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of Archaeology and
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Serene Spaces


A Letter from the Associate Director for Programs

I first arrived in the University of Pennsylvania Museum over 30 years ago. I would never have known about the Museum had it not been for a photograph of the “Ram in the Thicket” in an art history book I was browsing through. The caption beneath this very familiar photograph said “The University of Pennsylvania Museum.” Having grown up in England, and having been lucky enough to have had parents whose idea of a good time was to take the children to a museum, I had of course seen the British Museum’s Mesopotamian collection. But here I was in Philadelphia, and feeling a bit homesick at the time, I decided to go look at the Ram. Little did I know that that one visit would transform my life!

From the moment I stepped into the building, I was captured as much by the serenity and beauty of the spaces as by the extraordinary quality of the collections. I practically ran into the director’s office and asked for a job. One month later I was a full-time docent in the Museum’s education department. And here I am, three decades later, still serving the public and still able to be astounded and enchanted by our collections.

The very fact that I spent so much time in museums when I was so young, peering in dark cases and making discoveries everywhere I went, made me acutely aware of the importance of museums to the general public, especially to children. I was unaware at the time of the bustling rabbit warren of conservators, researchers, curators, and others that makes up the nine-tenths of the iceberg not seen by the casual visitor. The same kind of vital infrastructure supports this museum, which is visited by over 150,000 people every year, and whose traveling exhibits have been seen throughout the States by millions of people.

Our educational programs, such as International Classroom, bring schoolchildren face-to-face with people from Africa, the Middle East, and China, as well as Native Americans, for classroom discussions. The citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania can go to their local library and talk with an archaeologist or anthropologist who is giving a talk there courtesy of an appropriation from the Legislature. And anyone can come free of charge to the Museum on a Sunday during the academic year thanks to one of our generous donors.

The magical experiences that I had in museums as a child, and that have stayed with me, are available to everyone here at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. 

Gillian Wakely
Gillian Wakely
Associate Director for Programs



Gillian Wakely and friends in a ger, near Ulaanbaatar, Outer Mongolia in 2002.

To learn about our many programs and exhibits, visit us at www.museum.upenn.edu.