

Monmouth Memories

Monmouth Memories Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Ken Peal

Interviewer: Taylor Cavanaugh, Monmouth University Student

Ken Peal was born in West Long Branch, New Jersey and attended what was then known as Monmouth College from 1972 to 1976. He was raised in Tinton Falls, and attended Monmouth Regional High School. Peal lived a typical middle class life as a baby boomer who grew up in the turbulent sixties. His heroes consisted of his father, a career Navy officer, and other male heroes such as John Wayne, Steve McQueen and Clint Eastwood. As a child Peal joined various clubs such as the Boy Scouts of America, Explorer Scouts, and the Red Bank Rifle Club from the age of twelve to nineteen. As a teenager, Peal would skip class in high school to join his friends in Monmouth's college classes.

After applying to about five colleges, Peal chose Monmouth University for various reasons. The school was in-state; therefore he could retain his job running a store for the National Guard in Sea Girt, New Jersey. His first impression of the college was Wilson Hall, where he especially admired the glass windows and the beautiful architecture. Above all, though, was the theater department. He fell in love with the theater house and would go on to spend the majority of his time at Monmouth there. Peal's decision to become a speech and theater major was based off of his dream to get into film. His passion was in lighting and set design, which he explored through his involvement in every show during his four years at Monmouth. By sophomore year, Peal was designing each show due to his skill and drive for the task.

The productions were both educational and thought provoking. Peal had been involved in rock musicals, Shakespeare, and heavy dramas. He believes the work that went into the lighting of a show was very important and required creativity. There was design to it that entailed

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multiple uses of color, mood, and directional lighting. The work was complex in order to fit with each particular play.

Peal's work on set designs was both abstract and traditional. For example, in the show *Bus Stop*, Peal and his fellow students created a functional diner set. They used stools from a café, refrigerators, running water, a broken heater, glass windows, and a door he found from a building that was soon to be demolished. A more abstract design was created for the show *Adding Machine*. The students set the scene with pieces at odd angles and used objects for multiple functions. At the time, there was a low budget available; therefore forming a show took creativity. Peal recalls using mattresses that were being thrown away by the nearby Holiday Inn, which he covered in plaster and then painted to create hills for *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. The paint used was not store bought. Instead, Peal recalls making his own paint from three materials. Water or oil was used as a vehicle, pigment was needed for color, and then these were mixed with glue. Smoke scenes were also prevalent within Monmouth's shows and required a flash box where an electric current was added to smoke powder to give off the illusion of fog or smoke. After experimenting with the quantity of smoke powder he could use, Peal found himself in a bit of trouble when the fire department was called due to a large cloud of smoke coming from outside the theater.

He enjoyed drama class, where each student would direct their own one-act plays. Other classes taken by Peal included directing, acting, history of theater, and production design. Two inspirational professors to Peal were Robert "Bob" Kauffman and Lauren "Woody" Woods. Professor Kaufman specialized in technical theater, which was specific to Peal's interests and skill. A turning point for him as a student was during his sophomore year when Professor Kauffman was let go due to the budget. Professor Woods, for whom Monmouth's theater has

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been named, had been a favorite professor of many. Peal remembers how his professor would make every student feel important, and was someone students could talk to, hangout with, and also be professional with. Professor Woods made sure students always heard the truth which according to Peal was very important for a teacher to do.

As a commuter, Peal still spent a lot of time on campus. He would continue work for the shows from morning to late at night. When he was not working in the theater, Peal was serving as chief announcer for the Monmouth radio station. Originally the broadcasts were done through cables going into buildings around the school. In May, 1974 the radio switched to FM. From then on the students' broadcasts were heard all over Monmouth County and parts of Ocean County. Peal worked on the radio with about twenty to twenty-five people. The following year the school hosted a "stereothon" in order to raise money for the broadcast to turn into stereo sound. The majority of music that was being played was rock and roll, soul, and jazz.

Several attractions that stuck out to Peal as a Monmouth student were the beach, West End, Brighton Bar, Ron's West End Pub, then known as Patty Murray's Inn, the Windmill, and Long Branch Pier. Included were rides, arcades, and a haunted house which included several Monmouth students as the monsters.

Throughout school at Monmouth, Peal was given the opportunity to work as a student employee in the theater. The position helped him out monetarily and made him feel proud to have earned the position and to have been more than just a student.

During the Vietnam War, Peal recalls several student protests. He felt the students and the school were very political at that time. Peal joined his schoolmates at gathering points around the school including the college center, in front of Wilson Hall, and outside the dorms. He remembers the semester after the draft had ended, there was a noticeable decrease in the number

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of male students attending Monmouth. Those who had went to college to escape going to war had quickly left once given the opportunity. The war was personal to Peal, who lost seven friends in Vietnam, one whom is still missing in action. He remembers there being students, teachers, and family members that were both for and against the war during a time when the spread of communism had been felt as a threat to several countries.

On campus during the seventies there were several other protests as well. The Women's Movement was particularly important to Peal who had admired Gloria Steinem and grown up with very independent and educated women. The Civil Rights Movement was still prevalent as well, which originally puzzled Peal due to his experience growing up and being friends with people of diverse religions and ethnicities. Social causes had made their way to colleges around the country and were especially prevalent at Monmouth College.

Peal also participated in the Broadcasting and Drama fraternity. In order to get in, students had to earn their position through debating, acting, or doing technical theater. He remembers himself and other students feeling special for being invited into a fraternity which consisted of a brotherly connection. Peal remembers the unfortunate hazing event which claimed the life of a Monmouth student. He said the incident rocked the campus and was horribly sad. He believes times like those were a learning process.

Like many students Peal had rented a place with friends in Belmar while attending Monmouth. It was not uncommon for students to stay in dorms for their first to second year at college, then they would move into houses or apartments nearby the school. Through Elberon and Ocean Township there were huge houses that had enough bedrooms for ten to eighteen students.

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Peal remembers the dining services as not being especially popular. Many did not enjoy the food served at the cafeteria and there was basic food in the college center. The popular place for students to go was the on-campus bar, which served beer and wine.

There are similarities between the campus in the seventies and the campus in 2015. The offices in the college or student center are generally the same. Peal's old broadcasting office is still in its place. The theater building has gone under renovations, but the core remains how it did when Peal was designing sets and working on shows. He continues to visit Monmouth and goes to the shows including *Our Town*, which he believed was an excellent production and consisted of fantastic acting.

Of course over time there have been several changes to Monmouth, including its status as a university and implementations of new departments. Peal says the students would have killed to have the television and radio department that the school has today. He says he would have died to go to London or one of the other programs offered by the study abroad department. During his time as a student at Monmouth there was one two week trip to London in the summer, but he did not have the opportunity to participate.

Overall, Peal felt that Monmouth was a great place to be and continues to feel that way today. He says part of his heart is at Monmouth and even though forty years have gone by, he feels as though his time as a student was only yesterday. His degree in speech and theater prepared him for his twelve years of working as a professional photographer. He later moved on to sales and feels as though much of what he learned and gained in confidence was due to his experience at Monmouth College.