

Queer Florida: Speculative Southern Oral Histories

By Han Powell

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in fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Queer Florida Statement of Purpose

Queer Florida is a multimedia oral history project documenting the stories of LGBTQ+ people who are making efforts to organize, create, and build community in the diverse, politically-fraught landscape of Florida. Each interview is conducted in a physical space that is meaningful to the narrator—a rural gay bar that closed during the pandemic, the front porch of a beloved late grandfather, a local park that was the site of a first queer kiss, and more. The narratives that emerge explore our connection to nature, the queerness of the environment, and ask how our stories of self are rooted in the swamplands of home. Most of all, these stories seek to answer the question of why we stay, why we fight, and exactly what/whom we are fighting for.

The purpose of this project is to explore connection to place and identity from the perspective of queer people living in Florida —prioritizing the experiences of rural queer people, elders, and people of color—and learn from the methods and ethos of grassroots Southern organizing and community building. The goals are to preserve histories at risk of being lost, to co-create contemporary histories of Florida through a queer lens, explore why people choose to stay in Florida, combat metronormativity in dominant narratives of queerness, and document LGBTQ+ survival and resilience in a Southern (often rural) context.

A theme runs through each narrative with the intersection of the liminality of queer identity and the liminality of Florida as a physical space. Florida is often not considered a real part of “the South” (by the standards of Southern history grants and individual opinion alike). The politics are highly influenced by wealthy landowners that only live in the state part time over Winter, despite the fact that the landscape is made up

of a large diversity of communities and cultures. In fact, the South East has the highest population of queer and trans people in the United States, all of whom are making a home for themselves despite the regressive and violent politics and lack of access to resources. Florida as a physical space is resistant to definition in a way that is reminiscent of queer identity.

Alongside the interview process and collecting materials, the project has evolved into a more experimental and exploratory form that takes a curious look at embodied knowledge formed in relationship with place, queerness as liminality, and conceptions of one's queerness extending outside of the self and formed in relationship to environment. For example, narrators have expressed that Florida is seen and labeled as a “freaky” and “strange” place, undesirable and unprotected yet verdant and beautiful, derided yet complex and abundant—much like queerness itself.

My target audience is twofold. I document these stories to provide context to other Southern, specifically Floridian, LGBTQ+ people struggling with identity and sense of place, to provide a resource to learn how others have navigated finding and creating community, and to crowdsource knowledge and experience organizing in Florida. Public history and finding evidence of queer people who were able to build a life for themselves was instrumental to my own development and my evolving relationship with my own identity as a transmasculine lesbian in the South. In some ways, I move forward in this project with an audience in mind that looks and feels much like my younger self. The broader audience also includes researchers, oral historians, public historians, academics, and activists who want to build on this archive of Southern queer

experience, learn from the themes and qualitative data within the interviews, and explore embodied means of sharing and engaging with oral histories.

Current List of Queer Florida Narrators:

- **Shoog McDaniel (they/them):** 41, rural non-binary photographer and artist focused on queer fat bodies and their connection to Florida nature, currently living in their first home in Fort White, a conservative community outside of Tallahassee.
- **Roshonda Kelly (she/her), Marquita Julien-Kelly (she/her), and Kasheem Hodge (he/him):** This was an (accidental) group interview of the Founders of the Covering Foundation, a Black lesbian couple and Black gay man. The Covering Foundation is an LGBTQ+ Black-led community organization that operates out of their Tampa apartment, where they cook full BBQs for the local community, specifically catering to the local motels where Black, transgender sex workers operate, to provide food and sexual health resources.
- **Diana Shanks (they/them):** 23, rural organizer who grew up in New Port Richey, works with Pasco Pride and local unions, advocates for workers rights. Interviewed in the park where they kissed their first partner and helped organize their first local Pride festival.
- **Nina Borders (she/her):** 36, lives in rural part of Holiday, President and CEO of Pasco Pride, ex-military, partner to Diana, Black lesbian and firefighter/paramedic, self-proclaimed “party lesbian.”
- **Salem (they/them):** 21, Puerto Rican and Cuban non-binary activist and writer from Miami, interviewed outside of their late grandfather’s home in Calle Ocho, in the same chair where they used to sit together and watch the planes cross the sky overhead.

Methodologies

The methodologies used for this oral history project include in-depth interviews (two per narrator), audio recording, excerpts of transcriptions, photography, video, and public history mapping through the use of Padlet, QR codes, and mobile collection booths.

Upon reading Lindsey Dodd's *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France*, I was struck by her development and exploration of what an affective oral history methodology could look like—most of all, I felt the potential for this framework to be applied to a queer oral history methodology. I appreciate that Dodd does away with sampling logic, and instead focuses on a diversity of experiences rather than finding something representative. While reading her work, I developed the following questions as a guiding tool for approaching each oral history interview:

- How does my affectivity and emotionality as a queer person from Florida impact the way that I engage with narrators?
- Because the stories that emerge in the interviews can be laden with the tension between the beauty/joy and the systemic violence/oppression of living in Florida (and in the world as a queer person at large), how does feeling and affectivity enter into the production of memory from both the interviewer and the narrator?
- How does imagination (of the interviewer, narrator, and the generative nexus between both imaginations) influence how we record and interact with history? Put more simply, what about imagination allows us to do a better job than if we weren't honest about the role of imagination in history making? My final interview questions are always

located in the dreamspace - what would Florida look like if you could mold it to your wildest, most hopeful vision?

I believe that inviting emotion and affect into my approach to interviewing, analysis, and even transcription, can be a tool to deepen my oral history practice, and can reveal the ways in which narrators' memories (and my own) are interpolated with social structure. This project was always meant to be part of a larger conversation around Southern queer identity and community formation, the queer deconstruction of normative/linear constructions of oral history practice, and experimental, multi-dimensional ways of sharing and engaging with oral history interviews.

In Dodd's writing on the three assemblages—a happening-past, a memory-story, an interview-encounter—she points out that in relation to time, each is multitemporal: “all previous time could be mobilised to drive a trajectory towards this particular present; all presents could unfold in multiple ways; thus the present always contains within it various pasts and various futures” (59). Take for example the assemblage of the interview encounter—the way that the interviewee frames and shares their memories is influenced by the questions asked by the interviewer, the shared and dissonant identities (and degrees of privilege and power) held by each party.

Even the unpredictability of the environment can impact the way a memory is recounted—a blasting truck horn could interrupt a half-formed thought, a spilled drink on a favorite sweater can put a narrator in a melancholy mood, even the body language of the interviewer could direct the line of conversation. Assemblages encompass ‘every aspect of life,’ including the social, cultural, and political—they are comprised of connections. Therein lies the expansive potential of oral history—in the absence of a

singular static truth, the multitudes rush in to take its place. As Dodd smartly puts it, “it can only be *I* who gain this affective knowledge; *you* would learn something else” (18). With that frame in mind, I borrow a multitude of Dodd’s affective categories as I prepare for, conduct and transcribe interviews, and as I consider the most effective method to share these oral histories with a broader audience. These affective categories include the haptic and sensorial, the construction of memory through feelings (and my feelings as the interviewer in response), the connection of sound and smell to memory and their unique ability to evoke specific memories, and abstract sounds and vocalizations as tools to communicate and produce and interpret meaning.

Interview Question Guide:

1. Please start by sharing a little bit about yourself - your name, pronouns, age, and where you live.
2. How do you identify? How you answer this question is up to you - you can talk about your gender identity and expression, your sexual orientation, your sexuality, or which words feel good to describe yourself.
3. Where are we right now? Can you describe our environment?
4. Why is this space meaningful to you? What stories are connected to it?
5. What is it like being queer where you live? Extended prompt: Do you feel safe? Do you have a sense of community? How do you meet other queer people?
6. What was it like growing up in your community? Extended prompt: describe your town, your family, the people and spaces that were formative in your life.
7. Are you involved in organizing, activist, or creative work? If so, please tell me about it. Extended prompt: how has it evolved? What factors influenced that evolution?
8. How does your queer identity interact with or inform the work you do and/or your life in Florida?
9. What do you feel makes Florida a unique context for activist and organizing work?
10. What is your relationship to Florida? What does Florida mean to you?
11. Do you plan to stay in Florida? If so, why do you stay? If not, why do you want to move?

12. Bring me into your dream space - if there were no barriers or constraints, if you could construct your wildest, most ideal version of Florida, what would that look like?

Narrator Outreach

“Dear _____,

Queer Florida is a grassroots oral history project documenting the stories of queer Floridians doing organizing, activist, and creative work in their communities. The purpose of the project is to explore why LGBTQ+ people choose to stay in the South, specifically in Florida, to learn from your unique experiences, and to document, preserve, and build on the work you have done and the lessons you have learned. This sounds serious, but it’s also an invitation to explore aspects of living here that bring you joy, or that feel complicated. The interview is partly about the activist work you’re doing, but also about your relationship to Florida as a physical space - what it means to live here as a queer person, what connects you to it, why you stay, and your most radical dreams for the future.

The project is composed of at least one in-depth interview session, from one to two hours long, alongside a visual component that includes a photograph of you in a place you consider meaningful. I photograph people in places that represent something about their connection to Florida. For me, it’s a local nature preserve, but for you, it could be anywhere. For example: your backyard, outside the local dive bar, or a park you went to with your first partner(s). In the event that we need to do the interview online, I will ask you to send me a picture that you feel is representative of your life in Florida and your community - it could be a family photo, a self portrait, or even a picture from childhood.

The edited transcript of the interview (you will have the opportunity to review and make edits before it is shared) and your photograph will be posted on the oral history project’s website, queerflorida.life. The materials (transcript, recording, and photo) may be used

again in the future in other forms, such as in a book or documentary, and it will likely be shared with a physical archive for preservation. I practice ongoing consent, so I will always check in with you before incorporating the materials into a new project. It is important to note that my classmates and professors in my Oral History masters program will listen to the interview before you have the opportunity to review it.

Finally, to consent to the interview you will need to sign a Creative Commons legal release. This means that you as the narrator retain the copyright, but that the public may freely copy, modify, and share these items for noncommercial purposes if they include the original source information. The purpose of this license is to allow people to build on this work and make it more accessible.

If you have any questions or concerns, I'm happy to discuss them with you!

Warm regards.

Han Powell

Legal Release
Queer Florida Oral History Interview Project

Participant's name: _____

Mailing address: _____

Phone and email: _____

I voluntarily agree to be interviewed for this project to document the stories of LGBTQ+ Floridians doing organizing, activist, and creative work in their communities. I understand that the following items may be created as part of my interview:

- an audio and/or video recording
- an edited transcript and summary
- a photograph of me
- copies of any personal documents or additional photos that I wish to share

I understand that my interview (and other items above) may be distributed to the public for educational purposes, including formats such as print, public programming, and the internet and may be made publicly available via an archive.

Please initial:

_____ I agree to have my full interview placed on the internet

_____ I DO NOT agree to have my full interview placed on the internet

I agree to freely share my interview (and other items above) under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License. This means that I retain the copyright, but that the public may freely copy, modify, and share these items for noncommercial purposes if they include the original source information.

In return, the interviewer promises to send one copy of the interview recording, transcript, and related items to my email address above.

I understand that I will have thirty days to review my interview and identify any parts I would like to close or delete. I understand that if I do not send any changes within thirty days after receiving my interview, the interview can be used without edits.

Any exceptions to this agreement must be listed below:

Permission granted:

Participant's signature date

Interviewer's signature date

Questions? Hannah Powell, 727-698-9868, hep2120@columbia.edu.

What Makes Queer Oral History Queer?

Much writing has been dedicated to answering the question of “how is queer oral history different?” I believe that the time has come to move beyond this question, to a more expansive one—where is the liberatory and radical potential in queer oral history methodology? How can viewing time, affect, and subjectivity through a queer lens deepen and enrich our conception of the past? How does the fluidity of queer identity and narrative slip and bend into the fluidity of time? To invoke Dodd’s language:

The past simply cannot be observed. Thus any recreation of the past by the empirical traces ‘found’ by the historian (in archives or elsewhere) is an imaginative act of reconstruction and a rhetorical act of communication. The traces themselves are not imagined: they exist. They were created by real people in real places at real moments. But the past state, experience, place, mood, person to which they make reference, which they represent, must be conjured in the present via ‘inferential acts of the imagination’ (53).

An affective methodology for conducting oral history interviews—one that gives credence and credibility to feelings, relationships, and the use of imagination—is predicated on the idea that seeking a broad, empirical truth in any story of the past is fruitless. The question is one of the speculative and the subjective: how do we account for our own relations, feelings, and imaginations in the interview space? What remains unseen and how can we bring it to light? What theoretical tools do we have at our disposal to reconstruct a past that was never static or amenable to definition in the first place?

One of the quandaries of queerness is its expansive nature—it defies boundaries and narrow definitions, at once so encompassing and so shrouded in the secrecy of stigma that it becomes a moving target, difficult to pin down and put words to. Sexual

orientation and gender identity is, of course, inextricably bound with intersecting factors of race, class, ethnicity, location, religion, education, citizenship status, and so much more. This challenge of defining queerness extends to thinking in the field around queer oral history methodologies; it resists definition and forces itself out of bounds, yet is required by the structure of academia to articulate itself.

One of the hardest questions appears to be the most simple—what counts as queer oral history? E. Patrick Johnson's performance studies are a strong example of this resistance to norms in the field—he performs on stage the very oral histories he records, putting so much of himself as a narrator into the (re)construction of the conversation and story, making clear to the audience that it is a subjective construction of someone's life. This mirrors the importance of the interviewer as a subject in the oral history process, but pushes the subjectivity even further from the realm of the empirical truth that historians hold so dear. Johnson intentionally blurs the line between oral history encounter and performance. Of his interviews with Black gay men in the South, he writes:

The multiple identities I performed—black, middle class, southern, gay, male, professor—influenced my ethnographic experience as/of the Other. Therefore, I construe my ethnographic practice as an 'impure' process—as a performance" (11).

Johnson perhaps gets at something bigger, something at the heart of queer theory across fields: by embracing the 'impure,' there is a recognition that the concept of purity is overly simplistic, both in the mission to define ourselves and of historians to locate a singular, empirical truth of the past that cannot exist. If the "encounter of the body with the world produces a shifting stream of experience compounded of feeling and thought" (Dodd 63), then queer oral historians have valuable insight into the ways that systems,

norms, and communities can impact the way bodies experience memory feelings, and the way that intersections of identity can shape the way one moves through the world.

Queer oral histories have the radical potential to “challenge the paradigm of identity and traditional historical methodology by emphasizing the unstable historical subject and focusing on the body and desire” (Wyker 2). Dodd’s “assemblages” provide an alternate means of interacting with the past, in a way that is able to account for these instabilities and contradictions.

Queer Theory: Haunting the Halls and Seeding the Future

There is a commonality within the language used by many of those writing in the field of queer history—*ghost stories*. Cruising was once known as “haunting,” and the men who participated were called “ghosts” (Lim 31). This is the feeling of many oral historians who mine the past for evidence of the queers who came before—what Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz refer to as “the specter of queer history,” or Jose Muñoz’s “ghosts of queer sex.”

This sense of haunting, of an unseen yet sensed specter, is largely the result of the long tradition of misrepresentation and erasure of marginalized individuals and communities within the archives of our society. In Saidiya Hartman’s *Venus in Two Acts*, she identifies the erasure of the narratives of women in the trans-atlantic slave trade as “the silence of the archive” (6). In opposition to this silencing, a history of the present “strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing” (6). While

Hartman frames her argument around the histories of enslaved Black women, the same liberatory philosophy of history making can be applied to queer oral history practice. It is working toward the future—a goal that is beautifully articulated by scholar Jose Muñoz:

Queerness is not here yet. Queerness is an identity. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an identity that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain.

Queerness necessitates imagination, because we do not (yet) live in a queer world.

Recording queer oral histories is speculative, imaginative work. Rosenthal recognizes that queer history “opens up new worlds of possibility for our collective future, for who we might become and how we might live together...as queer and trans people” (61). One affective prompt I use to invoke the future is the same final question I ask each Queer Florida interviewee: what would the Florida of your wildest dreams look like? In this space, the feelings flow freely, and dreaming becomes part of the remembering.

The “Gay Bar,” Queer Rurality, and Public Memory

Dodd provides numerous examples to illustrate that history as a field has largely been conservative and “resistant to making its methods ‘dance a little’” (46). If this is the case, then the “gay bar” as a site of public memory forces those who engage with its complexities to dance; it forces us to disco to the contradictions, to move and shimmy Fosse-eque through the gaps. Any interviewer is inherently entangled in the telling and interpretation of life histories, but this is especially true when it comes to the documentation of queer life stories by queer interviewers. Rosenthal observes that:

As queer and trans people doing LGBTQ history, we do not simply study the past with an objective gaze, with our white lab coats on. Rather, the past is something that we are intimately tangled up in, and the distinctions between past and present, us and them, me and y'all, are never quite so clear (2021, 11).

Queer oral history has to be renegade and inventive, because queer people exist outside of neat societal structures, roles, and norms. The documentation of queer life throughout history must be filtered through the ever-shifting language, degrees and specific forms of structural oppression, and stigmas of each time period and locale. *Living Queer History* and *Gay Bar* both largely utilize the “gay bar” as the locus of their inquiry and exploration into queer memory-making. Of course, keeping in queer tradition, the “gay bar” resists a static definition—the spaces of same-sex gathering and connection over time are often short-lived, roving, and shrouded in secrecy designed to protect their lovers and revelers.

The “gay bar” is an empty field where a dilapidated building used to stand that hosted drag shows in the back room. It is each port city across international trade routes where boys with tattoos and rope-worn hands would cruise for a different kind of *trade*. It is public parks and bathhouses, historic women’s clubs, mafia-owned speakeasies, long, dark stretches of public streets and alleys—like George Court in London, appropriately named for the young male paramour of King James I, which has remained a well-known cruising ground throughout the city’s history, and has hosted a variety of short-lived gay bars in its lifespan (Lim 2021, 113). These places remind us that we have always been here, always resisting convention and definition, always finding ways to carve out space for ourselves and protect one another. As Lim writes of George’s Court’s namesake, it is a comforting reminder that “even kings have been forced to playact” (2021, 115).

Because my narrators are all queer people living in the South, I propose an expansion of the historical site of the “gay bar” to rural queer life. Much of the writing and thinking around queer identity is based on the misguided assumption that queer people are happiest, safest, and most fulfilled living in urban areas—an assumption that rural queer theorists vehemently reject (Soderling 2016, 38). In reality, the majority of LGBTQ+ people in the United States live in the South East, and many queer people find greater fulfillment in developing small, close-knit networks of support in their small towns (Soderling 2016, 31). The life histories of rural queer people combat the myth of queer metronormativity, and studying affect in the interview space can reveal deeper truths about the reality of queer life.

Evolution of Queer Florida

When I started Queer Florida as a project in 2020, I was working at an LGBTQ+ healthcare nonprofit, and deeply involved in local activism and organizing. At the time, I felt an acute lack of representation around the unique difficulties of organizing in the South, especially in more rural areas. I decided to try my hand at organizing a small oral history project to fill that gap—I sought out queer people doing activist, organizing, and creative work across the state, recording on my phone at first and later upgrading to lavalier mics. Each interview was conducted at a physical location with meaning to the narrator, and the connection between memory, identity, and place resonated through the project.

The trajectory of the thesis project shifted slightly through my time studying at OHMA. A particularly influential book on my journey was *Living Queer History: Remembrance and Belonging in a Southern City* by Gregory Samantha Rosenthal. Rosenthal, a public historian working in Richmond, Virginia, provides an in-depth reflection on the development and success of a living queer history walking tour through the city. The book prompted me to broaden the framework of Queer Florida; it seemed most impactful to make it a public history project as well, directing energy into creating lasting repositories of collective memory in the South, figuring out ways to invite narrators into the process and allow people to participate in building an archive. Through the development of a memory map, and working toward the goal of creating a self-sustaining digital walking tour, as well as guided queer history walking tours.

Thesis Event at Gulfport Public Library

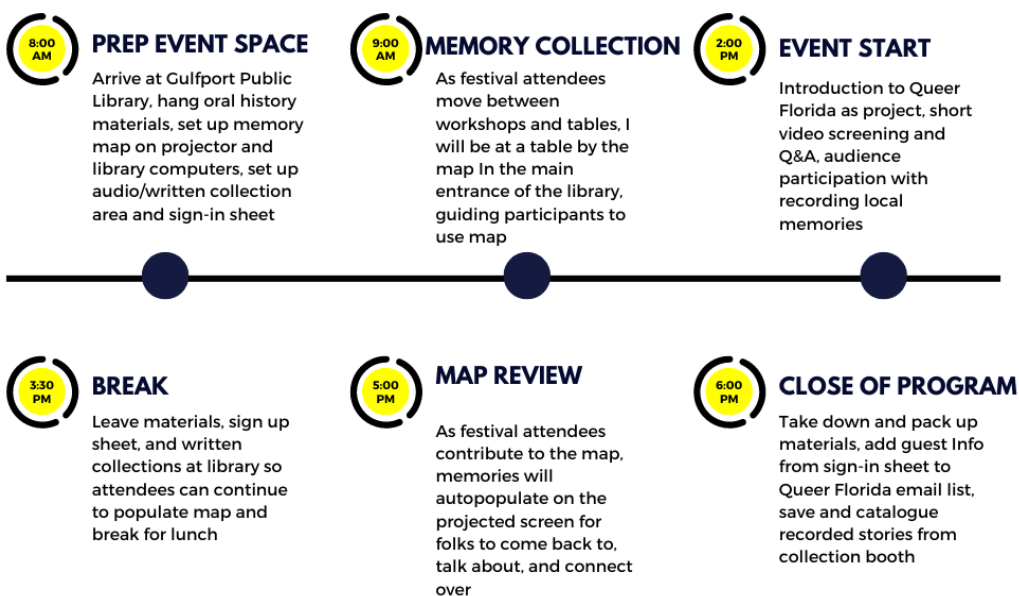
Event title: *Queer Florida: Mapping Memories in Tampa Bay*

Event description: Queer Florida is a multimedia oral history project documenting the lives of LGBTQ+ Floridians. Each interview is conducted in a physical space that is meaningful to the narrator—a rural gay bar that closed in the pandemic, the front porch of a beloved late grandfather, a local park that was the site of a first queer kiss, and more. At this graduate thesis exhibit, attendees can read, listen, and view excerpts of local oral histories, alongside mapping their own memories.

Location: Gulfport Public Library, 5501 28th Ave S

Date and time: Saturday, February 18, 2-3pm (table set up 9am-6pm)

QUEER FLORIDA EVENT PLAN FLOW



QUEER FLORIDA: MAPPING MEMORIES IN TAMPA BAY

Gulfport Public Library
5501 28th Ave S
Sat, February 18, 2-3pm

Queer Florida is a multimedia oral history project documenting the lives of LGBTQ+ Floridians. Each interview is conducted in a physical space that is meaningful to the narrator—a rural gay bar that closed in the pandemic, the front porch of a beloved late grandfather, a local park that was the site of a first queer kiss, and more.



At this graduate thesis exhibit, attendees can read, listen, and view excerpts of local oral histories, alongside mapping their own memories.

ReadOut
A FESTIVAL OF LESBIAN LITERATURE

◉◀IMA
Columbia ▶ Oral History Master of Arts

LGBTQ
RESOURCE
CENTER
Gulfport Public Library

Audience for Event

While looking into potential venues for my thesis event, my considerations were threefold: (1): How can I reach the largest, most diverse local LGBTQ+ audience? (2): How can I make the project accessible and give it longevity? (3): What space and audience make the most sense for building the foundations of an LGBTQ+ walking tour in St. Petersburg?

The Gulfport Public Library immediately came to mind—I volunteered there in elementary and middle school, and GPL has one of the largest public collections of lesbian literature in the United States. Gulfport is known as the Gayborhood in the city of St. Petersburg, and has a significantly older population of LGBTQ+ people than the downtown area. ReadOut—an annual festival of lesbian literature hosted at the library—also has a loyal group of mostly lesbian and sapphic participants who travel to attend every year from across Tampa Bay, and popular young lesbian authors (like Kristen Arnett, whose fiction focuses explicitly on being a queer woman in Florida) tend to draw a younger demographic for their workshops and presentations.

Because my thesis exhibit materials are able to remain in the library through the full day on Saturday, participants will be able to record their memories whenever they have a moment between workshops—and because I know that ReadOut draws a significant number of older LGBTQ+ people, this event will provide a diverse, multigenerational foundation for the beginning of the memory map.

Partnering Organizations



The LGBTQ Resource Center at Gulfport Public Library

The LGBTQ Resource Center is committed to promoting awareness of the diversity of experiences, contributions and needs of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer. We do this by providing educational, social and recreational opportunities through the Gulfport Public Library, including books, films, music, speakers, exhibitions and other events, as well as an online presence.

(<https://mygulfport.us/lgbtq-resources/>)



ReadOut: A Festival of Lesbian Literature

A Project of the LGBTQ Resource Center of the Gulfport Library ReadOut is a festival of literature by, for, and about lesbians. The sixth annual ReadOut: A Festival of LGBTQ+ Literature will be held February 17- 19, 2023, live in Gulfport (FL) as well as virtually on Zoom. Our theme this year is, Literary Queeries – A pitch letter for valuing LGBTQ+ literature, one presentation at a time! This year's festival will celebrate

published and emerging authors from across LGBTQ+ and allied communities with panels, individual readings and workshops. Presentations will be on-site, live streamed or prerecorded. ReadOut is committed to involving a wide array of voices.

[\(https://readout.lgbtggulfport.org/\)](https://readout.lgbtggulfport.org/)

ReadOut Festival Schedule:

Friday, Feb. 17, 2023:

Opening Panels (5:00 – 7:30 PM)

(DAY OF EVENT) Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023:

Panels, Authors Readings, and Workshops (9:00 AM – 6:00 PM)

Sunday, Feb. 19, 2023:

9:00 AM – 5:30 PM

Panels, Authors Readings, and Workshops (9:00 AM – 5:30 PM)

Mapping Local History

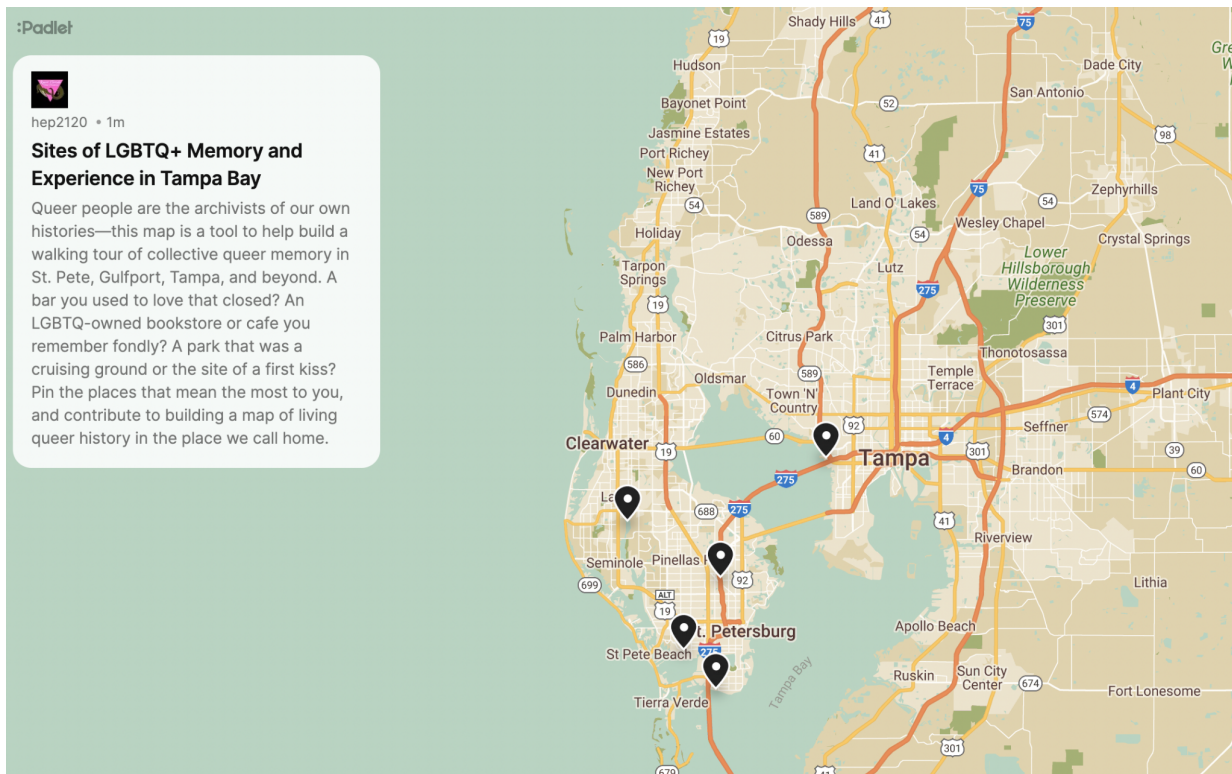
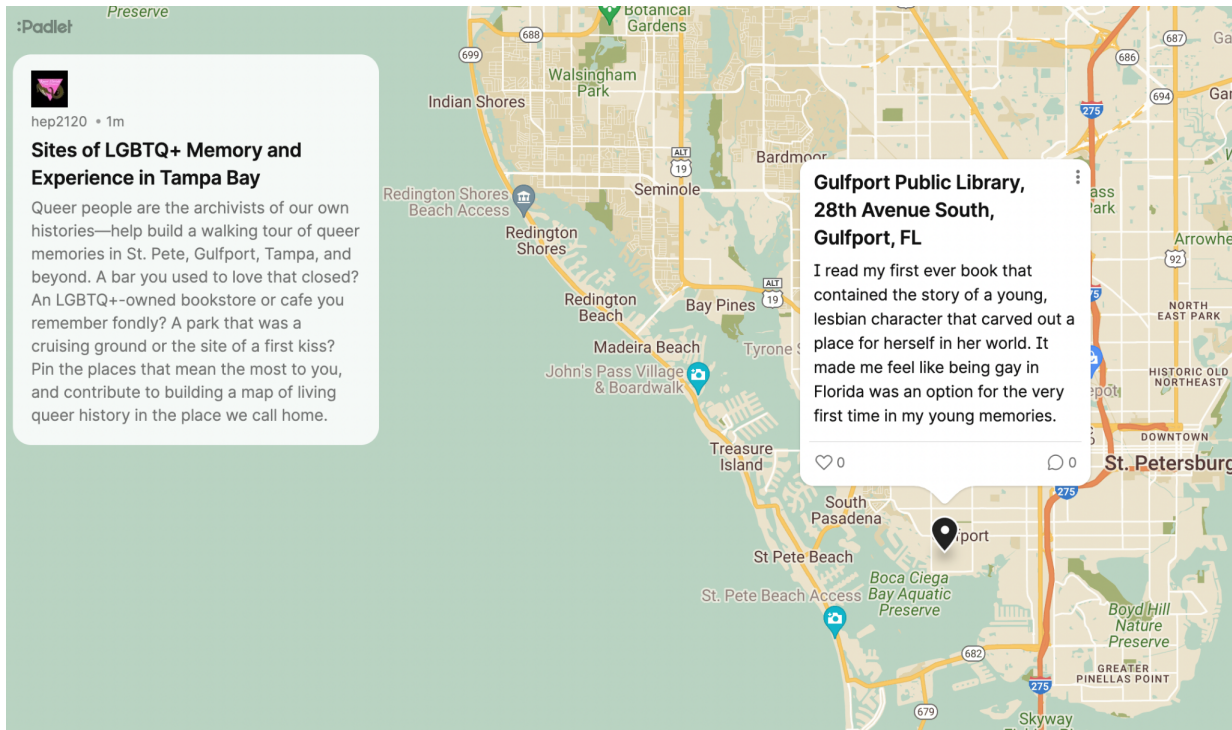
One of the primary goals of this thesis exhibit and event is to create a foundation for future growth. Using the digital tool Padlet, a live map of the local area will be projected onto the wall for attendees to drop pins of their own queer memories in Tampa Bay. Participants can either scan a QR code to access the map on their own device, or use the library computers (a more accessible option for the older folks in attendance). Padlet allows participants to type their memory in, upload media like photos and videos, or record themselves speaking, making for a simple, publicly accessible, multimedia collections process. The names of contributors are only visible to me, protecting participant's identities.

After the event, the Padlet map will continue to be live on the project website, Queerflorida.life, and I will print QR code stickers to put up around the city, in each site where a memory is recorded, allowing people to scan the code on their phone and read/listen to/view the memory cataloged at that location. As the map grows, I hope it will become a repository for local queer collective memory, creating a map of experience that local LGBTQ+ people can continue to update, share, and reference. In the long term, I would like to use the map as a jumping off point for a guided queer history tour in St. Petersburg. To summarize, the interactive queer memories map will be utilized in the following ways:

1. Projected onto a wall of the library during the workshop and throughout the day, allowing attendees to revisit and explore new memories shared by others as they auto populate on the screen.

2. QR codes with the link to the map will be on the wall next to the projected map and next to each displayed piece of material from Queer Florida interviews—attendees who have access to/are proficient with smart phones can share/upload their memories easily on their own device.
 - a. People who feel more comfortable on a desktop can participate digitally via the free library computers in a more intuitive and accessible way.
3. I will be manning a physical collections booth, with a guided printout and pens to physically write their memories down, or to share with me as I record using a bullet mic. I will then upload these memories to the map myself, after the event.
4. Finally, once the map is populated with memories from event attendees, I will print QR code stickers with the Queer Florida logo and put them up in each physical site where a memory has been recorded, so that the map can continue to grow organically as people find the memories across the city and add their own.

Visual Example of Padlet Map for Event:



***Image descriptions:** two screenshots of a Padlet map of Tampa Bay, Florida, with multiple memory pins dropped across St. Pete, Gulfport, and Tampa.*

Text on screen (map description):

Sites of LGBTQ+ Memory and Experience in Tampa Bay

Queer people are the archivists of our own histories—this map is a tool to help build a walking tour of collective queer memory in St. Pete, Gulfport, Tampa, and beyond. A bar you used to love that closed? An LGBTQ-owned bookstore or cafe you remember fondly? A park that was a cruising ground or the site of a first kiss? Pin the places that mean the most to you, and contribute to building a map of living queer history in the place we call home.

Text on screen (pinned memory on map):

Gulfport Public Library, 28th Avenue South, Gulfport, FL

“I read my first ever book that contained the story of a young, lesbian character that carved out a place for herself in her world. It made me feel like being gay in Florida was an option for the very first time in my young memories.”

Queer Florida Materials to be Shared

Interview with Shoog McDaniel

Audio excerpt of oral history interview and accompanying video



(Image description: screenshot of video excerpt from Shoog's oral history interview:

<https://vimeo.com/704366675>)

Text below video:

This video represents a short excerpt from an oral history interview with Shoog McDaniel (they/them), a southern, queer, non-binary, fat photographer and artist living in Tallahassee, Florida. Their words, merged with footage taken across Florida's wild landscapes, invite the viewers and listeners to engage in the act of dreaming a radical, queer Southern future into reality.

You can support, purchase, and explore Shoog's work at <http://shoogmcdaniel.com/>.

Video transcript:

Shoog: It's really weird down here. It exists as both the most hated place and the most loved place in a lot of ways. People have strong opinions about Florida—and it's almost never what's really happening down here. I think that just because there's so much lore about it. It just makes living here kind of like a joke, or kind of like “oh my god, I can't believe you live in Florida.”

People think these fantastical things happen here all the time. Which is true, but not in the way that they think. The flora and fauna of Florida is just so diverse and magnificent, and drastically taking over and recycling buildings at such a rapid speed. I don't know, it's just a very—it's a very mythical place, and yeah, I don't know. I'm just in love. I'm deeply in love.

the nature here is so queer, it's just everything is very weird and strange, and there's wild looking bugs, like there's there's birds of all different kinds. Like, everything feels really kind of absurd, in a really magical way—and of course that just feels very queer.

Just to sit and witness, just to go in my backyard and sit there and witness Florida, and witness this nature changing, the seasons changing, the crows, the birds—it just feels so full of life, and on the edge of change, on the edge of something big, and I want to be a part of that I guess.

You know that lake down there in South Florida, the big one? You know what I'm talkin about? Here, lemme look it up, just so I know. Okay, Lake Okeechobee. Lake Okeechobee is, you know, what is holding back water from rewilding the everglades, so Lake Okeechobee could be undammed, and then everything floods and goes back to how it's supposed to be. That would be amazing.

Text on screen:

Take a moment to ground yourself in the sight, sound, and feeling of the shifting landscape

Submit to the flooding, the constant and transformative force of change, and consider what you would like to release

What could be swept away with the tide? What new growth—and stronger foundations—would that sweeping make way for?

Han: Can you tell me, like, what does the Florida in your wildest dreams look like? What would you dream into the future?

Shoog: All the freakiest of freaks get to come live here, and everyone lives in a way that is informed by indigenous knowledge of this area and how to be living with it, instead of destroying it. I feel like if we really prioritize indigenous knowledge, there could be a way to preserve a lot of the Florida that is slowly being swept away from us. I think that everyone would have a boat, and people would use boats to go visit each other more. And

it wouldn't just be all the rich people with boats, and I think that all the springs would be protected.

And Black and brown leadership, trans and queer freaks everywhere, I don't know—just the dreams of liberation, whatever you think that is. Everyone would have what they need, and everyone would give what they could, and there would be a harmony reached between humans and nature. I wish that there wasn't such a strong divide anymore, and people could see themselves as a part of this place and deeply belonging to it.

Final text on screen:

Portrait photography by Shoog McDaniel

Nature Footage by Han Powell

Queer Florida 2022

Interview with Nina Borders

NINA BORDERS

she/her • 36 • Pasco County

Excerpts from oral history to be displayed alongside photos taken at Pulse Nightclub
from the narrator's personal archive:

Han: What is it like being queer where you live?

That's a two part question: one, because of class, and two, because of what I do for a living. To be out where I am, it doesn't affect me as much because of classism—I am considered middle class. And I own my own house, therefore rent discrimination on the basis of gender discrimination or sexual preference and all, it doesn't really happen to me. Also, people are less likely to come at me hard, even though I run an LGBT organization and am openly gay and fighting for gay rights, because I'm a firefighter/paramedic. I think it's important to state that. I am Black, I am a woman, and I am queer, but because of my class and career, I feel like It's a different experience. If you were asking another Black queer lesbian in this area, who does not have class on their side and works a regular job, it might be a little different. I would say it'd be horrible, and that's just because there are no protections.

There's no HRO in Pasco County—that is, Human Rights Ordinance. So you can be discriminated against for your sexual orientation or your gender, and it sucks. I *work* in Pinellas County, for the city of Clearwater as a firefighter/paramedic. And in the county of Pinellas, I'm protected by several HROs. The city of Clearwater cannot fire me

because I am gay and they can't fire me because I'm Black because of civil rights and human rights ordinances in Pinellas County. They even have a whole committee set up for those violations. When I cross the border from Pinellas to Pasco as a firefighter, I lose every single one of those rights. So as a firefighter, I can sit in a restaurant and be asked to leave. Because they don't want gay people, I cannot be served.

Now it gets fishy with the new Federal laws since Biden took office, but before that, I could be asked to leave anywhere. I could be denied rent, I could be denied just about anything because of my sexual orientation—or if I was kissing a girl, if I was wearing a rainbow t-shirt. And that is terrible, because if I hid my identity, they would love me as a first responder—but because I choose to not hide my identity, I lose out on a few things. But like I said, I own my house so I don't catch the brunt of that. But there's a lot of people that aren't like me. And they are also firefighters, and they have to deal with the same thing.

Here in Florida, organizing is weird. It's wild. It's hard to get around it. It's almost like here, you're so oppressed and you have almost no rights, so you can't even begin to take to the streets, because you're just trying to pay rent, or you're just trying to basically survive. So it's a lot harder in the South, and if you don't know anything else, then it's hard to envision a future that's different.

Han: What kind of future do you dream about for Florida?

My queer dream for Pasco... I want an area in which everybody fits in. I want an area in which a kid who grew up poor—I don't even want them to grow up poor anymore, I want us to provide enough resources so that they eat, they have the ability to go to school. They have whatever they need, including housing. I want them to have every

opportunity to succeed, regardless of income. But I also want income to be a thing that they have, because everybody should have basic income.

I'd like to see it as our own personal community where we have a lot of farmland here as well. I would love to see communities coming together. Small knit communities supporting each other, with the government stepping in and saying, "hey, you know, maybe housing's a right, and maybe basic income is a right, and maybe healthcare is a right." That'd be great. I don't think there's anything that we can't do. Some of the most brilliant people I've met come out of Pasco County, in the most insane circumstances—I don't want people to have to go through what they did, and I'd like it to be a lot easier. I'd like no kid to have to go through that, honestly. So yeah, that'd be my dream for this county.

On Pasco Pride and Protests

I'm the current President of Pasco Pride. We are an activist pride organization. We're not like most prides—we operate in an incredibly red and conservative district and we can't just throw a party. There's so many things that have to be laid before we get to that point. We're fighting for health care. We're fighting for recognition of our trans students in schools.

I think what puts us out from everyone else is that we are fully funded by the people. It's important to me because I feel like corporations run most major prides. For instance, they say what gets put out and printed, they say what you do. If you wanted to do something radical, they'd be like, "we're going to pull our 2.6 million dollars and you're not going to be able to throw your pride." So a lot of big prides don't, and if you notice, they will not get behind major campaigns. A lot of prides did not join for the Movement for Black Lives.

We can join the things that people call radical. We were protesting for trans rights, we were packing school boards, when no other pride was out there doing it, and why? Because we're funded by people who want us to continue doing this kind of stuff, which we wholeheartedly believe in because we are an activist pride. The people choose our fights for the most part, whether it's school board-related, HRO-related, or housing. And if they're like "oh, my child is being discriminated against," I'm like, let's go. Let's get it. Who do I need? Who's the Principal? I will walk in in a suit and I will go talk to your principal for you. We are *that* pride. I will talk to the school psychologist, I will pull in an enormous amount of people with me, and then we are going to go figure out what is happening.

Keep your money if you don't believe in what we believe in. It is that simple. We're funded by Pasco County residents, gay businesses, and Black-owned businesses, which is great because we can't be shut down. And now we're pushing for federal grants so that they can't control what we do, and who we fight, and who we slam. We will find ways to continue based on our beliefs in what we believe should be right, like access to health care and equality or equity. It's taken a lot of work and a lot of long nights. We've all burned out probably three times. We take turns burning out, honestly, like the whole board just burns out. But I've seen the progress and I think, I can't wait to see how far we come in the future.

Han: What does organizing and movement work look like in a conservative area?

Here [in Pasco], it is literally black and white. It is such a drastic change from Tampa, which is a predominantly Black city, right? And then you go thirty minutes out and you enter some of the highest white supremacy areas in the United states. It's mind

boggling to me how you can have such a progressive city that is years ahead, thirty minutes outside of Pasco's borders.

During the height of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, you had the largest marches in Tampa and St. Pete, but you had the most vicious here in Pasco County. People were just emboldened to attack you, and the police were just arresting people for no reason. It was one of those fights where I didn't realize how bad it was. I'm always dealing with churches, who aren't trying to kill me— theoretically, they're trying to get me to repent. They're not trying to murder me, but the Proud Boys are different. These white supremacist gangs, their intent is to eradicate me. I do not need to exist, and that's the scary part. Some of these people came to fight, and you could see it—they would get their big, lifted trucks, rev their engines, and they would act like they were gonna hit you and then drive off. They would stalk you to your car, so you had to go in a big group. They would kettle, which is pushing you into a small group and circle around you, and you're outnumbered by a ton of white supremacists.

That's what small town activism looks like. It's not the big march that you saw on television in Tampa—it was grit to grit, knuckle to knuckle, just face-offs in small towns where the minority was outnumbered, and people were emboldened because they knew they could harm you and get away with it.

On the 2016 Pulse Nightclub Shooting

Han: I usually conduct these interviews in a physical place that's important to the narrator. But given this is a virtual interview, you shared some pictures from your meaningful place—Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Can you tell me about those photos?

To put it in context, I went to Pulse the day it opened. This photo is so old—this is before they renovated it, around 2005. We loved it, right? There was a time when they closed for renovations, and this is a piece of the wall that broke off, then they were like, “take it, because we're gutting this place.” It was the final, like, blowout party, and I went with a group of people, and we all just got so lit.

All of my best friends and I used to roll into Pulse with an entourage of like 10 of us. We would show up late from our shitty apartment in Metro West or like, wherever. In the other photo we all just looked so drunk, and it was the same time when Pulse was shutting down for like a month, and everybody was like—*oh, we have to go out!* It makes me sad...but I love it. It makes me sad because it reminds me of such a good time in a good community, but also in one night, you can get wiped out. Everybody who knew me was at risk in one night. An entire friend group—and I've known these people for 20 years. The people who are still around met me this weekend at Girls in Wonderland [an annual lesbian event in Orlando] and it was a reunion all over again. To think about that, it's sad but heartwarming. I'm so glad I get to hug and see them, and I'm so glad it continued.

I had already moved from Orlando to Pasco County when the Pulse shooting happened, but Pulse is somewhere I went all the time. We called it church. Literally, like my Orlando friends, we would ask, "are you going to church?" because we went religiously.

It's just one of those photos that when people ask me why I dedicate so much of my life to activism, I'm like, *that's why*. Because I lived at Pulse—I could tell you the entire makeup of that club. Because we used to go like twice a week for Latin night and Wednesday night, which is college night. So yeah, this photo is a piece of Pulse that I

took home with me and kept in my dorm room. A lot of what I do is because of that kind of community. I think the people here deserve that kind of community. They deserve all different kinds—not necessarily the club scene, but the ability to just be who they are in a space that is safe.

It was my firehouse that responded to the call from Pulse on June 12, 2016. They all thought I was one of the people in the building, so I had to actually call them and tell them no, because they were all freaking out. I said I was gonna go [that night] and I thought about it, because whenever I'm in town we go to Pulse. I had several acquaintances that I knew who were killed or injured— at any point, it could have been an entire friend group of mine just wiped off the face of the planet. And so they called me in early from Pasco—I got the call around like 3:34am, and I left and drove into Orlando to relieve the crews because they'd been running all night at Pulse. There were 49 victims and more than 100 injured.

It changed the face of how we party—there wasn't one person I knew that wasn't touched by Pulse, in terms of loss. I know Kate, the bartender, very well, and I thought she was murdered. I just remember being like, Jesus, this is insane, how we lost so many people who were like family. We know the queer community is *not* just friends, it's a family.

Photos to be displayed:

Image descriptions: (Top) Nina Borders surrounded by friends at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida. (Bottom) Nina Borders holds a piece of golden scaffolding from Pulse Nightclub, a spiral framing her smiling face.

Interview with Salem

SALEM

they/them • 22 • Calle Ocho, Miami

Excerpt from oral history to be displayed alongside a portrait of the narrator taken at the site of the interview, and multimedia art I illustrated using an old picture of their grandfather:

Han: Can you tell me a little bit about where we are and why it's meaningful to you?

Well, we're at my Grandma's house. I think she's lived here since I was like four. This has been the one place in my entire life that has stayed the same. I've moved a lot, specifically between Puerto Rico, Orlando, and Miami. So many different houses... I think it's been like 12? 13? In Puerto Rico alone it was like five. So I've gotten used to a lot of change. It doesn't really phase me all that much. But this is the one place that has stayed the same. I wanted to memorialize it by bringing you here.

I lost my Grandpa earlier this year. He used to sit in this chair every day. When I was younger, you could hear the planes overhead passing by. He would sit me on his lap, and we would just watch the planes for hours. And—I'm going to start crying *[laughs]*—in my family, I think he was the one person I was the most like. And he was the most understanding person. He was—can I curse?—he was a dick *[laughs affectionately]*. But in the best way possible! He was sarcastic and stubborn, he was so stubborn. He could barely walk but he would go up and down those stairs to go to family parties and stuff like that.

I always figured he would be around to see me marry someone and stuff like that, but he's not. And now I'm moving, and we're going away from this house, and I feel like this is the one important spot in all of Miami, because he's the one person that understood me the most and loved me the most. I would joke about being gay with him so much. I'm like "Grandpa, what if I married a woman?" And he didn't understand it completely, but he never went, "No, that's gross." He would always be like, "Well, what am I going to tell you? You're going to do it anyways." And I'm like you're absolutely right, I will do it anyways. *[laughs]* You're absolutely correct.

I'm actually wearing his ring. This was the last thing he gave me the day before he died. And this place is so special for me because I knew that whatever I came to terms with, as far as my identity goes, he was the one person that was always gonna be like "Okay! We can do that." And even though he's not here, I'm not religious, but I like to think he's sitting up somewhere, smoking a cigar, kind of looking down on me like "Yep, they're doing that. They're doing something." *[laughs]* So I feel like this space is important.

Han: He sounds like an incredible person.

[Laughing] He was. He was hilarious! I remember we were in the middle of a hurricane, and when that happens we usually stay in hotels so we're all together. In the middle of the hurricane he's like, I want to smoke! I'm like, what do you mean?! He's like No! I'm going downstairs to smoke. I want the hurricane to take me and I'm going to smoke. I'm like no, you're not! And he was pissed. He was pissed at me for like two hours. He was such a character.

Han: He feels well suited to that chair and this space. I can see it, I can picture it so clearly.

Yes! Oh my god, he used to sit here for hours. He had a little radio where he would listen to Baseball games. Not watch them, never watch them, only listen. And he would sit here, smoking a pack a day, looking out and listening to baseball. Then as soon as I came up he would like “Nanee!” and I would be like “Grandpa!” He was the first face you saw when you came up here.

Materials to be displayed:

Image Descriptions: (Top) Salem sits in front of their grandparent's home in Miami, illustrated vines from a potted plant creeping over their shoulder. (Bottom) Salem's grandfather is illustrated sitting in the same chair where Salem now recounts his memory.

Future Goals and Objectives

I am currently in the process of transcribing and creating material from the Queer Florida narrators not featured at this event. The archive of interviews, portraits, and video/audio excerpts will continue to live on through my website, Instagram, and eventually will be housed with a local LGBTQ+ history archive. In the immediate future, I will continue to host local memory-mapping events to build a foundation for a virtual walking tour, and use the map to design and upload a QR-code walking route to the website for folks to find and complete on their own. I would also like to host “living queer history” walking tours, bringing groups to historic queer sites in St. Petersburg and breathing life into them—carrying a Queer Florida banner to educate passersby on the rich LGBTQ+ past of the city we call home, perhaps even partnering with local queer-owned businesses to stop for lunch, drinks, and to chat and connect with others who share the same passion.

Because this first event will reach a largely lesbian audience, and is based out of Gulfport—the gayborhood of a much more sprawling city—I will strategically host upcoming events in Downtown and South St. Petersburg to reach a more diverse group of LGBTQ+ people, especially because South St. Pete is home to the majority of the city’s Black queer history. Due to the layout of St. Petersburg, different walking tours will need to be routed in separate categories for each walkable area of historic sites—these could be consolidated into a driving, biking, bus, or trolley tour. As I build up to those more technical plans, I will continue to interview new narrators, share oral histories through events and talkbacks, and maintain/develop the map of local memories.

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