

Beach Roots



S.O.S. SEPT. 10-14 '86

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1986 S.O.S.

September 10-14, 1986



Ocean Drive Beach, S.C.

Fall Migration

Beach Roots™ ... a yearbook

The roots of the beach run deep and long.

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S.O.S. Fall Migration logo design by Malcolm H. Snedley

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The small computer renditions of Lindy Hop dancers were adapted from LIFE magazine photos - August 23, 1943. Photos by strobe lighting pioneer, Gjon Mili. Dancers: Kaye Popp, Stanley Catron (S.O.S.er), Willa Mae Ricker and Leon James.

Stan Catron has written an article for Beach Roots about this historic photo session.

Homage to Beach Friends Gone ...

Dewitt Armstrong
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George Hall
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Percy Hay
John Holcombe
Andy "Gump" Jernigan
Billy Jordan
"Buddy" King
"Tookie" Lee
Ed "Country" Meadows
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J.P. Oliver
Freddie Onley
Jimmy Ratley
Hoyt Shelley
"Sonny" Small
Jimmy Starnes
Phil Summers
Sam Talbot
"Swamp Rabbit" Thomas
"Sleepy" Timmerman
"Sharpie" Tysinger
Joann Nichols White

They are missed ...

... the way we were before the music stopped.

An exclusive *Beach Roots*
article by columnist

Kays Gary

of the *Charlotte Observer*



THE GRAND STRAND - There is nothing in the world like the Society of Stranders and maybe there never was.

Maybe someday in the remnants of a scarred planet some survivor sifting through the remnants for even a whispered clue to the way we were may chance upon an ancient bottle bobbing in the boiling surf and find inside a brief history of "*The O.D. Migrations of the 1980's*" signed by "G.L. and B.W."

There on the unpeopled crystalline shores and melted rock and sand the lonely man will try to shuffle his feet in the monstrous, music-less silence. Then, finally, a tear will slide down from the dumb agony of his eyes as he becomes aware that no one will ever know the way we were before the music stopped.

But today the S.O.S. IS alive and the seventh annual migration of beach kids of the halcyon 40's and 50's is upon us and once again thousands will dance *The Shag* to beach music as no other people in no other place have ever danced it.

The Shag was birthed here ... a southern art form born out of rhythm and blues to become literally the first soul connection of black and white, socially, before racial integration became law. The music did it. The music birthed the cool rhythms of laid-back soul. Shag mastery became a passport to where and what you wanted to be and, wherever it was danced there were no strangers.

I write, not as a celebrated member of the Shagger Society in its finest hour, but as a sort of wistful between-generation elder born a dozen years too soon.

But I almost made it. In 1941 a great Depression-born generation of UNC students jammed first the Tin Can then Woollen Gym at Chapel Hill to dance to the Dorseys, Goodman, Miller, Spivak, Shaw, et al. It was a time when the acrobatics of jitterbugging had all but faded

out to be replaced by a nameless, more subtle kick-kick, one-two-three kick interspersed with break-aways and partner twirls. Only on the final chorus of, say, "Pennsylvania 6-5000" or "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" did the subtleties disappear with some pretty heavy knee-pumps and downbeat stomps.

I do remember that I was, I had never been, so alive and transported as when I danced these syncopated no-name dances with an Alabama Chi O named Jane Moody. We never dated but when "Mac the Knife" or the first notes of "Tangerine" sounded we found each other and we were *one* for some moments of ecstasy without definition except in music.

I never knew *The Beach* until after three war-time years in Europe and marriage and our first-born and our first beach vacation in '47 at O.D. when we stopped for awhile to watch the kids at the Pavilion.

"Then, finally, a tear will slide down from the dumb agony of his eyes as he becomes aware that no one will ever know the way we were before the music stopped."

What I saw and what I felt was *Jane Moody* and I also felt a little guilty with my wife and 2-year-old because, mentally I knew the kids were getting to what Jane and I had been on the edge of.

They simply called it "*Beach Music*" but it was cool, easy understatement. Year after year I would visit the pavilion, feeling a little out of place, a little like a creep until one year the little sister, age 18, of a Shelby friend invited me to dance to "Sixty-Minute Man." Hers was the ultimate accolade to a 28-year-old: "*Hey, you do pretty good for a FATHER.*"

So. All these years I have been a fan who, as a columnist, took periodic excursions into examining the evolution of *dance* into the *Shag*. I am convinced that it was a natural progression from dances birthed by Swing to mergers with rhythm and blues ... all of this happening on a 50-mile stretch of the Grand Strand and evolving from the Depression and war-liberated prosperity of freedom of teens. Teens of the fifties were unquestionably the first socially liberated generation in America.

Yet, except for the afore-mentioned G.L. and B.W. and numbers of other disciples "The Shag's" importance, socially and in historical perspective, may have been lost.

In August of 1978 Deeb Fadel, a Charlotte teen, brought to the newspaper office an old bottle found in the Myrtle Beach surf and inside, on obviously ancient paper was penned a note signed by men aboard the shipwrecked whaling ship *Ann Alexander* in 1887. The curator of Charlotte's Mint Museum judged it to be authentic and we ran the story.

The next day the Whaling Museum of New Bedford, Mass. declared it a fraud noting that the *Ann Alexander* had sunk more than 30 years earlier than the bottle message.

Meanwhile, a Charlotte switchboard operator overheard a mobile phone conversation between a laughing friend of Richmond Attorney Bob White and White himself as the friend gleefully reported that the *Observer* had fallen for the story.

Tipped by the operator, a phone call quickly found White and his prankster colleague, Gene Laughter, Albemarle native who had become an executive with a Richmond-based furniture company.

Laughter not only confessed to this hoax but recounted it as a rather elaborately planned annual tradition of the White and Laughter families. Each year they brought their families back to the summertime place of their youth, the Grand Strand, and enlivened the weeks by casting old bottles containing purportedly centuries-old notes into the surf.

It had become a fairly expensive hobby, as well, with the purchase of antique bottles, researching old shipwreck stories, buying antique coins to be washed up as a "treasure cache" or having fake whale teeth made with scrimshaw inscriptions to fool all but the most expert examiner.

"I guess now the game is up," Laughter had said, "It was getting a little old anyway."

But the next year when a deposit of apparent fossil shells was found on the usually shell-bare strand, there was considerable excitement until they turned out to be shells common only to the Potomac River basin. Laughter had struck again.

By 1980 Laughter had become a phone chum of *Observer* reporters who automatically called him about any unusual developments along the Carolinas coast and they were soon aware that the executive in his mid-forties was simply a sentimentalist about The Strand, especially grand as a teen-age lifeguard there in a world of golden girls and crazy, beloved buddies and their glorious *Grail*, The Shag.

And so, in the Spring of '80 when fellow-columnist Jerry Bledsoe wrote a piece conjecturing on the history of evolution of "The Shag" Laughter was the first responder of many.

Immediately Laughter also phoned me with an idea. He wanted to figure a way to bring all those great beach kids of the 40's and 50's back for a reunion. They'd all want to dance again.

He spat out names and nick-names of those characters of youth never forgotten over 30 years. He remembered their home towns, the clothes they wore, the cars a few had, the jobs they had, the beer they drank, the scrounging for bed and board and, most of all, the dancing nights. Laughter even had a name for the reunion ... either the "*Society of Shaggers*" or the "*Society of Stranders*."

Many *Observer* columns by Bledsoe or me about the planned reunion brought baskets of mail to Laughter's home in Richmond. His family and friends pitched in to help. The word spread from beach kids of the 50's still in the Carolinas to others living in all parts of the U.S.

It quickly became apparent that the "beach bums" of the fifties had done all right. The numbers included doctors, lawyers, men high in government, career officers in military services, business executives, housewives, career women, people of varied careers and stations in life ... all with one common memory and passion: *The Shag* and their golden summers at *The Beach*.

Letters went out. Then a newsletter. And then, to handle costs for these and reunion arrangements and special events, a membership fee.

That first September migration of 1980 brought them in ... some flying, some driving, by the thousands with estimates ranging from 3,000 to 10,000. Since then it has become bigger, smoother, more manageable and stable with more groups planning their migration and lodging together.

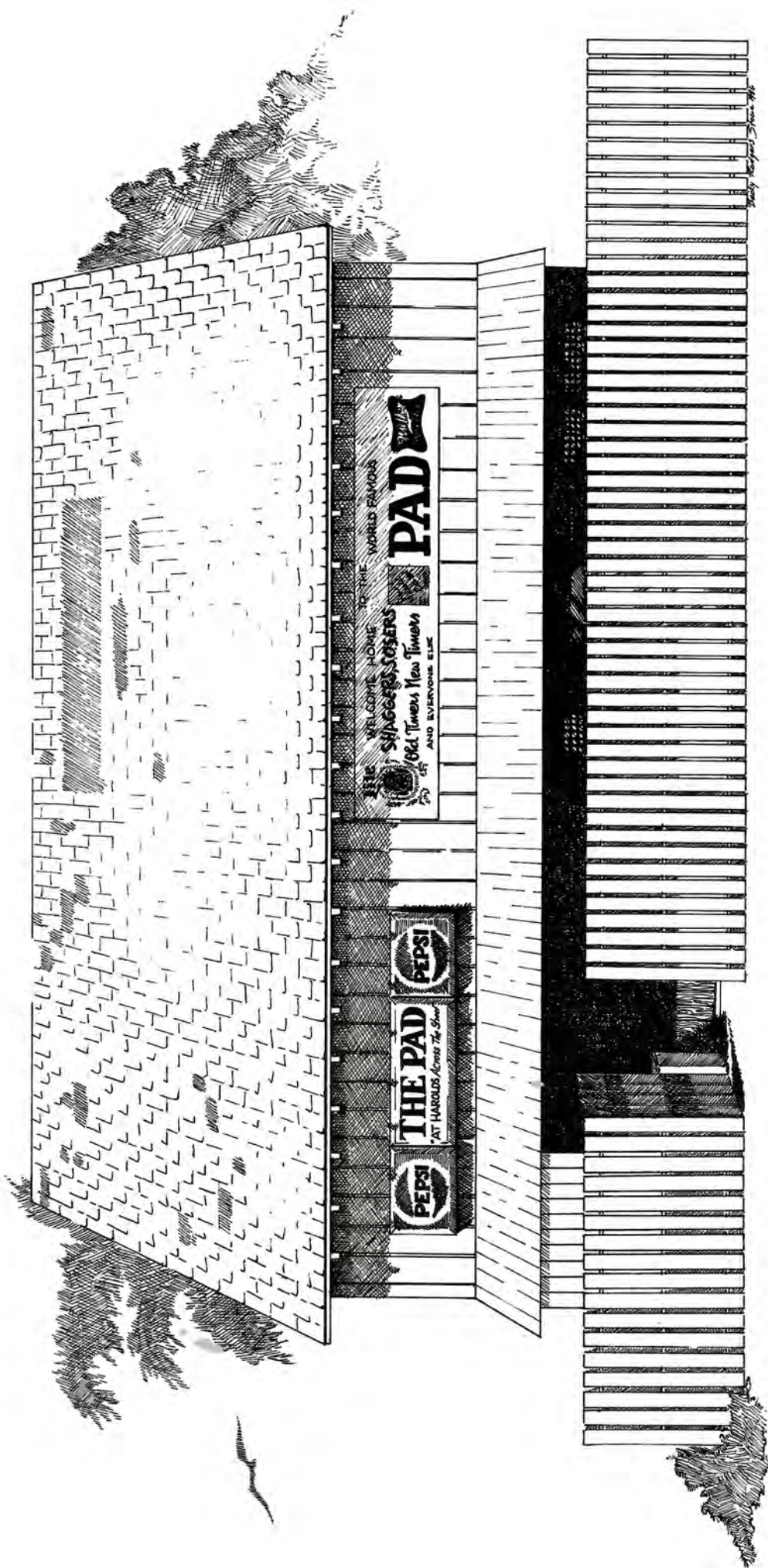
Many of them have less hair, more bulges and the laugh lines around the eyes and mouth have become a little deeper.

But when the music starts the years fall away.

And if you're merely a spectator at this September's S.O.S. Migration VII you will know you are watching living legends, the cool ones, dancing The Shag, which is their signature ...

And the richest reflection of a timeless youth celebrated one more time.

Editor's note (in-a-bottle): No, K.G., you weren't born a dozen years too soon. You're one of us ... for sure. Kays Gary and Jerry Bledsoe were The Keys to making the dream become reality. And the Gary-Laughter Connection was all so very eerie ... so bizarre. Were it not for that ancient bottle in the surf, and the fact that it was found by a Charlotte resident, and the chance overheard telephone conversation, S.O.S. most likely wouldn't have happened. The bottled message from "the past" played such an important role in our future. Ah, the twisted turns of fate! Kays and Jerry will both be in attendance for this September's S.O.S. Migration. We hope they recognize the love, happiness and joy they so ably helped to bring to the migrating hordes of the world's oldest teen-agers! Captain G.L. aboard the Anne Alexander out of New Bedford in search of a pod o' whales. Sept. 12, 1886



1986 S.O.S.

Ocean Drive Beach, S.C.



Fall Migration

September 10-14, 1986

The Pad ... a proud old lady chock full of tradition and memories.

Artist's rendering of the Pad by *Becky Rogers Stowe*

Ms Stowe has a larger, limited edition (signed and numbered) print of the Pad for sale. The original art of this print was purchased by the S.O.S. and hangs in the S.O.S. world headquarter's gallery in Richmond, Virginia.

Opening Day of the Pad ... July 4, 1955

Anxiously awaiting the delivery of the first beer truck. Front: Billy Moffatt (deceased), George Hall (deceased), Ben Umstead and Sonny Gillespie. Rear: Maurice Treadway and A.C. Brown Crook.



There's a Place at the Beach They Call the Pad ... by Gene Laughter

An institution. A shrine. A beach music haven. An old wooden two story building on the second row. The Pad was, and is, all these things ... and more!

It's really difficult for me to write about the pad. You see, I was "B.P." - before Pad (that really makes me old). My youthful beach days ended the season before the Pad opened. 'Never really got to know the place. My good buddies George Hall and Billy Moffatt took me by the Pad one weekend when I was at the beach on leave from the Army. They were so very proud of the place. Their K.M.A. Club headquartered there... in the back dirt floor recesses of Mr. Blankenship's structure. The K.M.A. was started as a beach fraternity of sorts ... an order of the boys on the beach. The Pad was their own beach "frat house."

The Pad opened somewhat out of necessity after Hazel ravaged O.D. in the fall of 1954. There wasn't much left at O.D. as I recall. Robert's Pavilion was leveled. Most of the old familiar R&B music hangouts, haunts and boogie joints were gone. Sonny's at Cherry Grove and the Pad were to become the new "in" places for the beach crowd.

Tommy El Ramey opened the Pad on July 4th, 1955. Now, in '54, Mr. "Blank" occasionally

sold a few beers to his cronies and to a few of the beach boys from what became the Pad, but this was before it was a beach hangout ... and before it even had a name. It was just kind of a "nip joint" that year. He did a little overflow business at El Ramey's suggestion.

The Pad became a beach music institution over the years and was even closed down by the city at one juncture. It was deemed to be too much of a nuisance ... too noisy ... too many fights, etc. Former Police Chief Bellamy indicated to me recently that serving the notice to close the Pad was one of his saddest chores. "I only did what I was told to do," he related.

The beloved old wooden building called the Pad still stands. Harold Bessent revived it as an operating business several seasons ago. Bill Griffin now runs the Pad as a college beer joint and the S.O.S. utilizes it for parties for the older crowd.

The Pad looks somewhat the same as it did decades ago. Echos of ancient R&B still reverberate through her aging timbers. The giant crowds are missing. The excitement of the Pad has all but become history. The Pad is still a proud old lady, however. If only she could talk! She's chock full of tradition and memories. Decades old graffiti and carved initials adorn her ribs and beams.

Stop by the Pad this S.O.S. and pay her your just respects.

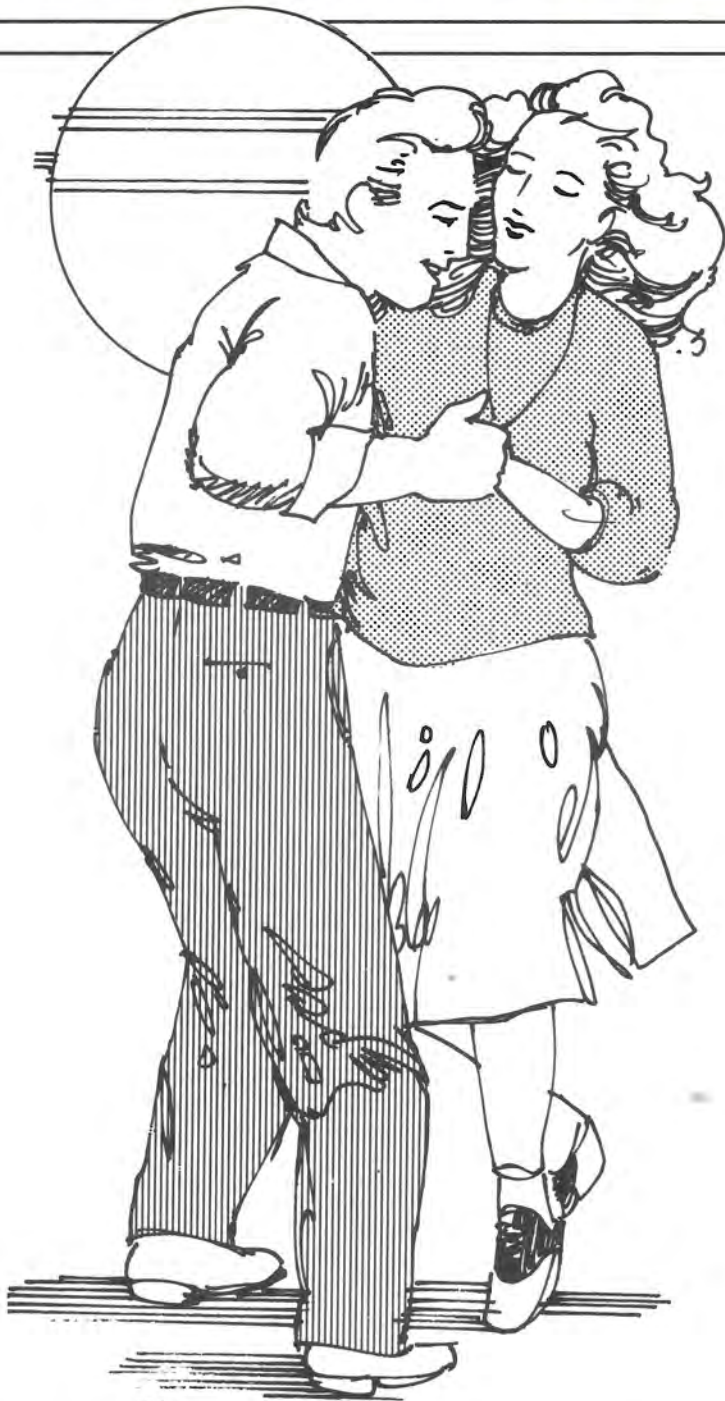
You'll be standing in very hallowed halls.



MYRTLE BEACH PAVILION "Board of Trustees" - circa 1949

Myrtle Beach Chapin Farms employees at opening of the new pavilion. Life guards, concession workers, bath house operators and sanitary engineers. How many of these young lads can you identify? A free 1987 S.O.S. membership to the one correctly naming the most guys. Send your answers to: S.O.S. / P.O. Box 8343 / Richmond, VA 23226. Those in the picture (and families) are ineligible. Deadline ... December 1, 1986. Photo courtesy of H.T. Cambell.

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Shagging

An illuminating look at the mysterious origins of this regional enchantment, now known as the official state dance.

By William Holliday

*The Dance is the sister of wild life ...
the Mother of Lust.*

-Rev. John R. Rice

On the deck at Fat Harold's in North Myrtle Beach, 50's R&B was crackling in the salt air. The music emanated from the club's cavernous interior, where couples (mostly in their 30's and 40's) danced the old jitterbug Carolinians call the shag: "Not corny jitterbug, not jump or anything," as Holden Caulfield said in *Catcher in the Rye*. "Just nice and easy."

Such scenes are common in the Carolinas, but to outsiders they're like a time warp, an entire region under the spell of an ancient dance. And Fat Harold's - with its bar and lounge on back, its short-order grill on the side, and the deck overlooking the ocean - is reminiscent of the old wood pavilions where the spell was first cast over 40 years ago.

Out on Fat Harold's deck one warm afternoon talking about this decades-old spell - the shag's *mystique*, as 50's dancers sometimes refer to it - were Shad and Brenda Alberty from Fort Mill, South Carolina. The Albertys, who are described by the *Charlotte Observer* as possibly "the best shag-dancing couple in the world." They weren't around during the formative years of the shag phenomenon, but when it comes to understanding the dance's mystique, its origins, and how long the old magic might last, they talk with perception.

Shad, a rugged-looking man in his late 40's, associates the shag's powers of enchantment with a primitive territorial function. It all goes

William "Billy" Holiday, of Myrtle Beach and Gallivants Ferry, is a charter S.O.S. member.

back to the way the best dancers - "big guns," he calls them - could dance and stake off what amounted to home turf.

"A lot of people had reputations at the beach," he said. "But some had bigger reputations than others. That's why people backed off when the big guns danced and didn't when the average dancer hit the floor. They backed off for Bunk Leach. They backed off for Harry Driver. And they backed off for me and Doug Perry and Spider Kirkman."

The effect these charismatic dancers had on the crowds - and there were dozens more throughout the 40's, 50's, and early 60's - makes you think of gunfighters striding into hushed saloons. It's a strong claim, though, for a tippy-toe-looking dance that even Alberty admits is downright dainty: "To get this dance *right*," he said with a sly grin, "you have got to look about half queer."

The hoarse saxophone honks of Earl Bostic's *Night and Day* were wafting on the breeze, and the Albertys demonstrated. Shad held Brenda's hand delicately, like it was a teacup; and they shuffled back and forth on the sandy deck doing steps so precise, they stretched out free arms for balance. Periodically, they drew one another in close and swang around in flowing pivots; then they unfolded back out to arms' length for more cat-stepping.

Back in the 30's when the prototype of the shag first appeared, the dance involved more swinging than stepping, and its territorial function was unmistakable. The shag evolved out of the Lindy hop, which originated in the late 20's in Harlem, where the Lindy's premier showcase was the Savoy Ballroom. According to Marshall and Jean Stearns in *Jazz Dance*, a section of the Savoy's dance floor was called Cat's Corner. Only Harlem's best dancers danced there, said the Stearns. Intruders got their shins kicked. Sometimes the crowd even beat them up.

When whites discovered the Lindy in the late 30's, they called it the jitterbug. From the late 30's through the early 50's, Carolina "jitterbugs," as they called these swing dance enthusiasts, converged summers upon two or three resorts along the coast. The coast was sparsely populated in those years, almost a kind of frontier. The places where the jitterbugs (also called "beach cats," "beach bums") gathered were wild and primitive, precisely like Old West saloons.

"Blacks in the Myrtle Beach area were doing a jitterbug step that looked like they were making love standing up."

Leon Williams



They called this dance the "dirty shag" ...

In Myrtle Beach, for instance, at Spivey's Pavilion fighting was so commonplace the manager kept a sawed-off shot gun under the bar for restoring order. Up in North Carolina's Carolina Beach, there was so much brawling along the boardwalk that the town council eventually closed down most of the juke joints. As one businessman recalled, "We ran all the jitterbugs, or hippies, or whatever they were out of town."

The main cause of these hostilities was the shag's territorial function, this symbolic thing that ultimately had to do with the scarcity of women. Chicken Hicks, a Carolina Beach jitterbug from Durham, North Carolina, says the old boardwalk teemed with soldiers and marines after World War II. They resented the long-haired, peg-panted jitterbugs, who got all the best-looking women.



"The girls," Hicks explains, "would give anything just to be seen dancing with one of us beach bums." One night three marines attacked him on the boardwalk. "I fought until I passed out," he says, "but when I came to, those three marines were still out alongside me."

Not every beach jitterbug could defend his territory as ferociously as Hicks. But as a group, the local dancers almost always came out on top in such skirmishes. Joseph "Jo-Jo" Putnam of Greenville, South Carolina illustrates with a story about the time three "rednecks," as he calls them,

tried to cut a buddy of ours' hair." Putnam and another jitterbug pal sought the three out and beat them up in a vacant lot not far from the present-day Fat Harold's. "They ought to have known," he said, summing up the action, "anyone as fast as us on the dance floor could hit them 10 times to their one."

The term you hear 40's and 50's beach-goers use is *dance* - not *shag* or *jitterbug*. *Jitterbug*, according to 40's dance standout, Billy Jeffers from Florence, had the connotation of couples pumping arms and bouncing all over the floor. Mrs. Jeffers calls it "Yankee jitterbug." Holden Caulfield, the fictional Yankee mentioned earlier, called it *corney jitterbug*."

The term *shag* originally referred to a nationally popular dance of the 1930's. Its peculiar use to describe the style of jitterbug Carolinians do to this date cropped up in the late 40's. Blacks in the Myrtle Beach area, according to Leon Williams of Columbia, were doing a jitterbug step that looked like they were making love standing up. These blacks called their bumps and grinds - with a humorous reference to the older, infinitely more sedate shag of the 30's - the "dirty shag." Williams, Big George Lineberry, Lacy Moore, and other popular beach dancers say they toned down the dirty shag's undulations into a more subtle pelvic motion they called "shagging."

"Hell, they were shagging all over the Savoy."

Dancers in Carolina Beach and other North Carolina hot spots, however, didn't use the term. Neither did the blacks up at Harlem's Savoy Ballroom. But when the more ardent Carolina jitterbugs made their obligatory pilgrimage up to this mother-source of swing dance, they noted as Lineberry, then of Greensboro but now of Virginia Beach, says, "Hell, they were shagging all over the Savoy."

The black origins of the shag, not to mention its definitive pelvic motion (which kept it smooth and flowing) explains why a woman now in her 50's says the shag "wasn't a very nice dance." Collen Lowder Roberson of Atlanta tells how

girls who had been stuck-up or prudish about doing the shag back in her hometown of Charlotte would come to the beach summers and try to get in with the shag crowd, which is to say the in-crowd. "But hardly any of them ever made it," she adds.

This eliteness was not due only to the shag's supposed indecency, but to the fact that it was difficult. To begin with, you had to have talent and rhythm, and you had to practice a lot. Nevertheless, even on a big summer weekend, says Weezi Rogers Vickery, also of Charlotte, "there might not be a half-dozen outstanding women dancers on the entire beach."

Those young men and women who did make the beach's inner circles were literally the center of attention, not to mention a source of public entertainment. "We thought we were hot stuff," says D.B. "Squirrel" Evans from Greenville, South Carolina. "The guys wore tailored pegs and long, slicked-back hair. The girls wore short-shorts, just short enough to show a fringe of panty in back. When we started dancing, the crowd gathered 'round and gawked for hours."

In the 40's and early 50's dancers like Evans did steps that were personal and often unique. Those steps were their signatures, their own marks on the floor. "We never copied one another, not exactly," says Carl "Tookie" Lee of Greensboro. But as the 50's wore on the shag became more and more standardized. The crowds not only gawked, they observed every step, every convoluted turn, every gesture down to the tiniest detail. And they assimilated what they saw into their own repertoires, hoping to become just so popular, just so charismatic.

One of the most charismatic of these 50's dancers was Harry Driver from Dunn, North Carolina. Driver won just about every jitterbug contest he entered, he says. "He was the best dancer I ever saw, bar none," says Lineberry. One night Driver was dancing at the Myrtle Beach Pavilion. He and his partner had taken the floor. As Driver danced, his pegged pants kept getting stuck in his loafers. Every so often he tugged at his knees to pry them loose. Next summer, as the story goes, all up and down the beach guys were tugging at their knees just so. It was the latest step.

In the late 50's the teenage-rebel look of tailored pants, peroxidized hair, and short-shorts faded in favor of straight-legged khakis, crew cuts, and Bermudas. And the shag for the first time in its history became *fashionable* - the dance of debutante balls and college parties. As an elitist



FIRST ELEMENT OF LINDY HOP WAS THIS SIMPLE BREAKAWAY

symbol for a few cocks-of-the-boardwalks and pavilion dance floors, the shag was losing its powers of enchantment - but not completely, not yet.

In the midst of these collegiates who did a simpler, more basic shag style was an old-guard remnant (in their mid-20's, a lot of them) who still improvised, still created individualistic steps and talked about "pressing for the limit," "dancing on the edge." It was a dance style that harkened back to the elitist home-turf days.

The undisputed leader of this true, jazz-dance remnant was Alberty, then of Greensboro. Following in the tradition of his Greensboro neighbors mentioned earlier, classic big-gun jitterbugs such as Moore, Lineberry and Leach (his actual mentor), Alberty and contemporaries Spider Kirkman, Doug Perry, Mike Osborne, Tommy White and maybe a dozen more, including women dancers such as Joan Basset Russell, Sandra Shoup Schwartz, Rosylynn Reynolds Anderson, Debbie Strong Joyce, danced and packed the old dance full of every variation imaginable. When these individuals danced, the crowds backed off in the 60's just as they had in the 40's and 50's.

"There was nothing like seeing a big-time dancer back off the crowds," says Jack Smith of Greensboro. "I saw Shad take the floor at the Pad (in North Myrtle Beach) one night. I'll never forget it."

Around 1968 all over America, dancing - the kind with steps and turns, the man leading - became less and less popular. Even the pavilions and juke joints along the Carolinas coast became silent and still. Dance authorities talk about a "danceless decade," citing acid rock and the so-called "British Invasion." It lasted into the late 70's when touch-dancing returned via the Latin hustle. The shag (which resembled the hustle) returned as well, its main exposure coming in the form of contests.

Shag contests became weekly events in the 80's. Their popularity was due in part to the showcase of virtuosos like the Albertys and in part to the way the contestants "took the floor" and evoked a sense of the old home-turf elitism of the 50's. In reality, though, no home-turf, no territorial privilege on some long-gone pavilion dance floor was at stake now - only prestige and a few hundred dollars prize money. And the crowds backed off because they had to - because the contests rules said so.

Now the peacock-strutting of the old dance - actually more complicated and difficult than ever before - was a thing in itself. Contest shagging had become choreographed and imitative. And old-time jitterbugs such as Hicks and Driver complained of "cloned shagging," dancing that lacked spontaneity, improvisation. "I might know the words to a hundred songs," says a lean white-haired Hicks, "but that doesn't mean I can sing worth a damn."

Contest shagging, though, represents only one shag style. More commonplace is the so-called "Collegiate bop shag," which evolved out of the happy-go-lucky shuffling shag all those collegiates did in the late 50's, the 60's. Couples doing this more popular style pump their arms and bop their heads to the blithful sounds of "beach music" - at times music with a brassy

upbeat including such regional hits as *Myrtle Beach days*, *Carolina Girls*, *Summertime's Calling* or at times music with a 50's swing or shuffle-beat including actual R&B classics such as *Nip Sip*, *Sixty Minute Man*, and *Under the Boardwalk*.

"He (Driver) was the best dancer I ever saw, bar none."

Back at Fat Harold's that afternoon, to the north and south, the motels and condo-clusters of modern-day North Myrtle loomed above the strand. The beach would never be the same. Neither would this anachronism of a dance with a misnomer of a name. The shag would continue to be popular all right. The South Carolina General Assembly even made it the official state dance. But there would always be something missing. Brenda Alberty had the last word.

She was thinking, she said, of her husband's era, thinking about Shad and his friends, Kirkman, Perry, Putnam and before them Driver and men and women of the past long before her own. It was only a few decades ago - but it was a past that seemed as distant and unreal as ancient myths.

"You know what's missing? I'll tell you what's missing," she said. *"There are no more legends."*



Margaret Hester Hollis and Little Red Spears shagging by the O.D. Bath House in 1953.

Little Red was one of the premier shaggers of the early 50's. He was widely renowned and danced for years, even as a child, at the Myrtle Beach Pavilion. Red moved his dancing act to Ocean Drive in 1953 and remained a crowd-pleaser. Unfortunately Red has not returned for any of the S.O.S. Migrations. Red is now retired from the navy, an Administrator of a V.A. hospital and lives in Ohio.

Margaret, one of the top female dancers of the early 50's, resides in Bennettsville, S.C. She is an S.O.S. member.

A Reunion to End Reunions

They came from all over South Carolina and from 25 states as well, to relive those days of youth at the old Myrtle Beach haunts ...

By Bill McDonald

A reunion is a reunion is a reunion.

With apologies to Gertrude Stein, that's simply not true. There are reunions and there are *reunions* - as anyone will tell you.

There was, for instance, what some call the reunion of the year here (North Myrtle Beach) last week - the "Society of Stranders" (or S.O.S. as it was called) first annual rip-roarin' reunion that attracted participants from 25 states, as well as Puerto Rico.

Bald, gray, paunchy, jolly, fat, thin, fun-loving, frenetic, frolicsome folks.

They were not "arrested developments," trying to clutch onto the past. They just happened to believe the shag, which originated here, was a super dance; and that unless you were really here to see it, it is not possible to imagine what those days were like back in the 40's and 50's - all the beach crowd sitting around Spivey's or the Myrtle Beach Pavilion or the Ocean Drive Pavilion, playing the juke, dancing the shag.

"It was heaven on earth - that's what it was," said Francis Nichols of Columbia, who spent three days here reliving the glory years.

Gene Laughter, a Richmond, Va., advertising executive, came up with the idea back in February; a reunion of 200 or so of the old gang. But when the news was leaked to the media in the Carolinas - out of necessity - the reunion grew like Topsy.

"What really happened," said Laughter, "we had to go public with the reunion in order to get some old names and addresses. But when we did, everybody wanted to come, so we included everybody.

"Actually, it's been the most fantastic thing I've ever been associated with in my entire life. I'm loving every minute of it."

S.O.S. was billed as a three-day reunion. But some of the faithful began taking up positions on local bar stools a day early, swapping yarns, brushing off shag steps at such popular watering holes as Dominick's, Fat Jack's, and Billy Smith's Beach Party.

While the number of celebrants never reached the "overwhelming" category - estimates ranged from 2,000 to 10,000 - the partygoers had the impact of a megaton bomb being detonated atop a sand dune.

Typlifying the reunion spirit of *joie de vivre*, for instance, was a carload of middle-aged females from Columbia who whisked into a motel parking lot late Friday afternoon, looking for fun. Their late-model sedan sported handmade signs, two of which read:

"We've been waitin' all year to shag if'n we can ... so slide on up here you 60 Minute Man." And, "You'll love us! We've got 'G' rated bodies and 'X' rated minds."

From the "early bird" cocktail party Wednesday

morning to a free Bloody Mary party Saturday afternoon, there was no shortage of parties to go on; and the impact on the Grand Strand was incalculable.

"I don't think there's any way to measure the impact," said North Myrtle Beach mayor Joe Saleeby. "The timing is a real shot in the arm - the jobs its created for us in the off-season; and the publicity has been phenomenal. We've had press conversations with the media in Los Angeles, Miami and Washington, not to mention national TV and radio. You can't buy publicity like that."

Saleeby, a Greensboro, N.C. native, spent his early summers in the 50's at the beach, "and never outgrew it; it stuck with me." He is now president of Myrtle Beach Airlines.

Reunion highlights? There were so many.

One night 300 reunion celebrants climbed aboard a cruise boat - *the Boogie Boat* - and sailed 34 miles on the Intracoastal Waterway while a DJ played golden oldies against a backdrop of tinkling glasses, shuffling feet. Among them were Fifth District Congressman Ken Holland and a TV crew from Chicago.

One morning the Beaver Boys - lifeguards of the 50's - held a reunion at the Oak Tree Inn which, along with Holiday Inn, was reunion headquarters. Their boss, Walter Beaver, housed them in the "Beaver House," and the house was synonymous with wild-and-wooley hijinks.

However Bill Martin, who lifeguarded in the late 40's and early 50's, remembered the time he struggled for a half-hour or so to rescue a young coed - "the only bonafide rescue I ever made. Trouble was, her top kept trying to come off, and she was so embarrassed I almost didn't get her into shallow water."

In the floating procession of reunion parties you could find a club open almost every hour of the day or night, and Fat Jack's at Ocean Drive, was a popular place, especially with the late night, early morning crowds. Even at 3 a.m. it was packed; and you could find almost every variety of shag on display.

Basically, the shag is a rhythm 'n' blues dance whose antecedents go back to the Big Apple and its offspring the jitterbug. Dave Pope says, for instance, "The shag is a lazy man's jitterbug, and the idea is to look 'cool' - sorta laid back all the time."

Whatever, shagging was the dance of the 40's and 50's. It went along with dirt roads and the wail of a jukebox against a starry night, feet shuffling, the mood irrepressible - a mood the S.O.S. reunion members captured and then some here in September.

But to date, no count has been made on the number of aspirins swallowed at the S.O.S. reunion. Nor has an estimate been made on the cans of beer or minibottles consumed -but the best bet is that the number is legion.

And just wait 'til next year. Mayor Saleeby predicts that everybody at this year's inaugural reunion will tell a friend, who'll bring a friend along with them next year, and so on. "It's the best thing to hit the Grand Strand since the invention of the jukebox," he says.

And so the first S.O.S. Migration ended, as it had begun - in a flurry of publicity. We were media darlings that year. Hour Magazine carried a segment on the S.O.S. on national network TV. Joe Saleeby's prediction came true. Six years later, and no wiser, here we are again!

LIFE



THE LINDY HOP

AUGUST 23, 1943 **10** CENTS
YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$4.50

U. S. PAT. OFF.

Editors's note: The August 23, 1943 issue of LIFE magazine featured a nine page pictorial cover story entitled, "The Lindy Hop ... A True National Folk Dance Has Been Born in the U.S.A." I urge you to try to hunt down this issue. It can be found at flea markets, antique shows, etc. We asked one of the "stars" of this story, Stanley Catron, an S.O.S. member, to write his remembrances about the historic LIFE article. Beach Roots is proud to publish Stan's exclusive article.

A Cover Boy Tells All ...

LIFE MAGAZINE REMINISCES

by Stanley Catron

When the *LIFE* magazine dancing pictures were photographed I was 17 years old and working in a musical comedy, "Something for the Boys," as a chorus boy. The show starred Ethel Merman, with the score written by Cole Porter ... the only show he ever wrote without a hit song. Nevertheless, it ran close to a year and a half.

I was moonlighting as a model. J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency received a call from *LIFE* magazine for models to do a photography session with Gjon Mili, who was to become the leading exponent of strobe speed photography. They called me and a female model, whose name I have long since forgotten. When we arrived at the loft where they were shooting the story, the girl they picked as my partner could not put one foot in front of the other. She couldn't dance a lick. In fact, it appeared to me that she would have trouble walking. After an hour of trying to get some action shots, I talked to the *LIFE* editor, saying it would not work unless they were able to get someone who could do the dances of the day, i.e. Lindy, Shag, Boogie, Shorty George, etc. He looked at me like I was speaking a foreign language. I convinced him to put off the session until I could get a girl that could dance.

That night at the performance of "Something for the Boys" I asked one of the chorus girls if she would be interested in doing this picture session for *LIFE*. She jumped at the opportunity. The next morning, bright and early, we appeared at Gjon Mili's loft and proceeded to dance for what seemed like 12 hours straight. Because these were action photographs, and Gjon Mili was experimenting with strobe photography, we had to be moving all the time.

The record we danced to was the Lucky Millinder classic, "Cotton Tail." Those of you

who remember the recording know how fast it was. I can truly say that I was more than a "60-minute man" when those pictures were taken!

I didn't know this was going to be as big a picture story as it eventually turned out to be. I had no idea it would be a cover story and didn't find out about it until the actual day the magazine was released. I was on my way downtown for a matinee, using the New York subway system. In those days a subway ride for a nickel was the fastest, most efficient and safest way to get to the center of New York City from the outlying boroughs. I transferred at 125th street, which is in the center of Harlem, and while waiting on the train, went over to the news stand to buy some gum when I saw stacks of *LIFE* magazines. Even though I had been in the entertainment business for eight or nine years, having started as a child, to see myself on the cover of the top national magazine was more than a 17 year old kid could handle! I was euphoric and splurged and bought ten copies for 10c each. For the remainder of the trip downtown I stood holding the magazine ... cover side out, with a big grin on my face. No one recognized me or asked for my autograph.

When I got to the theater there was a call for me to come up to see the producer of the show, the legendary Mike Todd. He congratulated and thanked me for the additional press coverage that the *LIFE* magazine cover had created for "Something for the Boys."

One week later I was contacted by M.C.A. theatrical agency, who signed me with United Artists Pictures to appear in a movie, "Song of the Open Road," with such illustrious names as W.C. Fields, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, and Jane Powell. It's still shown on T.V. Sometimes I think I should have detoured that particular road!

In the 40's, many budding careers were interrupted, and off to war I went. My movie contract was never renewed. Had it been renewed, I would have never met and married Betty Kirkpatrick ("Kirk"), one of the early Shag Hall of Famers, and all the wonderful people at the S.O.S. that I now consider good friends.

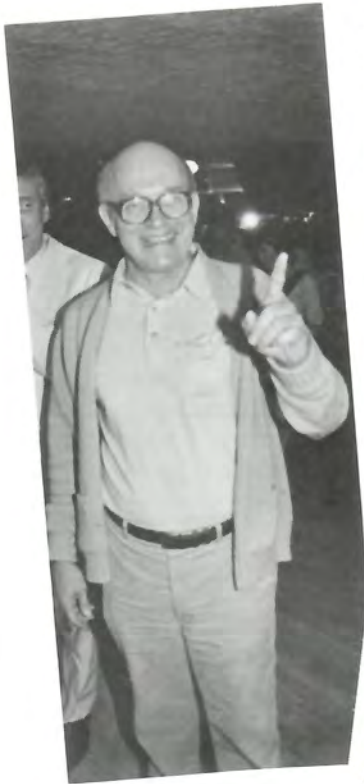
Even though I'm a New York street kid, the world famous beaches of New York (namely Coney Island, Rockaway and Long Beach) don't come close to what Myrtle Beach is ... and will continue to be ... for all the summer runaways of the future.



S.O.S. photographers have all the fun ...



Are you on the S.O.S. T-shirt?
Check this photo ... it was used to
make the screen for the shirt this year.



Joe 'n' Frankie ...



Flyin' Home ... to the S.O.S.



More of the ol' gang ...



A couple of the S.O.S. kids ...



Boogie on ...

The Beach Music Capitol of the World!



Retired O.D. Police Chief Merlin Bellamy Receives a Special S.O.S. Leadership Award

Chief Bellamy donned his uniform once again for the 1985 S.O.S. Migration and was kiddingly thanked for "all the free room and board" he gave the beach boys in the early 50's. In a more serious vein he was commended for the leadership and guidance he once offered the former beach bums. He was likened to a college professor who taught the youth of the 50's lessons in ethics. The award was presented by Gene Laughter on behalf of the "O.D. University - class of '54."



Stan Catron, Billy Jeffers and Bubber Snow at '85 S.O.S. Migration

Bubber was at the S.O.S. to receive the B.M.I. Achievement Award for his contributions to beach music. Stan, a vice president of B.M.I. presented the award.



Ira Schmidt
in front of Robert's Pavilion



Joe Keistler,
Gene and Nadine
Laughter
Crescent Beach ... 1953



Main Boulevard, Ocean Drive, S. C.

The frontier beach town of the 40's:
Ocean Drive Beach, South Carolina

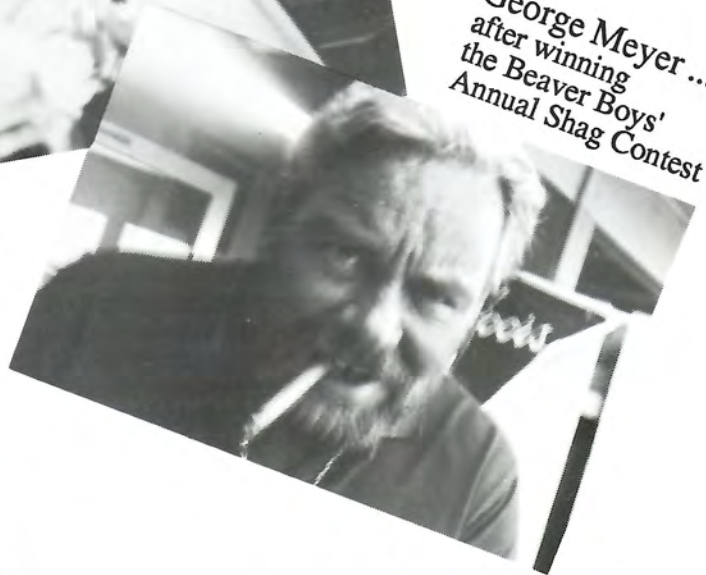




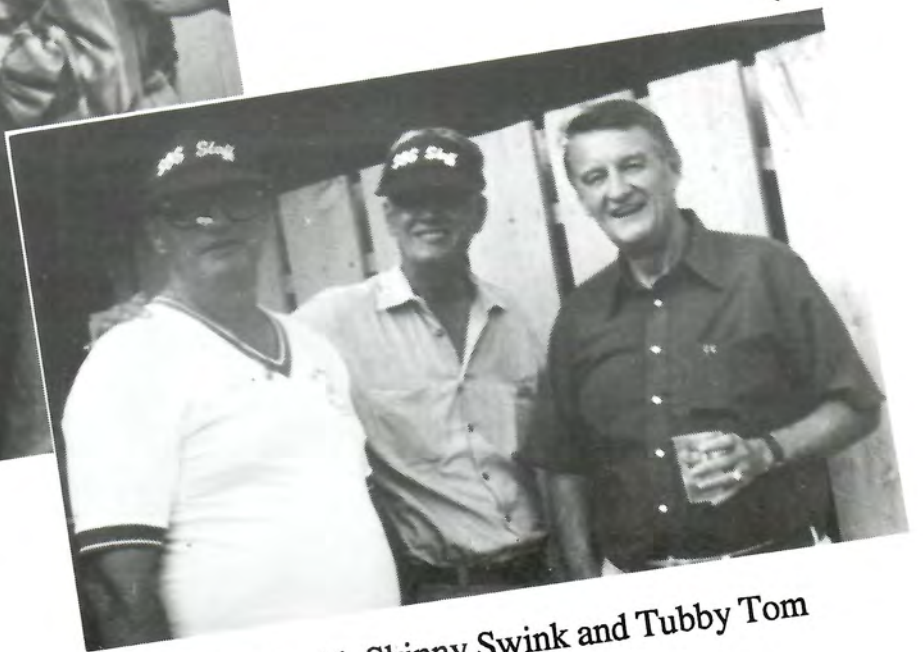
The Fat Harold's
Brain Trust ...



"Reece"
and "Ziggy"



George Meyer ...
after winning
the Beaver Boys'
Annual Shag Contest



Fat Harold, Skinny Swink and Tubby Tom

















Ira and Marjorie Schmidt
and Friends at O.D. in the 40's



The *Sand Flea* Beach News

Proudly Sponsors the

O.D. Living

Legends Awards

*The Sand Flea salutes the past recipients ...
The Living Legends of those
bygone days of glory at Ocean Drive Beach!*



**The
Sand
Flea**
Beach News

Homer Bessent

Larry Blake

Doc Brown

Joe Keistler

Gene Laughter

Tom Lilly

Charlie Porter

Malcolm Snedley

Maurice Treadway

Joel Wall

Publisher: Don Reid ... Editor: Libby Reid



10% Year 'Round S.O.S. MEMBERS DISCOUNT!

DON'S PANCAKE HOUSE

Where the perfect day begins at North Myrtle Beach!

"In my book, Don's Pancake House is *the place* for breakfast at the beach!"

Gene Laughter, S.O.S. President and Don's regular

When we first started the S.O.S. back in 1980, Don Kelly was the first local to support us and to offer his assistance. He has believed in us from day one. Don has been our biggest booster since S.O.S. was in the planning stages. This alone would be a good enough reason to eat at Don's Pancake House.

This is not why I eat breakfast at Don's each and every morning I'm at the beach, however. His loyalty to the S.O.S. has nothing to do with it.

It's simply that Don's food and service are the best you'll find ... anywhere. He's earned my business just as he'll earn yours. Take his country link sausage, for example. You just can't find better!

Don doesn't compromise on quality. He buys and serves the very best.

And then there's the quick service at Don's Pancake House. You hardly have time for a cup of coffee before a delicious, mouth-watering hot breakfast is on your table. If you see a long line at Don's, never fear. They'll have you in and served faster than you could drive somewhere else ... and breakfast will be far better at Don's too!

*Don doesn't know I'm writing this. He won't even see this ad 'till it's in print. I just wanted you to know that Don's is **THE PLACE** for breakfast at the beach. I should know. I eat there every morning at the beach for good reasons. If you haven't tried Don's Pancake House, you are missing out!*

If you're a new S.O.S. member, do yourself a favor and give Don's a try. You too will become a regular like the S.O.S. old timers. Tell 'em "The S.O.S. sent you"... flash your S.O.S. card and save 10%!

Take it from me, it's Don's Pancake House for breakfast at the beach!

**We LOVE
Shaggers
at Don's!**

Don's Pancake House is family owned and operated!

***The "locals" favorite ...
and the S.O.S.ers
favorite for breakfast!***

Homemade country link sausage, blue berry muffins 'n' biscuits. Delicious pancakes!

And try Don's for LUNCH too for real home cookin'! Lunch is served daily from 11 A.M. til 2 P.M. ... garden fresh salad bar and daily fresh vegetable plate.

Don's Pancake House Salutes the S.O.S. on it's Sixth Anniversary!

DON'S PANCAKE HOUSE

HWY 17 AT 11TH AVENUE SOUTH - PHONE 272-5015 ... No credit cards

OCEAN DRIVE JAIL



1947
Snookie Crawford (center)
and Crock Kupfer (right)
Not much has changed with these guys.



Eat Oysters ... Dance Longer!

Marina Raw Bar

HWY 17 NORTH ... OVERLOOKING VEREEN'S MARINA
The Seafood Favorite for S.O.S.ers
Since S.O.S. I ... 1980

Excellent
Local
Seafood
Char-broiled
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10%

Year 'Round Discount
for S.O.S.ers!

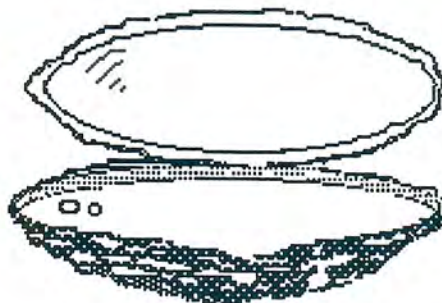
Year
'Round
Oyster
Roast

Present your S.O.S. Membership Card when Placing Order!

Open for Lunch Year 'Round ... 12 Noon 'til 4:00

1/2 Happy Hour ... 3 to 6 p.m.
Price Drinks ... Draft ... Oysters on the Half Shell

*Come get
shucked*



*at the
RawBar!*

Year 'Round 10% Discount for S.O.S.ers

Present your card when placing order

All You Can Eat Specials

Shrimp, Flounder, Scallops, Deviled
Crab, & Free Salad Bar

\$7.95

With mention of this ad

All You Can Eat

Alaskan Snow Crab Legs
and Free Salad

\$12.95

Other All-You-Can-Eat Specials at Reasonable Prices!

Daily Blackboard Specials

King Mackerel, Red Snapper,
Grouper, Yellowfin Tuna, Swordfish
and Oyster Roast (in season)

Summertime Childrens' Special

Children under 12 can eat for only \$1

Beer, Wine & Cocktails 7 Days a Week

Happy Hour daily 'til 7 P.M. in our spacious lounge!

Phone: 272-7485

The Ship's Bounty is owned and
operated by S.O.S. members!



**SEAFOOD
RESTAURANT**

SHIP'S BOUNTY

*at entrance to Possum Trot Golf
Course - Hwy 17 in
Crescent Beach Section*