

Unleash the goddess!

Celebrating her first birthday in business, self-styled bellydancing guru, Sara Smith shows women's editor **Linda Colling** how to unleash the inner goddess within.

GYRATING, shimmying, shaking and thrusting bits I didn't know I had to the rapturous rhythm of the belly dance, was hypnotic.

It was like transcendental meditation on the move, a spiritual re-awakening to the body we live in, but don't love enough.

What a powerful unleashing of the inner woman, the goddess who reigns within us all, if we only give her the chance.

I made this amazing discovery on a bleak Wednesday night in Ewesley Road Methodist Church hall, with a jingling, jangling band of women of all ages and sizes who keep coming back for more of Sara Smith's irrepresible verve and vigour for teaching the belly dance.

Sara's infectious passion for imparting the beauty of the belly dance is matched by her desire to help women feel special, no matter what life has thrown at them.

And amazingly, through hip drops and belly rolls, confidence is boosted, self esteem soars as stress goes out the window and they light up their lives, inside and out.

It's sheer magic how life-transforming this dance is, especially for women well past their sell-by date, consigned to watching Corrie while he's down the pub, and at a really low ebb.

"Shimmy those shoulders," calls out Sara, "If you've got the boobs just let them shake. Shake your bum. Let the music touch your body. Give your body to the music." So I did, and connected with all that's sensual about this dance.

Sara, a direct, down-to-earth Sunderland mother of two who looks anything but 43, is so inspirational and sunny, you would never guess that she has gone through the trauma of having 12 miscarriages in the last three years.

Through the heartbreak and stress of it all, it's the belly dance that carried her through, lifting her spirits, re-balancing her on days when she was in the depths of despair.

She says: "With the belly dancing I could take away all that grief. I've got my life back now and feel happy I gave it my best shot, and I really want to help other women who have had miscarriages. If I hadn't had bellydancing I think I would have lost the plot."

And that is why she is so passionate about empowering women through dance. Sara's creed is: "Don't worry about what you look like on the outside, but love who you are."

And she believes every woman has something special. That's why she gives all of her members a goddess name.



CHANCE FIND: Sara aged 8.

She's their guru, Supreme Sara, I'm Luscious Linda.

Then there's Delightful Doreen Foster, who at 79 has found belly dancing the ticket to shaking off physical ills, like a frozen shoulder.

Doreen of Leechmere Road, told me: "I love shaking my hips. You are never too old for this. It's very feminine."

And Divine Dee Ryan of Herrington, summed it all up beautifully with: "It's shimmying your cares away."

Sara energises every woman who walks through the door of her seven classes that have taken off in the city in the last year.

They're a haven of friendship, and you feel so good after an hour you are glowing.

Sara says: "It's like a magic class. Everybody has got their own movement, and I teach them hip drops and shakes of the body, and everybody has got rhythm. If you put the music on it lifts people, and if you just give yourself to the music it lifts their spirits and you feel on top of the world."

"Your body will tell you how far to go. It's about enjoyment. It's like our own little world. I love it when someone says to me how they were feeling down, miserable or worried about bills, and they've come and their worries just float away."

It's broadening women's horizons, giving divorcees a new zest and vision for life, and sparking others to take all kinds of courses, even launch themselves into business.

Sara's committed to helping women feel better and improve their lives. And for a fiver a session, or £25 a month for unlimited classes, it's a bargain.

One year old next month, Sara's Bellydance Moves is going from strength to strength.

"Eeh, it's brilliant," I'm told time and time again from women who have discovered a new dimension to their lives having taken Sara's belief to heart that bellydancing encourages you to love your body ... have fun and awaken your divine spirit.

And her business is blossoming by word of mouth. Sara's been bellydancing for Fulwell WI, and tomorrow will be dancing at a Turkish night at Eauzone restaurant and bar in Norfolk Street.

She also goes into the homes of women who want a goddess pamper party with bellydancing, beauty tips, henna art, Bollywood jewellery and if wanted,



DELIGHTFUL: Doreen Foster, left, Sara Smith, right, and her daughter Brogan, centre.

manicures, Indian head massage, reflexology and beauty treatments.

Sara has danced all of her life, and it was the chance find of a photograph of her dressed as a bellydancer when she was eight, snapped outside Echo House at Pennywell that transformed her life from the world of promotions to setting up her own business.

After an intensive week-long bellydancing course in London, she went to Egypt and has perfected the art in Turkish, Indian, as well as Egyptian and even Tahitian and Hawaiian belly dancing.

Talking as fast as a runaway train, Sara is a tonic. She's direct and proud of her roots in Hendon, where her nana Annie Burlinson was a by-word for the mouth-watering pies she made and sold along with steeped peas.

And thanks to Sara's mam, Anne Stamp for the

delicious pie she made for me to the time honoured recipe. After an hours' belly dancing it was sheer indulgence.

And that's also the secret of Sara's success and all that's so deliciously divine about the sensual allure of the bellydance.

As Sara says: "It's a magic thing, and you are only here once."

Sara can be contacted on 07876 248 070, or join Sara on Facebook "Bellydance Moves Sunderland" www.bellydancemoves.co.uk

● Classes are on at: Doxford Park Community Centre Monday 10am-11am; Valley Road School, Hendon, Monday 7pm-8pm; Redby Community Centre, Fulwell, Tuesday 9.30am-10.30am and 11am-noon; Ewesley Road Methodist Church Wednesday 6pm-7pm; 7.15pm-8.15pm; Hillview Community Centre, Stanington Grove, Thursday 6pm-7pm.