

Al Kalin: 2013 Farmer of the Year

In 1915 a young cattleman and farmer made his way to Imperial Valley to start what is now the number 1 agricultural commodity in Imperial County. Albert John Kalin settled in Brawley and started the cattle industry by building the first two feedlots in Imperial Valley. In 1927 Albert was also a founding partner in the building of the historical Planter's Hotel. He worked over the years and quickly built his business to include properties both here and in the Victorville area.

Meanwhile, in 1907 Thomas Kennedy came west from Abilene, Texas to the Imperial Valley. He traveled by rail on what was called an "immigrant train." That meant he and his personal belongings, possibly some farm implements and livestock, traveled on a boxcar. His wife, Bessie, and their two sons soon joined him. When Bessie became pregnant, Tom Kennedy announced, "No child of mine is going to be born in California" so she returned briefly to Texas. On January 10, 1920, Louise Kennedy was born and a year later they were reunited in Brawley where they raised their family.

Louise was a smart girl and after graduating from Brawley High School, she enrolled in Woodbury College in Los Angeles. Louise returned to Brawley in 1940 and landed a job as a bookkeeper for an agricultural company owned by Albert Kalin. Working closely was obviously a positive thing and in 1946 Louise "married the boss" and she joined Albert in all phases of the farming and cattle feeding operations.

Two years later, the couple welcomed their first-born son, on June 4, 1948 Al Kennedy Kalin bounced into the world. Rumor has it, that upon announcing the birth of his son, Albert road his horse through the lobby of the Planter's Hotel. A second son quickly followed when Carson was born on March 9, 1951.

Sadly, the family's time together quickly ended, the two young boys

lost their father when Albert passed away in 1951 – Al was 3 years old and Carson only 7 months. Being the pioneering woman that she was, Louise was determined to continue on with life and quickly put her knowledge and skills to good use and became the proprietor and manager of the feedlot and a 3,000-acre farm. To help her raise her boys, Louise hired Ruthie Mae who stayed with the family for many years later.

Starting at a young age, Al's mother would drive him around the ranches in Brawley and Westmorland areas to look at the birds and animals. There is no doubt that Al's love of the outdoors and wildlife was nurtured by his mother.

By the age of 5, Al was riding his own horse and running a trap line for gophers for which he was paid 25 cents a tail and shooting blackbirds around the family owned feedlot with his trusty BB gun. At the end of his 7th summer, Al had trapped enough gophers and ground squirrels to purchase a brand new Winchester Model 12 – 20 gauge shotgun for \$107.00 at the Imperial Hardware Store in Brawley and he enjoyed his first dove shoot on September 1, 1955. Always looking to make a profit, Al took his new 20 gauge to shoot muskrats that plagued the irrigation canal for which the water district paid him a dollar a tail.

Al spent most summer months at the family's high desert ranch near Victorville with his younger brother and his grandmother. One of the foremen on the ranch, an old retired farmer from Imperial Valley, took Al under his wing and together they irrigated the alfalfa fields and looked at all the wild creatures from the front of his Model A Ford coupe. Fred Middaugh was every boy's dream of what a grandfather should be. Fred spent countless hours teaching Al how to see things in nature that many did not even know exist. Within a few years, Al was spotting hidden rabbits in brush, or coyotes or bobcats that thought they were hidden. To this day, Al has excellent eyesight as well as a gift of spotting things that nobody else sees.

Yet with all of these talents that Al formed at a very young age, they are nothing to compare to his greatest and most cherished accomplishment of all time – In 1959 Al Kalin was named the Marble Champion of Brawley, California.

When Al was 6 years old, his mother purchased 80 acres on the edge of the Salton Sea. The property was too poor to farm and so it was decided the best use would be as a duck club. Al spent many days camped at the duck club either hunting or beach combing along the seashore. When you ask Al about his early days around the Sea, his tone quickly turns back to that young child when he tells you about his endless supply of army men that would wash upon the shore. His tale includes a 55-gallon drum that held his collection of mutated toy army men, some missing a head, or a leg or an arm that were produced in a factory in Mexicali and had found their way to his backyard at the Sea via the New River.

Throughout his youth Al was an active boy, he raised steers in 4H, he played football and he roamed around the countryside. One memorable story about young Al's activities included a curious trip to the Brawley Drive-in for a viewing of "Knockers Up" when he was 13-years old. Once he realized what "knockers" were he quickly offered to drive his mother's jeep station wagon that they called "Old Merry" to haul the neighborhood gang to view the movie from the ditch bank. Unfortunately for the boys, they never saw anything past the opening credits when two police officers showed up and they quickly high tailed it down the ditch, across an alfalfa field that they suddenly found out had just been irrigated until finding a hiding place in the middle of a citrus orchard. After hiding in the grove for an hour, the coast seemed clear and the boys remembered a little known and mostly hidden horse trail that went from Cattle Call Arena straight up the side of the riverbank through a thick growth of cane. As thoughts of "Knockers Up" were replaced by juvenile hall Al put Old Merry in low and nosed her over the cliff. The jeep slid down the horse trail and halted in the middle of the cane. The boys quickly jumped out and covered Old Merry with the tall plants as two cop cars met right above them on the ledge. For 30 minutes

they listened to them cuss wondering how the boys had disappeared. Before the sun came up the next day, Al snuck out of the house and drove Old Merry back to the steer pens before his mother found out of his mischief.

After graduating from Brawley Union High School in 1966, Al went on to attend Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where he completed advanced studies in Crop Science, Soil Science, Agricultural Engineering and Gamebird Management. He graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Farm Management.

Al enlisted in the California National Guard while still in college and he spent his summers from 1971 - 1977 fulfilling his duties where he became a master at fixing tanks and a grenade specialist. Using his grenade skills, Al later became a master at the Rodenator killing unwanted pests around the ranch with a single blast.

When Al finished with college, he returned to Brawley to work with his brother at Kalin Farms. Remember Ruthie Mae? She was still with the family and shortly after Al's return home he told her about being harassed by a zanjero. He explained how he had sat on the drain box to wait for the water from the first irrigation set to hit the end of the field, measured the water at its peak and then written a waste water ticket which made the water cost three times as much. Ruthie Mae didn't have much to say but a week later she handed him a rag doll. Over the right chest were the letters IID. Embroidered on the left chest was a black heart. Ruthie Mae told him to hang it from his rear view mirror and gave him a large hatpin with instructions to run it through the black heart next time he had any trouble. You see, Ruthie Mae claimed to be a Southern Baptist, but she was also a student of Voodoo. Al asked Ruthie Mae about it a year later and she responded, "No evil man gonna mess with my li'l Al." Now, I'm not certain if that Voodoo doll is still around, but just in case, if I were an IID employee, I certainly wouldn't cross li'l Al!

Al continued Kalin Farms that he started while still in high school with his brother and together they farm 2,500 acres of wheat,

alfalfa, carrots, dehy onions and sugar beets. The Kalin family home sits in the middle of the property he has farmed for most of his life. Al often jokes about planning his menu around the crops that are planted nearby his house.

In 1973 Al met Patti Faulk, a single mother waitressing at the Gateway Café in Westmorland. Patti knew Al was an avid fisherman and she would talk to him about the best way to catch corvina at the Salton Sea. After work, she would take her two children, Linda age 8 and Michael age 4 out to Benson's Landing to try out some of Al's fishing tips. It wasn't long until Al would join them. After a two-year courtship, Al realized that he had caught three keepers and he started the adoption process in 1975. Al and Patti were married on December 24, 1976. On January 13, 1980, the family became complete with the birth of their youngest daughter, Kristin.

And although farming pays the bills, it is when he talks about nature and his surrounding environment that Al really comes alive. I challenge everyone in this room to try to think of a better expert of the Salton Sea than Al Kalin. There is nothing that happens or has happened at the Sea that Al does not know about. This is probably why in 1997 when the Farm Bureau took the lead to organize our TMDL Coalition, Al was asked to sit on the very first Technical Advisory Committee of the Regional Water Quality Control Board's Alamo Sediment/Siltation TMDL. Next he chaired the TMDLs Best Management Practices sub-committee and was instrumental in developing and field-testing, on his own farm, the top BMPs for the Silt TMDL. And in 2002, Al was the clear choice to be hired as the Farm Bureau's On-Farm TMDL Consultant, a position that he continues to serve.

Working with Nicole Rothfleisch, together they built a system that is undoubtedly the most successful TMDL program in the state. In 2004, Al and Nicole traveled to Sacramento to receive the Governor's Environmental & Economic Leadership Award. Al often tells the story that he was excited to meet Governor and share a cigar, but was disappointed when he arrived and Arnold was a no-

show.

Then in 2006 the program was honored once again with the Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Award for Outstanding Achievement. I was lucky enough to join Al and Nicole on this trip... here we are representatives for the farmers in a room full of environmentalist...all we could do was laugh and state the obvious, to us anyways, farmers are the only true environmentalists.

Because of his vast knowledge of every aspect of the Salton Sea, Al is continually the go-to guy for interviews, meetings and committees and luckily for all of us, he has a difficult time saying no. Throughout his adult life, Al continues to serve his community well.

1977 – 2007 Westmorland Union Elementary School District
Trustee

1976 – 1986 Westmorland Community 4H Leader

And he continues to serves on the...

State Department of Water Resources Salton Sea Technical Advisory Committee
Regional Water Quality Control Board Silt / Sediment TMDL Technical Advisory Committees
Regional Water Quality Control Board Salton Sea Nutrient TMDL Technical Advisory Committee
Chairman of the IID Water Conservation Advisory Board
IID Water Conservation Committee
IID Drain Water Quality Technical Advisory Committee
Citizen's Congressional Task Force on the New River / Desert Wildlife Unlimited
Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program – Farmer Advisory Committee
Community Guide and Advisory Committee member of the Salton Sea Bird Festival
And last but not least, Al serves as Secretary of the Imperial County Farm Bureau Board of Directors where we definitely keep him busy.

And if all of this activity is not enough for one man, Al still finds the time to share his love of the great outdoors with his four grandchildren – Austin, Branden, Kalin and Destiny...All of whom are here tonight to celebrate their Papa.

On a personal note, I feel it was a true blessing that I was chosen for my original position as Natural Resources Director with the Farm Bureau back in 2006. I will never forget my interview with Nicole, then President Vince Brooke and Al. I was acquainted with Nicole and Vince, but this soft spoken, slow talking man named Al really intimidated me. After being hired, Nicole quickly encouraged me to understand the TMDL program better and suggested that I go on a field tour with Al. I think it was that first tour that our friendship really blossomed. (30) I always say we are the most unlikely friends anyone could ever imagine – Al Kalin: raised on the farm, offspring from a legendary pioneering family, well respected in the agricultural community, somewhat of a mountain man, calm and humble. And me: Never raised a 4H animal, shouldn't be trusted with as much as a houseplant because it would never survive, grew up in the big city of El Centro, loves the 80s music and of all things may I dare to say a Spartan true and blue. Aside from my parents, I have learned more about more things from Al than I have from anyone else in my 45 years. Al is a self proclaimed EXPERT...and if you doubt me just ask him for a business card.

Over the past few years I have learned how to dig for potatoes while wearing heels and a dress suit that if you have enough clout in Brawley, you can borrow the famous Victory Bell to rub it in that you won the bet that the Buckshot Café in Niland has the most amazing breakfast called the Slab City Slammer and if you go there you might have the privilege of meeting some of Al's friends – Laura Lee, Cuervo and Moth.

There are no dumb questions, just dumb people that don't ask the dumb questions.

The true beauty of the Salton Sea and that no matter how tough you think you are, sometimes a girl just needs a good friend to take charge and stand up for you. And for the record, I have also taught Al a thing or two about being more politically correct and how to get in touch with his feminine side.

As I have gotten older, I have learned that in life you have many

cubic zirconia friends, but few friends that are real genuine diamonds. I count Al as one of my few priceless diamonds.

Yes, Al Kalin is a farmer who is also respected authority of the Salton Sea. He is an entrepreneur who is also an effective statesman. He is an avid birdwatcher and outdoor enthusiast who is also a successful writer.

In reality, Al Kalin is nothing short of a Renaissance man in muddy boots.