



Charles H Gurley 1999

CHARLES H. GURLEY

I was born and grew up in Goldsboro, North Carolina. I first learned to dance in 1954 when I was eleven years old. My brother, Morris, showed me the "basic step" when I was getting ready for my first Junior High School dance. All the girls would dance together until they realized that I, and a few other guys, could "bop." Boy, was that a ticket in the front door!

In 1955, I made my first trip to Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, where I saw JoJo, Shad, Doug and many others. I soon realized there was a lot more to this dance than what I had seen and been doing. During the mid-fifties, I made many more trips to the beach and to towns with dance clubs like Kinston, Wilson, Snow Hill, and Mount Olive. I usually went with older guys because I was too young to drive. I was very fortunate to be influenced by Jimmy "Spider" Kennedy, Denny Wheeler, and William "Fat Man" Flowers, among other great dancers.

I attended military school in Georgia and could hardly wait for summer vacation so I could get home and go to the beaches. There was also a joint called Williams Lake that jumped three nights a week. I packed my clothes in a road map because it seemed we were constantly on the move from town to town going to dance halls. There was a dance going on almost every night of the week. I had seen Harry Driver in some clubs around Dunn and Faison and found out that Harry spent most of his time at Myrtle Beach. I made my first trip to Myrtle Beach in 1958.

In 1962, I moved to Richmond, Virginia, to raise a family and did not walk onto a dance floor again until 1980. I began traveling to North Carolina with my job and found out the music and the dance were still alive and well. I knew I could not live without it any longer and it didn't take me long to come home. I met Kathy in 1980, and we've been together ever since. She has been the light of my life for the last 20 years.

I had collected a few records early on and, once home, I started collecting old R&B records again. I discovered many great tunes that were unknown to me. Spider Kirkman and I became friends because I admired his dancing, we both searched for records, and both liked the music that originated with the dance. Looking for music is still a great joy and passion for me.

I taught my daughter, Carol, to dance when she was fourteen. At age 15, she and her partner, Warren Squires, won the first ever Junior Shag Contest. They won every single contest until Carol was eighteen and no longer eligible for junior competition. I have spent a lot of time helping young people with this dance and one of the true pleasures for me is to pass on what others were kind enough to share with me. Keeping the dance alive for future generations is of utmost importance to me because I also want to have somewhere to go and dance later on in life. Getting young people involved will assure this will happen.

The friendships that Kathy and I have gained through music and dancing have been so rewarding. This is the greatest prize of all and I wouldn't trade that for anything! To be inducted into the Hall of Fame is such a great honor for me. Many of my heroes and heroines are already there and to be among them is something that I will always cherish and hold dear in my life.