

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

#73 • Season 3 • Episode 12

12/3/2025

3 Rules for the Holidays

Our Hosts

Janet Cheyne McMahon is a lover of family, dogs, nature, travel, books, and music. Born south of the Mason-Dixon line, she left after 9 months for parts north, landing eventually in Michigan, which will always be “where I’m from.”

Love of learning led Jan to a Bachelor of Arts (History, Political Science) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (Go Blue), and a Master of Arts (Library and Information Science) at the University of South Florida. Amid all that, studied for a time with Rob at Colorado State University, a pivotal time in their lives.

Worked at the U of M-Dearborn Library, and then The Salvation Army Florida Divisional Headquarters, with the greatest reward being in serving as the Divisional Librarian. A librarian is who Jan is “in my soul.”

Jan and Rob have made our home in Florida since 1983, and live now in retirement with their dog, Skye, who makes it all the best adventure. They travel as much as possible, spending time in nature and in diverse places on this amazing planet. It has all been, and continues to be a fascinating journey, with hope of making a difference, in small ways, by being brave enough to speak and act on behalf of others.

Rob McMahon is a native Michigander, born in Saginaw and raised in the suburbs of Detroit. Rob attended Michigan State University, graduating in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He did graduate studies at the University of Michigan and the University of South Florida. Rob is retired, having spent 36 years in public education teaching both high school chemistry and biology and middle school science. He worked as a total quality management trainer for the Pinellas County School District and served four years as the president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association. Rob cofounded a non-profit total quality management training center, The Learning Co-op, for Teacher Unions interested in applying the W. Edwards Deming continuous improvement principles to their day-to-day operations. He worked with teacher unions in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas and Michigan. He also worked in a similar capacity with Jim Shipley & Associates. In retirement Rob has written a series of science related children’s books, and enjoys traveling with his wife, Jan, and their Black Labrador Retriever, Skye.

Deanna Cheyne, born in St. John’s, Newfoundland, earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Toronto (1996), studying with such luminaries as Elmer Eisler, Doreen Rao, Greta Kraus, Lois Marshall, and Rosemarie Landry.

Dee taught music at Mississauga Christian Academy, served as music director for Meadowvale Bible Baptist Church (Mississauga, Ontario), served as Assistant Divisional Music Director for The Salvation Army in Florida, is a former member of Tampa’s Master Chorale, and, for the past 18 years, has been a public school teacher.

Dee has visit 36 of the 50 U.S. states, and 12 countries. Her favorite destinations include France, Prague, New Orleans, National Parks, & Hawaii.

Dee & Jim live in Florida with Brigus (Golden Retriever) and Pip (Teacup Yorkie).

James Cheyne, born in Galesburg, Illinois, earned a Bachelor of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from Michigan State University (1978); and a Master of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign (1981), studying with David Liptak, Salvatore Martirano, and Ben Johnston.

Jim has served as music director for The Salvation Army in Central Illinois & Eastern Iowa, Orlando Area Command, and the Florida Division, served as a pastor with The Salvation Army, and was a public school teacher for 17 years.

In travel so far, Jim has visited 50 states and 27 countries. His favorite travel destinations include National Parks, New Orleans, Newfoundland, Argentina, Prague, & France.

Jim continues to write music and support Dee’s musical endeavors, and cooks whenever absolutely necessary. Jim & Dee live in Florida with their dogs Brigus & Pip.



L-R: Brigus, Jim, Deanna, Skye, Jan, Rob.
Inset: Pip

3 Rules for the Holidays

#73 - Season 3; Episode 12

12/3/2025

Host: Jim.

Jim sets out 3 Rules for the holidays: Show respect to each other; focus on each other; allow no distractions.

[Music]

JIM: Welcome to this week's Making Our Way podcast. I'm all alone today. Dee is at work with our dog Pip. Our other dog Brigus is at the vet for some eye surgery, which I've just learned went quite well. So I'm home alone, which has not happened for a very long time. And since you've joined me, I'd like to share with you some thoughts. Actually three thoughts. Actually, three rules I've written down for making my way in these perilous times. These rules come from three cases of recent real-life situations. So let's begin.

[Music]

Case #1: The Doctor.

I once had a doctor who used to enter the exam room pushing a laptop cart. Technology had invaded his practice. He'd offer a quick handshake and hello, and then sit down and focus on that laptop, reviewing my chart as if reading from a teleprompter. "Tests all normal, vitals good, no major issues, how are you feeling?" And then he would add notes as required by my answers.

That doctor retired.

So now my current doctor enters the room with a folder and pen in hand. The folder holds my chart, which he has already reviewed before coming in. So as we talk, he can look me straight in the eye with full attention. My doctor's from Vietnam, which matters only for this lesson he taught me. If you know Vietnamese culture, you know that when someone hands you something, you accept it not with one hand, but always with two. That is important, especially when accepting something from an elder. It is a sign of respect. Now, I've never been to Vietnam, but this is something my doctor taught me. And the respect this simple gesture entails permeates his approach to the doctor-patient relationship.

Now, I assume both doctors are completely qualified to guide my health, but I prefer my new doctor. He shows that he is paying attention.

So, Rule #1: Accept what is offered you with two hands, not just one, which is to say, give one another full respect.

Case #2: The Dinner.

I have a theory about restaurants that has absolutely no scientific research to back it up, but it works. When Dee and I are checking out a restaurant for the first time, what do we look

for? The reviews? The cuisine? The location? Maybe whether or not they require reservations? And of course the prices. But whatever the research we've done, we know we've made the right choice only when we walk in and see the people dining there. They are the giveaway. It's not how they're dressed. It's not if there are kids there or not. No, it's all about how people are engaged with each other. Listen for the laughter. Listen for the conversation. If their faces are lit up with paying attention to each other, I know we've found a good spot.

If, on the other hand, we see a bunch of faces lit only by the screens on their smartphones. I feel like walking out right there and then. I don't care how good the restaurant's salmon might be. These people don't have a clue what a good meal is all about. And this is the place they chose? No thank you.

It's the people who know how to enjoy each other's company that will find their way to the best restaurants for doing so. Not the most expensive or most exclusive, just those with good food, good service, and good ambience.

Now, let's be clear. Smartphones are amazing devices, amazing tools for information, for entertainment, for staying in touch with people. I agree. The problem is, they are so engaging that we carelessly let them steal our attention away from each other. I know that this has happened to you. You're talking with someone when their phone rings or buzzes or vibrates. and then they say those thoughtless, deflating words, "Just a minute, I have to take this." Do they? It's like a magic act in reverse. Eight words that make you disappear right before their eyes. "Just a minute, I have to take this." It happens so often I can't even remember how we used to ignore each other before smartphones gave us a reason to do so.

So, Rule #2: Put your phone away, which is to say, when you are dining with someone, give each other full attention. Which brings us to...

Case #3: The Hearth.

Dad could start a fire with just one match. A campfire on vacation, a council ring fire out at camp, or just a fire in our fireplace, after he had arranged the wood just so. he would strike a single match, set it to the crumpled newspaper and kindling, then stand back to watch it grow and glow. "Just one match," he'd say, and for Dad, that was the mark of a true wilderness survivalist. "Just one match."

Who knows when humans first domesticated fire and built the first hearth? Archaeologists have evidence that the hearth has been, for over 300,000 years, the gathering point for cooking, for warmth, for light. We come to the hearth for conversation, for community, for safety, for storytelling, for recounting the past, for planning the future. The hearth is a place not of physical nourishment only, but also of social and spiritual healing.

When Dee and I had our house built, we insisted the builders include a fireplace, even in this humid, subtropical, Florida climate. We're the only house on our block with a legitimate wood-burning fireplace and chimney. But there's something about the hearth that has lured neighbors to install maybe a natural gas fireplace, or even an electric one with orange flickering lights to simulate a fire's glow. Dee installed one of those next to her bath. Most of the year, our fireplace lies dormant. It's just too hot. But mid-November to mid-March offers plenty of nights chilly enough to try out my just one match skills. And when winter can't

make up its mind, I'll kick on the air conditioner and say, "Hmm, a bit chilly tonight. How about a fire?"

It is the fire of the hearth that calls us together. It is a place of gathering. This cultural idea of the hearth as the focus of family life is evident in many ancient languages. In Celtic, for example, the words for hearth and family are nearly identical. I don't speak Celtic, so I'm going to mispronounce it this way. The word for hearth is "teallach" (CHAH-lockh), and it is spelled just as it sounds, T-E-A-L-L-A-C-H, "teallach" (CHAH-lockh). The word for family is "teaghlach" (CHYE-lockh), obviously spelled T-E-A-G-H-L-A-C-H, "teaghlach" (CHYE-lockh). In Latin, the word for hearth is "focus," showing that the hearth is the focal point of domestic life. The Greeks have just one word for both hearth and focus. It's "estia." Estia gives us the Olympian goddess Hestia, who ruled over the hearth and all things domestic, who protected the home and family. and who maintained the sacrificial fire. And at this point I would love to point out how our words "heart" and "hearth" are connected. Etymologically they are not. But "home is where the heart is," and "home is where the hearth" is? Those both work.

When we were young, certain families of our church would go camping together near Jackson, Michigan, every Memorial Day and every Labor Day. And two things were certain. Sooner or later we'd head into Jackson to go to the Jackson Dairy for ice cream. And every night we would have a campfire. Whatever else the rest of the days had offered, the best times were around that campfire. It was almost a sacrament.

There's magic in fire, whether a campfire or a fireplace or a candle lit for dinner. Fire refines. It purifies. It forges relationships, strength to strength and it melts anxieties away.

So, Rule #3: Keep the home fire burning, which is to say, create a space of coming together, of safety, of focus, of warmth. and of sharing for all those who are in your care.

[Music]

Here then are my 3 Rules for making my way. One: Accept what is given you with two hands, not just one. Two: Put your phones away. Three: Keep the home fire burning and celebrate that which brings us together.

Focus on one another. Show respect to one another. Allow no distractions.

I do not expect others to abide by my thoughts. Also, the way I respond to others and treat others is entirely up to me, not to them. Keeping to that, making my way becomes so much easier.

Thank you for listening and thank you for your company today.

Until next time.