



HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

Giving Back to Education

HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!

Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments and encourage you to join the Duster Alumni Association (*see form below*).

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman
HPS Foundation Committee*

Kit Nelson - Class of 1990

1990 Grad Kit Nelson discovers mummy in successful archeology career

By Kristine Jacobson

Childhood experiences camping in New Mexico left a big impact on 1990 Holdrege High School graduate Kit Nelson. Her parents, Keith and Glenda Nelson, took her and her brother, Mack, to visit archeological sites during their summer camping adventures.

Although she didn't discover her passion for archeology until college, these childhood adventures did lay the groundwork for her amazing career. Kit eventually went on to earn a doctorate in anthropology, to participate and lead archeological digs in the Sahara Desert in Egypt and on the coasts of Peru, to unearth an ancient mummy, and now to teach and lead curriculum development at the prestigious New Orleans Center for Creative Arts high school.

"It's a weird trajectory," Kit said of growing up in Holdrege and now enjoying a career in anthropology. Although she

enjoyed her family's camping excursions, she said, "I wasn't one of those kids that said when I grow up I want to dig things up. I was never that kid." In fact, it's kind of a family joke that as a mortician, her dad was in the business of 'burying.' Now, Kit is in the business of 'digging things up.'

She always enjoyed science and math and thought that after graduating from HHS that she would study biology. She earned an undergraduate degree in 1994 from St. Olaf College in Minnesota, where she studied biology, history, and anthropology. She then decided to pursue a master's degree and that's when her parent's "go explore" mentality settled in with Kit. She went on to earn a master's degree in anthropology from Northern Illinois University in 1997 and then a doctorate in anthropology from Southern Methodist University in 2001.

After earning her master's degree, she fully enjoyed the meaning of "go explore." During the next several years she worked on archeological projects in Egypt, Peru, and New Mexico. Her assignment in Egypt was in the Sahara Desert. It was an international project where she worked with archeologists from 14 countries. Her job was to analyze pottery and participate and oversee sections of excavations. "It was intense," she said. "We were out there for eight weeks at a time. No showers. No flushable toilets. But as crazy as that is, I do love those types of experiences."

She will never forget the beauty and peacefulness of the Sahara Dessert. "There were no animals or plants," she said. "It was the most quiet I had ever heard (if you can describe quiet as hearing). It was just these beautiful scenes, like the sun coming up over the dunes -- experiences that some people can't even fathom, and I got to have those."

Kit enjoyed working with some of the most well-known archeologists in the world and hearing their stories. The most exciting discovery for Kit during the four-year project in Egypt was analyzing the second oldest pottery in the world and identifying contact between the early Egyptian state and hunters and gatherers out in the middle of nowhere. She also was asked to help on archeological projects in Peru, which led to her most important discovery, a Chancay mummy that dated back to around 1312. You can see a video of Nelson's mummy on the National Geographic web site: <http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/news/peru-mummy-vin?source=relatedvideo>



Kit Nelson

According to National Geographic, the finding will help anthropologists learn more about the Chancay, a significant community in Peru's pre-Columbian history of which little is known. This discovery of the "mummy bundle" occurred on the last day of the project in 2008. Kit had been leading an excavation and had sent most of her staff home when she noticed some textiles or "mummy wrap" sticking up from the ground.

She had to return to the United States and request more grant money to unearth the mummy. She receiving funding from National Geographic and enlisted a team of forensic scientists, doctors, and archeologists to open the mummy bundle. Each layer of textile that was removed had to be documented as metal, food, and other "offerings" were encased in each layer. It took nine weeks to open the mummy.



Kit also continued to work in New Mexico archeological sites, where her digging adventures all started as a child. She currently serves as the director for the Archeological Field School at Southern Methodist University in Taos, working at this project mainly during the summer. "This is a smaller project," Kit said of New Mexico. "I'm not a director in an office. I get to

excavate and help teach and work with incredible young scholars. It's the perfect kind of change because I actually get to do what I went to school in archeology to do."

Her current full-time job as the chair of integrated studies at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts high school keeps her busy during the school year. The high school is a prestigious conservatory where kids audition to attend in areas such as art, music, theater, and culinary arts. Harry Connick Jr. and Wynton Marsalis are some of the famous alumni of the 40-year-old school. However, in the past four years, the school has added academics outside of the arts to its curriculum. That's where Kit comes in. She oversees all the teachers in the math and sciences department, develops curriculum, and even teaches engineering.

"The archeology is so exciting, but probably my favorite part is teaching," Kit said of her career so far. "If you would have asked me 15 years ago that I would be teaching high school, I would have said you were nuts!"

Kit's mother was the dance teacher in Holdrege as Kit was growing up, and she participated in dance from kindergarten through her sophomore year in college. She also was involved in band, playing percussion instruments, at HHS. "I love that part of it," she said of the arts school. "I teach science, but I kind of understand what the kids are doing with the arts." She enjoys attending the students' performances.

Kit also teaches a night class at Tulane University in New Orleans. She has been teaching classes there since 2002 and was honored to receive the Newcomb Favorite Faculty Award in 2008.

Thinking back to her own high school days, Kit said she enjoyed science and math, but her favorite teachers were her English teachers - Mrs. Blackburn, Mrs. Rost, and Mrs. Ellingson. She also learned a lot from math teacher Larry Lum.

Her favorite Holdrege teacher was third-grade teacher Mary Oman. "She was fabulous," Kit said. "When I'd do something crazy, she never criticized me. She let me be a little nuts and she just taught me how to use it. Be creative, but use it for good instead of evil. I think that was an important turning point for me."

Although Kit's career has taken her all over the world, she calls New Orleans home now. She survived having four feet of water in her house during hurricane Katrina in 2005 and enjoys leading a Mardi Gras committee that also works to raise money for non-profits in New Orleans. "I love it. It's so fun," she said of the Mardi Gras group. "You get this incredible group of people, and we all come together to do things for the community."

Kit said she is grateful for her family's support of her career. "Support of my family is huge," she said. "And, hard work! It's really endurance. It's really about putting in the time. You just have to put in the work, and you have to love it!"

About Us

The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.

Holdrege Public Schools Foundation

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