

# Snowden's life surrounded by spycraft (Update)

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This Sunday, June 9, 2013 photo provided by The Guardian newspaper in London shows Edward Snowden, who worked as a contract employee at the U.S. National Security Agency, in Hong Kong. Posts to online blogs and forums, public records and interviews with Snowden's neighbors, teachers and acquaintances reveal someone who prized the American ideal of personal freedom but became disenchanted with the way government secretly operates in the name of national security. (AP Photo/The Guardian)

In the suburbs edged by woods midway between Baltimore and Washington, residents long joked that the government spy shop next

door was so ultra-secretive its initials stood for "No Such Agency." But when Edward Snowden grew up here, the National Security Agency's looming presence was both a very visible and accepted part of everyday life.

When Snowden —the 29-year-old intelligence contractor whose leak of top-secret documents has exposed sweeping government surveillance programs—went to Arundel High School, the agency regularly sent employees from its nearby black-glass headquarters to tutor struggling math students.

When Snowden went on to Anne Arundel Community College in the spring of 1999 after leaving high school halfway through his sophomore year, he arrived on a campus developing a specialty in cybersecurity training for future employees of the NSA and Department of Defense, though, according to the records, he never took such a class.

And when Snowden joined friends in his late teens to edit a website built around a shared interest in Japanese animation, they chartered the venture from an apartment in military housing at Fort George G. Meade, the installation that houses the NSA center dubbed the Puzzle Palace and calls itself the "nation's pre-eminent center for information, intelligence and cyber."

In this setting, it's easy to see how the young Snowden was exposed to the notion of spycraft as a career, first with the Central Intelligence Agency and later as a systems analyst for two companies under contract to the NSA. But details of his early life—in the agency's shadows and with both parents working for other branches of the federal government—only magnify the contradictions inherent in Snowden's decision to become a leaker.

What, after all, did he think he was getting into when he signed up to

work for the nation's espionage agencies? And what specifically triggered a "crisis of conscience"—as described by a friend who knew him when he worked for the CIA—so profound that it convinced him to betray the secrets he was sworn to keep?

The latter is a question that even Snowden, in interviews since his disclosures, has answered piecemeal, describing his decisions as the same ones any thoughtful person would make if put in his position.

"I'm no different from anybody else," he said in a video interview with The Guardian newspaper, seated with his back to a mirror in what appears to be a Hong Kong hotel room. "I don't have special skills. I'm just another guy who sits there day to day in the office, watches what's happening and goes: This is not our place to decide. The public needs to decide whether these programs and policies are right or wrong."

Posts to online blogs and forums, public records and interviews with Snowden's neighbors, teachers and acquaintances reveal someone who prized the American ideal of personal freedom but became disenchanted with the way the government secretly operates in the name of national security.

Those who knew him describe him as introspective, but seem puzzled by where the mindset led him.



This Sept. 19, 2007 file photo shows the National Security Agency building at Fort Meade, Md. When Edward Snowden joined friends in his late teens to edit a website built around a shared interest in Japanese animation, they chartered the venture from an apartment in military housing at Fort George G. Meade, the 8-square-mile installation that houses the NSA center dubbed the Puzzle Palace and calls itself the "nation's pre-eminent center for information, intelligence and cyber." (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak, File)

"He's very nice, shy, reserved," Jonathan Mills, the father of Snowden's longtime girlfriend, told The Associated Press outside his home in Laurel, Maryland. "He's always had strong convictions of right and wrong, and it kind of makes sense, but still, a shock."

Snowden, who was born in 1983, spent his early years in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, before his family moved to the Maryland suburbs when he was 9. His father, Lonnie, was a warrant officer for the U.S. Coast Guard, since retired. His mother, Elizabeth, who goes by Wendy, went to

work for the U.S. District Court in Maryland in 1998 and is now its chief deputy of administration and information technology. An older sister, Jessica, is a lawyer working as a research associate for the Federal Judicial Center in Washington, according to LinkedIn.

In the suburbs south of Baltimore, the younger Snowden attended public elementary and middle schools in Crofton. In the fall of 1997, he enrolled at Arundel High School, a four-year school with about 2,000 students.

At Arundel, Snowden stayed only through the first half of his sophomore year, a school district spokesman said. Former teachers and classmates interviewed in the days since he surfaced as the leaker said they had no recollection of him.

It's not clear why he left. Four years later, in a post Snowden wrote for the anime website jokingly explaining his irritation with cartoon convention volunteers, he wrote: "I really am a nice guy, though. You see, I act arrogant and cruel because I was not hugged enough as a child, and because the public education system turned its wretched, spiked back on me."

Years later, he "made a big deal of it (failing to finish high school), just in our everyday conversations," Mavanee Anderson, who met Snowden when they worked together in Switzerland in 2007, said in an interview with MSNBC. "I think he was slightly embarrassed by it."

With high school behind him, Snowden registered at the community college, taking for-credit classes from 1999 to 2001 and again from 2003 to 2005, as well as some non-credit classes in between, spokeswoman Laurie Farrell said. Snowden told friends and reporters that he later earned a high school general equivalency diploma.

In 2001, Snowden's parents divorced and his father moved to Pennsylvania. The next year his mother bought a gray clapboard-sided condominium in nearby Ellicott City, Maryland., and her son, then 19, moved in by himself. His mother dropped by with groceries from time to time and a girlfriend visited on weekends, said Joyce Kinsey, a neighbor who lives across the street from the unit, where Snowden's mother now resides.

During this same time, it appears Snowden became a prolific participant in a technology blog, Arstechnica, under the pseudonym TheTrueHOOHA, posting more than 750 comments between late 2001 and mid-2012. In 2002, he posted a query asking for advice about getting an information technology job in Japan and mentioned he was studying Japanese.

He also touched on questions of security and privacy.

In one October 2003 thread, he asked so many questions about how to hide the identity of his computer server that another discussion participant asked why he was being so paranoid.

Snowden's answer: "Patriot Act. If they misinterpret that actions I perform, I could be a cyb4r terrorist and that would be very ... bad."

And in May 2004, he enlisted in the Army.

Snowden reported to Fort Benning, Georgia, in June 2004, where "he attempted to qualify to become a special forces soldier but did not complete the requisite training and was administratively discharged," said an Army spokesman, Col. David H. Patterson Jr.

Snowden left the Army at the end of that September. He mentioned on the tech forum that he was discharged after breaking both legs in

accident, a detail the Army could not confirm.



A real estate sign stands in front of a home in Waipahu, Hawaii on Sunday, June 9, 2013 where Edward Snowden, source of disclosures about the U.S. government's secret surveillance programs, lived with his girlfriend. A Hawaii real estate agent says Snowden and his girlfriend moved out of the home near Honolulu on May 1, 2013 leaving nothing behind. (AP Photo/Anita Hofschneider)

He returned home, enrolling again in classes at the community college and working through most of 2005 as a security guard at the University of Maryland's Center for Advanced Study of Language. The center, affiliated with the Department of Defense, says on its LinkedIn page that it was founded after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to help the intelligence community improve language preparedness. But a university spokesman said the center's work is not classified.

When he went public with his decision to leak the NSA's documents, Snowden told interviewers that he studied at Maryland, Johns Hopkins University and the University of Liverpool.

A Maryland spokesman, Crystal Brown, said Snowden did not take classes at the school's flagship campus. However, Robert Ludwig, a spokesman for the University of Maryland University College, which offers classes online and at military bases, said Snowden registered for one term in its Asia Division in the summer of 2009, but did not earn a certificate or degree.

Johns Hopkins said it had no record of Snowden taking classes. The only possibility, the school said, is that he might have enrolled at a private, for-profit entity that offered career training under the name Computer Career Institute at Johns Hopkins University. The university said it ended its relationship with the training school in 2009 and it had since shut down, making it impossible to check any records.

Liverpool said in a statement that Snowden had registered for an online masters' program in computer security in 2011, but never completed it.

Snowden has said that he was hired by the CIA to work on information technology security and in 2007 was assigned by the agency to work in Geneva, Switzerland. Anderson, Snowden's friend at the time, made the same assertion.

The Swiss foreign ministry confirmed that Snowden lived and worked in Geneva, where it says he was accredited to the United Nations as a U.S. Mission employee from March 2007 to February 2009.

Snowden appears to have been well-known among U.S. staff in Geneva, though none of those contacted by the AP would comment about him. But Anderson, who met Snowden when she spent part of 2007 as a legal



intern at the mission, said many others can't speak out in his defense, for fear of losing their jobs. In both the cable TV interview and an op-ed piece for Tennessee's Chattanooga Times Free Press, she recalled him fondly as very intelligent—and increasingly troubled about his work.

"During that time period he did quit the CIA, so I knew that he was having a crisis of conscience of sorts," Anderson said in the TV interview. "But I am still surprised, even shocked. He never gave me any indication that he would reveal anything that was top secret." She could not be reached for additional comment.

Snowden told The Guardian he was discouraged by an incident in which he claimed CIA agents tried to recruit a Swiss banker to provide secret information. They purposely got him drunk, Snowden said, and when he was arrested for driving while intoxicated, an agent offered to help as a way to forge a bond.

"Much of what I saw in Geneva really disillusioned me about how my government functions and what its impact is in the world," he said.

Snowden has said he left the embassy to take a job with private contractors for the NSA—first with Dell, the computer company.

That work appears to have taken him to multiple locations. Public records show Snowden had a mailing address with the U.S. military in Asia, and he has said that he worked at an NSA installation on a U.S. military base in Japan.

After Japan, Snowden's work took him back to Maryland. In March 2012, he listed an address in Columbia when he made a donation to the libertarian-leaning U.S. Rep. Ron Paul's campaign for president. But when he made another contribution to the campaign two months later, Snowden listed an address in Hawaii. Lindsay Mills, his girlfriend,

joined him in Hawaii in June of last year, and they settled into a rented blue house on a corner lot fringed with palmettos.

Neighbors said the couple were pleasant, quiet and kept to themselves.

One neighbor, Carolyn Tijing, said the couple always left the blinds closed and stacked the garage from floor to ceiling with moving boxes, so high they blocked any view inside.

Mills' online posts hint at a happy home life in Hawaii together: pictures of sunsets, time on the beach and his-and-hers cups of Japanese shaved ice.

But by January of this year, Snowden secretly was edging forward with a plan to leak NSA documents, contacting documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras with an anonymous offer to share information on U.S. intelligence. The following month he contacted Glenn Greenwald, an American living in Brazil who writes on surveillance issues for The Guardian, as well as Barton Gellman, a reporter for The Washington Post.

In March, Snowden switched employers, moving to contractor Booz Allen Hamilton in Hawaii. The company confirmed he was an employee for less than three months, at an annual salary of \$122,000.

Mills headed back to the East Coast for a visit and when she returned to Hawaii, she wrote, Snowden unexpectedly told her he, too, needed to get away; he told his employer that he needed some time off for medical treatment. On May 20, Snowden flew to Hong Kong.

Three weeks later, as intelligence officials raced to control the damage from the NSA leaks, Snowden revealed himself as the person responsible.

"When you're in positions of privileged access," Snowden told The Guardian, "you see things that may be disturbing ... until eventually you realize that these things need to be determined by the public—not by somebody who is simply hired by the government."

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