

Chapter 4

More clubs opened around the Bay Area. We branched out too and eventually were teaching 6 nights per week! We did full color flyers for the first time. Kimball's in the meantime, perhaps true to Alex da Silva's predictions of demise, was using the shotgun approach. They cancelled salsa on Wednesdays and tried Tango. They nixed the Cumbia experiment and brought in George and Allison first to teach on Thursdays (ouch) until they got Gary and Isabel in officially in the month of August. Gary and Isabel took over Sol y Luna in San Francisco – another Alex stronghold! Alex left town to the bright lights of Hollywood. Giovanni had clubs going three nights per week. The scene was hot! Jake and Techii took over at El Valenciano when Alex left and started a new idea – teaching Casino Rueda with our friend Russ Hamer, who taught us. We held our own first competition (amateurs only). We stole a DJ friend of Gary and Isabel's to DJ at El Valenciano causing an uproar. We went back to my home town of Chicago and taught workshops at Chicago Dance and hit the clubs to promote. Scary! The first salsa web site appeared : salsasf.com created by Julia and the pre-cursor to the SalsaCrazy empire. We started a web site too around 97-98.

Alex returned on occasion to teach special classes and try to keep his name up in the area – always attracting a crowd. In August of 1997 Gary and Isabel took Thursdays and the management, wanting new blood, brought in Gabriel Romero at my suggestion for Fridays – the night that Alex had killed in the past (but was waning now). These new teachers were in heaven – landing the best club in the area. But they didn't realize it was all about to come to a crashing halt only 3 months later!

Over in San Francisco, a Sri Lankan man leased a huge warehouse in the Potrero and drafted the help of the band Charanson to help promote salsa there on Sundays. But it did not catch so quickly. The name of that place was Café Cocomo. Gary and Isabel landed Sat classes at 330 Ritch in S.F. Even Fred Flores got in on the act and started teaching at Caribbean Gardens. We taught a workshop at the huge Metronome ballroom. An L.A. teacher Janette, came up to try to teach here (workshop). We went back to Chicago and taught at 720 Club – on Wells Street downtown. We blew them away.

The Bay Area salsa scene was hit with a heart attack in December 1997! The lease at Kimball's was up for renewal and it was a growth period for the economy (dot com starting) and Emeryville. The landlord jacked up the rent by over 2x. Kimball balked. He was kicked out! The landlord gave a lease to his buddy to open a POOL HALL there before there was much negotiation and the best salsa club in the area vanished almost overnight. The big breaks for Gary and Isabel and Gabriel were gone after only 3 months. Nobody knew where salsa central was then...

This chapter ends around Dec 1997.