

“By 1975 I was free and ready to get into some political work. I had heard a lot about Salsa Soul Sisters and I was so anxious to get there! I was with a woman at the time and she had an African name and I liked that. I liked her name. She told me we could get one for me too!

She and I went together to this meeting at the church, the Washington Square [Methodist Episcopal] Church I think it was called, right there! I got there and met the woman that would become my best, best, bestie until she passed in 1993. Her name was Yvonne Flowers but she changed her name to Maua Flowers. Ok? So, when we got there I stood up and said, ‘Wait, wait, wait, wait. Why is everyone talking about whether or not to send their ex-lovers Christmas cards? I know I did not struggle for years to get here to hear this conversation.’ I guess it was the anxiety and the drive that pushes me even today at eighty. They all poopooed me! They said, ‘Sit down! Nobody wants to hear about no Kwanza!’ They still wanted to go ahead talking about Christmas cards. So, Maua said, ‘Wait a minute! If the sister wants Kwanza, then let her bring it here!’ I was like, ‘Who is that? I’ve got to know her!’ That’s my ally and I never saw her before in my life. This happened in November so we had about a month to get ready. And I knew that I wanted to have it balanced in terms of energy, you know? So, the femme who was so vocal about everything and was also one of the founders of Salsa Soul said she did Kwanza with her children! That was Cassandra Grant. So, we planned the first Kwanza!

Now, many of those lesbian women had children with men that they had been with prior. And to tell you the truth, some of them were still with men! I would find that out later. I didn’t know that they were going home to their husbands. We didn’t know that. But we knew that their children were right there. The most precious, precious, precious thing to me are the children. I know Cassandra feels the same way. We went ahead and had our first Kwanza. The children learned the principles and the parents of course who were helping us learn too! Christians, Muslims, African-belief-system-people can all participate in Kwanza because it’s a thanksgiving to the ancestors and we can all relate to that. Maua and all of the other ancestors that we talked about in Salsa Soul Sisters, they’re all there helping us. We were practicing something that was started in the larger community. It began in the Black Nationalists community but the Black Nationalists were not inviting us. And they still don’t. Less than a year ago, for this past Kwanza, I did call a brother who comes into New York City every year to I think Boys and Girls High to have that Kwanza that they’ve been having since 1966. So, I said to him, ‘We would like to be a part of what you do and let us meet up because we do the same work.’ And they said, ‘No, no, no!’ They said, ‘You can join us if you like but we ask that you not identify yourselves as lesbian.’

That’s what’s happening in 2020. It’s heartbreaking.”

Imani Rashid, 2020