

Sweet Creams & Sweet Dreams

Every time I visit the main street of Julian CA, I think to myself, "what a charming town. Families pile the kids in the car and head for a town where they know there is something for everyone. Couples stroll hand in hand for day trips and romantic getaways. I love seeing people from all over CA perusing the shops, eating at the restaurants and cafes, laboring over whether or not to get apple, blueberry or pumpkin pie from the local bakeries. There is a special feeling there, small town, mom & pop, old fashioned but not outdated. As someone who lives in a small town that I did not grow up in, Brawley, I have always thought The Arts District of Brawley-Main Street from the Plaza to 8th street, could be just as charming. There is a little charm there now, with Inferno restaurant drawing a loyal following, newer businesses popping up all the time and with the Greater Brawley Chamber of Commerce's annual events like the Cattle Call Parade, Mariachi Night and the Chili Cook Off, the potential is there for our little town to be a destination spot, similar to Julian. Enter the Brawley Creamery- A brand new ice cream shop featuring all homemade ice cream and recipes. My family and I love this place. We can walk to it, there are big comfy couches to relax on as you enjoy your creamy homemade treat. You can play games like Jenga with giant wood blocks and oversized Connect Four or Apples to Apples. You can even view local art on display or just enjoy the easy going vibe of the music softly playing in the background. I sat down with the Owner Andrya Juarez and found that she and I share the same vision for the Main Street of Brawley. I was curious to find out how the Brawley Creamery came to be.

Jodi: So, let's start at the beginning- What did you want to be when you grew up?

Andrya: " I remember not knowing what I wanted to be but, but I remember not wanting to be in the Imperial Valley. I remember almost every day in my grandma's backyard, like looking out in the distance towards San Diego, thinking like what is everybody doing out there? They must be having so much fun today, doing so many things, and I'm stuck here in 120 degree weather in someone's backyard just like playing with the dogs. I always knew I wasn't going to be living here, but I never knew what like my dream career was going to be.

Jodi: Do you still feel that way?

A: In college, I did have a taste of living in the city, and I did enjoy it, but literally nothing compares to living in a small town like this (Brawley) . It's definitely more comforting, less anxiety, knowing that your family is just a block away. But I was always wondering what people were doing in these big city's.

J: Where did you go to college?

A; I went to school for baking and pastry at The Art Institute of San Diego. I took a huge, huge jump and went out there. And the entire time I was there, I thinking to myself, I was totally fine with like moving back to the valley and working at a small bakery down here, doing that the rest of my life. It wasn't until after college I was like, oh my God I could do much better than what I was telling myself I could do. Throughout my whole entire childhood ...I kept telling myself I just

want to do a 9 to 5, hang out with my family and be comfortable. But after I graduated, I worked for a bakery inside a steakhouse, in SD. Then I became a supervisor and a sous chef. I was like knocking out all my goals, and I had a big wakeup call - I thought, this is actually a lot easier than people had told me growing up. So, like four years out of college I was like, I'm going to open a business in my hometown and show them that stuff in San Diego could be down here in the Valley - if everyone starts doing their part instead of being safe.

J: Did you travel outside of the valley as a child?

A: Yes, to San Diego, Yuma, Palm Desert. When I was little, my first time in San Diego I was just super fascinated, just seeing how another city could work. I still think about that when I come down here, like when I see main street, I still think it could look like one of those, you know small main streets like you see in San Diego with booming bars and businesses everywhere and plants, trees, art, murals - I'm like man, Brawley could really be like this!

J: It could totally be that -Or even like Julian.

A: Yes, yes, a little destination spot. I remember stopping there all the time before we went to SD, it was like a pitstop. I mean that would be fine too, if Brawley was one of those like destinations, little charming you know pitstops.

J: I do a lot of volunteer work where I speak with teens locally and I have found a lot of them feel hopeless. They tell me things like "Oh it's just the Valley" or "there's no work here unless you work at the prison, Border Patrol or be a teacher" They know those are good, respectable jobs, but they tell me they feel very boxed in. As if there is only one path to take. Did you feel like that?

A: I definitely felt that, exactly to a tee when I was a teenager in junior high. I literally felt that I would be working for the prison like my mom did or the school like my dad did...if I would have stayed here in the valley after graduating high school. My mom was like "just stay here and work for the government, work for the state, there are so many good benefits, you will be set for life."

J: So, what made you choose to study pastry and ice cream?

A: I had always liked art and when I looked at all the programs that they had at The Art Institute, the two that stuck out were graphic design and baking & pastry. I weighed down on the two and was like, do I really want to be stuck behind a computer all day or do I want to be hands on in the kitchen? So, I chose baking & pastry.

J: What was different in your mind? Why didn't you say to yourself- "yeah, I like baking pastries, but I am better off working at the prison?" What made you think I want to bring something from a big city to a small town? Most people go with what they know and what is comfortable? You didn't. I think there is something special in you.

A: I don't know...I guess I did have a lot of comfort. I had family, friends and my husband to fall back on. I didn't really do any of it alone. And even when I did feel like this is too much, I always

had that comfort in the back of my mind, that at least my husband still has a job, my mom will still pay for my phone bill if something happens.

J: Did your family support you or did they think you were crazy?

A: They supported me for sure! Luckily, I never got to that point where I was like "hey mom can you help me with bills cause I spent all my money on ice cream machines?" Luckily, everything worked out. I always knew in the back of my mind; I had that safety net.

J: Was it difficult to get your husband on board?

A: My husband Ralphie, was working as a general manager at a burger place, getting really good money. And he really didn't want to leave- he wanted to just keep going up in that company. But he was totally for it-

J: Was he from SD?

A: He's from here from Brawley, we are actually high school sweethearts - we started dating when we were 14, now I'm 28!

J: That's so cute!

A: So, when I moved to San Diego he moved with me and we both got jobs and we got consumed by our work and we were just like working every day. After a couple of years, I think he could see that I didn't want to do that for a long time. He was super supportive right off the bat. I want to say my mom probably was the most supportive. I threw the idea out like "ice cream shop." At first, I wanted to do a coffee shop, but looking at the finances, it's a lot more expensive to open a coffee shop. So, I was like, OK ice cream is definitely something the valley would like - because of the heat. I told my mom the idea and two months later was December and she gave me an ice cream machine for Christmas. I was like "OK I have to do this now! (She laughs.)

J: That is awesome that she supports you! Was it difficult to start a business here in Brawley?

A: You know, a lot of people scared us, before we moved back down. We would tell friends and family our plans and they were like "what?" "Are you sure you want to do this?" "The city is not going to help you." Or "The health department is not going to help you." We just heard so many negative things. So, when we came down (to Brawley) we were actually very nervous. We would go personally to all the places to talk to the people and get the right permits, instead of doing it online. It was not what people were saying - like people were extremely friendly, extremely nice, extremely easy to work with. The health department, fire department, the SBD center here and of course the city planning department helped us so much. It just was not what we were expecting because we had heard so many negative things.

J: Then what happened?

A: Five months later I was still in San Diego testing recipes and creating the menu and creating social media just to get our name out there. Our social media hit and the IV Press saw it and they asked do an interview, I was like "oh my God we haven't even sold anything yet." "We don't even live down there yet!" A week later the owner of this building (the current location of The Brawley Creamery) called us and asked us if we would like to rent his building. At the time we were not looking to do a brick and mortar. We wanted to start with events, farmers markets, catering and pop ups. But we didn't want to say no. We drove down early to see the place and we saw him and his family- his little boys were cleaning up the place and we were like "awww!" He seemed like a good guy.

J: How did you come up with the name?

A: I came up with the name because - basically because the town needed a staple spot where tourists and people from here could stop and feel like they are supporting the town itself - enjoy something that people of the town enjoy every day. That is one of the things I would do when I would travel. I would ask around "hey what's the best restaurant, dessert place or coffee shop?" And the locals would always tell you the same spot. So, I thought having the town's name in our business name would help bring in a lot of tourists and people and help us feel we are doing our part for the city and set a good example. We just love our little town. We wanted the name in our business name.

J: How did you choose the word Creamery?

A: That's funny because, I did think about calling it Brawley Ice Cream "Shopee" - the shop with two e's. But Creamery just sounded a lot less complicated and a lot more modern. It's also a lot more true to what we are doing. Because we don't just provide the ice cream, we are making the ice cream and a creamery is a place where they make the ice cream from scratch.

J: I have to ask - What's your most popular flavor?

A: Our most popular is "Sol Y Paz." Which means sun and peace. I felt like it was perfect for the Valley. It's a mixture of vanilla ice cream, dulce de leche, and marzipan peanut candy - which is a Mexican candy. We did that because I remember like all my friends and family, growing up, marzipan was the most popular thing to come out of the pinata. As kids we were like: "Oh my God, that's Mazapan, I want it!!" (She smiles) I kind of knew it was going to be a really good hit. It always sells out; we are actually sold out right now. We plan to add a horchata flavored ice cream in the future as well.

J: After receiving a lot of help and support from their landlord and a loan, they were able to rent the building and open for business. I asked her how Covid affected her business.

A: It was really really, really good in the first two weeks before Covid happened. We opened our doors in February, and we were packed, super packed during high school lunch, after school and nighttime. It was to the point where we had no room for people to sit down. And then Covid hit. We were struggling but our landlord was very helpful. We were hanging on for dear life until the Covid relief hit. Flash forward to now, we are doing really good. Bills paid on time. It's not

as good as pre Covid but I think people are still a little scared to go out. Now we are looking forward to Cattle Call Season. We are super hopeful. The Valley really thrives in the fall and winter - And in the fall we hope to have a lot more interesting and delicious flavors, and we want to do pies and baked goods.

J: What is the best and worst part of owning Brawley Creamery?

A: Hmm I want to say Well, the worst part would probably be the expectations. When somebody comes into the shop and their favorite flavor is sold out. I am just like "oh my God, I failed you!" (She laughs.) But the best part is making people happy, I know it sounds cliché, but like when a family comes in and there's a little girl and they're like "it's her birthday today and she wanted to get ice cream!" "We are just like aww, oh my God!" "This is exactly what we wanted, to have a really fun, safe, exciting experience for somebody here in the Valley- that grew up here all their lives. And the fact that they chose us, makes us super, super happy. So that's probably the best part when they choose us to brighten their day.

J: Ok last question - What do you see for the future for Brawley Creamery? What is your dream?

A: I kind of want to just be that charming go to ice cream spot that everybody knows that their parents know, their grandparents know. It's kind of like Foster's Freeze and Johnny's. They have been here for so long. They are kind of like historic at this point, for the town. I definitely want to be that. And I want to be an inspiration for others who want to open businesses - who may be thinking it won't do good here. I want people to break from that stigma. I want people to be like "I am going to try doing like this crazy dog washing, pet grooming place that sells martinis!" Like do it! (She laughs.) We plan to do other projects and open other businesses and I would still love to do my coffee shop. I would love to see a brewery here in Brawley. But for now, Brawley Creamery is it.