

I'm 61 & breaking the rules



Psychologist and actress Pamela Stephenson talks to Jane Gordon about her marriage to Billy, blended families and why dancing beats Botox

Pamela Stephenson-Connolly PhD, 61, was born in New Zealand, raised in Australia and is now based in New York with her husband, the comedian Billy Connolly, 68. An actress, comedienne and, more recently, ballroom dancer – after her brilliant performance in 2010's *Strictly Come Dancing* – she is also a distinguished clinical psychologist and the author of several books. The Connollys have five children: Jamie, 41, and Cara, 36 (from Billy's first marriage), and Daisy, 27, Amy, 24, and Scarlett, 22.

I have always hated the idea that there are “shoulds” and “shouldn'ts” when women get to a certain age. I hate it when people say, “This is what you should be wearing at 40” and “This is what you should be wearing at 50”, and so on. I haven't always been brave enough to break the rules, but the side effect of all that dancing is that I can now. I am 61 and I am in better shape than I have been in years.

It was a huge challenge getting back into my body and trusting my body,

especially at my age. I had been living in my head for 20 years and I had been a real slob with my body and my eating habits, and I had been fooling myself. I don't think there is anything wrong with being whatever shape or size you want to be, but being on *Strictly* was like being in a fabulous boot camp and I feel so much better now. I get up in the morning and I just feel great.

I am fearless, possibly to the point of stupidity. I am an extreme scuba diver – I scuba dive with sharks. I have

always enjoyed the risk factor. I think that's what picked me out as a stand-up comedian all those years ago. It's also why I took a year out to sail round the South Seas – six years ago – and why I took on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

I was a very, very serious little girl. There was a lot of pressure on me academically. I was two years ahead of my age at school and I was still pushed. My escape was dance – my ballet classes – and it has come full circle. It has become my escape again.

We moved from LA to New York a few years ago because our three youngest children had chosen to go to college there and it made sense. I wound up my psychotherapy practice in Beverly Hills with the intention of starting a new one in Manhattan after a break. But now Billy isn't absolutely sure that's where he wants to be. I am saying to him, “Can you just decide where you want to live because I would like to establish a practice”. He's 68 and I'm 61 – how many more times are we going to move?

Billy is just an immensely supportive person. He gets who I am and I get who he is, and we have a lot of respect for our differences.

I think we have a very good marriage. But could we stand being with each other full-time? Probably not. I think what makes our marriage so exciting is that we go off and do different things.

He will go to the Arctic and make a documentary and I will delve myself into some new scientific discipline. >>