

Andree



*Community /'kə'myōnədē/
A group of people living
in the same place or
having a particular
characteristic in common*

I'm from New Jersey, originally. When I moved to California I had been given the option to work in Los Angeles or San Bernardino. I've never been a big city kind of person – born at the shore, you know? So, the city is okay. I mean, Philly is my heart. But, to live there? Not so much. San Bernardino was basically a bigger version of where I moved from – a sort of depressed town. And so I said, "Why not? Let's go!" And, here we are.

People told me, "You don't want to live in San Bernardino." They have this impression that it's a dark, negative, dangerous place. Hold your purse close. Don't go there if you don't have to, and if you've got to be there after dark God bless you, and I pray that you get home safely. And I'm like, "I'm from Jersey. Are you serious!?"

I walk with my friends through our lovely neighborhoods. I take surface streets through the city to get where I'm going. People's eyes get big and their mouths drop open when I tell them that. They're like, "You were in one of the most dangerous parts of San Bernardino!" I just laugh. It's actually a rather lovely drive.

How can you complain about a place like this?

If you want green space, there's green space. If you want cityscape, there's cityscape. If you want mountains, if you want wildlife, we've got all of that. We've got beekeepers. We've got wine makers. We've got craftsman. We've got indigenous populations. We've got descendants of the Mormons who laid out the city. We've got descendants of Wyatt Earp. We've got all of that right here. We've got all the Americana, and every country on the planet, right here.

All of this gets lost in the talk about crime, and bankruptcy, or whatever. It's always easier to talk about the negatives, you know? You turn on the news, and you don't see those stories of the family that helps out their neighbor because they couldn't pay their electric bill. Or the entire neighborhood going out to help the old lady chase down her dog that got out. You don't see that because it doesn't get people's attention, and it doesn't have a political edge. It's just good life. And that's what we've got here in San Bernardino.

Whatever you want, it's right here in this city – if your eyes are open, and your heart is open enough to



"We've got PCs and we've got Macs. There's gotta be more than that. Open source is like community computing. I love that."

Andree enjoys re-imaging computers, including this one. The stickers are a method for further personalization and community-building.



go to it. If you're willing to maybe drive on a little side street you've never been on before. If you're not afraid of the people in that neighborhood because they live in closer quarters than you, or they look different than you.

But there are people afraid to even go shop at Ralphs, right by the University. "Well, there's too many homeless people out there." And I'm like, I've never had a problem with any of them. For me, it's just a nice conversation. If I don't have anything to give them, "Well, okay. God bless you, stay safe out there." You know, this person is my neighbor. It doesn't matter if they're in a house, or living in an RV, or in their car, or under a bridge. They're my neighbor.

People forget that most of us are just a paycheck or two away from being homeless ourselves. I mean, look at the last recession. But we see a homeless person asking for money, and all we can assume is that person's lying or up to no good. Some of them might be. But you can't just write off that whole population as not worthy of sharing space with you.

If you've got a problem with this city, then do something about it. Don't just move out, take your money elsewhere, and let the city decline. Join the school board. Go to the council meetings. Make your voice heard. You know — are you trying? Are you doing? Are you striving to make a difference?

My work is now exclusively online. I have a doctorate degree, and I teach. My son moved out, and my husband passed away. And I'm still in the same spot, up at Kendall and Palm. People ask me, "So, are you gonna move?" I'm like, "Why would I do that?" Even some of my neighbors are saying, "Well, we want to move to Rancho. We want to move to Redlands." And I'm like, they've got the same stuff going on. Their schools aren't any better or worse. But here? There's neighborhood here. There's family.

Even though I'm an East Coast transplant, San Bernardino is my home. People who want to keep themselves at a distance, they miss out on all of what this city has to offer.