



Barry Thigpen

BARRY THIGPEN

It all began at the American Legion Hut site of the Dillon High School Valentine Dance -1959. Kathryn Burns took me to the far corner of the room and taught me the basic and I was hooked. Later I went on to the pinnacle of shagging at ole D.H.S. - "Best Dancer" Superlative, 1963.

Through high school and the sixties on my weekend stays at my parent's house on Duffy Street, I mostly frequented Sonny's at Cherry Grove and the O.D. Pavillion. After four years in the Navy and graduating from Elon College, my wife Pat, and I, moved to Myrtle Beach in 1973. We danced off and on with entirely different styles. Then on October 9, 1982, she heard about a contest at Harold's and thought it would be a good idea for my birthday that night. We walked into Harold's. A couple named Charlie and Jackie were on the floor. I asked Kathryn Tilghman how they stacked up against the competition. We saw Shad and Brenda Albery do an exhibition. We were both hooked! A month later at the Beach Music Awards, Shad and Brenda agreed to teach a group of us in Myrtle Beach on Sunday afternoons.

In late 1983, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Ashley Ward and Festivals Director Marilyn Chewing asked me what event could replace the Canadian-American Days Festival Parade because of the bad weather that always occurred. A stroke of brilliance came to mind: "How about a huge shag contest complete with trips for prizes to New York City. Why not give all contestants free accommodations? Oh, and let's call it 'The National Shag Dance Championships'." With that the work began and hasn't stopped for nineteen years. Contest champions and our Nationals dance teams for the past ten years have been seen nationally on "The Crook and Chase Show," "CBS - This Morning," "Country Music Television (CMT)", "Good Morning America" (three times). Regionally they shagged at halftime of the Chicago Bulls-Hornets game; opening for the Gatlin Brothers; "From Nashville to Broadway", the Shaggers Hall of Fame, the Cammy Awards, and the Beach Ball Classic." Alive and in person the dance team's appearances have included: New York, Beverly Hills, Nashville and Atlanta.

In 1987, Pat and I were selected to "teach" the actors in "Shag, the Movie" to dance. We had many great experiences that summer because it also included our children: John, Jenny and David. Many younger shaggers enjoyed that experience as well. Matt Free lived with us, and actress Annabeth Gish and her mother, Judy, became our lifelong friends.

Pat and I also taught shag for several years, and she always insisted on teaching a sixth-grade group on winter Sunday afternoons. Our biggest kick now is for them to come back for review lessons - mainly for their wedding receptions.

I owe a great deal of thanks for the fun over the past years to the following: all the Nationals volunteers: Bob, Danny, Harriet, Jim, Dreama etc. (past and present); to Shad & Brenda; to our students; to the Nationals contestants; to John, Jenny and David; but mainly to Pat who said she just wanted to go see a shag contest one night in October of 1982, and it turned into a lifestyle.