



## William Milton Nowell, Jr 2003

### WILLIAM MILTON NOWELL, JR.

I did the majority of my growing up in Mt. Olive, North Carolina and became interested in music and dancing in 1963 after my mother got a stereo hi-fi for Christmas in 1962. I began to listen to the late night radio stations and hearing the music they called rhythm and blues. The first time I heard it, it moved me and it made me want to move to it, and I fell in love with it and it has been with me ever since. My grandmother taught me to lindy hop and my cousin taught me how to bop and I began to practice on my living room rug. I went to my first dance and just watched, but I saw that all the guys who could dance had all the girls around them, so I knew there must be something to this stuff. I continued to practice and eventually began dancing at school dances and local dances in town. At the time I didn't know that this would completely take over my life and control it. It has been the driving force in what I have done throughout my life, and believe me it has been well worth it.

I can still remember the feeling of getting my driver's license in 1967 and how free I felt, ready to hit the road to some of the joints I had heard about, like Williams' Lake near Dunn and the Faison dances at the produce shed. People came to these places from all over eastern N.C. every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night to hear great music, meet people and dance. They had great bands and entertainment every weekend and it was definitely the place to be. Later I heard about some clubs in Raleigh and I began going to some of those places in addition to local bars and dance halls in other small towns like Kinston, Wilson, Greenville, and Goldsboro. There was nothing like getting ready to go to a dance. You would wake up so excited and start getting ready early that afternoon. Shirts and Khakis starched and ironed, a 50-cent spit shine from Armstrong's Shoe Shop on you weejuns, and the car washed and gassed for \$2.00. And somebody would always go to the "store" for us to get us a bottle. Son, when we came to town, the knees started knockin' and we started rockin'. We were always ready to go again, and couldn't wait to make plans for the next night.

Finally I was able to get to Atlantic Beach, or Morehead as we called it, and went to the Pavilion, the Jolly Knave, and the Ember's Club, and those were terrific clubs. Atlantic Beach was the place to be and we were there every chance we got in the summer. The Pavilion and Knave were neat joints, right on the beach with a terrific jukebox and lot of good dancers. The Embers Club was in the circle and was a big steel building where bands played every weekend. You heard the best bands and music around and I learned to dance with a lot of different girls, and met some great guys who became life long friends. They began to call me "Daddy Rabbit" around that time, and it stuck, I guess because I was ready to hop in the car and go anywhere at anytime. Or it may have been for several other reasons, but we won't go into that here. I was so fortunate to have been able to grow up there when it was the best place on the North Carolina coast to dance.

Later as these clubs began to close I went south to Ocean Drive and started dancing at all the clubs there. I thought I couldn't love a beach better than Morehead, but found a home at North Myrtle Beach and have been going there since the late 70's. I have truly enjoyed meeting so many great people, so many terrific female dancers, and established some of the best relationships of my life. We used to go to all the contest and dance, and it seemed nearly every weekend was like a reunion. I have been privileged to dance at most all the clubs and dance halls throughout the south. What great fortune to have had heroes and friends in dancing like Shad Alberty, Bunk Leach, Harry Driver, Dough Perry, Spider Kirkman, Jimmy Kennedy, Fat Man Flowers, Norfleet Jones, Jo Jo Putnam and of course, Charles Gurley, who is like a brother to me. I have made many friends through dancing, most of which have lasted throughout my life, that I continue to cherish. The junior dancers have been a big part of my love for the music and dance, and I have thoroughly enjoyed watching the juniors grow into not only great dancers, but great young people who will carry this on for us.

You have to be blessed to have been able to enjoy music and dancing as much as I have over the years. I am just thankful for it all and I look forward to many more years of doing it and loving it. I am so overwhelmed by election to the Hall of Fame, and I can't express what an honor it is to be there with all my heroes and heroines. I still get that old feeling when I get ready to go dancing, that excitement and thrill of seeing friends, dancing with great women, and hearing our music. To all the club owners who gave us a place to go, to the DJs who have provided the music, to all people I have watched and learned from, and to all the women who have danced with me, thanks for making my life as good as it gets. I love you all.