

Jeff Around Town – June 28th, 2024

Otis: We're going around town. Jeff, around town. Jeff.

Jeff: Good morning, Otis.

Otis: How are you, buddy?

Jeff: Good. You love tall buildings?

Otis: I love tall buildings. I can, I can jump them with a single bow. Or something like that.

Jeff: We were chatting earlier, when you were a kid, you had a chance to visit New York.

Otis: Yeah, I was about eight years old, nine years old. The Empire State Building. Oh, yes.

Jeff: Well, when I was a kid growing up in South Omaha, there weren't a lot of tall buildings in South O, though, but I was obsessed with going downtown because I loved tall buildings.

Otis: Yeah.

Jeff: And my uncle was a dentist in the old Woodman of the World, the old W.W. Building on the...

Otis: Wild Building.

Jeff: Yeah. And 13th and Farnham. I think his office was on the 14th floor. And, you know, I didn't love getting my teeth filled, but I loved looking out from his office. So as a kid, I watched the new version of the Woodman Building, which was the Woodman Tower and now the Woodman Life Tower. Otis, the original design was only 20 stories, but during construction, they decided to keep adding stories.

Otis: They had so much fun. They just kept going.

Jeff: It was like a Lego set. And they eventually reached... reached 30 stories. I was obsessed watching it being built. And to me, the Woodman Tower stood for what was possible for the future of Omaha. And at the time, the Woodman Tower, I believe, was the tallest building between Chicago and Denver. At the top... Back in those days, at the top of the Woodman Tower, there was the top of the World Restaurant.

Otis: Oh, yeah, I remember that.

Jeff: Yeah, I never got to eat there. But my kid, my brother and I, when we were kids, my brother Artie, we took the bus downtown and took the elevator to the top one afternoon. They were closed. And a manager there said, hey, we're closed. You have to leave. So just before the elevator doors closed, I caught a slight glimpse of the sky, and it seemed magical. And I kept dreaming one day, one day, maybe I can gaze out from those windows. So enter Mike Yanney, who with his wife, Gail, have done so much for our city.

Otis: Pillar of the community.

Jeff: Truly.

Otis: Literally.

Jeff: Yeah. Sometimes publicly, sometimes quietly. They have had such a positive impact on our city. And a few years ago, I made his portrait for the Omaha Press Club's "Face on the Bar Room Floor", just like I did yours.

Otis: Yeah.

Jeff: And I included his accomplishments. But I also drew him on top of the Woodman Tower because he has his office there and he lives there. And since I drew that caricature, I've been thinking I should go meet with Mike Yanney so I can actually one day look out of the window. So last week I had a chance to visit with Mike on the top floor of the Woodman. We had this great chat. He's kind, as you know, he's thoughtful, he's humble. He's so passionate about our community and how to make it better. So we're talking, having a great conversation, but like a little kid, the little kid came out.

Otis: You're just staring out the window.

Jeff: I was. I said, "Mike, can I, I need to go look out the window." So, you know, I've stood in other tall buildings in other cities before, but this was extra special to gaze out at Omaha to think about all the great things that are happening in our city. You know, for all of you, all the wonderful things, and many of which are thanks to Mike and Gail. But in that moment, Otis, I felt like Omaha, I'm looking out and I'm just thinking about all the great things happening. Omaha is finally becoming the city I'd always dreamed it could be since the time I was a kid, because it really is so great. So even if you don't have a chance to gaze up upon the city from, several stories up, wherever you are right now at home or in your car, remember that you are part of something bigger. You are connected. You're a member of this incredible community, this place that is truly unique and special and magical. And Otis, that's another Jeff Around Town.

Otis: Yeah. Looking out at big windows.

Jeff: Big windows.

Otis: Tall buildings.

Jeff: They are big.

Otis: And hi to Mike and Gail and the whole family. I haven't talked to them in a while. Hey, great. I love the picture, by the way. It's posted on your Facebook page.

Jeff: Yes, it is. Yes.

Otis: You and Mike.

Jeff: That's right. Thanks.

Otis: Look for that. Thanks.

Jeff: Thanks, Otis.

Otis: Around Town with Jeff every Friday. Yeah, at 8:45.