

University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives

Interviewee: Gregg Homerding

Interviewer: Delaney Bullinger

Length: 00:12:03

10/27/2017

Gregg Homerding: I'm Gregg Homerding. I graduated in LAS, 1985 and I never left campus. I'm now staff in the university library and I worked in residence halls after graduation and before the library. My affiliation continues. So, I came to the U of I because I couldn't afford to go to the college that was the most expensive. I applied to several schools when I was in high school and the private schools were too expensive even though I won scholarships. I had been encouraged to go into engineering, and Illinois was a great engineering school and so I followed the guidance of my counselors and came here and enrolled in the engineering program. Which turned out not to be a great choice because I'm not born to be an engineer. I survived for several years on partial credit and ended up getting a bachelor's degree in engineering psychology, so my engineering training wasn't a total loss. But I had no particularly insightful memories of my engineering classes or work except that I learned how to think in an analytical way. So maybe that was good.

What I mostly remember about my undergraduate years is that when I first got to campus was 1980 and Illinois was coming off of a decade or more of terrible sports programs. And so the new athletic director was Neil Stoner, and the new football coach was Mike White and Lou Hensen had been the basketball coach for a while. And so there are these signs and posters all over campus when I first arrived on campus. They said, "The eighties belong to the Illini." And that became the catchphrase for the first few years of the 1980s. Some people didn't take it very seriously because we had lost like 50 out of 60 football games in the last ten years and it was kind of like now, except there was no hope or future. Suddenly there was hope, and so the very first weekend I was on campus, a girl from my dorm floor and I came to the first football game. And the first play in the first football game, the quarterback tried a 60-yard pass. It was incomplete, and I don't remember whether Illinois won or lost, but the team got a standing ovation because they tried something new and exciting and people really believed the eighties belonged to the Illini. So in fact, the eighties in many ways did for football and basketball. There was a big upswing. Derek Harper came to school the same year I did. He ended up being an All-Big 10 basketball player and an NBA star and with him and other players the basketball team got better. The football team got better, started going to bowl games. The basketball team went to national tournaments. So amongst students there was a big uptick in fandom for sports which there hadn't been before.

So one of the things I remember was the 1983 football team went to the Rose Bowl for the first time in 25 years and it was the first team that ever went 8-0 against all the other Big 10 teams. I remember the season very well because my roommates and I had seats that were fifth row and that became the time when it was very popular after the game to rush the field and [turned on?] the goalposts. So we did that several times and if there's any old video of that happening somewhere in that crowd, I'm there and all of my roommates are there when we beat Ohio State and Iowa and beat Michigan to lock up the Rose Bowl. That was sort of the high point of the eighties belonging to the Illini for football. By the time I graduated things were moving on a downswing again, so I think I got to experience the peak of fan interest among undergraduate students for Illinois sports. So that was good.

I made a lot of friends those years and a few of them I stayed in touch with. The friends that I made the most lifelong connections with though were when I was in grad school. I went here for graduate school in psychology, and I was also a resident advisor in Hendrick House. And I worked at Hendrick House actually many years. I eventually became the resident director there. But the students who were residents on my floor my freshman year, I mean their freshman year and my first year in grad school, so they came in the fall of 1985, some of them I am still friends with today including my wife Elizabeth who was in that class. We met while I was her resident advisor on the dorm floor. Although to be clear, we did not start dating until many many years later, just in case anybody is checking. So those memories of resident life in Hendrick House and the friendships that I formed there in the dorms and with folks there are probably the most long-lasting effect socially of my career at Illinois.

Academically, I went to graduate school in psychology. I got most of the way to my master's degree and I started working in the library and then I decided I didn't really want to finish that degree. But I still really valued a lot of the relationships and a lot of what I learned in the classes. Psychology program here is excellent just like the library school here is excellent just like the engineering college is excellent, and so I tried to take away what I could from all of the different academic programs that I was in. I think all of those have helped me in my adult life.

So some of my friends from my undergraduate years laugh because they say I never graduated, but it is true that I've never actually left campus once I got here. In the eighties I was a student, in the nineties I worked in the residence halls, and since then I've worked in the university library. And so working in the library and working on campus, I've got to see sort of the flip side of student life on campus. Sometimes it surprises the student assistants here in the undergraduate library that I went to school here and things were different. People didn't walk around with their cellphones and their earbuds all the time. When we wanted to go out, we didn't have plastic as a rule, most students. We went to the Illini Union to the check cashing where you could write a check for up to \$25 to cash and there would be lines there on Friday nights, Saturday nights with students going to cash checks for \$25 so that they had money to go out to the bars or out to the movies. There were a lot more campus movies then because that was a common activity and a fundraiser. [Greg Hall?], Lincoln Hall theater. Groups would get movies to show because you

had to go out to see movies. So the fact that there was not as much personal technology for entertainment I think encouraged people to get out more on campus and probably a lot of the folks that I met on campus was because there wasn't much to do if you stayed home whereas now you have, we all have many more options for how to entertain ourselves. So I think the campus was a more social place then in terms of students meeting each other and interacting with each other.

There were big campus events that students came out for like Hash Wednesday. It's still going on, the third Wednesday in April. Was a day that started as a celebration and protest for people to support changes in marijuana laws. By the time I was an undergrad and, in the eighties, the late eighties, it had mostly turned into a big Quad party and so thousands of people would come out with dogs and frisbees and beer. And there was a year where the campus set the record for the most Little Kings purchased by any campus student body anywhere in one day. Thousands and thousands of bottles of Little Kings were sold out the window of [Cacklins?] Bar on Wright Street because they had a drive-up window. They started selling them by the case at 7:00 am and people would just carry them over to the Quad, and there were pictures in the *Daily Illini* of guys pouring Little Kings on their cornflakes in their bathrobes at the bar. So some of the activities were more sociable. The *Daily Illini* was an actual newspaper that you had to pick up and read everyday, so people looked for ways to get into the *DI*. Campus groups usually, not always, but usually they wanted press coverage because press was fun. So they would try to do things like that.

Halloween was a big deal. For several years there was a big campus Halloween party, and people would come from all over the place. Sort of a precursor to unofficial. Southern Illinois University used to have a big annual Halloween party, then we started having one here. For a few years they closed off Green Street and the side streets and there was just the big [unintelligible] party. There were a few injuries and unsafe practices tied to that, so eventually the campus was able to confine that and reduce it and eventually eliminate it. So I'm glad those things don't exist now because we're more safety conscious now than we were in my undergrad years. Fortunately when I was an undergrad, I didn't have any personal experience with injuries or problems with that so I got to just experience all those things for the fun side.

Delaney Bullinger: You had mentioned earlier that students would try to get into the paper. Were you ever in the paper?

GH: I was in the paper once because I worked at the American National Frank and Deli Store, which was a little restaurant on Green Street. And one summer when I worked there when news was very slow, someone wrote a piece that fictionalized a rivalry between us and a neighboring restaurant. And highly fictionalized some of the quotes from my friend and I about the things we would do and how we would be food fighting in the middle of Green Street and such things like that. There might have been other ones but that was the most entertaining and the one I don't mind if people go back and look up [Delaney laughs].

DB: What was your favorite place on campus?

GH: I think when I started on campus when I was an undergrad, I came from a somewhat sheltered background. But I lived in co-ed dorm, Hendrick House, and we had a very social RA my freshman year who pushed us to have floor parties and activities, and so really my first couple years as an undergrad my dorm was my favorite place because we did things as a group. We developed a very tight bond on campus. Later on, when I turned 21 and it was perfectly legal for me to go out and socialize at other places on campus, there were a few campus bars that I really liked. I regret to say that I never really developed a fondness for the library as an undergrad so that came later in life. It didn't really help me with my academics.

Green Street was a happening place then. The [Co-ed?] Theater was there. They had four movie theaters. A block down the street there was a grocery store. Most students did not have cars during my undergrad years, so campus had to really provide all that stuff. So sometimes you just go walking up and down Green Street, going bar hopping or catching a movie at the Co-ed or going to Tackle Johns, was the big late night food place on Green Street. It was one of the first places that was ever open till 2:00 am. Most places were not, so you could go in and get a Tackle Bravo or get the- it was a family restaurant. It was owned by a husband and wife and their two kids, two young kids. And as far as we could tell, all four of them worked like 90 hours a week, including the kids, because they were always there until one or two in the morning serving food. And so that was a late-night hangout.

DB: Is there anything else you would like to say?

GH: There probably are more memories that I can recall and then when I go home tonight and I start talking to my wife, she started here five years after I did, so we could start bouncing things back and forth. But to go back to the point about my friends saying that I never graduated and I never left, I think it's because every time I got to a stage where I might have left the campus, there was another community that I got involved in. There were my undergrad friends and then there was graduate school in the psychology department and then Hendrick House residence hall staff there and then the library and so I feel like I've experienced the campus from different perspectives at different times. I really have a great appreciation for this university and all it has to offer people, not only as undergrad students but throughout many stages of life. So that's what I've experienced and I'm still here and I don't think I'm leaving anytime soon.

DB: Thank you so much.

GH: Thank you.