

Flip Flops, Tank Tops and Cold Summers in San Francisco

-The Journey to becoming Mayor of One of the Safest Cities in California

I grew up in New York, dreaming about performing on Television, film and stage. My passion was being creative. We lived in a tiny town smaller than Calipatria, about two hours from Manhattan. So, Broadway was within reach. However, When I was 9, my family moved to the suburbs of Denver. Colorado was drenched in sunshine, framed with beautiful snowcapped mountains. But it was far from Broadway and I was misplaced.

Meanwhile about 1000 miles away in another sundrenched part of the country, was Karin Eugenio, the Mayor of the City of Imperial, one of the safest city in the state of California. She is also my friend. She is vibrant, passionate and driven. Her passion for improving parks and outdoor resources is something I respect and admire about her. It was her platform when she ran for Imperial City Council in 2018. Karin grew in El Centro, also two hours from a major city, San Diego.

I interviewed Karin at the ideal place, in Cambria Park, at sunset. It was breezy and warm, and the sky was filled with an orange and red glow. We sat on a wooden park bench, and Karin, shared her journey away from, and back to the Valley.

She was born to a Mexican mother and Indian father. As a child Karin loved to read. "I would sit in the huge bay windows of the old El Centro Library (which is no longer there) read and daydream." She could escape to anyplace or any time she could read about. She dreamt of being a lawyer, about traveling, and living outside the Valley. That dream came true when her love of reading, writing, and the spoken word was explored and expanded when she received a BA in Literature at CAL State San Marco, and her MA. in Rhetoric & Composition at SDSU. She thought back, "I could not believe she could get a degree in something I was already so passionate about."

After graduating Karin moved to San Francisco with every intention to go into a PHD program or to Law school but, many friends who had gone to law school were now deep in debt and could not find a job. Karin found herself working for world renowned motivational speaker Tony Robbins, who was "larger than life." Next Karin got a job working for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, for Supervisor Aaron Peskin. She worked on his reelection campaign. This is where the spark for politics was lit. "I really saw how engaged San Francisco inhabitants were with their politicians, with bills, with propositions," she told me. Peskin was reelected. Karin flourished in San Francisco, she also lived in Napa for a time, but she missed her family and good Mexican food, "I just don't eat Mexican food outside of the Valley." She said with a big smile. Karin would visit the Valley in the summer when most people are trying to escape the triple digit temperatures. San Francisco is filled with 50 degree overcast summer days. "There is a famous quote by Mark Twain, that says the coldest winter I spent was the summer in San Francisco." She laughed as she said that. She missed her shorts, tank top and flip flops. As much as she loved living in all of these big cosmopolitan cities and traveling, the Valley always pulled her back. It had a magnetic pull over her. She would fly down to the Valley up to 12 times a year. 'I never missed a Thanksgiving or a Christmas

in the Valley,” she said. But It got to be too much. Then on chance Karin reconnected with her high school boyfriend Art, whom she had not seen in 17 years. They fell in love, got married, had their daughter Spencer and settled in Imperial in 2015. She knew she wanted to raise her daughter here, be near her family and to fully engage herself in her community. She wanted to connect with her community, the way she had seen in San Francisco. This was home again; it had always been. It just took some time to realize it.

Karin has been on City Council since 2018 and in December of 2020 she was sworn in as Mayor. It has been a pleasure and an honor for to serve. Add new parks and improving old ones is her focus. She is on a mission. She has realized that “whenever you make a hard decision as a City Council Member or as a Mayor, “you are going to make 50% of the public unhappy.” That is difficult for her she says.

This summer she will begin a PHD program at Claremont Graduate University & SDSU in education with an emphasis on social justice. When she is not working, you can find Karin with her family or the beach with her “mini me” Spencer or teaching for SDSU.

As for me, like Karin, I moved to the big cities both New York and LA and now I find myself here in the Valley, my home. I have no desire to live in a big city again. I have podcast that is heard internationally, and I write for this column, which is a dream come true I (do both of these things in shorts, flip flops by the way) But most importantly I get share stories about incredible and inspiring women like Mayor Karin Eugenio.