



Wednesday, March 27, 2024

BRAXTON FOUSHEE STREET

A POEM BY LIZA-WOLFF-FRANCIS

When we name something, we breathe
into it a different view of what previously was.

We bless it with a sound or movement
that can be made by our beings. Perhaps

the most important piece of naming
something or someone is the meaning

we give to it, the meaning understood
by the taker of the name and those around

a thing or place that is named. There are
some names we might recognize no longer fit,

maybe never fit in some people's experience,
maybe shouldn't have ever been named

as such. These are things or places that need
to be named more than once. This is not

about erasing history, but about righting it, making
sure the name doesn't hold people back,

doesn't silence or keep anyone in a community
stuck in harmful ways of being, stuck in a place

where people might not feel or have felt safe.
On this street here named after a person

who fought for the practices of human trafficking
and slavery, advocated for white supremacy,

segregation, and violence against Black people,
we stand as a community with a renaming.

This can be seen as a freeing of a place
of a heavy name, a name it didn't ask for, a name

that exalted a person who hurt other people,
a name that honored someone who lifted up

practices that individually and systemically
hurt other people as if this person were good,

as if what this person supported were something
normal and should be celebrated enough

to have their name as the name of a street.
This community stands with this street today

to offer a new name, to free this place
of the name it was formerly given, to unburden

the people who live here, who pass by here,
of the continued weight of landmark

street signs that remind them of oppression,
whether their ancestors would have been

oppressed or oppressors, whether they
continue to be oppressed today by how

violence, microaggressions, racism, and trauma
unfold in a people pushing through a past

biting their necks daily and the ongoing
injustices and discrimination of our time.

This new name honors local civil rights leader
Braxton Foushee, this street will be an uplifting



of his tireless work for justice. This street
will now be a reminder to all people of our town

and to all who pass by, of the importance
of fighting for equity, of fighting against racism,

of fighting against all oppression, of fighting
for justice, and a reminder that the fight

is ongoing and is one our community does not
turn away from. This street, now and in the future,

will remind us, we will not become complicit
before acts of injustice, but stand up

to fight against them. This new name
will encourage us to continue

to stand up and fight those battles against
the systemic oppression that racism allows,

to stand up to fight for equity, for access,
for inclusion, no matter the climate

of our nation, of our community, of our day.
The sun will shine upon this street sign, rain

will fall upon it, it may face bad drivers,
strong wind, or other perils, but the sign

is not what holds the name, it is us,
the people of this town who say its new name,

Braxton Foushee, stands for justice, for equality
and equity. It is us who gift this new name

of a leader for justice to be inspired by,
to move forward together in our world.

