

May 2022

Dear *Queerolina* user and researcher,

My first experiences of many places on the UNC Chapel Hill campus and the surrounding town were through the stories shared by “The Story of Us” contributors. During June 2020, I packed up my life in southern California and rode the I-40 east from Flagstaff straight to Durham to start working towards a Master of Science in Library Science degree in the School of Information and Library Science at UNC. It would be nearly a year before I saw the inside of any building, including Wilson Special Collections Library where I would spend the next two years developing the UNC Story Archive for the University Archives and the Story of Us.

When I first began contacting folks to contribute their stories to the UNC Story Archive and the Story of Us, I sheepishly admitted that I knew little about the place. I had read about the history of the campus and the area. However, places need to be experienced, and the pandemic made that nearly impossible. But the contributors were incredibly gracious with this short-coming.

And, in reflection, I am thankful for that.

Instead, I got so many “tours” of Carolina from so many perspectives. Because of the Story of Us, I knew the Student Union as a place where knowing glances and stolen kisses were shared, and the basement of Wilson as a place of privacy and sexual exploration. When I finally could walk the campus and explore the town, I delighted in knowing that the “Carolina experience” was not as typical or rosy as the dominant narratives of the place made it seem.

My relationship with “place” is complicated. I am a first-generation student who is of a “non-traditional” age, so I often felt out of place on college and university campuses. I was adopted through an agency that provided social services to those in need, so my lineage does not have a tidy narrative that some need to “place” people. My hometown is a place marked by the joys and complications of being on the Mexico-United States *frontera*. So, if one subscribes to the belief that research is “me”search, then it may be easy to understand why place and space interest me.

I share this with you because it illuminates my perspective as well as what I hope you gain in exploring *Queerolina*. As a straight, cis-gender woman I am in no place to make a grand argument- or say anything, really- about an “LGBTQIA+ narrative” at Carolina. But, as life experiences and the expertise of Hooper Schultz have taught me, a single narrative does not, and could not, exist. And that is not what *Queerolina* is trying to do. Instead, what I hope the structure, choices, and methods of *Queerolina* does do is provide you with a “tour” of Carolina that challenges the notion of a monolithic narrative of place, space, and experience.

Warmly yours,
Cassie Tanks