

“Reverend Dolores Jackson was really the one who had the inspiration and the vision, but we were the ones who coined the name for Salsa and began the incorporation and started having the regular meetings and built the structure. They started meeting first at a firehouse on Wooster Street in Manhattan with Reverend D. Jackson. Once we moved to a space at Washington Square Church at 133 West 4th Street, we decided on a name, created a board and started meeting on a regular basis. Every week religiously at seven o’clock! We did do some serious and political work as the years went on. Many Sistahs were committed and focused and they stayed till the end of each meeting. After the meeting we had to let off steam and so we went to Bonnie and Clyde’s. But the unfortunate truth about Bonnie and Clyde’s was that they only wanted to let about three or four of us women of color in at a time. Even with ID and paying.

At that time there was no support, there was no love and many sistahs had no family. And, so you see, Salsa became family for everybody. They couldn’t even explain that they were gay or that they loved a woman or that they wanted to have children and still be gay. There was no support for that. I don’t know if we would’ve even survived as long as we did if there wasn’t Salsa. We would have board meetings at our homes. We couldn’t have them at the church because they didn’t have that much time - we only rented the space on Thursdays. So, the other meetings would be at our homes or other women on the board would take turns hosting the meetings. You couldn’t get those women out of your house! They’d come in the evening and then they’d want to stay all night! They’d still be there for breakfast! I’d say, ‘You gotta get outta here!’ You know? (Laughing) But we’d have such a good time! They’d sleep all on the floor! They didn’t care where they slept! No bed, no pillow, no change of clothes, didn’t matter. They just wanted to be together! Oh, and we’d argue and we’d fuss and we’d fight about issues!

So many people talk about the 1960s and ‘70s with Stonewall and the activism that took place but they don’t know about the women of color who forged paths. Those gay sistahs were the electricians, the plumbers, the teachers, the activists, the writers, the drummers, the musicians, the dancers, the poets - they don’t know about all of these women in Salsa Soul! All of the women from Salsa had a story. Every one of them.”

Cassandra Grant, 2020