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When you arrived at Lake Forest College, did you know you wanted to major in History? If yes, why? If not, what were your plans when you arrived—and what changed your mind?

I arrived planning to major in history. I was a transfer student and had already narrowed in on American women's history as my main interest.

Can you describe a class and/or a professor who had a particular influence on you? It could be on your decision to major in History, on the course of your study of History (area of focus etc.), on your development as a thinker or writer, on your choice of career, etc.

The upper division seminars most inspired me and cemented my interest in history. When I transferred to LFC as a junior, I convinced Art Zilversmit to let me into his senior seminar on American slavery. In the following semesters, I was able to take upper division history seminars with Steve Rosswurm. All these courses challenged me to read history critically and to write substantial research papers.

Did you write a senior thesis? If so, describe that experience. If not, is there a piece of work for a course that stands out in your memory as particularly challenging or rewarding?

One day in the cafeteria, Art Zilversmit walked up to me at the salad bar and said he thought I should write a senior thesis. I hadn't given it any thought, so I asked what was involved. He told me I'd do research for a year and then produce a 100 page thesis. When he saw me blanch, he added in a reassuring tone, "Don't think of it as one 100 page paper; think of it as four 25 page papers." That was no less daunting! Still, I decided to do it, and it was the best decision I made at Lake Forest.

Art Zilversmit served as the chair of my thesis committee, and I also received substantial guidance from Steve Rosswurm. I wrote my thesis on American suffragist Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party. I still remember how excited I was when I narrowed in on my topic. My enthusiasm for the project held strong through research at various special collection departments, long hours in front of microfilm readers, and rewriting chapters after carefully considering the comments of Zilversmit, Rosswurm and my third committee member, Arlene Eskilson (Departments of Sociology and Anthropology). By the time I had to defend my thesis to the committee, I was able to take Art Zilversmit's advice to "think of it as a chance to have a conversation about a topic you now know so much about."

You first pursued a career in what might be defined, broadly, as public history—particularly archival work. This is a field that interests many of our students. Can you discuss how you became interested in that field, how you feel your Lake Forest education helped train you for it, and any graduate training you pursued?

My interest in the archival field was a direct result of writing a senior thesis. The summer before my senior year, I got a jump on my thesis by spending several days doing primary research at Berkeley's Bancroft Library. When the archivist handed me the first folder containing letters written by Alice Paul, I was hooked! What a thrill to hold those pieces of history in my hands.

My LFC education taught me so much about serious research. That knowledge was invaluable as I moved into a field where it was important to understand the process and sources of scholarly research and the needs of those doing the work. After receiving my BA, I earned a Master's degree in American History and Archival Administration from New York University. It was a good program for learning the mechanics of the archival profession and prepared me well for pursuing a career in that field. I was never as challenged, though, as I had been while working on that LFC senior thesis.

What kind of work did you do as an archivist? Please describe some of your day-to-day activities in that job.

My first professional job was as the Archivist of the Elizabeth Robins Papers while I was a graduate student at NYU. It was a fabulous position, given my background in women's history. Robins was an actress, novelist and suffragist who corresponded with people in all these fields. We never knew what correspondent would appear in the next box: Edgar Allan Poe, Henrik Ibsen, the Pankhurst sisters, and even my old senior thesis subject: Alice Paul.

My first job with this collection, and others I worked on in later years, was to organize and preserve the papers. Then I wrote guides to the collections that allowed researchers to use them well. To do the work, I needed a familiarity with the subjects and people in the collections and the ability to find supporting information when I needed to fill in my knowledge gaps.

As my career continued, I was also able to curate historical exhibits (at a museum) and participate in setting up a new research collection for the study of Los Angeles history (at Loyola Marymount University).

How did you make the transition into Web design?

After working in a historical society and then museum for a number of years, I decided to go back to school for my Master's of Library and Information Science (MLIS). Some of the technology courses touched on web design, and I became interested in learning more about presenting information via the web. When I finished my MLIS, I took another position as a curator, and a large part of my job was building up the web presence of the special collections department. My web design skills were largely self-taught, so I took some courses at an art institute to step up my understanding of design. This gave me the experience I needed to transition into a purely design position (also in a University).

Many students today are hesitant about traditional Liberal Arts majors (particularly in the Humanities) because they are unsure how they translate to job skills. What advice do you have for these students? As you have searched for jobs over your career, how have you presented your skills to future employers, whether in interviews, application letters, or other contexts?

In some cases my history degree was obviously relevant to jobs I pursued (all the archivist and curator positions). When I transitioned into web design, I was still working within an academic environment, where a liberal arts education was recognized as valuable.

My advice: don't think too narrowly about skills. It's more important to learn how to read critically,

evaluate sources, organize and write a research paper. These are not just tools for scholars, they are important to all thinkers and problem solvers. If you figure out how to think and learn, you can always pick up new skills. As somebody who has served on a number of search committees, I believe the best candidates are those who demonstrate enthusiasm for learning. I would hire someone who can grow with a job over someone who already has the technical skills but lacks the drive to tackle new challenges.