



Nick Mathis 1992

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I was born in Sumter, S.C. and lived there until I was 12 years old. I also lived briefly in Lancaster and Manning but all of my high school and college days were spent in the small mill town of Chester between Columbia and Charlotte.

The first time that I really watched a version of the Shag or "fast dancing" was the summer of 1955 at Myrtle Beach. A lot of the older folks (probably 20 years old) were dancing around a juke box at the pavilion. I was really impressed with the way they took over the dance floor and the "air" about them.

I learned to dance on a concrete pad at Mountain Lakes a few miles outside of Chester. Kids from Union, Lancaster, Great Falls, and Rock Hill all wore out their loafers on the sandy concrete in front of a wurlitzer juke box on Friday and Saturday nights.

The years that I went to the beach with friends instead of family were 1957 through 1962. We went to Sonny's at Cherry Grove, the Pad at O-Dee, the Pavilion at Pawley's, and to some late night spots in Little River and other places that I still can't remember where they were. We just jumped into a car and hoped we had a ride home at daylight the next day.

Several times we hitchhiked from Chester up Route 9 through the towns of Lancaster, Pageland, Darlington, Florence, Marion and Conway to Ocean Drive. This usually took about 6 to 10 hours and about as many rides. Once at the beach, we slept in cars, on porches, on the beach and in small houses with 20 or more people spending the night. Occasionally one of the guys could borrow a car and 7 or 8 of us would take off at a moments notice with no money and no place to sleep. I never stayed at the beach more than a week at the time because I was uncomfortable wearing other guys unwashed shirts any longer than that.

I don't remember any of the "Legends" that I saw dancing at the beach during those years. I was too busy trying to be friends with all the fighters that roamed the clubs in those days to be worried with names, but I saw some great dancing styles.

Eventually I married, had kids and lived all over the country in places like Arizona, Texas and Southern California. The thing that always amazed me about the Shag was that no matter where you danced it, people would come up and ask about it and where we learned it. On one occasion I was fishing in Mexico on the Gulf of California and danced at a poolside pavilion at a small hotel. Several Spanish folks came up and before the evening was out they were shagging (Latin Hustle) and teaching us the latin dances (Tango Shag).

I still enjoy going to the beach and seeing old and new friends. It always carries me back to the happy-go-lucky days when the biggest problem we had was catching a ride from the Pad to Sonny's.