



"I learned to dance Salsa in Seoul, South Korea.

I had moved to South Korea after college to teach English and one of my co-workers asked if I wanted to come with them to a Salsa club. I don't know if it's like this now, but when I was in Seoul, there were Salsa clubs everywhere.

The club we went to was this place called Macondo and it will forever be my happy place. I would get there at 7:00pm and then dance until two or three in the morning.

While I was there, I had so many people come up to me and ask me to show them how to Salsa. I would show them, and they would ask me if I was a teacher. When I told them I wasn't, they told me I should be.

And that's how I fell into teaching.

As I was getting trained to be an instructor while in South Korea, I began to have this vision of having my own space. This was about 20 years ago, and I had these ideas of creating a safe space where people could dance and build a community. Even when I left to

come back to the states to get my master's degree, those ideas of my own studio stuck with me.

When I moved back here, the closest place I could find to go Salsa dancing was in Columbia. I tried driving there and back, but it got to the point where I couldn't do that anymore and I realized I was going to have to start something where I was. So that's how I started a dance program in Myrtle Beach.

For two years, I hosted classes and brought in instructors from all over the Southeast until my husband and I moved to Abu Dhabi. I taught classes and danced while we were living there and we were there for about two years before we moved back to the states to Raleigh, North Carolina.

I eventually started driving back to Myrtle Beach to dance, but it wasn't the same community it had been. I'm a grassroots dancer and while I'm trained, I haven't spent years in dance studios taking ballet, jazz, tap and there was also this pressure to do competitions.

I just don't dance like that and when I started to realize that I wasn't going to be accepted there anymore, I had a conversation with a close friend of mine who asked if I would ever consider coming back to Florence and teaching here. He told me I needed to talk to this guy named Ezra who was going to be opening a place called Soule Café.

Ezra and I worked out a time for me to teach, and my first classes in Florence were absolutely shocking. In that one three-month period I had over 100 people take classes.

It was at this time that my husband and I were talking about moving back to the area and the choice was between Conway and Florence. We chose Florence because of that response, and I got to have some beautiful partnerships with people to teach out of their spaces, but I still wanted a space of my own.

Because I have gotten to experience what it feels like to be surrounded by a dance community that feels like family, and I want to create that experience in this space."

- **Adalia Ellis-Aroha, owner of Aroha Afro Latin Dance**