

Colleen Zawadzki

Selected Audio Transcript

Well, I think that we have to begin by honoring whose land it's on. And I think that's really critical. I don't know how one goes about that in a way that both respects and honors the pennies and nickels and dimes that so many people contributed to change it from St. Mary's Circle to the Columbus Monument Circle, because before that it was an Italian Cathedral in an area that had gardens there. And my grandfather Albert was a groundskeeper for Clinton Square gardens, and I even heard possibly the St. Mary's gardens. But it's really important that we both honor the struggles that the Italian folks had, as they were envisioning that, and their desire to honor their heritage, with the desire to not negate the challenges that the Indigenous people faced when everything was taken from them, and they got sort of relegated to the Onondaga Nation area and lost everything that was here, the lake, the streams, the kettle lakes, everything. So I don't know how one goes about balancing all of that.

But I think that through celebration of our diversity and honoring the struggles that we have had, entering a new culture, while balancing, hopefully, a respect for people that have always been traditionally disrespected, is a really -- it's a dicey situation. I don't know if through metaphors and symbolism, we can honor Turtle Island or, you know, the Great Tree of Peace, while we also honor the gardens of the Italian families that were coming here and the struggles that they were faced with. I don't know if there is a symbol, person, that we're looking at that represents all that is amazing about the Italian culture, or perhaps it's really just vignettes and stories about our ancestors that may do that. But there's no question about it. Our story, I mean, balancing all the people that came with all the trauma that they were faced with as new entries into any culture, needs to be acknowledged. But we really have to do it in a way differently than we have done in the past with the people that have owned this land. This was their land. So I don't know how you do that.

Biography

I grew up in the city of Syracuse on the North side with my Italian mother and my Italian grandfather. I went on to become a Syracuse City School District teacher of social studies--originally junior high, and then moving to high school. Then, I went on to become a high school principal, at the OCM BOCES campus. Throughout that time, I was also a trainer of teachers and administrators in the area of curriculum and social studies. So I have that perspective as a longtime educator and teacher, but also as a Northsider that grew up in Syracuse with my close Italian family.