

Jen Sims— Detailed Bio

*Danced on the Cardette dance team in Willmar, MN (high school) and at the University of MN Moorhead

*Attended one of JFK's first summer camps as a senior in high school! 😊

During and after college, I wanted so badly to coach. My first coaching experience right out of college was in New-London Spicer (MN). The dance team was new and the position was combined with cheerleading—of which I knew nothing about! So, the next year when a position opened up for an assistant coach with my high school team, I assisted for one year. The following year after subbing in the area schools, I was applying for teaching jobs and interviewed in Montevideo, MN. They had a head dance coach position they wanted me to commit to if I was offered the teaching position—I couldn't have been happier—finally, a head coaching position! I took over for a very talented and dynamic coach who created a very successful dance program. I stayed in Montevideo for 4 seasons in the mid/late 1990s, until my husband was transferred to Austin, MN.

At the time I moved to Austin, there was a husband-and-wife team that had been coaching for years. I figured my coaching days were over in my move to southern MN, haha. When I moved to Austin, I immediately started looking for a teaching job. I had interviews in Albert Lea and Austin, being the two towns are less than 30 miles apart. I got a job in Austin but had been in a third round of interviews in Albert Lea (there were a lot of us looking for teaching jobs back then). About a week before the start of dance season, I got a call from a captain on the Albert Lea dance team. Their team had experienced the loss of their coach just days before. They didn't think they'd have a season and asked if I'd consider coaching. I ended up coaching but told them it would be for just that season, as I was then teaching in Austin, had small children, and didn't want to commute. I coached them and of course it was hard to leave them after getting to know them. Little did I know, that the husband and wife team would be leaving Austin for a work-related transfer, and I was thrust into that head coaching position in a whirlwind of events. A year later, my husband was transferred to Nebraska. A wonderful studio owner in Fremont, NE allowed me to teach a kick/precision class and I was also able to teach JFK classes, which gave me

the dance fix I needed. We were in Nebraska for two years and then transferred back to Austin.

Two years later, I was back in Austin and began coaching again. I loved coaching in Austin—wonderful parents, dancers, and together with the best of coaching partners, we worked hard to build a strong, positive dance culture over a period of 11 years. My family was at a point of transition and though I can't ever say I was "ready" to stop coaching, I did so because I felt it was best for my family. To fill that void, I tried many things— Working with teams in the off season (which I loved), and also judging for JFK and another national organization, which opened my eyes to types of dance from around the country. I was content in this, though I missed those day-to-day interaction with a team during competitive season. One thing I learned is that dancers are the same—in any given gym in any town, they just want to dance, have the support of their school and community, and be good at what they do (competitive).

This past summer, I coached a short clinic for the Albert Lea dance team. I knew they didn't have a winter season coach and were looking for someone to step in. I wished them luck after our time together—I had been out of coaching for awhile and was content with where I was at. The Albert Lea AD contacted me shortly after and encouraged me to apply. I told him I wasn't interested. He contacted me again and asked if I'd be willing to talk about the program. I agreed and told him I was willing to help in some way but didn't want to coach at this time. He was persistent--- finally, in mid- August of 2022, I asked myself what I was afraid of (everything!!). No tryouts had been done, no costumes ordered, no summer camps, etc. ALL of that—AND starting over.

Well, here I am as the head coach of the Albert Lea dance team in the final weeks of our season. Phew... it's been a whirlwind!

SHORT VERSION:

Cheer/Dance Coach—New London-Spicer, MN (1992)

Assistant Coach—Willmar, MN (1993)

Head Coach—

Montevideo, MN (1994-1998)

Austin, MN (1999–2000, 2002–2013)

Albert Lea, MN (Present)