



Emily Reinl

Hi, this is Emily Reinl. The date is January 13th, 2023, and I would like to share the story of how I fell in love with New Bedford. So I don't have a long history with the South Coast region. I've lived in Massachusetts for four years, and I live in Middleborough, so I don't actually live in the South Coast, but I've worked in New Bedford for a little over a year now. And in that time, particularly in actually working on this project and working on the Common Ground project, I've gotten to know the region a little bit and come to really appreciate it in many ways.

The particular instance that I want to talk about happened last June, June of 2022. So in downtown New Bedford, there is a tradition called AHA!, which is a monthly celebration, I'd call it, where a lot of businesses and organizations in downtown New Bedford will stay open late on a Thursday night. And there are oftentimes a lot of activities, sometimes there's music. It's a really fun time and really sort of encompasses the spirit and the beauty of the downtown New Bedford region. So the Whaling Museum where I work, we oftentimes stay open late on AHA! nights. And in this particular AHA! night in June, for June AHA!, I was working, I was actually working on Common Grounds, funnily enough. So I was at the museum and down the street in the 54th Park, there was a Pride block party going on. So of course it being June, the theme of that month's AHA! was Pride.

And one of my colleagues, so I was at the museum and one of my colleagues who was also working, but she had gotten away for a few minutes just to check out what else was going on. And she came back and she said, "Oh, it's a lot of fun. We're missing a drag show right now." So I was like, "Oh, darn, that would've been great to see." So I finished up, I was working until a little after seven, and after I sort of wrapped everything up and cleaned up, I decided to walk down a block, and it seemed like there was still stuff happening, so I decided to go see if maybe that drag show was still going on. And so when I got to the park, the actual drag part was over, but there were still people performing. There was music, there was dancing, there were tables set up. So I walked around a bit and then I ran into another one of my coworkers and her husband and some friends of theirs. So I ended up hanging out with them and we watched some dancers perform. It was such great energy as you often find at Pride celebrations, but there was something extra special about this. Everyone was so happy, and there was just such a great sense of community.

I remember after some of the sort of official performers finished up, they just put on some music and then a lot of people started dancing and I wanted to go dance, but the people I was with didn't really seem interested and I didn't really want to just go join the crowd on my own. So I ended up not doing that. But then as a group we ended up going for a little walk and checking out some of the other things that were happening besides the Pride block party, I actually didn't think to mention earlier, but this AHA! also corresponded with a citywide celebration called 20mi2 that was happening over three days that weekend. And organizations and businesses and people all over the city were doing all kinds of special events as part of this citywide celebration. 20mi2, I think, if I recall correctly, referred to the 20 square miles of New Bedford. So it was really a celebration of New Bedford.

And as part of that same night, there had been earlier in the evening, this community dining table, it went all the way down the street next to the Zeiterion theater. And I had heard about this, but didn't really picture what this would look like. So we walked over there and we saw, the dinner was over by this point, but we saw the table still set up lots of decorations. I remember there were people dressed as Disney princesses, which I didn't quite know what that was about. But then there was also, again, there was music, there were people dancing. We were kind of hanging out in that area and all of a sudden, it was like a flash mob. This band all of a sudden came together right around us. It was kind of, I want to call this style mariachi, but I don't know if that's actually the right word, but it was that kind of music. And there were drummers was what first came up, but then there was a whole brass section, trumpets, I think there was saxophones maybe, there were violinists as well.

And they just came seemingly out of nowhere and formed this circle. We were originally kind of inside the circle and had to back up so we wouldn't be in the band and other people would be able to see. But it was very exciting



to just have this band start up and play very exciting music. It was a beautiful summer evening in beautiful, historic downtown. Everyone was so happy and there was such, I really felt that evening, this sense of a small town sort of community, even though New Bedford is not a small town, it's a city, but I felt that kind of community that evening, people running into people they knew and it was just beautiful. The whole thing was beautiful, and it was in that moment, I think, listening to that band and that atmosphere, having come from that Pride celebration that I fell in love with New Bedford. So that is my story, thank you.