

Episode 3: Jennifer Burgin

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:08;19 - 00:00:36;28

M2: Welcome back to the Arlington Public Schools podcast. I'm Frank Bellavia with School and Community Relations. I'm joined today by Jennifer Burgin from Oakridge Elementary School second grade teacher a former teacher of the year only a couple of years ago and we're talking about her recent trip to the Galapagos Islands she was recently selected as a National Geographic teacher fellow. I hope I got that one right. Talk a little bit first of all thank you for being on talk a little about The Fellowship program.

00:00:37;04 - 00:01:26;01

F8: Thank you so much for having me. The Fellowship. Is gosh. Life changing. It's it's amazing. So a little black history on the families that are really behind National Geographic and Lindblad Expeditions are the Grosvenor and the Lindblad families. The Grosvenor's are very involved. National Geographic and The Lindblad are very involved with Lindblad Expeditions and they have very similar visions and goals and that's Geo literacy for the world for people to understand that there are places that require protection. There are cultures that require protection and that it's up to us to observe them with respect and to keep them pristine enough for generations to visit.

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F3: So as a birthday gift to Mr. Grosvenor Mr. Lindblad said in perpetuity I'm going to save some spots on my expedition ships for teachers and from here on out as your birthday present. You can select teachers to come on my ships and to explore the world and have the most intense and extreme professional development a teacher could possibly have. And I got to have one of those.

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M1: That's awesome. Sounds great. I know there were several different places that you could choose from what were those places.

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F3: So through the application process I had to look at the different offers that came with the fellowship and decide my top three. You can go to the Arctic Circle Iceland arctics fall Baard which I had never heard of I had to look it up and arctics Falbe artisan is known for their ice bears. A new addition is to go to coastal Alaska. The Ant arctic sounds simple right. Three very cold places yeah extremely cold places and the Galapagos Islands. So you know I chose the Galapagos and it wasn't just a personal preference because I prefer warmer weather. When I was thinking about my curriculum as an elementary school teacher no matter what grade I teach I was thinking of places where I felt that honestly if I went I could apply it. And when I think about elementary science and I think about elementary social studies I think of biodiversity and culture. So the extreme biodiversity and culture of coastal Alaska and the Galapagos really appealed to me. So I put those as my top two choices and then I shared the dates where I could travel. I was given freedom from my principal to pick some dates during the school year. So I was selected to go to the Galapagos. The last one the last weeks of school and this past school year.

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M1: Now I know the Galapagos are our protected islands so there's not many people get to go there. What else is it about that island that just peaks your interest. I definitely want to go there. I want to learn about that ecosystem.

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F8: That island a couple years ago I was listening to a podcast about the Galapagos. It was on Radiolab and I'd never heard of the Galapagos before. I didn't know that it belonged to Ecuador. I didn't know that it was essentially an Eden and I didn't know about ecological naiveté which is this concept when animals have no apex predators and animals have such little interaction with humans that they just behave differently. So in the Galapagos the animals are unafraid. And so you're getting to see them evolve and live and interact in a way that is unheard of anywhere else in the world. One of the things that makes the Galapagos special is that it's protected the Ecuadorian government realized what a precious place it is and only 3 percent of the islands are inhabited. Of the 3 percent they now control who can come in and live there. So unless you are galop again you may not immigrate to the Galapagos even if your ecuadorian. They have parameters around this and I think there's some exclusions like if you'd already been there previously or if you marry into a family. They also protect wildlife that can come in my buddies the giant land tortoises were almost completely wiped out not just by pirates and whalers picking them up for snacks but by goats that people Galapagos Anos had brought to the Galapagos or by goats that had been dropped off by pirates and whalers. These goats are not endemic they don't belong in the Galapagos. So they almost killed all of the tortoises by eating up their food and stomping on their nests.

00:05:26;16 - 00:06:19;23

F2: So there's measures now to protect the animals thereby not introducing any other species plant flora or fauna. In fact when I landed in the Galapagos they come by and they fumigate the plane and they even have you step on mats so that any potential seeds that have gotten stuck to your shoes will come off. So they're very protective. They're also protected about who can visit how many and when. So ships may not dock at many of the islands. We had to come close the islands and take a Zodiac onto the islands themselves and also a ship cannot visit an island but every 15 days. So the islands that I saw on my expedition were completely different than the islands that the two teachers after me saw the very next week and the same exact ship. So the Ecuadorian government is doing a great job protecting such a pristine place.

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M1: How many islands did you get to visit.

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F3: I only visited. Wow. Wow. It's kind of hard to count because there's I left.

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F8: And there's eye lens. So the islands are so small that they have their own little name. I would say I went to about 5 eyelets and about six islands. For me one of the most memorable was Bartolomé and Bartolome was so memorable because that's where the Galapagos penguins live and they're known to be although I did see one very strange but very cool. I saw one two days previous on the island of Flori Ana and Ana has a shady past. They actually have some strange histories of people living there. There's a DVD called The Galapagos Affair and it's about strange occurrences. So anyway about Floriade was a mystery for me as well. My little penguin was there and but Bartolome was one of the most memorable.

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M1: We're talking with Oak Ridge Elementary Schools Jennifer Bergen who recently visited the Galapagos Island as a grocer teaching fellow through the National Geographic and Lindblad Expeditions. How long did it take you to get down there. Is it a simple plane ride to Ecuador and then you take the boat or is it more involved in that.

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F8: So I live in Arlington County. I started off on a Friday flying to Miami. I spent a little layover there and then I flew into Guayaquil Ecuador. So that was first day June 2nd and then the next morning I woke up bright early and I boarded a smaller plane that took me to San Cristobal and St. crystal ball is one of the islands where they have an airstrip and where they have people living in a city. So I flew there and so I would say it took about a day and a half. I had some time to rest and adjust to the time difference. It's only it was two hours behind the time I went. It can be only one hour behind. They don't participate in daylight savings time. So it just depends on what time of the year you go. And it was exhausting. It's actually a pretty short flight from Miami to Guayaquil it is about four hours. And once we got there of course all my energy got me ready to go.

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M1: You said you visited a number of small islands and bigger islands. How many days were you there. And were you do multiple islands in a day.

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F3: It depends sometimes. Well first off I was there for nine days on on the ship.

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F8: Sometimes we would hit more than one island in a day and if they were close together and they were really small that would occur. So an example might be you know wake up hike on one island get back on the ship take a Zodiac to an inlet get back on the ship have lunch during lunch they're moving they're taking you to another place that afternoon you hike somewhere else on a different island you come back to the ship. And then sometimes we spent one full day on one part of an island and the next day we went to the opposite side on the side.

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M1: So this is like somebody is listening cruise and these are at your excursions during each port.

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F3: Yeah.

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F8: Think of a cruise that has been planned by biologists and naturalists accompanied by a director who has a vision for sustainability and geo literacy. So it's kind of a teachers dream it felt in some parts like a vacation but it was not. I was learning every day every day. I was taking notes documenting with photographs. It really was the most incredible professional development I ever taken. And oh I wish they had more. I wish I could apply again.

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M1: How many teachers were on board the ship how many total people were on the ship. I know there's kroons like that. I can imagine it was probably a small group.

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F8: Lynn Brout blad really wants to make it a family. When you get on the ship they tell you you're part of the Lindblad Expeditions family. So there's about 90 people there solo travelers families. There are quite a bit of grandparents with their grandchildren you know saying things like my son just turned 12 or my grandson turned 12 and this is a trip I wanted to make with him or her. There are two teachers on my ship. There's 35 of us total. So the people going to the Galapagos are going in pairs of two people going to the Arctic or going in pairs of three Alaska pairs of two and Antarctica pairs of three. So it just depends on the space on the ship. My partner is named Priscilla Zenn and she's from Dearborn Michigan and she is a junior high teacher a recovering high school teacher and she was an incredible partner. And it was amazing how we were filtering through the lens of our great bubbles but still able to make so many connections and share together. I'm really glad they gave me a partner. I'm glad we don't go solo but we also spend a lot of time interacting with the other guests. I was lucky enough to have children onboard that I could interact with and talk to and I even went snorkeling with a second grader. That was the day we saw the sharks and I wasn't even scared because I was like I was in my happy teacher mode. I was like look over there Sophia. It's a shark. But of course we snorkel masks on so I'm going and I'm pointing. So it was it was incredible opportunity to meet with like minded people and to have them kind of kind of show me things that I might not otherwise pick up because I was looking through my teacher lens but I got to see them through their family lenses.

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M1: It's great also you know feet off of them and stuff like that and they are pretty sure that they feed off for you being a teacher. Yes. You're still in communication with others.

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F1: Yeah. You're Warren Michigan.

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F2: Oh yes yes. Priscilla and I will be wifey's we will be we'll be friends for life and we'll help each other.

00:12:23;21 - 00:13:11;30

F8: The other educators and I are in touch too so the Galapagos teachers all have our own group on Facebook and we support each other with equipment and sharing photos encouragement and then all the teachers are connected so I made a connection with an elementary school teacher in Colorado and she went to the Arctic Circle. So I hope that for the future I can actually do some things for apx where I either host people or virtually host them. So teachers can come and listen to not only my experience in the Galapagos but what was it like to be a teacher in Alaska a teacher and the Arctic teacher in Antarctica. And that's part of my commitment with this fellowship I have a two year commitment to do some things for apx and some things for my classroom as well as for national geographic. So Arlington watch out.

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M1: I've got some things coming your way. Looking forward to a lot of those. I know that a colleague of yours Kate Miller who went to the Antarctic she's been doing a lot of those community engagement efforts as well around her trip so look forward to that.

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F2: Oh and she was such a great help. She propped me before you go on an expedition like this. You've got to get your mind around it. And she gave me some pointers so I'm so grateful for her.

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M1: I'm just going to ask what the preparation was to go on. I can't assume just like you apply you get accepted your book your tickets and you go. There's got to be some preparation that goes into this.

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F2: Yes. I had a three day training in Washington D.C. at National Geographic headquarters and I spent time with my mentor naturalist Christian sađ. We had a natural search each one of the regions where we send our teachers and I spent time with him and actually with a previous Grosvenor fellow. She came from Baltimore and we talked about the nitty gritty like OK I don't want to get sunburned. What do I need or I don't want to hurt the coral. What kind of sunscreen can I use. We talked about things like what should I pack. What should I not pack. You know what are things that I should purchase and bring back from my classroom. How much money should I take. You know should I prep some things in advance. So there is just a lot of prep from the National Geographic staff. The Lindblad staff are naturalist's as well as each other. So it's become a really great brother and sisterhood. In fact I have a gentleman who lives in Canada who have been calling my Galapagos brother. His name is Mike and he he's incredible and he and I have been talking about how can we share this with each other and potentially you know how can we take what we've learned in the Galapagos and integrate it into language arts integrate it into math. So we're taking things really deep together as a group.

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M1: We'll talk about once you are on the islands what sort of things were you doing with activities. Learning Opportunities were you participating in.

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F8: So I was going nonstop from sun up to sun down. I mean there were some options for us but I mean why why. When you've been given such a great opportunity. Why. Every day we did some sort of physical activity and that was part of my agreement was that I would I would be able to handle the physical stamina of what we were doing. So there were hikes to see the nastiness the mating and courtship of the wave albatrosses. There were hikes to go see the nests of the red footed and blue footed boobies. We snorkeled around different islets.

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F3: There was one guy Fox eyelet and it was just a wall covered in invertebrates and I snorkeled over this deep deep area. It was insane. I was stretched. I was really told that I am an explorer and I believed it. I feel now that I am an explorer and I can tell my students look you can be explorers too. If you're teacher who is so concerned about rules and safety can go swim with sharks and can climb up a volcano you can do this too.

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F2: There were also some cultural events that we did. We spent a day at the Charles Darwin Research Centre learning about what the galop again most were doing to preserve the giant land tortoises. I visited an organic coffee farm and I sampled this adorable farmer's coffee and he showed us all the things that he

grows right there on his farm that the things that he's doing is is incredible by hand with handmade tools. We also had galop again dancers come and dance and play music for us on the ship. We also ate food every day from South America and when we were eating they were teaching us about the local food and how to fish and fruit and vegetables and sauces are integrated so everything was a lesson from my snack to the juice they gave me after snorkeling all the way to climbing up the volcano or crouching next to a sea lion.

00:17:07;06 - 00:17:25;26

F1: Everything was a joke. Did you have a favorite food favorite meal. Oh yes my favorite food is Lakota Papa soup. It is cheese potato and avocado soup actually just made it yesterday and it is insane. Let you bring back the recipes they all gave it to you.

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F3: They ask you what is your favorite food. And then they slip the recipe under your bedroom door. Yeah.

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F2: And something I should say is that the staff with land bought expeditions were so kind and generous. They wanted you to know and love the Galapagos like they do. They are Galapagos años on the ship. They wanted you to appreciate and take this back and share that love and fervor and that's what I hope to share is that when I talk about the Galapagos I'm teaching kindergartners and first graders this summer about the Galapagos. They want to protect it. They want to say the name Blue Footed Booby. They love same blueprint. What kid what kid wouldn't right. But I told them that you know we have to protect these animals are like yes they are special. We had to take good care of them.

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M1: I love hearing them say that you've done the fellowship you've learned all the stuff you've learned about this amazing part of the world that not many people get to visit. What do you do now. What are you doing to engage your students.

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F2: And what are you bringing back. So part of my process over the next two years is to once I've been poured in by National Geographic and the blood. Now it's my turn to pour out. So this summer at the end of the summer I'm presenting at Festival of the mines with my buddy Kate Miller. We're going to talk about teachers as explorers and how whether you go across the world or behind your school how you can infuse a love for exploration in your students. So speaking and presenting at conferences is one part of what I do also because National Geographic is local. I plan on integrating some of the things that I do with the people and their efforts there. So that's part of my plan. People who don't live locally might do other things they might speak at their local conference. They might train people to become National Geographic certified in their state. But I'm so blessed to be this close across the river from National Geographic and to see my teachers all the time. They've already come to my classroom. Another thing I plan on doing is a project with my future students. I tested it out on last year's cuties but we're going to make a book called. G is for Galapagos and I'm inspired by the book that I wrote with Elizabeth Caskey called. As for Arlington I saw that this ABC book not only reinforced a love of Arlington but it reinforced a pride in Arlington. And so I would like to share that with my students in the future and make geas for Galapagos and then share that with the National Geographic community. Make it available online.

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M1: I was going to ask you if you are planning on doing something around that since you did the ads for Arlington which is if anybody is still looking for that book it's still available to purchase five dollars and 25 cents through a social studies department. But it's great that you're planning on doing that. If there are teachers and colleagues and peers teachers that are thinking about doing this but they're not sure what would you say to them or would you encourage them to do this whether it's you know your expedition to the Galapagos or kids to the South Pole.

00:20:32;27 - 00:21:59;19

F2: You know I would say do it do it. I have some colleagues who are like well my children are young and I understand take that time. But when you're at a point where you can do it when you travel abroad as an educator it really changes you. And that's the reason I applied for this expedition 10 years ago after my first year of teaching I applied with the Gerta Institute for the trans atlantic outreach program and I spent two weeks in Germany and I was never the same and I still I still talk about Germany and it helps me realize that you know Germany is there and they are so much alike. But there's so much they also have to offer. And now that I've been to Ecuador and the Galapagos I feel refreshed. I feel like wow I've gone somewhere else and seen something completely different yet so similar. I've just dipped myself back into that refreshing pool of exploration. So I would say go for it. And if you'd like to hear more about the kinds of things I did with National Geographic and blogging about it. National Geographic is big on storytelling and I really took that to heart. So I plan on telling some stories soon on my own personal blog and I've called it educator explore. I'm really taking that name to heart and thinking of myself as an explorer and I'm thinking how can I take the things that I see whether they're local or abroad and infuse that into my classroom.

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M1: Where can somebody find your blog if they want to read more.

00:22:02;19 - 00:22:25;13

F1: Well I have it on a Google site and I can share it. It is oh I can't think of the address right now. It's ok we get we can put it in the show notes after. So I share it at the bottom of my email. But it's it's a it's an open Google site and you can look at the link connected to this podcast to find my site. That's my line.

00:22:25;17 - 00:22:34;04

M1: Well I want to thank you for taking time to talk about your trip. It sounds fascinating and I'm glad your students are going to benefit from that in the following couple of years.

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F2: Thank you. Yeah it's changed me as a person and as I reflect I started to realize just how changed I have become so I'll tell more about my reflections and my connections and thank you so much for the opportunity to share.

00:22:49;02 - 00:22:57;24

M2: I thank Jennifer for joining us and you've put her information or blogging in our show now and push that out so you can see it. Thanks for listening to this episode over the Arlington Public Schools podcast.