Archives in Context
Season 9 Episode 5: Christina Zamon
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Emily Mathay 00:00
From the Society of American Archivists, this is *Archives in Context*, a podcast highlighting archival literature and technologies and, most importantly, the people behind them.

Lauren Kata 00:18
Welcome listeners to another episode of *Archives in Context*. I'm Lauren Kata.

Emily Mathay 00:28
I'm Emily Mathay.

Lauren Kata 00:31
Hey, Emily.

Emily Mathay 00:32
Hey!

Lauren Kata 00:34
Hope your day is off to a good start.

Emily Mathay 00:35
It's pretty good. You know, sun shining, birds are singing. There are some leaves out, so can't complain. How's Abu Dhabi?

Lauren Kata 00:43
That's good to hear. It's getting hot. It's getting hot over here. Well, I'm happy to be back cohosting another episode together, looking forward to this conversation. Our guest today is Christina Zamon. Christina is currently the head of Special Collections and Archives at Georgia State University in Atlanta. Prior to that, she was the head of Archives and Special Collections for Emerson College. She has worked at the National Press Club, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Frick Art Reference Library, and has over twenty-five years of experience. She is the author of *The Lone Arranger: Succeeding in a Small Repository*, published in 2012, and *Alone in the Stacks: Succeeding as a Solo Archivist* in 2024, which is one of the reasons we invited her on the podcast today.

Christina received her MA in history and MLIS from the University of Maryland, where she also worked as a graduate assistant in the library's preservation department. Hi, Christina, thank you so much for being with us on the podcast.

Christina Zamon 00:44
Good morning. So glad to be here.

Lauren Kata 00:44
Today, we're going to dive in a bit to talk about the world of solo archivists.

Emily Mathay 00:56
Hooray! So, Christina, you were once yourself an archivist who worked solo in an institution. And can we start off with you talking a little bit about your experience of being a solo archivist and how that influenced you wanting to write about the experience?

Christina Zamon 02:10
Yeah, sure. So, I had some paraprofessional experience before getting my library degree, and as I was doing my internship and then my very last semester of library school, and I met getting my master's, I got hired at the National Press Club, and that was a solo archivist role; nothing like getting sort of thrown in the deep end when you are a newly minted archivist. And I know I wasn't the only one. And this happens a lot. It happens very frequently, especially with, you know, nonprofits and smaller organizations where they don't have a lot of money and they end up hiring somebody right out of school, but it is the deep end when you get there. No, I was in charge of the archives. I also, you know, had a couple hours a week on the reference desk in the library there, again, not unfamiliar to a lot of solo archivists, you're kind of pulling so many duties. And so, I did that for four years, and then when I became the head of Archives and Special Collections at Emerson College, same thing. I was- even bigger collection, and the only person. It was weird being the head of a department of myself. That was for six years, until eventually, you know, I had advocated enough to get some assistance. But it was quite the undertaking. My, you know, coming right out of grad school and being a solo archivist, my collections were in the basement of the building, and I was on the thirteenth floor, so that was fun. If anybody wanted to access them, it was- it was a journey. During my time there, in that four years, the Press Club was building a broadcast operation center, and there was a space where they didn't know what to do with it because it had no windows, and it wasn't going to be a great space for their operations, so I kind of inserted myself and said, I'll take it, and got to build my first sort of purpose-built archival facility. Lots of lessons learned, lots of mistakes made, not all my fault. So, I mean, it was really, really like getting into the deep end. Usually, you don't come out of school and within two or three years you're like building an archival facility. You know, while I was there and learning all this stuff, I was part of various lone arranger, now solo archivist networks, and sort of relying on my colleagues to kind of help me through. And I just really heard a lot of people saying that—at that time, the publications from SAA were very like high level theoretical—and people were saying, "What about us? Like, how am I supposed to apply these like high level theoretical practices when I have to do all the things myself?" That kind of started the discussion around writing a book and the need for solo archivists to have something, something practical that they could actually use and apply in their situations. So, it was that first ten years of my quote, unquote, professional life was- was a roller coaster ride, for sure.

Lauren Kata 05:30
I'm guessing, just listening to you talk about some of- paint the picture of what it is to be a solo archivist, and just those early days, I'm guessing a lot of our listeners will relate to that experience as well, and to your book. I wanted to also move into talking about the title change, because you just referenced it. You know, you, at one time you thought of yourself as a lone arranger, and now, now we're, you know, the phrase we're looking at is

solo archivist. So, from the 2012 to 2024 version, that move from lone arranger to solo archivist, and you address this in your introduction, you write, "The original title harkened back to a pun based on the radio series and later 1950s television western *The Lone Ranger*, which featured a white man as the "hero" and Tonto, a Native American, as his sidekick." Can you talk a little bit about why the shift is important and why that title change was important to you?

Christina Zamon 06:32
Yeah, this was a conversation that I had with Stacie Williams, who's the editor, or, you know, I think she's still the editor now for publications, and when I was working on the proposal for the new book, or this new version, and you know, a lot has changed. There was quite a shift between 2012 and 2014 (2024), just, you know, within archives, just culturally within America, and a lot more recognition. And the term lone arranger was, I think they pinned it back to somewhere in the 70s or 80s, which, you know, archivists at that time would have been very familiar with the television- radio and television program *The Lone Ranger*. And so it was just this pun that it- we haven't been able to figure out who exactly coined the pun itself, but while it was a fun pun, and people still kind of knew what the lone ranger was, and particularly from the more recent Johnny Depp movie, it wasn't having the same resonance. And for me, the bigger issue that I had was that it was really inaccurate, because it made it sound like you were a person that sat in a corner and you just arranged papers or you were processing. And so between the outdated cultural reference and just this inaccurate depiction of what a person in this position does or is, I really felt strongly that we needed to move to something that was a little more accurate, which is solo archivist. I mean, that's that's really what you are. So, you know, talking through it with Stacie, that's how we came up with this term, and in the process, talked a lot with the folks on the committee that- that puts together the Dictionary of Archival Terms (Dictionary of Archives Terminology), to work to update and change the term. Also worked with the section to update the section title. So, it used to be the Lone Arrangers Roundtable, then Lone Arrangers Section, and more recently, now it's the Solo Archivists Section. So, this book really kind of created this- this shift in terminology, and you'll still see lone arranger pop up. I still see people reference it. It's still out there. But part of what I was trying to do was- was make that shift, make that change over to the term solo archivist. I just, for me, it really was much- a much more accurate term and really better defined the work that we were doing.

Lauren Kata 09:12
Thank you for that. That makes a lot of sense. I started in SAA when it was the Lone Arrangers Roundtable, and I remember- I remember, kind of growing up with that term. Could you talk a little bit more about the updating of the 2012 to the 2024 version? Were there any major updates or even minor ones that surprised or excited or frustrated you?

Christina Zamon 09:39
Yeah, so I was the one that actually went back to SAA and said, "Hey, you know, again, like I mentioned, there was a pretty big cultural shift between 2012 and 2024." And I just felt like one, I didn't have as much experience and knowledge when I wrote the first book, and I had much more experience, knowledge, so I felt like there were topics missing. Technology had changed quite a bit. And there was a chapter on that had kind of threw everything together in this sort of technology realm, and it was very light. It was the one thing that I think in all the reviews of the original book got like the most criticism, because it was pretty light on information. And part of that was just it wasn't something that I was overly familiar with. But, you know, moving forward again, rapid changes in technology, I had more experience, more insight. I felt like that one chapter needed to be broken out into three. I've long had experience with donor relations and- and grants, but you know, over time, just- just gain more and more insights. And there were some sections in there that I wanted to update and broaden in terms of funding and fundraising and grant writing. The other big thing was really looking at privacy and copyright issues which weren't really addressed in the original book. And that was really tricky, because I didn't

want to make it its own chapter, but then I was trying to figure out which chapter it sort of went with. And I think that was one of the things where, in the process, you know, I was somewhat frustrated, and part of that too was when you go through this process, you get comments back, you submit a draft, and they send it to three reviewers, and you get these comments back, and those comments like they're great. I love getting the comments because it helps me to figure it out and see what I need to change, but then there's some times where one person says one thing and another person says another thing, and you're trying to reconcile those comments and then- and then you have to sit there and go, "Wait a minute. I can't make everybody happy. I can't." Like this book can't fix all the problems, right? Like, it's just a book, you know? It's just a piece of paper that helps people, like, guide people. It can't tell them how to do something. It can't, you know, give them step-by-step instructions. It's not what it's for. So, you know, sometimes you have to just, like, step back and go, Okay, let me take these comments and context. Let me see what I can do to best guide people. And I think that's- that's one of the things that can be really frustrating sometimes, is because you want it to have all of the information. You want it to be like this perfect thing. And I think, you know, after writing the first book, pretty quickly afterwards, you know, like, I never felt like it was done. I knew that there was missing information, but it was something. And overall, the reviews for the original book were pretty good. They were pretty strong. And it just, you know, made me feel better that okay, I had at least contributed something for all those solo archivists out there to sort of understand, put their own job into context, help them forward, and to not get stuck in that sort of wanting to be perfect scenario. So, the second time around, you know, I had that experience. And so, I was like, okay, these are the things I want to add. This is how I want to add it. I read through the whole original book, put all kinds of flags, like made all sorts of notes, and figured out where to add the new chapters and re-outline everything. So, some of the text is word for word, verbatim from the first book, but a lot of it's been edited and updated and changed. I had like a nice start point with the first book, but I was really able to reshape and change with the second book and expand it and give much more guidance to those solo archivists.

Emily Mathay 14:03
That's so interesting to kind of hear the- all that work that goes into it. You know, you kind of think great, like, second edition, cool, but it's so much extra work. Like, it's a ton of work, and then you have to reread everything you already did. Like, that's- that's great. I liked how you were talking about how it's a guide, and as much as you want to write out a step-by-step kind of thing of like, here's exactly what you do. That's impossible, right? Because, I mean, the whole motto of the profession is, it depends, right?

Christina Zamon 14:28
Yes.

Emily Mathay 14:28
But, I do think the case studies kind of provide that "here's what someone did in this scenario." So, to kind of like, fill that gap a little bit of like, well, I can't tell you exactly what to do, but here is a good example. And, in the book, you highlight that solo archivists, small repositories, they make up a large percentage of the archives in the United States, but the representation in the actual literature itself is pretty small, and cases are underrepresented. So, the case studies in your book are pretty diverse in terms of institution type, so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you- you picked those. How'd you find them? How'd you pick them?

Christina Zamon 15:09
Yeah, with the- with the first version, I mostly just reached out to people I knew. And that was- that was another issue that I had when I was- you know I mentioned about not feeling like the first one was sort of perfect, right? And that was one of the things that I felt like, okay, well, I had just reached out to people I knew, and so I didn't feel like, while it represented different types of organizations, it didn't have like that bigger, broader diversity.

So, that was something that I wanted to change with the second book. So, with the second book, I did two things. I did specifically reach out to people or institutions, not necessarily that I knew, but I had seen that they had done a particular type of work, or maybe they had written about it or mentioned it on a listserv or whatever, or maybe I knew them, right? And so, there were some specific people that I reached out to purposely, you know, diversify and sort of broaden those case studies. And then I also had created a Google Form, and I had put it out to the solo archivist list to solicit people, and they would check, you know, what the topic was, you know, kind of a brief synopsis, their contact information, so that I had some choices in different types of case studies, different organizations. So, I went through and, in fact, one of the things that I felt weak on is, you know, I hadn't been a solo archivist for a little bit, and one of my concerns that I brought up with SAA was maybe I'm not the person to write this book. And they said, no, no, you are absolutely the right person to write this book, because you- you have been a solo archivist, you do understand it, and now you have all this depth and breadth of knowledge. Okay, fine. One of the people that had initially put in a case study ended up being my point person. And I believe I mentioned in my intro that she was my sort of solo archivist in residence. And really, like, I would have her, like, read chapters or drafts of things, or say, you know, what do you think about this? So, I was bouncing ideas off of her to try and figure out what needed to change. What did I need to update? So, that was Heather Perez, and she was hugely instrumental in being that sounding board, being the live, in-person, current solo archivist to kind of guide some of where I was going with the manuscript. Yeah, and the case studies, that was something I pitched with the first book, because I really felt like the only way to sort of illustrate what I was trying to say in each chapter was through a case study, and it made no sense for me to write those case studies all from one perspective. I needed to have all these different perspectives. Because one thing, and this is the real challenge of the book, is that solo archivists exist in so many contexts. And back to what you said about "it depends," I mean, it really depends, because it depends on your context. What are your facilities like? What is the person's background and knowledge? What are the politics and organization of that particular- what is the purpose of the archives? You know, there's so many variables. So, I wanted to be able to show case studies that represented all those variables, but within the context of what I was talking about in the chapter. So, so yeah, I did change up the process for the second time, and I thought that worked pretty well, because I could have a pool of potential case studies. And part of it too- there were case studies that they had gotten written, and this was the same with the first book too, and then they ended up just in the process getting cut. And I always feel bad about that, you know, because you don't want to tell somebody, oh, you know, it's included, but, oh, sorry, in the editing process it gets cut, right? But it's sort of like a movie; you have these sort of cutting room processes, and you do want to streamline it. You don't want to bog things down. And if it's not sort of on point or really supplementing the rest of the text, and it's just sort of there, it doesn't always make sense. And so, and you want it, you know, one of the things too, is we wanted it to flow. We wanted it to really speak to what we were saying in the text. So, the one thing that I will say about the case studies in this version, some of them, because of the pandemic, are really pandemic-specific, but I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing. It just shows adaptability in that situation.

Emily Mathay 20:03
Yeah, I totally agree. And I think you did a really great job with the depth and breadth of the case studies. I found them really fun and interesting to read. It's always interesting to hear about what's going on in other places too. Like, that's- it doesn't happen very often. I mean, not for me anyway.

Christina Zamon 20:17
And it's like wrangling cats sometimes with the case studies, because you have to- like I think there were twenty-some case studies in this one, or something like that. I don't remember. But because they have deadlines too, like, you have to kind of keep things moving and, you know, and there's an editing process for each one of those as well to get them into the larger text. So, it's a process.

Emily Mathay 20:38

You were talking a little bit about how, in writing it, you were kind of struggling with like, well, it's not perfect, and it'll never be perfect. Archivists, I would say, struggle with perfection. And, you know, arguably one of the key philosophies for a successful archivist is "perfect is the opposite of done." And just reading this book, I mean, I've never been a solo archivist before, but it seems like that would be particularly true for solo archivists, just because there's so much that has to happen. Can you talk a little bit about that emotional aspect of the job and maybe give a little bit of advice on how to push through that perfection block?

Christina Zamon 21:15

Yeah, and I mean, that's- that's part of what I kept hearing, you know, before I wrote the first book was people were- they were getting so bogged down in these theoretical processes that were coming out through, you know, official publications, that they were like, how am I supposed to- and then they get stuck in like, one process. But, you know, when you're solo archivist, you have to do all the things. You aren't doing one thing. And so, people were very frustrated because they felt like they were getting bogged down in one process or another, or trying- getting super frustrated because they're trying to apply this across, and there's just no way when you're by yourself. So, one of the aims of the book was to try to help alleviate some of that, because when you are a solo archivist, and I think this is where it's really important to have those networks of, you know, with other colleagues who are in the same boat, so to speak. They're also solo archivists. And I think that's why, you know, typically, one of the most active listservs that SAA has is the solo archivist listserv, because you always come across a situation where you're like, Okay, here's the situation, but how am I supposed to handle this when I'm one person, right? So, there's a lot of stress, there's a lot of anxiety. And one thing I'll say about for myself being a solo archivist; I really enjoyed being a solo archivist because it was just me doing my own thing. I have control over everything, and I'm one of those people, you know, I want to control what the process is, or, you know, how things get done or what gets done, that sort of thing, but at the same time, you get so frustrated, because at some point you go, Man, I wish I had somebody to delegate this, like little, tiny thing. Because, you know, when you're a solo archivist, you're like, Okay, and now I got this new collection, and I need to process it, but I also have to answer these reference questions, and then I also need to have this meeting about who knows what, right, a facilities issue. We all have facilities issues. Doesn't matter. There's no such thing as a perfect archival facility, trust me, you know, because now the air conditioner is broken, or now your humidity is too high or something, right? There's just so many things that are running in the background. You know, like the first chapter is managing yourself. It's talking about how to manage yourself. You have to set your priorities, like, what are your priorities going to be? Every day is going to be different. Every day you're going to get a wrench thrown at you, like, you cannot plan your day. I mean, that is the one thing about solo archivists. I mean, even just as an archivist, generally, you can't plan your day too well, right? But if you're a solo archivist, you never know when, literally, somebody shows up at your door with a box of stuff or needing a reference appointment or a question. You know, your administration needs something. You know, it's just nonstop. So, there are those things where you say, Okay, I have this priority, and I'm going to carve out this amount of time. And it might be something as simple as, if you can do it, and not all solo archivists can, you know, blocking your calendar so nobody can make an appointment, you know, meeting or otherwise, because you're going to focus in on this one thing that needs to get done or figuring out, okay, these are all the things that I need to do, how do I organize it in such a way that I can, you know, kind of tick the boxes and check off that list? I don't think I mentioned this specifically in the book, but I know I've talked with people, is like only checking your email every other hour, or at, you know, like in the morning, at noon, and at the end of the day. Or some, you know, sort of blocking, right, like so you're not constantly checking it. You're turning off your notifications and things so that you can get those things done. So, it's really a matter of trying to organize yourself, but also recognize that because of all the things that are happening around you, you will never get anywhere if you are trying to be perfect about it, or if you're trying to meet some standard that is so high. And I think that's where some solo archivists get stuck, is they think, Oh, well, I have to put everything in a brand new folder and a brand new box.

But how am I going to do this with my budget? You can't do it with your budget. You just don't, right? Maybe you just get some boxes from Staples and some regular office folders. That's as- that's as good as it's going to get for now. Maybe in, you know, by some miracle, somewhere down the line, you have a budget and you can make it all fancy, great, but if it's magic marker on a Staples box, awesome. At least it's organized and somebody can access it, right? And that's the other thing too is when I started out, it was like pull all the staples and refolder everything and put it in these fancy boxes. And it's like, that's not even practical. If it comes in in a decent box that fits on the shelf and is already in folders, just make an inventory of all the folders in there, and you've got some access to it, right? That's what you need. I think too many people, and this goes for just about any archives, but particularly solo archivists, they don't have anything accessible, even to themselves for reference, because they're too busy worrying about getting it in some sort of perfect order, right, or perfect scenario, when really the bottom line is, can you access it, and do you know what's in the box? Even if it's just this is a box of objects. Great. I don't need to even list all the objects, but I know that this is the box that has the objects in it. This is the box that has the office files in it. And here are the names of all the files. May mean something, they may not, but you just, you can't move forward. You just, you'll get yourself stuck in the mud if you're really trying to hit those high standards. And I think it's hard for archivists. I mean, I know it's hard for myself, because I look at things and I'm like, Oh, I really want to put that in like, a different box. Like, can't believe it's in just this plain box. You know, it should be an archival box. But then sometimes I'm like, all right, you know what? Calm down. You know, get over yourself.

Emily Mathay 27:46
Yeah, I kind of like this idea. Are you overwhelmed? Okay, go back to the basics. What is the basic tenet of the job? And it's access, right? So, how can we facilitate that? Yeah. I do love this email idea, checking my email three times a day. I think I'm just going to do that, not even just for work, just personally. This is going to sound silly, but we think a lot in our job, I feel like our jobs are a lot of like, heavy thinking. I find myself spiraling down. And when I'm doing that, like when I'm processing a collection or something like that, I find myself usually talking to my colleagues around me, and solo archivists don't really have that. And you were talking a little bit about the listservs are so important and helpful, but I was wondering if you had any other advice on how solo archivists can go about building those communities, even locally or nationally, whatever, listservs are great, and also how colleagues at larger institutions that perhaps have more support can help solo archivists and be that support for them?

Christina Zamon 28:52
I was just messaging a fellow solo archivist down the road. I'm trying to help her out with some things. So, I've done a couple different things. So, there's certainly those, you know, online forums like listservs. I believe there's still a Facebook page. I think it still says, you know, lone arrangers, because it was set up so long ago. And I know over time, me and some other people, we had tried different platforms that are long since gone to create these sort of online communities and some- and in some places they already exist. In Boston, there had been a group before I had gotten there, and that kind of fell apart. So, I restarted a group, and it was, it wasn't all solo archivists, but there's so many colleges in Boston, right? So, there's so many of us in these small colleges. And the idea was that we had regular meetings, and we had set up a listserv for ourselves. And I think- I think the name changed, but it was Boston Area Archivists and Records Consortium. I think it was Suffolk that had an intranet kind of thing where we could share things like forms and information. And then there was a listserv, I think Brandeis had set up the listserv. We met semiregularly. We would talk about, like, could we do- get together on a grant or something to benefit multiple of us? Or could we work together to come up with, you know, more supplies to kind of be distributed, or just generally, ideas like, how could we help each other? It lasted a little longer after I left. I don't know if it's still around. But then there's also just broader organizations, I know, again, I don't know if it's still around, and I don't remember the name of the organization, but there was an organization, and it was primarily smaller organizations in DC, and we would meet, and it was- it was

something similar, although it was less about kind of helping each other as it was more about like, let's tour this facility and have lunch together and just have, like, a nice conversation and just sort of lean on each other, right, like what you were saying about talking to your colleagues about whatever issue or problem that you're facing. And a lot of times that's all most of us really want to do or need. And the one thing that I, you know, I meant to say in my answer to the last question, one of my mantras for archives is, and it's not always true, but for the most part, it is, and I- I've brought this up in groups before: there are no emergencies in archives because everybody's dead, right? Like, maybe they're not actually dead. You still have living donors and things like that. But the point being that nobody's dying. Nobody's like, there's- there's really not an emergency, right? So, sometimes we feel like there is, like, this emergency, and that's where those conversations, those groups, those listservs can come in handy to, like, talk you off the wall, right? Wait a minute. Hold on. Not an emergency, right? Like not a crisis. Let's, let's calm down. You know, we're doing okay. You know, that's a real benefit of creating those like communities and groups. And I know it's- it's really hard for particularly people in more rural areas where there's not a lot of just, generally, archivists around. So, that's where those online communities come into play.

Emily Mathay 32:25
And I'm thinking, like, post-Covid, I feel like, yeah, the opportunities for connecting online, hopefully are easier, right? Yeah, I love that. No emergencies thing. I have a former boss who used to say for like, unlabeled media, she would be like, if it was a cure for cancer, it would be labeled. That's what that makes me think of.

Christina Zamon 32:47
Right.

Lauren Kata 32:50
Christina and Emily, I mean, we've talked so far a lot about the challenges of solo archivists. I want to- I want to hear a little bit about what some of the fun aspects of the solo archivist life are or could be.

Christina Zamon 33:05
Oh yeah, we definitely have fun, and particularly if we have some colleagues that we can share our fun with. But, you know, because you're a solo archivist, you have your hands on just about everything. And I think if social media had been more prevalent when I was a solo archivist, then I would have been interested in social media. Definitely, there are some hilarious folder titles for things like those are things that I would like, you know, take pictures of or just like, jot it down. Be like, what does this even mean? You know, I feel like archives are just full of great memes or just just ridiculous hilarity, right? So, I always found it fun because I could see all the things like I knew my collections, even if I didn't know every single piece of paper, every single item in the collections. You get to be like really intimate with those collections. You really get to know what you have, why they're important, and why they're special, or maybe why they're not. And I used to, because there's always like, sort of political situations, right, so, I used to make notes in my paper files for future archivists about certain collections to be like, when this person dies, throw this away. I would like leave these breadcrumbs for future archivists, which I always thought was was kind of fun. Now, whether or not any of that ever happened or what happened, you know, after I left, who knows, maybe somebody threw away my notes. But sometimes I would be there and be like, okay, there's nothing I can do about this situation now, however, I can leave this little breadcrumb for the next person and then, like, make it their problem. So, and then there's, for me, I'm a huge collaborator, so I love figuring out ways to collaborate, particularly with non-archivists, to use archival materials or to engage with archival materials. I mean, I still do that. It's just fun, and because you do have that more intimate knowledge of those collections, you know kind of what will appeal to certain people or groups, and you can make that connection. You can bring that engagement. So, and I think, as a solo archivist, the other thing you have to your advantage is you're the only one that really knows what's going on, so nobody can really

dispute what you're telling them. And always have your allies. This is like, really, really important. This is like- and like nonarchivist allies, particularly within your organization. But this is- there's one where I was at odds at the time with the the library director at the Press Club, and I had several members who were allies, and I had been telling the general manager and the the library director, all- you know, of course, all these people are gone now, I'd been telling them that they needed to do certain work around this very large painting in one of the public rooms because it kept getting hit by cameras and chairs and whatever. And they just wanted to put a chair rail up around this painting. And I'm like, but the height of the chair rail- things hit above, hit below. We need to restore this painting, and we need to put plexiglass. Well, I had talked to some of the members who were very engaged and very interested in the archives, because, like I said, I like to collaborate. I like to, like, bring the archives out, and I had made them aware of this situation. I was never, ever allowed at any of the library committee meetings, right? Like that was, that was only for, like, the general manager, the library director, and members of that committee from the club, right? Well, I had a personal invitation from then president of the club to come to this meeting to specifically talk about the issues around this painting. And I showed up, and I took my seat at the table, and the library director just glared me down, like you do not belong. What are you doing here? Why are you here? I could tell he was, like, about ready to just lay it on me. And the president sat down across from me, and he looked at the president and said, "Why is she here?" And he said, "Oh, she's my invited guest. I have her on the agenda. We're going to have this conversation about this painting." And he was so livid, he was shaking like he was just appalled that I had a seat at the table. It was crazy. But yeah, I mean, I think that's the power of archives, and the power of your knowledge and making those connections sometimes is-. As a solo archivist, if you really know what you're talking about, and you can tell that to the powers that be, you can get that seat at the table, whereas sometimes, when you are in a larger organization, or you're part of a group, you're buried in that hierarchy, and you don't- you don't always get that seat at the table. You can keep pushing it up, you know, and there are ways to do that, but it usually gets stuck somewhere along the way, and you don't get the seat at the table when- when there is something that is important or needs to be addressed.

Lauren Kata 38:35
Yeah, that is real drama in the archives.

Christina Zamon 38:39
Oh, there's a lot of drama in archives.

Lauren Kata 38:42
I know, I know. I love it. I loved your- your breadcrumbs story too. It has like, time capsule, geocaching vibe to it.

Christina Zamon 38:51
Yeah, that's great.

Emily Mathay 38:54
I love that idea of coming into an archives job and being like, oh, a dossier. This has been so great, Christina. I wish we had hours and hours. I could just chat with you forever, but thank you so much for being with us today. Again, Christina's book *Alone in the Stacks*. We have a link to that in the show notes. It's geared towards solo archivists, but we found it to be a really practical guide to anyone working in archives, I would say so if you're, even if you're not a solo archivist, I really encourage checking it out. I learned a lot reading it.

Lauren Kata 39:26
Ditto.

Christina Zamon 39:27
I'm so glad. And it's become my baby. Twice over.

Lauren Kata 39:34
Yeah, thank you, Christina, and thanks again to all our listeners. If you have a suggestion for a topic or someone you'd like to hear on the podcast, reach out to us on our contact page, on the *Archives in Context* website, and looking forward to next time.

Emily Mathay 39:51
Goodbye.

Emily Mathay 39:51
You've just listened to an episode of the *Archives in Context* podcast, the official podcast of the Society of American Archivists. Members of the podcast team include Mary Caldera, Adreonna Bennett, Conor Casey, Lauren Kata, Emily Mathay, Camila Zorrilla Tessler, Carmela Furio, Kate Greenberg, and Hannah Stryker. All opinions expressed in this podcast are our own and are not reflective of a particular institution. Be sure to subscribe and listen wherever you get your podcasts, or at archivesincontext.archivists.org, and join us again next time.