



# Bonnie Carol Walker 2006

## BONNIE CAROL WALKER

My earliest memories are of music and dancing. My uncles owned a dance hall, the Pick 'n Bow, where they played square dance sets, polkas, and mountain music every Saturday night for years. Country folks and urban rednecks from three counties stomped and shuffled across that rough, sawdust-coated floor. I watched on the sidelines as my parents danced every dance. The Two-Step was their specialty. Uncle George took me through the paces of my first square dance at the Pick 'n Bow when I was 5 years old. At home older sisters, Gayle and Sue, who were high-schoolers in the 50s, taught me and my sister, Ann, to do the Bop. After supper we'd slide back the kitchen table, stack records onto the casket-like wooden console stereo (remember those!), and bop to the tunes of Jimmy Reed, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, The Big Bopper (I still know all the words to Chantilly Lace.), The Everly Brothers, and Roy Orbison. We played Elvis, too, when Daddy wasn't around.

My first encounter with the Shag came when I was about 17 years old at the Jolly Knave in Raleigh. There was a sign next to the jukebox that read "Shag Only," and Jeppy McDowell was on the floor just about every song, putting down his best steps. As I watched, I was thinking "this thing called the Shag looks a bit like the Bop but with a lot more finesse." A friend from Down East taught me the basic Shag steps and from that day forward, I was hooked.

A decade or so later I and my partner, then husband, Bob Myrick, were regulars on the Shag competition "circuit" across North and South Carolina. We gradually developed a style, rose through the ranks, and in the 80s won a few contests. In 1982, through dogged determination as much as talent, we won the First Annual Shag Preservation Association Championship. We danced in 26 shag contests that year.

It was during those years of competition that I made the most important friendships of my life. Fellow contestants and Shag aficionados became like a family; we were together in smoky honkytonks somewhere almost every weekend competing or practicing. We shared hotel rooms, late-night breakfasts (the only meal most of us ate during contest weekends), dance steps, and after-contest parties that have become the stuff of many a tall tale.

The last, best gifts that Bob and I gave to each other are the memories and enduring friendships forged during those years of competition. These gifts, which Bob and I now take with us down separate paths, would never have been possible without our mutual passion for the music and the dance.

Now, I look forward to returning to SOS and other Shag functions, not just to dance, but to visit with this delightfully odd mix of people that has become my extended family. At some point during my visit, I inevitably run into Norfleet Jones, and he always says "Welcome home." I just smile and give him a hug because coming home is exactly what it feels like.

I am humbled to be counted worthy of membership to the Shaggers Hall of Fame and extend a heartfelt thank you to the association for this honor.