

## *Monmouth Memories*

Monmouth Memories Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Donna Mitchell

Interviewer/Transcriber: Jamie Griffin, Monmouth University Student

Donna Mitchell was born in Perth Amboy, New Jersey in 1947. Her family then moved to Elberon, New Jersey because it was an up and coming area for children. Mitchell is a proud product of Monmouth County. She spent her entire life here and has seen the area undergo a lot of change. The biggest change that she witnessed while growing up was the continuing development of housing projects for families. She saw a lot of families move from Elberon to West Long Branch because the houses were bigger.

While she was growing up Mitchell was extremely inspired by her teachers. She loved literature as well as colonial history. Her love for the subjects of English and Social Studies came from having such great teachers. The passion that she had for these two subjects would greatly influence her future decisions.

When it was time for Mitchell to decide on what college to go to, she never expected to end up at Monmouth. She believed that she would be going to Penn State, however this eventually became out of the question for her. Mitchell was living with her grandmother in Asbury Park at the time and her grandmother became sick. She knew that she would not be able to go away to school so Monmouth became the logical choice for her.

During her time at Monmouth, Mitchell was what was known as the well-rounded student. She was scholarly, social, and athletic. The scholarly component came from her studies, Mitchell was an education major. She majored in History and minored in English. The influence of her previous teachers helped her to decide on her major and minor. The social component came from pledging a sorority in her sophomore year. Her grandmother was not pleased with this

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decision but Mitchell felt that it was the best thing for her. The sorority that she joined was Delta Zeta which was a national sorority. Unfortunately Delta Zeta did not last past its sixth year at Monmouth. Mitchell eventually worked her way up to being the Vice President. The athletic component came from being in her sorority as well. The tennis team needed another set of doubles and her sorority sisters encouraged her to join. She played on the tennis team for two years. When Mitchell was not in class, playing tennis, or performing a duty for her sorority she was working to pay to tuition. She worked at her family's restaurant which was located on Main Street in Asbury Park.

Mitchell attended Monmouth during the Vietnam Era. She witnessed and participated in many protests on the Great Lawn. This was great experience for her. She would later be able to bring this real life experience into the classroom.

The surrounding area was much smaller at the time. There was a pharmacy but no grocery store. Students still hung out at Inkwell and on Brighton Avenue and the West End. The area was much smaller but it was growing. This was a good sign because it meant economic growth.

When Mitchell graduated in 1970 she had seven job offers! Due to her major in History and minor in English she was dual certified in grades 6-12. This is what made her so marketable. Asbury Park was the only district that told her that she would be able to teach both subjects. Asbury Park also had the highest pay salary at the time. Her first salary was for \$7,500 and she thought she was a millionaire.

After she was hired in 1970, Mitchell spent the next thirty years at Asbury Park High School. She spent twenty-seven years teaching. During these years she always taught both Social Studies and English. She never taught one without teaching the other. She was the Principal of

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the Summer School program for twenty-six years. She then worked her way up to a supervisor's position and eventually became the Vice Principal.

After thirty years in Asbury Park, Mitchell accepted a job in the Brick school district. She had already been living in Brick for the last twenty years. Dr. Bruce Normandia was the Superintendent of Brick at the time. He took a chance on her and she was greatly appreciative. She was hired as the Vice Principal and then became the Principal. She spent thirty-five years in public education before retiring.

Mitchell began volunteering during her free time after she was retired. But Dr. Bruce Normandia, who had hired her in Brick, had since become the Dean of the School of Education at Monmouth University. He called her and said that he had a class that he wanted her to teach. Mitchell was enjoying her retirement and declined his offer at first. However, six months later he called her again and said that he had a better class for her. Mitchell thought about it and decided that since he hired her in Brick she owed it to him to listen. When she learned that the class was Methods of Teaching Social Studies she thought she had died and gone to heaven. She has been teaching at Monmouth ever since.

Mitchell takes pride in teaching the truth about education in her classes. She emphasizes the importance of being compassionate and empathetic to all students. She uses technology in all of her classes as well. She has been able to combine these two aspects of her classes. She uses technology to send her students internet links that emphasize what it means to be a good citizen. Citizenship is one of the main points of her classes. She thinks that this is such an important quality that needs to be taught in schools. She hopes that others will follow in her footsteps and use technology to help teach kindness.

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There has been a lot of change both on campus and in the surrounding area since Mitchell was a student here. The campus is three times the size it was when she went here. The surrounding area has also gotten much larger as well.

Even though there is a lot of change in the appearance of Monmouth, Mitchell thinks that the biggest change lies in the academic focus. When she was a student here it was more of a party school. Now, there is a competitive and academic focus. She thinks that the mindset of the students has completely changed and Monmouth is now a school devoted to learning.

She has seen the biggest change within the School of Education. When Mitchell attended Monmouth there was no Special Education component. Their focus at the time was on the Gifted and Talented students. Mitchell states that this change is largely due to No Child Left Behind. Due to this legislation Monmouth had to offer more classes on diverse learners. And because of this, all of the education students will be able to meet the needs of all their future students.

Now when Mitchell is not teaching she still likes to be involved with Monmouth University activities. Luckily, students groups often reach out to her so she gets involved with them. Some of the activities that she has been involved with are Make a Difference Day, Susan Komen walks on campus, and tutoring sessions for some of the sororities. She also attends the Susan Young auction every year. This auction raises money for the School of Education.

Mitchell is also extremely honored to have been nominated for the Dr. Martin Luther King Unsung Hero Award several times. This award honors those who have quietly made a difference in the lives of their students'. She is still very touched over this honor.

Mitchell has also started a charitable literacy organization. She dedicated this organization to her mother and the idea was sparked by her students. This organization collects

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any educational materials and donates them to at risk students. They donate any type of educational material from pencils to word searches. Mitchell is also very proud of this work.

Her favorite memory from teaching at Monmouth is that her students really make it memorable for her. Her favorite class has been her last ED 362 (Methods of Teaching Social Studies) class. In this class she had twenty-five really great students. This was the last Methods of Teaching Social Studies class that Mitchell was supposed to teach. She is down to teaching one class, and is on sabbatical for the Spring semester of 2016. She is looking to retire (again!).