

Southside ruminations (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Southside April 19, 2021

 *The latest in a series of posts on the Southside* 

Kim Carrell-Smith is a 31-year resident of Bethlehem's historic Southside, where she taught public history at Lehigh University for almost two decades. She is also an aspiring gadfly, buzzing in on issues of historic preservation, public education, city government, and other social justice issues. She tips her wings to the master gadflies who have served our community for so long!

ref: [Anna] **Smith's Song of the South(side)**

ref: **You tell 'em, Kim!**

Gadfly,

I fervently hope your wastebasket thumping will continue, as we ALL work on seeking out and coming to understand our Bethlehem community assets, rather than getting stuck in a deficit-based mindset. As Kiera Wilhelm suggested, Bethlehem folks definitely need to actively work against the conscious and unconscious bias that sees the Southside as a place that needs "saving." In my experience, deficits-based thinking about the Southside arises when people don't actually spend time in this part of town (other than for an occasional restaurant visit), nor have they really *talked* with the folks who live, play, and work here. I think those who live in or frequent the Southside might share a very different view of this place, based on our terrific assets, appealing quiriness, eclectic historical architecture, great small businesses (we can always use/support more!), and generally very good quality of life. Pondering this gap has led me to a lot of questions. Lots. Apologies in advance.

Do the deficit-based-savior-thinkers know about the Greenway that runs like a ribbon across this side of town – I mean, really know what it is/does/means for the Southside and the city? Have they observed the folks walking, running, playing, chatting with one another, sitting on a bench and watching the world go by while greeting passersby, or have they stepped off at Bonn Place or Dinky's for a quick beer or a snack? Do

they say hello to the folks they pass, or do they put their heads down or clutch their wallets?

Have they shopped and observed the summer market that CADCB runs on the Greenway, where the director chats with passersby and gets to hear what's going on in the neighborhoods, while folks hang out in the shade of the CADCB canopy and sip drinks and eat ice cream? Have they visited the fabulous new park area with great play structures that lie behind the former Holy Infancy School? Have they visited the community gardens behind Litzenberger House, where they might chat with the folks who sometimes sit beside them, admiring the plants, while chatting with the gardeners? Do they greet the friendly residents of Victory House who sit out in their garden, or do they turn their heads as they walk by?

Do they get their hair cut in a barbershop, because if they do there are myriad choices on the Southside, where you can get local news, talk with a barber-landlord with a million dollar portfolio, see children doing homework, maybe hear multiple languages at once, all while seeing Lehigh students and staff, as well as diverse residents, getting a shave, a trim, a shapeup.

Have they looked (really looked, and that means looking across streets and up at buildings!) at the eclectic streetscapes that tell the story of our city's past? Do they see the potential to enhance those great buildings, to adaptively reuse those which are underutilized (especially above the retail spaces)? Or do they see "old" as outmoded, without really thinking about these structures? Do they only see one building or space at a time, disconnected from the human setting, or do they see the impact of buildings and eclectic historical architecture within the whole streetscape? Do they see the people in these places and on these streets, or do they imagine other people, in their place?

Do they hang out in the historically restored Deja Brew Coffee House and Deli, or at Lit with its nationally renowned baked goods, or Cafe the Lodge with its dynamite outdoor Serenity Garden (just off the Greenway!), or have they eaten at Casa de Campos with its bountiful, inexpensive food, or La Tia's Dominican restaurant across from St. Michael's, or maybe at Macchu Pichu, beside Peruvian families with

children giggling and playing between tables? These are all places where so many Southside community members meet up. They are places where residents may meet with Lehigh folks, or perhaps they simply peacefully coexist in the same space, places where students descend after class for lunch, or where moms with babies meet to destress in the afternoon, where remote workers find quiet havens and free wifi, where friends connect.

Do the deficit-based-savior-thinkers know where we buy groceries, or dance salsa? Do they know the fun of picking up a last-minute item, and winding up with far more, from the Dollar Max? Have they heard you can buy the most stylish glasses in the Lehigh Valley over here? Do they know where to get homemade sausages, whole octopus, or fresh wild caught salmon for \$7.99 a pound? Have they stopped for fresh *pan sobao*, or impulsively picked up some tembleque or pineapple cheesecake when they're in the Four Blocks International (*Quatro Bloques*) area? Do they perhaps buy that occasional three-course Dominican lunch for about \$6?

Have they talked with the resident next to the great little park with the domino tables that was created by CADCB, about the facade grant that allowed her to fix up her house with an historically accurate porch roof that lends beauty and functionality to her home and the streetscape? Did they ever come to the annual tree lighting in that little park, where you hear Broughal singers and Three Kings sing carols in English and Spanish, and afterwards families walk down to the Southside library to make crafts and drink hot chocolate?

But I still have other questions, about what folks might be missing beyond our commercial areas and the Greenway. There's so much more to understand about our people, our neighborhoods. But I'll save those for the next post . . .

Kim

to be continued . . .