



Meet *Elyse*, an American girl who, like Jess, has explored the Maya ruins at Caracol with her family and who has made a few discoveries of her own.



For ten-year-old *Elyse*, ancient ruins are a normal part of family life. Her parents are both archeologists at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. They began excavating the ancient Maya city of Caracol in 1985, and now her whole family travels to the heart of the Belizean jungle every year. Elyse has visited Caracol twelve times. "I've been going since before I was born," she says matter-of-factly.

The family typically spends two months at a time in Belize. For Elyse, the best part of a dig is getting lots of hands-on experience. "I get to help with the excavations and organize things in the lab," says Elyse. She's found plenty of artifacts while *screening*, which is a process of sifting dirt through a screen that's held parallel to the ground. "The most interesting thing I've found is a human bone." Elyse works side by side with college students who are often on their first excavation. "I like to show them what I find. They're really surprised when someone my age makes a discovery."



## True Story



*Elyse and her brothers sort out roots and stones while screening for artifacts.*

Elyse also likes to watch her mom draw. “She draws the architecture of the area,” says Elyse. “When we find fragments of pots, my mom has to draw the pieces on graph paper.” Every artifact found at the site has to be carefully washed and cataloged. “It’s actually fun to wash things,” Elyse says. “I work with the students. We all sit together with washtubs and toothbrushes and talk while we scrub.”

Elyse’s favorite part about being in Belize is spending time with her family. “We get to be together more in Belize than at home,” she says. She and her brothers are the only kids in the camp. For fun, Elyse and Aubrey, who is 13, play basketball or

*A shady spot—and plenty of water—are a must when doing homework in the Belizean jungle.*





*Elyse says climbing the Caana pyramid is a fun way to exercise.*

card games together. Fifteen-year-old Adrian joins them on their daily walk, which includes a hike up and down the Caana pyramid. “There are 99 steps to the top,” says Elyse. “I’ve counted!”

Aside from her family, Elyse likes to spend time with Ms. Rita and the other cooks in the camp kitchen. “I know how to make tortillas,” says Elyse, who also likes to cook at home. Her favorite Belizean food is called a fryjack. “It’s fried tortilla dough,” Elyse explains. “You eat it with sugar, and it’s delicious!”

## True Story

Daily life at Caracol is a bit different from Florida, where Elyse lives. "I miss air-conditioning, running water, and ice!" she says. But there is a lot more wildlife to watch. "I see tropical birds like toucans, macaws, and parrots all the time," says Elyse. There are also jaguars and small cats called margays.

At night, Elyse loves to look at the stars. Because the closest town is 25 miles away, there are no lights to get in the way. "We can see many more stars here in Belize," she says.

Elyse sleeps comfortably in a string hammock covered by a mosquito net. She usually climbs into bed

with a book and a flashlight and reads before she falls asleep. "The hard part," she explains, "is that you can't

just get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. You need to get a flashlight and check your shoes for scorpions. I usually just wait until morning."



*Elyse looks forward to seeing Ms. Rita (in the green apron) and the other cooks each time she returns to Caracol with her brothers Aubrey (far right) and Adrian.*

*A scarlet macaw*



*Margays are Elyse's favorite animals.*

## True Story

Despite all of her experience, Elyse hasn't decided if she wants to follow in her parents' footsteps. "I like archeology," Elyse says confidently. "But I don't like bugs!" Her favorite classes in school are math and art, but Elyse is interested in exploring all sorts of subjects. Her advice to anyone interested in archeology is to practice patience. "It takes time to dig," she says. "And it takes time to draw and photograph the artifacts."

If you find yourself heading to a dig, Elyse recommends packing plenty of sunscreen and drinking lots of water. "And make sure you tell your teachers about the trip way ahead of time," the A student adds. "That way they can prepare your homework." Is it hard to focus on studies when there are so many other things to see and do? "It really is," Elyse agrees. "I spend more time doing schoolwork than I do helping with the excavation. It's hard to stay inside, but I take breaks throughout the day to walk around camp and see what's happening."



*Elyse uses a small tool called a trowel and a dustpan to excavate part of an ancient floor.*

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Take a virtual tour of Belize at [www.belizeexplorer.com](http://www.belizeexplorer.com).

You'll find maps and photographs of 18 different Maya sites—including Caracol—by clicking on the “Mayan Sites” tab near the top of the page.



Discover the mammals, birds, and reptiles of Belize by visiting the zoo's Web site at [www.belizezoo.org](http://www.belizezoo.org).



To learn more about the Caracol ruins, visit the Web site Elyse's parents have created at [www.caracol.org](http://www.caracol.org). Click on the “kids section” for more facts about archeology, life at the Caracol camp, and even fun games.