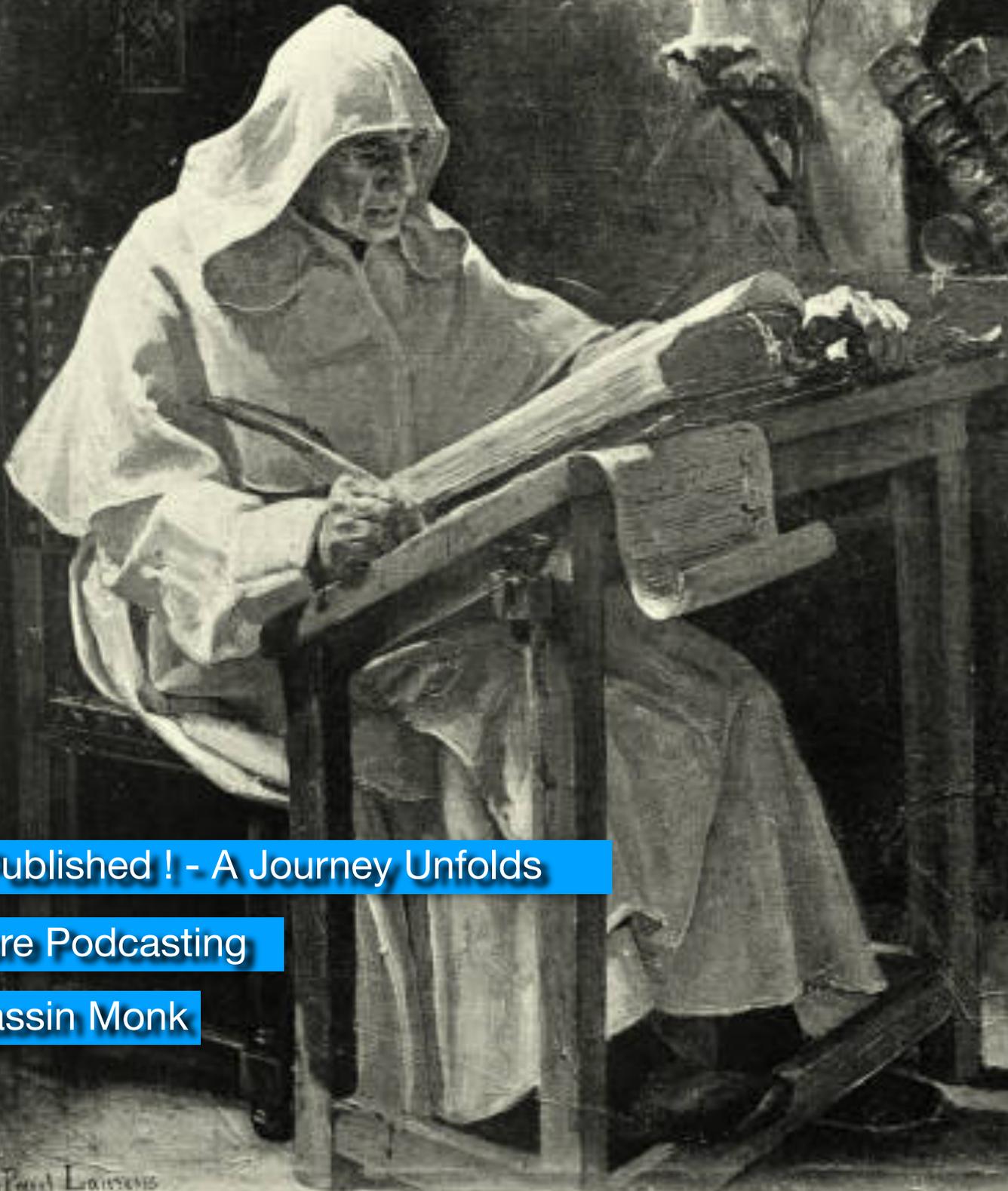


# St. Some (Author) Times

February 2022

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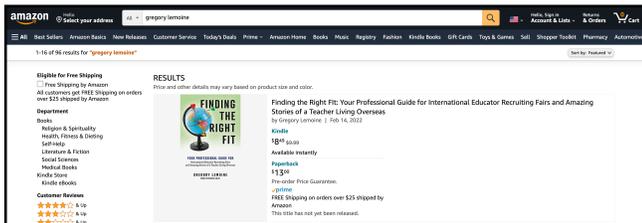
Published ! - A Journey Unfolds

More Podcasting

Assassin Monk

# Writing a Book

Turns out to be more of a journey  
than I bargained for. From  
manuscript to book, this was my  
journey.



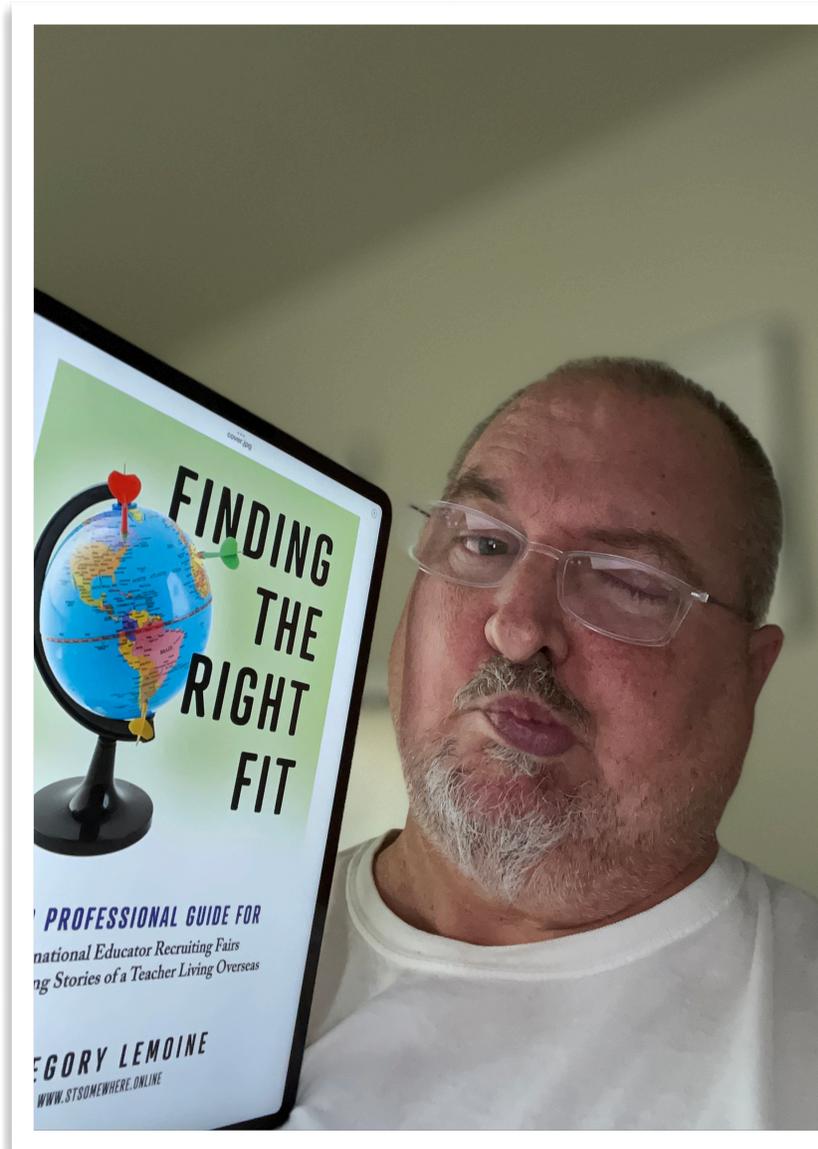
What were you doing in January of 2001? I was preparing for a job fair. What was an overseas teacher recruiting job fair? And why the hell was it in the vast open corn fields of Iowa?

When I tried to find any and all information about this weekend in Iowa, the only bits available were from the University of Northern Iowa itself. They were the ones hosting the job fair. It seemed more like a sales pitch rather than trustworthy information.

That was the start of my book. The feelings of helplessness. Leaping into the unknown when there should be *something* "more" to know.

Over the next twenty years, I wrote newsletters just like this one. I collected stories, talked with international teachers, recorded ideas, and went to six different fairs in four different time zones.

Along the journey, the newsletters were placed online in numerous website iterations. The sites went from Microsoft to Apple to free templates with Joomla to the easier to maintain Weebly. The St.Some Times newsletters went from one page writings in MS Word to full fledged magazine format like this one.



The entire way, bits and pieces of my book were typed out and saved, started and forgotten, continued, edited, never to be formalized.

Just before Carona landed on the island, in March of 2020, there were about 10,000 words in one word document. I had been collecting bits and pieces and starting to question whether I should write one book or two. I chose one in two parts.

## If You Can't Finish a Book During Covid, You'll Never Finish a Book

It was the overall type of book that was my initial problem. Joe, my long-time friend and author of three books, advised me to either write separate books - one about the process of

job fairs, the other a collection of travel stories - or to intersperse my travel stories into the process.

My overall feeling was to keep the process step by step without interruption. The process is absolutely mind-boggling. I feel the stories are more of an entertaining reward after getting through a fair. Not only that, but if you aren't interested in the first half about job fairs, you can simply skip to the second half and just read the travel stories.

Before this becomes a second book, let's skip to Covid Summer 2021. I was back in the USA for a short time. Joe asked me for a copy of my manuscript. I couldn't give him one. The manuscript only had 40,000 words. In other words, it was half done and scattered. Not ready.

Joe couldn't believe it. He challenged me, "if you can't finish a book during Covid, you'll never finish a book! Get it done. What's your excuse? Do it. I'm ready to read it."

And so I did. The manuscript was near finished in October. At that point, I decided to start my quest for a publisher. Joe distinctly said I should find an online publisher. He wasn't publishing his third book. Basically, that meant he wasn't offering to publish my first book. Ok. Off to google.

## **BookBaby. Click. BookBaby. Check.**

I really didn't know where to go with the idea. My first google search was heavy with an outfit called BookBaby. They professed to be a one-stop shop for authors to get their books out. Maybe I was just lazy. Maybe I just feel like some parts of life should be left up to professionals, like taxes. I'll pay almost anything for someone else to take care of my taxes... and I DO.

BookBaby has the process spelled out clearly on their website. Easy enough. For about \$1600 I could get my book printed with: cover design, ISBN numbers for eBook and soft cover (I didn't know that was a thing you had to pay for), a Cover they design with my instructions, printed and eBook formatting, and sending my book out to Amazon and the other online stores. That was their quote for a document about 180 pages of MS Word, double spaced. Hmmm.?

## **Oh Snap! What About Editing?**

All over the BookBaby site, they warned against having a friend or family member (that happened to

have been an English major in college or just loves to read) be your editor. What? Why not?

For \$10 a page, I began to wonder if it was really true. Since this is just a first book, is it worth all that money for someone to check my spelling? I read the advice of BookBaby again. The picture above and below, from their pamphlets, say it all.



Their options are defined with different prices for a variety of professional editing. For \$10 a page, I had the first half - the procedural step by step guide - Line Edited. Line editing included an intensive edit focusing on finer aspects of language as well as



style, development, structure, phrases, and vocabulary. Yep, since I haven't been corrected officially since college, a hundred years ago, I opted for a deeper scrutiny.

Since I had to pay per page, and there were a lot of formatting rules (double spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, etc) like in college, I stressed out about my manuscript. It took me two weeks of going through my own writing to take out extra line spaces, make titles simple bold, and rework any lists into shorter format. I shaved off ten pages just by reformatting my chapter headings and getting rid of the MS

Word bullets for lists. I chose comma lists instead, figuring I could always choose some other “look” for the lists later on. Lastly, since someone was reading this, it felt like a grade. I didn’t want to scare the editors. Like I learned from my mom, just because someone is coming to clean the house doesn’t mean your room can be disorganized.

## More Editing?

Two weeks after submitting my \$1600 and first part of my manuscript, the editor sent it back. I got the edited version that I could accept or decline every edit, an “accept all” version, and an editor comment page.

The editor was impressed. Well, it’s their job. I don’t really know if they were impressed or just coddling me to keep me within the BookBaby process to

spend more and get published. Oh well. Glass half full.

That was only the first half of my book. I sent in the second half for Copy Editing. This was \$7 per page and involved less scrutiny. It’s still like having a teacher grade it rather than having a friend peer edit. Worth it.

## Choices, Big Decisions!

Before I paid the \$2,000 for the package, I called and introduced myself. A guy named Morgan was designated as my liaison for BookBaby to walk me through the process and answer my questions. Cool. A short talk with him and I had my next steps planned out.

Put both halves together. Choose a price. Add chapter headings. Add a dedication page, introduction, Appendix, and any of the other sections you see in books. Put it all together and send it in with my credit card number.

A dedication? That was easy. Chapter headings? Crap. That took forever. The second half was easy. The first half was a total chaos and just didn’t flow for a long time.

The Author? Wow. Biggest question. I didn’t see any benefit - pros - for putting my own name on the book. Only cons. Like what happens if I recruit next year and I had somehow offended a recruiter. Even though I feel my book is neutral and I held back on some of the crazy stories/language, what if? Just what if?

I decided to use a pen name. Gern Blannsten. That’s what I put on the first cover and all of the information for Book Baby.

My friend Steve, who is sailing around the world with his wife Kris, is the only person who will ever understand my inside joke. My homage to Steve Martin. Gern Blannsten is a stand-up routine Steve Martin did back in the late 70’s. Both Steve and I are huge fans from Steve Martin’s older LP’s. We both know the stand-up routines word for word, line by line.

My real name was still on the ISBN’s and the project, so I could change my mind later. No matter. But this decision required me to go back through the entire manuscript and do “find/replace” any instance or iteration of my name.

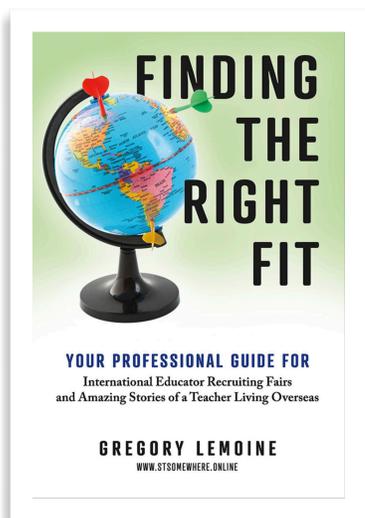
So I did all this. And here is the caveat: this is the point where Typos are costly. Once I submit my edited and final manuscript, changes in the manuscript would cost me \$50 base and \$2 per individual typo change. PRESSURE.

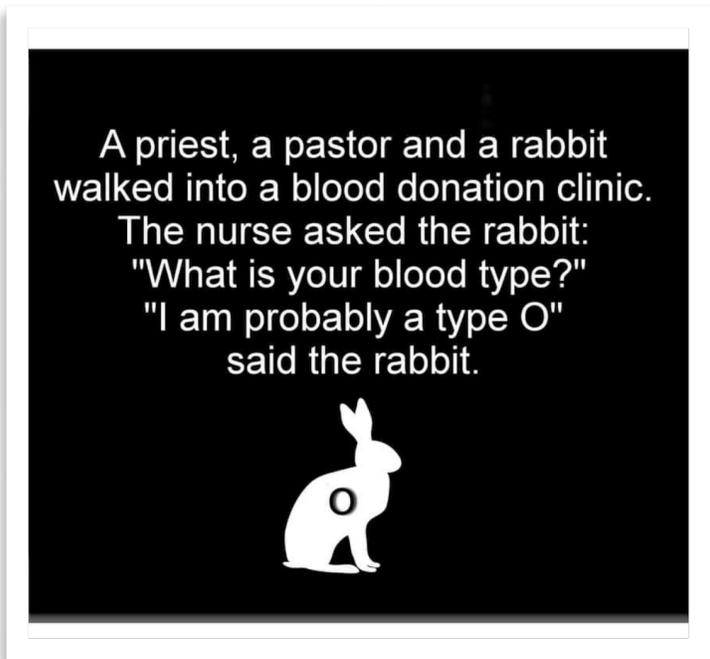
## Your Audience Has to Trust You

Excited to receive my very own Book Cover and a first proof of my manuscript, I sent the image of the cover to Joe. “Who is Gern? Oh, is this YOUR book? You can’t do this. Use your name. No one trusts anonymity anymore. Your audience wants to trust you, google you, find out more about you, follow you.” Joe was right on. But that was the last thing I wanted to hear.

I called Morgan and verified I could still change the author and not ring up a huge typo change. Like I thought, I would be charged for the content changes, not the cover and author changes.

Back to the manuscript again. I had to find the page and line number of each instance. I couldn’t just find and replace in a word document. Nope. The team of editors had to go one by one and make the changes so I had to be hyper-specific.





Done. My cover is now in my name. The stories and content are all in my name. It's time to Publish!

## Amazon! Me?

Only another author will understand the feeling of seeing your name on Amazon. It was instant. On February 14th, I viewed and approved all the changes in my proofs. The ebook and the print book each had to be formatted, viewed, approved. So welcome to the world, book.

The print book won't be available for several weeks. According to what I have learned, Amazon and the other online book sellers establish a new print book as a Pre-Sale for a few weeks because even though the book is printed, the online company can see how many pre-orders come in and they can, in turn, order a more acute number of copies. That number is what they keep in their warehouse.

## Print on Demand (POD)

Gone are the old days, when an author or book store has to order X amount of copies, store them, and hope they can sell that amount without discounting the copies to get them off the shelves. Now, publishers like BookBaby use POD. If 20 pre-orders come in to Amazon. Amazon will stock 20 copies and re-order just one or two later on to keep their stock pile. Then BookBaby just prints a few more for Amazon. No dusty copies in the Amazon warehouse or in BookBaby. Print on demand.

## Show Me the Money!

Hah! Hoo haw! Whatever. I won't see any money. Amazon pays out around 70% for each eBook sold. Each print book will ring out at \$1.59

From My own BookPage (BookBaby Shop) online, orders net me 100% for the eBook and \$6.50 for each print book.

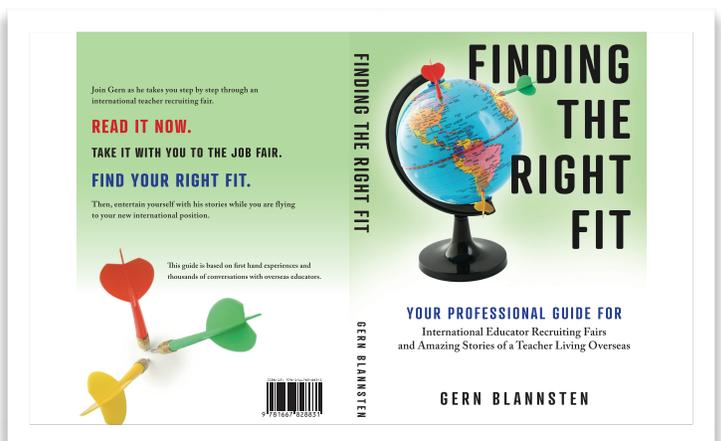
It will take me a very, very long time to break even for this journey. Oh well. I'm a teacher. I didn't get into teaching for the money. Why should I rely on authoring a book for money? Whatever.

I won't even see sales numbers for three months anyway. When asked about amounts to cut a check for, I basically told Book Baby not to write a check until it is at least \$100. Let's talk next year. Hah!

## Reaching Out, Sharing What I Know!

One of my teaching philosophies, and my life philosophy is "Knowing something is wasted on me unless I share it with someone else." All I really care about is getting my book out into the hands of readers. It would be nice to break even, don't get me wrong.

This was a milestone for me. Cross it off the bucket list. Job done. It was a journey. Still is, in a way. Now



I have some more books in mind. Later.

# The Joy of Podcasting continues

Podcasting is a lot of fun that requires a lot of work behind the scenes. First, I have to organize the interview. Teachers come out of Facebook, Twitter, emails, and LinkedIn. The time zones are all over the world, so google calendar and Zoom come in handy. Most of my interviews end up happening in the evenings or on my weekends (Fridays and Saturdays). Life is pretty non-social outside of school hours, so I have no problem letting most of my guests choose the time. After the initial interview, I have to edit the recordings. The raw recordings have a lot of dead air times, filler words like “um, right, and so...” Most of those end up being edited out using software like Audacity and Garage Band. I’ve learned a lot about audio editing.

Finally, I have to be organized with my projects in progress and the finished episodes. A finished interview goes into a few different folders either online or safely on a hard drive for later. The most entertaining and important episodes are Matt and I together. It’s not easy for Matt and I to coordinate times. He has a big family and a masters program that take up his time. No matter how I try to be available via phone and social media, Matt feels like I am elusive when he tries to contact me. Hmmmm. When Matt and I miss an episode I publish one of the interviews to the podcast. Hopefully, this kind of strategy maintains our listener base. Listeners can

## The Library of Interviews

Here is look at the “library” of interviews I have already done. Each one is somewhere along the process of being published. Soon, you will see them in our podcast episode list.

### Chantal in Chicago

We talked for almost two hours about life overseas in India, Honduras, Ecuador. Her story about being beaten by a road raged rickshaw driver in India was amazing.

### Jason in Armenia

Jason was a real talker. He is an American married to a Russian, with two or three kids living in Armenia. He has stories about Russia, Africa (i forget where), and Armenia. This guy is amazing to listen to. Talk about a renaissance man! Playwright, actor, instrumentalist, dancer, choreographer, director, film, podcasting, lighting engineer, and the list of the “Arts” goes on. Check out this podcast for sure. Allowing guests on that are not exactly in the International teacher/international schools career path adds a little variety.

### Andy / they/them/their in Tokyo, Japan

I don’t know about the LGBTQ lifestyle and I don’t relate to it. However, I empathize with kids/students that are having problems. I was uncomfortable talking with Andy, at first. I certainly didn’t want to offend him (them I mean). He (they) made it easier as we talked about it. The goal is simply to open conversation and awareness. Maybe I’ll understand it at some point. Until then, I’ll just be aware of the pronoun issue and respect their differences.

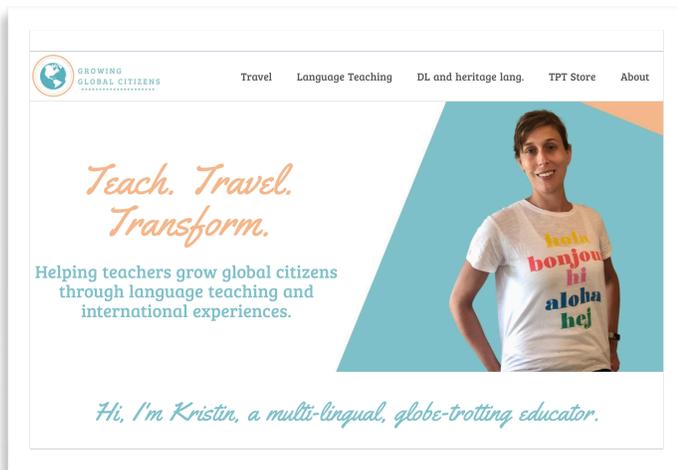
This character seems like a great teacher. At 26, they have an excellent view on life and their care for students is obvious through conversation. They and their partner (I’m trying the pronouns Andy!) were scheduled to move apartments the next morning, but Andy took the time to interview for the show. Exciting. This will be a great episode once it is edited. He had a lot of good advice for new teachers and the LGBTQ listeners out there. They even have a fair dedicated to international teaching positions in LGBTQ schools.



## Jennifer Cypra in Luxembourg

This was a fun interview. Jennifer currently lives in Luxembourg with her high school son. Easy to talk with, Jenni talked about getting hired through word of mouth and being a legacy from her parents. Her mom and dad took her to Abu Dhabi when she was in school. Jenni experienced three years of TCK life.

Later, married with two kids, she and her husband moved there - the same school - to teach. The interview then focused on STEAM, STEM, and Maker Space teaching. Her tiny school is a lot different experience than my current experience teaching on the Island.



## Kristin Montgomery in Colombia

First off, before I forget, Kristin has a website you should visit. <https://www.growingglobalcitizens.com>

Later, married with two kids, she and her husband moved there - the same school - to teach. The interview then focused on STEAM, STEM, and Maker Space teaching. Her tiny school is a lot different experience than my current experience teaching on the Island.

# Lego Webinar

I guess I don't have anything else to do at 11pm (23:00). I signed up for a webinar broadcast held at 3:00pm on the East coast. Why? Why am I so stupid. The webinar didn't really teach me much. The chat was more interesting than the guest speakers. Legos in the classroom are super expensive. The webinar reminded me how fortunate we are to have 60 sets of WeDo 2.0 in our school.

I logged into their Zoom and felt suddenly back in the USA. Even though the chatters were dialed in from all over the world, the speakers were USA based and acting a bit ethnocentric. How many times can one speaker keep mentioning the global teachers in chat? Yes, mention it once. Great. Celebrate. Then get on with the discussion. Ughh. Why do I suffer these webinars? I have yet to be a part of a truly successful webinar that makes me go "WOW!"



# In Death:

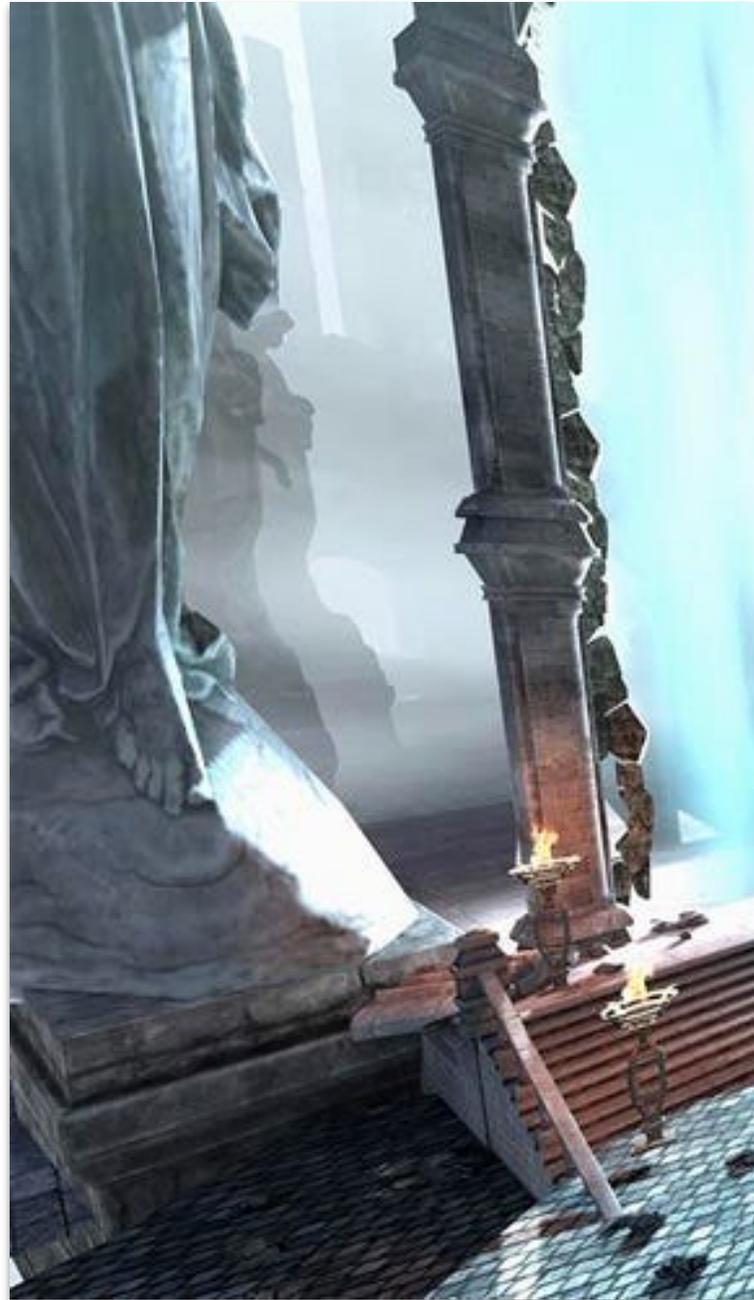
## Unchained

### Season 4

**The Quest 2 is now sitting in my apartment. The best part of the design is a limited battery. It only lasts for 1 1/2 hours.**

Great. That's all I need is a new addiction. A new video game! When I received the Quest, I decided to only purchase three games. The Quest 2 is a virtual headset and I have never experienced the VR world. My choice in games is geared towards multiple environments to see what VR is like.

The accompanying picture above is from the shooter game. Get this, your character is a first person monk assassin. You can sit in a chair or stand. The pulling hand has a port-hole arrow to move around quickly but you can also virtually move with the joysticks on the handsets. The left rotates your view and



**Shooter:** In Death Unchained  
**Virtual Reality:** Roller Coaster  
**3rd Person RPG:** Moss

the right moves the character in different directions. Amazing.

The first time I played, I figured out how to set a circle around my office chair. It allows me to physically stay in one place but move around within that circle in real life. So, I sat near my desk and used a fan to give me a point of reference in the physical room.



About five minutes into the game, after killing two or three monks with my bow, I was attacked by a Knight wielding a battle axe. As he approached and slashed at my virtual left arm, in reality, I swung my arm violently to my left as a deflection reaction.

Wham. My hand swiped my coffee mug off my desk and launched it against the wall. Coffee everywhere. The computer monitor survived the aerial mug and coffee.

Rookie mistake. From now on, I play sitting in the middle of my room, physically well away from anything else that could be damaged in the real world. The game is immersive and amazing for an hour and a half each day.

The roller coaster game is way too immersive and makes me sick. The game Moss, like a series of shadow boxes set up so I can manipulate a small mouse character through puzzles and miniature battles, still hasn't come close to the excitement of killer monks. Thank God the battery only lasts a little while.

# A Success Story



**Alejandro and I just got off a Zoom meeting. He reached out because he saw my book on Social Media!**

It's not very often that I get to hear from former students. I don't expect to as an international teacher that travels and moves around so much. However, like any teacher I've ever met, the one aspect of teaching I love more than anything else, is hearing from former students.

I was taken aback by this 30 year old man on the screen in front of me. After all, the last time I saw him he was 11 years old on the last day of fifth grade in Honduras. It was also one of the last few days of my teaching in Honduras.

Flash forward almost 20 years. Alejandro is a successful recruiter for U.S. Corporations looking to hire the best performing foreign college students. He called to say how inspired he is from all those years back. Imagine that. I made a lasting positive impression on one of my students.

That's all I ask. One student at a time. Let me inspire them. According to Alejandro, he was and is still inspired by my intentions all those years back when I was a fledgling teacher, doing his best.

Alejandro is currently in Dubai, doing a lot of public speaking, long Webinars, and traveling to the Indian subcontinent looking for recruits. He sounds ultra busy.

Even though he called to tell me how I inspired him, Alejandro is inspiring me. When I asked him about recent life, he described himself as a person that "doesn't quit". His ex-

ample was weight loss - my next personal project. He wanted to lose weight before hitting 30, so he did it. Put his mind to it and done. His secret is not really a secret. Simply watch what you are putting into your body. How many carbs are there in an egg? Do you know? If not, why are you eating an egg? The key to weight management is knowledge first, then action according to that knowledge.

I'll keep my eye on this kid. He is going to continue his rise to the few that change the world in a big way. I really think so.

There is one thought I had during our conversation. 2003-2004 was a good year. It was my third full teaching year in Honduras and overall in my career. I was still learning. What I didn't know until today...Alejandro has an Eidetic memory. Yeah, he says not to worry. It wasn't identified until much later. However, I see that as a failure on my part. Noted. Move on. Thank you Alejandro, your call has brought me out of a current teaching funk. Timely!

*Just one student that I know of. So far, so good. There might be more?*



Thank you!! Truly the most influential professor I ever had.

# Tinkering for a Job

Don't get me wrong. It's a job. Now more than ever. I'd say every teacher feels the same. Post Covid. Post unending changes. Post craziness. Post "normal". We've had it. I need a vacation in the worst way.

My job has morphed and changed like never before. The actual job description has never been made, at least the one specifically for this school and this position. Everyone talks about how to set up and manage a STEM lab or a MakerSpace. Yet, they are all different.

The bottom line is to create a space where students can learn by "doing", with their hands, in a safe environment different than ever presented before. It's happening. My boss, when I complained about no time to plan, simply stated: "Greg, if your students leave your classroom with a smile, having learned

something fun and challenging, it's a success. This is a journey."

I have great support from the central office and my MakerSpace boss. I think my principal, my immediate supervisor, also supports me. I'm not completely sure. He isn't always clear about where I stand. Sometimes I get the feeling no news is good news. Certainly, he supports the class. I just don't know how he feels about me personally in this position (or the other two of my colleagues, but that is NOT my business).

I'll keep doing what I am doing. The kids are smiling. The parents seem happy. The immediate boss seems content. Other teachers are a bit jealous - whatever! I am part of something big, something new, something exciting.



I am always impressed when my friends put their kids up to something, just to make me smile.

