



in our experience

# *We revived our* **PASSIONS**

Reclaiming the enthusiasm of your youth for a favourite hobby could help you find your mojo, as these three women discovered

## *‘I’M A MUM BY DAY, DJ BY NIGHT’*

**Claire Sweeting, 42, is a writer and editor. She lives in Surrey with her husband Ed and their two children.**

‘You’re a dark horse.’ I must have heard this half a dozen times when the mums at my daughter’s school found out I was DJing at the Christmas party. Fair enough – the dad who usually DJs does Ibiza residencies. I don’t have that level of skill, but I’ve been DJing for fun for 20 years, albeit with a large gap when I was too busy with babies to stay up past 10pm.

My teenage life revolved around *Top of the Pops*, poring over *NME*, and convincing friends who’d passed their driving tests to ferry me to concerts. When I headed to university in 1995, Britpop was blaring out of every hall of residence, and I jumped at the chance to write music reviews for the student newspaper.

Soon after, a friend asked me to DJ at his birthday party. It was a massive buzz. I felt like I was playing my favourite music in my bedroom, except all my friends were dancing to it. The best bit was keeping the crowd on the dance floor.

At 22, teaching English in Greece, I volunteered for a local radio station, where I worked the graveyard shift. I’d be left to my own devices to play anything from Nirvana to Dusty Springfield and had no idea if anyone was listening.

When I moved to London and started

working in publishing, I continued to DJ at parties and the odd hipster venue – one gig was at a bar that used to be a public toilet. But I had the most fun playing at friends’ weddings. It’s brilliant to see grannies, aunts and kids dancing away.

After I had my daughter in 2012, and my son in 2014, my world shrank to church playgroups and trips to the swings. Disney soundtracks filled the house.

Then two of my best friends, a gay couple, told me they were starting a club

**‘It’s brilliant to see grannies, aunts and kids dancing away!’**

night in Southend, Essex, and asked if I could DJ with them. It would be inclusive and eclectic, with an emphasis on alternative 80s pop. I said yes straight away. As I worked out my set list, I rediscovered how much

I loved listening to new and old tracks, and putting them together in unexpected ways.

The technology had changed since the days of CDs – this time I could stream any music I wanted from an app. I just worried everyone at the club would know I was a suburban mum, who spent most Saturday nights asleep in front of the TV.

But I put on my Debbie Harry T-shirt and tons of eyeliner and pretended I went clubbing all the time. Once I relaxed, it all came back to me and the crowd were up for dancing. I messed up a couple of times and even cut the music once, but everyone laughed it off. Now I DJ there regularly, and do more local

gigs, including the school disco.

My husband bought me a DJing lesson for my birthday, and I learnt how to make smoother transitions between tracks. I love being a mum, but I’d lost sight of how much music meant to me. It’s been brilliant seeing my friends’ lives open up in their 40s too – they’re playing in orchestras, painting, writing books – and really going for it. >>



## 'ROLLER-SKATING FREES MY MIND'

**Tamu Thomas, 42, has her own life-coaching business ([livethreesixty.com](http://livethreesixty.com)). She lives in Harrow, north-west London, with her 13-year-old daughter.**

When I was a kid, my friends and I would play out on the streets in our roller-skates. We had cool roller-boots and we'd head to the park and skate up and down the roads all afternoon.

I stopped roller-skating around the time of my GCSEs. But years later, when I was 39, and thinking of activities I could do with my 10-year-old daughter, I thought it would be fun to take her and her friend to a roller disco.

As soon as I put on the skates and set off, it all came back to me. I wasn't wobbly at all. I could have been 12 or 13 again. My daughter and her friend zoomed off so I had plenty of time to skate on my own. I absolutely loved it – my only problem was that I couldn't stop with much grace!

At that time, I was a social worker and feeling very depleted, but I was doing a positive psychology course at work, where we were encouraged to keep a written record of our week. I wrote about the roller-skating, and realised it was the only time that week that I'd had a sense of satisfaction and connection. Everything else was achievement-based, to do with work or getting my daughter to her after-school clubs.

Childhood is full of magic and wonder, partly because we play. I think that when adults rediscover their old hobbies that they enjoyed as a child, they open themselves up to that magic again.

I reflected on the rest of my life and thought, 'There's something wrong here, I need to change

this.' So I decided to quit my job and went into independent social work, but that still wasn't what I needed. I eventually realised I love supporting others to make changes, so I became a life coach. I particularly enjoy working with women in their late 30s and 40s, coaching them to approach their mid-lives joyfully.

After that first time roller-skating with my daughter, we went to the roller disco as often as we could. Then, when I was working for myself, I bought my own pair of skates and started skating in the park in the middle of the day. There aren't many people around at that time, and I like skating on the basketball and tennis courts because they're so smooth. I put on my headphones and get totally absorbed in it.

At first I felt guilty:

'Who do I think I am, going off to play in the middle of the day when I should be working?' But I don't have a team to bounce ideas off any more, and often skating helps me do work

I've been stuck on. Roller-skating frees my mind – it's when new ideas and thoughts come to me. They're not just work-related ideas but things to do with my daughter at the weekend, or realising I haven't made much of an effort with my friends recently, or need to talk to my mum more. It's like taking a step back and observing my life, rather than getting lost in my thoughts and feelings.

My roller-skating has led to an enjoyment of other types of exercise – I now go to the gym regularly and do yoga too. I'm also on the waiting list for roller-skating lessons and, by my next birthday, my aim is to do dance tricks and skate backwards.

**'I wasn't wobbly at all – my only problem was that I couldn't stop with much grace!'**



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## 'YOU NEVER FORGET HOW TO SING!'

**Michèle Baxter, 54, is a fundraiser for the NSPCC and a volunteer counsellor for Childline. She lives in Maidstone, Kent, with her partner Matt, and has four grown-up children.**

When I was 14, my older brother was in a band, and I used to loiter around them all the time. Eventually, they said I could

sing in their band – probably because I was annoying them so much!

Our band played pop, funk and disco, and it was my whole world. We got a bit of a following and I didn't do all the normal teenage stuff because I was performing.

At 22, I got pregnant, and when my daughter was born I realised motherhood

and being in a band didn't mix – especially as I ended up having three babies in three years. I always sang at home to my children, though, and they grew up to have better voices than mine! They'd sing at school concerts, so I enjoyed music through them.

Then, when I was 45, my husband and I divorced. I had more free time, so my brother said, 'I'm getting a band together again, what do you think?' I jumped at the chance.

My brother's teenage son joined too and we played our first gig to a packed pub. It was lovely having a familiar crowd who were thrilled to see me and my

brother back after 30 years. We played a few songs from the old days, like Chaka Khan's *Ain't Nobody*. I needed to polish up on how to feel relaxed and talk to the audience, but I hadn't lost my confidence because you never forget how to sing.

When I met my new partner, Matt, we joked that he'd passed his audition as a roadie – the prerequisite being the ability to lift heavy equipment.

The band began to get lots of gigs, including local festivals and even at Claridge's hotel. But when the keyboard player's career took off and he couldn't commit as much, we all thought, 'We've had five amazing years, let's try something different.'

Our final gig was headlining a festival of 4,000 people in the village where I'd brought up my children. People were probably thinking, 'Hold on, isn't that Michèle who used to do the school run?' It was incredible. All my kids were in the audience and they were so proud of me. Most of the time they'd been slightly embarrassed by my singing, but they were swept along with that one.

I've been lucky – I have a lovely family, a fulfilling job, and being trained to talk to kids for Childline has been one of the great things in my life. I'm now looking to join an acoustic band. Our youthful passions never leave us, they just get buried under grown-up responsibilities like careers, paying the bills and school runs. It's never too late to uncover them – and it's even better second time around.

'We headlined a festival of 4,000 people – my kids were so proud of me'



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