

University of Illinois at Springfield

Norris L. Brookens Library

Archives/Special Collections

## **Jess Douglas Farrington Memoir**

### **Farrington, Jess Douglas**

Interview and memoir

Digital Audio File, 22 min., 11 pp.

UIS Alumni Sage Society

J. Farrington discusses his experiences attending classes in accountancy at Sangamon State University, graduating in 1990. He worked at Pillsbury Mills, a local manufacturing plant that helped to pay his tuition. He remembers the helpful professors that enabled the completion of his degree by taking 48 hours in one year because the plant was closing. Doug said that SSU "really opened my mind to things outside of my current realm of understanding of the world at that time."

Interview by Lorrie Farrington, 2009

OPEN

No collateral file

Archives/Special Collections LIB 144  
University of Illinois at Springfield  
One University Plaza, MS BRK 140  
Springfield IL 62703-5407

© 2009, University of Illinois Board of Trustees

Narrator: Doug Farrington  
Date: January 10, 2009  
Place: Chicago, IL  
Interviewer: Lorrie Farrington

Q. This is Lorrie Farrington on January 10, 2009, interviewing Doug Farrington, class of 1990. The interviewer's class is 1972 and we're in Chicago in his home. Doug, do you understand why we're doing this?

A. Yeah. I had to double check my diploma and make sure I was class of 1990.

Q. Ah, OK! So you understand why we're doing this, first of all.

A. Yes.

Q. And are you excited about doing it?

A. Yeah.

Q. And why did you consent to do it?

A. Lorrie asked me to participate.

Q. All right that's good enough; that's good enough for me. There are some questions that the University has drawn up and I have a few of my own just to get the juices flowing here. But so why did you go to SSU?

A. I had been going to some classes at Lincoln Land and I had a position at Pillsbury in the management office of the finance. And I wanted to further my career. So I had kind of recognized that there was kind of a limit as how far I could go within the company – Pillsbury – career-wise within accounting without having a four-year degree, bachelor's degree.

Q. OK. So prior to attending SSU, you just said you already had taken some classes at Lincoln Land. And then, OK... you attended in, you finished in 1990.

A. Right.

Q. And got a diploma or degree.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. OK, what field was it in – accounting?

A. Accountancy.

Q. OK, accountancy.

A. I had entered the school through the alternative entry program.

Q. Oh, what's that?

A. It was a program of entering into the University not only through educational credits from prior post-secondary education but also through life experience.

Q. Oh, OK.

A. So there was an essay that I wrote, eight page essay that was used to evaluate whether I was ready to enter the University.

Q. OK, well you know at that time in 1970 is was a senior University. It was only during the last two years of your bachelor degree. OK describe your initial impressions of the campus and your classes.

A. I mean the campus – I really didn't have any experience with other campuses besides Lincoln Land. I had never really looked at any senior educational colleges besides SSU. So I really don't have much to compare it to.

Q. OK. Well, did you go to SSU because it was convenient or like if you had a choice to go to any university anywhere what's your idea of the best university in the country or the world?

A. Oh, well I'm going to start with the first question. So I actually preferred – there's two reasons I went to SSU. One is it was convenient and secondly both my parents had attended and, you know, I had a lot of respect for the school and you know, it was kind of a little bit different style than most universities with the board of regents versus a standard, traditional university. Now there were other colleges I could have attended but that was my preference.

Q. OK. Did your impression change over the course of your studies? I mean in the end, are you glad that you went there, and was it a good experience for you?

A. Yeah, I'm very happy, very happy with the quality of education. I thought the professors were well prepared and very professional, probably even more so than I had expected. So yeah I'm very happy with the education I got. I think it was a quality education, I think it was high-value for the cost per credit hour. And overall it was a very good experience and exceeded my expectations.

Q. Good. Well just a little aside here, I want to come back to that question – a question about the professors. But right now just kind of wondering, do you feel – well, first of all what are you doing now for work? What kind of work do you do now?

A. OK, I work for a company called Beam Global which is a spirits company, spirits and wine, predominant brands like Jim Beam and Salsa Tequila and some other brands internationally. And I'm the vice president of IT for the business relationship management area.

Q. So not accounting, per se?

A. Right. Although I do partner with my – in my roll I partner with the CFO of the company.

Q. OK. So you really are in information systems? IT rather than accounting?

A. Right.

Q. But at Pillsbury did you do – you told me before we started that you had worked in the accounting department at your first job. Right?

A. Right.

Q. And they put, did they put you through school?

A. Yup.

Q. OK.

A. They paid for a lot of my education.

Q. OK. OK now did you take classes at night? You had a full time job besides classes?

A. Yup.

Q. OK.

A. Night classes and then in my final year Pillsbury announced they were closing in– well, they announced it in 1989 or 1988 so I really wanted to make sure that I fully utilized the educational money that Pillsbury was providing. So I, in the last year before Pillsbury closed, I took forty-eight credit hours in one year including twelve hours in the summer, which required the dean's approval to take that many credit hours.

Q. Oh my goodness. I didn't realize that. Well do you attribute the job you have now to your education at SSU? Or maybe not directly but indirectly? I mean, would you have the job you have now if you hadn't graduated at all with a B.A. or especially from SSU?

A. Well, I wouldn't have the job I have now without a four year education for sure.

Q. OK.

A. But I think what the education at Sangamon State really provided me was a – it enlightened me. It gave me some experiences and really opened my mind up to things outside of my current realm of understanding of the world at that time. So I think I wouldn't be where I'm at today without that education and those experiences.

Q. OK, what professors particularly – names if you want to – influenced you or subject matter? Did you have a good advisor in your opinion? Would you care to name two or three professors that particularly influenced you?

A. No advisors that really stand out. There was one professor and I'm trying to remember his name – it's been so many years ago – Don....what was his name?

Q. Not Ahoy...Stanhope?

A. Stanhope?

Q. Yeah.

A. It was Stanhope. Somebody I really respected in accounting. He had a really good teaching style and kept people, kept the students engaged and made it exciting and fun unlike some of the other courses in accounting. I think another professor and I can't remember his name at all, but in discrete mathematics, as boring as that sounds, was really something I excelled at and I attribute some of that to the instructor. Also there was a gentleman that taught tax and I believe one of the PAC courses during the spring intermission and I can't remember his name either but I know I remember I really appreciated his style as well.

Q. Well you know that was one of the questions I was going to ask you about those interim – I forgot what they call them – intersessions?

A. Uh-huh, intersessions.

Q. So in other words, you took part in one of those.

A. Many, yeah.

Q. Oh, OK.

A. That was one of my favorite forums really. It was only a couple of credit hours but it was over a very intense week or couple of weekends during the spring break. And I really liked the

format, it was – the couple that I remember were primarily in the auditorium and then they would have breakout sessions.

Q. Oh, OK.

A. And I got a lot of value out of those courses even though again, they were only two credit hours but they really stick out in my mind as some really good intense education.

Q. I don't think the University does that now but they keep talking like maybe they'd go back to that. You know the original mandate of the University it was a public affairs university so it tried to keep people realistic about how their education related to the world and their practical every day experience. So that's part of what those little intersession things were. OK...

A. I remember two of the intersessions I particularly remember, one was on personal finance and again it was one of the instructors that sticks out – I can't remember his name. And the second one was on male and female gender roles. I don't know if that was the exact title of it...

Q. Oh, OK.

A. But it was really interesting and we had some really good breakout sessions.

Q. Well that's interesting because one of the questions they suggested that I ask you was what was memorable about those sessions. Excuse me, I kind of lost my place here for a minute. Did you have a favorite classroom that lent itself – was there anything unique about a classroom that – did you have seats in a row? Was the style much more relaxed – were there sofas and chairs, were they desks? Did you have a favorite classroom?

A. Just the PAC at the auditorium, the PAC are the only ones that stick out.

Q. OK, OK.

A. The other ones were pretty standard. I don't remember any with couches but there may have been but I don't remember any. I think it was just chair and desk for most of the other ones.

Q. OK. Did you stay in touch with any students, staff members, or professors that you knew at that time? In other words, do you see any of those people anymore? Are you a member of the alumni – I guess everyone is a member...

A. I am a member of the alumni but the only one I've stayed in touch with is Lorrie.

Q. Oh, OK.

A. So I mean, there may be some other ones that I know casually but...

Q. Well that'd be...

A. Just coincidentally went to the same school maybe a different year.

Q. Yeah, well that'd be me and I just happen to be your mother. Your sister went there and so I graduated from there twice your sister once and you once, so it's a family affair but anyway. OK, now let me find another something here to talk about. Have you been back to the campus recently or do you have occasion to visit?

A. Just to visit my mother.

Q. OK, now what did the campus look like? In other words I can't remember in the 1990s at what point you came in, were the permanent buildings there or were they still in the temporary buildings at they're called.

A. There were – it was all the temporary buildings that I had classes in...

Q. That's where your classes were?

A. Yeah, yeah.

Q. Oh, OK.

A. I don't remember anything negative about those. I mean they were temporary and maybe not the prettiest things but you know, they were comfortable and amenable. I think the Library maybe the main...

Q. Had been built, I think...

A. I think Brookens Library was there.

Q. I think it was the first permanent building that was built up on the hill. OK, did you participate in graduation ceremonies?

A. No I did not.

Q. And is there any reason why?

A. It just wasn't the reason I was there, you know?

Q. OK.

A. There wasn't any value in it for me to participate. It was just a personal thing I guess. To me it was just a personal achievement that I got the education, that I got the degree.

Q. Oh, OK.

A. Rather than more of a public and formal recognition of... [inaudible].

Q. But so you did get a diploma...

A. Yes.

Q. And you have that framed and it's hanging right here in your office right now, OK.

A. Probably if I had to do over again I would participate... [inaudible].

Q. Have you had any post-graduate education to speak of?

A. Just lots of seminars and conferences. I do have a certificate in project management, yeah.

Q. Wasn't that about like the equivalent of a masters? I mean you studied two years...

A. Well I also had an associate's certificate and a master's certificate in project management.

Q. What did that involve in terms of time commitment?

A. Just weeks you know, to get the certification, the professional certification required about a summer's worth of weekend and night work and taking a pretty significant test at the end of that. And then over the course of the years – a couple of years prior to that, I took some three and four and five day classes.

Q. OK. So you got some professional certification then beyond your degree, OK, well tell me about your – before you went to college didn't you mention that you attended an alternative school?

A. Yup, a couple.

Q. And you attributed some of your IT interest or work to the headmaster of that school. Can you tell me something about that?

A. I don't know for sure if I attributed to the IT interest, although Joe McHugh was the headmaster I guess you'd call, of Learning Community and...

Q. The name of the school was the Learning Community?

A. Right, the Learning Community, alternative education. And Joe did spark my interest in mathematics.

Q. OK.

A. So I guess if you – that kind of leads and plays into the IT – information technology area. But when I started school I didn't really – when I started at Lincoln Land and I didn't really know that I wanted to go into computers or into finance it was just kind of a, take a number of courses and kind of feel my way around. And I took a liking to, and at the time it was called EDP – electric data processing. However working at Pillsbury then later, for them to fund my education they wanted me to obviously to take course work in the finance area. So I kind of combined the two and had a major in accountancy with a lot of course work in data processing.

Q. OK. So how did you get involved in computers in the very first place? I mean this is way back before computers were the thing, you know, to do.

A. Yeah.

Q. But tell me a little bit about that.

A. My father brought home a TRS-80 which was Tandy/Radio Shack. TRS-80 which had...

Q. What year was this?

A. I think this was like 1980, 1981 maybe. I think they came out in 1979 so it was a used one he brought home. I just tinkered with that and broke into many games and figured out how to win the games and kind of became a self-taught programmer.

Q. Oh yeah?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. So you and your dad did that together before and then they just kept – the industry just escalated and now we got the World Wide Web and all that good stuff and OK. OK. I have one question that might kind of be off the wall but do you think, from what you know about online education now – for example Phoenix and the University of Illinois both have programs, very distinguished programs – do you think you would get the same kind of an education from online curriculum as you got at SSU?

A. I guess everybody's unique but for me personally, I don't believe I would have gotten that kind of interaction and the kind of quality of education that I got from having you know, being there in person. I guess if you're driven enough to you know, get an education and get a degree, the online course work would be a means to an end. But I don't know that I would

have been as enlightened with the interaction of other students and the professors, face-to-face.

Q. OK, thank you. Now a couple more questions here. Did you socialize with extra-circular activities when you were at SSU and have a favorite meeting place that you and other students met or did you – were you married and had a family and didn't have time for that or what was your situation? Did you, in other words, were you a typical – I know the school was not typical. The average age of the school because it was a lot of professional people that were taking night classes to enhance their jobs and career – it wasn't a typical college. So did you avail yourself to any extra-circular activities with other students on a social setting either at campus or at a nearby place on the campus?

A. Very little. I mean my routine especially in that last year of school when I was taking forty-eight credit hours even leading up to that my routine was to work either eight or ten hours a day, get off work at say five, five thirty, go home, take a nap for about an hour, rush out the door, grab something at Hardee's and be at class by six or six thirty and have a two to four hour class and be tired as heck. So I really didn't have much time to socialize with the other students.

Q. When did you do your homework?

A. On weekends, stay up late, cram before tests.

Q. And you still got a lot out of it. You still feel you had a quality education.

A. Yes. I think you get really good at being a student after awhile. You get into a routine you really know how you learn and how you prepare for tests and how you know, it's a matter of everybody's different but to me it was important to be at every class and take notes. Less important to do all of the homework assignments, to me it was important to show up for every class and take notes, that was the important thing, and then to be able to study the notes and the summaries of the chapters before the tests.

Q. OK, all right. Sounds like a good routine. Can you think of a particular situation, maybe with another student, with a class, with a professor, or something that just happened on campus that stands out in your mind? I guess I'm searching for something – a recall of a particular situation that you experienced and then your reflection on it. How did you feel about it? Were there any extremely positive vignettes that you could give me – or negative? Just something to elaborate.

A. I really don't have, nothing really sticks out too much.

Q. You never stumbled on any sidewalks or fell down broke any bones or anything like that?

A. Nope, not at SSU.

Q. OK. All right let's see. I thought I had another question.

A. There was a – gosh I think he ended up being the dean maybe of the school of accountancy, but Professor Nasari, does that sound right?

Q. Yeah, he's since retired a couple years...

A. John?

Q. John Nasari?

A. Yeah. He's somebody else I guess that sticks out. And when I was really cramming through forty-eight hours in one year he really – he may have been my advisor that year too, I'm not sure but – he was very helpful in making sure that I got classes lined up to be able to graduate. You know, because it's tough when you're taking that many to get the right classes that you need to graduate.

Q. Yeah.

A. So he was somebody that I really remember helping.

Q. Didn't you and him have a mutual interest in trains or something – was he the guy that talked about trains? OK – irrelevant. I don't know I think that's probably, unless you can think of anything else that you want to talk about, that's probably all I have. Do you think we should call it quits here? We've had the dog shaking her collar and the phone ringing but we still did it. Can you think of anything else you want to say in conclusion?

A. No I just think that UIS now – SSU formerly – has a very interesting and unique history. And you know, in a way I guess it's kind of sad to see it change from the structure that it had before it became a part of UIS. Not that it wasn't necessary but it definitely has changed the culture.

Q. OK.

A. And I can't say for better or for worse, but it has changed.

Q. OK, well thank you Doug. And again this is Lorrie Farrington, class of 1972, interviewing Doug Farrington, class of 1990. OK, thank you.

21 minutes 15 seconds

End of Interview