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Quilting in the Gee's Bend Style (Summer 2023)

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Staff Creative Residencies Summer 2023 Self-Assessment

**Erin Parker, Community Coordinator for Student Housing,
quilted in Gee's Bend style.**

Summer months used to soothingly hum with humidity, evenings flowing lazily by and spending time with family and friends outside. I've been thinking back through my childhood, to the summer nights before my first year of college so many years ago. These breaks continue to hold that hum, a frequency that comforts and envelops. There's a rhythm with this frequency that builds higher in tempo with each summer I've continued to work on campus. While most students have gone, it seems to be one of the most demanding times in my role, with constant changes, new conferences moving in and out, cleaning, planning for training and so much more. This time tends to break all the routines I have and sets into a restless ambiguity. This project has helped to regulate and anchor me.

I proposed to use the grant money to go on a quilting retreat. I fell so far in love with the process of quilting, I was able to attend two retreats over the summer. Part of the reason I chose a creative project in quilting, was to build connection with others. I was able to attend one of the retreats with my mom. We've lived 12 hours away from each other for nearly a decade, and haven't had much quality one on one time since most visits occur during holidays.

The connections I made at the Gee's Bend retreat will last beyond my lifetime. The diversity of people in age, experience, race, and background was incredible. I learned an incredible amount, during my time. I saw selflessness and generosity that I've never experienced before. It was a place of welcome and help, a space for vulnerability and to hear from the women of Gees Bend, and work side by side with them, I have a vastly different understanding of what community can be, what it can feel like, and how to model it and bring it back.

I cannot explain how impactful this experience has been for me. The grant and residency time were the break I needed to slow and re-connect with the reasons I work at the University. I want to build the community that I've seen and felt for our first year students in our housing spaces. I've come back refreshed and renewed in building projects that already hold so many memories and so much meaning.



