

My Summer Working with Gloria's Foundation

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Sophi Tomasulo newcomb@tulane.edu

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This summer, I had the immense honor and privilege to work at Gloria's Foundation as an intern in their archive department. Originally, I had applied for the Soapbox Feminist Camp Administrator position, but upon meeting Amy Richards and talking about my experience in the Newcomb Archives Collection and the digital archive for my Masked Violence Exhibit, she had another opportunity in store. She asked me if I wanted to work for "Gloria's Archive Collection," and I remember reading the email

over and over. Gloria Steinem? Gloria Steinem, feminist icon. I felt something I can only describe as “feminist validation.” For years, I had given into what society told me about Gender Studies majors: I didn’t think my passion for feminist advocacy and radical thought could translate into the professional world, but I found my place within the Newcomb Institute and Gloria’s Foundation. I was now in a space where that work was recognized, valued, and treated with immense care. Despite my fears of leaving the summer camp counselor days behind, I knew there was no way I was going to pass on this opportunity.

The first half of the summer was more administrative, virtual work, as they had been in the process of transferring offices for a few months. I connected with Laura Fischer, the head of the archival department who worked remotely from Italy, and we talked about how my position would be filling in some of the assorted overload tasks. I quickly learned this was not your typical 9:00-5:00 office job and that I was going to be learning a little bit of everything this summer. I learned to become flexible in what I was doing and began to adjust my expectations to meet the needs of the growing foundation. I was tasked with assisting in auditing Gloria’s Foundation’s expenses and donations, keeping track of Gloria’s press alerts and making sure any content including her was downloaded and filed correctly, sorting through fan mail, and even transcribing some of Gloria’s recorded Talking Circles, a series of consciousness-raising conversations featuring other feminist figures and celebrities.

Once there was a new space available for the archives team at the *Ms.* Foundation for Women’s office, we began the process of meeting more in person and working on the archives. Amanda McCall was like no one I had ever met before, and she quickly became my personal inspiration. Amanda never sacrificed her values to fit into professional spaces; she never let go of that radical bone that some have tried to pry out of me, and her knowledge of the archives and feminist history was astonishing.

I had two major tasks in the second half of the summer: identifying and categorizing the assorted digital archives and making sure the physical materials were stored safely. There were thousands of photos in the collection that needed to be dated, pinned to a location or event, pinned to a specific photographer, or have the individuals identified. This began to feel like detective work in a sense: I’d have a picture, and I’d trace back the steps. I learned about feminist history I’d never heard of before just by seeing where Gloria’s been. During this time, I was emailing

bookstores in Milwaukee to confirm they had a book signing event with Gloria in March of 1983, rifling through old university newspapers to track down the photographer of a specific picture from one of Gloria's speeches, and digging for archived magazine articles. The tasks were incredibly difficult at times, as you can imagine. Some of the photographers had passed before we were able to acquire archival permission. Some of the events just ceased to exist on the internet! So, it was frustrating at times, thinking I had found the right thing, but really, Gloria was just wearing the same outfit. But there was something so satisfying once I put the entire story behind the picture together.

In addition to the digital research work, I handled the physical documents. Together, we went over each different piece of archival equipment. We got all nerdy with headlamps and protective gloves, and it was here I was able to see the bigger picture of all the work I'd done prior. Amanda took me to the storage unit, where we went through Gloria's old diaries, drafts for speeches, *Ms. Magazine* prints, newspaper clippings she had saved, itineraries, etc. My favorite little piece of history was the box of Gloria's vintage belts. The same belts she wore at the first feminist conventions, the same ones she wore when confronting politicians and speaking in front of hundreds. Seeing something so personal of someone so iconic made the whole experience click. What I was doing was laying the foundation for future research and making history accessible for future feminists. Amanda even trusted me to re-sleeve Gloria's personal photo albums from vacations with Angela Davis and Polaroids from her travels. I held photographs with Gloria's handwritten notes on the back, notes of love and gratitude from other feminist figures and politicians.

Before starting, I was anxious about entering a more "corporate" space than I'd been in prior (even though I think Gloria would laugh at my characterization of that,) but I found comfort and belonging within the team. We celebrated my birthday in the middle of the summer, we traded bracelets, and we laughed over ice cream together. I saw a beautiful balance of sisterhood and professionalism that I never knew was possible. I'll never forget the feeling of standing in a storage unit and letting the weight of history hit me. I remember feeling embarrassed crying reading over some of Gloria's old letters, but then I looked up and saw others were doing the same. I saw that a feminist epistemology in a workspace was possible, and I regained a sense of hope for the future.

I owe the utmost gratitude to the Newcomb Institute for facilitating my internship program and for showing me that feminism isn't just a hobby; it can be a living.