



Roger Burris 1994

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In trying to recall my first exposure to dancing, I delved as far back as my birthplace of Union, SC. Needless to say, the foremost thing on a child's mind is playing, so I soon realized that there was nothing particularly significant during those years there that caused me to want to dance.

When my family moved to Lake City, SC, I soon became acquainted with such lifelong buddies as John Mack, Robert Floyd, Henry Meritt, Iris Langston (Hodges) and Wilson Moore. We became inseparable during our years at Lake City High School, spending our free time at the canteen beside the Lake City swimming pool listening to the juke box and watching the older kids dance. I was intrigued by the manner in which they moved. Boys in v-necked sweaters, khakis and loafers led blond beauties in crinoline skirts and tight cardigan sweaters through movements that made my heart throb. I tried to memorize every step and twirl, imitating them with my own equally-inexperienced partners. It was then that I knew I was hooked.

As a freshman at the University of South Carolina, I rushed the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity, known as "the dancing fraternity", and was soon hanging out with the likes of Tom Barrineau, Don Bryant, Sandra Banks (Bryant), Tommy White, Ginny Lou Bryant, Sandra Weed, Mack Windham, Dick Terry and George Murrell. I suppose my greatest mentor during that first year at USC was Rufus Wactor, who noticed my love of dancing and taught me the pivot and the boogie walk.

I spent the summers of 1959 and 1960 living in my family's Surfside beach house and working at the hot dog stand at the Myrtle Beach Pavilion. Just outside the stand on a cement slab stood a weather-worn juke box that throbbed all day long with the sounds of those magical years. My feet tapped anxiously, waiting for the moment I could join my college buddies for the evening out. We would begin in the afternoon at Sonny's Pavilion in Cherry Grove and dance our way down the beach to The Pad at Ocean Drive, the Pavilion at Myrtle Beach, the Funfair Pavilion in South Myrtle Beach, and on to a midnight wrap-up in Pawley's Island. We never tired of the night-life, foregoing sleep to dance as long as the clubs would stay open. I truly believed I was living in a dream.

One night in 1960, Rufus showed up at a Greek Week party with a lovely young blond named Peggy Riddle from Greenville, SC, on his arm. Little did any of us know that the very date that Rufus wowed on the dance floor that night with the same steps he had taught me would become my wife of 33 years. We all still laugh about the fact that there were three people taking Peggy back to the house she was visiting in Columbia that night - Rufus, Peggy, and me!

After our marriage, Peggy and I lived in Greenville for awhile, spending some time at the AmVets and at Pine Grove Lake where I first met dance legend Jo Jo Putnam. We soon moved to Charleston, SC, our current home and became friends with such fine people as Chick and Carolyn Snell Hedrick. During the years that our three children, Roger, Robert and Brandi, were small, there was very little time for dancing, though we did sometimes arrange for a sitter so we could visit such local establishments as the Folly Beach pier, Art's Old Side on the Isle of Palms, RVA, the Merchant Seaman's Club and the Elks Club downtown.

During the 1980's, our style of dancing saw a resurgence and we soon shared many evenings with our friends in Charleston at such establishments as Xanadu, the Mirage and Pivots. Often we would also get together with our Columbia friends Norman and Wanda Holliday, Nick Mathis, Billy and Jeannie Pack, and Freck and Sylvia Green for a weekend of dancing. Peggy and I also spent quite a bit of time in R.H. Bentley's in Charleston, and we entered shag contests across the Carolinas. During that intense decade of entering contests, teaching shag lessons and visiting the beach, we recaptured some of the dreamlike life we had discovered in our youth.

I now spend a lot of time with my children and my grandchildren, Robbie and Tori. Golf is my sport of choice, and I can always find time to try to hit the perfect ball! I have been very fortunate throughout my lifetime to have friendships and some of the finest people in the world and to have a loving family who supports and even shares in my hobbies.