

Jeff Around Town – January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026

**Jeff:** It's Jeff Around Town and I'm chatting with my friend Bruce Arant. Bruce, you are an author, an illustrator, and you also spend a lot of time on the road. We'll talk about that in a second. Thanks.

**Bruce:** Great. Thanks for having me, Jeff.

**Jeff:** First of all, you're an award-winning author of several books. You, you're probably, is it fair to say, your most popular children's book is *Simpsons Sheep Won't Go to Sleep*.

**Bruce:** Yes, Simpsons Sheep, well, *Simpsons Sheep Won't Go to Sleep* and *Simpsons Sheep Just Want to Sleep*.

**Jeff:** The follow-up.

**Bruce:** Yeah, the follow-up, the sequel.

**Jeff:** The sequel.

**Bruce:** Both of those have... have done very well.

**Jeff:** And tell me about the awards.

**Bruce:** Well, the first book, *The Simpsons Sheep Won't Go to Sleep*, that came out in 2013, actually. I can't believe it's been that long. It was a nominee for the Golden Sower Award, which at the time I didn't even know what the Golden Sower Award was, but it was kind of a big deal.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bruce:** And then it also won the Nebraska Book Award, and it represented the state of Nebraska in the National Book Conference in Washington, DC.

**Jeff:** Wonderful.

**Bruce:** And then the second book has done very, very well. It also won the Nebraska Book Award, and it went to DC as a representative for Nebraska.

**Jeff:** And you wrote and illustrated both of those.

**Bruce:** Yeah, I illustrated both of those.

**Jeff:** And then you also illustrate other, other books?

**Bruce:** I mostly illustrate for other authors. I've illustrated like 25 books and or book covers, but I've done quite a bit of that.

**Jeff:** One of the things I've always loved about your work, Bruce, and in this world of, you know, AI and all of that sort of thing, you are a hands-on guy. And you mostly draw in pastel?

**Bruce:** I, well, no. I switched, in fact, I switched a lot to pastel. After I did The Simpsons Sheep, that first Simpsons Sheep book, I had to find a way to make my sheep look soft. And so it was suggested to me to, to, you know, have you ever used pastels? Well, no, I haven't because they're so messy and so scary to use. But I, I use all traditional mediums. I like getting my hands dirty. I think I did one book cover digitally years ago, but I just like getting my hands dirty.

**Jeff:** There's such heart and warmth to your work.

**Bruce:** Oh, thank you.

**Jeff:** And it comes through. You're, you're that kind of a person, but it comes through in your art, but it takes a while. Oh, human, human made drawings take a long time.

**Bruce:** It does. It really does. It's, but that's, and that's part of the struggle is when you are in the midst of a project, and you know this, sometimes you feel like you're really in the trenches and you just have to keep going. But there's something about it where, you know, the project, you're pushing it and pushing it and all of a sudden, you feel like it's pulling.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bruce:** And it's coming together. And that's, that's a great feeling.

**Jeff:** Has almost a life of its own.

**Bruce:** It does.

**Jeff:** Yeah. So, let's switch gears just a little bit, but it's still connected to books. So in two different ways, you spend a lot of time on the road. You do a lot of author visits, a lot of teaching.

**Bruce:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** And we talked about that. And also you represent something, a book distributor that I didn't even know this sort of thing still existed. It sounds old school. You go to libraries and small towns.

**Bruce:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Not your own.

**Bruce:** A little over a year ago, I was approached by Gumdrop Books, and they are a nationwide distributor of books to schools and public libraries, primarily nonfiction books. So, if you wanted a book about, you know, tractors or coffee or plants or whatever, it's those type of books, and they're all, they're all library bound. So, they're very durable. I'm not trying to do a sales pitch here, but they really are. Yeah. And it, it has really been interesting. I was... I was asked if I would be interested in working with them. I have the western half of Iowa, and then I have some, some areas in eastern Nebraska, too. I have all of, for instance, like in Omaha, I've got any parochial or private schools.

**Jeff:** Sure. Maybe more in Nebraska, you do author visits.

**Bruce:** I do a lot of author visits in Nebraska.

**Jeff:** All day. Like you'll go into a school and you'll teach all aspects of...

**Bruce:** Yeah, I might drawing, I'll be make it there, you know, 7:45 in the morning won't leave till after four, but I'll have maybe six or seven or even up to eight sessions in a day. But I have seven different programs that I offer... different sessions, like a writing workshop and an illustrating workshop and all of this sort of editing storyboarding. At this point, and I'm not bragging, I feel very blessed that I've had a chance to engage somewhere realistically between 75 and 80,000 students.

**Jeff:** Wow, that's incredible.

**Bruce:** So yeah, I can't believe I feel like I'm the winner on that because I love doing it.

**Jeff:** I don't know how you do it. Because the one time I did an author, illustrator visit all day, I got halfway through to lunch period. And I was so tired. And I just had so much respect. I always have respect to teachers. But I thought, Oh, my gosh, I get home. four o'clock. I went crawled right into bed. I could not get up.

**Bruce:** No, you know what, at the end of the day, when I do a full day gig, I am... I am sad that it's over because I do it all over again. It just energizes me.

**Jeff:** Love it.

**Bruce:** Bruce Arant. Such a pleasure chatting with you. Thank you.

**Jeff:** Thank you so much. It's been great. Thanks, Jeff.