



TRANSCRIPT

This is a career, a profession, and a calling.

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GUEST

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Kate: I want to start with before I ask your thoughts on professionalization and family child care, tell me a little bit about how you got into family child care, how long you've done this work, and just a little bit about that foundation.

Denise: Sure. Before I was married I worked in Israel in a preschool for three years and it was obviously an Israeli preschool and so I spoke Hebrew. And I had an incredible mentor who trained me in so many areas and I learned so much. The most important thing that I can take away from that is the relationships I built with the children but also they put me in charge of shadowing a child who had some emotional needs and I had to document everything that he did and then we would go, I think it was about every other week, to a psychiatrist and then do a report and do progress and behavior situations. So that was huge. It was just such a huge learning curve for me and I really enjoyed that and developed a very special relationship with the family and the child. That was sort of my, who knew at the time that that would hold me in such good stead for my future in family child care, but it really did. I took a little break when our first child was born and we moved to the United States and I opened up my own family child care and joined Satellite and became licensed right away. I have been teaching for, actually in total, 37 years in my family child care and then the three years in Israel.

Kate: Wow. That's amazing. I had no idea you taught in Israel. I'm remembering that you were born in South Africa, right?

Denise: I was, yes. I left South Africa after high school and moved to Israel actually.

Kate: That's amazing. The things that you learn about people when you interview them. We've known each other for a really long time.

Denise: We have, yeah.

Kate: It's just a real gift to be able to do these interviews because I learn so much more about all the providers. So I just have a list of about eight questions. Do you consider yourself a professional? When did you see this happen? What happened to make you feel professional? And why do you think that was?

Denise: Beautiful question. I definitely consider myself professional. I take great pride in everything that I did. I have been completely committed to the field and absolutely love being with children. I would say that the learning curve never ever stopped because every child that comes into my program has a different need, a different ability, a different way of learning and a different personality. I just love gearing my program to those specifics because I think we're so individual and every one of us has so much to offer and I learn as much from the children as

they learn from me. My education was ongoing from the very beginning. I did lots of classes through Madison College. I went to national conferences every single year no matter where they were. I did my CDA.

It's a child development accreditation that was a national accreditation. It still is, but that was so many years ago, probably 25 years ago I think I did that, where a trainer would come from another state actually and shadow you. You had to write, not a dissertation, but you had to write a specific subject. They still do that at NAEYC, there are still people who are doing their ongoing studies and accreditations through them. Then you had to submit all of the writings. There were particular questions and you submitted the essays. Then they would shadow you and then you would have a whole day of testing. I remember that the person that did that with me was from out of town. I couldn't go into my program to do the testing because I needed to hire a teacher to be there the day I was not there, and so she asked if I could think of a place because a library wasn't good because we had to talk all the time. The beautiful place just off State Street, the beautiful bookshop. I can't remember the name of it now. It's just slipped my mind. But it was, you must remember it ... It had a castle ... Canterbury.

Kate: Canterbury. Yes, I remember now.

Denise: So I knew the owner of Canterbury and they let us have one of their private rooms and we spent the whole day there and she was testing me and questioning me and all of that. So then I passed and I got my CDA. It's an incredibly intensive program because I had to do it while I was working full-time and there was so much writing involved. I remember I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning to do that writing because at night time I just couldn't even think anymore. It was an incredible experience though.

Kate: I never did the CDA because I think well I started in 2002 so I don't know if they were still offering the CDA.

Denise: I believe that they still are because I know every year that I've gone to the NAEYC conference there's always a section for that training. But I didn't need to continue with it because I had already done it.

Kate: Right. It's just interesting as we talk further on just the difference in professional options I think are really interesting. The CDA, was that a two year type of program?

Denise: I know it changed over the years. Joan Lorie was the first one to do that and then we spoke about it and it's so individualized or it was so beautiful and I think it

was NAEYC that created that. It focused on the highlights of each person's program, which was amazing, because we're all individuals. I remember Joan did hers and then she talked about it and I thought, "Well, I'm going to do mine too." While I was doing it I thought, "What have I taken on here?" But I was really glad when I did do it.

Kate: Well, it's good to learn more about it and I had no idea that you had to do so much writing. An entire day talking with one of the trainers.

Denise: I can't remember if it was one day or two days. I can't remember, and I think it was maybe specific to CDA credential online, finish it in as much as, as fast as three months. It's a hundred percent online now. We had to pay for it. That's right. They have a curriculum and programs and everything. So just research it. I put in, "CDA child care NAEYC." You will find out a lot of information about that.

Kate: I just think that it's interesting because some providers have a CDA and some providers don't. Like you said, you had to pay for it and I'm curious, do you remember what the cost was?

Denise: No, it was a long time ago. I do think that Satellite did give me a stipend for it at the time. It was an incentive grant I think. I can't remember the specifics. It was worth it though, very worth it. I had to work hard.

Kate: Like you said, you're working during the day for probably nine or 10 hours during the day and then five days a week. So when do you do education?

Denise: And parenting two children.

Kate: And parenting two children. Yeah. There's not a lot of extra, so-called free time in that.

Denise: Right.

Kate: The next question is what do you think makes a family child care provider professional?

Denise: I think knowledge is huge. You do have to have a background. It's very interesting that people would think, "Oh, well, they couldn't do anything else so they chose family child care." It's so not true. You really have to know what you're doing and you have to be willing to expand your horizons and to really search deep into what it takes and what needs need to be met. I have to say at the time Satellite was extremely strong in the education part and the support and, I mean, I was

part of that network from the very, very beginning and our monthly meetings were unbelievable. People didn't want to miss them. Look how long Sojourn has been going on for. Before Sojourn it was called the Senior Providers. We were all in our late '20s, early '30s, so we weren't that senior. It was just a fun name. I think the willingness to learn, and you have to have a lot of energy, there's no doubt about that.

Kate: Can you explain a little bit what Sojourn is?

Denise: There was a program actually that was invented in California, it's called Shared Facilitating or Shared Services. Everybody takes a turn and has a role at the same time at a meeting. So you have a facilitator, you have a timekeeper, you have an outreach person, a process monitor. The facilitator usually holds that position for about a year or two but then the other roles rotate every meeting. A chart writer is also another one and then a note taker as well. We have a check in where each person gets a certain amount of time uninterrupted to talk about anything that they want to talk about, whether it be a problem they're having, a personal problem, a professional problem, or a situation that they need help with. We also write out if anything comes up during that time where people need more time to talk and process, we call that the burning issues, and people get a specified time, depending on how many burning issues there are, to process and get advice from other peers about how to deal with the situation, and it's huge. It's incredibly supportive. Beyond and above those meetings when things come up, we know each other really well because we've developed such a close bond and relationship and trust, that we can call people up and say, "This situation I'm dealing with, this is how it's progressing. Do you see anything that I could do differently or where can I go from here," and so it's so helpful.

Kate: That's such an amazing, professional sounding community of practice.

Denise: It is. Actually we went through an extensive program training where the trainers from California came out to train us about how to lead these meetings, and we've been following that example for, let's see. My youngest is 31, so 32 years.

Kate: 32 years?

Denise: That way, it's such a beautiful way to share because everybody has expertise in different ways. There isn't one person who's a leader. There isn't one person who takes over the meeting and governs the whole thing. We're all equal because we all have such different skills and that's just amazing. It clearly works. It's an incredible model.

Kate: It must, because 32 years later in this shared leadership is so non-hierarchical and really sees everybody as an expert. You lean on each other and you learn from each other and support each other throughout the process. You got that training from California, which I didn't know about. I didn't know that it had gone on for that long a period of time and what a fabulous model. I keep thinking of, we're talking about professionalization, doing that process on a monthly basis. It sounds like that's just a perfect example of what professional is.

Denise: Absolutely. It's a commitment.

Kate: Thank you for answering that question. The next question is why is it important to see this as a career and a profession to you?

Denise: Well, for all of the things that I discussed beforehand but also, working with children and learning with children and teaching is just a joy. It's clearly my calling and what I was cut out to do. I take an enormous amount of pride in it and I've always felt that it is such an important career and you spend so many hours with the children and have such an impact on their life. As we all know, now that all this amazing brain research has come out, those formative years are some of the most important years in a child's life. So it's a pretty serious and important career and there's no question about it. The fact that I have the passion for it as well, it was like a perfect marriage.

Kate: It certainly has been. I know I'm excited to hear more as I ask you more questions because I know you have a lot more to say about that. The next question I have is tell me about your experience with the YoungStar QRIS, which stands for Quality Rating and Improvement System. Has it helped you become more professional? Why or why not? And the second part of that question is what about accreditation? Has it helped you become more professional? Why or why not?

Denise: I think that all of these educational threads are important because if they can all weave together they will build more strength. I would say, for myself, because I have been in the field for as long as I have, YoungStar was very helpful. For many people I know with the grant money that's basically why people did YoungStar so that they could buy more equipment because when you're starting out there's a huge amount of expenses. By the time YoungStar came about I already had my program established and so it was a little bit frustrating to me, to be quite honest, because I understand you can't find one program that's going to meet everybody's needs but there was a lot of discrepancy because I said, "I have the equipment. I go to these national trainings every year. I'd like to use that money to help me with the hotel or pay for my registration and that kind of stuff." So I had to go through quite a few hoops to have that happen because they were still a new

organization and they were still in the infancy stage of the learning curve. So I would say, for me, it wasn't very helpful. I was really appreciative that Satellite could do the re-accreditation and I could use that for the YoungStar because it was so repetitive. I understand they were in the infancy stage of their development. I actually stopped applying for the grants because it was just not worth it to me. If they would have just have given me the money so I could have put it into an IRA. They did allow me to do that one year and then it became very complicated, and I just thought, "I just don't need this in my life." Of course I do paperwork. I do my taxes. I do everything that's required of me and I read a lot and do a lot of training, but that menial paperwork was not worth the effort for me. So I stopped it. I understand that people who had children in their group who were on funding, the higher the star rating they had, the more they got reimbursed, and I understand that's very important. I did have children who were on funding in my group and so that was okay, that worked okay. I also wanted to mention, at this time too, I was on the board with the school district who developed the Early Learning Standards at the very beginning with Rita Cayle, who retired many, many years ago. I've been on the 4-C board a number of times and the Satellite board a number of times and up until recently, was on the Madison College Early Childhood board as well. I've really advocated for family child care as much as possible and put myself out there to help people understand what family child care is because, as I said before, we're so individual. Many people, especially people who don't have young children, have no idea. They have good intentions but they have no idea what we do every day and how we do it. I think exposure is so important.

Kate: There was a lot in what you just said, and one of the things maybe if you can explain a little bit more is the mini-grant from YoungStar and how much is it? What were the things that you had to do to get it? And are you foregoing that grant at this point?

Denise: I think I haven't received it for two or three years now. It just didn't benefit me. I didn't need equipment. I didn't need more toys. I didn't need more artwork. I mean, I would buy my stuff in bulk, and to fill out all of that stuff too, and then you have to give them a note and then you had to give them receipts. The last time they said that the receipts didn't arrive and they had lost stuff because they were moving offices. I just said, "I'm done. Giving up." I think it was \$500 a year. I'm not trying to be critical. I really want to say that I understand that they were dealing with a lot of different people with different needs, but their system was not very organized in my opinion and I felt I spent way too much time on it and it just wasn't worth it for me. As I said, because I did not need any more equipment. I had everything.

Kate: You were already well-established and had all the equipment that you needed.

Denise: I could have put it into an IRA for retirement or something like that. That would have met my needs, but I know that not everybody is at the stage where I am.

Kate: If you can talk a little bit about accreditation. You've mentioned Satellite and a lot of people don't know that Satellite family child care in Madison, Wisconsin, is a city accreditation agency that accredits family child care providers, but when you talk about Satellite that's what it is. If you want to talk a little bit about that and how it's helped you to become more professional, why or why not, and just some, I don't know, details about that?

Denise: When I started out 37 years ago in Satellite, I didn't understand the legal system in the United States, it's very different from Israel and South Africa, and I was so appreciative of Satellite having a contract that I could use and guiding me through all of those things. As you're starting a business there's so many pieces that you have to go through. So they had it all because at that time there were three accreditation systems in Madison, not just Satellite. There was Central City, Satellite and one more. I can't remember the name of it. Satellite did the west side and Central City did the central part and then there was another one. Satellite had consultants and still do, and they would come out each quarter and they'd do observation, they were there as a support, if you had questions you could call them. They were very much in touch with the administrative part of our business and very helpful. At that time too Satellite was extremely strong in advocating for education, and Satellite used to actually have their own conference and also gave people stipends to attend other conferences too. It was a support organization for people in family child care. Many years ago there weren't any other systems in the nation like that because I remember when we would go to NAEYC and we would talk about what Satellite in Wisconsin did, people were amazed and many people started to model after what Satellite had done. We were very much ahead of the game then. Satellite has changed over the years, they've done different things, they've gone in different directions.

Kate: You talked a lot about the extremely strong educational support that they gave you.

Denise: And administrative support too.

Kate: Administrative support and stipends. In three locations. That's so interesting because the name Satellite a lot of times confuses people, like "What does Satellite mean?" but I think it's because there were three different offices, right?

Denise: Well, they were individual offices. Satellite was its own entity and Central City was its own entity. In fact, Terry, who was a consultant for Satellite, used to work for Central City.

Kate: That's a great background on accreditation and how it's helped you become more professional and some of the history. That's a long history, 37 years, with Satellite and it is such a unique agency that helps accredit. Well, now we're going to pivot to this next question, and I'm really looking forward to hearing what you have to say about this. In what way do COVID-19 and the various racial justice incidents make you think differently about your profession and/or YoungStar? That's a big question.

Denise: I think I need to be very open about this and that is on March 13th 2020, when Governor Evers requested that everybody close and stay at home and be safe, I did close, as did many people, and we went from week to week not knowing if we were going to open the following week. I had a system with the parents where on the Thursday before the next week I would say to them, "I can't open next week. It doesn't seem safe to do so." I was very fortunate that most of the parents in my group completely understood and wouldn't have sent their children anyway because many of the families have grandparents who, maybe some of them had underlying conditions or they were much older, and they were very worried about their safety and their health. It was definitely an understanding and acceptance that I had with the amazing families that I had. As things went on and as the pandemic got worse, I realized after talking to my doctor and my husband's doctor, that both of us have underlying conditions and it wasn't safe for us to open. It was just driving me insane because I kept thinking, "Well, what am I going to do?" I had just started a new group in September 2019 and by Thanksgiving of 2019 we were all gelled together and had fallen in love and understood each other and spoke each other's languages and the teachers could take a deep breath and settle down. I should mention that I had three part-time teachers working with me so I never worked alone, which was very important because I had some children under two and I had eight children in my group. We went from working so hard to integrate all these new children into my group because the others had graduated and gone off to kindergarten so it was, basically, a new group and it was a fantastic group. The families were beautiful, we were so supportive. We were getting together for adult time and it was just amazing. We had formed incredible bonds and then the pandemic hit. So we were all on hold. We were all hanging by a shoestring not knowing what was going to happen. That drove me completely crazy. I was not ready to retire. I had not thought about retiring. I'm only 62 years old, I was 61 then. I had my whole program set. I felt I was at the top of my game and had so much more to give but it wasn't the right time to do that. Then, I made the really difficult decision to close because parents

were not looking at other programs or thinking about their future. They kept thinking Honeybees was going to open again. I started to think about my house and how empty my house was, and it was echoing. I couldn't stand it because the whole of the downstairs, which was huge, it was over 1600 square feet, was dedicated preschool space, and it was just empty. I mean, it was full of preschool stuff but there was nobody there. That was really hard, and since I couldn't see when things were going to change, and as we started learning more about the pandemic, it seemed it was going to take a very, very long time. We found a condo that was too good to pass up. It's a stand-alone ranch and we made an offer and it was accepted immediately and we realized that we had to sell the house because my children are grown, my husband and I did not need to live in a home that was over 3200 square feet. That was the bottom line and actually we're in the process of moving now. The movers are bringing the rest of the stuff in three days' time. The beautiful part of the story is that one of my former preschool families bought our house.

Kate: That is amazing.

Denise: Yeah. It is amazing. It was a very, very difficult decision. If not for the pandemic I would not be where I am now, but I've had a whole year to process and think about it and I don't feel my career is done, but I haven't had the vaccine yet and I'm not going to put myself out there until I do and then I can decide what I want to do in early childhood because I still want to be a part of it. The future is very unknown to me and you know as much as I do.

Kate: Denise, thank you for sharing that. It's such a dramatic example of the impact of COVID and it's heartbreaking and emotional impact. I can't imagine having to sell your home that you've done your whole career in for so many decades and not feeling ready to retire. Just having so much to give and just at the peak of your game.

Denise: Exactly. Yeah, that's exactly right. Yeah.

Kate: I can't even imagine how the last year has been for you.

Denise: On the positive side of it, being so used to working so hard, the project that I had was to distribute the stuff that I had accumulated, which was beautiful stuff, and I divided it all up and donated it to programs like the Boys and Girls Club and Head Start and Abbi Kruse's the Conscious Discipline program, the Playing Field, yeah. So I donated to two of their sites because they just opened their second site. One City preschool as well. We made uncountable trips to all of those programs to donate stuff. They wanted very specific stuff so I sorted everything

out for them. Over 600 books to the Friends of the Madison Library, where they sell them and then all the proceeds go to the library. That filled my heart up. It was so good to me to be able to do that. Now, most people suggested that I sell things, and I tell you my heart couldn't do that. My heart was not in it because there were some people who were really sweet and grateful and understanding of what I was going through and why I was doing it and then other people who just felt to be really greedy to me. I thought, "I don't want to be judging people like that and this is taking way too much of my time." I talked it over with my husband, who's always been such an incredible support, and he said, "You'll find a good place, a good home for this stuff." And I did. Wow and that's amazing. I have got so many thank you letters because my stuff was good. I mean, I bought quality stuff. I had natural stuff, a lot of stuff from nature, most of my books were good literature, not just children's books. I had wooden puzzles, just beautiful stuff. I had everything, gallons of paint, everything you need for preschool. That was a big project to keep me busy and out of mischief.

Kate: I can't imagine all the different programs that you've made so happy.

Denise: Yeah and that feels good. Many of them have invited me to come back and work with them when it's safe to do so. So that feels good too.

Kate: What a wonderful strategy that you came up with to make that transition feel a little less painful, slightly.

Denise: Yeah, absolutely.

Kate: And such a gift for programs who are newer or who are struggling really, because we're all individual businesses, we're in the private sphere, we have to pay for everything ourselves.

Denise: Yeah, absolutely. There isn't a money figure that could total how much money I invested in my business, and that doesn't matter, but there isn't a figure that you could put on that. So to try and get \$800 or \$2,000 from all of that stuff is just crazy. But to give it away, people give land away for natural resources and that kind of stuff. So that's how it felt for me, you know?

Kate: So much heart and so much sentimental value in all that equipment and to see it live on with another program.

Denise: Exactly.

Kate: Well, it just gives me goosebumps to hear you talk about it and just the journey that it's been. I feel emotional just listening to you because I know it's been just such a huge year. Challenging things, but then some beautiful things as well.

Denise: There's that beautiful saying, I think it was Eleanor Roosevelt who said, "A woman is like a teabag. You never know how strong she is until she gets into hot water."

Kate: I love that. That's great.

Denise: I think it's so true because really you can look at us, in my career, as firefighters because we're always running around putting out fires and working with challenges. This was, for me, another challenge to work with. I am a very positive person, I definitely have a can-do spirit, and so I'm now so open to my next adventure. I'm young.

Kate: You are a spring chicken. That's so great and it's exciting just to know that this hasn't ended things for you. This is a new beginning for you.

Denise: Right. Exactly.

Kate: Which is just a really exciting thing and I hope that I can come back and interview you in another year and see where you're at and see all the things that you've done because you're still young and nimble and excited about what can come. I'm looking at our time and I know we have just a couple of questions left. In an ideal world what sort of professional support would most help you to do your best work with children? What do you need so that you can really focus on the children in your care, or hypothetically?

Denise: It's a good question and such an important question. I'm so lucky that I had the resources that I had and still have where when I was dealing with a situation that we'd talk it through at the Sojourn meeting, I'd talk it through with other professionals, I'd go to training on it, but there was just something there that was missing. We weren't hitting the spot yet, you know? For me, I was able to find my own person to come in and do observation, and that's something that I would say is so crucial because sometimes when you're in the situation you can't really look at it objectively and you may be missing things because there's so many other things going on. You have one arm around one child, you have your other arm around the other child, you're using your voice to help the third child navigate, and so you don't have that concentrated one on one all the time that you might need for a child who's really challenging you. I have a very dear friend who's a guidance counselor and she would come in and do observations for me. I learned so much from that because she would tell me what I was doing and how I was anticipating

what was going to happen and how I had to use my voice and how I expected the particular child to be doing what that child was doing or how that child was reacting because he wanted only my attention and didn't want me to help other children ever. There were those kinds of situations where it seemed quite simple but the behavior was so disruptive to the group. I would say if you were to ask me what is the biggest thing for me, I would say, "To have somebody I can call on to be a consultant for behavioral issues." I know from being in Sojourn for so many years that that is something everybody could benefit from. I, myself, have done that for my friends where I've gone into my friends' programs in Sojourn and done documentation and observation to help them deal with situations. It's a great job. It's really fun to do that because I love to solve problems.

Kate: It's so creative because every single situation you encounter is different. Like you said earlier, every child is different and has different needs and comes with a different temperament.

Denise: Absolutely. I do want to mention too that I was an inclusive program and so I had children with many different kinds of needs and abilities and I worked very closely with occupational therapists and speech and language therapists and physical therapists who would come into my program, depending on what the needs of each child were and work with them. I worked with all these therapists in my program. Many of them came through a school district, some were private, depending on people's insurance and the ages of the children, and we always worked together. They would work with a child and then give me a work order that I could follow until the next time that they would come through. Then, I would be documenting the progress that the child made as well. I felt very fortunate that I had those aspects in my group too. I had a child who was deaf and at that time hearing aids didn't work because he had to have cochlear implants then he started to learn to speak. In the meantime I had studied sign language before he even started in my group. I always taught sign language to my children anyway and so we could communicate with this child. And then he learned to speak and the speech and language teachers would come in every week and often would work together with another child because children love to play with children and that's where language is so rich. Those kinds of support are just so beneficial to everybody because I honestly learned as much as they did. It was so exciting to me because people would sometimes say, "Are you still teaching?" Or, "Are you still looking after those children?" And I'd say, "Oh, my gosh. It's so much more than that." And it was. That's what kept life so interesting because every child was so different. It was amazing. Some children were born with old souls where they just knew how to interact socially, and other children needed to be broken down into little steps to learn how to get to the next rung of the ladder.

Kate: Yeah and understanding that complexity is so important because, like you said, so many people will use these terms, "Are you looking after children?" But it's so much more than just looking after children.

Denise: No, they're looking after me. They bring me pretend cups of tea and they bring me coffee and pancakes and make me salad. They're looking after me.

Kate: It's such a mutual thing and I keep thinking of what you said about the whole part of your house was empty and just missing the component of the children's voices and activities. It's such a reciprocal thing.

Denise: Totally.

Kate: Yea and I love that. I was just going to ask a quick follow-up question, which is all the occupational and the speech and all those kinds of therapies, do all children not have that? When you think of Wisconsin as a whole, is it accessible to all children to get those services?

Denise: That's a very emotional question. It just depends because there's a rating system and there's different categories: a social, emotional, cognitive, language. There are four different categories, and fine and larger motor, I believe, it is. You have to score in each category and you have to be below the average score in at least two categories before you can qualify. Obviously there are children that slip through the cracks that absolutely need the services but don't get them. It's a huge process to go through because there's so much testing that has to be done and then the team has to meet. It's the IEP, Individual Education Program team needs to meet and agree on all of this, and then meet with the parents and the teacher and all the specialist therapists and then decide on a plan. Based on what it is, they give you a certain amount of hours for each child, depending on what the different ability is. It's not straightforward and it takes a long time to go through that.

Kate: Well, we're at our end. I just want to thank you for taking the time this morning and sharing so much of your heart and so much of your career and your profession and sharing that with all of the people who will listen and learn from what you have to share. I'm so excited to see what you do in the future.

Denise: Thank you so much. It was actually a pleasure because talking about these things, I have so many wonderful memories and so that makes me feel very happy. Talking to you about it, knowing that you really understand where I'm coming from and what the profession is all about because you've been there, it makes a huge difference. So thank you for what you're doing.

Kate: Yeah, yeah. So you're welcome. So we'll talk again

Denise: Okay.

Kate: and have a wonderful day and-

Denise: Thanks. You too.

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