

## My Career as a Male Belly Dancer

*By Dennis Knight*

Judy and I had been classmates since the third grade. We were seniors at Laramie High in the spring of 1961. Our class was putting on a show for the student body. Some solos by brave kids in the band and orchestra, at least one tap dance, a silly skit or two, and a few rock and roll songs by the Imperials, our own garage band. Nothing special, it was just a nice way to enjoy being seniors and have a little fun.

Judy was doing the Honey Bun piece from South Pacific, the popular Broadway musical. I had seen the movie and I laughed at the production number with Mitzi Gaynor in a sailor suit, and Ray Walston as Honey Bun in a flowered skirt and bikini top. I asked Judy the day before the show to let me join her act. She didn't turn me down, but she probably wished she had.

It was a grand opportunity to showcase my unique and secret performance talent, really my only performance talent. That genius was the ability to roll my stomach, a contraction and expansion of belly muscle that began at the sternum and proceeded in rolling waves to and from my waist. Nobody outside my family had ever seen me do this, and I was excited and not even a little bit embarrassed to bring it to the public. Even Ray Walston couldn't do it.

I visited Woolworths and a grocery store for cotton yardage to pin around my waist, some cord, and a nice, round coconut. Materials in hand, and with little knowledge of coconuts and absolutely no experience with brassieres, I proceeded.

Using some of dad's tools, I cut the coconut in half, drilled the necessary holes and assembled my new top. Trying it on, I discovered one weighty engineering problem. While I'm sure the Maidenform people deal with gravity issues in all variety of ways, I solved mine by eating the coconut, or enough of it that I had a light and balanced load hanging around my neck. With some colorful felt tip pens, I tattooed my belly with a fine, steaming tugboat to ride the waves. I borrowed some of mom's rouge to do my cheeks.

All this was accomplished the night before the big show, leaving no opportunity for Judy and I to rehearse the number together. I hadn't even told her about my costume, and she had no inkling until I came in from the wing to meet her at the introduction of our act. I could see she was taken aback, but let me tell you, Judy was a trooper. She danced and sang every note and word of Honey Bun, and my belly kept the rhythm. I turned and wiggled my butt on cue when Judy sang the wonderful line, "I call her hips, 'Twirly' and Whirly.'" We were magnificent.

Fifty years later, at our class reunion, I briefly reminded Judy of our triumph. I'm sure she hadn't thought about it for the six hundred months that have passed, but she remembered of course and laughed, and that was the end of our reminiscence. I think looking back we were each satisfied with our own performances that day and content to have gone our separate ways.

That was also the end of my career as a male belly dancer. I tried once for a revival, but my tattoo had faded and was spread over too much poundage. Chippendales wouldn't even talk to me. I have no regrets, but if I were to do it over again, next time I would buy a bigger coconut.