

Jeff Around Town – April 7th, 2026

Jeff: This is Jeff Around Town. If you watched the launch of *Artemis II*, the historic mission to send four humans in orbit around the moon, then you know how dramatic and cinematic that liftoff was. All the camera angles, those engines firing, the deep rumbling roar as the rocket defied gravity, soaring into the deep blue above.

It truly felt like a scene in a movie with Tom Hanks. And for me, it took me back to my childhood. Now for those of you of a certain age, you likely recall those launches of the Apollo missions when TV networks would break into regular programming to broadcast the latest launch to the moon.

As a kid growing up in South Omaha, I had plenty of opportunities to watch those launches. Although my dad was a drummer and had an office job, he also fixed up old TVs that he resold from our house, which meant that our house had no shortage of TVs. Now many of them in disrepair of course, but he always had a stack of working TVs like our own personal newsroom.

On launch days, he'd take a day off from work and yes, he would call me in sick to school so that I could stay home and watch the launch. When I was around five or six years old, I had shown my dad a drawing I had done of Snoopy. My mom loved the drawing, but my dad wasn't so happy with it. Not because it was poorly drawn, but rather because it wasn't original. My feelings were hurt, but eventually I went back to the drawing board and came up with my own dog character named Dogie. In the lead-up to the first moon landing with Neil Armstrong, I made cartoons declaring that Dogie had become the first dog to land on the moon. All was well and good until my mom and I came across a display in the toy section of a department store in downtown Omaha. The display showed Snoopy as the first dog on the moon. I felt as though my character, Dogie, was once again not original enough and so I put him away in a drawer and forgot about him forever.

Many years later, when I was drawing cartoons for the *Omaha World-Herald*, Nebraska's astronaut Clay Anderson reached out and asked if I would be willing to draw two cartoons that he could take on board space shuttle *Discovery* on his upcoming return to space. Along with that request came an invitation to his launch for me and my family. Of course I agreed.

The first cartoon came easily, and it was called "The Astronaut and the Cartoonist". It had two parts to it. The first part showed Clay on the shuttle looking at the Earth. The other side of the drawing showed me gazing from my window at the newspaper. These were the words. "One gazes upon the world, the other gazes from the World-Herald."

But it was the other idea that was giving me trouble. I was stumped. Then, just before my deadline to send my work to NASA, it came to me. I would bring back Dogie. I would show Dogie in his triumphant return to space with the words, I finally made it. The launch of *Discovery* came on April 5th, Easter morning 2010, when it was still dark out.

Moments before the launch, I had a chance meeting with none other than Neil Armstrong. And soon after, as the engines of the rocket fired up and roared, the early morning sky ignited with oranges and golds and pinks. It was more beautiful than any sunrise I've ever seen.

And knowing that my drawings were on board made it all feel even sweeter. Talk about cinematic. This is Jeff Around Town or around the world.