

5 REASONS WHY I BECAME AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

June 29, 2012 Polly Peterson Day of Archaeology 2012, Digital Archaeology, Education #dayofarch, archaeologist, Arizona, armchair archaeologist, Belize, California, Caribbean, Chicago, CRM, CRM archaeologist, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, malaria, Massachusetts, Mexico, Open Education, Polly, Public Outreach, sleeping soldiers off-guard, web articles

1. Travel

Ever since my parents took me on a trip to the Caribbean as a child, I plotted to find a way to spend every winter in the tropics. I wanted to get paid to travel. I wanted to escape the Chicago snow.

My chance came in grad school when I had the opportunity to teach [field schools in Belize](#). I was in grad school for a long time so I was able to look forward to flying south with the birds each time spring semester rolled around.

Since completing my MA and PhD in Archaeology I've continued living a nomadic life by working on projects in Mexico, California, and Arizona. What I didn't expect was that I'd eventually tire of travel after moving from motel to motel off remote desert highways as a CRM archaeologist. So now I'm what they call an armchair archaeologist, and today I'm exploring world archaeology via posts to this blog.

2. Adventure

Tropical archaeology isn't for the faint-hearted. Oh, no. I knew an archaeologist who was struck down by lightning and another friend who was mauled to death by a jaguar. Never underestimate the Maya gods!

I once accidentally walked right into a military jungle camp and caught the sleeping soldiers off-guard in their hammocks. I overcame my greatest fears when I swam through a cave so

dark I couldn't see my hand an inch away from my nose. I've surveyed a bombing range littered with undetonated WWII ordinance under a blistering desert sun. I used to need a canoe and rappelling gear to get to work.

These days my adventures are a bit tamer with less chance of malaria or blowing up. But I wouldn't trade those memories for anything.



The Good Ol' Days: Rappelling to Work in a Maya Cave

3. Curiosity

I doubt I'll ever quench my insatiable thirst for knowledge. Whether I'm puzzling over a database in the lab or trying to reconstruct a prehistoric crime scene in the field, the process of figuring out what happened in the past drives me.

When I'm done posting this blog, I'm going to go excavate my desk to figure out where my favorite moleskine notebook has disappeared to. It contains all those burning questions that keep me up at night.

4. Fame and Riches

That couldn't be further from the truth! Archaeology isn't as glamorous as it appears in the movies. Most of us do it for the love of the past, not for the glory. I've published over 17 years of scholarly journal articles, book chapters, and web articles and *haven't received a single dime* for them. If you're in it for the money, or to be revered by society for analyzing dead people's garbage, then this probably isn't the field for you. If you're seeking to find buried treasure and live large off the illicit antiquities market, then may a **giant boulder steamroll you Indiana Jones-style**.

5. Outreach

That's exactly what I'm doing today, for my bread and butter, and as I type these words. In creating digital curriculum for a **virtual university** and contributing to **educational resources** on the interwebs, I'm sharing my passion for old, dead things with you, the interested public.

I'll never forget the moment I first found a pottery jar in a hard-to-reach niche of a remote cave. It probably hadn't been seen in a thousand years. That feeling—the thrill of discovery—motivates me to educate the public about why it's important to protect artifacts and archaeological sites for future generations to treasure and explore.



Dr. Polly, EduPunk and Cyber Archaeologist