



Phil Sawyer

TASSELS

A potpourri of and about beach and shagging

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The dance floor juttet out on the front left side of the pavilion. The large wooden windows opened to the ocean, wind, and a world of beach people as they sunned, swam, and drove up and down the beach. The juke box, a vintage Wurlitzer with twenty-four seventy-eight rpm records sat in a box sort of like the ones refrigerators come in. Five cents a record, six for a quarter. Robert's Pavilion in 1945 was the Taj Mahal to a 14 year old from Salley, a rural town in the sandhills of South Carolina about two light years from Ocean Drive.

We were down for a house party which was itself a miracle. Aiken, Orangeburg, and Barnwell, country people didn't go to Ocean Drive. They didn't even know where it was. Folly or Edisto maybe, but not Ocean Drive. We had just learned to jitterbug, another miracle because Salley boys in 1945 hung around the filling station and learned to fix carbureators or put hot patches on red rubber innertubes. They sure as hell didn't learn how to dance. There are about a dozen stories in these short paragraphs but the bottom line is I saw shagging for the first time, somehow learned to do it in the next year, got it in my blood, and my life has been greatly enriched ever since.

I graduated from Carlisle in 1947 and entered USC in the fall. I remember seeing Bubba Snow and Jackie Sawyer (no kin) shagging in the Carolina canteen about the first week I was there. I was smitten. I went to dances just about every week-end for the five years it took me to graduate. (Shagging just may have had something to do with taking 5 years.) This was the era of the fraternity dances on Friday night with Woody Woodward's orchestra and the big bands at the township Auditorium. For \$2 you could dance all night to Harry James, Tommy or Jimmy Dorsey, Stan Kenton, or the Glen Miller Band. When black bands played for dances, white spectators were allowed in the balcony for \$1. I had surely died and gone to heaven.

Chick and I dated and were married in the late 50s. We met several years earlier at a dance at Newberry College. We went dancing on most every date at The Web, AMVETS, VFW, and other spots in and around Columbia. We slowed down a little in the 60s and 70s to raise two children but continued to dance at the Fort Jackson Officer's Club to 2nd Nature and other bands.

We became a part of the beach and shag renaissance in Columbia in 1979 at Wit's End and were out almost every night dancing. In the heyday of the old Fanny's Beach Club in 1985, we went shagging 57 consecutive nights to celebrate turning 55. We joined the Columbia Shag Club which I served as president for three years. I originated the Columbia Shag Club Newsletter the first club publication and have written articles for It Will Stand and Carolina Class.

I was co-founder of the Association of Carolina Shag Clubs and have served as Chairman of the Board of Advisors for three of its six years. The Association grew from 16 to 33 clubs with over 6000 members. Chick and I assisted with the organization of Our Time and are a Host Couple. We have attended most major Association and OD shag events since 1980.