
Back on the Northside — by keexote, Winter 2018

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I
stopped by
Rosalinda's a few years back
and her oldest son reminded me
how we once packed the liquor board hearings
demanding they shut down the scourge of bullet-ridden nightclubs
Now that Highland has become Highlands
there are more liquor licenses than ever, he said,
I came home the other night and found a drunk guy
passed out on my front porch
and the dude was, like, fluently White!
The future landed
on the Northside
like a Kansas farmhouse on Lollipop Land
Scottish village is a sedimentary layer
beneath stands of apartment towers
The sandstone facade of the Tallmadge Building
is brushed clean and new windows sparkle
a tea house and yoga center loiter the sidewalk along Zuni

Before Peña imagined a great city
we planted seeds for new life
lending out tools and weatherizing
redrawing zoning lines
installing new curbs
Remember the street party
when low riders and b boys paraded West 32nd...
We cheered as dozers knocked over
the broken-down gas station on the corner
gone were the junkers, chainlinks and dobermans
but we did not want to push out the old families
clustered around Our Lady of Guadalupe and Mt. Carmel
the Capilluppos and Ortegas
We knew we didn't hold the levers of control
but thought that someone did
Then Denver took off

like a sea monster rising out of the deep
 shimmering scales, fire and smoke
 massive tail roping through the wave tops
 laying blocks flat
 reconfiguring at the pace of Pixar

Now I sip IPA in a brewpub of first order on 29th
 Instead of falling up in a vertigo spin
 I look across thirty-five years, thousands of miles
 and it seems as natural as the riffing rock guitar
 strangely become background music

As normal as the young dads with cropped beards
 and striped cotton shirts with their toddlers in tow
 savoring an evening craft beer
 in their neighborhood of choice

The Northside unfolds another chapter
 as real and imaginary
 as each one before.
 Traversing the creative destruction
 of a city on the make
 only a super-sized ego can claim much credit.
 my small role, only a trace
 a singular point of view

like the abandoned flour mill that towered north of the railyards
 where winds blew through unhindered

a solitary, windowless sentinel harboring graffiti Inferno

What endures in my mind and body of memories
 are flavors of tamale and calzone
 voices, scars, faces, and stories

Stretching across and connecting as the old twentieth street
 viaduct once spanned Platte Valley
 gliding above the glint of steel tracks
 Station.

from St. Pats to Chapultepec
 curving toward Union