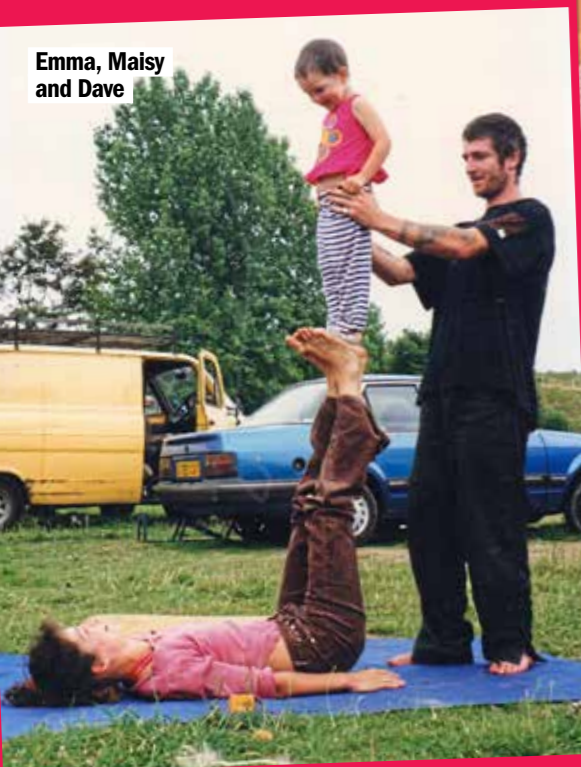


Emma, Maisy and Dave



Generation Circus

*When aerial performer Emma Taylor turned 50, she decided to form a circus troupe with a difference – and she was prepared to jump through hoops to make it happen*



Carol on the trapeze



# The OLDEST show on Earth!

Taking a deep breath, Carol's hands shook a little as she reached nervously for the trapeze handles.

Seconds later, the 69-year-old cleaner and gran was flying through the air, her silver hair flapping behind her as the crowd burst into applause.

Watching on, Emma Taylor, smiled proudly at her OAP – Old Age Protégé!

'When I first met Carol, she was so afraid of heights that even standing on a chair to reach something was too much for her,' explains Emma, 53. 'She's not only had to overcome that, but she's also waiting for a hip replacement.'

Emma had spent years as a circus performer, touring the UK with her husband Dave and their daughter Maisy, who is an aerial teacher at the National Centre for Circus Arts.

So when the family moved from the bright lights of

London to the sleepy suburbs of Harlow shortly after she hit the big 5-0, Emma saw a gap in the market and decided to start her own troupe – with a twist.

'People are often too self-conscious to really let go. But older people? We stop caring what anyone thinks,' Emma says. 'That's when I knew that I needed to start a circus just for us.'

With determination and funding from the National Lottery, Generation Circus was born. Keen to get things off the ground, Emma found a venue with strong beams called the Ware Drill Hall, and set up an audition date.

'I hoped for maybe 12 people to show up, but we had more far more than expected,' she says.

One of the first through the door was Claire, a 53-year-old who'd had

over 100 strokes.

'Part of her face was paralysed, and she was nervous to be seen in public,' Emma explains. 'She arrived in her wheelchair with her assistance dog Keisha, and she said to me, "I know

you're going to turn me away." Instead, I handed her a hula hoop and minutes later she was spinning it around her head. She nailed her audition and

landed herself a part.'

Carol, who had a fear of heights and a limp caused by her dodgy hip, arrived next along with her hubby Bob, 77, a retired telecoms engineer.

'Bob tried his best to blend into the background but I could tell that he was born to play a clown,' Emma says.

Emma paired him up with another auditioner, 64-year-old grandfather-of-12 Jeff,

and they formed a double act, with Bob playing the bumbling waiter to Jeff's chef.

As more people joined, Emma eventually got her 12 performers – plus one dog!

With just a year to put on a show, she got to work showing her troupe the ropes. Although she'd taught people of all ages over the years, she'd never had a group who were all over 50.

But she was undaunted and her confidence in what they could achieve paid off.

'Each week, the group grew stronger, sillier, and braver,' Emma says. 'Carol, who was scared of heights when she joined us, was soon flipping upside-down in mid-air after mastering the trapeze.'

'None of the troupe had any prior performance experience – but you wouldn't have known!'

As the date of the big performance grew closer, Emma had to come up with a name for the show and with its focus on ageing,

she chose, *Will You Still Love Me?*

She interviewed people, including her own parents, about their thoughts on ageing and used those alongside music as the show's soundtrack.

Emma got local children to animate the video backdrops for the final performance and the cast designed their own costumes.

When the big day arrived, to coincide with Age Without Limits Day, a celebration of ageing, Emma's troupe performed to a sell-out crowd of over 500 people.

'Seeing Carol fly through the air on the trapeze was amazing,' Emma recalls. 'They were all fantastic and the audience went wild. I was so proud of them all. None of them could've imagined doing anything like this, and yet here they were.'

And they all agreed that it had transformed them



Bob clowning around

as people.

'Carol has no problem standing on chairs, Claire now teaches others how to hoop, and another of our performers, Chris, was even scouted as a mature model!'

Generation Circus has since gained charity status.

With such a demand for later-in-life circus classes, Emma has launched Circus Fit, a weekly Sunday drop-in



Maisy and Emma now

for anyone over 50 who wants to give circus skills a go.

'One of my most devoted attendees first turned up in a wheelchair just after a hip replacement. Now 95, she comes with her walker, spinning hoops alongside

her children in their 60s!'

Thanks to Generation Circus, Emma's proved it's never too late to teach an old dog new tricks.

● To find out more, visit [generationcircus.co.uk](http://generationcircus.co.uk)