



Grayson Smith

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I am forever grateful for the lifelong friendships formed through this dance, and I am at home when I am contorting and jiving...or smoothly shuffling along...to the rhythm sections and solos of yesteryear's musicians.

Born and raised on rhythm and blues music in Marion, SC, the youngest son of Judy and Stacy Smith and brother of Brandon, I graduated from Marion High School, and received a BA from Clemson University and a JD from the University of South Carolina. In 2013, I met the love of my life, Carrie Harrison. I have been blessed throughout my life with a supportive family.

As with most things in life, my mother taught me the basic step. I then attended Linda Vaughn's shag camp. With guidance from many patient mentors, I honed my skills and danced competitively. Sam West was integral in my instruction. Richard Skipper, Judy Duke, Jackie and Charlie, David Campbell *and others* were also generous with their time and talent, and I was honored to work with Shad Alberty. Milton Nowell and Charles Gurley empowered me to dance from the heart. After the inaugural Grand Nationals, Ramiro Gonzalez and Mario Robau had a profound impact on my dancing. Meanwhile, Norfleet Jones molded my psychological approach to dancing... and life. I remember Norfleet asking, "would a trainer allow a boxer to enter the ring without psychological preparation?" I am grateful for Norfleet's guidance.

At age 14, I began competitively dancing with Jessica McAlhany. We spent hours dancing *and talking about how we should practice*. Practicing was never our strong suit; however, we forged a lifelong friendship and had a lot of fun. While I enjoyed dancing competitively with Jessica and others, many of my favorite dances were not competitive and took place in the corner of a smoky bar or Duck's Too during SOS or a ballroom in California or New York or on the balmy deck of a cruise ship. All these dances – and dance partners – were defined by the circumstances of the moment and special in their own ways.

At age 15, I moved to Ocean Drive. Michael Norris and I worked as busboys on Main Street and immersed ourselves into the shag world. While I would return to work in O.D. (notably, the summer I turned 21 when I stayed in and out of trouble with my brother and Brent Key), that first summer set the course for the lifestyle I would enjoy for years to come – I soaked up the lifestyle from characters such as Jimmy Soles, Dewey Kennedy, Willie G., Cooter Douglas, and others.

When reflecting upon my time at the beach, I think of how the music, people, memories and magic made me feel. For example, to truly live is to catch a ride with Jessica McAlhany at Ducks to Billy Ward and His Dominoes' *The Deacon Moves In* during a Labor Day Dance Contest and to be totally engulfed with the music, the dance and the energy of the roaring crowd and to watch the judges shaking their heads and to look around and notice that everyone was equally aware something special was happening...that memories of the rarest kind were being made.

I am grateful for the shag's influence on my life, and I am honored to be inducted into the Beach Shaggers National Hall of Fame.