

Jenni Jo McLaughlin Hits the Road in the Peace Pod

Her Love of Travel, Music, and Bodywork—and Distaste for Lugging Gear—Inspired Her Airstream Conversion

By Lisa Bakewell

Photography by Deanna Cantrell

Wake-up calls come when we least expect them, and for Jenni Jo McLaughlin, September 11, 2001, was her moment of clarity. It was during that horrific day in American history that McLaughlin resolved to live her life with a deeper, more significant purpose. And she has. McLaughlin says 9/11 was the catalyst to finding her niche, stepping off the corporate ladder, and living a joyous and grateful life, one filled with amazing success—and lots of adventure.

Born an Army brat, McLaughlin is a self-proclaimed nomad. “My heart skips a beat when my passport gets a new stamp,” she shares, “and I’ve been known to live out of a backpack for months on end.” So, for McLaughlin, taking her massage and bodywork practice on the road only seemed natural. “Growing up all over the globe has given me a deep appreciation and sensitivity for our differences, as well as our commonalities. And, the one thing that rings true—regardless of where in the world I am—is that people want to feel good in their skin. I am blessed to have a career that allows me to take my knowledge everywhere I go and to help [my clients] find that power that lies within to heal. How mighty is that?”



State Lines

“When [touring] with Faith Hill, which is the only tour I’ve been on that crossed state lines,” answers McLaughlin, “I was an employee of the tour, and exclusive to working with Faith. So, licensing was not an issue.” For more information on rules and regulations when crossing state lines, view the [interactive massage and bodywork state licensing requirements map at www.abmp.com/practitioners/state-requirements](http://www.abmp.com/practitioners/state-requirements).

INSPIRATIONS

McLaughlin’s first inspiration for beginning her bodywork practice in 2003, after leaving her corporate gig, was her grandmother. “I [watched] her live with the debilitating effects and frustration that comes with rheumatoid arthritis,” McLaughlin says. “I grew up a little heartbroken knowing that some people are trapped by their own bodies. The seed was planted.”

Another profound inspiration for McLaughlin was music and musicians. “The energy around dreamers is highly contagious,” she says, “so I created a niche market for myself as ‘Massage Therapist to the Rockstars.’ I traveled to venues all around the Pacific Northwest, working with artists and entertainers.”

Although McLaughlin only toured out of state once, the tour was a big one. In 2007, she was asked to tour with country singer Faith Hill as her personal massage therapist during Hill’s nationwide Soul2Soul Tour. “After our session, Faith got up from the table,” she recalls, “and she asked, ‘JJ, do you tour?’ I said, ‘Yes, I do,’ and so I spent the summer touring with Faith and Tim McGraw for two and a half months of their North American tour—56 show days in total, I believe.”

WAKE-UP CALL #2

McLaughlin’s dream of taking her own show on the road started well before she toured with Hill and McGraw, but it took her “many moons”—15 years to be exact—to scrape up the courage to take the plunge. She even went as far as purchasing two vintage Airstreams years prior for that very purpose. “I ended up freaking out over the scope of the project,” she says, “sabotaging my idea—and selling my Airstreams!”

Finally, in 2018, McLaughlin received wake-up call number two and decided to fulfill her dream of owning a mobile studio. The





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decision came when a touring artist hired McLaughlin for two shows in two different venues, and she didn't know what kind of space they had for her. "I'd always felt that ambience is extremely important to the entire massage experience, so I'd bring a lot of gear with me to onsite massage gigs, like towel warmers, salt lamps, aromatherapy diffusers, music, bodyCushions, white noise machines. I even had a custom road case built to house all my gear in an attempt to make it easier to set up in different locations."

McLaughlin was tired of lugging gear from gig to gig. It was finally time to step into her dream. "I woke up one day," she says, "and I just couldn't deny the reality of 'It's now or never.' I am getting older, life is not promised to us, and my dream of an Airstream mobile studio would not get out of my head. It just started to make more and more sense for me to use my energy doing what I love versus hauling gear around."

BUILDING THE DREAM: PEACE POD LAUNCHES

McLaughlin's original sketches and blueprints were for a vintage-style trailer, so when she decided on the smaller Airstream Basecamp model, she had to rearrange her ideas on how to make her mobile studio work. "The other Airstreams I owned were 23 feet and 31 feet long," she says, "allowing for a deluxe-size studio. The Basecamp is only 16 feet long with 96 square feet of interior space." A big difference, but the flow of the Basecamp gave McLaughlin instant confidence that she could finally make her



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dream come true. “It’s surprisingly roomy for being so tiny,” she exclaims. She reached out to Ultimate Airstreams, a full-service Airstream customization facility in Oregon, to help her bring her dream to life. “The incredible team at Ultimate Airstreams was absolutely fantastic in taking my crazy ideas and turning them into reality,” she says. A few of the customizations include:

- Modifying cabinetry to house a towel warmer
- Removing seating to create space for a custom-made massage table on pneumatic pedestals, allowing for a variety of heights
- Creating an oversized lounge that comfortably seats two
- Installing a teak bench seat and floor mat in the bath to create a sauna look and feel
- Creating a micro-steam room using a portable steam converter
- Converting lights to allow for dimming

McLaughlin’s Airstream, named the Peace Pod, is “a tiny healing capsule” where she can control and customize the ambience for each client. “It’s like a sensory

deprivation experience,” she says, “where you leave one world and enter another—even if all the time you have is 20 minutes.”

BODYWORK LOGISTICS IN THE PEACE POD

McLaughlin knew body mechanics would be a challenge in the custom build, but she considers herself a massage ninja. “I blend all the modalities I know into one fusion session,” she says. “One half of the table I can walk around like a typical massage table, then I have grip bars I’ve placed on the ceiling that assist me in volleying to the other side of the table. This side of the massage, my techniques are more Thai style with a bit of ashitsu. It’s a unique experience! And I explain this to each client.”

A huge part of McLaughlin’s practice is Yamuna Body Rolling (YBR), which is a self-healing, self-fixing, total-body exercise. She has been a certified YBR practitioner since 2011. “Without it, my massage career would have ended years ago,” she says. “YBR is a self-healing tool I share with my clients.



Mobile Studio vs. Various Venues

According to McLaughlin, deciding between traveling to various venues or owning a mobile studio comes down to control. “Having the ability to control the environment is what I find so critical to providing a complete relaxation experience,” she says. “Personally, I don’t enjoy setting up in people’s homes or at hotels. I never know what type of space I will have to work in, and that makes it difficult for me to feel grounded.” Plus, she says, traveling to venues can become a physical nightmare—especially when there are stairs involved. “With the Airstream, I can offer people an experience—a unique, personalized therapeutic experience—that allows for maximum rest and recharging. The Airstream is a space I created and am completely comfortable in. This environment allows me to do my best work—each and every time.”



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Depending on their health intake and how they present themselves on the day we work together, I'm able to share quick routines that make a huge difference in a short amount of time."

Body rolling does not replace massage therapy, according to McLaughlin, but provides the same therapeutic benefits as deep-tissue bodywork so her clients can make progress on their own between sessions. McLaughlin says she also uses YBR on herself. "I am able to elongate and stretch my muscles to keep the impact out of my bones and joints from long days of being a massage ninja!"

BALANCING FAMILY LIFE AND THE ROAD

Running a mobile business is relatively easy for McLaughlin, but learning to maneuver being on the road and raising a family is a challenge. "I'm learning as I go," she says. "Being a single mom of 4-year-old twins, I rely on Grandma and my family a lot (which they love!), but most of my gigs are between 6

and 8 hours, and right within Portland, so I'm home at night."

"My goal with the Peace Pod is to align with family-friendly tours—to work with them during their Oregon show dates—allowing me to travel with my children in my home state. Micro-tours, I call them. This hasn't happened just yet, but I'm putting it out there into the world. In the meantime, I love traveling around my hometown."

Since this is a new business endeavor, McLaughlin feels her challenge is getting the word out about the advantages of this mobile style of bodywork. She says she also has other considerations, such as space for her Jeep and trailer and available electricity, that she didn't have to think about before. Her biggest consideration, though, is whether her clients feel comfortable stepping into her world versus the other way around. To this, she answers, "We shall see. I have a big marketing and education project ahead of me!"

MOBILITY + VARIETY = PEACE

Even though the Peace Pod made its debut in June 2019, McLaughlin loves the variety that comes with her mobile work. "I love the new places and new faces," she says, "and, if I'm working with musicians, [the] new music! It's everything I hoped it would be and much more." She also enjoys the ideas and possibilities her new business creates, with people asking her what services she could offer at different events and celebrations.

"Life is too short to not go after your dreams," McLaughlin says. "Get a fantastic business plan in place, as well as your power team (attorney/CPA), and take steps every single day to get there. There is room for everyone's dreams to come true."

Lisa Bakewell is a full-time freelance writer, editor, perpetual learner, and lover of life in Chicagoland. Her areas of writing expertise span a multitude of topics that include health and wellness, travel, parenting, personal/company profiles, a plethora of "how-to" articles (her favorite!), and technology. She can be reached at lbakewell@att.net.

Resources

"Mobile Massage Trailer by Ultimate Airstreams" Airstream Conversion on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/yZ84L-bIEVU>

"More Good Day! Interview" with Jenni Jo: <https://youtu.be/ZCoxPx0ZGEGs>