



Gretchen Giel Abney

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When my family moved to Myrtle Beach in 1960, I was still in boarding school. My first summer at the beach was quite an experience. While we waited for our house to be built, we lived downtown which meant walking distance to the Pavilion and all that went with it. The M.B. population was around 8,500 with about a million tourists amongst us in a three-month season.

Living among vacationers is eye opening for anyone but is a wondrous encounter for teenagers. I was somewhat familiar with rhythm and blues music through my father. So, the first time I wandered down to the Pavilion, I was drawn to the sound of the jukebox. There they were! The older kids (and some beyond what you'd call a kid) jukin' and jivin' in a dance that looked something like a Lindy and something like a Jitterbug but smooth, "steppy" and synchronized. Unique and intriguing, it eventually came to be known as the Shag.

Thank heaven my mother thought it a good idea for me to enter high school here so I would meet people and learn the surroundings. Fast dancing was pretty much the center of socializing, but we didn't learn it by lessons. We picked it up. At that time, among the young dancers in Myrtle Beach were Johnny Butler, Jimmy Brown, Randy Jennings and his sister, Sandra, Darryl Hammond, Petesy Reynolds and his sister, Rosalyn, Donna Harrison and Venessa Simmons.

When summer came, we traveled to the dancefloors from Sonny's in Cherry Grove to the Pawley's Island Pavilion. The local dance crowd grew especially as we went off to college. And, oh, those Easter house parties! I also have many memories of backing off the dancefloor to watch the best of the best at the Pad. Part of those courtesies was also dancing within your space. It was crowded and important not to get in anyone else's way.

Most of us had jobs and they gave us more insight into a large variety of lifestyles – there were the belly dancers at the Ocean Forest as well as the stars who performed there and the ladies of the evening. Running an elevator there or bell hopping promised certain enlightenment. So did working in a movie theater or on the board walk. People are invisible when they go on vacation. Wherever we worked, every evening wound up the same way...back to the dancefloors. It was intoxicating.

As the Sixties passed, we came to lose some "joints" and gain them. Sonny's closed but Donnie's opened along with Go Boy's and The Black Cat. Every city in the Carolinas had at least one club. Of course, times change and through the decades, so has the dance. It adapts to where the younger generation takes it and, thereby, survives while the music thrives. And, thanks to the Beach Shaggers National Hall of Fame, there are ways to contribute to the future of both. I am honored to now be a member.