

Jeff Around Town – December 10th, 2024

Jeff: And now it's time for another edition of Jeff Around Town. What is your why? That singular reason that you pursue, that dream or passion, the thing that keeps you going even when filled with doubt. For me, my why for learning French is directly connected to a couple I met in Limoges, France many years ago.

Michael and Irene, or in French, Michele et Irene, I first met them several years ago when I was invited to take part in a cartoon exhibit there. We immediately hit it off. They were warm and kind and invited me into their home, feeding me, offering me, well, cheese and wine.

Each year I'd go back and as much as I loved seeing my cartoonist friends from around the world, it was mostly Michele and Irene I looked forward to seeing. There was just one thing, they only spoke a little English and I didn't speak any French. I'd always wanted to learn French, the language that I just love, but somehow I just convinced myself that it would be too difficult and yes, it is difficult. But I also wanted to communicate with Michele and Irene.

So about six years ago, I jumped in taking classes with Allianz France as Omaha and I used apps like Babbel. At the same time, I launched a group called Café et Conversation, Café and Conversation, which is a weekly free meetup where you can come and practice French.

And here is where it connects to the Omaha area and possibly to you. Because of Michele and Irene in France, this weekly conversation group now has over 500 members, not just in Omaha, but in Lincoln and Sioux City and beyond. It's now the largest free weekly French practice groups in America.

I've seen so many friendships come from this group, so many connections being made and we also support local businesses by meeting at local cafes, bars, museums, galleries, bookshops. Now this isn't all so much about learning French. It's about connecting with your why and how that can be, you know, it can be about learning a language, but it can be about pursuing any new skill, following any dream of yours, whether that's taking up the guitar or the piano or oil painting or starting a new business.

When you connect with your why, it's a powerful thing that can impact others in wonderful ways. So how about for you? Are you pursuing a dream or a goal? And if so, what is your why? And if you haven't yet jumped in because of fear or you worry you won't have the time, connect with your why. When you do, you'll not only reach your goals, but you just might make an impact on others in a powerful way.

This past Friday, a couple of Fridays ago after Thanksgiving, I had what might have been my most complete conversation with Michelle and Irene and their smiles are something I will always treasure. And I'd love to hear about your project, your passions, your dreams, and your why. If you care to share, reach out at jkoterba@unomaha.edu. And that's another Jeff Around Town.