

Jeff Around Town – July 26th, 2024

Otis: Let's go around town with Jeff. Jeff Koterba is here.

Jeff: Good morning, Otis.

Otis: How are you, buddy?

Jeff: I'm well, and Felix Mendelssohn, oh, Fingal's Cave, love that work. And, well, speaking of Mendelssohn, he was an artist, a watercolorist.

Otis: Yeah, that's true.

Jeff: And carried his sketchbook wherever he went, and that ties into Jeff Around Town today. Otis, you've been to KANEKO, of course.

Otis: Yes, of course.

Jeff: Yeah, wonderful, and love what they do. Well, they have this great educational outreach, and one of the things they do each summer is they offer these creative camps for middle schoolers on everything from the art and science of scent, so they're making their own perfumes, to architecture.

Otis: Ahhhh.

Jeff: Yeah, and, well, they even had a class, well, on cartooning taught by, well, yours truly.

Otis: Oh.

Jeff: And one of the things that I like to stress when teaching art is that it needs to be an organic process, and that you need to allow yourself to be vulnerable, and you don't have to be perfect. Kids worry about perfection. I think a lot of adults, too. And, you know, at first the kids were, you know, a little bit shy and quiet on Monday. It was a week-long class.

Otis: How old were the kids?

Jeff: Middle school.

Otis: Okay.

Jeff: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know, and they don't really know each other because they're, you know, a couple of them did and knew each other, but mostly from different schools, and I could, you know, relate because I'm an introvert, and I certainly was like that at that age, but by Wednesday morning they really began to open up, and that afternoon, you know, I wanted to get them out of the building, so we went for a little walkabout, took our sketchbooks into the old market and sat, you know, those circular flower planters on 11th and Howard?

Otis: Right right. That's where you hang out.

Jeff: That's where you hang out.

Otis: Yeah.

Jeff: That's where I eat gelato.

Otis: Watching the people go by.

Jeff: Oh, love people watching. Yeah. So they're sitting there sketching, and it was, oh, it was a great scene, and they're sketching the passersby and the trees and the birds, and one of the students, who was, you know, kind of quiet at first, he opened up and he said, he asked this, what I thought was a really profound question. He said, "what do you think grownups think when they walk by and they see a bunch of kids drawing?" And I thought, oh, my gosh, I love that question. It was so touching, and I told him and the rest of the students. I said, "I bet adults see all of you, and they wish they were you. They wish they were still kids. They wish they were still drawing." Don't you think, Otis?

Otis: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Jeff: And at that precise moment, these two women were walking by, and I thought, well, I'm going to stop them and say, excuse me.

Otis: Ask them the question.

Jeff: I'm going to ask them a question, and they said, it's absolutely wonderful seeing these students drawing, and by coincidence, they both work for the Nebraska Arts Council, Rachel Morgan and Rachel Dion. I did not know them.

Otis: Go figure.

Jeff: And I know.

Otis: What are the chances?

Jeff: I know, and Nebraska Arts Council is located in the Burlington Capitol Building, and they invited the class to stop by the Fred Simon Gallery the next day. So, of course, I took the group, and one of the things I wanted to tell the students is that when you ask questions, opportunities can present themselves. So we went, and we're walking through the Burlington Building, and there's a Chihuly sculpture in the atrium there.

Otis: Yeah, it's a great building. I actually worked for an ad agency there. I had an office in that building.

Jeff: You did?

Otis: Yeah, it's a gorgeous building.

Jeff: It's a beautiful building, and it kind of has a European feel to me a little bit, that atrium.

Otis: Yeah, very, very.

Jeff: Italy or something. So, we're down in the gallery to see the art, and there's this wonderful exhibit by Allegra Hangen. I think it's going until August 7th, and the photos are

beautiful photos. They're black and white, taken at a nature preserve in Council Bluffs. So, Megan is there to greet us, giving us a tour, and she was explaining that there was a malfunction in the 35mm camera that the artist had and that some of the images began to overlap at odd intervals. But here's the thing. She was saying that the pieces reflect spontaneity, serendipity, and the acceptance of errors in the creative process. It was exactly what the students needed to experience. And, you know, when they came back, because, you know, we were talking about not having to be perfect. We came back. They worked on their final projects, and they were fantastic. I cannot believe the level of talent. So, so great. So, no matter your age, stay connected to your kid self. Sketch, and don't worry about being perfect. Leave perfection to robots. You are human. Go see those photos at the Fred Simon Gallery, and here's a little added bonus. Tomorrow, Saturday, at KANEKO, they're having an opening for all the campers, for all the works, the perfumes, the cartoons. It's from noon to three tomorrow at KANEKO, and the exhibit continues until August 11th. So, stop on by if you can, and notice that's another Jeff Around Town.

Otis: Very cool, very cool. Like the Simon Gallery, it's a neat place. My nephew's exhibited there before, and other people, great artists. And the KANEKO, yeah.

Jeff: Great place.

Otis: One of those local treasures.

Jeff: Oh, indeed.

Otis: Hey, have a good weekend.

Jeff: You too.

Otis: Stay cool. That's the trick. Jeff Around Town, every Friday. Don't miss it. Stay out there, eh?