



THE MOST INCONVENIENT SUMMER OF MY LIFE

Written by SHREYA NALLAMOTHU

"Our first task was to get gym memberships. It seemed simple enough, but there was one problem: there was no way to register online. So, my friends and I called the number on the sign. To our surprise, we weren't connected to a front desk or an automated robot, but the gym owner himself.

We made plans to meet him at the gym the next day, and twenty-four hours later, the six of us had memberships, his personal cell number, and a friendly face. What I had initially seen as inconvenience—the inability to register online—was my first welcome to the town.

This summer, I'm interning in Tarboro through the Robertson Scholars Leadership Program, a scholarship and leadership development program for students at Duke University

and UNC Chapel-Hill. The Robertson places its rising sophomores in communities across the South to teach them about leadership, community, and service. Six of us are spending the summer in Tarboro, living together, working at organizations throughout town, and immersing ourselves in its rich culture.

I'm highly interested in technology and the way it's changing how we live. One of its greatest strengths is its ability to reduce friction, the time in between wanting something and having it. In my computer science classes, I've always learned that less friction was better. Why wouldn't it be? The faster we

can accomplish something, the more time we have for everything else.



Tarboro has politely dismantled this assumption.

I don't have a car here. Walking takes longer than driving, but it has introduced me to people I never would have met otherwise. Everybody waves, and many stop to ask how you're doing. A five-minute drive becomes a twenty-minute walk, and a twenty-minute walk becomes a conversation. I've stopped to ask for directions and, in return, gotten stories, recommendations, and sometimes even a new friend. Now, I can't walk into a store without recognizing someone.

When I first found out I'd be in Tarboro for the summer, I immediately Googled what there was to do. I didn't find much. Google Maps could tell me where places were, but not which biscuit was worth waking up for or what people did on Thursday nights. To learn those things, I had to ask people. That's how I learned about Abrams' biscuits, Trivia Night at Tarboro Brewing Company, and things that don't show up in a search result. I have found so much more joy in the friction. In asking for directions and getting a story. In needing something and watching someone rearrange their evening for you. In walking, and talking, and being seen. Friction is where the people are.

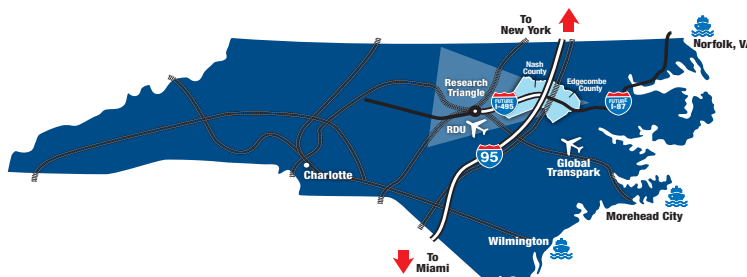
I often hear small towns dismissed as "behind the times," as if they're waiting to catch up. But, I think that misses something. Tarboro hasn't fallen behind, but rather has held onto something other places have optimized away.

My housemates and I love to go on walks after dinner. We wave to people on their porches, watch the sun set, and stop to chat when we inevitably see a familiar face. I still remember the walk we took on my first night here; the warm glow of Calvary's lights and my delight at how every single car slowed down for us. At the time, it surprised me, but I've come to understand that, like all of the friction

we've encountered this summer, sometimes what slows us down is what brings us together.



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