



Duke Curtis Nivens 2003

Duke Curtis Nivens

I was born in Gastonia, N.C. in 1936. My family then moved to Statesville, N.C. where I lived for several years. In 1943 we moved to Spartanburg, S.C. where I grew up.

I grew up watching the Jitterbug, the Fast Dancing and the Shag while vacationing with my family at Ocean Drive Beach, S.C. in the 40's and 50's. My first visit to this small beach community was in 1943 as an adventurous 7 year old Pavilion Rat. In the early 50's I shared my beach experience with a good friend and high school classmate Mack Atkinson and together we somehow learned to Shag.

Growing up in a small town with no exposure to dancing or the nightly party atmosphere in my teen years was a good and normal life. But I couldn't help but admire the lifestyle of the familiar faces that were on the beach every summer, guys like Charlie Boone, Maurice Treadway, Charlie Porter, Gene "Swank" Laughter and Dennis Beam. They were the personalities, the characters and the stand out dancers, the ones that seemed to have the most fun. I began to realize that these guys were Life Guards, Bingo Callers, Snowball Sales, Raft Rental, and anything else that you could think of that would pay for their summer on the beach. The life style of roaming the beach every summer with girls all over the place and dancing every night began to draw my interest. I used to think that one day I would be able to do that but that wasn't going to happen. That idea evaporated real fast. My dad arranged summer employment for me working for Duke Power Company from the back of a pickup truck, digging ditches, cutting grass, clearing brush, and the like. It wasn't all bad, I got an excellent tan from the waist up. I did have those short trips to the beach with friends to look forward to. As a resident of Greenville, S.C. for the last 35 years I still visit OD to see old friends and dance.

At home in Spartanburg I danced at private parties, the Rec Center, The Village Supper Club and if adventurous enough, The Porky Pig. In the early and mid 50's we really didn't have many opportunities or places to dance at any given time, but when we did it was every bit as much fun at home with friends as it was at the beach, (Almost). There was this one girl that I enjoyed dancing with, she is now Jane McAbee Nivens, whom I married in 1960.

With the resurgence of the Shag in the 70's, I picked up where I left off in 1960. In Greenville S.C. I was part of a small group of Shaggers at Tramps that organized the Carolina Shag Club. My wife and I traveled the Carolinas in the 70's and 80's competing and judging in the Pro Division on the SPA Shag Circuit. It was very competitive and a lot of fun going up against the likes of Shad and Brenda Alberty, Mike and Brenda Pace, Charles and Betty Jernigan, John and Pee Wee Teel, Nick and Terry Columbus, Ronnie and Pam Shue, "Cadillac" Jack and Connie Smith, Sam and Babs McIntosh, Bill and Kay Young, Tommy and Connie Woods and the list of names could go on.

Three notable events, SOS by Gene Laughter, ShagAttack, and Shaggers Hall of Fame by Rick Hubbard were unprecedented successes that brought many of the dancers, personalities and characters back together of a time at Roberts Pavilion that I thought could never be revisited. These events allowed many of us to get as close to reliving an era as you can get.