

Chapter 5

This chapter is kind of a “dark” period for salsa in the Bay Area after the closing of the central location for salsa – Kimball’s Carnival. I think this took Kimball himself by surprise since it is speculated that he assumed he could negotiate a better new lease with the landlord. There were few places to go and clubs began trying to open to fill the gap, however many promoters just don’t have the resources to last long enough for a club to really take off. Additionally, promoters tend to not have property either, so they make deals with hungry club owners that just want new business. If the salsa night is successful, the promoter is often cut out. Or if not enough drinks are sold (a common situation in salsa scene) then the club owner pulls out. Either way, the energy is destructive.

In the winter of 1998, we thought we had a huge break. We were contacted by a guy Dave Martinez to teach at a new location in the heart of San Francisco – North Beach! The club was quite nice and it had a full stage and medium size dance floor. We printed flyers and worked our asses off to promote. It opened to fan fare and a crowd of about 275 the first night. I remember distinctly when the Vasquez brothers and entourage showed up on a visit from L.A. Francisco and brother Johnny charmed the crowd and this was when Johnny was just dancing for about 9 months.

After opening, the crowd tended to shrink rather than grow. The problem? Parking! If you can’t park you can’t dance! And there was only one pay lot that was expensive. Another problem was Dave himself, who eventually disappeared after stiffing a band their pay and Jake had to pay for the band the last night open (and DJ). But we couldn’t see taking over due to the parking problems and it shut down only after a few months.

It was a really slow year, salsa was waning... The big break fortunately came again during the summer. We heard about Café Cocomo and the manager at the time Predip had heard of us. They asked us to teach on Sunday afternoons, which was a disaster. Nobody was showing up and it just wasn’t a good time for classes and salsa. Other clubs such as El Rio and Jelly’s have made a good go at Sunday late afternoon, but Cocomo was unknown and our class was at the worst time – 3pm.

We finally hung in there long enough to convince them to go for it on Saturday nights. The grand opening was Sept 1998 and we printed our own flyers (see scrapbook). Our first class was 56 students – a good showing for opening and we worked with DJ Henry to promote the club. Cocomo had a lot of advantages. A long lease, free street parking in a relatively uninhabited more industrial part of town – the Potrero. This is before the UC extension or ballpark were built.

The club popularity grew steadily and soon we were averaging 75-80 people on Saturdays! As the year came to a close, we were approached by Alberto from the Alberto’s club in Mountain View and took a night there to teach – Tuesdays. Cocomo started printing calendars and the club momentum grew. They

began salsa on Thursdays as well in March 1999 and Audrianna was chosen to teach. At the time she was the only person pushing NY style on-2 dancing in the area, although Ava Apple also danced that, but she didn't really push it in her classes since on-1 was so dominant here. Audrianna had courage but not the most refined promoting skills and her classes suffered. She also lived in So. Bay making it difficult for her to arrive on-time consistently. Her classes did last until around June 2000. But 1999 came to a close with one new bright spot of growing interest on the scene Café Cocomo.

This chapter ends around December 1999.