

Sharon Wright

THROWS A SALSA BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR HER HUSBAND

MY DANCE partner wasn't letting being half a head shorter than me get in the way of his machismo. "The man leads!" he told my chin sternly and I tried to go a bit submissive, arms-wise.

But it was no good. A sweat had broken out on my upper lip as I stared fixedly at my feet, trying to maintain the forward, back, sideways, twirl.

I don't like to go on and on about what a wonderful wife I am but I'd organised the surprise salsa party for Husband's Big Birthday. I won't tell you which particular Big 0 we're talking about in case I get flooded with junk mail for stairlifts and funeral plans, but a bash was clearly called for.

A year ago, he'd made several speeches about the fact that he didn't want a party. But as the date grew nearer, it was obvious that really he did, and it fell to me to organise the "surprise".

Casting around for ideas a bit more exciting than sausages on sticks and Wig Wam Bam, I remembered his terrible secret.

He used to go salsa dancing before he met me. I was shocked, of course I was, but it's the sort of thing you have to overlook in the name of love.

"I loved the music," he said. "And the chance to meet women," I said. "And the Latin atmosphere," he ploughed on.

"But mainly," I said, "the hope of coping off with a snake-hipped seniorita."

"Well, yeah," he sighed. So now was the time to be kind. Another decade and it might be a Sanatogen party at best.

All our friends duly arrived, grabbed a glass of fizz and glanced around nervously. This was the British 'burbs in winter, not Brazil, and no one was likely to come over a bit loose-limbed and expressive when the bongos sounded.

So the blouson-shirted band started up at one end of the hall and we all stood huddled at the other, with a gaping expanse in between, like the start of a school disco.

"Just say when," said the dance teacher.

"Er, OK," I said, deciding our nearest and dearest needed a few drinks down them first.

FINALLY, he strode into the centre of the room and clapped his hands. Everyone shrank into the corners, their eyes unblinking. Not what you might call salsa enthusiasts. Some of those people hadn't wiggled their hips since the Seventies.

I came over a bit PE teacher and ushered everyone forward into lines to practise some basics. And as I stepped to the side twice, then back again, a terrible feeling came over me. I was line dancing. Oh, shoot me now.

Thank God we moved into a circle of couples where we all moved one partner along every few minutes.

I'd like to say I was a convert, that I was swept along as everyone else relaxed into the fun.

Actually I couldn't help fixating on the fact that every man I know was forced to lay a hand on my waist over the precise spot of hold-in knickers "overspill". I bet that never happened with Carmen Miranda.

And when the Husband grabbed me at the end for a star turn dancing alone in front of everyone, I contemplated throwing a faint.

Sure, we both went the wrong way on the twirl and nearly dislocated our shoulders. True, the look on my face was more akin to rictus than being lost in rhythm, but bless - there was the Husband, finally salsa dancing with a woman who would follow him home.

True, my less-than-snake-like hips might have been held firmly in place with military-strength Lycra, but you can't have everything.

All those men were touching a part of me I'd rather they didn't

expressyourself Life choices

My friends are so important

TV Supernanny Jo Frost, 36, is single and lives in West London

FOOD

Always the same or always game?

I'm a bit of both. I have my favourites but I'm not afraid to try anything new. If I'm in a restaurant which has snails on the menu, I'll always order them because I love them.

CLOTHES

M&S or D&G?

I'm more high street but I do have a few designer pieces in my wardrobe and have always been like that - I'm a very balanced woman. The high street shops I go to are M&S, Jigsaw and Whistles, while my favourite designers are Betsey Johnson - especially her dresses - Marc Jacobs and Armani.

HOLIDAYS

Beach or piste?

Beach without a doubt. I've tried skiing but I'm much more of a beach girl. I love water - swimming, jet skiing and sailing are

all wonderful. I've just spent time in Miami and the beaches there are to die for.

APPROACH TO LIFE

Mañana or right now?

I get things done. If I've got lots to do I tend to fly through it but I'm very good at prioritising. I'm very aware there are only 24 hours in the day and only so much I can do.

HOUSEKEEPING

Aggie & Kim or Wayne & Waynetta?

Aggie and Kim. I'm very clean and tidy, and get chores done over the course of the week rather than all in one go. I hate it when I go to houses to film and find they're dirty. One family last year had a high chair with bits of food on it that had been there so long there was fur growing on them.

That's not acceptable, you can't afford to be dirty around babies.

DRINK

Beer or Bolli?

Neither. I'd have a rum and Coke. I don't drink very often at the moment because I'm working so hard but it doesn't bother me.

CARS

Boy racer or Sunday driver?

Somewhere in the middle. I like getting to places quickly and I don't care what car I'm driving. In fact, I don't have a car at the moment.

MONEY

Rainy day or live for today?

Both. I think you should enjoy every day as much as you can and if you can afford things then buy them. I never buy something and feel guilty about it afterwards. At the same time, I think you need to keep an eye on the future and put a bit of money away.

PROPERTY

Urban chic or rural retreat?

You're catching me at an awkward age here. I'm a city girl and always have been but I'm starting to think weekends in the country would be nice. A beach retreat would be ideal.

FRIENDS

Quantity or quality?

Quality every time. I love my friends and they're so important to me. It's difficult when I'm working abroad so much but they're brilliant at keeping in touch and I really miss them. I'm a chatterbox and make friends easily.

SHOPPING

Till you drop or avoid at all costs?

If I'm on my own I shop for a while but soon get fed up. Fortunately, I don't shop very often. Because I've been on the road so much I haven't been shopping for ages. I love lunching with my friends and then having a quick look round the shops.

but the focus is definitely on the lunch rather than the shopping.

COOKING

Experimental or tried and tested?

I like cooking a lot and kids make you want to experiment because you want them to eat well. I've been told my chicken curries and chilli con carne are pretty good.

HEALTH

Alternative or aspirin?

I'm alternative and always try this approach first. I love essential oils and aromatherapy and very rarely take medicine.

DECOR

Minimal or cosy?

At the moment I'm filming in the US and living in hotel rooms, which all seem very formal. I much prefer a more casual décor. I like a bit of old and contemporary together.

FASHION

Victim or setter?

I don't care what other people wear. I can't imagine looking in a magazine at Jennifer Lopez wearing a pair of jeans and thinking: "I must buy a pair of those." If I see something in the shops I like, I buy it. It's as simple as that.

RUBBISH

Bin it or recycle it?

I recycle when I can. I'm good at keeping things for kids to use - toilet rolls, cartons and jars.

FITNESS

Jane Fonda or Jim Royle?

I'm not as fit as I should be and it's very difficult to watch what you eat when you're on the road but I do like getting outside and going for a walk when I get the chance.

TECHNOLOGY

Gadget man or technophobe?

I'm working with a production crew who are so clued up technologically that I feel like something out of the last century when it comes to understanding gadgets. But when I think about it, I e-mail and surf the internet, so I get by.

ENTERTAINING

Intimate dinner or big bash?

I like both and like to think I'm a good hostess. I love entertaining and having people round. I'm very sociable.

● Jo Frost is promoting the release of *Nanny McPhee*, which is out on DVD now.

DEANY JUDD



Picture: ALAN QUAY/Scope Features