

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

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“On the Beautiful Blue Danube”

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 visited 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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“On the Beautiful Blue Danube”

#82 - Season 3; Episode 21

2/4/2026

Hosts: Jan, Rob, Dee, & Jim. Guests: Lillian and Larry

Strauss's "An der schönen blauen Donau," perhaps the world's most famous waltz, is beautiful music, but misses on two points. Rob says it's not really blue, and in Strauss's time the river did not flow through Strauss's Vienna as it does today. Lillian, Larry, Jan, & Rob offer no complaints, and say their trip was more about the company they kept, and of course the food. Join them on their Romantic Danube Viking River Cruise from Regensburg through Passau, Krems, Vienna, and Budapest.

[Music]

JIM (voice-over): "An der schönen blauen Donau," or as I like to pronounce it, "On the Beautiful Blue Danube" - Johann Strauss Jr.'s most famous waltz, or as I like to pronounce it, waltz. The music sails along the eponymous river with energy and celebration, but misses the boat entirely on two points. As you'll hear today, Rob reports the Danube is not really blue; and in Strauss's day, the Danube did not yet flow through Strauss's beloved Vienna as it does today. Nevertheless, Lillian, Larry, Jan, & Rob offer no complaints. Their trip, they say, was more about the sites they did see; well, about the sites they did see and the company with which they traveled. Okay, the sites they did see, the company with which they traveled, and the food. Mostly the food. From sausages to dumplings to strudels and more, join them on their Romantic Danube Viking River Cruise from Regensburg to Budapest. And, yes, they stopped in Vienna, too.

[Music]

ROB: Are we ready to go to Regensburg?

JAN: Yeah.

ROB: We hopped on a bus that took us to the ship. We got settled in our rooms. We were on our own because we'd been to Regensburg before, and Regensburg is one of my favorite. I mean it's a little Bavarian town. We just wandered around the town because it felt very comfortable. We'd been there before. We knew where the sausage, the Wurstkuchl, supposedly the oldest sausage restaurant in Germany. Right by the old stone bridge. We walked across the bridge on our own. We saw a ship coming through the lock. That was pretty cool. Watched the whole process. It was a nice day. It was cold, but nothing stops us. We wandered about the city. It is to me the quintessential Bavarian town.

LARRY: A lot of people go straight to the boat from the airport. The people that were with us in Prague and Nuremberg, we had gotten to know. We had been with them four nights and they were asking, "Well, what are you going to do?" And I said, "We're just going to wander around the town." And they were thinking, "How can you do that?" And we had to tell them, "Well, we were here last year." And they were like, "Why are you here this year?"

[Laughter]

JAN: There is a way that you travel where you think you'll only go someplace once, and you do approach it like when we were in Prague. You're gonna try to do everything you possibly can. There are a lot of places to go in the world, so I understand that. But it is a different experience to go back to a place that you liked and you're familiar with. And you get off the boat and you walk and you know what you're going to see and what you're going to do, and you feel comfortable. You know that you want those sausages from that local place, or that mustard from that local place, because it's authentic, and you have memories of it that enrich the experience the second time. So, I really enjoyed everything about going back to every place we went back to. Regensburg was particularly good because it's small enough to all feel very familiar. In a good way.

JIM: When you get to Regensburg, does your stuff go right on board ship?

ROB: Yeah.

JIM: But the ship doesn't leave that moment.

ROB: No.

JIM: How long are you there before you go?

ROB: We were there...

LARRY: Overnight.

ROB: ...a full day. Overnight, yeah.

JIM: I'm remembering a story that Larry told. He liked sleeping with the curtains open. And then one morning, the surprise of a sister ship parked right next, and so you're looking in each other's bedrooms. Have you learned your lesson, Larry, or...?

LARRY: I kept the curtains closed this time.

JIM: Oh, okay.

[Laughter]

LILLIAN: There was something in Regensburg that I don't remember seeing the first time, and that is that Jehovah's Witness Memorial. Perhaps they were wise enough to say, "It's the Jewish people right now, but it could just as well be us," right? But it was a big church there. We weren't able to go in or look at any of the documentation or anything like that. As I understand, it's something that's rebuilt, that's modern now, but it was a meeting place or whatever, and this is where they put this monument right on the river. I had no idea.

JAN: Mm-Hmm. That's a reminder, too, that, you know, we have focused in on the Jewish community for good reason. But there were many other people, groups of people, who were in danger...

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: ...during those days. That was an example that I had never heard before. So.

JIM: If you say, "What are the top five groups that the Nazis were after?" Jehovah's Witnesses is on that list. It's any vulnerable minority that threatens the majority view. It was homosexuals, it was gypsies, you know.

ROB: Gypsies.

JIM: Those are other people, because we can put a tag on them. We come to realize the Jews are not *them*. The Jews are *us*. Everyone is *us*. And as soon as we sort them out by category, we make every category vulnerable to how we want to regard that category. They're after people. They're after a certain notion of purity, of superiority. We hear that a lot in our political discourse. I've heard things like "subhuman." I've heard things like "scum." I've heard things like "animals." "They're rapists, they're killers, they're here to hurt our women, they're here to take our jobs, they, they, they, they, they," all the way down the line. And that's just coming from one person. I mean it's great to have an experience like that, but it's it's at our front door here. All sides of the political spectrum, we hear the the same mistake. It just seems to be more costly when that mistake is made through power.

LILLIAN: Yep.

JIM: What other stops did you make?

ROB: Passau and Krems. In uh Passau, again, we were on our own. Passau's a neat town. There's this one walk that's got the colored tiles. All these little art studios along the way. It's very narrow. And Lil and Jan discovered - I don't know, maybe Larry, too, I missed it, I went right by it - But all these pictures that had been drawn of our president in different situations.

DEE: [/laughs]

JAN: Well, they were cartoons.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: They were like political cartoons.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: Satire. You have to talk about Krems, though.

ROB: Yeah. One other thing about Passau, we walked to the point where the three rivers come together, the Ilz, the Inns, and the Danube. The water changes color because the Inns comes from the Alps, and so it's glacial and it's very green. And then the dark Danube and you can't really see the Ilz very well. But that was pretty neat, too. Oh, and that's where I got to go on the zip line. [/laughs]

LILLIAN: Yes. Great.

ROB: Yes, that was fun.

JIM: I don't understand the color tiles reference.

ROB: It's a walkway, a very narrow walkway between buildings. We were told last time we went, "Follow the tiles, they'll take you down back to the river," I guess. Most of the things along the way have something to do with art - a gallery or something like that.

LARRY: Kind of like following the yellow brick road.

ROB: On the way from Passau to Krems, you go through the Wachau Valley, which is a beautiful section of the Danube. Our program director was on the sun deck talking about

the different sites along the way. So that was very nice to see that. And then at Krems we went to the Göttweig Abbey. And the thing I remember most about Göttweig Abbey is the apricot dumpling.

[Laughter]

JAN: Again, we have Lil to thank for this. The whole tour group went one direction. They were going for the free wine.

ROB: Yes.

JAN: And we went for the apricot dumpling, which was a spiritual experience.

ROB: I gotta tell you though, Larry and I got both. We got some free wine too.

[Laughter]

JAN: Oh gee.

LARRY: So they were doing the wine tasting and everybody was headed there. And we asked - was it Paul?

LILLIAN: Yeah.

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: "Where is the dumpling at?" And he says, "It's right over there." And he says, "Go now, because there's nobody in there." We went right in and they got 'em right away. He says, "You'll easily be able to get a dumpling and you may be able to even taste some wine."

ROB: And it was so good. Oh my gosh.

LILLIAN: It's like nothing you ever had anywhere else.

LARRY: They grow the apricots there at the Abbey.

ROB: Right.

JAN: Honestly, it was - you can't say enough. I would not have known about that except for Lil having heard/read about it. So because she knew ahead of time, we knew to go find it. Everybody else sort of got left out of that experience for the most part. And it will stand out for my whole life as one of the best things I've ever eaten.

ROB: I'm not sure anybody else in our group got there.

LILLIAN: It's an addition of the excursion and you pay an extra \$50, and you get to watch them make the dumplings, and you get to have a sample. Or, if you're like us, you go to the cafe and you spend \$15. That's what we did.

JAN: Oh, it was so good

ROB: And then we got back on the ship and headed for Vienna because we had the Mozart/ Strauss concert that night.

JAN: Vienna was our, um, we had really great memories of there from the year before. It was

Christmas market time, which, uh, Deanna needs to go see. So we knew what we were going to get when we got there generally. Somehow it was even more beautiful than I remembered, especially around the cathedral with the lights on the cathedral. We didn't do any tours there except for transportation. We just walked around. There was a Christmas market down by Saint Stephen's Cathedral and then also at the palace.

ROB: At the Schönbrunn Palace.

JAN: Schönbrunn Palace. So we got to compare two different Christmas markets in Vienna. We opted for the palace being the best food and the best setting.

LARRY: By this time in the cruise, people we had met in Prague, they started asking us, "What are you guys doing today?" So I said, "Well, we're [...] rendezvous back downstairs about quarter to three and head out to wherever we were heading." And they said, "Well, would you mind us tagging along?" "No, come on."

LILLIAN: "Of course, if you don't mind going to the park to go with me to where my parents' ashes were," which is always very special to me and very much appreciated that you guys are willing to go along for that. So, that's a very special experience.

LARRY: Several people say asked if they could go with us, even in Prague. And I said, "Sure." But then they would bail at the last minute thinking, "Do these people really know what they're doing?"

[Laughter]

JAN: There's a special thing about that story with Lil and her parents, because her dad had gone to Vienna, and had always wanted her mom to go with him. And so when they both passed, some of their ashes were spread in one of the parks in Vienna, and last year we spent some time there for Lil's first visit. But this year we went back again, and Lil and Larry would have set us free from that experience if we didn't want to, but I was grateful that we got to go with them, because, first of all, I knew her parents, and then to be with a friend in that moment is an intimate, powerful experience that I am grateful that I got to have.

LARRY: And I was confident that Owen and Mary Catherine weren't going to be interested once I said, "We do have to stop at the Stadt Park. My wife's mother and father's ashes are sprinkled there." And I said. "It was a beautiful park. It's got a statue of Mozart." And they actually said, "If you don't mind, we would love to come with you." And we just had a wonderful day.

JAN: But we went back to the palace grounds. It is a wonderful Christmas market. I had a cup of white hot chocolate with whipped cream on top that kept me going for days. It was just extraordinary. So.

ROB: You get the most time in Vienna on this particular "Romantic Danube" cruise. We had two completely full days and part of another one.

JAN: One of the big things we did in Vienna was go to the opera.

LILLIAN: A great idea. We loved it.

LARRY: And we got to see [the] opera house without paying the price for the tickets to just go see the opera house without an opera.

JAN: Everyone should say, "I went to Vienna and I saw an opera." You know, even if it's from the nosebleed section where you only see half of the stage.

ROB: That was a nice evening. That was a long day, because we went into town with the tour, did our own thing, caught up with them at the end, and came back, ate lunch, and then we went back on our own to St. Stephen's, did the Christmas market around there at night with the light on the cathedral, which is really beautiful. Then we walked down that main drag. So many people! I mean, it was really busy. Lots of people. We ate the Sachertorts at the restaurant. Then we went back to the cathedral again just to see it in really dark. And then we walked to the opera house and got to see the opera. How'd we get home? I don't even remember.

LILLIAN: Oh, we took the metro.

ROB: Okay. So Vienna was great. We had a great time in Vienna. And then it was on to Budapest.

JIM: What was the opera?

LILLIAN: Falstaff.

ROB: Falstaff.

JIM: Verdi.

ROB: Verdi. Yep.

LILLIAN: Okay, I got a question. This is a music question because you guys are music people. Operas are in Italian. But they were saying that Falstaff was in German in Vienna. Is that possible.

DEE: Opera originated in Italy, so traditionally it was in Italian, and then as you have these German composers coming up, then they started writing in their own languages, and you have poets like Goethe. A lot of his text was set to operas.

LARRY: It was great because we had those little screens in front of us that translated...

DEE: Yeah.

LARRY: ...it to English...

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: ...in a beautiful - that opera house is magnificent.

ROB: Yeah. Budapest, we only had one day last year and we thought that wasn't enough. So we extended through Viking and spent two nights in a hotel. And Larry and Jan got sick.

LARRY: The first day I got sick, and, Jan, I apologize. I'm sure you caught it from me, but...

JAN: It's - I - it's okay.

LARRY: ...that was when we went up to the up the hill past the funicular and I was feeling so bad, but I'm, like, "There's no way I'm I'm missing Budapest."

[Laughter]

JAN: Budapest is a beautiful city as much as any city I've ever been to. They do a magnificent job of lighting their structures.

LILLIAN: So that was the day that we went to the Shoes on the Danube. Of course we went to Market Hall.

ROB: Yeah, we walked down to the Parliament that day, too.

LARRY: Remember the...

LILLIAN: The steam...

LARRY: ...the smoke or the [...]?

LILLIAN: ...rising?

LARRY: I don't know what that was. Still don't know what that was.

ROB: They have the thermal pools in Budapest and we wondered if that had something to do with it, but it just came out of nowhere. All this steam up out of the ground.

LILLIAN: Now the Great Market Hall, a lot of people really love that. And I think if you like to shop, that might be something for you. There's a lot of...

LARRY: Things that you can't unsee. [Laughs]

LILLIAN: ...unidentifiable meat.

ROB: Yeah, it was, yeah, there was stuff there that was like, "hmm?"

LARRY: And we saw that t-shirt. The dictators or...

ROB: Yeah. Oh, I forget what it said.

JAN: There's a lot of awareness in Europe of what's happening in the United States, questioning about how is this happening to a place we thought was different. There's an awareness of that, I think, when you're traveling there and you see, you know, mockery of Trump or whatever. You know that they know.

LARRY: Didn't you find it more vocal this year as opposed to last year, because he had just won the election last year?

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: People were asking us, "How can you let this happen again?"

DEE: Yeah.

JAN: Where we stayed in Budapest, there was a Christmas market right outside our hotel. And then there was another one down by the cathedral. Rob and Lil and Larry went down there the last night to see it. Or maybe it's just the...

ROB: It was just the two of them.

JAN: And I did not feel, you know, I was done. So they went down and we did miss

something extraordinary, because Larry videotaped the light show that was done on the cathedral, and it was just spectacular. Plus, there was all this market all around. I mean being at those Christmas markets, as cold as it was and as crappy as I felt, was one of the best - it was a great experience to do.

LARRY: The next morning Jan was hurting bad, and so we met for breakfast, and Jan opted to rest. And I said, "Look, if I go to that Hospital in the Rock, everybody there is going to be sick." So I stayed back, too.

ROB: And then Lil and I got on the bus, and took the bus up to Matthias. church and then walked over to the Hospital in the Rock, which was a World War II hospital that was also a bomb shelter because it's built right into the hillside. It was an interesting tour. They were way over - I mean, it was overcrowded.

DEE: Yeah.

ROB: They didn't have nearly enough staff to help people. A lot of people that went up there died. But, that was interesting.

LILLIAN: Hospital is built for sixty; they had 600. Their supplies came from a hospital on the outside of the rock. But that hospital was bombed. And so they ended up washing out bandages, reusing needles, just a lot of unsanitary conditions. And people smoked in there. I mean, there was just a whole lot going on at that time.

ROB: Can't imagine.

LILLIAN: Yeah. So people were dying right and left. But it's quite a history.

JAN: There's a lesson in there about, if you do get sick, take time to take care of yourself. You can't control that, and there may be something you miss. But at the end of the day, don't get sicker. Take care of yourself when you travel.

JIM: Some of us have to travel vicariously. We're not able to experience it ourselves. You're talking about being there makes you see things differently. So what would be the biggest ways that these two Viking experiences have changed you?

LILLIAN: As you get older, you have all these life experiences, and you have this big bucket of knowledge that you draw from to come to conclusions, right? When you travel...

LARRY: Think again.

LILLIAN: ...you learn that a lot of these things you've got in this bucket, the world is changing. And so you need to think differently. And when you see life through the eyes of others and you see [how] others live, it makes you think differently and it makes you appreciate your own life so much more. So that's what I would say I get from travel.

ROB: I get the sense of commonality. We're all members of the same species. We have our disagreements, but there are more commonalities in the things that I see when I travel, and meet people in other countries especially, than differences.

JAN: The Viking motto is "Be Curious." I love that motto because I think if we stay curious, we stay young, and we stay learning. That to me is how Viking works in the world. If you go on a Viking River cruise, or any Viking trip, and you aren't really curious about what you're

gonna see or what you're gonna do, you probably'll come home pretty much the same as what you went. But if you go with an open receptive arms, open approach to travel, you're gonna be impacted. You're going to learn about places and people and your own self. You know, how do I travel in a place that I'm not familiar with? That doesn't speak my language? That doesn't eat my food? How do I travel there? And what do I learn about myself that maybe will broaden my own life going forward? So, yeah, be curious.

LARRY: I think just the things that you learn when you're immersed in those cultures, if you have an open mind, you're learning like [a] sponge in water It's just been an amazing two trips. Again, back to the Zeppelin field. And he started talking about the megalomania that Hitler was. I noticed that one of the other guys who I felt didn't have an open mind, all of a sudden he's nodding his head like, "Wait a minute, that can happen again." It's just to me, you get to see how the rest of the United States, the rest of the people live in other states, and other countries. And it's just eye-opening.

LILLIAN: And it's who you travel with. You want to be with people who are like-minded, people who make you think, who ask questions, who see things that you don't see. We all look at something and every one of us sees something different. And we share that. And that is why it's such a great joy to travel with you.

LARRY: We've always found that when we travel with other folks that we end up having to compromise, or having to not do something that we wanted to do because they're tired or whatever. So for you guys, I mean when we went through Amsterdam and I think we did 20 miles just in Amsterdam. People say, "Why do you push so hard?" Tomorrow's not given. I want to see as much and live as much as I can while I'm here. And again, I always say it, "When am I going to be back?" Or, "When in Rome." I'm still not eating that liver and uh...

[Laughter]

JAN: You have to go with people who embrace life. We've done this two years in a row now. I would go anywhere Lil and Larry went, because their approach to it, regardless of where it is, is like ours. We would enrich each other from that experience. We are grateful you guys for those experiences, and I hope we get to have more.

ROB: Well, that's it, James. That's our trip.

JIM (voice-over): And that's our time. Our next episode is such a change of pace that even we don't yet know what it will be.

Thank you for your company today. I see a bend in the road ahead. Please join us again as we continue Making Our Way.

Until next time.