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# Yearlong tour of state brings Costa Mesa native home

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By [ANTONIE BOESSENKOOL](#) / ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

COSTA MESA – Ingrid Hart strolled into Fairview Park one morning this week, the warm breeze bending the brim of her floppy hat.

"I love to show people new things," Hart said as she led two visitors into the park and onto a mesa offering wide views – the Santa Ana River, houses, power lines, the man-made ponds of the park, and, in the distance, the snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains.



Ingrid Hart at Fairview Park in Costa Mesa . She left Costa Mesa at age 21, and returned last July to take care of her elderly mother. She's written a book about the year she spent living all over California, volunteering and getting to know different parts of the state.

CHRISTINE COTTER, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

"There's so much in California to explore, especially places that are off the beaten track," Hart said. "So this is a place I just come. It's a refuge. It's such a joy to live near this park because it's a way to connect with the land, but with very minimal effort."

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When Hart grew up in Costa Mesa in the 1960s and '70s, Fairview Park was "the Gully." Teenagers partied there and even rode motor bikes up and down the hills. The improvements there today – interpretive signs, a wetlands project and more – weren't yet added.

"You can imagine what a cool place this was," Hart said as she looked over the mesa where artifacts from an ancient American Indian village have been found. "Plus, the view. It's a great place to watch the sunset. It's just exquisite."

Hart comes to the park for a walk about five times a week, at sunset, and hikes for miles.

"I like to walk at the beach, too. But there's something more earthy about it up here. It's a deeper connection to the land. It just has a sort of ancient feel to it."

Not only has the Gully changed since Hart grew up in Costa Mesa, but so has the city itself.

When she left at 21 years old in 1981, Costa Mesa was a different, less crowded place. There were 30,000 fewer people

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#### If you go

In 2010, Ingrid Hart sold her house in Sacramento and hit the road, spending the next year living in a dozen different cities and towns across California. Hart used the trip to explore how to transition to the next phase of her life. On Dec. 3, she'll share the experience of her "midlife renewal" in an interactive class.

**What:** An interactive discussion on "midlife renewal"

**When:** Tuesday, Dec. 3, 7–9 p.m.

**Where:** Visions and Dreams, 2482 Newport Blvd., Costa Mesa

**Cost:** \$10, payable at the door

**RSVP:** [ingrid@myyearincalifornia.com](mailto:ingrid@myyearincalifornia.com) or 916-717-8812

living here. A roller-skating rink, Hawaiian-themed bowling alley called Kona Lanes and ice rink – now all gone – were gathering spots. Homes were more affordable, Hart said. Now the vibe is younger, more urban and hipster, a good thing for the city.

And Hart also has changed from the Estancia High School student and

cheerleader she was then. Now 52, she has returned to her hometown to help take care of her 76-year-old mom. That homecoming, and the journey to a dozen California cities that led to it, is part of a process Hart calls “midlife renewal.” Rather than a midlife crisis, it’s choosing a direction for the second phase of life, after the kids are grown, the house is acquired, the career is established.

With funding from an online Kickstarter campaign, Hart wrote and published a book this year of her story and photos. It’s called, “My Year in California: A Journey Toward Midlife Renewal.”

And on Dec. 3, she’ll hold a class, of her own design, to share her experience and talk with others about choosing a path for the second half of life.

“I still say I have more questions than answers,” Hart admitted. “But the question that I do pose is who are you going to be in the second half of life?”

“Midlife renewal is really when you reinvent yourself.”

**HITTING THE ROAD**

In 2010, Hart was living in Sacramento and running her communications firm, working from home as she’d done while raising her daughter and son, Haley and Jordan. She was getting closer to her fiftieth birthday and about to be an empty nester on her own as Jordan was about to follow his sister off to college.

“I was feeling stagnant in my life,” Hart said. “There was no forward momentum. I didn’t like where I was, but I didn’t know where I was going.”

More than that, Hart had been shaken by a recent event. Her then-boyfriend, a musician, was moving band equipment one night and had a heart attack. Hart called for emergency help and was instructed to give CPR in the meantime.

Odd thoughts traveled through her mind as she waited for paramedics. One of them was that her boyfriend had never been to Yosemite, though he lived within a three-hours’ drive of the national park.

“To have missed the grandeur and beauty of Yosemite when it’s so close... And I thought, ‘What am I missing in California?’” Hart said. “It’s a huge state and it’s so diverse.”

So Hart sold her house in a short sale, dove into her life savings and took off. Over the next year, she would spend one month each in a dozen cities and towns she’d chosen to experience the variety of California. There was Lake Tahoe in the summer. To see the fall colors, she stayed in Bishop, near the Sierra Nevada mountains. Christmas was spent in a cottage in Carmel. She stayed in big cities like San Francisco and San Diego and towns as small as Cedarville – population of about 500 – where the number of cattle outnumber the number of human inhabitants, Hart said. Artsy cities. Gold Country. Wine Country.

She explored, delved into local history, volunteered, hiked, ate and met locals.

In the end, having seen the variety that the state contains – from desert to ocean, big cosmopolitan cities to rural towns – Hart made a perhaps unexpected decision.

**HOMEcoming**

In September 2012, Hart’s older brother called and had some bad news. Their mom, Emma da Silva, had suffered a stroke.

Hart’s brother, determined to care for their mother in her own home, has moved in, and Hart is helping carry some of the weight.

“Home is where you’re needed,” a friend told Hart. With those words, Hart said, “I knew it was time to move back home.”

“That I can be here to support my mom gives me a sense of well-being,” she added.

“Costa Mesa is the place I grew up.”

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