

From Pirillo's Geeks: Meet Jeanette

by Catherine Forsythe

Chris Pirillo's "Geeks" space is a meeting place of a variety of very talented people. One of the regulars at Geeks is Jeanette McDermott who was gracious enough to answer a few questions:

1. How did you find Chris Pirillo's Geek space?

It was one of those flukes of fate. I was surfing YouTube videos one restless night, looking for information about digital marketing. I was opening and closing videos at the rate of about a dozen per nano-second. I remember thinking, after reviewing what seemed like a thousand poorly produced videos, that somehow, over the course of who knows how long, I had turned into a geek. Only a geek could sit glued to YouTube videos for hours on end in search of something as geeky as digital marketing. And here's where fate kicked in.

Instantly after having this thought flash across my mind, a video calling for geeks popped onto the screen. I remember thinking to myself, "no way, a video for geeks about geeks; this I've got to see." And so I hit the play button and there squirming madly in a chair doing six things at the same time was this manic personality talking a mile a minute about his new site for geeks. I could relate to this guy! And so, while watching Chris' live show in one window I opened another and became the Nature Geek at geeks.pirillo.com.

At the time I had no idea that the one small step of joining Chris' network would set into motion a whole chain of actions that would lead to me creating my own social network. But three weeks ago, just a few short weeks after joining geeks, I launched ecopaparazzi.ning.com, for environmental journalists, photographers, activists and others who care about Mother Earth and Earth healing. The extraordinary thing, again, that twist of fate, is that I learned everything I needed to know about digital marketing and social networking from other members at geeks.pirillo.com. Between the groups I joined and the friends I met, it all just unfolded spontaneously and naturally. It's been an amazing process.

2. You have started "ecopaparazzi". Can you summarize what led you to undertake such a site?

I have been a passionate lover of Earth my whole life and an environmental activist for many years. There is so much grave environmental destruction taking place today, problems and concerns that affect me down to my inner core. Like species extinction, mountaintop removal, animal welfare and rainforest depletion. I am a photojournalist and video producer by career and one day it just hit me that I could blend these two passions into a network that would pull people together the way Chris' geeks site has pulled folks together. I suddenly became very inspired by the thought. And one thing

about me -- once I get a notion in my head and that notion resonates deep in my bones -- I go for it. I don't stop until I achieve it. That's what happened with ecopaparazzi.

So, the very day this notion struck me I went into the groups I had joined and began asking questions. And I began sending notes to the people who had become my friends at geeks. I began asking questions the way any journalist would ask questions; who, what, when, where, why and how. I asked these questions about everything related to social media. As I received responses, my own thinking began to clarify. And as I became clearer and clearer about how this network could help heal Mother Earth, I grew more and more excited.

So I started exploring every nook and cranny, every avenue that a geeks member recommended. I figured I was starting out square one and had nothing to lose and everything to gain by following people's advice, tips, suggestions and warning. At one point I got so overwhelmed with information overload that I had to reach out to Chris for some sage advice. His response served as an early guidepost that helped me keep things in perspective.

3. What are some of your goals with "ecopaparazzi"?

Really there is just one overarching goal. That is to bring together every single person on Planet Earth who cares about the environment, including people who care about rural issues, wild open spaces, animal welfare, our children's future, social justice, peace and healing, global economy, hunger and poverty, consumerism, global warming, food security, you name it. Every social issue is connected to our precious soil, water and air. By coming together in the ecopaparazzi network we can find each other. And once we find each other, we can link together on issues of personal importance at the local level, the bioregional level and the global level. We can join in solidarity for support, because we all know that there is strength in numbers. And through our voice and through our actions, standing together as one to help each other, we can change the world. We really can. It is in our power. I truly believe that. But it starts with a small single step, and step by step the longest march can be won. Creating ecopaparazzi is my first small single step. But it's up and running now and the network looks good. We have nearly 100 members who are true Earth lovers and Earth healers and we are ready for action. So the more people we have, the more actions we can undertake to create a better tomorrow.

4. Is your background experience in environmental issues?

EcoPaparazzi is a play on words. As a photojournalist I have often felt like a voyeur going through life. I've never been a celebrity stalker, but I have been an Earth abuser stalker. I look for environmental problems and the people who are directly responsible for causing them. I especially like catching culprits in the act and exposing them through the media. Because this leads to change. When something is hidden or swept under the carpet things don't change. I love that in California on November 4 citizens will vote on Proposition 2. This is a proposition that will change forever the cruel way in which slaughter animals are treated in factory farms. The Proposition is a direct result of an

underground media investigation that documented horrendous animal cruelty in one of the largest U.S. factory farms. The media investigation led to 18 workers being prosecuted on criminal charges and the closure of the factory farm. The public outcry was so significant that this new proposition will now go to the vote to change forever the face of factory farming. That is the power of photographs, the power of video, the power of voice, the power of an individual taking a stand. That's what inspires me about ecopaparazzi. Our network has the potential of leading to this kind of change.

I started as a newspaper reporter as an 18 year old right out of high school and became a lifelong learner from day one. I was completely enamored with the profession and wanted to learn it all. So I learned photojournalism, then magazine writing and layout and design, then radio and television production, then filmmaking and now social media as a network creator. I have also been passing on my skills to the new generation of media makes, today's teens, since 1996. Youth media has the potential for being one of the most powerful voices for change on Earth. I love working with teens on social and environmental justice videos.

In addition to my media background I have taught environmental education as an informal educator and was a roster artist with the Kentucky Arts Council for three years, teaching digital photography and video production. Now I live in Costa Rica, where I work on conservation videos. In January I begin working with teens in Nicaragua to uncover ugly truths about the landfill conditions in the capital city. In Managua, Central America's largest landfill, more than 2,000 people scavenge daily through the toxic waste to eke out less than a dollar a day. Including children as young as five years old. It's time that story was told from the youth's perspective.

5. What are some of the surprises, so far, in running such a site?

Without a doubt the most surprising element is the incredible knowledge that people have and their willingness to share their knowledge with others who want to start a social network. It's not only phenomenally incredible, but it's beautiful. Social networking is like Woodstock in cyberspace. It's fabulous. There is so much peace and harmony and love when people come together for common causes to create positive social change. This has been my biggest surprise. In two weeks I was able to create what I think is a beautiful site with beautiful people because of the embrace I have received from others. So many people have helped me build this site through their comments, leads, tips, suggestions, moral support, feedback, candor, you name it.

The other surprise, which is really blow-away, is the Ning network itself. Wow! There is an entire system set in motion for the sole purpose of helping people like me set up a social network. And most of the people behind the scenes at Ning are volunteers. They do it out of love. Love for the future and love for Earth, because they know the power of social media and they are agents of change making the future better through the networks.

Here is a link to Ecopaparazzi. Do drop by, have a visit and see a work in progress - Jeanette extends a welcome.

<http://ecopaparazzi.ning.com>

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