

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

Season 2 - Episode 18

1/29/25

An Epic Adventure - II

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

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An Epic Adventure - II

Season 2; Episode 18

1/29/2025

Hosts: Jan, Rob, & Jim. Guests: Lillian & Larry Harrison

Jan, Rob, Lillian, & Larry set sail down the Rhine, Main, and Danube rivers on a Viking's Grand European Tour. Each port of call presented a myriad of experiences; this episode ties together a common theme: the legacy of WWII & the Holocaust.

[Music]

LIL: We did tour the Anne Frank house. That was very emotional. We've mostly all read the book here in the United States. But just to walk up those stairs, very narrow stairs, and you think of someone carrying food up there every day and trying to be quiet and carrying things up that the Frank family needed. You look at where the Frank family stayed for those two years and they had to be quiet. And for a 12-year-old girl to be quiet, that's not an easy thing. And maybe that's part of why the diary.

LARRY: She actually talked about before we even took the trip that we probably wouldn't do the Anne Frank. She had to get up at two in the morning to make the reservation on the day that it becomes available. You have, like, a very short window and then the tour fills up and then you don't get in. And she wasn't gonna do it. And I'm like, you know, "If we're going to Amsterdam, we certainly have to do Anne Frank Museum."

[Music]

JIM (voice-over): In our last episode, Jan & Rob and Lillian & Larry gave us an overview of Viking River Cruises' Great European Tour. In our recording sessions, the Fab Four recounted the riotous fun they had over those 12 days. But they also noted a more sober narrative thread that ran from Amsterdam to Budapest and most points between. That is, Europe in the aftermath of World War II, which is where we join the discussion today.

[Music ends]

ROB: Let's talk about the Holocaust experience. We had that in several places. Then - Anne Frank is one that I remember. The other one was in, was it Miltenberg? Where the...

JAN: The suitcase?

ROB: ...the suitcase?

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: That was in Miltenberg.

ROB: Yeah, it's just a plaque with a concrete suitcase in remembrance of the Jews that were taken to the concentration camps. All they were allowed to take was one suitcase, and they would never come back. So I remembered that. And then there were the little plaques that

were in the sidewalks. They were - they had a name on it and a description of the person that was, that you - would live there, but was taken away.

LARRY: The children shine the - go along and shine the brass plaques and maintain them. And the community does that so that the young will understand, because one example the guide explained was a 15-year-old - current today - girl goes and she's cleaning a plaque of a girl that was 15 that was taken to a concentration camp.

ROB: Mm-Hmm.

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: And so she can relate to that. And it hopefully makes them more - entices them to never let that happen again...

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: ...because it could happen to me. Part of it was the feel that you get that you're standing on a street where people were rounded up.

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: People weren't rounded up yet in the streets in America. I say yet.

JAN: Yeah. Yeah.

LARRY: But just to be standing there and then you think back, okay, so when did this happen? And then you realize, you know, 80 years ago isn't that long, and the feel of actually standing there, and I asked our local guide in Regensburg, "How do the locals feel about the Holocaust?" And he said, "We are constantly trying to remind all of our generations that this is what happens, and we need to make sure it never happens again."

ROB: Then there were some of the gravestones. Remember...

JAN: That was in...

ROB: ...we found that the people would take the...

JAN: No, go ahead.

ROB: ...gravestones and they would actually put them in the walls of the homes that they were building. And we saw those from place to place, too.

JIM: You're talking...

LIL: Partly...

JIM: You're talking about...

LIL: Partly to ward off evil was one of the things that they thought if they use those gravestones in a cornerstone in the house, it was partly to ward off evil. And it was partly to say, "I took this."

ROB: Yeah, I know.

JAN: "This is the side I'm on." Right.

LIL: There were moments where you felt, at least from my own personal experience, there were moments where I felt like I've been punched in the stomach...

ROB: Yeah.

LIL: ...you know, where it just, it literally takes your breath away...

ROB: Yeah.

LIL: ...to see what humans will do to other humans.

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: But to actually be standing in the place that that actually happened. And it was pretty, pretty moving in every place that we were that that was discussed.

JIM: And the gravestones you're talking about, are these from Jewish cemeteries?

ROB: These are Jewish cemeteries, sorry.

LIL: Yes.

JIM: Okay, we didn't say - that's okay. So these are Jewish cemeteries. So it's a matter of...

ROB: They were destroyed.

JIM: ...superiority. "Look what I did. I've desecrated a grave and now I get to put it there." And so they're still there?

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: Okay. They haven't been given back in any way?

ROB: No.

JIM: Okay. Is there any talk about something like that? To put them back where they were? Or are they left there? Is there any discussion in the Jewish community, for instance?

LARRY: What happened was in the time when they rounded up the Jews in this particular - I forget what town it was, it might've been Regensburg, but...

LIL: It's Regensburg.

LARRY: It's Regensburg, but they also dug up the Jewish cemeteries, and eliminated all the corpses.

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: And so that's how the gravestones became available for the local folks to use as...

ROB: Building materials.

LARRY: ...ornaments or building in...

JIM: Trophies.

LARRY: ...on their...

JAN: Yeah, trophies.

LIL: Yeah, trophy is really what it is. We, we saw one in the corner of a house. I think part of it is that remains there to remind people of, of what happened. Uh, that is the same place where they have the Memorial built where the synagogue once stood...

ROB: Right.

LIL: ...and it is a place that is a park, a place for children to play, a place to sit and reflect. And that was the artist wishes. And that was constructed - and its concrete - it was constructed, uh, where the old synagogue once stood.

JIM: I'm thinking, what would it be like? - I guess you'd have to be there to know - to purchase a house that has, as part of it, a tombstone from a Jewish cemetery that had been desecrated. Is this something that you would do to say, "Yeah, that, that is a choice place," or "I don't want that. It's a cursed place." Would a homeowner have a choice of - are there any laws about these have to stay in place or a homeowner could remove it and could offer it back to the Jewish community? I just, this is a, this is a surprising bit of, uh, that I wouldn't have expected on a journey like this.

LARRY: Some of the houses did not have them. They had been removed...

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: ...but some still had them. And I think it could be, it could be a choice either way. Either, "I'm showing this to show that I still supported what happened" - not likely - but, "I am showing this as a reminder of history, and let's not let that happen again."

ROB: We saw that a lot in Germany, that reminders, okay, we don't want to forget that this happened. Unlike here in our country where we want to whitewash everything that we've done in the past, they're not afraid to talk about it.

LIL: No.

LARRY: No.

ROB: They're, you know, and it's important in their culture for the, the next generation to remember, because they're so far removed from it that it wouldn't mean anything to them unless there were these...

JAN: Tangible?

ROB: ... little tangible things that they could see and they could be a part of to remember.

JAN: Lil wanted to say something. Lil? You were going to say something?

LIL: We have historical properties here and, you know, we provide grants to maintain those properties and so forth. So it could be possibly that it's government owned or controlled so that that reminder remains there. I don't know.

ROB: Yeah, we don't know.

LIL: We could certainly, we could certainly look it up.

JIM: The thing is, with the ascendancy of the Alternative for Germany Party that Elon Musk is promoting. They say, "We want this," you know, another imperialistic view, another nationalistic view, another far right view, that these things will have different meanings. You

know, I'm wondering if, "Oh, I'm going to get one of those houses because I'm part of the AfD." That's, that becomes now a new trophy of a different kind of an in your face sort of thing. I'm just wondering, like you say, with the National Historic Places Register, if these are done that way and how it's, how it's viewed that way. I do know that in Germany, how do they deal with their history? Well, I can think of three ways. One is that they do have field trips that are part of children's education to Holocaust sites...

JAN: Yeah.

LIL: Yes.

JIM: ...so that they're not burying anything in the past. This will be different than the way Hungary deals with its past. Another way they deal with it is also that this is not all of Germany. This was Nazi Germany. So they can isolate it to that. And the third way they deal with it is, since 1945, you don't have a lot of baby boys being called Adolf anymore. After Eichmann and Hitler, we're not going to name our boy Adolf anymore. I'm just thinking...

LIL: Another...

JIM: ...yeah, go ahead.

LIL: Okay. One more thing about the Holocaust. We passed a residence where Oskar Schindler once lived...

JAN: Yeah.

LIL: ...in Regensburg. And we talked some about Oskar Schindler, and we're familiar with his story. But what was so interesting is that there's a story that's related to his wife and her work...

ROB: Mm-Hmm.

LIL: ...as well, with helping Jewish people to escape and to get out of Germany.

LARRY: Yeah.

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: She was actually more instrumental...

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: ...in helping people escape than Oskar Schindler himself was.

ROB: Yeah, that's right.

LIL: On another note, I will say, to your point, Rob, my sister just got back from Japan, and she went to Hiroshima...

ROB: Mm-Hmm.

JAN: Ah.

LIL: ...and she said that the Japanese do not whitewash anything that happened there. She said it is extremely graphic the way that they present the history of the bombing. And she said it's things that you never really learn here in the United States. We have an idea about

it, but it's a whole different thing when you see it there. And I think it's, I think it's a lot like that when you go to Germany and you see remnants of World War II as well.

JIM: To hear what you're saying about what they say in Japan, I don't know exactly what it is that would whitewash. The horrors of the bombing? Or the horrors of the war? What is it that they're not hiding?

LARRY: I don't...

LIL: Well...

LARRY: I...

LIL: ...[for] one thing, it's video footage, it's photographs, it's things that we don't see here.

JAN: About how bad it was?

LIL: Yeah.

JAN: Regensburg guide was a teacher and one of these closing challenges to us was not to think about not so much that Hitler was able to accomplish this, but that so many people were deluded, were brought along with Hitler. And, how can we not let that happen again? And of course, that's what spoke to me as you watch people easily follow. What can we do differently to help people think before they do that? I was so impressed with every place we went, but especially Regensburg, with the fact that children are educated about their country's history, including these things that were very difficult.

LIL: Right, right.

JAN: It was not the only topic that we covered while we traveled at all, but it definitely was a part of each town that we went to. What happened dur[ing] - Maybe it's just the part of Germany we were in - but what happened in this town at that time, and the realization, just like Larry said, it really wasn't that long ago. And, oh, maybe, um - in some ways what's happening in Europe right now should concern us because we are making that shift again toward the right, and not just a little right. Far right.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: So - And again, Christianity is involved in that, so.

ROB: Did you talk about the...

JAN: ...Shoes?

ROB: ...the shoes?

JAN: No.

ROB: That to me was the most moving of all of the - in Budapest, along the river. An artist has bronze shoes, all sorts, all lining along a section, maybe 100 yards of the river, and lots of tributes, and people have left little offerings in memory of that. But what they did, the Nazis would take them down to the river, tell them to take the shoes off - because the shoes were valuable; they could be sold - and then they'd shoot them, and they, right in the river. And it was, it's just, it's hard to imagine what mankind can do.

JAN: Yeah.

JIM: I thought the people who were shooting people into Danube were the Arrow Cross Party.

JAN: They were.

ROB: They were.

JIM: It wasn't the Nazis.

JAN: It was not the Nazis.

JIM: That the Arrow Cross Party was trying to keep the Nazis out of Hungary...

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: ...and their effort to do that was they had to show suitable brutality that would impress the Nazis enough to know that the Nazis didn't have to come in,

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: ...and so they could keep some sort of autonomy. Now, it was a short-lived party. I think it was something like, I think they started in August of '44, and they finished in the spring of '45. But in that time, they were quite brutal. And of course, when I was saying earlier, the way Hungary dealt with that, it has not so much to do with that as the communism. They were behind the Iron Curtain, and the way that neighbor would turn in neighbor...

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: ...you were rewarded for turning in other people. And now, some of those people are still living there as neighbors, and some are descendants of them. And the way that I understand that they deal with that is that they do not talk about it. They simply don't. They said, "That was the past, and we're not going to be continuing our Hatfield McCoy about what happened under communism."

LARRY: And the thing is, it started in Amsterdam with the Anne Frank.

JAN: Yeah.

ROB: Yup.

LARRY: And so we would get bits and pieces of it through our - not at every port, but at ports that were historical to that. And then to end in Budapest, where the shoes are on the seawall, or on the river...

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: ...it was a...

LIL: Well, in a little bit different perspective in each town, and ending with Budapest, where the memorial with the shoes, it wasn't Jewish people.

ROB: No.

JAN: Right.

LIL: It was people who helped Jewish people.

ROB: Helped Jewish people, yeah. Jews and people who helped them, yeah.

LIL: And an example was set. "If you help them, here's what's going to happen." Every bit of it was just... I was stunned to see that every day in every place that we went. A reminder of what people can do...

JAN: Yeah.

LIL: ...for greed, for envy, jealousy, and just hatred.

ROB: Yup.

LARRY: But the cruise is not necessarily about the Holocaust. It's just that where we are...

LIL: It's a component.

LARRY: It's a component of the tours that you could get. And it wasn't at every single port, like Kinderdijk, there was nothing about that. That was talking about the windmills. And so, you learned about various things, but to actually be standing where this happened was pretty unique.

LIL: Do you have enough on the Holocaust, Jim?

[Laughter]

JAN: You can teach...

JIM: No.

[Laughter]

JAN: Okay, what? No. We got some here, right?

JIM: Well, you were talking about your tour in Nuremberg, and I think that...

JAN: Oh, yeah.

JIM: ...is not one of your favorite places other than just that it was in a bus, but Nuremberg, how do they present Nuremberg?

JAN: Sometimes I think it's my own mindset that affects how I see a place like Nuremberg. So, humor me, but, as we were going on the bus, we're very tired. And we went by one field - stadium kind of field - and our guide said, "That's where Hitler addressed masses of people." Well, in all honesty, I don't want to see that, you know? I was very upset during that part of the Nuremberg tour because it's too real. There's a way I can push Hitler away a little bit. And in the towns that we're in, he's not the face. He may be the effect, but he's not the face. But when you're going through Nuremberg, that was the center of Hitler's activity. And that's why the trials were held there. And it was just - it was a rainier day too, I don't know. And the tour was not great. So all that together made me say, "I probably ought to go back there someday when I'm in a different frame of mind," but it was a hard place for me, so...

LARRY: But after the bus tour...

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: excuse me, after the bus tour, though, we toured a castle...

JAN: Yes.

LARRY: ...an old castle that was still standing. And then you're looking down over the town, and then the town has, you know, moved on.

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: A very, very beautiful town. And we all felt like - we were really tired that morning on the bus tour, so anxious to get moving. Once we got to the castle, and then we moved into the town and saw how people live there. And I always felt, I told Lil, "We need to give..." She said, "I don't need to go back to Nuremberg." And I said, "Well, we need to give Nuremberg a chance."

LIL: So I looked at my notes this morning. And when we left Nuremberg, I had sort of a bad taste in my mouth about it. But as I look at my notes, it's almost like we were in two different towns.

JAN: Yes.

LIL: The bus, it was a more, I don't want to say modern, but maybe a more modern part of the town. It was more industrial, more busy. It was where Zeppelin Field was, the Nazi rally grounds, the Nuremberg trials, all of that. It was raining, and you're right, it was depressing. A lot of it is left as it was. So, very emotional. On the flip side of that, we got to the old part of town. We go to the old town walls. We're looking out at old Nuremberg and in the old buildings and the old homes. And we walked, we walked down the hill and we walked into the town and it was like a different city. They were getting ready for the Christmas Markets. We wanted to get coffee and we wanted to get Lebkuchen. I guess that's how you say it. I have a whole list of German words that I can't pronounce. *[Laughter]* So that was a whole different feel, right?

JAN: Yeah.

LIL: And like what you expect of Europe. That is the place where we sat down to get a cup of coffee and the server brought her phone over to us *[Laughter]* and she'd translate her to say to us, "Excuse me, you're sitting in our break room."

[Laughter]

JAN: I forgot about that. I forgot about that.

ROB: "You can't sit here."

LIL: That was you [unintelligible].

JAN: Oh, I didn't put those two together. Okay.

[Music begins]

LIL: And she knew to put it in English. Somehow.

JIM (voice-over): These memories tempered the otherwise fun-filled adventure Jan, Rob, Lil

and Larry had while traveling through the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Hungary. So you'll want to join them again as they give their expert insight into the region's cuisine, drink, scenery, drink, and history. Oh, and we might enjoy a beer or two as they are making their way.

Until next time.