother Keith and civil partner Brendan, sister Glenda and husband Stewart, Nephews, Nieces and Ferguson family cousins. As hope for the future, just eight days before her passing, Susan's only grandson, Jude, was born to her daughter, Carrie-Ann Thomas.

She is greatly missed and may she find peace and eternal rest.

Susan Glover nee Susan Edwina West
12 October 1949 – 29 April 2014



Eulogy for a Sister: Susan

You have heard about Susan as daughter, sister, mother and friend and also about her passion for dancing, her teaching, choreography and charity work... so what more could be added to that? Well... behind all those qualities was a person, a person whom all my life I have tried to identify. Susan was born my birthday present two years and a fortnight after me, and consequently don't think I ever saw her as distinct from me: When I was five I sat her in the boot of my tricycle and, she holding on for dear life, I belted up and down Sydnall Road in Longford, scattering pedestrians along the way. But when other boys called on me to play I didn't want my little sister tagging along so in my childish way, I pushed her away. It was, I suppose, a natural process of separation – but one I regret because from then onwards, there remained a part of her I had to rediscover.

In 1964, the Beatles, Motown and Dusty Springfield were the dominant pop personalities and it was then I first recognised how perceptive Susan was: She had a remarkable ability to pick music tracks and performers who were to become the next big thing. It was also the time dancing was to become her life and from a gentle, open hearted public persona I saw a steely determination gradually emerge.

The question is –where did that determination and talent for music and dance come from? There is a family legend that her Grandmother – Hannah Embray–Ferguson slipped off to Birmingham to become a dancer. Not good for her reputation but she remembered dancing behind Gertie Gitana and Marie Lloyd among others. Chickens came home to roost when her elder sister Polly, her guardian since their mother's early death, heard of her exploits. What annoyed Hannah was not being found out but having to hand over her wages thereafter. That was the end of that career but there is a faint echo in gossip around Longford about a trip she made to Paris in 1946 as a merry widow when friends spilled the beans about an escapade at the Moulin Rouge which included, among other indiscretions, dancing on tables... There was also a Great-Uncle who was a violinist in the precursor to the Birmingham Symphony orchestra and all our Ferguson aunts played instruments except for Brenda – whom her father Edward said 'played her face...'

The common assumption is that art, whether dance, music or painting, just materialises from thin air, a product of pure inspiration but it is utter nonsense. Artists are among the most organised people there are and Susan had all the characteristics serious artists have in common, hard work and preparation, meticulous attention to detail, rehearsal - practice, practice, practice - and execution to the highest standard. Of course inspiration plays its part, but without a clear vision, the rest is vacuous and pointless; as someone said Art is 99% *perspiration* and 1% *inspiration*. The results are evident in her successful career and life.

I once thought Susan should consider a dance choreographed to a Dusty Springfield track from her penultimate album called *Reputation*. The track is *Daydreaming* and includes the line: 'I want to watch the parade, you want to watch TV, so we don't do either, it's insanity...' I imagined a figure lying in semi-darkness on a couch with a huge window behind with a video loop of the changing of the guards ceremony projected on the glass, echoed by young pupils in soldiers' uniforms dancing a tap routine to the rhythm of the backing track with a beautiful ballet dancer in a white chemise who implores the daydreamer to join her in the dance... to no avail...

May the Lord of the Dance always be her partner...

Keith West