

# Journeys still lead back

by John R. Nay

Looking back, it's easy to wonder about choices, and how one's life might have been different, but I must say that going to Andrews worked out well for me. I have been both blessed and lucky—I believe in both—and coming to Andrews made a huge difference in my life. As a senior at Battle Creek Academy it was exciting to consider colleges ranging from Michigan State and Hope College to Tulane and MIT, but I did not plan to go to Andrews. When an Andrews recruiter said I could apply for free, however, I half-heartedly did so, and when Andrews offered me a scholarship for more than half of the first year's total costs, I first hesitated among the options, and then Andrews became my fallback choice.

In September 1971, I moved into Meier Hall. After a rather rocky start, which thanks to Dean Ashlock didn't end my Andrews "career" before it really started, I got on a more even

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keel. Like many students, I wound my way through several majors before finding the right major for me—history, in my case. Several professors made particular impressions on me: McAdams, Land and Herdman in history; Ogden in English and honors; Augsburger and Greig in religion; and Wilkins and Mutch in chemistry. I still remember a speech I gave in Communication urging the preservation of the Amazon rain forest—a cause I now advocate as U.S. Ambassador to Suriname, where I have promoted environmental awareness. Serving in the student senate for four years gave me a start on learning persuasion and negotiation skills, as well as learning the equally valuable lesson that persuasion doesn't always work. Sometimes discussions simply cannot resolve fundamental disagreements. Learning writing skills in the history and English programs also has been invaluable, as the ability to organize one's thoughts into writing is essential for most careers, and certainly for mine.

When people ask me how I became interested in the Foreign Service, however, the first thing I cite was the year I spent in Japan as a student missionary teaching English and Bible. I am grateful that friends urged me to consider it, and to Andrews for the chance to do so. During my year in Japan I also traveled as much as possible, from Okinawa to Hiroshima to climbing Mt. Fuji and visiting Korea. Upon my return from Japan, I immediately joined

Pearson's geography tour, driving through Mexico and Central America to the Panama Canal and back. In 2009, as I began my assignment to Suriname, I met with several General Conference officials, courtesy of another friend and former Andrews professor, Eugene Hsu. My pitch to them was that the student missionary program has a remarkable influence for good on those who take part, and the program should be strengthened and broadened.

When I returned to Andrews for my senior year, I felt much more confident about navigating the world, so when I spotted a Foreign Service brochure in the Placement Office, the Foreign Service sounded like a good option. One early December week found me taking first the LSAT, then the GRE, and then three of us "Andrewsians" went to South Bend on Sunday for the Foreign Service test. I graduated that spring of 1976, and was invited to join the Foreign Service in early 1977.

Speaking of good choices, as a junior I also met an Andrews nursing student named **Judy Ashdon** (BS '76) at a Sunday evening roller skating jaunt. She then served as an



John Nay (right) and Russ Mittermaier, head of Conservation International, were part of a small group who made the first recorded climb of Van der Wijk Top in August 2010. Van der Wijk Top is an inselberg that looms above the rain forest in Suriname.

SM in Bangladesh, working in an up-country hospital accessible only by river launch where, she has since pointed out, she had it much tougher than I did in Japan! In any case, we "teamed up" in early 1978—a great choice on my part and lucky for me that she has conceded to travel so far and so long with me. Thirty-three years later we have made 11 international moves to and from the United States, Taiwan, Singapore, Canada, South Africa, India, and now Suriname. In every case, we found a ready-made church family that was a great help. Our three children, born in three different countries and who each attended school in four countries, all came back to Andrews, so counting grad school, we actually have nine Andrews degrees among the five of us and many good memories of the campus. Clearly, AU is having a trans-generational impact on our family.

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## What's your story?

We'd love to hear your reflections on the time you spent at Andrews University. If you're interested in contributing, please e-mail [focus@andrews.edu](mailto:focus@andrews.edu).