



Like manatees taking to water, I had an exhilarating immersion into audio and digital journalism

by Shivani Persaud | Jan 7, 2022

When I received the message that I would be part of the Florida Newsroom Project cohort for NPR's Next Generation Radio, I screamed. I remember waiting for about two years to apply to the project, honing my skills so that I felt confident enough to. As a West Indian woman, I didn't see many people who looked like me in the journalism world, so it took a while for me to make the plunge. The acceptance was only the beginning.

In one week of intensive training, field work and production, I learned so much about myself. I grew up in Queens, New York, and had virtually no access to nature in its purest form. Being able to physically go out into Florida's nature preserves and tell an individual's story allowed me to immerse myself completely. Before sunrise one morning, I had already begun interviewing my source, Cora Berchem, about her dedication to protecting manatees. I spent the entire morning in Orange City collecting material to construct a narrative. I was new to this, but curiosity worked in my favor.

Stitching the pieces together into one cohesive story was a process, and at times it felt long and arduous. But I never felt that I couldn't do it, because the NextGenRadio editors and my mentor, Rick Brunson, always kept me on track without making me feel overwhelmed. I am endlessly grateful to have had an amazing mentor and editors whose encouragement and reassurance were unmatched. Selena Seay-Reynolds, Gabriela Saldivia, Erica Lee and Kylene Yumul were so much more than I could have asked for, and I think things would have turned out differently if it weren't for them.

As it all came together, I had to come to terms with the realization that it was only a week-long project, and it was slowly coming to an end. It's intriguing how quickly we get used to something, and it will definitely feel odd not signing onto Zoom or driving to Blue Spring State Park the morning after everything is over. But that just shows me how much I

enjoyed this week, and I couldn't ask for a more incredible opportunity to dive into the world of digital and audio journalism.

I had no prior experience in radio journalism prior to this week. I didn't know how to operate a Marantz deck, and opening Adobe Audition frightened me. I had never ventured beyond the city of Orlando during my time in college, and I had never spoken to an environmentalist or seen a manatee. I leave this week with a renewed passion for journalism in all its forms, eyes open to Florida's beauty, and gratitude for NextGenRadio for selecting me.

