Meet Carolina Martinez of Environmental Health Coalition

Today we’d like to introduce you to Carolina Martinez.

Carolina, let’s start with your story. We’d love to hear how you
got started and how the journey has been so far.
I was born and raised in Colombia. I came here when I was 14 years old. Immigrating to the United States was one of the most challenging and transformative experiences. My teachers and counselors did not think I could go to a 4-year university right after high
school. I was tracked to work in the service industry and placed in cooking classes, typing, and really low-level math courses. Little did they know that I come from a lineage of warriors and survivors who also had to overcome discriminating practices. So, at home my parents did everything possible to make me believe I was meant to go to college and
that’s where my career fighting for justice and liberation began.

I found my coping mechanism in organizing. As a student, I mostly identified with others committed to put on the best parties in town while working collectively against injustices. In that process I found home in the environmental justice movement.
Grounded in the civil rights movement, environmental justice organizes against structural racism that is placing low income communities at the forefront of toxic pollution and climate change.

We’re always bombarded by how great it is to pursue your passion, etc – but we’ve spoken with enough people to know that
it’s not always easy.
Overall, would you say things have been easy for you?
Doing justice work is challenging but also very liberating.
As an immigrant, it is challenging and key to feel a sense of place, community, and belonging.
Fortunately, movement building has allowed me to connect with most amazing and caring
individuals, who have helped in my search for liberation.

We’d love to hear more about your business. I work for the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) as the Associate Director of Policy, empowering community members to demand toxic-free neighborhoods and a healthy and safe place to live, work and play.
As the only environmental justice organization in the San Diego/Tijuana region, EHC works with residents who live in the most polluted neighborhoods. Our team and our work are dedicated to achieving environmental and social justice, and we know that is only accomplished when empowered communities act together to make change. EHC supports
broad efforts that create a just society and fosters a healthy and sustainable quality of life for all people.

What were you like growing up?
I used to be really quiet and shy. I think I’m still, but working on policy advocacy has required me to step out of my comfort zone.

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