

On Your Corner

By Kenan Dudley

Sistah C's van is a staple of the bright and bustling downtown Charlestown marketplace on weekday afternoons. Normally situated right in front of the Nevis Sports museum, Carmen Griffen, known across Nevis as Sistah C, has established herself and her van as the place to go for delicious, cheap eats.

Sistah C started cooking when she was 3. Her large family included nine girls growing up together. Her mother made sure that there was always something for her children to eat.

"It meant that there was always going to have to be a pot on the fire," Sistah C said. A part of this was ensuring that everyone in the family had equal responsibility to ensure meals got prepped and served out in abundance. The oldest siblings took turns cooking some meals, and her mother made sure that the smaller ones would team up with one of their older sisters so they were always cooking together, and so the younger siblings could learn what was going on.

"My older sister was always into cooking fancy foods, so there was always gravy, baking, making pastries and cakes when I was with her," Sistah C said. "I learned what I learned from her, and that put me into a position of loving to cook."

Griffen, from childhood onward, embraced her love of cooking and made a career out of it. She started at the Four Seasons Resort, working there from when the hotel opened its doors, until 2000, when a hurricane caused the resort to



lay-off several employees. Griffen started out as a hostess and moved around the resort to find wherever it was busiest. Lunch hour at the Cabana was where she found herself needed the most.

"Sometimes lunch didn't come out in time, so as long as my tables were okay, I would find myself in the kitchen trying to help out," Sistah C said. "Turning a burger or turning a fish, prepping a salad or something. The cooks there were grateful for the help, so I just found myself not idle. I made sure I had something for my hands to do."

After her time at the

Four Seasons, Sistah C found herself rejuvenated and ready to work on her own terms. She figured "If I can do it at the Four Seasons, I can do it for myself." With that in mind, she started frying chicken on the main road in Cotton Ground. Every Friday and Saturday she would be out serving, and as the business expanded, the menu grew. She went from chicken to fries, burgers, hot dogs and coleslaw. She was simply cooking to keep up with demands, and noted that everything now on her menu "just worked itself in."

Sistah C realized she had found her calling, and relocated across

from the Best Buy supermarket in town to expand. Originally, the shop was set up on Friday afternoons, treating passers-by with something to eat after just finishing a week of work. One more relocation saw her move her shop into its present location, and she has been there ever since, evolving with the community around her.

Now she does burgers, fish burgers, chicken, coleslaw, green salad and the "best local drinks you'll find anywhere" on Friday afternoons. After a stint at Choice 105.3 FM ended, Griffen had her weekdays open and was eager to expand her

business.

"I figured that just doing something on a Friday would not cut it," Sistah C said. "I've got my kids I have to provide for and put food on the table and shelter and everything. I decided I'm going to have to find something else to do during the week, so I got myself a van and now I'm doing Sistah C gone mobile."

In addition to her regular Friday menu, Sistah C offers a rotating meal option for lunches during the week. Today's entree was a baked chicken lunch served with rice and peas, pasta salad and corn on the cob, all for \$20 EC.

Griffen's meals are some of the cheapest around, and she intentionally tries to sell as cheap as she can to make sure there is plenty of food for everyone, a value that has been a part of her cooking since the beginning.

"There are times people come along and they don't have," Sistah C said. "If you have leftovers if you're ready to go home, why not give it to someone there who needs it, but can't buy?"

"Just like my mother, always making sure that there is food on the table. For me, I always make sure there is food in the mobile van."