



MAKING OUR WAY - A McMahon/Cheyne Podcast

**"...from inside the house!" (Season 1; Episode 18) -
3/13/24**

Today's hosts:

Deanna Cheyne

Jim Cheyne

JIM (voice-over): Maybe this has happened to you. There's a family gathering, siblings are talking with each other remembering stories about growing up together. And then one of them relates a story that no one else seems to remember ever having happened. And that one is thinking, "You're kidding, you don't remember when - " and then they tell the story again and people are saying, "We don't know what you're talking about." I have a story like that today. One day when we were preparing to do a podcast, I was telling Jan, you know, "This is something that happened to us that we could make into a podcast." And she looked at me with that look of, "Jim, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't remember that at all." Nevertheless, I'm gonna share that story with you today. And then you can judge for yourself whether you would remember something like this happening in your childhood. For me, it was a very traumatic moment. We'll come to that story in a few minutes. But first, here's some music.

[music]

JIM: So, hello, Dee.

DEE: Hey, Jim.

JIM: How you doing?

DEE: I'm okay.

JIM: So Jan and Rob got back from Tanzania, but they're still kind of processing things. And we're trying to get a schedule together when Jan and Rob and also Russ and Sandy can be guests on our podcast, and talk over their trip to Tanzania, which was, from all reports, a life-changing trip. We look forward to that. But today, Deanna and I are holding court, and I want to talk about what happened last night. This was a great event. What did we do last night? What did you do last night?

DEE: Well, I brought some of my choir to Heritage Springs Golf and Country Club to perform for the Floridian Club. And they had invited us out December to do some Christmas stuff for them. Anyways, they were so impressed by the kids, they called me up in January and said they wanted to do this fundraiser for the kids, and it was going to be in March. So, we just had that fundraiser last night.

JIM: So for context, you teach at J.W. Mitchell High School, and you teach two choirs there, three piano classes. Is that right?

DEE: Yes.

JIM: Yeah, a few minutes ago, I saw you were preparing part of the piano curriculum for the district, right?

DEE: Yes.

JIM: And so you have this choir, and you've got a show coming up April 5th. What show is that going to be?

DEE: That's our annual Broadway review show.

JIM: So you brought part of the choir to the Country Club last night, and they presented...

DEE: Portions.

JIM:...portions of that.

DEE: Yes.

JIM: And this was a fundraiser they did. And what great people over at the Floridian Club! They were just fabulous. So Jan and Rob were there.

DEE: Yes.

JIM: And you also had a former student, Cheyenne...

DEE: Cheyenne.

JIM: ...Cheyenne, and her fiancé, Matthew.

DEE: Yes.

JIM: And the kids did a fabulous job. Great job from the whole group, great job from your soloists, and it was a nice night. There's something that happened last night. I don't think you saw it. Now, this community - what's the demographic? Other than your kids, you were the youngest person in the room.

DEE: Yes, these were retirees.

JIM: And if you weren't there, then I was the youngest person in the room by maybe at least half a decade or so.

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: That's their age. Now, they're starting - they're used to early bird dinners. Now, they're starting at 6 o'clock. They've got a dinner. You come out, perform at 7:45. That's pushing their bedtime. 7:45. And then when you guys are finished, there's another singer that they've brought up from Naples to do this. It was an Italian-themed night. So he's singing every Italian song anyone could ever think of for this. Did a great job. Now, it's getting to be past 9 o'clock. Way past 9 - I mean, I'm talking like 8, 9 minutes past 9 o'clock. I was thinking these folks are gonna wanna get back to their homes pretty soon. And so he's up there and he says, "Let's see. Does anyone like Engelbert Humperdinck?" Sure. So he brings out a song, and the reaction to this song was what I wanna talk about. He brings this song called "After the Lovin'," you know?

DEE: Mm-Hmm.

JIM: "So I'll sing you to sleep after the lovin'." And when he sings that line, "So I'll sing you to sleep," a whole bunch of people got up as if Pavlov had just rung a bell. They all get up and start heading for the door. And I'm thinking, "This is hilarious. They've just heard this word 'sleep'," and they're, "Oh, it's our turn to go. Let's go home." But that's not what happened. They go towards the door because towards the door is the large area for a dance. And here are these couples slow dancing to this Engelbert Humperdinck song. And I just stopped and watched and thought, "Remember this. These are decades' relationships up there just dancing through this wonderful song." And since Cheyenne and Matthew were sitting there and they were watching it too, I leaned over to them and said, "Hey, guys, that's you in 50 years." So it was a great night last night. And that was a great opportunity for your kids. And after they performed, they went out to the crowd, greeted them, said hi.

DEE: And we have some people who are going to come to our Broadway show.

JIM: And they even had a raffle. They had these raffles. You had tickets. And there were, like, five prizes that were envelopes with cash, like 100 bucks in them. Right?

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: And so they'd call it a ticket. And someone would say, "That's me. I'm the winner." And it was the spouse of the singer who won one of them.

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: And I watched her, because the person came over with the envelope. She took the envelope, kept the envelope, and put the cash back in the hand of the volunteer, saying, "Give this to the choir," which I thought...

DEE: Yeah.

JIM: ... "That's just wonderful." So, very generous people there at the Floridians Club over at Heritage Springs Country Club. That was last night.

Do you know those old movies, horror movies? They're like teen slasher movies, babysitter movies.

DEE: Right.

JIM: And one of the tropes is she's babysitting.

DEE: Right.

JIM: And the phone rings.

DEE: Mm-Hmm.

JIM: And it's threatening.

DEE: Yes.

JIM: She calls the authorities and stuff. And then finally, they call her back. And there's panic in their voice because they tell her what?

DEE: "The call is coming from within the house."

JIM: From inside the house. Now, that's just a trope that they use for these horror movies.

DEE: Yes.

JIM: And it's...

DEE: It's unpredictable.

JIM: ...you know, teen date night type of movie. But I have a story today that is very similar to that. And that's why I've called this episode "...from inside the house." And we'll get to that in a bit.

But first, I want to talk to you about maybe some famous people you've met. You know, on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, they have this Colbert Questionnaire sometimes. And sometimes the questionnaire will say, "Have you ever asked anyone for their autograph?" So have you ever asked anyone for their autograph?

DEE: Yes. In 2000, at the 2000 Congress, I asked Bernice King to sign her book.

JIM: Bernice King, Martin Luther King, and Coretta Scott King's...

DEE: Daughter.

JIM: ...daughter. So you got her autograph. Any others?

DEE: Not that I can remember. So I'm going to say no. Otherwise, it wasn't that significant.

JIM: I usually don't do autographs. But there was - I met Buzz Aldrin, second man on the moon. He was at EPCOT. And he was selling a book that he had written. It was a science fiction book. It's over there on the bookshelf. I think it's called "Encounter at Tiber." And he had written that, and he was signing the book. And of course, he has a connection to Buzz Lightyear for the Toy Story series with Disney. So he was there at EPCOT. We were at a book signing at a lecture that Amy Goodman gave from Democracy Now. And so we met her at a book signing. So those are book signing sort of autographs. Are there any other famous people that you've met and maybe didn't ask for an autograph?

DEE: I'll start with, when I lived in Toronto, I went to see Stephen Curtis Chapman in concert.

JIM: Well, thousands of people have seen him in concert. What makes this so special for you?

DEE: I was sitting on the end of the row. And he came out into the audience while he was singing, and he held my left hand and continued to sing. And I was absolutely flabbergasted. I don't know what made him target me, but he came down off the stage, and he started walking through the aisles, and he took my hand, and he was singing, and it was one of those moments where I can't believe - because at the time, he was one of my main go-to musicians I would listen to a lot.

JIM: My goodness. Was the song like a love song? Was he singing to you? Was he just holding your hand while he was singing?

DEE: No. Well, he's a Christian artist, and it was a slower song. So it was more of, I guess, a worship song, but I don't know if it was just - maybe there was some connection, or he sensed I needed a connection with someone. I don't know.

JIM: That's pretty good.

DEE: It was so long ago. But all I know is I was standing there going, "Stephen Curtis Chapman is holding my hand right now, and he's singing."

JIM: That's pretty cool. I met Robert Plant, Led Zeppelin, Robert Plant. And it was so out of context, it didn't occur to me who he was yet. Because I was with a friend. We were in Macomb, Illinois. This is the International Youth Congress - what was that, '85? Something like that.

DEE: Mm-Hmm.

JIM: And so we're in Macomb, Illinois. And this friend and I were just walking. We were saying, let's see where we can go, maybe get something to eat, something like that. And he says, "That's Robert Plant." And I'm thinking - you know, there's no context that would say Led Zeppelin in Macomb, Illinois - I'm just thinking it's somebody that he knows from someplace else in The Salvation Army world. And he says, "No, that's Robert Plant, Led Zeppelin." And he's walking with some other guy. And so we go up, and they're headed for a diner. So we decide to head for the diner. And it's the four of us sitting at the counter at this diner. There's me. Next to me is my friend. Next to him is Robert Plant. And next to Robert Plant is whoever he was with. And the four of us had lunch together. It was as calm as that. But I didn't ask for his autograph. That was just...

DEE: Did you talk music?

JIM: Well, the friend I was with was kind of doing fanboy stuff.

DEE: Oh, no.

JIM: So there was a lot of, "Oh, I just love this. I love this." It was like when Chris Farley used to do his Saturday Night Live interviews. "Remember when you did that album? Yeah, that was great." [laughs]

DEE: Yeah, right.

JIM: You know, that kind of stuff. I don't like doing fan stuff. When we're down in Argentina, and we were having lunch, and we run into Antonio Banderas, Melanie Griffith, Madonna, because she...

DEE: I wasn't there.

JIM: You weren't there. She was down filming "Evita." And they come into the same restaurant we're at. And it's a smallish area. So the room that we're at has maybe five tables, and we're at one, and I'm sitting there, and I look across and said, "That's Antonio Banderas." Because this entourage had come in, and suddenly, there were bodyguards at the door. No one else was coming in. But there are lots of windows out to the public, and people started gathering at the windows taking pictures, and I'm thinking, "Why?" And then it occurred to me, that's Antonio Banderas. And then suddenly, it occurred to me who he was with. He was with Melanie Griffith at the time. And then the woman in the baseball cap and the sunglasses with the blonde hair was Madonna. Now we're going to go by, and I don't want to say anything to them, because they should be able to - unless they're asking for the attention, which they weren't - they're just wanting to have a meal. So let's not do that. Eddie Hobgood was with us on that trip, and he asked for a picture, and Melanie said, "Oh, later," and just kind of waved us off. And then we go outside, and Eddie said he was so disappointed. And I

said, "No. She said, 'later' when Antonio's not around. Then you can take her picture." I don't think he did. So I've got - in my corner, I've got Robert Plant. And I've got that trio.

DEE: Yeah, that's pretty big.

JIM: And so, I mean, not to kind of bump your Stephen Curtis Chapman off the pedestal here, but you have anybody else that you could mention.

DEE: Well, I have a legend.

JIM: Oh.

DEE: My person - and this is when I was a kid - is Princess Diana, who I was - when I was a kid, I just thought everything of her.

JIM: Princess Diana. Now, where were you that you would have met her?

DEE: Well, it was a year or two after she and Charles were married, and they were visiting the different commonwealths, and they came to Newfoundland in the summer.

JIM: Again, like Stephen Curtis Chapman, thousands would meet her and say, "Oh, I was there where Princess Diana was."

DEE: I have a memory. It's somehow associated with the Citadel and why the Citadel would do this, I have no idea. It was a sunny day, I remember. It was by the old stadium near where my mom lives. And they took this group of Sunday school kids down to the park. It was a really nice day, and we were in the front of the line because we were little kids. I remember we were holding a rope, and Princess Diana was going around shaking hands. She came right by me, and she was reaching over my head to the people behind me, and I desperately wanted

her to shake my hand. She didn't. So as she continued to walk, I reached out my hand, saying, "Princess Diana, Princess Diana," and my hand swiped her bum.

JIM: Oh my goodness.

DEE: And I remember she was wearing a white cotton dress with yellow polka dots. The bodyguards quickly pushed me back - here I was a 10-year-old little kid. So I can say that I did that.

JIM (voice-over): And now our story. If you have a strong heart, I recommend you listen to this at nighttime with the lights out. Otherwise, just hold on tight. And now, "...from inside the house."

JIM (story): Some questions just don't have a good answer, as was the case in the fall of '71. My sister Jan and I attended Franklin High School. Mom and Dad both worked, and they got home after we did. Actually, Jan got home before I did that fall because I was in the marching band and had practice after school. So for about an hour, Jan was home alone, which sets the stage for this story.

I was on my way home when I heard the police sirens. [SIRENS] Nothing that would normally grab my attention. It's what happened next - well, this part needs music.

[background music]

I turned down our street - a long block - and noticed flashing blue lights. Closer, I saw the patrol cars in front of our house. An officer was on our lawn. He held a rifle.

"You should cross over the other side," he said.

"I live here."

“Then stand over there. Don’t go in.”

It’s the in-between times we don’t handle well. There’s a paralyzing tension in that time between having a biopsy, and getting the results. Or between the bailiff’s “All rise!” and the reading of the verdict. Or between a surgeon walking into a waiting room, and his first words to the family.

In our story, it was the time between the officer’s order, “Don’t go in,” and seeing my parents finally come home, and we would learn what had happened to Jan.

[music]

Jan, it turned out, was not in the house. She was safe. As the officer spoke to Mom and Dad, some neighbors walked up, Jan walking with them. She was shaken. She did not seem to be injured. She had been crying. She did not want to talk.

Mom gave her a hug. I was left to wait. Other officers came out of the house, told Dad it was all clear, said a few more things, gave Dad a card if he needed to contact them. Then they went their way. We went inside and sat in the living room to listen to what Jan had to say.

[music ends]

Now, this is Jan’s part of the story.

[music]

First, you should know there were three phones in our house, one in the kitchen, one in our parents’ bedroom, and one in the basement, three extensions, one

line. Jan had come home as usual, spent some time doing this or that, and happened to be in the kitchen when the phone rang.

[phone ringing]

She walked over and reached to answer it, but it stopped, [music ends] mid-ring, the way it does if the caller gives up. She picked it up anyway.

[music]

"Hello?"

It was Mom. She wanted Jan to look for something upstairs before she and Dad got home.

"Sure, okay," Jan said.

End of call.

Jan did a little more this or that, nothing much. Everything was normal until Jan went upstairs.

At the top of the stairs, she heard a noise coming from our parents' bedroom, went to investigate, and stopped cold when she saw it. The phone handset lay on the nightstand, emitting that beep, beep, beep alarm, the way a phone does when someone has left it off the hook.

When someone has left it off the hook?

But if Jan was home alone...

[stress music]

She thought it and did it all at once. "The stairs, go! The door, get out! The neighbors, run!"

[choral music]

The neighbors had called the police, Jan told us, and the police found nothing. No one hiding inside, no sign of forced entry, nothing. So there we were in the living room. Jan was calm now. Dad wanted to do - something. He sent us around the house to see what, if anything, was missing.

Jan and I looked together. We let Dad check the basement. We went room by room.

[instrumental music]

Have you ever noticed it's a lot easier to see what has been added to a room than to see what has been taken away? What was missing? What could they have wanted? All we had was ordinary personal stuff. The TV was still there, the high-fi. There were some old coins and some great grand-uncle's medals from the Crimean War in the coffee-table drawer. They were all there. The musical instruments were all accounted for. What could they have been after? This was like a jigsaw puzzle with all the pieces on the table, but no clue what the picture was supposed to look like. What had happened to us?

It seems some questions just don't have a good answer.

[music ends]

Now, this is my part of the story.

[piano music]

The house changed for us after that. Less familiar, less comforting, more vulnerable. Being home alone put one on edge.

We had a door in the kitchen that led to the basement. Dad put a locking bracket on that door, which I had forgotten about on the day I came home early and discovered I had forgotten my house key. Check the front door. Locked. Check the back. Locked. What about those ground-level basement windows we never opened? I found one not quite latched closed and was just skinny enough to slip through and drop to the basement floor. Walking up the basement stairs, thinking myself clever and swearing I would never tell Dad what I had done, I turned the kitchen door knob.

Locked. Uh-oh.

Back to the window to climb out? No use. It was too high. No way to squeeze back out. So I was stuck there until somebody else came home. Please let it be Jan. Please not Dad.

I had time to think. Could the intruder have gotten in this way? Yeah, it didn't say much. Fixed the window. At least we had a small piece of the puzzle in place, but only a small piece.

[music ends]

Don't worry. All the other pieces will fit, too. This puzzle has an answer.

Neither Jan nor I can remember ever being told not to go in our parents' bedroom. It was just understood. A bit of psychology, perhaps. You know the story. "You can go in any room except that one." "You can eat of any tree except that one." What happens next is inevitable. So our parents had never said that. We simply understood and complied.

Except, one afternoon...

[music]

...when I had come home early and had the house to myself. For no particular reason, with no particular purpose in mind, I thought I'd have a look around. Good view of the street from their second-story window, I'd be sure to see someone coming home. They had a tall dresser. "Let's see. The top drawer? So that's where they keep jewelry and watches and things like that. The second drawer? So that's where they keep - those things. The closet? Nothing special there." Actually, the whole adventure was rather dull. Not wanting to push my luck, I turned to leave and was just about at the door when it happened.

The phone rang.

[phone ringing]

Then, something strange.

I picked up the phone. "Hello?"

It was Mom. Two thoughts hit at once. One, how did Mom know I was home? Mom's just know things. Two, why did the handset fall off the phone mid-ring just before I answered it?

And just like that, the pieces fell in place.

That evening, I called the family into the living room. This was exciting. In my best "the butler did it" murder mystery reveal, I explained what had happened.

Mom and Dad had a trim line phone in their room, the kind where the handset was laid on top of the holder, and if you didn't set it down just right, it could fall off the holder just from the vibration of the ringing.

That's what had happened to Jan. There was no intruder. Never had been. The phone had just fallen off on its own.

I don't know if I expected applause exactly, but all I got was a rather indifferent "Okay." That was it. "Okay, makes sense. What's for dinner?"

Except what Dad said next.

"So, what were you doing in our bedroom?"

Thinking back now, I should have anticipated that.

Some questions just don't have a good answer.

[music ends]

JIM (voice-over): And that's our story. Do you think you would remember that happening to you?

[music]

Next week, Jan and Rob return, and we'll have as our special guests, Sandy and Russell Dobney, who joined Jan and Rob on their wonderful adventure to Tanzania, and they'll regale us with tales of the Serengeti and Mount Kilimanjaro, of Ngorongoro Crater and Maasai villages, of lions and leopards and African buffaloes, elephants and rhinos, hot air balloon rides, and Jan will give us a first-person account of what it's like inside a Tanzanian health clinic as we continue Making Our Way.

Until next time.

[music ends]