

EXPOSÉ EXPERT

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It's no secret that this year's presidential election is one of the most controversial yet. Among all the campaign chatter, Alumni David Fahrenthold, now a *Washington Post* reporter, has had a thing or two to say himself about a certain notorious candidate.



WASHINGTON POST REPORTER David Fahrenthold has been covering the 2016 election since the start, specifically following the rise of presidential candidate Donald Trump. Fahrenthold is a Class of 1996 alumni and the former Co-Editor-in-Chief of *The Anvil*.

"David was a top notch kid," former *Anvil* adviser Jina David said. "Everyone adored him and knew he would go places."

Twenty years later, for his work on exposing the fraudulence within the Donald J. Trump Foundation, he's being mentioned as a Pulitzer Prize candidate.

In President Obama's September speech campaigning for Hillary Clinton, Obama said, "Trump took money other people gave to his charity and then bought a six-foot-tall painting of himself." This was a direct citation from an article Fahrenthold wrote, one of many covering the controversial candidate. His many scoops involving the election has given him some notoriety, especially on Twitter, where he updates his followers whenever he discovers something new. Journalism 1 student Rafi Saqer managed to interview Fahrenthold for a class project, asking him about everything from his years at Memorial to his current career.

Q Who are some of your important role models and how have they impacted your writing today?

My three biggest role models would be: 1. David Simon. His book *Homicide* is still my favorite book, both for the way he writes scenes and characters, and the way he explains the truth those scenes add up to. Maybe my favorite chapter ever is "The Out," an explanation of how homicide detectives trick a suspect into thinking a confession is their best move. 2. Chris Jones, the *Esquire* writer. His article "The Things That Carried Him" has stuck with me for a long time because of the incredible attention to detail and the incredible number of stockpiled anecdotes that he uses at every stage. 3.) Michael Lewis. He's like Simon, in that he knows his subjects well enough to pull back from the details of any one case, and tell you how things really are.

Q What advice do you wish you got as a high schooler?

Don't worry if you aren't elected senior class president. It's a trap. You get, like, one day of electoral glory, but then you have to plan all the class reunions until the end of time.

Q What's your fondest memory of Memorial High School?

I've got a lot of them: I had great friends there, and I won a national championship on the Academic Challenge quiz-bowl team. I once appeared in a school play and, on a dare, yelled out "Penis!" instead of my line - thus ending my high-school drama career. But newspaper was the activity that has the most to do with my current life. My favorite memories had to do with my humor column, which was called "Musings of the Omnipotent

Leroy." It wasn't that terribly funny, and my best jokes were ripped off from Dave Barry. But I loved that feeling of watching other people reading my jokes and laughing.

Q Did any of your MHS teachers make a significant impression on you?

The two biggest were Ms. David, who was my journalism teacher, and Frau Sisler, my German teacher. I was a terrible disruptor of class for both of them, and got bad conduct grades that worried my mother constantly. But in both cases, that was because I was actually having so much fun in their classes. I really enjoyed the responsibility of helping run the newspaper, and I really enjoyed the oddball German literature we read in Frau's German classes. Both of them also treated us like adults, and expected us to have grown-up, almost co-equal conversations with the teacher. Since I was nowhere near *actually* being an adult, I didn't always handle that freedom well. But both classes turned out to be great preparation for college. As painful as it was, I imagine, for Frau and Ms. David.

Q Obviously you have strong opinions on the election, does this affect you reporting? Are you more inclined to go after a candidate you don't like?

In general, journalists are taught not to choose a side and try to use our stories to boost the candidates we like. Back when I started, the *Post's* top editor didn't even vote! He didn't want to make up his mind ever -- not even in the privacy of a voting booth. But that doesn't mean that you're required to force false equivalencies on the candidates, either. If one candidate in the race has obviously done something terrible on one issue, then you can cover that and not constantly look for ways to make his/her opponent seem to be an equal sinner.

For most of this election cycle, I didn't write about just Trump. In fact, since the start of 2015, I've done stories on Walker, Jindal, Cruz, Rubio, Gilmore, Lindsey Graham, Rick Perry, Mike Huckabee, Rick Santorum, Bernie, Hillary *and* Trump. It's only been since this March, when I started digging into the issue of Trump's donations -- and Trump's people started lying to me about it -- that I really focused on him.

Q Do you think that the whole media circus revolving around the presidential election is overhyped? Should we be more focused on local elections?

It was definitely over-hyped last year, when we expended so much energy on people who would never be president (Jeb is a good example). But it's definitely not over-hyped now. Whoever wins gets to control nuclear weapons! I think that's a job you want to vet people for, closely.

Q Does it make you nervous to be on bad terms with someone who may be president?

It definitely does. But, if I do my job right, whoever is president will probably not like me, eventually.