

A Sense of Place

By Gretchen Goldman

I take tourism very seriously. And I don't mean snapping a quick photo of me in front of an ancient monument in a foreign city, I mean thoroughly exploring the city where I live. When I moved to Atlanta in 2006, I set out to do just that. Without a car, MARTA was my ticket to freedom. I rode buses and trains to get me to any museum, festival or neighborhood I wanted to experience in the city. MARTA gave me a sense of independence I couldn't have had relying on friends' cars and also allowed me to gain an intangible sense of place through interactions with fellow riders and through seeing the world from the street in all its infinite details as I walked to my destination. I particularly loved the feeling of coming up the escalator at a new train station and not knowing what the landscape would look like. Would it be skyscrapers and businessmen or small shops with local flair? Would it be a grand boulevard bustling with people or a quaint quieter neighborhood? This is a sense of discovery so rare in adulthood.

MARTA indeed helps the environment. Transit systems help reduce the number of vehicles on the road, decreasing our fossil fuel use and emissions of harmful air pollutants; but on top of these benefits, MARTA has another perhaps overlooked contribution to Atlanta: MARTA matters to the *human* environment. It enables a sense of community and connectivity that one cannot obtain through the windshield of a car. It allows us to navigate across a large city, experiencing people and places along the way. I have seen and heard much of the sights and sounds Atlanta has to offer and I am proud to say that I owe it to MARTA.

