

Too Many Jennifers

Episode 16: Space Swaddle

Episode description: We're lost in the existential-terror-hole of space this week with Dr. Jennifer Levasseur from the National Air and Space Museum! Answer your burning space questions like, "Is the International Space Station a party space station?" and "Is the moon real?" (jk, we know it's not). Plus, why sleeping in space is too creepy for the Jennifers!

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(Upbeat music)

*Too Many Jennifers,
So little time.
Too Many Jennifers,
All on the line*

(music fades out)

JENNY C. 00:41

Hi and welcome to Too Many Jennifers, a podcast made by Jennifers for everyone. I'm Jenny Cavallero.

JENN T. 00:49

And I am equally as long on my I'm Jenn Tisdale.

JENNY C. 00:53

That's correct. Welcome.

JENN T. 00:56

I thought you started off so softly. I thought we were bringing JeNPR back.

JENNY C. 01:00

You know I just can't decide how my voice is going to be today. Am I projecting? Am I mumbling
This is a audio medium. I can't tell.

JENN T. 01:09

I think we're we're gonna invent ASMRcore, which is exactly what's happening is some
whispering some accidental tapping on my part. And at some point, I'm a scientist inexplicably
working in a library, which is a lot of these videos, so or maybe I'm painting my nails. They have
great content.

JENNY C. 01:33

My ASMR that I respond to is the soap cutting we have we've talked about this before?

JENN T. 01:40

No, we haven't but I...no.

JENNY C. 01:42

Have you seen his videos, they cut they like score a bar of soap. And then they scrape it off with
a razor and it makes my brain go like [WEIRD NOISE]

JENN T. 01:52

Is it the sound? Do you have visual?

JENNY C. 01:56

It's the visual. I have not, I usually watch videos like that on mute like the hydraulic press
channel. I don't want to hear it. I just want to see it go smoosh and then squirt out. You know,

JENN T. 02:07

I do think that all of this sounds a little sexual.

JENNY C. 02:11

It does. I'm into soap cutting. It's my kink. No it like really, I saw one on my Instagram Discovery Page one day and I was like "What is this?" [COUGHING] excuse me, and it really made my brain like vibrate in a way that I'd never experienced before. I was like, Oh, I finally get ASMR.

JENN T. 02:30

Oh, so that's, see that's so interesting. I don't really, I only have visual triggers if it's accompanying audio triggers and my, the whispering binaural whispering is mine, page turning so there's a lot of ASM artists I will like listen to them read books out loud to me. In fact, Phoebe, I can't remember her last name don't worry about it, from the podcast "Criminal."

JENNY C. 02:56

Phoebe Judge

JENN T. 02:57

Thank you, she has a podcast where she reads, where every episode was like a chapter of a book and she did "Dracula," and I was like, sign me up baby. You have a soft voice. It's about vampires. It's like these things will never converge again.

JENNY C. 03:12

No. nor should they because she has perfected the convo.

JENN T. 03:16

It's true.

JENNY C. 03:17

Thank you Phoebe Judge.

JENN T. 03:18

So before we get into what we're what we're doing today, we have a guest another guest. We're so guest dependent. It's like doing crowd work at a comedy show. We can't come up with anything on our own.

JENNY C. 03:31

We love a guest.

JENN T. 03:32

You did excitedly text me about some small but mighty JenNews that was relative to the episode that was released the week before this one.

JENNY C. 03:44

Yes so on our previous episode, Episode 15, you might have listened to it. It's really great. We had Gigi Modrich on the show and I said her name wrong again. I think

JENN T. 03:56

Mah-Drich

JENNY C. 03:57

It's Modrich like mod. Mod is a common word, Gigi Modrich my friend, my close personal friend Gigi Modrich was on the show and was giving recommendations for indigenous owned companies. And one of them we talked about was Cheekbone Beauty, which I have bought lipstick from before. It's amazing lipstick. They're Canadian indigenous own company. And we

tagged them in a tweet related to Gigi's episode, and they were so kind to Retweet it. And so I was like "Oh great," and I didn't follow them on Twitter. So I went to their page and realized their CEO and founder is a Jennifer and not only that, she is a double N Jenn.

JENN T. 04:39

Finally, I mean, we keep meeting all these people who are inexplicably spelling Jen incorrectly.

JENNY C. 04:45

I know. I know.

JENN T. 04:47

And it's just nice to find somebody, a Canadian, no less okay?. And it's not that sex and you said maybe we should have run the show. And I agree because we seem to primarily focus on the Jennifer relationship in America. We're a couple of xenophobes. we hate, we want to build a wall around our names. So um...

JENNY C. 05:07

And we want to build a bridge named Jennifer to Canada

JENN T. 05:11

That's right where all the healthcare is free.

JENNY C. 05:14

Yeah so Jenn Harper, we would love to have you on the show we're gonna, we're gonna try and reach out to her. I'm sure she's very busy running a business and doing wonderful work but yeah support Cheekbone Beauty either way and Jennifer CEOs

JENN T. 05:28

Be our guest, be our guest.

JENNY C. 05:31

Don't sing that. We'll have to pay money. She's here!

Dr. Jennifer 05:37

How are you both?

JENNY C. 05:38

Great! How are you?

JENN T. 05:40

We're smarter now.

Dr. Jennifer 05:44

You've improved by one Jennifer.

JENNY C. 05:46

Yay!

Dr. Jennifer 05:46

It's like a measurement.

JENN T. 05:48

It is a unit of is a unit of measure. We should do that from now on. We're starting it. I know that I, we talked about how to say your name when I cold called you like a telemarketer.

Dr. Jennifer 05:59

What was ironic about that I meant to tell you is that you know, all of my work calls get forwarded to my cell phone. So it's not like I was answering it at work. I was answering my cell phone, which still feels weird.

JENN T. 06:09

Can't help it. Oh God that's right you guys aren't there.

JENNY C. 06:12

I love that. I love that Jenn just called you and was like 'Hey, my name is also Jennifer.'

JENN T. 06:17

That's exactly what happened!

Dr. Jennifer 06:17

That's pretty much how it started.

JENNY C. 06:19

Come be our podcast.

JENN T. 06:22

She was like "This is Jennifer" and I was like " I have an update."

Dr. Jennifer 06:26

Not a tough sell, I have to say.

JENNY C. 06:28

Oh we're so grateful.

JENN T. 06:30

It's um, it's almost like this is like oh, this is how you get into a club. It's like "Oh you're named Jennifer? Come to the front." So great. Will you say your last name again for me. I know it was like sir, because you said like drop the....

Dr. Jennifer 06:40

Yeah just scratch out the U and so you say it Levasseur.

JENN T. 06:44

Oh that's better.

JENNY C. 06:45

Levasseur

JENN T. 06:45

Oh like Le...the college.

Dr. Jennifer 06:48

Exactly I actually have a friend whose maiden name is Vassar so it makes it super easy for her because that's how like in her head she sees it. She's just used to it so putting the Le on the front is no big deal.

JENNY C. 06:59

Amazing and you go by Jennifer or?

Dr. Jennifer 07:04

Oh...

JENN T. 07:05

We gotta get into that!

JENNY C. 07:08

We have to get into it because we have to know how to refer to you.

JENN T. 07:12

Yeah yeah so our first...

Dr. Jennifer 07:14

In a professional, in a professional setting I would not deviate from Jennifer if my life depended on it.

JENN T. 07:20

So your Jennifer tonight. We never get to say Jennifer. Okay.

JENNY C. 07:23

We are so excited. We have a great guest today who Jenn so wonderfully cold called from the Internet. Love, Love a Jenn Energy. We want to welcome Dr. Jennifer Levasseur, who received her BA in history from the University of Michigan in '99, an MA in American studies from the George Washington University in 2002. Hey GW, and a PhD in history at George Mason University in 2014. In July 2020, Purdue University Press Hey Midwest, released her book "Through Astronaut Eyes: Photography from Early Human Spaceflight," which looks at the cultural significance of astronaut photography. She serves as the responsible curator for the museum's astronaut cameras, chronographs, the space shuttle and the International Space Station programs. I'm nailing this bio.

JENN T. 08:16

Yeah, it's it's time for part two Electric Boogaloo. Since 2002, Jennifer has worked at the Air and Space Museum, I've been drunk there, on artifact loans serves as the program committee chair for the biannual mutual concerns of Air and Space Museums Conference and as a department representative on digital projects. She curated the 2015 spacewalk anniversary exhibit "Outside the Spacecraft 50 years of Extra-Vehicular," great wordplay "Activit," and currently serves as exhibition curator for the "Moving Beyond Earth" exhibition. Welcome Dr....Levasseur.

Dr. Jennifer 08:54

Wow, that's a mouthful. That sounds so unreal listening to it read back to you.

JENNY C. 09:00

That's why we split it in half. We were like, how can we get through this very impressive resume. Without you know.

JENN T. 09:08

It's crazy. I think mine is basically Jenn Tisdale was born in Washington, DC. That's it. That's the whole...

JENNY C. 09:18

Here she is. She's started a podcast however.

JENN T. 09:20

Still here! Coming to the stage still very much here: Jenn Tisdale. So yeah, so I did call you out of the blue. That's a sky joke. We're gonna get into, we're gonna we're gonna get it up there.

Dr. Jennifer 09:34

There yep, there is nothing wrong with good air or space pun in my opinion. We do it all the time ourselves. So it's not gonna surprise me.

JENNY C. 09:43

We love that, we think puns are the highest form of humor. And I just want to tell our listeners that sometimes this is literally the way we find guests, is we think about a topic we're interested in and we Google that topic with the name Jennifer and then we get a great options. Um, we're literally everywhere. And you are right near us here in Washington DC.

Dr. Jennifer 10:06

Yeah

JENNY C. 10:07

Or adjacent so we're so thrilled to have you. You work for one of one of the great institutions being The Smithsonian.

Dr. Jennifer 10:18

Yeah, it's, um, I recently passed my 19th anniversary at the National Air and Space Museum and did you know sort of a little bit of a reflection. I've done, obviously, a number of those throughout, you know, 19 years or have had cause to. One of them was when the person who hired me retired a few years ago. So I did a huge sort of Facebook reflection on how grateful I am still to this day to him and how he is so important to me and all that stuff. But the 19th year,

19 year one was a little bit more personal. And just thinking that, you know, obviously, coming up soon is another big milestone. And it's kind of surreal to have spent, obviously, the last 18 months not really spending time with my colleagues and spending time in the museum. Those times have become more precious in a way. And so yeah, it was just a good time to sort of sit and think about all those things in the biography that really all yeah, they did. They did something they got me here. So it's, yeah, it's an honor. It's a privilege working for the Smithsonian generally is just really fantastic. It's a great place to work. We, you know, you work in in a really collegial environment for the most part. I mean, everybody has their bad days in every place but we work in a place where we have this shared goal, this shared mission that has existed and we just passed the Smithsonian just last week, passed its 175th anniversary.

JENN T. 11:45

Of the institution...

Dr. Jennifer 11:47

Of the institution

JENN T. 11:48

...because people outside of DC and often myself within DC, the Smithsonian is many things and it is also one thing. Don't try to describe it. You cannot.

Dr. Jennifer 12:01

Yeah, I remember as a kid like trying to, the very first time I was coming to Washington, my I think in my head, what is the Smithsonian and I very distinctly remember talking about it about, you know, what do you do when you go to Washington, DC? Well, you go to the Smithsonian. Well, what is that, because it just has this, it's this somewhat ambiguous sounding name, it doesn't really mean anything, outside of this institution, in the sense of nobody's called Smithsonian. Or Smithson isn't even a familiar name and that's where it originates from: James Smithson. So yeah, we just passed the 175th anniversary and sort of thinking about being part of those 175 years, and then what will happen, you know, beyond that date, too, is just a little crazy. Yeah, it's, but it's special. And it's, um, you know, we have I think something like 6000 employees across the institution, but it is still just surreal to think, you know, I've been I'm a part of the same thing that, you know, other individuals who I really highly respect are either part of or have been part of, and it's just a privilege, you know I...

JENN T. 13:07

Yeah

Dr. Jennifer 13:07

...for being a government employee it's kind of unusual to say, wow, I really respect my employer. And I really do you know, it's the big the big employer, you know, the, the entity that you know, kind of signs my paychecks basically, with the Smithsonian...

JENN T. 13:25

Space

Dr. Jennifer 13:26

...print on it. Yeah.

JENN T. 13:26

Space signs your paycheck. Just a star.

JENNY C. 13:31

It's underwritten by Air but Space has the signing.

Dr. Jennifer 13:35

I like to think of the space side as definitely the way more important side.

JENN T. 13:39

Yeah, who's coming for air?

Dr. Jennifer 13:42

That's the boring part. I say that to my kids. I say it to my colleagues jokingly. It's the part I pay the least amount of attention to. I'm a terrible tour guide, because I don't really like airplanes other than, well, frankly, I just don't like airplanes. I don't like riding on them. I don't like hearing them. I don't like being near them. I'm just not a fan of airplanes. So I very specifically, kind of try to avoid all that. Which of course is quite ironic because there's an airplane nicknamed The Jenny so

JENNY C. 14:09

Yes!

JENN T. 14:10

We know, we know!

Dr. Jennifer 14:12

It's officially the only airplane I like.

JENNY C. 14:14

Obsessed with that airplane.

JENN T. 14:16

We are. We are.

Dr. Jennifer 14:20

It's just got a...

JENN T. 14:21

Wait do you guys have one?

Dr. Jennifer 14:22

We do, yeah out at our museum well it used to be downtown in the downtown museum building. And then for safety reasons, people were actually trying, this is a crazy museum story, people are not often respectful of boundaries, meaning boundaries like railings and things like that. So in our case, it was getting, it was installed in an exhibition and then from the second floor, people were throwing things and so we had to move it to the Udvar-Hazy Center which is out near Dulles Airport. So yeah, I did like I talked about like an instinctual need to protect something. I was just like " No, this can't be happening!"

JENNY C. 15:01

They attacked The Jenny.

Dr. Jennifer 15:02

Exactly

JENNY C. 15:03

That is shocking, but also not shocking. I work in public libraries so I understand that people don't always treat things well, especially things that they get to access for free, unfortunately, but I have been to the suburban air & space, as I call it, cuz I'm always forgetting the name. And it's quite impressive. So is it on display there now? Like, could we take a field, a Jennifer field trip and go visit it?

Dr. Jennifer 15:29

You betttter believe it Yeah, it's definitely out there on display, it's at floor level. So you can kind of come and look, you know, look at it. And I've never, you know, it's funny, because I've never really spent other than just knowing what I mean, I know a little bit about what it was used for. I

know, sort of, sort of its history to some degree. Because it's a pretty early aircraft. I mean, it's not you know, this is not an SRS-71 by any means. It kind of hangs out in that sort of area, we kind of tend to organize ourselves, you know, by time or by period, basically. And so it sits in a different area a little bit more on the commercial side. So, but it tells us some really, I mean, you can tell really great stories with it.

JENN T. 16:09

You know what if there's a tour guide, who specifically has a bunch of stories about this plane, we should, we'd love to, we'd love to do like a remote recording from next to The Jenny really quick, and then I we have so many questions for you.

JENNY C. 16:27

So many questions.

JENN T. 16:29

Some of them goofy. I want to point out that I have a tiny relationship to the Smithsonian, my great, great, some great, great uncle. I never know how many. It's more than three. Right? His name was Calhoun Derringer. And he was the he was very high up, I think it was the highest up in the Freemasons. And he presided over the cornerstone laying of the Smithsonian building, because he was like, I mean, I'm fairly certain our family is cursed, because we invented a gun. But maybe we're also in the Illuminati. Right. There's, there's a lot of newspaper articles about him presiding over the laying of the cornerstone of the Smithsonian.

Dr. Jennifer 17:03

That's pretty awesome. Yeah, I mean, there's so many like crossover things, stories in this area, in particular, with people from different, you know, different kinds of backgrounds, and, you know, members of certain kinds of clubs that, you know, are all it all connects. It's sort of like the connection I never, you know, I was I'm obviously fascinated with history and one of the histories I always thought was really cool. I think because I read a Choose Your Own Adventure book when I was a kid about it but I was always interested in what's his name? Powell, the guy that went down the Colorado River way back and sort of like the late 19th century, you know, the 1870s. I was fascinated by him. I don't know why I just thought it was kind of cool. And then it turns out, he was part of the Smithsonian in what was called the Bureau of Ethnology over at the Natural History building. And so it's just sort of like, Whoa, this all comes in, like circle back

around. And yeah, I don't I don't have any I'm, my roots are all in the Midwest still. So I don't have any good family, family connections. I think I'm the only one but I'll make my own routes. My kids will stay here probably. And we carry on and maybe even you know, doing a Smithsonian job at some point.

JENNY C. 18:16

People couldn't see this. So we're listening but I pumped my fist in there because I'm also from the Midwest.

JENN T. 18:22

Yeah, I noticed. I noticed that. Yeah, yeah. Well, it seems like the Smithsonian is a cult. No, I'm kidding. I'm just kidding. Might that's just my family, specifically,

JENNY C. 18:34

And possibly the Jennifers at large. Okay, so we have some questions for you. Because we're, we're excited to learn about your work. And you work a lot with photography. And as reflected in your wonderful book "Through Astronaut Eyes: Photography from Early Human Spaceflight," available now through Purdue University Press. And you also curate astronaut cameras for the museum. So could you tell us what about space cameras is so different than say, your earth Kodak models?

Dr. Jennifer 19:05

Yeah, this is where my job sort of breaks down. And I always hate to be the kind of Debbie Downer to use another name in a not great way. I don't like to be the Debbie Downer of the Smithsonian or the Air and Space Museum. But when you know, you're speaking to children, especially because that's a primary focus of the au-, you know, that's kind of our primary audience. If they are similar, you know, kind of like, what's it like to be in space? What, what is what is astronaut food, like, you know, it really is not as different as you think it is. And its cameras I had no joke was just writing. I'm writing a new book proposal. So moving on from the astronaut photography thing a little bit, but one element of it is about cameras, and it's really not. Not spacey. They are I mean, in reality, they're pretty much the same, especially today. I mean, you can just basically take a digital camera and put it on a, you know, a space shuttle or a launch vehicle or whatever it is take it up to space, use it and bring it back. The only problem is the batteries usually. So you don't want anything that's potentially combustible. I mean, even

when you go on airplanes these days, you are cautioned about the types of batteries that you have. And so that's the one real, that's the one real difference that's true today. Now, if you kind of keep moving back in time, there's definitely considerations for making sure that things function properly. So when you're talking about, say, the period that I talked about in the book, they weren't necessarily thinking so much about batteries, but thinking about things like friction. So there are parts of mechanical cameras and digital cameras obviously work much differently but when you're talking about a mechanical camera that actually has to turn gears and move parts on the inside, you don't get the same effect when the temperatures are different. And temperatures in space are vastly different. So yeah, they had to take some things like that into consideration. So yeah, that and then in the beginning, especially like John Glenn, and the Mercury Program, those things look very weird, because they were taking things they bought at the store and then kind of playing around with them, to make sure the astronauts could actually hold them and use them. They just didn't know what they were doing so much they were prepared for everything. Apollo astronauts had it a little bit easier, in that they were kind of using cameras just like what you would have used if you were you know, walking around on the Earth that day.

JENN T. 21:28

A Polaroid?

Dr. Jennifer 21:30

Could have used a Polaroid.

JENN T. 21:32

Me trying to shake it as it floats away and I'm like "Well there goes another one guys."

JENNY C. 21:37

I'm just thinking of the pressure of that photo technician to not like screw up.

Dr. Jennifer 21:42

Yeah those guys, those guys were pretty intense. Well, what was the bigger pressure was really on the astronauts because they did screw up. They were not professionals. They didn't know

what the heck they were doing other than some, you know, minimal amount of training that they got. And there were always written instructions. That's one of the things about space it's always written down somewhere. So if you forget, you train you train, you train you train, but it's always written down too so they always have instructions, but sometimes, you know, made mistakes. Infamously on Apollo 8, the first mission to take people to the moon, one of the astronauts use the wrong speed of film in the camera for what he was trying to do. The thing was, he thankfully noted it, that he had messed up and then when it got to the lab back on Earth, they could process it in a special way. And fix the mistake.

JENN T. 22:31

They call that fixing it in post.

Dr. Jennifer 22:33

Yeah exactly. Yeah, I used to do that actually, as a middle schooler ages ago. I love the darkroom. I thought it was great. So during the shuttle program, there's actually some great stories about using IMAX cameras because IMAX was obviously a big thing in the 1980s especially because that's really when it hit its stride. You started seeing it in a ton of different places. I saw a lot of IMAX movies at an amusement park I used to go to as a kid.

JENN T. 22:36

I feel like what should have been necessary is every like astronauts are taking all these like very intense, I'm gonna say classes there. And then one of them is just a photography class, and they have to go do that thing that I had to do, which is try to take the film out of the camera and roll it into the canister in the dark. Ha ha! At the Science Center speaking of science.

Dr. Jennifer 23:24

Science centers, yeah everywhere and but those that they actually had to those rolls of film are gigantic. They're like, they're like huge or 70 millimeters so they're gigantic.

JENN T. 23:34

And I'm I'm sorry I'm laughing it just feels like, I'm picturing like, whenever things are comically large or comically small it is...comic.

Dr. Jennifer 23:40

It is comically large, but they had to do this what you're talking about in a, so they have like a mini darkroom that was basically a bag. So if you imagine a big suitcase size bag, and armholes, no like, like little arm holes that they so they had to do it blindly, basically, with by feel on the inside. So they had to take out one reel, put it back in its little canister, and then load the film back into the the magazine that attached to the camera itself. So there's this crazy process that they had to learn. And so it's just, yeah, that's one of the better like visual stories about them doing photography, because it was really involved. And you can imagine, you don't want to mess it up. I mean, I get so many you only get so many. So many reels.

JENN T. 24:27

Yeah you'll be back in like three years sorry or whatever it is.

Dr. Jennifer 24:31

Yeah

JENN T. 24:31

So speaking of your book, it sort of explores, sort of it explores photographs taken during the Mercury, the Gemini, which is a messy sign and Apollo programs. So those and if and if my "research" is correct, this was between 1962 to 1972.

Dr. Jennifer 24:51

Right

JENN T. 24:52

What photo told you the most compelling story, that's a maybe that's a big question.

Dr. Jennifer 24:59

I mean there's definitely, um, there, I definitely have my favorites. I have ones that I think about a lot in terms and are used a lot. I mean, that's one of the things that becomes really obvious is there some you just see all the time. And that was really kind of what my got my thought process going in the first place. Why are these so important? Why do we keep seeing them? Why in the one at the end of the book really talks about sort of where my origin story for the book will go and come from. And that was when I saw "An Inconvenient Truth," by Al Gore. And he gives a talk and he uses these space photos. And I'm like, gosh, those photos like if you think about it, he's doing this talk in like the late 90s or something, early 2000's. Those photos were 40 years old. At that point, why are 40 year old photos so intriguing and useful to people today, and that's kind of where the whole thing started going. But the one that I really have the most, I think the most about because I think it asks some really, or brings up some really interesting ideas and they're like the big life life, you know, spanning kinds of ideas. There's one that sort of nicknamed The Loneliest Man and it is a picture that Michael Collins the Command Module Pilot on Apollo 11 took when he was looking out his window, and in the window is the Earth but also the lunar module that has Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on it. In that moment, the only person in all of human history: living, dead, ever, ever, ever that's not in that picture is him. And it's just this like, like really like massive sit back and like, absorb that concept thing. Like there's literally behind him.

JENN T. 26:43

Okay I just got that. I just got that. It took me, hold on. I'm not, I'm...

JENNY C. 26:48

My brain was like, exploding.

JENN T. 26:51

I was like what is she even ta-, everyone's on Earth.

Dr. Jennifer 26:54

Yeah everyone's on, everyone's back there and then there's the two guys in the spacecraft. But then he's the only guy not the only human ever in that. So the fact that that was possible, the fact that like that, to me that brings home the enormity of going to the moon of doing spaceship all of it. To me, it just brings it all into this one and so I think the farther along I went and thinking about the book, that one really kind of struck me as being the most powerful. For the real

message that's like the facts of the actual photo is really mind blowing. So I've spent probably, I don't want to say I sit around and dwell on it, because I don't, but it is

JENN T. 27:31

The loneliest, the loneliest Jennifer.

Dr. Jennifer 27:34

Yeah, yeah, I mean it could be, but you know, the other thing is, too, is that one of the points I make in the book, and it's definitely true, and it probably comes from that photo is that that's what makes them so powerful is the fact that you can imagine being the person taking it. And it's really hard to imagine being in space, but you can imagine being a photographer because, you know, we do it with our cell phones and, you know, cameras and whatnot. So it's a little bit, it makes it a little bit easier to understand a point of view. So it's kind of the beginning to thinking about, you know, what it's all about.

JENNY C. 28:07

I love that and I try not to imagine myself in outer space, because I find that absolutely terrifying.

Dr. Jennifer 28:15

I agree!

JENNY C. 28:16

You agree, okay. I, I find space so interesting and fascinating. And when I want to feel connected to some meaning in the universe, I think about how, you know, things orbit and, and how small we are, but how we can have an impact and, and I also go into an existential terror hole. And so I have to cut myself off.

JENN T. 28:43

I love that you have to think of space when you want to feel insignificant because I just have to get out of bed. We like to have fun here!

JENNY C. 28:51

Whatever works for you, depends on the day. Okay, so I also, I looked up the word chronograph because I didn't know what that was. It's, it's I learned, it's basically a fancy type of watch that's also a stopwatch.

Dr. Jennifer 29:04

Yeah

JENNY C. 29:05

And how, so how much does the space watch cost first of all, and what types of things do they use it for? Because you do you collect these for the museum?

Dr. Jennifer 29:14

Yeah, so the museum has a collection and I talk about these a lot. And that's because if you think about what and this is the way I've sort of started looking at it, and this is sort of my present like research area that I've been thinking a lot about is about time and about...no small concepts for me. Only time.

JENN T. 29:37

Listen, I think of time. I think of space. And I think about time travel.

Dr. Jennifer 29:43

So um, but thinking about it you know, most people I know wear watches, many people I know wear watches or you have access to a clock or yes, there's always something nearby usually that tells you time. You have an alarm clock you have whatever so time is incredibly relevant in our daily lives. And it's it's a necessity knowing the time or a time since something started is is a

necessity in space. And so the astronauts needed something and part of NASA's, you know, maturing process through sort of the early days was figuring out how to kind of regulate all of the stuff that astronauts were using. So Mercury is kind of a story of a mishmash of things. It's just like, let's try this. Let's try this. We're taking all kinds of stuff.

JENN T. 30:28

I'm not going on the let's try this mission. Let's see what sticks. This is the throw it at the wall mission. Anything.

Dr. Jennifer 30:35

It's not cool. Yeah, it's not cool. It's not a good idea, really. They got in trouble, too. So Gemini program comes along, and then it's all about let's figure out the right answer, not about just trying out different things. And so one of the things that they insisted on doing was coming up with a timekeeping device of some kind that astronauts could wear. The most of them at the time were pilots and they had flown airplanes. And so watches were important to almost everything that they did. Same is true and probably more so in the lives of the astronauts. And so basically, a guy who was assigned to this project had to go out and find watches and test them against all these criteria they thought would be important for spaceflight. And he did all kinds of crazy tests on them. And he picked one which was the Omega Speedmaster. If you look up Omega's website today, they are super duper proud of their connection with space as are most every company. If they don't know that they were involved in space, and they want to find out they you know, every company that's a big marketing tool these days is like "Look how cool we are. We were involved in the space program." So Omega has been involved since 1964, basically. They still supply the watches today that astronauts wear when they go on spacewalks. So it is an incredibly long story of involvement with that program but it's just super important. If you think about it, when you go out and this goes back to the outside the spacecraft exhibit I did when you leave the spacecraft in your own sort of mini portable spacecraft if almost everything goes wrong, you still have to know how much time it's been since you left that spacecraft. So you have to have a watch that's going to be able to be act basically like a stopwatch to say "I've left the spacecraft at zero. And it's now you know, one hour." So I know I've been out here for an hour, because you have a limited supply of air. You have a limited supply of material that's going to keep you alive in that backpack. So they've just been really consistent, Omega has in the way they build these things, and they've just maintained that kind of presence in the program. And it's you know, super cool they are I work with them regularly on just sort of keeping an eye on the older stuff, make sure it's safe, but there is a gigantic and this is the reason I always say these 60 or so items are the most popular in my collection of over 3000 objects. That's because there's a huge collector community timepieces. kind of think of it like Tiffany you know, chandelier is not you know, any any kind of like, like high class.

JENN T. 33:18

Garbage Pail Kids cards.

Dr. Jennifer 33:20

There you go. Yeah, very collectible.

JENN T. 33:24

Yeah yeah yeah, yes.

Dr. Jennifer 33:26

It's not a you know, it's not a po-, it's not a it's not for the those who don't have disposable income, that's for sure. It is it is an investment. And people are really interested in these they want to know every single detail there is to know so I get a lot of inquiries about "Which ones do you have? What are the serial numbers?"

JENN T. 33:45

Oh my God.

Dr. Jennifer 33:46

They want to know, the intimate details because watches if you like like kind of open them up, have all kinds of details inside of them, numbers and all kinds of things. And it's so it's just a very crazy thing to get to be involved in but I love it. It's one of those like, it's weird. It's kind of quirky, it's very, it's a very small little tiny segment of things. But I love kind of thinking about it and talking about it. And it's just, they're just some really interesting stories from it all.

JENN T. 34:16

Listen, "Back to the Future," is my favorite movie. If you recall the opening scene it pans over Doc Brown's house a wall of different kinds of clocks so you don't have to explain a clock obsession to me, I get it. And also every episode I almost make Jenny and I spend money on a song so for this one, it's going to be "Look at this chronograph!" I'm gonna get us...

JENNY C. 34:42

We're so sorry for that.

JENN T. 34:45

And then I'll just squeeze in NickelBack to the Future and I'll get on with my next question. You just talked about all of these iconic photos of Earth. We've seen various photos of Earth for you decades now...

Dr. Jennifer 35:01

Yeah

JENN T. 35:01

...from, from space. If you of course, believe that this is real this space crap. No, I'm kidding. In your professional opinion, what movie about space gets it right and is it "Spaceballs"?

Dr. Jennifer 35:14

Ohhhh

JENNY C. 35:16

It has to be.

Dr. Jennifer 35:16

Sadly no. They did get most of the humor right, that's for sure. I am a, and for those just listening, I have a very large lightsaber on my bookcase behind my head. I am a huge space nerd. I absolutely love "Star Wars," and so I, but I am I am also I can appreciate the humor that "Spaceballs" provides. Just like I really, I really appreciate the movie "Galaxy Quest" for the same reasons because I do have interest in Star Trek, not as much, but I love that kind of play that they do on the on all of the tropes of those kinds of films. And so it's really fun. But the space film that gets it closest, and this is one that we often talk about amongst ourselves, because it's one thing, basically, what we tend to do now is when a new space movie comes out, we try to gather as a group and go and see it together so then we can have our little conversation right afterwards and prepare ourselves for the inevitable "Which one," you know "What did you think of that?" It is not "Gravity."

JENN T. 36:24

I assumed that would be it. You couldn't get past that wig. You could not get past that wig.

Dr. Jennifer 36:30

Yeah, that's a tough one. In terms of like plot, I think it's, it's, it's interesting. I did enjoy watching it. The one I suspect could be closest to sort of scientific reality and it's hard to test because we haven't been there yet but I actually think it might be "The Martian."

JENN T. 36:50

Whoa! The Matt Damon...

Dr. Jennifer 36:52

Yeah Matt Damon, yeah so there are lots of truths to that. There are lots of things that we know to be accurate about life and trying to live on Mars. I mean, we are trying to eventually go there. But having been to the moon, there are lots of experiences that we can kind of use to...

JENN T. 37:09

I air quoted the moon for you.

Dr. Jennifer 37:12

Yeah, yeah...it's okay.

JENN T. 37:15

Um, I thought you were gonna say "Total Recall," because that's a very accurate depiction of life on Mars, in my opinion, that's the Mars I want to go to.

Dr. Jennifer 37:24

I don't think Arnold in space is probably going to cut it among space historians but we do love a space movie I used to run on Tuesdays, we used to actually have a sort of little movie group that we would have it just outside the office I had in the museum. And so we had a TV in there, and we just set it up. And I put a DVD in and back when we did DVDs and we did a lot of Netflix ordering in the early days of Netflix, and we would watch just all these little quirky space movies. So I have a catalogue still of all the movies we watched and let me tell you, some of them are pretty awful. But "The Martian," is pretty is pretty good, um "Gravity's" not terrible. I mean, it's not like really far off. It's just that there's this thing called orbital mechanics, where you really could not have all those bits of stuff, just kind of flying in all kinds of directions. It just doesn't work that way. So there's a fundamental flaw at the beginning of the movie that then kind of sets off this chain of, yeah, that's really fanciful.

JENN T. 38:27

That's funny, because like, why, why used to do stand up comedy, and Jenny still does stand up comedy. And I find that I can't watch it, because I would just pick it apart and ultimately, I would have a very terrible time. So I imagine with a few exceptions, that space movies are out. They're out. You just I would just sit there being like "That's not what would happen in space."

Dr. Jennifer 38:47

Yeah, I'm no fun to go to space movies with. I try to, if I'm not going to go with my colleagues I go by myself, because no one will be able to tolerate my like, you know, chuckling under my breath, or, you know like...

JENN T. 39:00

Myth busting the whole time.

Dr. Jennifer 39:02

Yeah, I'm the I always told my kids, I'm the kind of Queen of Rolling my Eyes and so you don't want to go to movies like that with me.

JENN T. 39:09

That's all I want to do.

JENNY C. 39:11

I was really hoping that the answer was going to be "Contact" starring Jodie Foster but you know what, maybe that's just a future.

Dr. Jennifer 39:20

Yeah, I think that's the one we all kind of hope for. Like I really love the idea behind it. I love that it's based on some Carl Sagan thinking because he's super cool. Yeah, it's just I love that there are real places in it, too. I mean, that's one of the thing I have to be honest, the movies that are about like real people or about sort of real concepts. If you can't fill them at the real places that would be involved in that thing. It just to me, it doesn't really do any good. It's like It's like you may you appreciate this one of my biggest pet peeves about any movie is about when anything is based in DC and it's either not actually filmed in DC or they mentioned directions or something that couldn't yet happen

JENNY C. 40:03

The Georgetown Metro stop, doesn't exist!

Dr. Jennifer 40:08

My favorite is in "The American President." He asks her why she's late. The President asks the girlfriend, Annette Benning, why she's late and he goes "Did you get stuck in Dupont Circle again?" And it's like she's like, why would you go like she was in, she was on Capitol Hill!

JENN T. 40:27

She's already, you're right there.

Dr. Jennifer 40:29

Why, why are you going to Dupont Circle come back to...

JENN T. 40:32

Also for anyone outside of DC It is very easy to get stuck in Dupont Circle. I want to be clear, that part they did get right. Yeah, if you get lost, there's a Krispy Kreme right there. Just pull off and have a doughnut and relax.

JENNY C. 40:46

You regularly just fall right into quicksand it happens. Um, so you mentioned I know, kids are a big part of like, the population that comes to the museum. I'll be honest, the only times I've been there recently has been with children. Not my own, just children I find. No, I'm kidding. relatives. Um, so I imagined their, you mentioned they're always interested in like, what the food is like, probably what the bathroom is like, Oh, yes. Um, but what is to you the weirdest or like most asked about thing that you have added to the collection or seen on display yourself?

Dr. Jennifer 41:28

So great question. One of the weirdest sort of things and I and this is kind of this new book concept that I'm going with is I'm going to break down some of those, what are the major topics that people ask about. And it's some of the basics about you know, just our daily lives. So eating, eating and drinking kind of fall in the same category, sleeping, going to the bathroom, of course, taking pictures, because that's my thing, and then keeping track of time. So these are things that kind of are generally part of our daily lives. So one of those is sleeping. Sleeping in space is creepy. And that's my personal opinion. But...

JENNY C. 42:05

I think everything in space is creepy.

JENN T. 42:10

It's not a safe space.

Dr. Jennifer 42:12

No, this is I think this story alone might be one of the reasons why, and you can read it in any number of astronaut autobiographies, is they talk about the process of sleeping. So I really love my bed. I love my pillow. I love my blanket, you know, these are things that are like a fundamental part of the process of sleeping. I also really like sleep, having had two kids who are now 8 and 11 and not having slept a lot, especially after the second one was born. You know, sleep is precious. And so the idea of changing one sleep pattern to me is just beyond the pale, like that's not happening. So the fact that you are not actually laying on something, so there's nothing that is pushing you into a bed. There's no reason for you to then put your head on a pillow. There is not even a need for a blanket to me like the fundamental parts of sleeping have been gone. Because you can basically fall asleep just

JENN T. 43:16

floating, but can you go because I see what I need. Eventually, I guess you'll be tired that but like if I don't feel a blanket on my person, I guess I'd have to strap myself in and strap a blanket around or get

Dr. Jennifer 43:30

into a sleeping guy would need to swaddle Yeah, absolutely. So let's say you are you are right on and this is exactly how it works. And they have lots of options. So they basically give astronauts the opportunity to figure out what works for them. So we have a what you might think of as a sleeping bag. It's actually on a metal backing because they have to hook it on to the sides. These are from the space shuttle era, they have these like compartments now that looks kind of like an old telephone booth basically where they can kind of close the door. But inside is basically a sleeping bag. They can zip themselves up there are straps that they can tighten to kind of keep them in that secure place. They have essentially what looks like a pillow it's kind of

like what you might think of as a crappy airline pillow. So it's super thin, but it's soft, it has some you know material in it. But they also have basically like a strap where you it would like push your head against. Sorry, that sounds awful. I know it does.

JENN T. 44:32

I wish people could see what you just did

Dr. Jennifer 44:34

anything but comfortable. So think about wearing an eye mask. So I wear because I have found like light is the biggest deterrent to me sleeping so I wear an eye mask when I sleep. Imagine putting that on your forehead and it just kind of pulling your head back. That's basically how they do this.

JENN T. 44:51

Yeah, space is fun. It sounds so fun. I want to go well.

Dr. Jennifer 44:55

But the weirdest part of the experience is the fact that here on Earth And this is one of the facts of living in space is that because we are here on Earth, we are protected by this amazing atmosphere and why that we should be taking care of our earth and taking care of the atmosphere. Because it protects us from all these kinds of all these bad things when you go up to space, the space station being the best example right now, that protection is not there, which means things like cosmic particles kind of can come really close and through your body. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. The story about sleeping is this there are astronauts who have talked about the cosmic particles going through their retinas. And like creating these flashes, and it like has woken them up, now they get used to it, but it's just that these particles like do these things, you know, like, I'm sorry, I'm done. I'm done. They also have obviously kind of have really crazy dreams. I mean, we can have crazy dreams anywhere. But I'm sorry if I have a dream about somebody opening an airlock in space. I am out of there like, fastest way back to Earth. I'm just

JENNY C. 46:07

picturing you're like, you're like John. JOHN, are you okay? And he's like, Oh, yeah, it's just space passing through my eyes. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm gonna take a nap. Oh, my God. It is. So much like it's like, my favorite thing is being unconscious. And I cannot imagine having to be I don't know, there's something comforting about being strapped in, I guess. Yeah. Like, yeah, like I'm a baby. Yeah,

Dr. Jennifer 46:35

my my oldest was a big fan of swaddling. I must have been at some age, too. I think I love the idea of just kind of being tucked in in the fetal position and just kind of have I have my own position that I've got a you know, and I'm like, what happens to that when you take gravity away? It's a really scary concept for those of us who really take our sleep seriously.

JENN T. 46:56

Well, you know what, I sleep on my back, which kind of blows people's mind. So I'm ready to be strapped in on my back. I'm already I'm already there. I sleep trades myself that way because it prevents aging, because I'm thinking now that I know I have to try that. This is a this is a freebie. The next one is gonna cost you

JENNY C. 47:15

I sleep on my stomach because I want my face to just fall off. It's gonna be fine.

JENN T. 47:22

Don't worry, it will. Stop. So speaking of once again, being an exhibition curator, which I think it sounds like it's such a mysterious I'm gonna say romantic job that I'm only aware of because of Indiana Jones. And he was not even a curator, obviously. But he you know, famously screamed that belongs in a museum, which is from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade the best one, though, as someone who is responsible for choosing from I assume a ton of content. Yes. Use the internet. Yeah. content. How? How do you narrow it down? what's getting what's getting into the exhibit? I know, maybe you can't be speak vaguely because each one's different. But in general, what's getting in? And what's getting thrown in the garbage? never to be seen again?

Dr. Jennifer 48:16

Yeah. Well, that's part of what we actually, you know, we spent a lot of time talking about is when you have all that stuff, what do you do with the leftovers? And that's one of the things as we were going through this huge renovation project in the downtown Washington, DC building. And so we're coming up on the halfway point of that. But as we've gone through that, it's like, wow, we have so much great stuff, not only artifacts, but content, things that we want to talk about stories, people all this stuff. Where do we put the extra stuff? And so that's what we're trying to figure out right now. It'll probably be some kind of a, you know, obviously a sort of digital online platform of some kind. But there Yeah, we want to find a home for all those leftovers, because you do have to make cuts. And really it's about coming up with the story. What is what is what are the and we did this years ago now anybody who lived in dc 10 years ago, remembers we had this really odd like five point something earthquake. And that kind of set off this chain reaction for my Museum of thinking about what happens if what would happen if we needed to close the museum down and renovate the entire building and then redo all of the exhibitions, which is 10 years later, exactly what we've done. So we got a project. I know it was the weirdest thing that ended up happening is that we thought about it, we said, hey, what would happen and then we ended up doing it. So we sat down, and some of us were assigned to a group to think about exactly what stories do we want to tell and part of it is about you know, Time passes. We want to tell new stories. People don't want to keep coming to a museum and seeing the same stories over and over from the same the same stories they saw when they were in eighth grade when they came to visit Washington DC is a middle schooler like I did so you know, how do we want to tell stories today? What kinds of stories What are what's important now versus what may have been important? 20 years ago. Or 30 years ago, or almost 50 years ago when the museum opened in the middle of 1976. So, yeah, we sat down and thought about it. And so some of the things that we're doing now come came out of those conversations, we're thinking about things like globalization, you know, Air and Space technologies have really changed the way we interact with the rest of the world. We have satellites, we have spacecraft, we have, you know, shipping that has changed, communications, all these things have changed. So that's one sort of exhibit area. 15 years ago, when we did moving beyond Earth, which is in the in the museum now, we didn't really have as much material to talk about with the International Space Station. The space station got started in 2000. Oh, yeah. So like, we have tons of things to say 20 years later. So let's focus on that. Because you can walk outside your door at the right time of day with clear skies and at night, and you can see the space station so we should be talking about that we can know happening. Oh, absolutely. All of this light pollution, all of this light pollution. My house now I live in Manassas. So I'm a little outside the city. So I have a little better view. But you can go on to a spot the station website, plug in what city you're in, and it will tell you exactly when to walk outside what direction it will come from is so cool.

JENNY C. 51:23

Thanks for inviting us to your home to

Dr. Jennifer 51:27

generally have a lot of trees. So it's a little bit challenging at times, but ticks I love not paying. So yeah. But that's the thing we want to convey those stories about, you know, and this is the way we're framing it now is making space a home. It's not just a place that you go and do stuff and then come home all the time. Now people actually stay there for really long periods of time. And it has to function like and this has become far more relevant of a story since we all got sent home because of COVID. What do you do when your house is also your workplace? And that's what the space station is it has to function perfectly for those people to continue to live. So the air conditioning breaks down in your house, you have somebody to come fix it. Well, they have to do all that stuff themselves. So that's the kind of stuff we want to talk about. What are they doing up there? We get that question all the time. What are people doing in space, other than just floating around and eating m&ms that fly around? Well, they're doing science, they're doing technology research, they're figuring out how we go to the moon, they're figuring out, you know, what are the things we need to have? And how is it going to work? So it's a lot to tell there's lots of detail, it gets kind of pushed to the side, because you only get a certain number of words to print on a tiny little label. And that's the real challenge. And that's what it means to be an exhibition curator, which is basically you're trying to distill down all those things. No about into sometimes 30 word labels.

JENNY C. 52:57

I've got the tagline for your new exhibition. Cover. ready for it. Yep. How to Turn your International Space Station into a international staycation. I like it, I like it. Oh, I have that for free. Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer 53:17

Let me tell you their staycations last about half a day. That's that's their off time. off time is like a relative term apparently. So I just don't think I like the idea. That's again, contributing to the why we'll never go to space. They basically never stopped working because they're in a place that could kill them if they stopped working. Yeah. It's just I know, I just like

JENN T. 53:37

yeah, and also, you forgot to mention the many times that an alien will treat them as a host body and burst out of their chests and kill the entire crew. So I mean, yeah, I have not seen but I know it's out there. So please do yourself a favor. And please watch alien please.

JENNY C. 53:57

Also, if you're a co workers being annoying, you can't go home and you they might like yeah, wouldn't who while they're asleep and annoy you further. So that's

Dr. Jennifer 54:06

Yeah, personal personal conflict is really like something. I mean, obviously, that's something they spent an awful lot of time trying to figure out and prevent. But you can't prevent everything. I mean, everybody eventually is going to, you know, you know, call for you know, is this is something's gonna happen that's gonna annoy you. You know, like a cough in my direction.

JENNY C. 54:27

There's no coughing and coughing in space. Um, well, speaking of the what they do up there all day. The NASA astronauts Twitter posted recently about how they make space tacos on the International Space Station. So I have to ask, Is this a party space station?

JENN T. 54:48

Yeah, Jennifer, where are my tax dollars going to walk on Moly?

Dr. Jennifer 54:52

We're just having Taco Tuesday up and so totally ironically, that ironic that you asked about this, because we did. I actually have tacos in my house tonight. So I said taste tacos. For my poor eight year old who had to hear me probably say it for the 10,000,000th time, which is, did you know that tortillas are the one of the most commonly used items in space? Because it turns out tortillas like, well, if you use them in your own house, you know, tortillas don't like crumble like breads. So they basically when you use them for everything, they will last forever. Yeah, so

JENN T. 55:25

your children are gonna rebel and become oceanographers. They're gonna be like, what's going on out there? Because they know I'm going down.

Dr. Jennifer 55:33

You know what you've got it called exactly my eight year old is a huge fanatic about sharks.

JENN T. 55:39

This is how you rebel when your mother a big eye now, I like that they

JENNY C. 55:44

they swaddled themselves for sleep. And then they swaddle their food.

Dr. Jennifer 55:51

It's perfect. They do. They do love everything to basically be a taco of some kind. I mean, they make tacos with peanut butter in them. They, you know, it's basically whatever you can put inside that that container. I think we're eating crepes that we're eating a crepe would be lovely.

JENNY C. 56:09

I mean, I sometimes just run out of bread and use a tortilla or whatever happened. I get that I get to be an astronaut. Sounds like you are more of a land astronaut is specific but

JENN T. 56:22

right. And I'm calling Jennifer a man astronaut because she's a man NASA's and I was fresh and I will accept that. Thank

56:30

you mentioned the other nickname for NASA as well. I'm aware of Oh, yeah. Kid into it. Okay, it's right there. Lo pleasant one. Yeah.

JENN T. 56:42

So we have one more question before we get into our gentian air. We're going to move away from space for a minute and give all of our nightmares a bit of a break. And I want to get into your time is historic interpreter George Washington's Mount Vernon. Yeah. What is the juiciest George Washington gossip you can share and we know he probably wasn't great as all white men then and I would argue now are not so the barring any of any up very upsetting stories. What's some just like hot g dub Goss? And did you go to George Washington because you love George Washington? No kidding. But some hot hot g dub guys.

Dr. Jennifer 57:23

You know, I wish I had something on him. In a sense, because I think there's always you know, as a historian, I know nobody's perfect. And having met another incredibly famous, prominent, well respected person in our history, John Glenn. You know, there's got to have been something there but man, I met him a few times and I've read a lot about him and we've talked and you know, if he in being from Ohio, I have to give him some credit. He's a pretty he was a pretty down to earth guy Haha, space plan. But you know what I clearly slave owner not a great thing. One of the things that I went a little details and it's it's not a pleasant detail by any means. But one of the things you sometimes get asked about when you work at a place like Mount Vernon is there's, you know, their stations

JENN T. 58:18

pay me really quick. Can you tell people who do not live in DC? Just really quick, what is Mount Vernon, because I might not know what is.

Dr. Jennifer 58:27

Mount Vernon is the home of George Washington, he built most of it. He built it up from something that was small, and he built it into this estate basically. And he was a surveyor. So he was, you know, doing all of these various strategic planning kinds of things about his property, he built up some really incredible things like barns, and you know, just a really thought almost, like in an engineering sense about how to do certain things is very creative that way, had beautiful gardens. The gardens supplied a great deal of their food. And just the way Mount Vernon itself is run today is it trying to get people to realize just how much you could do back then and had to do for yourself. So basically, your food had to be grown on your property or you had to be able to get it from someone locally. You're not getting a lot of things from you know, China or other places you can get those as luxury items. But one of the things that's interesting to me and I think to a lot of people is medical care in the 17th 18th centuries, this is what I was looking for. Yeah, pretty, pretty grotesque kinds of things. And so George Washington's passing in 1799 was totally avoidable. unfortunate. Basically, he did the thing that we always tell people

not to do our kids, especially in the wintertime is he went outside on a cold day and really didn't have himself protected. He wasn't dressed warmly enough. He wasn't wearing a hat. He was wearing gloves, all the things again that we always tell people do. So basically got, kind of think of it as sort of a, you know, pneumonia type problem, a cold, something like that. And back then some of the, you know, attempts to try and help people were actually quite detrimental.

JENN T. 1:00:23

So I just went to the apothecary Museum in Alexandria. And while it hasn't been around since the 1790s, it certainly still provides you with enough medical mishap.

Dr. Jennifer 1:00:34

Yeah, it's pretty gruesome on the National Institutes of Health also have a museum, which I understand is also pretty gruesome.

JENNY C. 1:00:41

I've been there. I love it. I want to go a lot of things in jars. Yeah. They'll show like, here's a skull that a cannonball has gone through. Yes. It's fast. Yes, it's. But

Dr. Jennifer 1:00:55

yeah, so there's a spot that we used to get stationed quite obviously, which was outside of the Washington's bedroom, which is where he died. So people would ask, you know, why did he die? What happened to him? What did they do to try to save him? But anybody? You know, was there a doctor and all those kinds of things? And so obviously, yeah, I mean, he was the first President of the United States. So somebody was going to try to come and you know, help help him feel better. And one of the things super common back then was to put leeches on people. So yeah, not such a great story. So bleeding was, yeah, super common to try and get rid of the what, what they thought were some kind of blood borne diseases of some kind. I've seen leeches, at least in videos before on people. I'm not interested in having those on my body. It sounds pretty gross. But I don't remember some of the details. But you know, this is a very experimental time for medicine. And the last person I would sounds like

JENN T. 1:01:57

that one mission, that one yes. Face mission. They're just throwing stuff. You know, just we don't need to get it right. Let's just see what happens.

Dr. Jennifer 1:02:04

Yeah. But like if you know, if you know that you're treating the first president united states. I'm not sure I want to do a lot of experimentation. But again, I don't remember some of the details. It's been it's been a long time since I was 20 years since I worked there. But I believe there were some other things that they were attempting to try and help him breathe better and things like that. And none of it was very obviously none of it was successfully died. Not long after he got ill. So

JENNY C. 1:02:33

I gave him some heroin at least. Right? Yeah. Yeah, thank you. Yeah,

JENN T. 1:02:39

I learned at the apothecary museum that they had medical professionals err, quoting This, of course, who's whose expertise was urine, so they would smell your they would smell urine and taste urine. And that's how they were, quote, unquote, again, diagnosing various ailments that I'm sure were incorrect. And I'm so glad that that version, like that branch of Somalia, study is no longer with us.

JENNY C. 1:03:04

They're just like, hey, this guy ate some asparagus. And right.

Dr. Jennifer 1:03:08

That's it. So it's funny you say that though, because there's always this really interesting counterpart story to George Washington, which is the story of King George third over in England. I mean, this is the guy that we rebelled against. And there is a wonderful movie called the madness of King George, tell some of that story. And he had something called porphyria. I think it's called I think, has a modern name, too. But that was actually one of the things that the doctors were observing him, they were basically every time he urinated he had to do in a bowl. While that's kind of how people did it back then. He they were basically observing that because

it would turn the disease would turn you're in blue. So it's just this, there's there's like, the medical stories on both sides of the Atlantic back then are pretty fascinating, gruesome, according to today's standards, but you know, kind of fascinating for thinking about putting yourself in those places. So thankfully, no major medical emergencies in space so far, though, you know, of. That's one of the things that's also speaking of medical issues in space. It's one of the things that's hardest to really understand and come to grips with is the fact that, especially for us astronauts, HIPAA regulations do still apply. Oh, no yet details on anything that happens. It's all anonymous. If we ever learn about it. A lot of the cycle,

JENN T. 1:04:29

I still have to be 21 to drink or where are Where are we?

Dr. Jennifer 1:04:33

There are lots of rumors about things like alcohol up there, but that's mostly on the Russian side of things. So supposedly, an astronaut snuck some cigarettes into space at one point back during Apollo, but I'm not entirely sure

JENNY C. 1:04:49

seems wildly dangerous.

Dr. Jennifer 1:04:52

Yeah, in an environment where there's lots of oxygen. Yeah,

JENNY C. 1:04:56

like, kind of CBD just ate it. He was sprinkle this tobacco in my space. Go right call it a Texas do exactly. Well, this is all been so interesting, but we want to get to obviously the main thing that interests us and

JENN T. 1:05:13

matches I space.

JENNY C. 1:05:15

You're also named Jennifer. So we have our gentian err, which is a permanent title. And we want to just start right off the bat by asking why did your parents name you, Jennifer? Do you know? Um,

Dr. Jennifer 1:05:29

I don't know. But I suspect it's, you know, um, you know, I was born in early 1977. So I'm guessing just as sort of like a popular name of the period. I remember doing a search. There's a search engine website, you can go to where you plug in your name, and it'll tell you like the peak years that it was, it was popular, I think 77 is the absolute peak. Jenny, do you

JENN T. 1:05:52

share the span of time?

JENNY C. 1:05:55

Yes, it was the most popular name in the United States from 1970 till 1983. There you go. And I was born in 85. And it was in Illinois, and it was still the number one name in Illinois. Five. Regional

Dr. Jennifer 1:06:09

Yeah, regional differences are not surprising and all of that. So my parents at one point told me that and i i always hesitate to tell the story, but I do not shy away from an uncommon incriminating myself or my family. When they do things that sound crazy. But what at one point what think when I was in middle school or high school, my parents told me that I was going if I had been a boy, I would have been named Homer. No. So here's why that's problematic. My married name is levasseur. But my maiden name is pronounced Skomer? No.

JENN T. 1:06:48

Why would they do that? No, gentlemen, are

Dr. Jennifer 1:06:51

a rhyming name just sounds like a great time. My background in terms of heritage is mostly Polish and Eastern European and some English. So I've always tried to figure out like, Is there some origin story to my name, my first name at least? And there's just I can't come up with anything because Jennifer is a sort of name as some French origins. So yeah, just nothing. There. I was. Yeah, I must have I think it just was like, hey, that sounds like a great name. So

JENNY C. 1:07:21

yeah, I think in the 70s, they were just like, yeah, this is fine. It's very popular. We'll just stick with it.

Dr. Jennifer 1:07:26

Yeah, I have lots of friends who fall into that same kind of category in that time period there. Where I go away, I have a Yeah, we all have their groups of friends or female friends. And my group of friends consists of some of the most classic names of the period, including Tina, Karen, Shannon, Melissa, you know, the list goes on. Yeah, there is. And there are some of them, I do have some friends named Jennifer too. But I always find it interesting that there's just this sort of classic set of names from that period. And you definitely know usually when someone is, was born in a certain period, so from 70 to 83, or whatever it is, you kind of have a really high chance of having the named one of about seven names as a girl.

JENNY C. 1:08:13

Well, we're gonna collect you some friends with more interesting names. From this appearance, I can tell I can tell.

JENN T. 1:08:19

I would like to know what your middle name is.

Dr. Jennifer 1:08:22

So my middle name is k, which is not just the single letter K, but the name KY. That is the same middle name that my mother has. My mother is Barbara K. I am Jennifer K. And k was the nickname of my great grandmother whose name was Catherine. That'll come up again. And another question. Okay, is such a 50s 1949 or regular Make sense? Great. I bet. I was gonna also say and I don't know, I don't think it's another question. But I do you you asked in the beginning about what I prefer to be called. Hmm. So I have very distinct tears of what I would be called in any scenario. Jennifer, professionally, most of the time, if anybody asks who I am, I tell them I'm Jennifer. You know, it's just sort of routine. Now. If I were in the context of my family, meaning brothers, sister, mom, dad, friends from elementary school and high school, I am Jenny. Jenny, Jenny, if and if I am referred to by a child often so a relatives trial nieces, nephews, that kind of thing. I am aunt Jenny. I actually prefer aunt Jenny. I think it sounds cute. It's cute. I'm gonna add any it's very fun. I think it's fun. It makes me feel like I'm not 44. So it's kind of nice. That way.

JENN T. 1:10:00

Is it fun that your current initials are alphabetical?

Dr. Jennifer 1:10:04

Ah, yes, you notice JK L which is also quite cool. I was like super happy to marry someone with an L because it made it so like streamlined and very simple. But um, so I also have a spelling issue on that I will not use an eye I always use je and ny big thing for me. But then my philosophy on the name shortening issue becomes really, really tricky at this point. There's only one person in the world who I actually don't mind calling me Jen. And in my world, it has to be je n. It's just a like, why we cut off one letter let's just cut off two letters. Okay, like that. It's just a you know, weird logistics thing in my head. It's weird. The only person I've ever liked having call me Jen is my older brother. This is very These

JENNY C. 1:10:53

are a lot of rules. Yeah, super rules. You get to make these rules.

Dr. Jennifer 1:11:01

You have preferences and people and people will ask me what do you prefer to be called? And so I always break this down. But uh, yeah, my older brother. I didn't grow up living with him. And so when I would see him, he would call me Jen. And I just stuck. Like, that's so cool. But that all changed in terms not in terms of my preferences. And but in terms of what people would say to me when Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez got together and they became bennifer. Because guess what my husband's

JENN T. 1:11:35

we can call you j love Gala.

Dr. Jennifer 1:11:41

Because she was often called Jen, people just made the assumption that it was mine to call me so people will call even my in laws call me Jen for people are weird. You were like, it's Jen

JENN T. 1:11:51

and Ben Avia. Oh my god. So how are you feeling about the reunion tour?

Dr. Jennifer 1:11:59

I know of it. I think one person has brought it back up to me. I mean, I find it kind of cute in the grand scheme of life and how to feed it back together. I, however, am the least interested in hearing any news about Jennifer Lopez.

JENN T. 1:12:17

She's just not listen, at the end of the day. All I want is to see if we can convince your husband to get a giant tattoo of a phoenix on his entire back. That's it. That's all

Dr. Jennifer 1:12:26

I want. come true. But yeah, it's so there's all this like very weird, like, involved thinking about it all and rationale for why I do it the way I do it. But

JENNY C. 1:12:40

yeah, it's my choice. Right as a Jennifer, because people, as we know, are just going to call you whatever anyway. And then you get to say No, thank you. Thank you. Um, so you mentioned other names your parents were considering and that was Homer. But how is how it's being named Jennifer affected your life overall?

Dr. Jennifer 1:13:00

I think generally, it's been something I mean, I like because I'm a historian. I like the weird sort of historical commentary that the name ends up being I like that there's a period of time when it's the most popular name in the United States. It's a very uniquely, I think, probably a uniquely American name. I there's so much about that, that I just find really fascinating. I think it's also probably been the most complicated name to have when you're growing up. Because there are so many of you, I think there are lots of you know, there are similar names today that we see like in my kids classrooms today, where you have like, three kids, three girls named Ava or Eva or Olivia is a really common one. So there were at least there's at least I'm trying to think of what it was like. And by the time I got to high school, I think there were only two Jennifer's at the time. But it's really complicated when you get to a work scenario when it brings together people from all different places. So I mentioned my exhibit project called moving beyond her there were three Jennifer's on the same project assigned to that we had to go by our initials, because that was the only way to distinguish really between them. I have lots of conversations with other colleagues named Jennifer and it's super surreal to write to Jennifer and then sign your name as Jenna it's just really awkward. So I think it's probably created mostly an adult problem where I'm like, I don't know what to say or what to call you. Because then I know on the other side of it, there's a similar like, Well, I have a way I like to be called you know, like, you know, if you haven't internalized what the whole thing is and so yeah, the more the older I've gotten the kind of more stressed out I get about too many Jana. It's true,

JENN T. 1:14:50

perfect sense to come on this podcast because it's absolutely the case. This does bring us to our next question and I don't know if you were able to get a count How many friends do you have named Jennifer?

Dr. Jennifer 1:15:03

Um, I would probably I, you know, and I can do it sitting here probably quickly looking through Facebook, but I suspect at least right now it's I can think of the two who were previously on my exhibit project because one of them still is on my exhibit project, my current one. So that's at least one I probably have in the neighborhood of, I would say six or so contacts are also Jennifer's, and that's people I can think of just off the top of my head. I'm sure there are more and more that are kind of like, I know they exist, or I've talked to them a couple of times. In my circle. Yeah, my Smithsonian circle, mostly, but also sort of within my sort of personal circle. There's a few people who I know, ironically, there is another Jennifer levasseur, who lives almost in the same zip code. And wait a minute,

JENN T. 1:16:00

we've had this happen before. Do you remember Dr. Jennifer Wade said that another Jennifer Whitely lived on her street? Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer 1:16:07

And we actually we actually kind of work in the same general type of language. She's a teacher. So do education. We both kind of have an educational role. But she, however, uses a capital V in her name, and we do not they are not connected. We are not families that are connected by any heritage that I know of. But the really crazy part is that her husband, not named Ben looks a little like my husband. They are both

JENN T. 1:16:40

sounds like you guys were cloned. Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer 1:16:42

They're both hockey players. And the reason we know each other is because our kids all play hockey at the same rink here in, in the Woodbridge area. So this is a real it's, it's and my funny my funny, like, you know, like way we connected on in, in a different way was that I once ordered a meal early in COVID, I ordered a meal for my kids and I at the local Olive Garden to pick up, pulled into the parking spot sat there, the guy brings the bag out and he goes, you're Jennifer levasseur, right. And I said, Yeah, he goes, well, so and so in the kitchen, put some extras in there for you. And I was like, What did I do? Does she know me

JENN T. 1:17:19

know? Would you like get 40 pounds of ranch?

Dr. Jennifer 1:17:24

I'm sorry. Like, what? What is this? Uh, turns out that the woman in the kitchen, had children who were in the class of the other Jennifer Vassar. And she thought that was me. Oh my god. Some desserts in the bag.

JENNY C. 1:17:42

I'm obsessed with the Olive Garden. So like, I know, I know. You're our guests. So we should be on Team Dr. Jennifer Levasseur. Like I'm trying to think maybe this other Jennifer should also be our friend because yes, she has Olive Garden connection. Yes, she does.

Dr. Jennifer 1:17:58

That it was it was crazy. So I immediately sent her a message and said I have to thank you and pay you back at some point. The kindness that someone paid me because they thought I was you.

JENNY C. 1:18:10

At least they're like a cool one to like she's liked by someone. It wasn't like oh, that lady.

Dr. Jennifer 1:18:16

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I didn't get a dead mouse in the bag. I got like really nice Olive Garden dessert.

JENNY C. 1:18:21

When you're here your family? Yeah. Well, what are you saved in? As in some friends cell phones like any nicknames?

Dr. Jennifer 1:18:30

You know? That's a great question. I don't know. I almost fear to now I'm probably Jen Levasseur in those phones. I have a feeling most people think that that's just the sort of way to refer to me, which is fine. You know, I just have I've gotten over it. But when someone has it'll never Yeah, I'll never be able to hear it that you know, in a way that I can appreciate it unless it comes from my older brother because then that's special to me. Yeah, he gets that.

JENNY C. 1:18:58

I do that with my sister Katie, too. I'll call her Kate. Like, just offhand, but like no one's calling her Kate.

Dr. Jennifer 1:19:05

Yeah, I'm convinced in most of my family's phones. I'm probably Jenny. Because that's just how they've always known me.

JENN T. 1:19:12

Like you need to confiscate a bunch of phones.

Dr. Jennifer 1:19:14

Yeah, I need to fix all these problems. I have.

JENNY C. 1:19:19

Jenn do you want to be friends? Your constant anti-Jenny agenda is really weighing on the podcast.

Dr. Jennifer 1:19:33

I think as a teenager I probably contemplated changing my name I think that way

JENN T. 1:19:38

that's the last question. If you could change your name What would

Dr. Jennifer 1:19:43

you change it to goes back to my story about family? I back

JENN T. 1:19:48

when you would change your name to Olive Garden? I would know. I thought it was about family.

JENNY C. 1:19:55

No, I would change mine to breadstick is what I would do.

Dr. Jennifer 1:19:58

Oh, how about Olive Garden salad, that would be great. Yes. So my great grandmother, once I started doing my family history, especially, I was just fascinated by this woman whose nickname was K or Kate. And that's probably what I would have wanted my name when I was interested in the idea of changing my name as a teenager, because of course, you want nothing to do with who you really are, or who people think you are, you want to be something completely different. And going through all of those, you know, really significant life changes as a teenager, I was definitely would have been happy to change my name to something like Katherine. However, the name was already taken in my family. My cousin's name is Catherine, or Catie. So I was like, well, that stinks. I can't go with that. The other part of this is I would never have wanted to change my name to Karen, because my sister's name is Karen. So glad I avoided that one. But yeah, I just, I don't think there's another name out there that, you know, this is the name that definitely suits me. My parents nailed it. I have a son, whose name I think both of my kids names actually, like, totally suit their personalities. And so to me, I kind of in that same category. Now, my husband does not like the name. His full name, of course, is Benjamin, he can't stand that he It's a family name for him. So he can't stand it and wishes he had a different name, but on my account, it perfectly suits me and who I am. And the same is true for my kids. Hopefully, I think, you know, we got it right. Hopefully, that hopefully they don't have that same anxiety as a teenager. And one. I love that.

JENNY C. 1:21:28

I love that. And also, I want to thank you for not being named Jennifer. And because you are you're our fourth Jennifer guest and three out of four. were named Jennifer and

JENN T. 1:21:41

yeah, it's an an epidemic epidemic. Yeah.

JENNY C. 1:21:44

So Jennifer Kay, I think, yeah, and really crushes it. Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer 1:21:48

So my husband and I also have we do have we have a lot of conversations about this we have a lot when we were having kids two is that we both have very long first names. He He's Benjamin, I'm Jennifer three, so have very short middle names. So I wanted the kind of I wanted something similar where the first and middle names worked well together. So having a nice long, but short nibble, first name, and a middle name. And so to me, it had to ring you know, like if you're gonna yell my kids name and have to break coming out and stern yesterday, their middle names actually balanced the opposite direction, which is they have four letter first names and they have a little bit longer middle names. It rolls off the tongue very nicely. My parents would yell Jennifer Kay all the time that rolls off in a slightly you know, the opposite has the opposite effect in a way of what it's like when I yell at my boys. Yeah,

JENNY C. 1:22:41

I think every. I think every parent now just has to name their child something they can scream.

Dr. Jennifer 1:22:48

True. Yeah, it has to roll off the tongue in a really easy way when used at high volume. Otherwise, you know, one of them was going to be named Andrew, john, and that just did not sound right when being yelled, so we had changed the game. That was my dad's name.

JENN T. 1:23:06

Oh. Okay, I was about to say, oh, like that name. But JK. I like that name. Also, JK. Sorry. No, it's there. Oh, man. Well, thank you. Thank you so much. Looked at Jenny, did you add the social media to our outro? Because I never know what it is. So I didn't I'll just do it. I got it. So, Jennifer Levasseur, what you don't know is that I cannot for the life of me remember social media. And each time I fumble through it, and Jenny just saves the day. But I've made sure to keep track of it this time. Oh. So is there anything you'd like to plug I know you had a book come out last year. That's obviously the name is at the top of this, but you could plug it yourself. It's your book

Dr. Jennifer 1:23:56

through astronaut eyes available on Purdue University presses website or on Amazon. And I've also got a couple of kids books that are either out or in the works. I just recently had one come out in May called A is for astronaut which is available at Costco and on Amazon, I believe at the same time. And we'll have another version of that out next year that will have some fun activities for kids and just finished a book too. For Kids a little bit higher reading level kindergarten, first grade, second grade, it'll be on the International Space Station. So that is all kind of really super fun.

JENNY C. 1:24:32

Awesome.

Dr. Jennifer 1:24:33

Yeah, it's just I'm yeah, it's nice to be able to take a little bit of a mental break and do some fun stuff after doing the serious dissertations slash first book project. Yeah, and and to kind of do something that's more a little more relevant to my daily life. My kids aren't really the audience for any of my kids books, but they make good test subjects when I need someone to just look at it and say, Does this sound cool? And yeah, they pretty much take five seconds to I'm looking at it and see if it's fine.

JENN T. 1:25:04

Jenny Is there something you would like to plug? Remember this comes out August 25.

JENNY C. 1:25:10

...Do I?

JENN T. 1:25:11

I don't know this is not a leading question

JENNY C. 1:25:17

no. Everybody go to the Air and Space Museum it's free and if not, you know look up at the sky. It's also free. Yeah.

JENN T. 1:25:30

I would like to plug with it when this comes out that night I will be looking glass lounge doing a little DJing Jenny's already done it for the recommend if you like online magazine, I'm doing an hour of the Smiths. But it's will Willow and Jaden. I'm gonna zig and people were like she zagged because Morrissey sucks. So you can find us on Instagram @TooManyJennifers. You can find us on Twitter @TooManyJsPod and you can email us TooManyJennifersPod@gmail.com Did I get that right? You are perfect.

JENNY C. 1:26:07

And I just want to say to close out, Jen, where can you find us?

JENN T. 1:26:12

Not in space, at the mall.

(Upbeat music)

*Too Many Jennifers,
Jenns Galore.*

There are:

*One million, five hundred fifty-five thousand, three hundred and four
According to the latest Census.*

Like, whoa.