

Jeff Around Town – May 6th, 2025

Jeff: Time for Jeff Around Town, and joining me is Denise Natali. Denise, you are a former military intelligence officer, currently a technology executive. You've done lots of other things, but you're also a cartoonist, so thanks for being here, Denise.

Denise: Thanks, Jeff. I'm super happy to be here.

Jeff: You know, how does someone who comes from military intelligence, how do you get into cartooning, or have you always done that?

Denise: I've always been in cartooning, so all through high school and college. In fact, I had my own business in college doing comics for hire.

Jeff: Oh, okay.

Denise: And, you know, I had a design business and all the rest of that, so it's just something I've always done.

Jeff: Do you process things that, you know, work-wise, when you were working in intelligence, and now you work a lot in AI, and do you... when you're drawing... is that ever part of the creative process when you kind of... for me, I kind of zone out, and I think about other things. Do you ever work on problem-solving for your job, for your other work, when you're drawing?

Denise: All the time. In fact, some of the reasons why I started really veering off towards illustrating the AI, and illustrating unstructured data, and things like that, is because it was helping me to explain what we were doing to our customers, and why it was important, and how it was relevant with what they were struggling with, you know, on their daily requirements.

Jeff: Because you do a lot of speaking, and workshops, and things like that, and so you use cartoons to get the point across.

Denise: Yeah, visual intelligence is something that I've always been pretty deep into, and I think that's probably the connective tissue between being a comic artist, as well as being a technologist. It's a whole thing. In fact, I spent a little bit of time once as a consultant, and all we did was basically take complex problems and illustrate them to visualize it, so that it was able to simplify and help people reach different solutions.

Jeff: It makes sense, emotional intelligence, of course, but I think I'm just keep hearing about artificial intelligence, and I know you work in that field, but it's... I don't know, it's weirdly reassuring to me to hear the term visual intelligence, because it sounds human... but I guess it isn't, because it could also relate to artificial intelligence. So how does... what's the connection here? Does it all work together?

Denise: Well, you know, it's really interesting, because visual intelligence helps people to process what they're understanding better. I mean, you look at it as a cartoonist. I think one of the hardest forms of art is being a cartoonist, because you have to do it with very minimal effects. So how you choose your gag lines, how you weight your lines, how you even do who you're presenting as a character... has everything to do with visual intelligence, because it

speaks so much about what's going on in the message that you're trying to portray when you're doing a comic.

Jeff: So, you did a cartoon, Denise, about AI somehow utilizing AI. I can't remember the exact joke, but it was really great.

Denise: Yeah, and it's, I think, infusing the most human element into AI, which is... you know, people are intrinsically lazy, and so leveraging AI to prompt my AI.

Jeff: (laughter) okay.

Denise: The intersection of human and AI is a really interesting intersection, because one can't exist without the other, and I think it can be a very synergistic relationship.

Jeff: Well, that's kind of what I wonder about, though, because at some point, does AI just start feeding upon itself?

Denise: So that's what's called a hallucination. It's kind of like having a, like a positive bias towards something.

Jeff: Yeah.

Denise: A confirmation bias.

Jeff: Okay.

And that's, that's essentially what a hallucination is in AI, where it's a... you only feed it information, or it only recognizes information, and then it just continuously recycles that information, but in different words and formats and all the rest of that. So that's why the intersection of humans and AI really has to be a very dynamic one, where it's constantly relearning and re-understanding, just like how humans have interacted with machines now for a hundred years, is making sure that that is always a dynamic and equal relationship.

Jeff: You still draw your cartoons? Is it, are they all human-drawn, or?

Denise: They're all human-drawn.

Jeff: Okay. (laughter)

Denise: I, you know, you got to have a soul, and I think the one thing is, it's, it's, you can't train AI to have humor.

Jeff: Yeah.

Denise: In the way that we do, because humor is the most human way of reflecting what we are as a species, and it's, it's finding what we do and poking fun at it, because that's what makes us human.

Jeff: Denise Natale, thanks for being on Jeff Around Town.

Denise: Thank you, it's been great.