



Richard Abney 2002

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We were at the Teen Canteen at Myers Park Methodist Church in Charlotte when I had my first experience fast dancing. I was twelve and this was my first "date" chauffeured by my mom and dad. Up to this point I had only slow danced. So, I sauntered over to the jukebox where I perused the song titles carefully, picking one which sounded slow and easy to me. My date and I took the dance floor when, much to my horror, the record which came up was anything but slow. The musical assault of "Sea Cruise" filled the room and my lungs. Somehow, we got through the dance but I made up my mind then and there this was not going to happen again. Next time, I would at least be able to *look* like I know how to dance.

My early teen years followed with parties at private homes, teen cotillions and sock hops. My only goal at these was not to look like some wild turkey on the dance floor. A local T.V show in Charlotte called "Kilgo's Canteen" was a popular thing with the kids then. The first hint I got that other people thought I was a better dancer than they, was after several guys come to me with the exciting news that they were going to be on the show. As I got a little older, my venue broadened. My mother's cousin had a beach house in O.D. and I always drug a pal along with me when we went down there. We'd go by the Pad where all the excitement was. What I remember most clearly were the times everyone would back off from the floor and you knew somebody with a real reputation was out there! We all watched- one did not dare get out on the dance floor while the big dogs were at work either. When I graduated from high school, I began going to the beach on my own. That's when some faces and names started becoming familiar. I went off to Carolina (that's U.S.C., ya'll) and began discovering some of the joints. Back home in Charlotte we heard about this place called The Cellar and, there, I would see some of the same faces. Around then our group began to form. Buzz Sawyer, Cindy Mangum, Judy Kilpatrick, Ed Miller, Larry Lupo, DeWitt Henson, Earl McGillicuddy and some others were the die hards. I was twenty years old at a friend's apartment when I distinctly remember asking Buzz to teach me how to really dance. And his answer was.... "No"! I figured it out thereafter that there was this pie-, which was the ladies-, and the pie would never get any bigger. The ladies all loved to dance, it seemed. So, the guys were not about to add anyone to their competition or cut into their pieces of that pie. (Of course, Buzz will tell you now that he knew I could learn on my own.)

I went off to serve my country in the U.S.N. for a couple of years and it was upon my return that the dance really took on a different face for me. I was back at Carolina and living with Buzz again and, I think, it was his dedication to the dance and the music that had the most influence on me. He always touted that *it was the music*. The dance comes from the music, not the music from the dance. Soon after that, everyone went about the business of building their lives. For twenty years or so we'd see the old faces sporadically. In the middle eighties, after the dance had begun its resurgence, I moved back to Charlotte briefly, then to the beach. S.O.S. was firmly established on everyone's calendar, shag bars had contests and shag clubs were having their various events. It was Randy Roland's invitation to judge a contest at the New Groucho's that really brought me back into the heart of it all. The National Shag Dance Championship shone a new spotlight on our dance. And the Shaggers's Hall of Fame was established. Never would we have imagined all this back when we were kids just doing our thing. And never would I have imagined I would be nominated to this horror- it's a tribute I share with all who love the dance, as I do.