

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Fulbright Stories Project

LYNNE OGREN

*Interviewed by: Fran Leskovar
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INTERVIEW

Q: All right, today is October 26, 2025, and this is a Fulbright interview. Can you state your name and just spell it out for me?

OGREN: Lynne Ogren, L-Y-N-N-E O-G-R-E-N.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about it yourself? Where did you grow up?

OGREN: I grew up in Albany, New York, and went to college at SUNY Plattsburgh. I completed my master's degree at University of Albany, and taught in Colonie, a suburb of Albany, for most of my teaching career in both English and Spanish.

Q: All right, how did you get interested in Fulbright? Was there an international affairs interest, study abroad program?

OGREN: I was an English teacher originally, and I decided to build on my Spanish minor toward a Master's in Spanish. I was looking for a way to improve my Spanish proficiency and saw a flyer on a bulletin board for the Fulbright Program. I participated in the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, where you exchanged jobs with a teacher from another country for one year.

My first Fulbright exchange was to Cartagena, Colombia, and then I completed the Fulbright Hays Summer Seminar in Mexico. From that group, they encouraged some of us to apply for the COMEXUS exchange to teach English in Mexico. I also hosted two Fulbright teachers from Uruguay at my school for a month.

When I returned to Albany after my Fulbright experiences, I was excited to share with everybody, not just my students, about how fabulous the experience was and what I

learned. Remember, in the late 80's and 90's, we didn't have the internet and a lot of the social media connections we have now. I was looking for a way to continue this connection to Fulbright, and the Eastern NY chapter was in the newspaper, hosting a talk for teachers or for people who had done Fulbright exchanges. I contacted them, and they made me a panelist. I joined the alumni group and ended up being the president of the chapter for three years. When I moved to Florida, I wanted to connect with Fulbrighters in South Florida. And somehow, I ended up being the president here too.

I think my richest connections to Fulbright have been through the Alumni Association.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about that?

OGREN: When I was president in Albany, we organized different events for the visiting Fulbrighters as well as the chapter members. There was a certain key group of about half a dozen Fulbrighters in the Capital Region that I became very close with. They were the ones that always showed up, and they've become like family to me. I don't have my own children, but they are like my children in many ways.

I'm especially close with students from Mali, from West Africa who studied at Ualbany from 2012-2020. Aissata named her daughter, Lynne, after me; and Patrick from Cameroon, gave his daughter my name for her middle name. It's so touching to me because, not having my own kids, it's an honor. I visited Mali in 2023, and they and their loved ones received us like family.

I have witnessed Fulbrighters returning to their countries as academic leaders, which reinforces the impact Fulbright has around the world. Two Ukrainian Fulbrighters have navigated the war there in different ways, but each contributes to their country's efforts toward peace and safety. One is a correspondent there and another fled to protect her child who was in danger of being kidnapped and sent to Russia. She has led peaceful protests and fund raising in Canada and Europe as well as providing support to refugees from many countries around the world.

Q: Wow.

Our senior alumni share their wisdom through stories of their Fulbright experiences as well. Being part of the Fulbright Alumni Association engages you as a lifelong learner. Through social media, we are all able to stay connected. I see the accomplishments, both personal and professional, of my Fulbright friends in Colombia and Mexico, as well as those students who studied with us in the US.

Q: So it's all about a relationship.

OGREN: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Can you talk a little bit more about what Fulbright means to you? I think you address it multiple times, but I'm curious, how would you summarize it, what is sort of the meaning? Why do you care about it?

OGREN: When you get to know people on a one-to-one level internationally, you see the commonalities that we share. We love our families; we go to work every day, and we want to make the world a better place. Also, Fulbright provides a place where you can constantly learn. That stimulation of connecting with the innovation and creativity that blossoms from Fulbrighters really does promote peace and mutual understanding through education. Fulbright experiences enrich our lives and help us to learn about how others live around the world.

Q: That's like a two way street, you go there, you help there, but you also learn about a world and a better society here too.

OGREN: Yes, which is why Fulbright funding is so important.

Q: What's the value of the Fulbright program to U.S. diplomacy? I think you've addressed it, but I'm curious, why do you think the Fulbright program should be continued to be funded, and why do you think that people that are sitting at the State Department and the Congress should value the program? What is the contribution of the Fulbright program to American diplomacy or national security?

OGREN: The Fulbright Program personalizes international relationships. When I was listening to some of the business leaders at the conference, the one thing that they were talking about was the importance of interpersonal relationships. No matter what we do to improve foreign policy with AI, technology and social media, nothing is better than that interpersonal interconnection and understanding of other cultures. I think that that level of diplomacy is one that is most effective and valuable.

Q: What is your advice for the next generation that are considering applying for Fulbright? I bet you probably have plenty.

OGREN: Please stay optimistic about the future of our country. We need you all! Share your passions and ideas and remain open to always learning and sharing that knowledge in whatever way fits your area of expertise. Stay connected to your heart and your humanity.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

OGREN: No, I think I talked enough. 😊

End of interview