

*Philly DJs and
summer memories*
Georgie Woods
Jerry Blavat
Jocko Henderson



by **Robert L. Woodard**
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Growing up, every summer was an adventure. I remember bus trips to summer camp programs hosted by the city. The outings were exciting because they enabled children to have fun visiting places outside the neighborhood.

I found out what “love at first sight” meant the summer I met Rhonda. We fell in love after a wonderful bus trip. The only problem was that she lived in the DC/Virginia area and I was from South Philadelphia. In those days, there were no cell phones and your parents did not allow you to make long distance calls. My father even purchased a phone lock so you couldn’t dial out! I thought about Rhonda every day for the rest of the summer.

I knew if I wanted to feel better, I had to hit the dance floor. Dancing became my therapy. The **Boogaloo**, the **Funky Broadway**, the **Jerk**, the **Twist**, the **Mashed Potato**. I learned the **Bristol Stomp** and the **Eighty-One** when I danced on the **Jerry Blavat Show** – “The Geator with the Heater, The Boss with the Hot Sauce.” I even helped form a Cha Cha Club, *The Imperial Diplomats*. We traveled around the Tri-State area competing with other Cha Cha Clubs. We made up our own steps and became Cha Cha Champions.

There were dances everywhere back then and Philadelphia DJs were some of the best Dance Hall hosts in the world. **Georgie Woods**, “The Guy with the Goods,” used to tell his fans not to eat chicken on Sundays because it would “put a hole in your soul.” **Jocko Henderson** would say, “E-tidily yock, this is the Jock and I’m back on the scene with the record machine, saying oh papa do, hi y’all do.” **Sonny Hopson**, “The Mighty Burner,” played music back to back, which gave birth to the Disco scene – ongoing music with few commercial breaks. Off the air, he was a civil rights activist. He used his show to bring Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali their first championship bout after Ali’s boxing license was revoked for refusing to take part in the Vietnam War. Hopson’s popular radio show helped Ali get his license back. DJs were special people.

When the transistor radio came along, we could carry a radio around wherever we went and listen to our favorite shows. One day, I heard a DJ on the radio whom I thought was a black man until I saw him live at Stage Three Dance Hall in New Jersey. He was so cool. And because he was a fat white guy and I was a fat black guy, I liked his style as much as his delivery on the air. He called himself **Butterball**. He’d say, “I’m too tall to get over, too wide to get around

and I’m laying down the fat sounds in our town and I’m doing it pound by pound.” DJ **Carl Helm** played most of the slow sounds on the air. Later came the smooth, cool sounds of an up and coming DJ, **Tony Brown**. At the end of the dance show, they played a slow song called, “It’s Time to Go Now.” It was our last chance to dance the **Slow Drag** with someone special.

Dancing was mentally and emotionally therapeutic for me and helped keep thoughts of Rhonda off my mind. Even though I was a fat guy, I was very light on my feet. They called me the “Heavy D” of my time – the name of a well-known and respected rap star who had great dance moves.

Sundays were special because we would all go to the dance at **Town Hall Theatre** on North Broad Street. The only problem with going there was that you would have to fight your way back home because of all the gang wars in neighborhoods. North Philly guys didn’t like South Philly guys coming into their neighborhood and dancing with their girls. I would bring my PF Flyers sneakers in a bag so I could “run faster and jump higher” to get home safely without damaging my Stacy Adam shoes! Every time I left Town Hall, I’d ask myself, “Why do I put myself through this?” The answer? My friends in the Imperial Diplomats – John Robbins aka “Frankie,” Bernard Baxter and Daniel Boone.

Even with all that pressure, one of the good things about going to Town Hall was meeting a nice girl from South Philly named Jean. She later became my girlfriend. The summer’s end approached and my memories of Rhonda slowly faded...

... Until Jean and her family invited me to Thanksgiving dinner. When I walked through the front door, Rhonda was sitting at the head of the table! My summer love and Jean were cousins!

People in the neighborhood started calling me a “MacDaddy” and “Player.” When I walked into a room, I heard them shout, “Heavyweight lover in the house!”

This awkward situation made me realize how things can appear one way but aren’t always what they seem. I didn’t know the two young ladies I cared about that summer were cousins until I showed up for Thanksgiving dinner. Judging others before knowing the facts can lead to many misunderstandings – between people, between races, between nations. We can all do our part to make the world a better place. To share love – not only with your girlfriend – but with your fellow man of every cultural and ethnic background.

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