

# The Diplomat

*Former British ambassador brings a world of experience to her first year in law school.*

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To say **Deborah Barnes Jones, JD candidate '18**, has done some traveling would be an understatement. Originally from Kent, England, Barnes Jones joined the British Diplomatic Service just a year out of university, resolved to make the world a better place. From 1983 to 2010, she crisscrossed the globe, deftly sliding into other cultures for three or four fascinating years at a time.

“One of the reasons I joined the Diplomatic Service was to *live* in other places, not just visit them,” said Barnes Jones, who speaks six languages to some degree.

“People sometimes ask me, ‘Which of your postings did you like best?’ And I can never answer that question because every one I was in at the time, I liked best. There was always something intriguing and marvelous about each one.”

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The world seemed to unfold before her, with assignments in the Soviet Union, Israel, Uruguay, the Republic of Georgia, and the Caribbean island of Montserrat. Even her courtship was thoroughly international. She met her American husband in Moscow and was pregnant with twins in Tel Aviv.

It's only now, as a first-year student at Washburn Law, that Barnes Jones realizes the law “has been a thread all the way through” her diplomatic career. Nowhere was that more evident than in her post as the first female British ambassador to Georgia, from 2001 to 2004.

“The rule of law there was weak. And NATO countries were trying to strengthen that,” she said.

“I think as a diplomat and a lawyer, what you're trying to do is to make sure that there's a level playing field. And the rule of

law, if it's in the background, you don't really notice it a lot of the time. It's there. When things need enforcing, it happens. When it's *not* there, you really notice it.”

Barnes Jones set out to lend structure to these “lovable people,” touting the value of ethical courts, trustworthy police, and reliable university degrees. All while dealing with the unexpected — worries about Russia cutting the gas and electricity, and the four-month kidnapping of a British businessman. Being a diplomat, you just “never know what you're going to be called on to do.”

That theme continued to her 2004 to 2007 posting as governor of Montserrat.

The first female governor of a British Overseas Territory, Barnes Jones was charged with keeping citizens safe from the island's volcano. Already, devastating eruptions in the '90s had forced 8,000 people — two-thirds of the population — to flee Montserrat. But with the volcano still active, Barnes Jones faced the tense task of relocating certain homeowners. For those affected, it was harrowing to leave their homes behind.

“The queen appoints you, and you're parachuted in. You're, in theory, the head of this little state, even though you're a foreigner. So it's not always easy,” she said.

“It was a lot of work and very uncomfortable to do it because you've got to go and talk to these angry people. But once they see that you're an ordinary person, too, some of that anger goes away. You go there, you go to somebody's house, put your hand out. So you just take it from there, a step at a time.”

Barnes Jones took countless steps like that over her 30 years in diplomacy, earning a well-worn passport and a lifetime of stories. Until finally in 2013, she unpacked her suitcases for good, settling in Topeka with her husband. With zero interest in retiring, she chose her *own* next assignment: three years at Washburn Law. An exotic post indeed.

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One person who's made her feel particularly at home is Professor Rory Bahadur. Hailing from Trinidad, Bahadur actually has family in Montserrat — business owners who were friends to Barnes Jones during her stay. If that weren't coincidental enough, he's also been heavily involved in Washburn Law's ongoing work with Free University of Tbilisi in Georgia.

"We have a project where we do some co-research, and have the students research Georgian constitutional law issues from a U.S. perspective," he said. "And when her name was mentioned, the Georgian professors were just blown away. We're just really lucky to have someone with that wealth of experience here at the school."

Barnes Jones is in Kansas for the long haul now, relieved to be putting down roots at last. As for her journey through law school, she considers it an investment in the next 20 years of her life. A way to cultivate one more precious corner of the world.

"Even though I've been involved in the big stage and the treaties, I still feel very strongly it's the small things that make the difference. So do what you can within your ambit; that's my thing. Wherever you are, you can make a difference, on whatever scale."