

## **Transcript of Interview with Jenny Ebeling by Tory Schendel Cox**

**Interviewee:** Jenny Ebeling

**Interviewer:** Tory Schendel Cox

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**Location (Interviewee):** Evansville, Indiana

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**Abstract:** In response to COVID-19, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science launched the mini-series, "Cultural Insights: Interviews in the Creative Sector," to highlight colleagues and professionals working in the same or similar field of museum professionals.

Jennie Ebeling, PhD, Associate Professor of Archaeology, Co-director, Jezreel Expedition ([www.jezreel-expedition.com](http://www.jezreel-expedition.com)), University of Evansville

### **Tory Schendel Cox 00:00**

Hi, my name is Tory Schendel Cox. I'm the Virginia G. Schroeder Curator of Art at the Evansville Museum. Today, we have a really special guest for our telecommunication. So, Jenny, I'm gonna take it over, or hand it over to you.

### **Jenny Ebeling 00:11**

Okay. Hi, thanks for having me. I'm Dr. Jenny Ebeling. And I'm an associate professor of archaeology in the department of archaeology and art history at the University of Evansville. And I've been here at the University of Evansville since 2002. And before I came, I actually was living in Israel for a few years and then also in Jordan, working on my dissertation, and I had a postdoctoral fellowship. And I've been working in the region of the Middle East for about 25 years. So, I wanted to go back and talk a little bit about, you know, sort of my background and where I'm coming from, and then how all of this sort of, you know, kind of fits in with what I do at the University of Evansville as a teacher and also as a field archaeologist. So, I always wanted to be an archaeologist. And I know, I hear that from a lot of people I randomly meet, you know, like, "when I was a kid, I wanted to be an archaeologist," and all of that or a paleontologist or something. But I was really lucky to grow up on the East Coast, so that I had great access to the museums and other institutions, and, you know, Civil War battlefield sites and places like that, where we went for school trips, and also with my family. So, I think that had a lot to do with my early interest in archaeology and history in general. So, going to the Smithsonian, you know, several times a year and, you know, other sites in that area was just probably really formed, you know, kind of a formative experience for me. And I was also interested in traveling. So, my, I really haven't traveled with my family so much, except for in the United States. But when I was 16, I was able to do a summer program abroad in Germany, and I had been studying German for a few years, and I was placed with a family of only German speakers. So that was really exciting. And it was in West Berlin. So, at the time, it was still divided. And it was a really amazing time to be there. And I also was able to, you know, go to all the museums in the area that have some amazing, you know, artifacts, and architecture, even from Mesopotamia and Egypt and other places. So that was, that was huge for me to be able to see these sort of World Class museums when I was 16. And then, so I decided to study archaeology in college. And

then I also had the opportunity to study abroad when I was a junior, and I decided to do the program that my university, which was Rutgers University, was offering in Israel. And this was because at that point, I had taken some courses in religion and Biblical Studies, in addition to anthropology and classics. And so, I became much more interested in, in that history and that culture. And so that seemed like a really good fit. And also, I'd be able to travel to all these places, you know, in that region that I was interested in. So, during the semester, I was able to study at the University of Haifa, in Israel, and live on a kibbutz, and I was with a group of students from my university and other universities. And I was able to get to Egypt and go to Greece for a few weeks. And so, it was really, you know, I was like, 20 years old. And it was, um, it was amazing. So that kind of sealed the deal about what kind of archaeology and history I was really interested in. So, I got to go to lots of sites, and I took classes on the archaeology of the region, and, you know, studying languages still, and, you know, Hebrew, you know, I began taking Hebrew that semester. And so, then after I graduated, I, I took a year off, and then I decided to, to try to get into a graduate program in Near Eastern archaeology, and I was lucky enough to be admitted into the program at the University of Arizona in Tucson. And so that's where I completed my MA and PhD. And so, it was wonderful to be able to live in Tucson, because, you know, just, it's beautiful and amazing, you know, climate and also just the culture there is, is great, laid back and, and just, just really warm and inviting, and just nice. And I also, you know, was acquainted with the archaeology of the region as well by taking courses in with, with anthropologists and archaeologists at the university who were working there. So, I learned more about Southwest archaeology and North American archaeology. But I continued to go back to Israel, and I worked on excavations in the summers. And then I was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship my fourth year in my graduate program, so I was able to spend a year in Jerusalem, and I had another fellowship that took me to Jordan for a semester. And so, I was really lucky to get a lot of, you know, scholarships and other opportunities that allowed me to spend time in the region while I was working on my dissertation. And then when I finished my PhD, I had a postdoctoral fellowship and was continuing to work on excavations in Israel, and then I was able to get the job at the University of Evansville, so I relocated here in 2002, been here ever since. And even though I've been working on various digs during my time in Evansville, I was not able to, you know, direct or kind of take a lead role in a project because it's a lot of work. I mean, there's a lot of, you know, kind of fundraising that's involved with that. I had, I have young, younger kids, so I wasn't really able to get away in the summers for weeks at a time. So, none of that really came together until 2011. And that's when two of my colleagues at the University of Evansville and I organized a trip to take students to Jordan and Egypt. And so, we taught a course in the spring semester to prepare students to go when the, it became impossible for us to go to Egypt that year because of the instability in the region. So, we changed it to just Jordan. And we had a great time, we took a great group of students, my colleagues are a history professor and a political science international studies professor. And so, the three of us were able to kind of create this really awesome program that had amazing speakers. And we went on great trips, you know, to sites all over the country, and Petra, of course, and lots of other places. And so partly due to the success of that trip, and then also at the same time, I was sort of talking to colleagues in Israel about what possibilities might be for getting my students involved in digs there, came the opportunity for me to start a new project with a colleague at the University of Haifa. So, it all kind of happened at just sort

of the right time, it was sort of serendipitous, but my colleague, Dr. Norma Franklin, who's an Israeli archaeologist in Haifa, wanted to get a new project started. And she knew that the University of Evansville had a large undergraduate, you know, group of archaeology majors, it's one of the largest programs in the country. And my colleagues know that. So even though students can go and dig wherever they want in the world in the summer to get our, you know, to get credits, we haven't been organizing them in groups, as faculty, to take them on specific digs. So, she reached out, and we, we talked about it in summer of 2011, while I was still in the region, and decided to organize a project to start in 2012. So, in 2012, eight of our undergraduate archaeology majors at the University of Evansville, went with me and several colleagues from different universities in North America and England in Israel. And we did a three-week, three-week survey of a site called Jezreel. And Jezreel is a site that might be familiar to those who are familiar with, with, of course, biblical stories about the site. And if it plays an important role in the story of Ahab and Jezebel, so the king of Israel and the queen. And it was a site that was excavated for six years in the 1990s, but only a certain part of the site, there was a lot more to the area that was really kind of unknown. And so, we decided to, to survey it. And what that means is literally to walk in a kind of systematic way over the landscape. We went through 2.5 square kilometers of area, basically, is what we covered in a few weeks. And we basically documented everything that we saw on the landscape, and we were able to identify more than 350 features. And so that means, like, it's a wall, and tombs, and caves and like things like that, just things that were sort of, you know, you could kind of see on the surface, and many of them have never been documented before. You know, a lot of people in the area knew about them, but they'd never really systematically gone through a number of things and taken photos and, and you know, had the GPS out there to get the exact location and that sort of thing. So, based on that work with these eight students, we had a great time doing it, we were able to decide for the following year, which areas would be fruitful to dig, because when you start to excavate and actually, you know, break the ground, you know, setup squares, trenches, that kind of thing. That's a big commitment. And so we needed to be sure that we were going to, you know, be excavating in areas that we thought would give us some really good results. So, we created this program. It was a study abroad program through the University of Evansville, we eventually had eight consortium institutions, so other schools in the United States, where our colleagues teach, basically joined up with us and sent their undergraduate and graduate students. And so, we started in 2013, and broke ground and made some really amazing discoveries over six years of excavation. And then in 2018, that was our final excavation season. So, we wrapped up our fieldwork then. And all through those years, we had archaeology students making up kind of like a core group of participants, and then some of them continued to come back even after they graduated from UE and went on to jobs or grad school or whatever the next steps were, and come back in the summer with us and then mentor the younger students and then serve as our, like junior staff members, and then eventually senior staff. So, it was a really great opportunity for, you know, younger students with less experience to work with students who are gaining more and more experience every year, and we're out in the world, you know, kind of teaching and doing excavations and other places, and, you know, being able to all come together in June every year and work together. So it was, it was amazing. In that way, we formed a lot of really great, you know, mentoring opportunities and close relationships between a really great group of people. So,

since 2018 then, we have been working on the analysis and publication of our finds. And that takes usually not longer in years than the actual excavation, but I mean, when it comes down to like, you know, how much money and sort of support is, is required for that, for that part of things, sort of like the work after the fact that post excavation stuff, I mean, it's, it's sort of huge. So, it's an ongoing process of people in several countries working on this sort of part time all year long. I've been lucky to have students help me here in Evansville, with some of the things that we can do from afar. So, but of course, last year, that [audio skips] actually working some of the small finds from the site that I was able to bring back with me. So, all the metal artifacts were able to come to Evansville for a short period of time and then all the glass artifacts. And so basically, half the students worked with a glass specialist, a friend of mine, who came from North Carolina to help, help with them and sort of give them a little workshop, basically, and then work with them from afar on writing a report. And then also others here who are more familiar with metal artifacts work with a group. And they created the preliminary reports of those materials that are going to appear in the future publication, which was awesome. And then I've had students working with me also as independent studies, and kind of in other capacities, like as work studies, to do data entry and do some more research on different topics related to the material that we excavated. And then last summer, I was able to take two students along to Israel for a few weeks to continue working on some of the kind of the larger, heavier artifacts, especially the stone artifacts that I specialize in, we were excavating a ton of those per year. So, we literally have more than six tons of stone artifacts to work on. And so, you know, I've been doing this sort of steadily over the years with, with my colleagues and, and others, but they were able to help out with some of that work, and then do many other things also, while they were there. So, sort of in these support roles, students have been able to continue to play a part in the excavation, even though we're not digging anymore. Um, so excavation then ended, it seems at a relatively good time, given that now, because things are so different than they were just a few weeks ago, it looks like a lot of my colleagues are now canceling their excavations for the summer in different parts of the world, including in Israel, because it's, it's hard to know what the future is going to hold if people are going to be able to travel and if these programs can, can actually happen. So, it's possible that I will go in Israel, go to Israel this summer for a couple of weeks and continue some work, I was last there over the Christmas holidays for about two weeks working on material. But at this point, there's no guarantees. So, in the meantime, what I'm doing is mostly working on teaching this semester, I had to, of course, convert my classes over to an online format. And I teach introductory archaeology courses and senior level seminars, as well as everything in between, for the department. So, this semester, I'm teaching introduction to Egyptian archaeology, Syro-Palestinian archaeology, so my part of the world sort of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and then also women in antiquity. And so, I've been, you know, working on trying to get those up to, up to standard and, you know, keep students busy and accountable. And all of that, while also continuing to push forward with the research of the material that I'm working on for the excavation. And then also, of course, you know, making plans for the, the more distant future it seems every day, but you know, for the next couple of years with different projects that I'm affiliated with, mostly in Israel. So, my particular interest, which I touched on just a little bit, but I'll talk a little bit more about, you can kind of see from the courses that I teach and the research that I do at excavations, you know what my interests are, but, but specifically, I'm interested

in ancient food and drink technology, as well as women in antiquity, especially in Canaan and ancient Israel. So, one of the things that's really amazing about the excavation in Jezreel, was that we uncovered a winery, a complex from the Iron Age from the biblical period that was in really good condition and one of the largest known in the region. And so, our final publication of that find actually just came out a few weeks ago in a journal. So, I'm really excited about that. But we continue to, to research different aspects of wine production in the region. There's a biblical story that is in First Kings that talks about someone who, a winemaker, basically a Jezreel named Nabeth, and this is one of the first times we hear about Jezreel in the biblical texts. And then the story of Ahab and Jezebel, you know, the king of Israel and the Queen are sort of playing out at Jezreel, because that was sort of a second home of theirs after the capital. And so, there's a really interesting story that takes place in Jezreel that focuses on a, a winery, and a vineyard. So we were, we were really lucky to find something that doesn't necessarily confirm the reality of the biblical story, but it provides context for the production of wine in that area. And, you know, give some insight into why, you know, the biblical writers would have placed that story specifically where they did in Jezreel and tied in, you know, the most powerful king of Israel and his queen with, with that particular winemaker. So, it's been really exciting to, you know, continue working on that from afar. And then when I'm in Israel, you know, being able to take people to the winery itself, when they come up to visit the site is a lot of fun, because you actually get to, you know, walk on the trading floor, and you can even go into the vats, if you want and check those out, everything's cut into the limestone bedrock on the landscape. So, it's a bunch of, you know, basically cuts in the rock. So, it's not going anywhere, it's, it's kind of protected, where it is sort of off the beaten path at the site. So, people are really amazed when we're walking around through trees, and, and it doesn't look like anything, and then all of a sudden, you come upon this really, really cool looking, you know, winery installation, just sort of in the middle of nowhere. So, I've learned a lot in doing this particular project, since it's the first one that I've co-directed the first excavation. So, there's a lot of kind of administrative aspects that I didn't have a whole lot of experience with before. So, you know, in addition to, you know, kind of organizing and recruiting people and preparing them to go, and fundraising for the project, and all of that sort of stuff, of course, you know, my co director and I are also responsible for the, for the archaeology. So, it's you know, so there's a lot that goes on and goes on year-round when you're doing an excavation. So even though we were only in the field for four weeks, each season, usually in June or May, June, it was something that was basically a part time job for me through, through the year for the past, well, from 2012, to 2018. So, it was a lot of work. But it's been really rewarding. I think the most rewarding part of this has been the ability to work so closely with undergraduate archaeology students in the field, and to, you know, kind of be side by side with them literally in the trenches, you know, kind of teaching them, you know, how to excavate and watching them, you know, learn these skills from alumni and staff members from all over the world and kind of, you know, you kind of see the, it's sort of cheesy, but sort of the sparkle in their eye when they get it or you know, kind of make that connection with something that they pick up out of the ground that's 5,000 years old. Or, you know, something like that. So, it's just really fun to work with students in that way in the field and get them out of the classroom and into the dirt and, and really, you know, kind of getting into the nitty gritty of the field.

**Tory Schendel Cox 18:38**

Yeah.

**Jenny Ebeling 18:39**

So, in addition, I think the opportunity to have to keep those alumni connections alive has been really important to me, and, you know, kind of maintaining that, that support network and professional network for current students as well as alumni. That's, that's also been really important. So luckily, some of our alumni still live in the region, some of them work, you know, at the local museums, Evansville Museum, of course, as well as you know, Angel Mounds and other places. So, we're lucky to have them around as resources, and some of our students do internships with them during the school year, and then summers as well. But also, you know, we, we really like the opportunity to get, you know, through usually through social media to make those connections between alumni and current students. And, and that's something that's, that's been great during the last few weeks, while we've all been sort of housebound is that we've, we have a closed Facebook group that's for archaeology and art history students and alumni. And I challenged them to write, you know, entries about themselves and give us updates on where they are and what they're doing and their career paths and that kind of thing. And they've been really great about it. And so, we have, you know, dozens of stories that people have posted with, with pictures, you know, talking about, you know, when they went to UE when they graduated, our first graduating class was in 1994. So, it's not that long ago. It's our 30th anniversary, that Share of our program actually. And, you know, they talk about, you know, if they went to graduate school, or they went into professional archaeology through cultural resource management, if they went in the direction of museum work or archival work, libraries, whatever else it may be, a lot of them, even if they went off into paths that weren't strictly archaeological, still continue to support excavations, and work on projects whenever they can get away to do that. And they support in other ways, and they're interested to keep up with the news. And I think, you know, a lot of people are interested in archaeology and history, generally speaking. So, I mean, we've really, it's great to have this sort of community of people who, you know, you know, are interested when you post something about, you know, excavation work, or something that one of our students did in class or a presentation or, you know, one of their, you know, internship experiences. And so, I think there's a lot of support that kind of comes in that way from, you know, older, older folks who've been out of school for a while, who were still paying attention and still really invested. So, yeah, so it's our 30th anniversary, and we're now working on a program that I hope we'll have in the fall, we'll see how things go. But we would like to do something on campus that brings some alumni back. And we're working now on logos and things for the T shirts and sweatshirts that are inevitable for something like this. And so, yeah, I mean, I think the University of Evansville, for those who don't know it, I mean, have a really vibrant, you know, program in archaeology and art history that has connections with the local community, as well as connections, you know, with people all over the world. So, this is sort of, you know, some say, like, a little, little hidden gem here, that I think you know, a lot of people don't, don't know about, but come find out more about us on our website, and, and through, you know, other, you know, where we are in social media, our social media presence, and then through the gestural expeditions on publications and social media.

**Tory Schendel Cox 22:00**

And we will definitely be looking forward to seeing that publication. And would you be interested in sharing, like, a link or way for our viewers to see if they can put in the description?

**Jenny Ebeling 22:10**

Yes, sure. So, yeah, I mean, it's [archaeology.evansville.edu](http://archaeology.evansville.edu) will give you, you know, gets you to everywhere, basically, that you, that you'd be interested in looking, looking for, for archaeology and art history at UE.

**Tory Schendel Cox 22:24**

Amazing, was there anything else you'd like to share with our viewers today?

**Jenny Ebeling 22:27**

Um, nothing specific. I guess, just, you know, hopefully, people are taking some time now, while they're, you know, kind of busy with work or cooped up at home or, you know, have their, their schedules changed to, you know, watch some videos online about recent discoveries in archaeology and history, I'm having my students, you know, do these things now sort of as extras in my classes, and I'm doing those sorts of things myself. So, I think it's, um, you know, one of the things that it's been going around is, like, you know, online museum collections, and virtual tours, and things like that all over the world, like, you can really have access to so many things, even if you're not, you know, if you're unable to travel. So, I think now's a really good time to learn more about those resources. And actually, you know, take advantage of them and see how much you can see, you know, without, you know, of course, leaving, leaving your house or your chair or whatever. So, I guess those are the kind of encouraging words I have for now is that, you know, try to get out there and see what kind of resources are available for, you know, going to museums virtually, and other site-, and even sites or excavations that have, you know, sort of walkthroughs and flyovers and 3D reconstructions and videos and all kinds of things so that you can actually, you know, visit sites all over the world without really going there.

**Tory Schendel Cox 23:44**

That's where we're definitely lucky to be in the 21st century because even though this is very sad, what's going on, it is an amazing opportunity to see the resources that are free and available to you. Because we're producing at this point now, at least one virtual exhibition every week. And this is the, the foot traffic, if you will, it has been outstanding.

**Jenny Ebeling 24:06**

That's great. Yeah, thank you for doing this.

**Tory Schendel Cox 24:09**

And likewise, to you too. So, this was an amazing, amazing telecast. I appreciate your time. And just remember, this is a Evansville Museum recording. And again, thank you so much for your time, and we hope to see you soon, and we definitely will keep posting your discoveries.

**Jenny Ebeling 24:21**

Alright, thanks very much.