

Bellevue  
Public  
Schools



Alumni  
Spotlight



# Zach Ireland

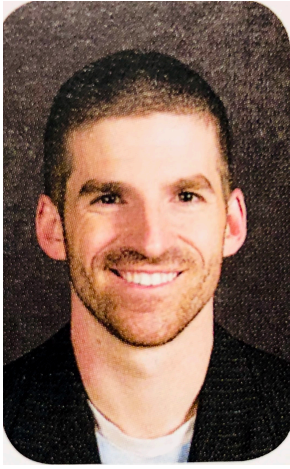
## Bellevue West, 2008

Welcome to our Alumni Spotlight series where we shine a light on some of the amazing alumni that have graduated from Bellevue Public Schools!

Know someone that should be in a future spotlight? Send us their name along with a brief explanation of why they should be in the spotlight. eMail: [bps.alumni@bpsne.net](mailto:bps.alumni@bpsne.net)

Zach Ireland (Splittgerber) (West, '08) might be one of the most famous people to graduate from Bellevue. However, if you haven't heard of Zach, That's because he lives in China and most of his works are in Mandarin Chinese. Zach hosted a TV Talk Show viewed by 25 Million people. He also is part of a Chinese Web Series that has over 700 Million views. With only a few years in China under his belt, he has already built up an impressive resume.

Zach recently took some time to answer a few of our questions.



**AJ Reimer**

What school(s) did you attend in Bellevue and when did you graduate?

Mission Middle School and Bellevue West

Could you name a few of your favorite teachers and share why they were your favorite?

**A.J. Reimer - Choir and Music Theory**

I was lucky to be in one of Mr. Reimers first classes at West. He did an amazing job of not just being a friend, but also an authority figure and a good person to look up to.



**Yvonne Goodman**

**Yvonne Goodman - English**

Ms. Goodman taught me the value of diversity, sticking up for others who cannot protect themselves, and to always think of the person with the most at stake when making a decision.

**Kim Bultsma - English**

Mrs. Bultsma did an amazing job of ensuring that every person felt like they were listened to and valued. She really went above and beyond to ensure the most marginalized of her students felt comfortable.

**Maka Nazarro - Forensics**

I learned from Maka how to speak with conviction, how to formulate a good argument, and that being right is not the most important part of a discussion. Many, many, many of the lessons I learned from her I still use on a daily basis with my work.

Did you have a favorite place to hang out - either at school or in town?

You could definitely find me at rehearsal, either for the play, or for an upcoming forensics competition.



**Kim Bultsma**

## What was one of your favorite classes?



**Zach's Senior  
Picture**

My life in high school definitely centered around forensics, and theater. To this day performance and the arts are the major driving forces in my life. In high school I knew that if I wanted to make a career out of this, then I would have to dedicate as much time as I could to get better.

Outside of these courses I really enjoyed World Religion. This to me was an incredibly interesting course. At the time Bellevue was pretty homogenous with its religious beliefs, and growing up in a post 9/11 world it was very important for us as global citizens not to hate an entire group of people for the actions of a radicalized few. And to this day I strongly believe most hate comes from ignorance, and we fight ignorance with knowledge. It was while taking this course I attended a talk hosted by one of the greatest religious scholars of the world, Reza Azlan.



**Mark Kruger**

American history with Mark Kruger also really sparked a good love of history for me. I learned that if you find history class boring, that's because you have a bad teacher. I really thought history was a boring class, but the way he would get so excited to tell us of all the drama that went down back in the day was really inspiring. Whenever I play historical figures or period pieces, I remind myself that this can be some of the most exciting work if you put your heart into it.

## Do you have a good memory you could share from your time in BPS?



It was common place for students who were competing at events at the state level would have banners with their last names hanging in the student commons. For the most part this was only for athletes. I could not think of one instance of someone competing in any other statewide event being represented up there.

Until my senior year: I walked in the commons and found my name unfurled, celebrating me and my teammates who were going to state for forensics/speech. But not only was this day special for that, but because throughout the day so many people in my classes were congratulating me as well. I suppose I had it in my head that it was only athletes who where celebrated in high school, and thus as someone who worked mainly in the arts I didn't quite feel part of the main stream high school experience. But then seeing athletes, the dance teams, teachers, Principal Rohlf's all congratulating me, I really felt included.

Especially when I found out later some members of the dance team had helped paint the posters, with Maka Nazarro at the head of the team.

## What did you want to be when you grew up?

So many things. When I was a young kid I wanted to be a marine biologist, because it sounded cool. Then a computer engineer because that's what I thought my parents did. But when I was five I told my father I wanted to be a Power



Ranger, and he said I couldn't because they weren't real. I said, "Of course they are, I see them on TV every day." He then said, "That's not their jobs, they're just actors."

So I stubbornly replied, "Fine. I'll be an actor then."

### What do you do for a living?

I work as an actor and a talk show host, and have been doing that professionally for about 8 years. I have worked in over 10 different countries, made over 200 talk show appearances, been apart of over 30 different sitcoms all with major roles, 10 short films, and 3 feature films. But if you haven't heard my name that isn't surprising at all as most of my work is in Mandarin.



While I attended Bellevue West I had already made up my mind that I was going to be an actor, and luckily two women, Jen Austin and Michelle Boykin, had already enrolled at Nebraska Wesleyan University before me, and they tried so hard to convince me to attend with them once I graduated. Luckily they had encouraged me to apply, because had I not, I definitely wouldn't have gotten a scholarship, and there is no way I would have began studying mandarin there as an elective.

While at Nebraska Wesleyan University it was required of us to take a foreign language as an elective to graduate. I, being incredibly flippant, made a joke about needing something easy, 'so why not mandarin?' It was then my advisor perked up and excitedly encouraged me to go through with it, "Who knows, you could be an actor in China some day!" he said. At



the time I thought it to be a complete joke, but several years later here we are.

About after a year of studying the language I knew I wanted to study abroad. I was dead set of France or Italy to take some acting courses abroad. But then my same advisor began to push China - and frankly, it was much cheaper than any European country at the time. So once again scholarship in hand, I was on a plane 6 months later to Beijing. Upon returning after one semester I knew then that I wanted to begin my career in China.

A question that usually goes hand in hand with this is, 'What sort of roles do you tend to play?' Most people would assume as a white American actor in China I would play nothing but bad guys. While this is true for the vast majority of actors who fit a similar build this isn't true in my case. I tend to play the best friend to the main character, the nerdy tech guy, or sometimes the manic pixie dream boy. (Think the male version of Zoey DeChanelle in literally any film.) I've played high schoolers or college students far more often than I've played anyone closer to my actual age.

Is there anything you are working on now that you could share with us?

I have several irons in the fire at the moment.

I am on a long term contract turning a mystical Chinese epic into a web series for a major distributor (think Chinese Netflix, but bigger.) It revolves around tomb raiding and magic powers. Unfortunately that's all I can reveal about that project without violating my Nondisclosure agreement... but



it is set to have one of the largest viewerships in China for this century.

In a few days I will be flying to Guangzhou for a few episodes of a travel show highlighting a new water park there.

I'm in talks to become the host of a children's show which wants to be the 'Chinese Mr. Rogers.'



I am also currently the host of the Expat Chit Chat Show. A podcast interviewing prominent expats from around the world. Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Play, Stitcher or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Which accomplishment of yours are you most proud of?

I was a main character of a web series that currently has over 700 million views (Mad House available on Youku).

I've had 3 films go to the Cannes film festival.

I am the first American to receive a Certificate of Gratitude for promoting Chinese and Egyptian culture abroad from the Chinese Cultural Center of Cairo.

I'm also pretty proud of my general body of work.

Where do you see yourself 5-10 years from now?

I see myself doing the same things that I am doing now, just on a larger scale.





About one year ago I took a working vacation to Egypt for about 4 months to see if learning Arabic is something feasible for me in my life. I did this as I have a rapidly growing fan base in the Middle East and, as there are few actors with my physical appearance and skill set in that film market, it seems like a good spot for me to throw my hat in the ring. It's a future goal of mine to be a major contender in several film markets around the world, and as Hollywood is an over saturated market it makes sense to grow my name in foreign markets to have a more intimate understanding of and relationship with my audience.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about yourself or your work?

It's an honor to be part of this series. I'm very proud to be from Nebraska (I gleefully announce my roots to anyone who asks about my background) and hope that someday I'll be able to give back what I've learned to the local community.

What message would you like to give to current students in Bellevue Public Schools?

Often when I speak to people younger than I am, I'm asked, "How do I get a job that I love?" Because of the current stage of capitalism that we live in, work is one of the largest aspects of our life. So we are often pushed to immediately go after our 'dream job,' and if we don't achieve that we are viewed as failing. But in reality many people don't get to work in their 'dream career field.' A job is only supposed to allow you to do what you want to do with your life.

I am very lucky that I get to make a living from my passion which is acting. But not many people can do that. I have a friend who makes a living by writing about technology online,





but this isn't her passion. Her passion is to travel. So she found a career that would allow her to do what she wants. She writes remotely and travels every day out of the year. Opting to spend three months here, three months there.

I would also like to add that just because something hasn't been done before doesn't mean that you can't do it. When I revealed that I was going to start my career in China I can count on one hand the number of people that supported me. Literally. It was two friends, one professor, and my mom. Everyone else said that I would fail, 'because no one has done that before. Everyone goes to New York or LA.' And when I said, "Why would I do what everyone else does?" I was always met with blank stares. But truthfully the only person who needs to believe in you, is you.

But if you believe in your heart an idea or a path is right for you, do your research and go for it. Stan Lee was told Spider-Man would be a failure, and was repeatedly told not to do it. At the end of the day, it was the Spider-Man comic that saved Marvel.

## Links

2015 Global Times Interview with Zach

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/947146.shtml>

Omaha World Herald Interview with Zach from 2015

[https://www.omaha.com/eedition/sunrise/articles/no-joke-nebraska-native-is-a-celebrity-in-beijing/article\\_e4d63af7-b954-52ac-ad6f-a4e9fe02ef92.html](https://www.omaha.com/eedition/sunrise/articles/no-joke-nebraska-native-is-a-celebrity-in-beijing/article_e4d63af7-b954-52ac-ad6f-a4e9fe02ef92.html)

Link to Zach's Expat Chit Chat Apple Podcast

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-expat-chit-chat-show/id1457427033>

## About Us

The Alumni Spotlight is a recurring feature on the Alumni Association Facebook Page. If you know of a Bellevue graduate that we should shine the spotlight on, please reach out to us and they will be considered for a future column. Continue to invite your friends and family to Like and Follow our Alumni Association page: <https://www.facebook.com/BPSAlumni>

