

**University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives**

**Voices of Illinois**

**Interviewee: Bob Lumsden**

**Interviewer: Spencer Bailey**

**November 21, 2024**

**Length: 1:30:39**

**Spencer Bailey: Okay, so can you hear me well, sir?**

Bob Lumsden: I can.

**SB: Okay, good. So this is an interview for the University of Illinois Archives, Voices of Illinois Oral History Project. My name is Spencer Bailey. I am an Archives Research Assistant here at the University Archives. The date today is November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024. I am pleased to be speaking today with Mr. Bob Lumsden, who is a university alumnus, a longtime resident of Champaign-Urbana, and a longtime employee of the university and the Alumni Association. And we're going to be talking about some of his time as an Illini, his work with the Student Alumni Ambassadors and the Alumni Association, and just his memories of this place and its history. And so first of all, Mr. Lumsden, thank you very much for speaking with me today. It's great to have you. We are here at the Archives Research Center on the University of Illinois campus. And yes, and we're speaking in person. So first of all, Mr. Lumsden, thank you again for your time. It's great to meet you and have you here. And would you say your full name for starters?**

BL: Bob or Robert Eugene Lumsden.

**SB: Okay. And where were you born, Mr. Lumsden?**

BL: At Burnham Hospital here in Champaign.

**SB: Oh, so you grew up here.**

BL: So I was a native, correct.

**SB: And what was growing up here like and what was your family like?**

BL: Well, gee, I was born in 1931. I don't remember a lot for the first few years, but it was a much smaller town at that time. I believe we had about 20 or so thousand people in population for Champaign and maybe 10,000 or 11,000 for Urbana. I attended Leal School in Urbana

where my parents lived, of course until 1941. And just before World War II started, we actually moved to Champaign. And I remember that Urbana schools were printing at that time. And when I moved to Champaign, they had been doing cursory for three years. So I ended up with sort of a combination writing. I print part of the word of my name and do cursory for other parts.

**SB: So that came from when you were a young man and you had to switch schools. So you had the, so your early years of life, you lived in Urbana and then you moved to Champaign.**

BL: Yes, correct.

**SB: Do you have brothers and sisters?**

BL: No, I just have...I'm just a single child.

**SB: So am I. So, and what do your folks do here in town?**

BL: Well, my dad worked at the mailing center. He was supervisor of the mailing center for later years. And my mom worked for the Department of Mechanical Engineering as their head secretary.

**SB: So they both worked for the university?**

BL: Yes, they did.

**SB: So what would you say your earliest memory of the university is, if you remember?**

BL: Oh, yeah. Well, I remember certainly going over to both of their offices, and I think the mechanical engineering building was brand new about that time, 1941 or so.

**SB: So you were, so I guess, because the university is so big here in town, you kind of grew up with it.**

BL: Yes.

**SB: And if I might ask, just with my historian hat on, do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?**

BL: I sure do. I was in sixth grade at Dr. Howard's school in Champaign. And we were all, all the six classes went downstairs to the basement. They had a coal-fired furnace at that time, but we all sat in chairs around the furnace. And I just remember one thing all these years, something about infamy, and I didn't understand that word until I got older and learned how to use the dictionary and found out what it meant.

**SB: It was Franklin Roosevelt's speech before Congress.**

BL: It was, yes, the Declaration of War.

**SB: And how did, during the war years, how did World War II going on change Champaign-Urbana and the university?**

BL: Well, for me, I had a paper route through the *News-Gazette*. We lived On Russell Street, which was the line between the country and Champaign itself. And it was, my paper route was from Russell all the way to what's now called Mattis. It was Arthur Road at the time.

**SB: Oh, it wasn't called Mattis at that time.**

BL: Right. But it was just an oil road. And most of the people, as I remember, on my paper route, I had around 120 papers, where it was just women and children. Very few men were at that time living in that area.

**SB: Because they were all the way in the service.**

BL: Yes.

**SB: And when you were in school and growing up, did you have a favorite subject or a favorite class?**

BL: Well, I always liked history, U.S. history. Now, it was through high school that I really enjoyed that subject.

**SB: And that must have been very interesting growing up in the time that you did, seeing history play out in your life. And was education important in your family? Had your folks gone to college?**

BL: No, they hadn't. I was the first one in the family to go.

**SB: You were the first to go?**

BL: Uh-huh.

**SB: And when it came time for you to attend college, when did you graduate high school?**

BL: '49.

**SB: '49, uh-huh. And you went to, did you go to Central?**

BL: I went to something called, it was called Champaign High School. It's now on Green Street. It's a junior high school now.

**SB: Oh, okay. Is it the Edison School now?**

BL: Yes, it is.

**SB: I'm sorry. So that was the high school at the time?**

BL: Yes, it was.

**SB: And when it came time, when you were growing up, did your folks, did you know you would go to college or were you thinking that you would?**

BL: You know, it was almost a given.

**SB: It was a given, uh-huh.**

BL: And all I had to do was walk across Wright Street to the administration building. And I don't believe there were any tests involved. It might have been that you had to be in the upper three-quarters of your high school class. But it was so easy, and I don't remember the exact cost, but it was probably something like \$100 for a whole year of tuition and fees together.

**SB: And did you ever consider going anywhere other than U of I?**

BL: No, I never did.

**SB: I figured you wouldn't, having grown up here with your folks working here, but...**

BL: No, I actually lived at home.

**SB: You did?**

BL: For all those four years.

**SB: And so when was your first semester then? Your first semester at U of I as a student?**

BL: Oh, it would have been 1949 and full semester.

**SB: And what was it like becoming a student at the university after having been a young man and a high school student just around it with your folks? What was the change like?**

BL: Well, I took two geology courses that first semester, not first year, I guess, my freshman year, one each semester, four-hour course. And I really loved geology.

**SB: You did? Uh-huh.**

BL: And I took, these were electives, I took geography as well. And then for the geology, the third course required a lot of chemistry, and so I knew right away I probably shouldn't follow that further. But I basically, probably sometime in that area, declared a major, and it was marketing in the College of Commerce at the time.

**SB: And what made you decide marketing as your path?**

BL: You know, I suppose it was professors that I had, especially one who was Frank Beach. He was Ted Beach's father, at the time professor in sales. And I really enjoyed the course and thought that I would like to maybe consider sales for my career.

**SB: What was he like as a professor?**

BL: I couldn't say too much. He was just a good professor and we just connected very well.

**SB: He was a good teacher of his subject and helped you realize that this is something that you enjoyed.**

BL: Right, right.

**SB: And what was it like on campus at that time? So you said you lived at home, so you would just walk or take a—how did you get to campus from your home?**

BL: Well, I walked basically from home to campus most mornings, but I did ride with my folks to work at times with the weather and that type of thing in the winter, especially.

**SB: And what was it like at the time on campus? What were, was it growing or there with the students after World War II still?**

BL: It was three or four years when I was in undergrad. I think the enrollment was around 11,000 and didn't move very much during that period.

**SB: So the big boom of the GIs coming home after World War II had kind of settled out by that point.**

BL: Well, yeah, there were a lot of GI students there and they lived in Prairie Ground units if they were married and so on and so forth. Prairie Ground is where now the six-pack and the residence halls on 4th Street were located.

**SB: So before those halls were built, it was housing for the students who came after the war.**

BL: Right.

**SB: And did you join any clubs or fraternities?**

BL: I joined Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, but only as a... I just had lunch there. I did, I wasn't, I was a full member, but I didn't really... have these periods of following them on weekends and things like that, or evenings. I was just there for lunch.

**SB: But you, so you were a member, but you weren't, you didn't live in the house?**

BL: Right, right.

**SB: You lived at home.**

BL: I was just called a townie.

**SB: A townie, of course. And did you ever attend any sporting events or anything like that?**

BL: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. We did.

**SB: What was it like to go to, I'm assuming, football games. What was it like to go to a football game at that time?**

BL: Well, I, you know, I don't remember too much. The configuration of the stadium was a little different of course at that time. They had a, for homecoming, I remember they had a king, or excuse me, they had a queen contest and they had steps on the north side of the stadium, concrete steps, and they all, they were kind of tiered during that area.

**SB: What other things did you do on campus? Were there performing? I know Krannert wasn't built yet, of course, but were there performing arts events or other shows or anything that you went to?**

BL: Well, I don't remember being too active in activities. I basically just was there during the daytime and came home at night.

**SB: And you were concentrating on your studies, of course, too. And when did you graduate?**

BL: 1953.

**SB: 1953.**

BL: And from there, I took an advanced ROTC and had a deferment and served in the Army. Went in November of '53 to November of '55, and I remember the Korean, excuse me, the Korean War was on and off during those mainly five months or so that I was at Fort Sill in the artillery, and we thought we were going to Korea. It was almost a certain day that classes had all gone in that direction.

**SB: The previous groups of men that had been there were all on their way over.**

BL: Right, in that officer's basic course. And two weeks before we graduated, everything changed and we went to Germany.

**SB: They signed the peace treaty in Korea.**

BL: Well, it was still kind of iffy all and off. And Germany was, I was stationed in Wackernheim, a very small town, with the second armored division in their armored artillery part of their division. General Patton had been a second. He was the commander of the division, very well decorated and so forth.

**SB: It was a good unit to be in.**

BL: It was an interesting unit to be in. And I lived in my, it was a BOQ, big BOQ area that surrounding bases offered living accommodations and had a car over there. We had to take some vacations in Germany and Europe, basically.

**SB: What an experience for a young man just out of college.**

BL: It was, it was, it was a great experience.

**SB: And you said that you were in a deferred, had you been in ROTC when you were a student?**

BL: Basic ROTC was required.

**SB: It was required at that time.**

BL: It was required. And you could, as an option, go to senior ROTC and get to deferment until you graduate.

**SB: And that's what you did? Why did you decide to do that?**

BL: Well, I just thought I would like to complete my undergraduate years and then going through the service.

**SB: So you didn't do ROTC activities while you were a student?**

BL: No. Basic ROTC was two years for everybody.

**SB: Oh, for everyone. For men, of course.**

BL: And then I signed up for senior ROTC an additional two years before I was, I went on active duty.

**SB: I see. Okay. So you were, you did the basic ROTC here as a student, which all men would have done. What was that like on campus?**

BL: It was something everybody expected. It was just part of our life.

**SB: And so the idea would be that every male student would do that, but that not everybody, but you decided to do the senior ROTC after you graduated.**

BL: And a pretty good sized number did the same thing.

**SB: And the senior training you said was at Fort Sill?**

BL: Yes. Because that's the artillery base.

**SB: It is. Schools. So you were, so you graduated from here in '53 and then you went, did you go right away to the senior training in Oklahoma?**

BL: In November.

**SB: In November.**

BL: About four months after. I graduated actually in July.

**SB: You did, uh-huh.**

BL: And then started my service in November.

**SB: So you had a couple months off in between.**

BL: Oh yeah

**SB: And then you said you were in, were you in Germany for the whole two years of your time in the service?**

BL: 19 months, actually.

**SB: 19 months. And I'm guessing that the Second Armored was part of the American units that were there in case the Soviets decided to come last.**

BL: Yeah, it was called the Cold War. And Western Germany was, the U.S. had that as their part of the location. France had, they were on the other side of the Rhine and so on for other countries.

**SB: And the Soviets were sitting in the east probably doing the exact same thing you guys were.**

BL: Right.

**SB: But of course you never had to fight because it never went hot at the time.**

BL: Right, right. We did have, we went out of [unintelligible] once a month and we did have several NATO, what would you call them?

**SB: Exercises?**

BL: Exercises, yeah. It wasn't, it was peacetime, no, but they called it the Cold War.

**SB: So you were, you guys were all there ready for the call that never ended up coming?**

BL: Supposedly.

**SB: Supposedly. And so when you got back from the service, what did you do then?**

BL: It was a surprise to me. I wrote several letters for job openings. And it was only a matter of two or three months. And I had written one using [unintelligible] Beach as a...

**SB: Reference?**

BL: Reference. And I got a job with Armstrong Cork Company. Armstrong Flooring was one of their divisions, their main division, but they had five other divisions. One was for building products. And we had a school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in a farmhouse just outside town. And I was assigned to Kansas City and then to Nebraska. And I had at that age, the whole state of Nebraska—we'd only been west of the Mississippi since World War II. So they were kind of the new guys.

**SB: They were expanding to the west.**

BL: Expanding to the west. And I was with them for four years, loved the job. They were very ethical, very honest. And I remember in school learning about Armstrong and Procter & Gamble and probably several others that were featured in school.

**SB: So you were able to go work for somewhere that you'd heard about as an example?**

BL: Right. But it turned out that I was let go. I think the better word is fire. I just didn't get enough new accounts, and it was a sad day when I heard that, and they let me keep my

company car for a while until I got relocated. We moved to—I was married at the time, and we moved to Chicago, and I had another, would you believe, sales job. I was a slow learner, and that was with Procter & Gamble. Excuse me, no, it was with Colgate Palmolive and getting orders from grocery stores and that type of thing for their product line. And we used to come home fairly often and I, after it was probably two years with Colgate Palmolive that I came home one weekend and I always looked at job opportunities at the university and they indicated or I was I saw the opening which sounded very interesting it was being of the uh, gee, I'm having trouble remembering.

**SB: Working with Campus Tours, right?**

BL: Right. It was the coordinator of Campus Tours for the university. It sounds like an interesting job. And I interviewed for it and got the job and we moved back to Champaign and I was up on the fourth floor of the Illini Union. I had actually, that was the start of 30 years of my career in the Illini Union, just that one building.

**SB: Just the one building. If I might ask, had you, was your wife from here as well?**

BL: Yeah, she was from Champaign. She was four years younger than I was, so I knew her, but I wasn't. We weren't in the same school at the same time. And before I came home from the service, I actually wrote to a friend who had a sister that knew Sharon and asked her if she was going steady and that type of thing. And it all worked out that when I got home, that was... when I started getting what became my wife.

**SB: And so, and she was from, so coming back to Champaign was kind of coming home for both of you?**

BL: Yes, it was, right.

**SB: And had you, you know, when you guys were living in Chicago and in Nebraska, had you thought that you might like to go back to Champaign?**

BL: Well, you know, it came down to probably, it just didn't look like I was going to be able to own property in Chicago and, I suppose it was, you know, in my mind that coming back to Champaign was probably what I really would like to do, or both of us would like to do.

**SB: 'Cause your folks and her folks were both down here as well.**

BL: Yeah, right, right.

**SB: So you'd be coming home and somewhere that's familiar. And so you said that when you come down and visit, you kept an eye out on job openings.**

BL: Right.

**SB: So when you were, when you started as the Campus Tourist Coordinator, what did you do in that position?**

BL: Well, it was kind of wide open. That year, there was a creation by the state of a division or department of tourism. And as a result of that, they divided the state into, I think it was 12 or so districts, one of which was Champaign or Champaign County and seven surrounding counties. And two people from that committee in district number five, I think it was, went to the university and said, "We think you have a tourist attraction." I remember it was Lewis Tanner, who was an attorney in the Lincoln Building, and also an editor of the *News-Gazette* named Ed Borman. And the university...the person they talked to at the university was Vern Kretchmer, who at the time was in charge of student fee buildings. And yeah, I was able to get the job and started out in room 420, the Illini Union, where there were only about six people, including Mr. Kretchmer. And I was up there for two years. It involved any kind of tour and arrangements for tours. It could have been a first grade that maybe it was some Champaign school that wanted to see the assembly hall and as a stop. And I would take them on the bus on a general tour with including that stop. So there were arrangements to be made and so forth. And two years, but it was all kinds of tours. Chanute Air Force Base had foreign students, a class that started every other week. And they always brought that class to campus and a tour.

And two years later, I was moved from Room 420 down to the north entrance lobby of the Illini Union and combined with what they call campus information. Now this is separate from public information and basically it was answering telephone calls for information and students picked up pamphlets and answered questions for them. And we ended up relatively shortly after that having, it was open, the office was actually open seven days a week, 8 to 10 p.m. So we had a crew of part-time students, 28, I think is the number, filled that area and three staff members, including myself. And I was, it actually involved or evolved to having, offering tours for prospective students and their parents. And that became the major tour we were taking. Plus others, we still had school groups and so on. But we would make arrangements for, I guess, you know, for them to come to North Central Drive of the Illini Union and we would go out to their car or one person would go out to their car and usually a student would take them on a tour and try to hit what they wanted to see.

**SB: What they were hoping to, building they were hoping to study in or play or something like that. So when you started out in the role, you were coordinating tours. If anyone wanted to see anything on campus, they were going to go for you.**

BL: Right. So it was very open, right.

**SB: So it could be a kindergarten class from Champaign or the governor or military officers from Chanute or anything like that.**

BL: So I really enjoyed working with those students. It was a good group, and we had a lot of fun together and so on.

**SB: So it was, and do you remember any students in particular that you really enjoyed working with from that time?**

BL: Oh, sure. In fact, I'm still in touch all these years later with several of them.

**SB: You are? Who were students back in the '60s and '70s.**

BL: Right, right.

**SB: What sticks, were there any notable tours you gave or anyone that you met as part of that that really sticks out in your mind?**

BL: It was, and I don't want to make this too long. At that time, I guess I'm talking further back or further ahead.

**SB: That's all right.**

BL: No, I... I'd have to think about that. I think we can leave it there soon. There were a lot of interesting... People I met, we received thank you letters and that type of thing through them.

**SB: Would you ever have students who you'd given tours to or who'd seen the campus as prospective students come to say thank you or even to work for you after they arrived?**

BL: I had several interesting things that didn't result. I was invited to several fraternities and sororities at different times to have supper with a person who had been on a tour and enjoyed it and so forth and remembered who was taking the tour. In that case it was myself.

**SB: And so they'd say, "I'm here, you know, come say hello or come have dinner." That must have been really great for you.**

BL: It was. I really appreciated that.

**SB: And at that time, you said you were in the north end of the Union. Was that kind of the front door of the university?**

BL: It was, it was.

**SB: And the alma mater statue was not yet where it is now. Was it still behind Foellinger?**

BL: It was behind the auditorium.

**SB: Do you remember when they moved it?**

BL: I don't remember the year, but it was probably in the '60s or early '70s.

**SB: 'Cause I remember reading that some people were, that was controversial at the time. But they decided, was it just a more public place for the statute to be? So that was why...So that really became the front end of the university at that time. And were you working there when they built the addition onto the second-half of the union?**

BL: Yes.

**SB: What was it like-- what was it like to say that? When I started, you know, you know, and was it all--**

BL: The question again, please.

**SB: The addition on to the Illini Union, the second-half.**

BL: Yeah, the second Union and in between was just level ground, initially. It wasn't built out like it is now. It wasn't, there wasn't anything between the North and South.

**SB: So they did it in stages as it was said.**

BL: They did.

**SB: That must have been something to see campus grow at that time. Was it, and if I may ask, you know, you were working there in the 1960s, you know, do you remember the Vietnam protests and the unrest there at the time?**

BL: I do. I wasn't, I remember my office window looked out to the drive.

**SB: It did, right out on the front.**

BL: And I remember Army vehicles with barbed wire on their bumpers and so forth, come down Green Street and so forth. It's a pretty serious situation.

**SB: It's certainly, everything I've read about it certainly says it was. You know, and how long were you in the role working with the tours before you moved over to the Alumni Association?**

BL: It was from probably '64 to '75.

**SB: And what, up until '75, were you still working with campus information and tours up until that point?**

BL: Yeah, and we had two kind of, what would you call them, satellite offices. One in the undergraduate library on the first floor for information and one in the student services building on the first floor.

**SB: So you expanded from just the space in the Union to... Because there were more students coming in at that time.**

BL: You know, I don't know how much the enrollment changed, but I believe maybe we had expanded to around 30,000 by 1975 or so.

**SB: So it was bigger than it was when you were [unintelligible]. And so why did you decide to join, to start working for the Alumni Association in '75? What inspired that change?**

BL: There was an opening announced for the Alumni Association. It was business managers. And I had had coffee with a lot of different people downstairs in the morning, including the Alumni Association. Wasn't there? They only had four or five staff members in the police department, the [unintelligible] department, just a lot of different people at the table down the stairs that we used in the cafeteria.

**SB: That was in the Union?**

BL: That was in the Union. So anyway, I felt very comfortable applying for that job. And I was hired as business manager. It didn't last very long in a sense that within the first two years I was working in the Alumni Association, there were basically three parts to my job. One was family camp, which was in the summer for two weeks at the 4-H camp. Primitive cabins, but we filled

it every summer with the 29 families that used it with us. And then I was asked, let's see, the second thing that happened, I was asked to be the assistant to the campus director of the Alumni Association, Don Dodds, to assist him with alumni clubs. And I didn't travel, but I basically was assisting and making the arrangements and so forth for Don, who traveled with the clubs.

**SB: And these would be the alumni clubs around places in the country?**

BL: Yeah, we even had some international clubs. I didn't travel internationally, but I did travel mostly in-state, but that's... getting a little ahead of myself. A couple, several years after I started working with Don, I became the coordinator for alumni clubs. And that's when I started traveling in-state and two other tours to other states.

**SB: But you still stayed mostly in the U.S.**

BL: Yes, I did.

**SB: And, you know, and how did you, how did the Student Alumni Association come about? When did, uh, when did that, when did that start?**

BL: That was the, that was the third part.

**SB: Oh, yeah, okay.**

BL: That's all right. That was the third part. And Lillier was our associate director at the time, and they had been to a meeting, a national meeting, I believe it was, for Case, C-A-S-E. And that organization most universities belong to, not all, I imagine, but a greater number of universities are associated with it. And they had mentioned, I guess, at one of the meetings that they should under schools in that organization should consider having a student alumni group since students really didn't know much about the alumni association until they graduated and then they were asked to join the association. It made a lot of sense, but every university had to kind of consider how they could start one that would do that, be effective in doing that.

**SB: To kind of bridge the gap between the students and the program association.**

BL: Correct. And it took us two years after being asked to start the organization before it actually, we actually found, what we more than actually found something that we were very pleased to have happen. A young man by the name of Josh Grafton came into the room, into our office in the spring afternoon. And Sidney had an idea and he had people named to fill positions. And that idea was a student homecoming, reviving homecoming as a tradition. And it

took us a year and a half to get it organized. Josh was such an interesting person. He was the president of Young Republicans. He was a sophomore at the time.

**SB: So he was an underclassman at the time.**

BL: He was an underclassman at the time.

**SB: Oh, wow.**

BL: He was a sophomore. And it was a great experience that he offered me. And we became good friends, of course, in a year and a half. But we had a lot of obstacles, including the Alumni Association. They were a little concerned about taking on such a big program without any experience. And we didn't have any money. And they loaned us, finally, Jim from that, the director at that time, let us have some money to I think cost \$10,000 that first program here we offered it in the fall homecoming week of 1979.

**SB: 1979.**

BL: And right away we knew we had something big. Josh covered all the bases. And we had a parade. The Chief and I went on a Palomino horse leading the bands and then the parade behind that. It was wonderful. And then at the end of the parade was on Matthews Street and the band led the floats which were behind the band onto the quad, both broadwalks. I think there were seven floats from either side. The band was seated on the steps of the auditorium. There was a platform constructed for the guests to sit as well as the football team members and the audience stood on the quad. It was estimated that we had 9,000 people attend that first homecoming in '79. And there were a lot of things that had to happen. The police didn't have any money. How were they going to fund it?

**SB: Oh, because they had to, like, do the road control and things.**

BL: They asked a lot of questions like that. Oh, we'll break up the squad on the quad. And we don't have any money. This is a physical plant talking. And just one and on things of that nature. And somehow we overcame them. And that was the start of the Student Alumni Association, actually.

**SB: So it started up in conjunction with the Homecoming revival.**

BL: Right. And that was... I guess a couple months later we had our first member selection and then we just knew that we had something solid at that time and really never had to look back.

**SB: It was a big success from the start.**

BL: It was. A big jump start, it really was.

**SB: And if I might ask with kind of a revival of Homecoming, what was the, how did homecoming decline from when it was when you were a student or when you were a young man?**

BL: Well, I think there were two big reasons. One was the Vietnam War, unrest, basically low morale. The second reason started back in 1965 with the flush run, our athletic coaches in basketball and football. were hired, fired, I'm sorry, because they were giving something like \$20 a month to players on both of those teams to guard the stadium. And of course they were. There wasn't anything to guard really at that time. Yeah, that really upset the athletic program. And it really didn't improve until 1979, which was that first year of homecoming. Two things happened. One was that Mike White was hired and had great success for several years. And also Ikenberry and his wife, Stan Ikenberry and Judy Ikenberry, were hired and in that turn you have to be something Josh also worked for Governor Thompson as a student...

**SB: Intern?**

BL: Student assistant, I guess we call it.

**SB: To the governor.**

BL: And he's the one also that set up the coming president who became the president, Ikenberry, to meet Governor Johnson. It was a race that they would be on an elevator that would come to the floor in which the governor met the Ikenberry's for the first time. And that became an interesting arrangement because when we had that first homecoming, the Ikenberry's invited the committee for homecoming to their home. And that was kind of a landmark event because students didn't go to the president's home or weren't invited to the president's home. Maybe there had been some contact, but not very much.

**SB: It was not common.**

BL: And that became something. Other groups were invited later and so forth. It was just a big change in how the president reacted to students.

**SB: And this is the president's home that's just over that way out in Florida.**

BL: Right. And when our first program basically after homecoming was the following spring and it was called Illini Comeback. And the purpose of Illini Comeback was to invite three adults that students would know the names of probably. And they were asked, it was, you know, they were asked to come back and be a part of homecoming pep rally. In addition, it was sort of a whole weekend, and they were, would make, arrange for them to go to other departments and colleges on campus for, what would we call them, having trouble again.

**SB: Visits?**

BL: You know, I'm looking at missing the word.

**SB: We can come back to...**

BL: Well, okay. What would we call them? They were about... Oh, shoot.

**SB: Uh, visits of some kind? Tours?**

BL: Not tours, but... We can cut all that out. But, uh... Yeah, to visit departments and colleges. I just can't think of the name of what I don't want to say. And that worked very well.

**SB: These were alumni that were coming to visit?**

BL: These were three alumni each year were selected because we thought they would identify with students or students who would like to meet them. And so we arranged to have them also who we can visit these different colleges on campus and even some departments. And the thing that was unexpected at that time was we arranged for each guest to have a female and male accompany them, drive the car, and take them to all these locations. And unexpectedly, that was the start of student ambassadors. We got letters from, not we necessarily, but letters were written by those guests saying they really had a great time and learn more about the campus than they ever expected to and so forth. And we... Yeah, we didn't expect that to happen. But it was those letters that triggered... Like the foundation decided to have 10 cars come to their foundation weekend for students to take their guests, 10 guests to... different parts of their itinerary. And in doing so, they also received letters back from other parts of campus and so forth. So that grew fast, quickly. I think it was three years later. We were asked to, by the dean, Vice Master of Student Affairs to make them a separate organization and they had their own selection and so forth and the reason for that happening was diversity you know, and we did that in 1984, I believe it was. And they called themselves Student Ambassadors after that.

**SB: So they had, originally they'd been part of the Student Alumni Association.**

BL: Right, and they still were, actually. But they were separate in the sense that they did their own selection of numbers, right? Although they still were a part of the field on that association.

**SB: So it had started out with, okay, let's have some students escort these folks and show them around, and it turned out to be a... Big success, much more than you had thought.**

BL: Oh, yes. It was a big surprise.

**SB: And if I might ask, you know, who were some of the alumni who came back for Illini Comeback? Do you remember any of that, who they were?**

BL: I remember the first year, it was John Coleman, maybe, was one of them. He was a Chicago weatherman, I think, for WGN, maybe. Doesn't really, I don't, I can't say that for sure. But any rate, later he started the Weather Channel.

**SB: Oh, wow. So they would come back and speak to students and things like that. Right, right. And, you know, when you, you also mentioned, I'm just saying, I'm reading off of some notes that Mr. Lumsden has passed along for me. You mentioned the Senior 100 honorary program. How did that start?**

BL: The alumni actually started that program. And it had been given to the Illini Union Board several years before the Student Alumni Association, it was started and given back to the Alumni Association to give to the Student Alumni Association. Basically, these were students that went through interviews, nominations, and were honored close to commencement this year. It was a dinner room.

**SB: And so that started out under the auspices of the Illini Union Board, and then when the Student Alumni Association was created, they took it over.**

BL: It was started, actually, the Alumni Association.

**SB: Oh, it was started by the Alumni.**

BL: It was then given to the Illini Union Board, and then given back after we got to be an organization.

**SB: I see. And so the Student Alumni Association, that was that you had had an idea for it before that 1979 homecoming, but that was, the homecoming was really the catalyst for getting it established.**

BL: Right. Over the years, there's probably a couple hundred or more student alumni associations now in the country. I understand the biggest one is in UCLA, they have four times, fourth, four full-time advisors for that for their programs. Must be very expensive.

**SB: Certainly, yeah. And when that was established, when it was established here you know after '79, were you the staff advisor and administrator that would work the most closely with them?**

BL: Right. Actually, we took a trip one night, one evening to Purdue. And when we were starting Illini Comback, and it was a program at Purdue called Old Masters. And we came home that night. They had 12 non-alumni, well-known people. And it was a whole week program. And in the car coming back, there were three of us, three other students, and we modified everything, so we used that trip, though, to start the Illini Comeback. We had alumni instead of non-alumni, and we had only a weekend instead of a full week, and so forth.

**SB: So you kind of got the idea from something that Purdue had done and thought, well, how can we make this work for us?**

BL: Right, right.

**SB: And so it really seems like that 1979 homecoming was just such a huge event, not only for the campus, but also for getting these programs established. What do you remember about the homecoming specifically, you know, when the event was actually happening, you know, what sort of things were you involved in as part of that?**

BL: Well, you know, I guess it started with Josh, but I started to realize that those students were so capable, they came through that first member's selection, that they could get things done that, as an advisor, I wouldn't be able to do. And so that was kind of the start of the programs that came after this. That's how I handled them. And I think the students enjoyed having ownership as far as we could, I could give it to them. There were limits, but yeah, that's kind of [unintelligible]. It's just started to grow.

**SB: Well, I'm sure they were glad for the experience too, right?**

BL: Oh yeah, but they were capable.

**SB: Of course.**

BL: Some went on to be leaders and others were already leaders in other organizations.

**SB: So you really had some involved students, you know, people who were active on campus and knew how to tap into networks and grow things.**

BL: Right. I remember, it was a couple years later, we had a start of a program called "Be Apart from Your Start." The president that year, student president, and it was my first conference to a CASE conference. And her name was Terry Ludley. And coming home, we had heard a program presented by Penn State by that same name, "Be Apart from Your Start," and talked about it and she wrote for a copy of their video and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs six months later, she had had several meetings with him of course, but we had had a convocation on the first night of student week, and she was, or Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Stan Levy at that time, indicated that he was going to drop the convocation because it just wasn't, it was voluntary to come and they just weren't getting much in the way of a turnout, which was, a big move in his part and we had our first one at the auditorium and the next year it grew quickly that we moved to the Assembly Hall and curtained off something like a third of the Assembly Hall in the middle of the floor. And a couple years later there was a, we...I guess I'm not sure. The first year maybe it was we had a small band over in the back not yard but beyond the backyard of the president's home, there was a field. And we had a flat wood, flatbed truck, trailer and a small band perform. And it was for seniors about to graduate.

**SB: Oh, towards the end of the year.**

BL: Right. And the president and his wife came over to see what was going on. And they...well, maybe six months later, Mrs. Ikenberry called and said that "We want to have a breakfast at the President's home on commencement morning." And chose them to use Student Alumni Association members to serve all the food in the backyard near the big tent. And I remember the President and the Student Alumni Association, and I'm not sure how the other person was a male anyway or vice versa, got to be at the front door of the President's home and shake hands with all the students. About 5,000 parents and students came through the house, through the backyard every year.

**SB: So that was Mr. and Mrs. Ikenberry were hosting the students.**

BL: Right.

**SB: And you had said previously that students would never come to the president's house, so what a change this must have been.**

BL: Right, yeah. That idea was fresh and I think still is going on. I don't think Student Alumni Association's involved in it anymore, but it's still something the president's doing.

**SB: So that's really, and how many presidents have we had since the Ikenberry's? So it's continued on.**

BL: It's certainly a string.

**SB: In that same tradition stuck around. And you mentioned here uh Lunch on the Quad, talk about what that was?**

BL: Yeah, that was kind of a fundraiser plus. And again, we were able to get the housing division to give us the money lunch in the residence halls would have cost and give that to the Student Alumni Association. And we prepared...oh, I don't know. We had hot dogs and hamburgers prepared, not by the students, actually, using the Illini Union food, basically. I think we were making like \$6,000 just in that one event. But that we had the marching band and cheerleaders and other things going on while they were eating lunch, it was a sack lunch that they were given.

**SB: What time of year was that held at?**

BL: That was held in the spring.

**SB: In the spring.**

BL: Might have been in April.

**SB: Once it warmed back up. Once it warmed back up.**

BL: Yeah, it was warm enough to be outside again.

**SB: 'Cause there are definitely some months when you don't want to be out on the Quad for too long.**

BL: Right, right.

**SB: Today might be one of those days. For the record, Mr. Lumsden and I are speaking on one of the colder days of 2024 so far.**

BL: I should also mention maybe fundraisers.

**SB: Yeah.**

BL: The big one that we had almost from the start; it was a student's idea, again, I remember, to have survival kits. And that was a sack of food. Actually, the idea came from a high school. This was a student attended. And yeah, we would write...How should I say it? The *Alumni News* was a newspaper that we would advertise in that, and they would send in their \$7 or whatever it was at that time for the survival kits at the end of the semester.

**SB: Oh, it would be for around finals.**

BL: Right. And we did it twice a year. I guess it was each semester we would do that. And they would come to the Alumni Association office to pick up their food. We would store it a couple of days in advance and have a room on the second floor of the Illini Union to store it in. But that earned a lot of money over all those years. These events, in part, were pretty expensive to use, or we needed additional money to our, but some are in addition to our budget to afford to do those events. Old cowboy hats I mentioned.

**SB: You did, yeah.**

BL: Three years. 25,000 hats.

**SB: Who came up with the idea for those?**

BL: Again, it was a member, I think it was Josh Greff.

**SB: It was, uh huh.**

BL: He was still in school at the time.

**SB: He must have been very involved with the whole thing.**

BL: He was. It was, yeah, we were... Just very, very fortunate.

**SB: And I think you said that he was only a sophomore when the homecoming first happened, so he had a couple more years to be part of it.**

BL: You know, he was a six-year student.

**SB: He was, ah.**

BL: And the sad part of it was he, after he graduated, he went to Springfield working for Governor Thompson still as a traveling secretary at that point. And four years, six years, at the

age of 28, what that would have been, he had changed quite a bit. He had a health problem. He never did disclose it to me, but I know he went to University of Iowa Hospital

**SB: He was ill.**

BL: A couple times a year for a day or two. And he started to gain weight and got on a plane to go to Florida to see his dad. And this was in May. As I said, 28 years old, went into a coma and never came out.

**SB: Oh, he passed away pretty young.**

BL: Very young. He actually lived with Craig Burkhart, who was also a young Republican officer. And when he came back, both of them, Craig had graduated in law from St. Louis. And he had the advantage of being a Boy Scout leader at their national convention in New Mexico every year and had done three screen slideshows the final night of their convention, I guess we call it, and put it together and that's how he was able to do that for the homecoming pep rally.

**SB: That was the video that you showed me before?**

BL: Right, it was, right.

**SB: To speak for the recording, Mr. Lumsden showed me a video recording of that slideshow that was put together a few years ago, and we're going to work on trying to get a copy of that for the archive, so hopefully, when you're looking at if someone is reading this interview or watching it, there'll be a related link on the screen so you could view that as well. So we're going to work on that and hopefully that'll come to fruition. But it was a very, very cool slideshow. And who did you say the narrator was?**

BL: Gene Honda.

**SB: Gene Honda.**

BL: At the time that SAA started, Gene was a radio announcer for K104 with Mike Hale. And the show was called "Mike in the Morning" or something like that with Gene. And he's had quite a bit of success himself as an announcer.

**SB: Oh, yeah. Did he announce for some of the sports teams in Chicago, right?**

BL: Well, he's the voice of United Center. Plus, I think he does the Maui basketball tournament they have in Hawaii and he's done national commercials for PBS and so on.

**SB: So it must have been really great to get, is he an alumnus?**

BL: He is.

**SB: He is?**

BL: He was working full time as a student doing that and then started working for Blake or something like that. It was a radio station in Chicago and just gradually has put together quite of career.

**SB: Most certainly. When Mr. Lumsden turned on the recording, I think, well, goodness, that voice certainly sounds familiar to me as a Chicago sports fan and a long time Illini. You know, and all of these events that are happening, so this was around during the 1980s that these different things were coming along.**

BL: I retired in '93.

**SB: In '93.**

BL: And really retired. I didn't really look back at the time. And it was in 2015 that I... met Kip Custer. He was the student president at that time and uh asked me to, we had had a dinner after before he became president... heard that there was some problems with the...I'm getting ahead of myself, but Student Ambassadors became the name of Student Alumni Association in 2004, and I didn't have any background on why that happened and so forth. But in 2015, when Kip was President, when we went to the supper because we heard that Student Ambassadors at that time was being separated from the Alumni Association. The director, after Lou Liay had been in office for, I don't know, 10 years or so, decided to terminate the membership. We weren't a membership organization anymore. And of course, that was the income stream. And interestingly enough, after this new director had been there 10 years, he decided to separate Student Alumni or Student Ambassadors was the name of the organization at that time. And they were without a budget. They were without an advisor. They were without, well, basically they were separated. And the interesting thing about it was they didn't seem to be too worried. Student Ambassadors really didn't need much money. They basically were asked to do events for the university rather than doing them on their own. Okay, so that makes a little more sense.

**SB: It does, yeah.**

BL: And they were able to get money from the foundation separately from the Alumni Association. There was an associate director at that time, the associate president at that time.

who became a little later the president at Iowa, University of Iowa. But she was able to get just bones only budget for SAA and they still basically, I think they're, they do have a part-time advisor now, but for a while, it was really kind of touch and go like they would last.

**SB: They're doing all right now.**

BL: Right. But as I maybe mentioned, they had a 40th anniversary. And we had about 150 people there, I think. And that was in 2018 or something of that nature. And so that and also after I retired in 1921, I received an award at the Alumni Homecoming Awards, I think it's called. It's a dinner they have during the homecoming week. And I received the Lou Liay Spirit Award that year, that was in '21, a year that we didn't have homecoming because of COVID. And so I actually... It was awarded the next year and so forth, which was...

**SB: Oh, they did the award the next year. That must have been really great, because you had worked with Lou as well.**

BL: Right, yeah. He was my boss.

**SB: So you said after you retired, you said in 1993, you kind of really retired and weren't very involved.**

BL: Right.

**SB: But you've been more involved recently.**

BL: Right. I'm still in touch with, I'm outside looking in. I have kept in touch with their current officers, the incoming president, and outgoing president. I'm working on trying to get to Josh Grafton. He was given a scholarship when he died by the Helene family that he was intermarried. His sister was married to Helene's son. They, the Helenes on Montgomery Elevator, now in Rock Island, Moline area. And it's being arranged that we will probably have the first one this year, but the scholarship office I called one day last year. And they said they would be willing to have the nominee honored by the Student Alumni Association, and that's a special meeting in the fall or spring. And that way, hopefully for years to come, Josh's name will be...

**SB: There'll be a scholarship name for him. That seems like it'll be very fitting, because a lot of this seems to trace back to that time when you walked into your office.**

BL: And the scholarship has enough money in it that it perpetuates itself. So hopefully on that, you know.

**SB: That will persist. And so you're not, you're on the outside looking in, you've said, but you're kind of you're there to provide advice and show up to the archives and talk to me and various things. So and you've lived in town all this time. So you've been involved with the students and the community ever since you first came back in 1964. If I might ask more generally, you grew up here in town. You were a young man during the Depression and the war years, and you came to campus with your folks to see places, and then you were a student, and then away for a while, and then you came back. What are the biggest differences? How has campus changed in your mind? You mean physically, of course, there's new buildings and new technologies, but what is...what sticks in your mind as differences or similarities as someone who's been around here for all this time?**

BL: Well, you know, in the last few years, a huge difference in enrollment. We're at, what, almost 60,000 now, and especially Chinese students. I'm not sure of the total number, but it's very numerous.

**SB: It's got a big international population.**

BL: Especially in the GIES College of Commerce and Engineering. I know they have an insurance policy that will protect them in case we lose a lot of those students for some international reason, and I think that's kind of interesting. I'm sure that happens all over the country, but especially here, we have probably the largest number of foreign students from China.

**SB: Were there many foreign students when you were a student?**

BL: I don't remember that being a big thing. It was basically just people coming back, men coming back, some women too, I'm sure, from World War II. That was the big thing on campus.

**SB: So having a lot of students from other countries is a more recent phenomenon.**

BL: I think it is. It's grown substantially anyway. Especially recently, I think the last 10 years or so.

**SB: It's been very interesting because I think I've said I was an undergraduate here from '16 to 2020 and a graduate student. So it's been really cool to have friends from different countries and friends from the suburbs of Chicago right next to where I grew up. And that seems to be a great thing about U of I, is you can come here and make such a path for yourself you know Or wander into Bob's office and start and start a tradition and the like. You know, if I might ask also, we're getting up on almost an hour and a half, which is just**

**wonderful, which is just wonderful timing. This is such a great, you know, great conversation and I'm looking forward to getting a transcription and thinking, you know, what follow up questions can we ask and various things on that. You know, is there anything that we haven't talked about today about your time here or just in general that you'd like to mention that we've skipped?**

BL: Well, I've been very fortunate. I'm very fortunate, and I realize that not only to live this long, but to have such an interesting career. I didn't make a lot of money, but I was really enjoyed. It's been a wonderful time I've had.

**SB: I can tell just from speaking to you just how much you've enjoyed a lot of this. It's great to talk to people like yourself who have such an enthusiasm. And like you said, you still have involvement, you still live here in town, so you're not showing any signs of retiring for the second time. The, yeah, so you've just, it's really been an honor to speak with you and to hear, you know, and with that, I think I'll end this conversation for now and we might speak again at another time or we might not, but either way, Mr. Lumsden, it's been a tremendous, great, it's been great to have you here and to hear your story and from myself personally and from the archives, thank you very much.**

BL: Well, thank you, Spencer. I appreciate very much the opportunity.

**SB: All right, very good. Well, I'll end the recording here then. We're just resuming here for a moment, still on the 21st of November, and I had one more question for you, sir. You know, when you were working as an administrator, when you were working with the students in all the different roles that you did, did you ever think back to your own time as a student and think of, you know, what you know, that you were in their shoes at one point, you know, and how did, did you ever use your own experiences here to make connections or to come up with ideas and things that might work?**

BL: You know, I'm not sure I can explain it. Maybe I don't know myself, but I, I think I owe a lot to Josh Grafton. I learned a lot from him and I used that to, as the years went by, that just seemed to be a natural way to operate, to supervise as an advisor. I'll tell you. We couldn't talk about individuals so much, but I went on Facebook after that reunion in 2015, and I have about 200 of those students in the early years on Facebook, in addition, and that's, I don't know, I don't think they understand totally, but that has helped me a lot. My wife was ill during many of those years, six or seven years. And still today, having them come to campus and we can have lunch or cup of coffee, it depends on how much time they have.

**SB: Yeah.**

BL: But that's still a big part of my life.

**SB: That must be just really great. So, all right, great. I just wanted to make sure and get that one in there. So I'm going to end the recording again and just take another opportunity to say, sir, thank you so very much.**

BL: Thank you.