

Jeff Around Town – March, 25th, 2025

Jeff: Time now for another edition of Jeff Around Town. Today I'm talking with Bob Atherton, by day a therapist, by night a cartoonist, or maybe by early morning a cartoonist. Welcome Bob.

Bob: Thank you, thanks for having me.

Jeff: So, when do you draw your cartoons?

Bob: Well, I do a lot in the morning and in the evening too, so I set aside about an hour a day now to draw.

Jeff: Okay, so we'll unpack that here in a second. So, we've known each other a long time, since our days at UNO back in the day when we were both working on The Gateway. Maybe not quite the same time?

Bob: A little overlap in the early 80s, I think.

Jeff: And you were drawing a comic strip called...

Bob: Big Macs on Campus.

Jeff: Uh-huh.

Bob: And you were doing your political stuff, and you were a good mentor to me.

Jeff: And then you kept up with it for a while, and then you kind of put that aside to pursue your professional career.

Bob: Yeah, you know, I kept at it for a lot of years there, and even after I graduated, The Gateway was nice enough to just keep printing my stuff anyway.

Jeff: So, after you graduated?

Bob: After I graduated in 88 with a master's degree in counseling, I still kept drawing Big Macs until 95.

Jeff: So, you held like the record or something?

Bob: I did, I did. I did win an award, a Gateway award, for the longest tenure at The Gateway.

Jeff: And then you put it aside for a while. You put the cartooning aside.

Bob: Yeah, after I had my second child and the full-time private practice.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: And being married, I thought maybe it's time to give it a rest.

Jeff: But you brought it back. Why?

Bob: Well, partly, you know, it's hard to find somewhere to be printed after you get out of college.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: And especially these days. But a few years back, I thought, oh wait, there's Facebook.

Jeff: Uh-huh.

Bob: And then later, Instagram. And I could just put my stuff there, and I don't have to find a publisher.

Jeff: Creative spark for you. Something inside of you that just felt compelled to... I mean, just because there's Facebook and Instagram, it didn't mean that you had to start drawing. So, but why?

Bob: No, yeah, you're right. It's always been part, I guess, part of who I am. And even when I wasn't printing any cut strips at all, I was still jotting down ideas for those years, and just stacking them up, and thinking someday maybe I'll do something with it.

Jeff: As a therapist, do you hear other humans talk about their problems and the things that they're dealing with? For you, is cartooning sort of your own form of therapy, or is it you're commenting on the human condition?

Bob: I don't know. It's a good question. It's certainly my creative outlet. And therapy can be too. There's a lot of creativity from just two people talking.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: Like we're doing right now.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: You never know what's gonna come up. I do think it's therapeutic, in a sense, because sometimes I just have silly ideas to get a laugh, and other times I do want people to kind of think a little bit, especially when I'm having fun with maybe some current phrase or current thing going on.

Jeff: You do a lot of wordplay. You're a word guy. You're a wordsmith.

Bob: Yeah. That's been a lot of fun to really get kind of deep, deep into that this last year.

Jeff: So, Bob, I mean, I still think of this as being in college back in the day. I still think of us as young guys, but, you know, we're not exactly college-aged anymore. So, what do you say to someone who always had a dream to, you know, maybe they were pursuing a creative outlet, and they put it aside? You picked it back up. So, what do you tell someone who says, like, ah, I wish one day...

Bob: Just start doing whatever you want to do, and don't worry so much about where you're gonna show this or where you're gonna perform. I think that'll work itself out sooner or later.

Jeff: Do you think it's important for a song to be performed in public or a cartoon to be seen, or is it enough to draw it for yourself? You said you were jotting down ideas.

Bob: Yeah.

Jeff: No one was seeing them.

Bob: Right.

Jeff: Maybe your family members, but...

Bob: No, really, really nobody. So, I don't know. Is that the artist's eternal question? Is it art if nobody else has ever seen it? Yeah. I don't know the answer to that. It's certainly a lot more rewarding to share it with others.

Jeff: Awesome. Well, Bob, thanks a lot for chatting, and if folks want to see some of your cartoons, they can find you on Instagram.

Bob: Instagram, it's athertoons, is the name of my Instagram. Lowercase a-t-h-e-r-t-o-o-n-s. Extra o in there. And you can like me on Facebook, too.

Jeff: Bob Atherton, thanks so much for joining me on Jeff Around Town.

Bob: Thank you.