



Sarah West Kemp

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Dance has been part of my life since the young age of three. My earliest childhood memories are from tap class; then later, ballet, jazz, pointe, and clogging lessons. During my pre-teen years, Mama suggested I add shag to my repertoire. Mike Pace and Brenda (Pace) Gray taught lessons at Fat Boys in my hometown of Hamlet, NC. My younger brother, Sam West, jumped onboard and I finally gave shag a try in 1982. I soon realized my previous “jazz” sugarfoot, boogie walk, and pivot were nothing close to THE REAL SHAG sugarfoot, boogie walk, and pivot!

As my confidence increased, I partnered with Sy Creed, a natural dancer with innovative steps. Our first junior contest was at the new Fat Boys in Rockingham in November 1983. We participated in exhibitions and contests at Shag Preservation Association (SPA) clubs before competing in the first National Shag Dance Championships (NSDC) in 1984. In 1987, we were honored to win the Overall Junior NSDC title. Later that summer, many of us participated as featured dancers in *Shag, the Movie*, and made wonderful memories!

Filming the movie ignited a spark for learning to shag in Kevin Womble. Our partnership began and the advanced shagger I thought I had become was starting over with polishing basics, turns, and pivots. Our hard work paid off as we competed in the 1988-1991 NSDC, winning the Overall Junior title in 1990.

During my college days, I was finally old enough to compete in adult divisions and saw Larry McCorkle at a contest at Groucho's in Charlotte. One highlight of our partnership was Bill Young teaching Larry a male lead that we modified into a together step. It was an all-time favorite as we became the 1992 Non-Professional winners of the NSDC and members of the first NSDC Dance Team directed by Barry Thigpen. Later, I had the pleasure of forming a lifelong friendship with my shag partner Rod Hager. We were very active in the Competitive Shagger's Association (CSA), competing at various shag clubs across NC and SC and in the NSDC. We were fortunate to experience a few

private lessons with Shad and Brenda Alberty taking us back to basics, turns, and pivots, Pivots, PIVOTS!!! There was NEVER a dull moment with Rod.

Once Sam progressed from the novice category around 1994-95, we partnered in the pro division. Sam and I enjoyed success winning competitions across the Carolinas as well as NSDC, Grand Nationals, and swing events featuring shag categories. We served as CSA Board of Directors, were honored as Grand Marshals of the SOS parade, received Lifetime Memberships to Sandhills Shag Club, Moore Area Shag Society, and the Junior Shaggers

Association (JSA). We continued as members, and intermittent choreographers, of the NSDC Dance Team. To our surprise, during the team's exhibition at the 1998 Shaggers Hall of Fame party, Sam and I were honored to be announced as the first inductees into the Keepers of the Dance.

Frequently, people assumed Sam and I were married. My husband, John Kemp, was one. Many don't realize that John was “around” shag clubs and competitions before we were married. He often supported his cousin, Grayson Smith, throughout his early junior shag competition days, and had a great appreciation for the music and the dancers. Our first date was to Duck's Too during SOS and the rest is history!!

John came into my life aware, and supportive, of the lifestyle associated with shag dancing. We've had many blessings raising our twin sons, Bradley and Johnathan, in Edgefield, SC. Our boys were singing beach, shag, and classic rhythm and blues music, right along with learning their nursery rhymes. They attended their first shag function at 5 weeks old. As young adults, they continue to create shag friendships and memories.

I am grateful to my shag family for helping foster some of the fondest memories of my life. I am humbled, and very thankful, to be recognized as worthy of induction into the Beach Shaggers National Hall of Fame.