

**University of Illinois Archives**  
**Voices of Illinois Oral History Project**  
**Interviewee: Vanessa Faurie**  
**Interviewer: Alicia Hopkins, Student Life and Culture Archives**  
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**Alicia Hopkins: Today is March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and I'm Alicia Hopkins with the University of Illinois Archives. I'm here today with Vanessa Faurie in Room 308 of the Main Library to talk with her about her experiences as a student at the University in the '80s and her career at the Alice Campbell Alumni Center. First of all, thank-you for talking with us today, if you could just first, what years were you here at the University as a student?**

Vanessa Faurie: Sure. So, I came in as a freshman in the fall of 1982, and I graduated with my bachelor's in 1987, so I was here for five years, because I took a semester off to do an internship.

**AH: Alright. And then, you also returned for a master's degree later, is that correct?**

VF: I also received my MBA in '15, as part of the professional MBA program for full-time people, people who work full-time and [unintelligible] going to school in the evening.

**AH: And when you were here for an undergraduate degree, what departments were you part of?**

VF: Mostly the journalism department. So I came in as a pre-journalism major, which is how they entered freshmen at the time. And took my gen-eds, but always with the idea that I was going into the College of, what was then the College of Communications.

**AH: Ok.**

VF: And probably also did, although not really involved in the departments, took a lot of history courses, and English, the art of writing.

**AH: Ok. And, so you didn't really change your major at all, just from the pre-journalism to journalism?**

VF: Nope. Came here with the thought of being in journalism.

**AH: Did you have a specialization within journalism, was that a thing?**

VF: Just print.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcriber's Note: Some "filler" words – "Um," "Mm hm," and others – were not included in this transcription. I endeavored to write a transcription as faithful as possible to the conversation between interviewer and interviewee. That said, there may be some errors, so anyone considering citing any part of this interview is encouraged to listen to the relevant part of the conversation and make their own determination of what was said.

**AH: Just print, ok.**

VF: Just print journalism.

**AH: Alright, and how did you decide to attend UIUC?**

VF: So, I'd been interested in journalism from an early age, and was editor of my high school paper, and U of I had a great reputation for journalism in that period. And it was the place to go, University of Illinois and the University of Missouri, as far as regionally, were really the two strongest journalism programs at that time.

**AH: Yeah. Did you have any family members who attended the University?**

VF: No. I was a first-time, and well, I'm among the first generation...

**AH: Ok.**

VF: ... college students in my family. So yeah, no, no one else before that.

**AH: Do you remember the first time you visited campus?**

VF: I know that I had come down here for some journalism conference in high school, Illinois Journalism Association. And then I also visited a friend who had, was here, and came to look at the, at Greg Hall, which is where journalism was housed. But that was really it. I was not very familiar with the campus before I came here.

**AH: Do you remember your first day on campus as a student?**

VF: I do not remember my first day on campus as a student. But, it, it was exciting to have been admitted, I mean, for me and for my family, that was an accomplishment, I mean, that was a fun thing. And, but I had to say, I also just sort of assumed that's kind of just what you did, that was a natural next step. But it was, it was a very welcoming atmosphere, I remember, and I don't recall it being very daunting, other than standing in lines. [Both laugh] Standing in lines for classes in the Armory and standing in lines for books.

**AH: Yeah, do you, where all did you live when you were on campus?**

VF: I started out in the Six Pack, I was in Hopkins, in a quad, which is just not something that I would recommend. [Both laugh] You know, shoehorning four people into a room is not a good idea. But, so I was in Hopkins, and then I lived in apartments after that. Because that was around that time when you only had to have 30 hours and then you could live elsewhere.

**AH: Okay.**

VF: Because before that, it was 60 hours.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. Hopkins was the first hall I lived in when I came to U of I too. What did a normal day look like for you when you were on campus?**

VF: Well, I just recall carrying full loads and, then I worked at the *Daily Illini*, from pretty early on. I did a couple of stories in my freshman year, but really you're just acclimating, I think, when you're a freshman. Getting to know where things are and how things work. And then mostly it was probably after my sophomore year, I was pretty much a fixture at the *Daily Illini*, which was not uncommon for people who worked at the *Daily Illini*.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. Were you involved in any other RSOs or anything?**

VF: Nope. It was pretty time-consuming. I mean, folks who worked at the *Daily Illini*, that's pretty much all they did. Classes and being at the *DI*.

**AH: Yeah. Where did you go to study when you were on campus?**

VF: At the *Daily Illini*. [Both laugh] Which was still in Illini Hall, then. So either that or in the Union or at the Quad. I know some people had favorite hangouts and so forth. My world quickly shrank, from Greg Hall, most of my classes were around the Quad, so it wasn't even venturing very far away from the Quad. And then the Union and Illini Hall. That world shrank very quickly.

**AH: Were there any particular professors who were influential to you while you were on campus?**

VF: Yeah, a lot of the journalism professors who, you know, at the time I was here, I was just kind of catching them before they retired. So it was this great vanguard. Jim Carey, Bob Reid, iconic among journalism majors, Steve Helle, who taught Communications Law, [unintelligible] best classes, and Dick Hildwein, photojournalism master, and then, as I said, I took other courses, and I took a lot of the narrative writing courses, as well, so Mark Costello, who is a well-known regional writer, took every class he offered, great writing coach. And so, really combining journalism with narrative writing is kind of a literary journalism approach, it was just a great balance for that.

**AH: What can you tell me about what you remember about your favorite classes?**

VF: Well, the other, as I said, the communications law class from Steve Helle was just, to me, sort of that quintessential college class. It was so meaty with content and everyone just talked about it, you just chewed on these topics, of constitutional law, cases that came before the Supreme Court and the pros and cons and there was never one right answer. You never felt like you fully had landed in the right spot of what you thought. Things were always, kind of, challenging you and that was really exciting. And I should say one other kind of, the grandmaster I had was Ted Peterson, that was mostly because I had an interest in magazine journalism as well, so he was so well-known among in the profession but also in academia, he would give you great feedback but he was also great for letters of support and he would always

attach a penny at the bottom of his letters, just to kind of give you luck and support. So he was very helpful in helping me get scholarships and internships.

**AH: And you mentioned that you worked on a paper in high school as well? When did you know you wanted to go into journalism? Sort of, what was that route for you?**

VF: So I always liked to write, I was always interested in history. Had no idea if I wanted to become a teacher or a lawyer. But journalism, to me, allowed you to be something, anything, at any given time. You can delve into something just enough to get a feel for what it was like, what it was about, and you could go and sort of be that thing. But then you could also step away from it. So, to me, it was, there was a lot of interest in being the great generalist. Knowing a little bit about everything, and also being, trying to be very empathetic of the human condition, basically. You know, trying to understand what people's lives are like, what they think, how they've experienced the world, to me, is fascinating. So, being able to share that and find accurate but also lyrical ways of sharing that with people, was kind of what drew me to that. And the fact that you could make a living from it, at that time, was amazing.

**AH: You talked a little bit about this, but when did you originally join the *Daily Illini* and in what capacity?**

VF: Right. So I'm almost certain I wrote a couple of articles in my freshman year, but that's kind of how people tend to seep into the *Daily Illini*. You step, you put your toe in it, you write a couple of articles, then you realize that it's not so intimidating, and it's not, you know, this awful process and you just start getting deeper and deeper into it. So, but it was by sophomore year, then, I was, I actually had a staff position. So it was, as a casual contributing writer the first year, then I started having holding staff positions my sophomore year.

**AH: What was the process for getting a staff position of any sort? Did you apply, were you selected?**

VF: Nope, you apply, there's, it was very much a student-run publication, then, and took a lot of pride in that, and it was a very robust company then. So you applied at a certain time of year, and you would do interviews with the other senior student editors. So my sophomore year I was assistant features editor, which is kind of [unintelligible], you don't just go from 0 to 60, so you kind of work your way up, I also started working as a copy editor on the [unintelligible], and based on the technology at the time, you literally were working a big slab of big box computers, you know, along a row. And there was a chief copy editor for each night, the paper was printed in Rantoul, and so you had a nightly deadline, it was pasted up the old-fashioned way of, you know, strips of photographic paper that were pasted down on layout pages. So it was old-school, not hot-type, but it was not too far removed from that. But copyediting positions were paid, too, so that was a nice plus.

**AH: Yes.**

VF: And so in it, a lot of the editors would also work as, in the copyediting shift, as well. So you worked as a copy editor some nights, some nights you had, you moved up and you became chief

copyeditor for that night's paper, so you're responsible for doing layouts, and story selection, and things like that. So that also started along while I was doing the features desk, with the features editor at the time, Kurt Greenbaum, who ended up working at, I believe it was the *Sentinel*, in Miami.

**AH: Oh wow.**

VF: But that was great, because I was very much interested in features. My junior year I was editor of the weekly, I don't know if it was weekly, it was like a magazine of the *Daily Illini*, and we called ours *In Style*, and it was the first four-color printing that we did at the *DI*. And so we did, and it was much more of a feature development. I remember doing some stories like when NCSA first opened up and Larry Smarr was here. We did fashion, we did just other stories like, it's almost become cliché now, but, you know, typically your college journalism student has to do the ride-around with the local police, and so doing those kinds of stories as well.

**AH: Yeah. And then how, you said earlier you took a semester off for an internship, how did that fit in with this, and was your internship journalism-related?**

VF: So in 1984, in the fall, I did an internship with a magazine called *TeenAge*, in Lowell, Massachusetts, and it was a paid internship, and it was a general interest magazine for both young men and women. So it, too, was general feature content, and it was the fall semester, so I moved out to Lowell, Massachusetts, I remember that experience because I was 19 at the time and first time really living away from home. But lots of editing, lots of short feature pieces, some longer ones, working in an old mill that was converted into a magazine office. Interviewed actors and veterans and, you know, teenagers who were doing great things, activists, et cetera. But that threw the school plan off by a semester. And then I also had done, thanks to Ted Peterson, I had also done an internship over the summer in 1986. So it didn't interrupt the school at all, but that was at *National Geographic* in D.C. But it was a lot of, with Ted Peterson, you know, recommending me for this national internship program and getting placed there was an amazing experience.

**AH: What did you do with *National Geographic*?**

VF: That was mostly spending about a week or two in different departments throughout the whole process ...

**AH: Oh, okay.**

VF: ... and just really getting a handle on how the whole publication comes together, which for journalism people is what the world is like if money is no object. [Both laugh] It was an amazing place to work, but the two places I was able to contribute more was in copy editing and also in basically, they call it their legends department, but it's all the, writing all those captions. So there's a real art to writing their captions, because everybody just, a lot of people, it was known, is reading the *National Geographic*, is [just?] reading the captions. But that, too, was a great opportunity to just see how a professional magazine operated. They had this huge control center for this publication, and I was able to attend these weekly meetings, and you went up to the top

floor, I think it was on I Street or K Street in D.C., and this room had one wall that was just an entire, almost like a white board that a staff managed, the status of all of these stories and people in the fields and the photographers and what was coming up, you know, one year, two years, down the road. This was the time when the *Titanic* had been rediscovered by Bob Ballard, so that was a big deal, they also did the very first mass-production of a magazine that had, basically, it was like scratch-n-sniff, but it was about, the story was about human sense of smell, but they had these little microcapsules that they found a way to print on their [unintelligible] presses of how this technology could actually send 10 million copies of these smell samples. So it was verry, they were very cutting-edge in a lot of ways too, so, very cool. And I got to hang out in D.C.

**AH: Not a bad, never a bad time.**

VF: Yeah.

**AH: How did you decide to become an editor with the *Daily Illini*?**

VF: Well, I don't know that you consciously decide, you just keep getting so involved in it that it just becomes, that was the thing I did as a student. For me, it was the best complement of the academic training in the classroom and the practical application working lab of the *DI*. And so you just become committed to the product, and putting out as good of a publication as you can, and that is also, for journalists, hands-on experience is good for getting hired. So, the more you could demonstrate that you were doing this work, I mean, no one ever felt they were not already being a professional, because they took it so seriously. Not that you didn't have fun, but they took the work really seriously. And there real things happening with real consequences, you know, if somebody screwed up, people did take notice and they held you accountable. I remember some instances where if you had a mistake in the paper, or, you know, you might have positioned a photo next to a story that wasn't maybe the best pairing, but you didn't realize it, you know, and it makes an impression on people. So you just become further and further committed to it, so it just is a natural progression. And you become more comfortable, that you feel more confident, I think, is how it evolves. So I was going to be there another year, so I applied to be the editor-in-chief, it's an interview process, it was, they put you through the paces, but it's also, you feel the responsibility of it, not to screw up. And you also feel like you're following in footsteps of all those who came before you, I think a lot of that for anybody at the U of I. You just feel this sense of being part of a longer legacy.

**AH: Yeah.**

VF: So, it keeps you on your toes and inspires you to want to do a good job.

**AH: About how many, I guess, one, how often, was the *DI* being published at that point, and then about how, what was the circulation?**

VF: So if I recall, you'll have to fact-check for me, but I think we came out six days a week, five or six days a week, and we probably had a circulation of 15000, maybe.

**AH: Okay.**

VF: 15, 20 thousand. Yeah, it was good days. [Both laugh] We had a lot of advertising, and we had a whole ad staff, and it was a very vibrant place.

**AH: And if you were talking to someone who either doesn't know about the newspaper printing process and, you know, the large machines that it goes through and all that kind of stuff, how would you describe it from start to finish in a 24 hour timespan, that's a lot of work?**

VF: As far as just the workflow, the cycle of things?

**AH: Yeah, yeah.**

VF: So at that time, we did have computers, we still had a few typewriters in there, but you basically started, you know, you were collecting your stories, reporters were working their stories throughout the day. By afternoon, we would have, I think we called it "Edit Board," so the editors would get together, meeting, you'd talk about what the major issue news is of the day, you've got wire services coming in with different headlines or different stories. You had some, they would also issue kind of like a compendium of top stories, and you also knew what local stories were coming in and having been assigned by campus news by state and local, your features desk, your sports desk, your opinions staff, and any other kind of, one, breaking news that was happening, and then also just maybe some features you had been cultivating and working on. So you would talk about, that would all happen kind of mid-afternoon, you determine kind of what the major play was going to be for things. Then the shifts for editors would start, they would kind of stagger, I'm not exactly sure what time they would start, they might have started as early as 4 o'clock, maybe somebody else started at 4:30, and others came in at 5:00. But by that time, your, you've got the chief copy editor, or the head desk copy editor, starting to lay out pages, and you, you literally have these big sheets, and you were using a blue pencil and you were estimating what was going to go where, kind of what point size you wanted headlines to be, and you were writing on copy, indicating the specs and you would hand it off to a copy editor who would prep that copy for you on their big computer. And it was very much of a flow, you would literally, you would hear the ding from the AP newswire if something was coming in, you'd have the TV on so you would be watching the news, it was just a very bustling, talkative, people talking about things, but you also had people hanging out talking about issues of the day. But that group was working, all the [unintelligible] and bustle was happening around you. And then, you started, as soon as you had some things ready, you would send those pages back to the [unintelligible] which was a couple of full-time people and student workers. You would set this stuff, you'd have the copy editor edit it, then there was somebody who looked over that work and greenlighted it, and it would come out in film and if you screwed up with your minimal amount of coding that you were doing and programming. But hopefully it came out the way it should and [unintelligible] they were trained, they started laying out pages. So as you finished a page, that layout would literally be walked back to that department, and they would start laying things out, printing out pages. We had a photography department and staff photographers, they're literally developing film from wherever they had been, and doing prints. And then, I don't know when the deadlines actually were, but usually, by 11 o'clock, you're, you

know, you should be finished. So as pages were getting laid out in the back, they would call you and say, call you in and say, “This page is ready for your OK.” So you’d walk back, look the page over, make sure everything was spelled right, make sure everything was positioned right, you would sign off on it with your initials. And it would get shot, as a page, and they’d start, you know, I’m trying to think now if they did the negatives there and then we drove the negatives up to Rantoul or not. But, so that was the process, and usually by 11, 11:30, maybe midnight, though that would be strange, and sometimes you were, you might have a hole that you were holding off for something if somebody was in a city council meeting, you’re waiting for them to come in, you’re doing everything else that you can. And then they get their story written, and they get, you get an editor looking at it, then it goes to copy desk. So it was always a very exciting atmosphere too, and it was not, it was not chaotic, there was a method to the madness. But certainly there would always be things that pop up or, you know, if news happens at a very inconvenient time, then you might tear down a page and re-do it, for whatever happened.

**AH: Yeah. And how. So it sounds like you worked fairly late into the night, so how did that...**

VF: You were lucky to make last call at Murphy’s. [Both laugh] If you got out in time, so yeah, so didn’t drink a lot on the campus because I wasn’t out by [in?] time.

**AH: How did that affect your being a student? I like to be in bed fairly early, so I imagine for myself that would be very difficult as a student to do both things.**

VF: Yeah. It’s why I find that I work at night on projects and writing assignments and things like that, more so than in the morning. Because you’d be in class in the morning, so at night, you felt like you had this expanse of time, whereas in the morning you have this finite time before class.

**AH: Right, yeah.**

VF: So my brain just worked that way, by being in that atmosphere. So students did a lot of their homework in-between times.

**AH: Yeah.**

VF: In downtimes, or after you went to press. And sometimes you’re waiting around for just one thing, you’re reading your chapter for the next day, or you’re doing. They were very good about letting students write their papers there, on free, equipment that wasn’t being used. And they had, the printouts we had were literally these, what are they called, jet printers, you know, with the dots that showed the letters. [Both laugh] A lot of papers were handed in from students who went to the *DI*. So you could print your papers out there for assignments and so forth and they were cool about it.

**AH: Yeah. Well, that’s, that is an added benefit.**

VF: And usually, because you’re in journalism, not that everyone was nor needed to be, but the professors, there was always this sort of, at least at that time, there was, sort of this not really



tension, that's a strong word, but you'd have some professors who'd just sort of roll their eyes if you were working at the *DI* all the time. They wanted to make sure you were giving enough time to their work, and class too, of course. Others were very understanding that you were also giving time to the *DI* so they were pretty cool about understanding.

**AH: Which is in and of itself an educational experience to work.**

VF: Yeah, very much.

**AH: And you said your senior year, you were editor-in-chief, is that correct? Yeah, so as editor-in-chief, what specifically were you doing in this process?**

VF: So, managing staff and doing some more of the business side of things, dealing with the publisher, on making longer-term decisions. Also, though, helping direct play [?] of the content, things that you wanted to try, helpful to do more color, for example, are you telling a story more effectively. Also just managing people, because you're a team, and helping people work together more efficiently, finding process improvements, finding ways to save money and balance a budget, or, doing budgeting was a big part of it, you want to be able to send staff to conferences. We had a van at the time, a vehicle, you really just were running the whole process. And you'd also be meeting with advertising, and just meeting with the board, and reporting back to the board on how things were going.

**AH: And was there any involvement from, I don't want to say, full-time staff, but people who weren't students, whether that'd be professors, or journalists from other newspapers or anything, that were, sort of, assisting with the production of the *Daily Illini*, or was it really all students?**

VF: There was a full-time, professional publisher, and, but [unintelligible] was very hands-off on the daily production of the newspaper. There were full-time production managers who had a student staff, they were great friends and still are, but, no, it was really driven by students. So there were no advisors, formally, at all, the publisher was, in fact, the culture was such that the publisher really didn't show at that time, his face, much in the newsroom because it was just a student-run place.

**AH: [unintelligible] add pressure, I would feel like, to not...?**

VF: There was a lot of pride in that.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. Are there any news stories that you were particularly proud of writing, or that really stand out to you, and what kind of things were being written about at the time?**

VF: Well, the big things in my era were divesture from investment in South Africa, and, you know, we had the Shantytowns that they built on the Quad to protest the Board of Trustees divesting. What else do we have? Iran-Contra was going on then, I was, you know, thinking about some of the more memorable stories. I remember, very specifically, in 1986 when the *Challenger* shuttle exploded, and I was trying to remember the name of the place on the corner

of Wright and Green where that bank building is right now. It used to be, just a, office supply and store and little lunch counter place. And just kind of dime store type of thing. And they had a television up in the corner, and I was in there getting a cup of coffee or something, and the launch was taking place on the TV and everybody was gathered around and we saw that. And I just, you know, one of those times where you kind of remember where you were type of thing. And the first thing you do is you go to the *DI*, and you go, Okay, what's going on. Anybody who worked on the *DI* if you were out and about on campus and some major news event happened, you just quickly found yourself in Illini Hall figuring out how the *DI* was going to cover it and react to it and get local reactions et cetera. Let's see, Farm Aid happened, [unintelligible], I was actually there in the rain, and I remember that too, because the other thing about being at the *Daily Illini* is that you'd get the opportunity to talk with people who came to campus and so forth. I remember being at the press conference with Willie Nelson and John Mellencamp and Neil Young, sitting there at the table.

One of the ones I personally liked doing very much was, I did a phone interview with Graham Nash, when Crosby, Stills, and Nash came to town. And they were very much, at that time as well, as they continue to be, promoting voter registration and students being active and being engaged in society. And so it was a great conversation. I remember another story, though, that I was actually helping coach a writer to do the story. So she did the story, it was an amazing series, but it was about, there was a local attorney in town who was accepting referral fees for connecting people with attorneys, and he was a public defender. And you're not supposed to take referral fees. This was an experience where this young student was doing just really great, strong reporting, and I wanted to make sure she just didn't feel alone. And because people in town were pressuring her and pushing back on this story that she was doing, and it was legit, she was. We, in those cases, in a case like that, I would, sometimes, like reach out to Steve Helle who would be an informal advisor on constitutional law and so forth, just to say, are we in the right space here on this.

**AH: Right.**

VF: Students aren't necessarily always used to quote-unquote adults pushing back on things, so it was fairly tense for her, and a lot of pressure on her, and she just did an amazing job. But we worked through and fact-checked and we just made sure we had our stuff right, and it did result in changes being made and this person, you know, kind of being held accountable. And it had a, the right outcome in that regard. Those are the kinds of things, when you see people go through that kind of growth experience, and know that you were helpful in that, that was, those are things that I remember.

**AH: Yeah. And was that a news story that the *Daily Illini* broke or did that...?**

VF: Mm hm. Yep. Original reporting, yeah.

**AH: So that makes it, I feel like, extra, to be a college student and dealing with something breaking in that way.**

VF: Yeah. The really great, so the *Daily Illini* was a great eclectic group, it wasn't just all journalism majors. And they brought a variety of points of view, and again, when you think about, when I thought about what was your quintessential college experience supposed to be like, that's what it was. It was sitting around with people sharing ideas and perspectives that you weren't necessarily used to. Lots of diversity in lots of different ways. So that was a cool atmosphere.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. And in your answer, you talked, I've been asking people a little about pop culture on campus while you were here and you pointed to that a little bit. Which isn't a connection that, admittedly, I made between the *Daily Illini* and, I sort of thought of that as outside, not outside of pop culture but separate. So how did those things play together, aside from national news? I know you talked about the magazine circular that had fashion and things like that. So could you talk more about the overlap?**

VF: So, in that era, lots of padded shoulders [both laugh]. And, you know, interesting hairstyles and fitness, everybody was into the fitness craze, people were becoming more aware that smoking was really probably not good for you. And the AIDS awareness was really coming on then. And people needing to, sort-of, fight for their healthcare. It was kind of a new concept too, I think. You know, reflecting that, from a student perspective, but we, I think we always approached the *DI* as being a bona fide source of news, not hey, we're the student publication at our school, you know. Bands, the music scene in Champaign was really, is legendary, and so you had people who were very up on music reviews. We'd get press passes for the same access to movie reviews as other journalists got, so we had movie reviews, we had columnists who were commenting on trends of the day, too. In a lot of ways I didn't view myself as being really in tune to a lot of the pop culture of the day, but I learned about it through my friends and colleagues and what they were covering. But in sports, you know, of course was a big thing, but yet it was a very good community of diverse options. From folk singers playing at Nature's Table to bands playing at Maple's, it was two. We had opera reviews at Krannert, because we had this great reviewer who knew what he was talking about with respect to opera. So yeah, very eclectic, and kind of, you know, live and let live for people.

**AH: So during your time at the *DI*, there quite a few, I mean the *Challenger* explosion, and also dealing with the beginning of the HIV/AIDS Crisis. What was it like, to deal with those things and talk about them so publicly in the newspaper?**

VF: Well, I think some of the more politically-charged ones, it was probably more challenging for students for things that were related to the U of I. So divesture in South Africa was probably more riskier for a student because you were calling out actions by the administration. Not to the level, perhaps, of Vietnam protesters, a decade or two before, but still it was not popular and yet you felt like you were taking the pulse of students who really had an issue with apartheid and they didn't think it was right that we were accepting funds from companies that were doing business in South Africa and student voices, we weren't making the news, we were reporting on it. So it was handed over to the students who were stepping up and doing it, and we were just reflecting on it, and amplifying the words but we weren't causing the change. So, you know, it was student government association, the Student Senate, and other students across campus who took their mind to build these shantytowns which was highly visual for a newspaper to be

covering as well to get their message across. But they did, you know, I think to this day, even, because of that experience, I don't wear my own political views and actions on my sleeve because I was just, sort of, trained not to. It's really just reflecting what other people are doing. But even, you know, certainly students, I don't think you can even pigeonhole them. Yes we have liberal students, but we had a lot of conservative students too, and it was nice that we had both voices and other voices reflected in the newspaper. Because again, it's kind of, the, it's the town square, you know, for the microcosm of the world that is the U of I campus at the time. So, I'm not sure if I answered your question very well?

**AH: Yes, no, that's definitely a good answer. Let's go down. Moving past graduation, sort of looking back, what was one of, or more than one, of your most memorable experiences on campus?**

VF: Well, it's hard to say an instance, versus the experiences. So again, those days in the *Daily Illini* basement just blend into each other. But it was more the atmosphere, I would say, that was also a time not long after when the Berlin Wall was coming down, and people were, sort of, calling out some of the things with the Reagan Administration. You felt, I think it's that time in people's lives when they're here, that you feel like you can make a difference, and you learn the power of your voice, and so the *DI* just provided a good vantage point for that, and what I loved is the friendships that developed from that experience. Because you're all kind of in it together. And you get to know people really well by spending time in a dingy basement [both laugh]. And again, the college was, it just had, like I said, this real vanguard of talented people in it that you learned from, and they respected you. It was a fun time to be on campus, too, at the same time. Sports was kind of more fun then, we went to some bowl games and then toward the later part of the '80s, after I graduated in '87, then you had the Flying Illini coming in '89, great fun for people. So you had these shared experiences as a community.

**AH: And then, shortly after graduating, you came back to campus. So what was your journey coming back to campus to work?**

VF: Well, I never moved away from here, then, so I lived here but I worked in Decatur after I graduated, because jobs were hard to find at that time in the late '80s. And then I had the opportunity to work at the, for the alumni magazine as an assistant editor and, again, it was the opportunity to, for magazine journalism, to not only write about everything because the *Alumni* base is a microcosm of the world, but in a small enough publication that you're not pigeonholed. You could be involved in a photo shoot, you could be involved in story selection, you could be involved in planning a year's worth of stories and doing the stories. So it was a great opportunity to be this generalist, and experience, what's it like to be a nuclear physicist for while, what's it like to be a teacher in the inner city, you know? You could do all of that.

**AH: So you started as, you said, assistant editor?**

VF: Assistant editor.

**AH: And are currently working as the director of advancement for research initiatives? What has that path been like? Big question!**

[Both laugh]

VF: I spent most of my career at the Alumni Association, again, because it was such a creative environment. So I worked my way up through the editorial ranks at the *Alumni* publications which have morphed over time, it used to be a tabloid, it became a glossy magazine, online did evolve during that time, et cetera. So I worked up to being senior editor, then editor of the magazine, then vice-president for communications, leading the overall, multiplatform communications enterprise, and, again, kind of, I think with some of the leadership skills learned through the *Daily Illini*, managing staffs and to be their best, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Also, learning the business of alumni relations and engagement. So as that went along, then the business model of the Alumni Association changed, there were other philosophical changes that weren't aligned with how I viewed alumni relations. Anyway, so I left the Alumni Association after many years and took this position of Director of Advancement for Research Initiatives, which is a brand-new position, but I loved it because it's about connecting the dots, which I kind of think I've done since I was a student. Just bringing people together who have, who can create something bigger than what they can do on their own, that's what I do.

**AH: And, what has it been like to come back as an alumni and work at the University?**

VF: It's great because you see the potential that's here. It's great to be in this environment, alumni who go away from their alma mater often will, if they had a good experience, will recall it fondly. But they love coming here where there's students, there's this spirit of inquiry that people have, and discovery, if you're here as an adult, or in a professional or however you want to term it, you never get away from that. Any time you feel like you're having a crappy day, just go and hang out with a student and you just, your perspective just resets itself. So it's a great environment and I love that there's culture here, you can be in the middle of the cornfield and still be around people from all over the world, sharing different ideas, so it never gets old. And it's always creative, and as long as you've got the outlet to try new things and a structure that lets you try new things, you're good.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. How has campus changed since you were here as a student?**

VF: I think that, I don't want to generalize, there's probably, I feel like there's more of a seriousness, a bit, with students. There's so much more expected of them earlier, I think. To have it all figured out, to have a plan in place and I think in the era when I was a student, you, it was more normal to figure it out as you go. And that was ok. So maybe that. I just think that there's a lot of pressure on students now that I didn't feel back then, to have it figured out. At the same time I think they're much more globally aware, much more globally engaged, the way it's typical, the way people consume information. You know, in your work, is so different that they just are more aware of so much more. I think we still had a pretty sheltered world, you know, unless you really had to make an effort to punch out of it and gather other information.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. Was it a conscious decision to stay in the area after leaving, or did it just kind of fall that way?**

VF: Just kind of fell that way, truthfully. Because again, if I have the right environment to, there were no limits. So what would you trade it in for?

**AH: Right, yeah.**

VF: I used to fancy myself as the next Ann Keegan of the *Chicago Tribune*, if you don't know Ann Keegan, she was an amazing feature writer for the *Tribune*. Had I gone that path, that's all I would have been doing.

**AH: Right.**

VF: Versus, again, being able to shape the publication that your work is appearing in, and decide what that's going to be. Who's going to be featured, and what kinds of stories you're going to take on. Again to me, that's a richer canvas to work on, and influence than just doing one thing. And if you go into some of these larger, in this industry anyway, you go into the larger area, you do a narrower and narrower kind of work.

**AH: Yeah, yeah. So my last full, sort-of, full and narrow question...**

VF: Sure.

**AH: ... is if you were giving advice to an incoming freshman to UIUC, what would it be?**

VF: No other direction than that, huh? [Both laugh]. It's to open yourself up. To new opportunities that challenge you. I have two daughters who go and have gone here since then, and it's the same advice I give to them, is don't presume that you know what you, what steps to take. But open yourself up to things that make you a little uncomfortable, and contribute. Don't stand on the sidelines, and cross Green Street, whichever way that means to you, to broaden it out. I catch myself even now, sometimes, making my world smaller and smaller, you go to your car and your lot, you go to your office, you go here to this café and that's it. And you have to sort of, and I think students have to do that too, you have to make an effort to widen your world.

**AH: Yes. Yeah, yeah, as, when I was here in undergrad, I was in history, and it becomes my University of Illinois is the Quad, it's a different experience for everyone, I think, and it's great advice to cross Green Street, whichever direction that is.**

VF: I know there have been some students, because we have, have had a student alumni association, and always had interaction with students, and for some, you get the feeling that they look at Illinois as a really big place that they have trouble finding their spot in. And I keep trying to say, "Once you're here, your world shrinks rapidly." And just give it that chance. Then once it shrinks, you have to proactively widen it again.

**AH: Are there any topics or questions I didn't ask you about that you would like to talk about, or any last words?**

VF: I think, I mean, I appreciate not being held accountable to dates and places. I appreciate that very much. No, if this can help shed any light on how people felt or lived during different times, I think it's a very cool project, so I'm happy to help.

**AH: Well, thank you so much, I really appreciate it.**

**END**