

In Her Words: August



Barbara Perzigian



"You can be a 49ers cheerleader, pass meaningful legislation, and run a business. That's what feminism is all about."

Every woman has a story. But some stories shake rooms, open doors, and redefine what's possible. In Her Words is SAR's series spotlighting trailblazing women who lead with courage, shape community with intention, and inspire the next generation through purpose, resilience, and grace.

Barbara Perzigian is proof that purpose doesn't come from choosing one path—it comes from refusing to settle. A former 49ers cheerleader turned political visionary and business leader, she's worn many hats: advocate, mentor, and hospitality executive. Each chapter of her life has been fueled by service and driven by impact.

The granddaughter of Armenian Genocide survivors, Barbara grew up in a working-class neighborhood built on grit, hope, and community. Growing up during the civil rights era and Vietnam War, Barbara saw injustice up close. Her family's journey from survival to resilience planted seeds that would shape her lifelong mission: to serve people with purpose. At 19, she moved to California alone, believing deeply that she was meant for more and determined to create change.

Her first chapter in politics was bold: helping pass California's first cigarette tax and working on legislation that made it illegal to dump cancer-causing chemicals into drinking water. These were high-stakes fights against powerful industries and she didn't back down.

She then entered hospitality to build spaces where everyone, from guests to staff, felt seen and valued. She believes in the dignity of every human being. “We are losing our sense of connection,” she says. “And someone has to bring it back.”

Having navigated her own path without a mentor, Barbara is passionate about mentoring others. Her advice is simple: “Work hard. Show up early. Stay late. Don’t give up.” Keep learning - education is so important.

And while her career has spanned industries, Barbara hasn’t lost sight of her ultimate dream: to teach. She wants to teach kids how to think, how to care, how to see the world. She wants to spark curiosity and courage in the next generation.

She once hesitated to share she’d been a San Francisco 49ers cheerleader—unsure how it fit alongside her identity as a feminist and changemaker. But time has given her clarity, not contradiction. She laughed as she recalled, “I don’t know how I became a 49ers cheerleader... I just showed up! How I got picked among the hundreds of girls—I don’t know, but I did.”

Looking back, she wishes she had kept her uniform to one day pass down to her daughters, not as a costume, but as a symbol. “Feminism means you can be all things,” Barbara says. “You can wear the uniform, pass legislation, and lead with integrity. None of it cancels the other. That’s the power of being fully yourself.”

Barbara leaves us with the words that reflect the heart of her journey: *"People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel."*

And that’s exactly what she does. This is Barbara. This is SAR.

By Hector Zamora



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