

Chapter 3

This chapter continues with pictures and memories from the Florida trip in March 1996. Kimball's continued to go strong during this time, offering salsa four nights per week with live bands on three of those. I printed my first true graphic flyers with a photo and professional design. More clubs opened and closed. Many were started by people with little resources, so if they could not turn a profit in a couple of weeks, they would fold. Bands were often the victims in that situation, being booked and then not paid for future or even real performances!

The Palace opened in Sunnyvale. Alberto's was one of the oldest venues in South Bay area – Mountain View and Alex taught there on Thursdays originally. The Palace was started on Wed nights by Audrianna and it was a beautiful venue, getting a lot of attention.

Kimball's Jazz Club would occasionally even have salsa events or out-of-town big name salsa acts as well. It was great to be in the Kimball's fold since we could go up and hear any of the jazz shows as we desired.

Alex started a class at a small bar/club in the Mission district of S.F. and true to form, made it popular on Wednesdays at El Valenciano. Caribbean Gardens in Burlingame was also an institution on Sundays in the Bay Area, with D.J. Tony-O spinning and occasional live bands. It remains open today even after the owner had to flee the country related to some crime. (Someone took it over)

We did more workshops in June, September, and then started teaching at Studio J in Sept 1996. Our competition was Gary and Isabel at the time and there was a lot of bad blood between us. It was a dicey story that is not repeated here, but they eventually landed what ended up being their most crucial victory – the job of teaching at Allegro Ballroom, which opened in 1996 as a non-profit organization. Every teacher has a big break. Mine was Kimball's. Gabriel's was Alberto's/Kimball's. Gary and Isabel's was Allegro. It opened a Thursday night which was an affront to Kimball's since we did salsa that night too and only about 2 blocks away! Eventually the Thursday effort failed at Allegro but they did a Sunday night that was a home run. No clubs other than Caribbean Gardens were open on Sunday and the ballrooms seemed to step in to fill the gap: Allegro in Emeryville, Metronome in S.F., and eventually the Starlight in Sunnyvale.

When we went to visit my family in the Midwest at the end of 1996, the rug was pulled out from under us by the wonderful Kimball's managers. When we came back, we no longer had a job on Thursdays and they decided that Cumbia dancers would drink like fish in contrast to salsa dancers. So Cumbia Thursdays were conceived and of course failed miserably!

The general manager Kent was especially vindictive and did not like anyone smarter than him, so even when Thursdays failed, he refused to re-hire us and instead did the highly sadistic act of hiring our competitors Gary and Isabel to teach starting later in 1997. We in turn branched out to teach in So. San

Francisco – our first gig with Diana Bowen, who we had a long relationship with – at Tito Rey, Cocomo and Glas Kat – where she resides today.

Chapter 3 ends around March 97.