

Monmouth Memories

Monmouth Memories Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Wendy Rejan

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Wendy Rejan has moved over 25 times during her life, accomplishing more than most people do in a lifetime. She was born in London, England, but spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Wollongong, NSW, Australia. Her parents worked for the Navy in London; her father was active duty military and her mother, civil service. Wendy and her younger sister, Kelly, attended primary school, high school, and some university in Australia. When she was 18, she moved to Germany, attending the University of Maryland European Division and later moved to the U.S. at the age of 19. She finished college in Virginia and moved to New Jersey for work. In 2009, she joined the U.S. Foreign Service and spent the last 7 years overseas, recently returning in 2017. Over her many years of travel, she has lived in multiple countries including England, South Korea, Australia, the Bahamas, Germany, and Mexico. Wendy described these experiences as influencing her desire to live and work overseas, as well as instilling resilience and a sense of adventure.

When she moved to New Jersey in 2001 to work for the U.S. Army, she discovered Monmouth University through work opportunities. She was a member of the civil service at Fort Monmouth. The base offered different programs to support employees with professional development opportunities. Due to Monmouth University's close proximity to Fort Monmouth and some encouragement from her coworkers, Wendy enrolled in the Graduate history program. While enrolled in this program, she completed her thesis in European Art, focusing her research on the Interwar Period. Her thesis topic on the Surrealists was influenced by her study of art during her time in Germany. During her time at Monmouth University, she fondly recalled going

Monmouth Memories

on archaeological digs with Dr. Veit as archeology was a childhood passion for Wendy. While at Monmouth she juggled a full time job (she served as a technical writer, public affairs officer, and historian) while working on her graduate courses. She enjoyed the comradery with other graduate students, enjoyed friendly conversations on class breaks, and fondly remembers the campus coffee shop. Looking back, she wishes she kept in better touch with fellow students, but still maintains contact with several fellow Monmouth alum and faculty via social media. She credits her time at Monmouth with strengthening her critical thinking, reading, writing, and public speaking skills. Her fondest memories of her time there include Dr. Kenneth Stunkel's history classes. Since leaving Monmouth University, Wendy has been back to visit twice. In 2010, she participated in the U.S. Department of State's *Hometown Diplomat* Program. She spoke to students interested in foreign policy and pursuing a career in the Foreign Service. After getting married in 2014, she brought her husband to Monmouth to show him around the campus as they were passing through New Jersey. She said the campus still looked the same as she remembered it, a tranquil and peaceful academic oasis in Monmouth County.

Some highlights of Wendy's career include the publication of several history works about the U.S. Army at Fort Monmouth and her foreign policy work for the U.S. Department of State. Wendy left Fort Monmouth in 2009 and wanted the books she authored to serve as a lasting legacy for both the site, and for all those who worked there.

Wendy served her 2nd and 3rd Foreign Service tours in Tijuana, Mexico where she did non-immigrant visa work and finished her time there as Chief of American Citizen Services (ACS). Wendy described this work as "cradle to the grave" services that document U.S. citizen children born abroad, document U.S. citizen deaths abroad, and everything in between. Her section covered the states of Baja California Norte and Baja California Sur, an area inclusive of

Monmouth Memories

250,000 U.S. citizens. Wendy described ACS work as incredibly rewarding and meaningful and considered it an honor to assist U.S. citizens through what were often the most challenging periods of their lives. Her team of 28 handled sensitive child custody issues, missing people, and kidnappings. This position required Wendy and her team to strategically plan in order to address life and death issues affecting U.S. citizens. She really enjoyed mentoring entry level officers and working with an outstanding professional local staff. Foreign Service Officers typically learn the language of the country where they are serving and Wendy learned to speak, read, and write in Spanish for her position in Tijuana.

Prior to joining the State Department, Wendy served as a technical writer and editor, public affairs officer, and command historian for the U.S. Army. In 2009, she entered the Foreign Service and handled both political, economic, and public diplomacy issues on her first tour in the Bahamas, then served as a Vice Consul during her second tour, and as Consul, or Chief of American Services, during her third tour. Currently, she is a student at the Joint Forces Staff College of the National Defense University in Virginia. She is working on her Master's in Science in Joint Strategic Campaign Planning. She is one of the only civilians in her class, and describes this experience as very rewarding and very different from her first Master's program at Monmouth University. Her husband is an active duty Naval Officer and shares Wendy's passions for history and foreign travel. Wendy plans to continue to serve in interesting places, doing meaningful work, representing the best of the United States to our overseas allies and partners.