

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

#63 • Season 3 • Episode 2

9/17/25

All Lives?

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

All Lives?

#63 - Season 3; Episode 2

9/17/2025

Hosts: Jan, Rob, Dee, & Jim.

| We continue our conversation about race, with focus on New Orleans, red lining, Black Lives Matter, Trayvon Martin, and how engaging people does not always bring the results one might hope for.

[Music]

JIM (voice-over): The following episode was recorded on Saturday, September 6th, 2025.

JIM: Stephen Colbert, when he was doing the Colbert Report, something about race would come up and he'd have this line. This is a typical line. He would say, "I don't see color. People tell me I'm White and I believe them because of my Barry Manilow collection."
[laughter] The other one that I like is Tina Fey. This is 10 years ago now, Golden Globes. And one of the best picture nominees is Selma. She says, "In the 1960s, thousands of Black people from all over America came together with one common goal: to form Sly and the Family Stone." And then she says, "But the movie Selma is about the American Civil Rights Movement that totally worked and now everything's fine."

ROB: Yeah, right.

[Music]

JIM: This is hurricane season. We're always looking at the Atlantic. It took me to a documentary about Katrina. In that, CNN was showing how reporting on this was happening. And they show a photo. And the photo is a Black man carrying food away from a convenience store, which was shown as an example of the looting that's going on in New Orleans, and how bad it is, and how the military has to go in and solve the problem. Then CNN showed that news outlet showing a photo of two White people carrying food away from a convenience store, and it was captioned as an example of how desperate people are in trying to provide for their family.

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: That is a racism that goes so deep into what, of course, "See, this Black person is doing this. They're doing a crime. They must be doing a crime. You know how those people are." And that becomes the narrative. And if White people are doing it, "Well, you have to understand their circumstances and what they've come through."

New Orleans is a great example of what happens to people because of how they're perceived, and what that does through the whole system. Everyone will know the Ninth Ward. The Ninth Ward - because of things called redlining - the Ninth Ward is where Black people could find affordable housing. In fact, while the Ninth Ward was flooding, reporters were out in front of Café du Monde and Jackson Square talking about how New Orleans

dodged a bullet here.

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: Meanwhile, the Ninth Ward - no one's there reporting - is underwater fast. Does anyone have a good perspective on what redlining is and what this means in terms of, I'm going to say, Critical Race Theory, which explores why, with opportunities supposedly equal, do results not come out equal? And it has to do with the system, doesn't it?

JAN: Sure. This is from the Federal Reserve. Let me tell you that I learned about redlining in college. But I hadn't thought a lot about it until I did a program that was offered through the Episcopal Church, called Sacred Ground, on racism and the history behind the economic inequality that we face today. But this definition is a good one. "Redlining is the practice of denying people access to credit because of where they live, even if they personally qualified for loans. Historically, mortgage lenders once widely redlined core urban neighborhoods and Black populated neighborhoods in particular. It was part of the lending practices of the United States until the 1968 Fair Housing Act outlawed redlining, though in practice it still existed." So you end up with people who would, in theory, if race was not a part of it, would have qualified for the loans that gave them mortgages, but because of where they lived with these lines drawn around Black areas, do not qualify for mortgages. Or they qualify but have to pay a much higher rate of interest. It's very interesting. You can actually go online today and look at the city of Detroit. This one I'm looking at now from the Federal Reserve of Chicago, but you can also, you can look at any city and say, "Show me the redlining districts that existed." And you can see the racial distinction of those areas, both at the time and today. And you can see the continuity of what's happened because of that economic policy.

JIM: When you look at where interstates were put through cities, and the way those interstates divided areas. I know that in Orlando, Interstate 4 was placed in a way that would separate White neighborhoods from Black neighborhoods. Tampa and the way that the Interstate 275 was put in, what was demolished to make room for that interstate? It was this historic Black neighborhood.

ROB: Right.

JIM: That happens all over the place, of here, if we have a big project, what's the land that's going to be grabbed? You're going to go where the power isn't, where there's least resistance, the least political power, least social power. And that is another example of, "Well, this is that group, this is our group." So it really is systemic, and isn't Critical Race Theory for all - it's just, it's thrown out all over the place just to say, "We shouldn't be teaching our kindergartners Critical Race Theory." I mean, you know, the absurdity of the statement itself ought to defeat the argument, but people don't know what it is. So people will say, "Yes, that's my banner. Don't teach Critical Race Theory," which somehow comes out, "You're teaching liberal, progressive ideas. You're indoctrinating children with that." It's really just the study of why is it that when we make these certain efforts to, like when redlining becomes illegal, why does it still exist?

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: Yeah.

JIM: Why doesn't that then bring equality, economic equality, among different groups of people? And that's what that discipline has developed to study, isn't it?

JAN: Yeah. The other thing to think about now in our current reality is the importance of courts in fighting inequality. The mechanism to fight these things is being undermined right now by denying they exist, by shaping our courts and our law firms so that people don't take up these causes. And if you don't have an avenue to fight, you are stuck in a system that perpetuates this discriminatory practice, which is where we are right now today. We are whitewashing our history. We're deciding that George Washington didn't have slaves. We are deciding that slavery wasn't that bad. We are equating vaccines with slavery. We are doing all kinds of things to diminish the price of racial discrimination.

JIM: Just to put a detail on that, when you say, "Equating vaccines with slavery," this was the Florida Surgeon General that did this...

JAN: Yes.

JIM: ...right? Joseph Ladapo, and he is talking about having vaccine mandates "drips with disdain and slavery," is the way he said it.

JAN: Yeah.

JIM: Florida, you know, innovative Florida now is removing all vaccine mandates so that diseases that we have spent a century curtailing, even almost eliminating completely, and making us a healthier, better-life nation, those are now going to be taken away because someone gets upset about, "Oh, this is called a liberal thing, so we have to be against that."

JAN: I need to speak to that just quickly. It will only happen if the legislature supports that mandate. The legislature will have to act on that because that's where the vaccine mandates come from, [Florida Governor] DeSantis aside. I believe this is a time to speak. So we have an opportunity to stop that from happening.

DEE: Now you have the vulnerable in society who cannot get vaccinated because they either have some type of disease or their sensitivity to vaccination. It's the whole herd mentality where you get vaccinated to protect those who aren't able to be protected against these diseases and things. So they're even more vulnerable now.

JAN: That is hugely important.

DEE: Yeah.

JAN: Because to the person who says, "Well, you can still get vaccinated.

DEE: Right.

JAN: Yeah. But you've just removed the immunity...

DEE: Mm-Hmm.

JAN: ...of the whole group of people, especially for those who have autoimmune disorders...

DEE: Exactly.

JAN: ...and can't get a vaccination. You are exposing them now to...

DEE: Being more - they're more susceptible.

JAN: Not to mention, sorry about Florida, but you already have exemptions to the vaccine that you can apply for.

DEE: Yes.

JAN: So you don't need to eliminate it for everybody in order for your child, if they have a reason to be exempted, to not be vaccinated. Also, there's a very good Poynter Institute article about what is wrong with the comparison between slavery and vaccines, in case you don't already know what's wrong with that. We can post that on our podcast.

I had several moments this week when I wanted to say, "I don't care. If you're going to be stupid about vaccines or about any of these health issues, then I don't know what to do with you." I want to go on, though, to the fact that I think the things that changes people's minds are relationships and education. And that's the journey that I've been on, is to have relationships from which I learn, and to educate myself about topics. And that's part of what my making my way for myself, and I would say for Rob, or for all of us at this table, we want to seek truth, as Francis Collins discusses, seek credibility, and learn about the experiences of others, which is what heals prejudice.

JIM: That's good.

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: Go ahead.

DEE: I want to second what Jan said, because as what you said, people who change their minds or their attitudes are people who end up having relationships with someone they may have perceived as different from them. Because, I mean, I've watched the documentaries of former or Klansmen or Klan leaders who completely turn around. And it has to do with the relationships they develop with people, and they realize how wrong they were. I mean, it really does come down to that. We're not going to change minds talking about science or how we all come from the same place, because that just isn't the way humans work, I don't think.

ROB: We all had good examples at home, too.

DEE: Yeah, yeah.

ROB: Our parents instilled in us this sense that there's—

DEE: People are valuable.

ROB: Yeah. All people are valuable. And whatever differences there are aren't important when it comes right down to it.

JAN: That probably made us more open to relationships because of that education and modeling that we had in our homes.

DEE: Well, that's where you see we're all one humanity. When you get to know the person, you're like, "Oh, we're not different."

JAN: One of the best experiences I had as an adult was working in a library, and at lunch,

people came to lunch that are my friends. Sabrina, EB, Adely, Cherika, Alan, all these people are Black. And a lot of times I got to just sit back, especially if I'm the only White person in the room, and listen. Because I was probably a safe person. And so from the standpoint of talking about race and how it impacted them, I learned a lot by just listening and asking questions about how their experience was different from mine. From a traffic stop to the conversation you have to have with your children about being aware of race and how it could negatively impact you. So I got this up-close-and-personal education about my privilege versus their experience. The same thing happened with my roommate in college, with rooming with Bev, somebody who came from a totally different cultural background than myself. We would have the best conversations in the world. And I learned so much from her personal experience with prejudice that I wouldn't have known had I not had those conversations. I could read it in a book, and I do, and I did. But actually talking to people, that's a different encounter.

ROB: It's easy to be prejudiced - racist - from a distance.

DEE: Mm-Hmm.

ROB: You put a face to that person, that individual, it makes a huge difference.

DEE: Yeah.

JAN: Hopefully.

ROB: One-on-one.

JAN: Hopefully.

ROB: I think it's very difficult for anybody to get in a situation where they see the person up close and get to know them, if they'll spend that much time, that that doesn't change things.

JIM: I think you're right, and I think the only chance racism has to survive personal encounters is what's called confirmation bias. "Oh, yeah, but you're not really that."

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: Right, exactly.

JIM: "You're a friend of mine. I know you. You're not like those. You're not like the others." And so they're able to maintain their stereotype by talking about, "They're the exception."

JAN: I'm going to have Rob just talk a little bit about what is the Equal Justice Initiative and why this was important to us.

ROB: Bryan Stevenson is a lawyer. He has been instrumental - especially in the South - representing death row inmates who have been incarcerated wrongly. It's a whole documentary about him. It's a movie about him, as a matter of fact, I think. He started this Equal Justice Initiative, which I think is headquartered in Montgomery. He has sponsored these three sites in Montgomery, Alabama. They call them the Legacy Sites. There's a Freedom Monument Sculpture Park. There's a National Memorial for Peace and Justice. And then there's what they call the Legacy Museum. And we've heard about them, and we were really interested. I scheduled a couple of days in Montgomery so that we could go. I

mean, it costs nothing. It costs \$10 apiece for us to do all three of these things.

JAN: The first part of it that we went to was the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. And this is a memorial to the people who have been lynched in the United States. All of the people who are represented in this memorial are verifiable as to their name, where they were lynched, and the date. It's a structure where there are these hanging pillars that represent those who have been lynched. You can go through this and find - for instance, I was interested in who in Pinellas County, Florida, had been lynched and what were the dates. So I can go find my state and county and see who has been lynched in this county. And the importance of the exhibit is to remember the names of the people who died.

ROB: Right.

JAN: The large part of how Blacks were controlled post-Civil War was the threat of, and the actual occurrence of, lynching. It's a very powerful exhibit. It's a lot like going to the Holocaust Museum. It is painful...

ROB: It is.

JAN: ...to acknowledge our history. It's also incredibly important to acknowledge our history. And so we did that. We went to that part of the Legacy sites. We also took a ride down the river, which used to be part of the transportation for slaves. And we went then to the Legacy Museum, which is this wonderful, very well done museum about all the different aspects of racism from slavery to the time during Reconstruction, lynching, and then the incarceration of people of color.

ROB: Jim Crow, yeah.

JAN: Yeah, Jim Crow, and incarceration, which was the pivotal point for Bryan Stevenson. He's written a book called Just Mercy, which is about his work to go back and revisit cases that he believes to be inequitably decided. So the museum is exceptional.

ROB: We can post some pictures on the website of the Memorial for Peace and Justice. They didn't allow any photos inside the Legacy Museum.

JAN: No.

JIM: I wanted to find out the history of the Black Lives Movement and where it came from.

ROB: George Floyd.

JAN: George Floyd.

ROB: I mean, that's when it came to everyone's knowledge.

DEE: Yeah, that's when everyone - that's when the stuff happened down in St. Pete.

JIM: The first time the phrase was used was in reaction to the verdict in the George Zimmerman case.

DEE: Yes.

JIM: This is in 2013. This was Trayvon Martin.

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: And Trayvon Martin, 17-year-old boy who's not in his home neighborhood. He's visiting from Miami, and he's up visiting in Sanford, and he's just - he walks to the store, buys a couple things, walks home, and then he's confronted by someone who's decided he's part of the neighborhood watch.

DEE: Yeah, he was chased by him.

JIM: And in the scuffle that follows, George Zimmerman, who has a gun, Trayvon Martin, who has a bag of Skittles, Trayvon Martin ends up getting shot. But there's a recording when he's on the trail, when he's on the hunt, I'll say.

DEE: Mm-Hmm. Yeah, he was.

JIM: When he's on the hunt, when he's going after Trayvon Martin, because he doesn't know who Trayvon Martin is. Phone call goes this way. George Zimmerman is speaking. He says, "This guy" - I'm going to use some language here...

JAN: You don't have to explain to me.

JIM: That I'll bleep.

JAN: Okay.

JIM: "This guy looks like he's up to no good or he's on drugs or something. These a**holes, they always get away." Police dispatcher says, "Are you following him?" And he says, "Yeah." And then the police dispatcher says, "Okay, we don't need you to do that."

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: So he's been called off the hunt, but he's got the scent. He's going for it.

DEE: It was amazing he was acquitted.

JIM: And he goes forward with it anyway and creates the altercation in which he then said, "I felt threatened." Watching this covered different ways. Geraldo Rivera said this. He noticed that Trayvon Martin was wearing a hoodie. And he says, "Maybe that hoodie is as much to blame for his death as George Zimmerman was." Yeah, it's *those* people. It's *that* type. It's what I'm *looking* at. And I see a threat there. And that's why George Zimmerman should have been acquitted. People will say it that way. "It's because of the way he looked." Closest you can get to that person is the way they look.

There is a activist named Alicia Garza, and she posted on Facebook as a result of that decision. She said - and I've got a quote here someplace about it - she said, "I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. Our lives matter." And then there was another activist, her name was Patrice Cullors, who shared that post and used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. And that's how it started, and then with another death of Michael Brown, and then George Floyd, and these incidents kept coming up, the Black Lives Matter is trying to say, "Black lives matter as much as anybody else. And it seems like they're not being treated the same as everybody else."

ROB: Mm-Hmm.

JIM: And the immediate pushback to that was...

DEE: Right.

JIM: "What do you mean Black lives matter? You want some special status? No, all lives matter. That's racist if you try to say something like 'Black Lives Matter.'" That's the way it's twisted around.

ROB: Somebody said to me, "All lives matter." And I said, "Exactly. That's why Black lives matter, because all lives matter."

DEE: Mm-Hmm.

ROB: That's why Black Lives Matter.

DEE: Did they get it?

ROB: No, they didn't get it.

DEE: No, I didn't think so.

ROB: Right over the top.

DEE: That's what I figured.

JAN: I want to say something about the pushback to, if we say this, then we're going to lose people. Or if we say this, then people are going to say this. When I say I don't care, I don't care. I mean, I don't care because I'm making my way. People can join us on this journey or not. I hope we say something that's engaging. I think we probably do. But people who would turn the dial off because I happen to say I actually take the Bible seriously and believe in evolution, if you can't hold those two ideas together in your head, or at least have a question for me about how I do, if you've already rejected me because of that - I'm a pretty tolerant person. I can engage most people on most ideas. But when you reject me because I have an idea that's different from yours and you're not going to listen to me anymore, I'm letting that go.

JIM: Shake the dust off your sandals...

JAN: Well, kind of.

JIM: ...and go to the next village.

JAN: I can't win. In the sense, by win, I'm not talking about a competition. I'm talking about I cannot make you listen to me. I can try. I can find common ground. But when you shut the door on me.

ROB: That's your problem.

JAN: Go.

DEE: Yeah.

JAN: And we will - we will engage people who are of interest - who are interested in what we bring to the table...

ROB: Right.

JAN: ...and I bring to the table a seriousness about Scripture, and not a literal interpretation

of the Bible, because it does not make sense to me.

DEE: I think it's about being authentic, and if we are our authentic selves and it rubs people the wrong way, well, so be it. Who cares?

JAN: I can't care because I can't affect it. I mean, I can couch my beliefs in whatever kind of nice language. I've done this in my life. I've found the way to talk about things where I'm using language that the other person would accept.

DEE: Yeah.

JAN: Beyond that, I can't I'm not going to change what I believe...

[Music]

JAN: And I want to be able to say what I believe, so - I don't know beyond what we've said. Inform yourself. Speak to people. Have relationships. Advocate for somebody besides yourself.

TINA FEY: *Selma. in the 1960s, thousands of Black people from all over America came together with one common goal: to form Sly and the Family Stone. But the movie Selma is about the American Civil Rights Movement that totally worked and now everything's fine.*

[Music ends]

Links:

Poynter Institute:

"Florida's surgeon general called school vaccine mandates 'slavery.' They're not."

<<https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2025/florida-vaccine-mandate-removal-exemption/>>

Equal Justice Initiative: The Legacy Sites:

"The power of history is in telling the truth."

<<https://legacysites.eji.org>>



