**Chari Bostick:**

Sometimes, you know, people say don't bring up the past, but the past is what you want to reflect on in order to get to know yourself, get to know the community, get to know the people so that you can have a better understanding of where you're going.

**Chari Bostick:**

People migrated to Gadsden for the steel mills and the saw mills. People were able to work and feed their families.

**Chari Bostick:**

My name is Chari Bostick and I'm the Executive Director of Grace Heritage Community Development. Our purpose is to protect, preserve, and catalog all the graves that are in Sixth Street Cemetery for future reference. And to also have all of that information placed in the Grace Heritage African American Museum, so that people can use it as a reference, as a place to come to find out more about their family that's buried there as well as the families of all the population of Gadsden and Etowah County.

**Chari Bostick:**

I wanted to be a lawyer. So I went to school for criminal justice and for sociology, neither of those has anything to do with history, but that's what I found myself doing as a second career.

**Chari Bostick:**

The cemetery is known as a Southern Hills cemetery, historically known as Sixth Street Cemetery. The cemetery was established in 1826 by a man named John W. Slack.

**Chari Bostick:**

When I found out about Southern Hills Cemetery, I was seeking information on some family members that was buried there. When I first sought to find the cemetery, I couldn't locate it.

**Chari Bostick:**

When I first laid eyes on the cemetery, really a sadness came over me because I wanted to know how an entire cemetery could be lost in the woods for so long and nobody was looking for it.

**Chari Bostick:**

Right now, we have a count of 826 persons that we have records for being buried in Sixth Street.

**Chari Bostick:**

I consider that cemetery a sacred space. It has gone through a lot of transition over the years. We have had a lot of desecration that has happened over the years at the cemetery. And we have tried to restore as much as possible, clear as much as possible and to maintain the level of dignity that the people that are buried there deserve.

**Chari Bostick:**

In 1972, there was construction of an apartment complex there. And for as much as history shows a cemetery, there, there was always surveys present to let them know that there was a cemetery there, there were headstones there, but those construction workers still damaged that property. I absolutely think that it was deliberate and with malice, for them to build that apartment complex and bulldoze those headstones into one central hole so that they could have as much of the property as they could to build those apartments.

**Chari Bostick:**

Since 2013, we have really tried to make our presence known here in Gadsden, by, you know, putting out information that was relevant to everyone in the African American community. We also wanted to make sure that we document it. A lot of the history from the people that are still living that lived that history.

**Chari Bostick:**

The city of Gadsden, it was nice enough to offer us a space to operate from. I initially operated out of my home. We collected a lot of photos and a lot of artifacts from people that lived here in Gadsden. Really gotten some of the collections from individuals, such as Jack Lowe, Sr. We were able to collect a lot of the things that he collected over his lifetime. He lived to be 104 years old.

**Chari Bostick:**

I get discouraged quite a bit. You can say all day long that you don't listen to the chatter in the background but you want to try to please everyone but that is impossible.

**Radio Host:**

This evening in Gadsden a historic marker will go up noting one of the most painful parts of American history of lynching in 1906, a white mob and Gadsden took a black man named Bunk Richardson from the Etowah County jail and lynched him from a bridge of the Coosa river. He had been arrested along with three others for the rape and murder of a white woman. Richardson was not part of the crime and was never charged, but he knew one of the suspects.

**Bryan Stevenson:**

In my church they say that Jesus said the last first shall be last and the last. In 1906, Bunk Richardson was the last. He was told by people that he doesn't even deserve to live, even though he had done nothing. But tonight he is the first.

**Chari Bostick:**

One of our, I guess, most famous or infamous burials at Sixth Street Cemetery is a man by the name of Bunk Richardson. I had heard about where he was buried, but there was no headstone on his grave because they did not want his grave to be destroyed by whites. I found out that the police sent for his wife and ask her to come and to claim him. And she told them that they hung him—they should bury him. She left town to never return. The Equal Justice Initiative project came to Gadsden and talked to us about his being buried in Sixth Street Cemetery and how relevant it was to a project that they were working on called the Memorial Lynching Project.

**Bryan Stevenson:**

I'm proud to be in Gadsden tonight. I'm proud to be with people here tonight. I'm hopeful about what we can do tonight. And I want to celebrate each and every one of you for all the acts you have taken to create this moment of recognition, of transformation, of reconciliation, and hopefulness. I wish you all the best and continue the work. God bless you.

**Chari Bostick:**

My work with Grace Heritage is important to leave a legacy for my daughter. She doesn't know a lot of the history of this town. I have found that a lot of kids do national history projects, such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, but we have some local black history that they need to know about as well. I'm doing the thing that most people wouldn't dream of doing and trying to collect as much of the history of Gadsden and preserve it for future generations.