MEET OUR MEMBERS

Bonnie O’Boyle

Finding a Home away from Home

I transferred to Penn in my junior year; I was interested in Oriental Studies. I had started learning some Japanese with a Japanese nun who was at my previous college. I had a very good grounding by that time in Western Culture but all that I knew about the East were things like Marco Polo and his expedition, or the Japanese involvement in World War II: just some bits and pieces. So, I thought, why don’t I transfer to Penn and see what happens?

It was a wonderful department. I discovered the University Museum after a couple of months at Penn and I started hanging out there, looking at the different exhibits. I had always loved museums, and this was just a wonderful one. I was interested in archaeology, and here there were these great excavations carried out by Penn archaeologists all over the world.

Staying Connected

After graduating from Penn I began working as an editor, and after a few years I started making a decent salary so I joined the Loren Eiseley Society—it was at the lowest level at the time. It was the thing at Penn that I loved most and wanted to support. I’ve been very proud of the Museum.

Since then, I’ve traveled on several archaeological trips with the Museum. I went to Syria: I saw Palmyra, Aleppo, and all these wonderful deserted cities. I’m so happy I did it because of what’s happening in that country now. It was special to travel with the Museum, because I was able to see a lot of treasures in the company of world-class archaeologists.

Looking Forward

Each time the Museum re-does galleries, I feel like I’m seeing things for the first time, and that’s why I love the Museum. When they re-do the Egyptian Galleries, we’ll be able to see the wonderful columns of the throne room of Merenptah, extending to their full height. Outside the Penn and archaeological communities I don’t think enough people understand that we have treasures at the Museum that are really unique in North America. These columns are just one example.

I once took my grand-nephew to the Museum. He had an interesting assignment: to choose a museum and write an essay about five objects he saw there. I was so glad he chose the Penn Museum to visit. He got an A on his essay, but even more importantly, he just loved the Museum; he was fascinated by everything. It’s wonderful to see the Museum making those kinds of experiences happen for many children. The Unpacking the Past partnership with the School District is really exciting.

Perennial Favorites

My personal favorite object in the Egyptian Galleries is a door socket with the head of a prisoner with his hands tied behind him in the way that when the door swings it crushes him, reminding him of the Pharaoh. I’ve never seen anything quite like it anywhere else.