



Mack Windham 2004

MACK WINDHAM

Back step, 123,123, back step, step kick, 123. Those were the two basic steps my brother, Julius, showed me. I practiced these steps for about a month holding on to a belt wrapped around the doorknob. Then, one Tuesday night, at the Teen Age Canteen, I got up enough nerve to face the possibility of rejection. I asked a girl to dance. She said OK. We walked onto the floor, I took her hand and started dancing to my first basic step. She followed. As we shagged into the second basic I checked to make sure that my right arm was bent at the elbow with the lower part of my arm parallel to the floor. My right hand was bent slightly downward, and my right pinky was extended out to the side, like my mother's was when she held her cup of tea. I danced straight up and straight back. I stayed in the slot, so I would look cool, like a shagger, not a jitterbugger. At the end of the second basic I led my partner into the under arm turn. Wow, it was working. I couldn't believe it. We danced to the same sequence of steps over and over until the end of the record. I was shocked. Everything had gone so well. I knew I had passed the test my first time out. I was happy. I was hooked. I was a shagger.

Little did I know that at the age of thirteen I had entered into a love affair, one that would last my whole life long. Fifty-one years have passed since that night in 1953, at the Teenage Canteen, in my hometown, Sumter, SC. I'm still shagging and I'm still in love with the dance.

When I look back over my life, there are people, places, and times that I remember with great affection. The shag hangouts in Sumter that I hold most dear are the Teenage Canteen, The Elks Pool, Second Mill, and Bob's Drive-In. The mere mention of any of these places brings back many wonderful memories of good times and precious moments among the boogies shagging to the rhythm & blues.

The summer of 1957, I was a lifeguard at Aiken State Park. We spent our evenings shagging at Scotts Lake right outside of Aiken. I was seventeen. That was a wonderful summer.

The summer of 1959, I spent at Crescent Beach as Toby Huffman's assistant lifeguard. Practically every afternoon after work at the pavilion I taught somebody how to shag. Then I would go home, take a cold shower, dress for the evening, thumb a ride or walk to O.D and spend the evening dancing at the Pad. Sometimes, if we could bum a ride, some of us would go to Sonny's. After midnight we would often end up at the Windy Hill Pavilion and sometimes we would shag until the sun was coming up. I was nineteen. The summer of 1959 was the greatest summer of my life.

When I got to college we shagged away many evenings at the Opus. That's where Tommy White taught me the drop spin. I became a member of Pi Kappa Phi. Pi Kappa Phi at that time was the "shagging fraternity" at USC. Some of the notable shaggers to come out of this great fraternity are Doodle Munn, Rufus Wactor, Don Bryant, Dick Terry, Tom Barrineau, Hank Fulmer and Roger Burris.

The girls I remember shagging with the most in high school are Julie Anne DuBose, Jessamine Dubose, Pattie Ann Gauthier, Shirby Jean Knight, and Stick Kennedy. My college years were spent dancing with Donice Bishop (Windham) and Wanda Walker (Holliday). My adult years have been spent dancing with Harriet Anderson (Windham), Libby Jones and Charlene Chappell. However, when I need some help with a step I'm still searching out Sandra Bryant. Those male shaggers who have influenced me most are Julius Windham (my brother), Rufus Wactor, Tommy White, Don Bryant, and Jim "Pig" Peigler.

I started singing professionally at age 20 with a band out of Charleston called the "Dardenelles" and for the next 26 years I continued to perform as a lead singer with one band or another. The last group I sang with was "Shoreline". In 1984 I put out an all-original-songs album call "Shag". One of the songs on that album was " Shagger's Heaven", also know as "The Hall of Fame Song". It was unofficially adopted as the theme song for ShagAttack. This has been a great honor for me to hear it played at the ShagAttack functions for the last twenty years. I've been asked by many hall of famers to rewrite "Shagger's Heaven" into a more modern version. I just might do that as soon as I come up with the right idea for the song.

To be voted into The Shaggers Hall of Fame is a great honor. To think that I've been honored by my peers in such a manner, is to say the least: humbling. I cannot find the words to express my feeling of gratitude; so I can only say Thank You, to those that voted me in. I also want to say thank you, to those old jitterbugs that were responsible for changing the dance from jitterbug to shag. Also, a great big thank you, to those that are still out there keeping the shag alive.

Well, God Bless You All; and in as much as I enjoy writing about this wonderful subject, I think I'll call Charlene and see if the two of us can't go somewhere and find a dance floor and a jukebox full of beach music, 'cause, like I said, this is all well and good, but.....I'd Rather Be Shagging.