

Jeff Around Town – July 1, 2025

Jeff: Time for another edition of Jeff Around Town. I'm talking with Alicia Jaunty. We've known each other a number of years in Omaha through a French conversation group, when we happen to be here in Paris, thanks to a French conversation group. Welcome, Alicia.

Alicia: Thanks, Jeff.

Jeff: And I have to keep reminding myself to call you Alicia, because when we're speaking in French, I would call you...

Alicia: Alicia.

Jeff: Alicia. Yeah, so you've been speaking French for a number of years, and you speak other languages, and then you sometimes help others because of your language learning. You're very humble, but in general, okay, so you speak French, and what else do you do work at?

Alicia: In my job, I speak French and Spanish.

Jeff: And, but you also study German?

Alicia: Yes, right now, I'm studying German and Ukrainian, and a few years ago I picked up some Catalan as well, because I found that one interesting, because it's kind of similar to both French and Spanish. So, I can speak that, more or less, but I'm kind of rusty.

Jeff: What's the thing about learning languages for you that, assume it brings you happiness, or what is it for you? Is it a challenge? Why do you even do it?

Alicia: Yeah, I mean, it brings me happiness. I mean, I like experiencing the culture through the other languages. For example, watching TV shows, listening to music in these other languages. And I will admit, I'm kind of a linguistics nerd as well. I studied linguistics as well, so the grammar of the languages is fascinating for me, and just the different sounds, like the phonetics, phonology, all that kind of stuff. Especially in Catalan, because it's like a lesser-known Romance language, so it's interesting to compare it with, like, Spanish and French, which I know pretty well, so.

Jeff: So, in Omaha, you sometimes help for your work in social services with the translating for health patients, or what exactly, kind of, in general, what kind of work is that?

Alicia: Yeah, in general, it's not so much social services, but I work at clinics and hospitals, and I'm there, like, in their encounters with doctors, therapists, nurses, what-have-you. I'm helping patients, usually Spanish speakers once in a while. I will help French-speaking patients as well, and then once in a while...

Jeff: From West Africa?

Alicia: Yes, the French-speaking ones tend to be from, like, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, yep. But yeah, and then once in a while, I would work for, like, the social services as well.

Jeff: And when you're doing that translating for someone who, I'm assuming they have very little or no English, and you come along and you help them, what kind of reaction do you get with that person you're helping? Are they pleased? Are they happy? Do they feel better that someone can understand what they're saying, and is it satisfying?

Alicia: It's very satisfying. I mean, usually, like, people are very happy that I'm there, even though, like, sometimes I do feel a bit out of place because I am not, I did not grow up speaking other languages. I grew up with English. I started learning Spanish when I was 11, and then I added on French when I was, like, 19 or something like that. So, I'm not like the people, like, in Omaha who are lucky enough to grow up with two or more languages in their house.

Jeff: Well, we generally don't do that in America.

Alicia: This is true.

Jeff: And in Europe, you do. So, I just, I love, though, that, Alicia, that you had this love of language, and you pursued it as a passion, and now, occasionally, you help others. That's awesome. And for you personally, like, how do you think learning language has changed your life? I know that you said you enjoy the culture. Do you think it changes your brain? Do you think it changes your overall quality of life, or is it just more like an intensive hobby?

Alicia: It's a little bit of both. I don't think it's, like, changed my brain completely. Yeah.

Jeff: I sometimes worry that learning French ruins my brain, because I'm trying to think in French so much that I sometimes struggle for words in English.

Alicia: Oh, I do that, too. Yeah. Yeah.

Jeff: What languages do you dream in?

Alicia: Oh, I must admit, I usually just dream in English, but yes, I will have a dream in French and Spanish here and there. One time, I had a dream in Spanish just a couple years ago, so not when I was still, like, learning the basics, but in my dream, I realized that I was using, like, a bad grammar or something, and then I woke up from the dream, and I'm like, my grammar was so bad in that dream.

Jeff: So, I've had the opposite experience, where my French, in my dreams, it's parfait. It's so perfect, and then I wake up, and I'm like, oh, I need to go back and study conjugations again, because in reality, I don't know what I'm doing, probably. But, well, Alicia, thanks so much for joining me on Jeff Around Town for this special edition from a little cafe. We're not far from...

Alicia: The Pantheon. The Pantheon.

Jeff: Yeah, and Luxembourg Garden. Jardin de Luxembourg. Merci. Thank you.

Alicia: Merci à toi, Jeff.