

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

Season 2 - Episode 19

2/5/25

An Epic Adventure - III

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 - III

Season 2; Episode 19

2/5/2025

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

Jan, Rob, Lillian, & Larry complete their journey aboard Viking's Grand European Tour with some of the lighter moments in Amsterdam (what Red Light district?), Cologne (Kölsch Beer), and Vienna (an unexected bather in Stadt Park). Plus, they offer their perspectives on their goals in travel.

[Music]

JAN: You know, we've just gotten off the flight, we get to the hotel, we go to the room for like two seconds, and then we're off to go find the first things we want to do in Amsterdam.

JIM: And what was the red light district like?

[Laughter]

[Music]

ROB: We only saw a corner of it. I saw one woman in a - in a glass container...

[Laughter]

JAN: A glass container?

ROB: [laughing] ...as we're walking by.

LARRY: [laughing] Don't let the genie out of the bottle.

ROB: Yeah, and right past that was The Salvation Army, so it was like, figure that out.

JIM: Just where they should be.

[Music]

JIM (voice-over): If you've ever wondered what the US elections, Anne Frank, Kölsch Beer, Mozart, and Strauss have in common, well, you've come to the right place. Jan and Rob and Lil and Larry will explain what I mean, as they highlight a few final moments from their journey along the rivers of Europe with stops in Amsterdam, Cologne, and Vienna. Quiz to follow.

[Music]

JIM: Are we ready to set sail?

JAN: Yeah. Before we actually sailed, we were in Amsterdam, and Lillian lived in Amsterdam for a time as a young adult, which is part of why she prepared for us ahead of time. But I just thought we could talk a little bit about what a great city Amsterdam is.

ROB: Lil visited a lot of coffee houses when she was there, so she doesn't have a great memory of what happened while she was there.

[Laughter]

JAN: Look that one up if you don't know what an Amsterdam coffee house is.

[Laughter]

LIL: So, there's a lot to say about Amsterdam. They dam the Amstel River and that's how the canals came about. The houses there are built on pillars or pilings. For example, the palace at Dam Square is built on 12,000 pilings. The way the houses are built, the tops lean out a bit because they had wenchers or pulleys for pulling goods and commodities up to store them. The homes are built tall like row houses. That is because the taxes on the real estate were very high, and the canals were used for commerce. We started by touring a houseboat, an old houseboat that was once used for maybe hauling vegetables or tulip bulbs or whatever.

ROB: But the houseboats are all along the river, and some of them are really glamorous inside.

LIL: They are, they are, and they basically have hookups like RVs along the canal...

ROB: Yeah.

LIL: ...so that they have a place for sewage, electric, and so forth.

LARRY: Gas.

LIL: And the houseboats are checked out regularly, just like any structure would be, to see that they're maintained. We had our tour that day. We had our Viking rep...

ROB: Walking tour.

LIL: ...that gave us a tour of the city, showed us the old city, part of the new city, the library. We walked all through Dam Square...

ROB: Dam Square.

LIL: ...that's really - Yes, Dam Square. We got a lot...

JIM: Are we doing this?

LIL: ...of information about the city that...

ROB: It was the best Dam Square I ever saw, I tell you.

JAN: Shh.

LARRY: It was.

LIL: Yes. So, after that tour was when we went to the Van Gogh, which is just incredible and amazing. You see those pictures, you see photographs of them or whatever. When you see those works of art in person, it's not just something you look at, it's something you feel.

ROB: Yeah. And it was a beautiful day too. I mean, it was a gorgeous day.

LIL: Oh, it was a beautiful day. That area where the museums are...

ROB: Mm-Hmm.

LIL: ...is like a park.

ROB: Yeah.

LIL: There's people everywhere, and just a word about that. People were out all over in Amsterdam. It was a Sunday. They were riding their bikes. Their hair was flying in the wind. They had their children in little carts behind them, and the children were laughing. And, I couldn't help but think, what a happy people these are. They're so content.

LARRY: Very joyous.

LIL: I stepped back for a minute and I said, "Well, what's it - what's it like in America?" And, particularly rush hour, when you see all the bikes get off the ferry, and they're coming past you and you're just trying to save your own life, and you see them. They're dressed for work. They're in their suits, they're in their heels. They've got their kids in the carts in the back. They're taking them to daycare. They have smiles on their face. Americans are in their vehicles. They're angry. They're upset. They're anxious. They have their phones in front of their face. They're in contact with their office. They're worried about everything that's going on somewhere else but where they are right now. They're not present in the moment. These people are present. They're present in everything they're doing. When they're with their children, they've got their children in their bike behind them. They're happy. They're enjoying the moment together. You cannot ride a bike and use a cell phone in the Netherlands. It costs you €95 if you're caught. You cannot ride a bicycle intoxicated in the Netherlands. There are a lot of rules related to bicycling, and one is you don't have to wear a helmet. The Bicycling Association in Holland did some research and some studies on this, and they felt like it was stifling to the well-being to ride around on a helmet, because that's the main mode of transportation there.

ROB: We thought that perhaps pedestrians should wear helmets, because it's very -

LIL: Yes.

ROB: You have to watch. You really do. And there are certain places where you think it's a sidewalk, but it's really a bike lane. And so you need to know what you're doing.

LARRY: And in the first 30 minutes, I probably almost got run over 30 or 40 times. *[Laughter]* And I quickly learned the bikes have the right-of-way, then motorcycles, then cars, then pedestrians, in that order.

ROB: Then pedestrians, right.

LARRY: They weren't yelling at you or anything like that, and they were amazing bike riders. And I'm thinking, I wouldn't rent a bike there, because I'm a pretty good bike rider, but I'm not good enough to ride an Amsterdam.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: One of the gifts to me of traveling like this is what Lil said, about you look around and take in the perspective of the place that you're at. And you learn about the people, and you

only get to really do that if you're walking through the city. If you're in transportation, you do not see that up close and personal people's faces and their families and the interaction. I don't want to overstate it as a spiritual experience. That might be too much, but it was definitely a moment when you're looking around saying, "This is a cool place. I want to come back here and experience this again." Fortunately, we're with walkers, and we walked miles in Amsterdam, but it gave us such a great feeling for the city.

LIL: We walked 19 miles in Amsterdam.

ROB: 19, yeah.

LIL: 19 miles.

ROB: That's right.

JAN: That's amazing.

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: That was over - that was over...

JAN: Two and a half?

LARRY: Two days.

JAN: Two days, yeah.

ROB: Did you calculate our average speed, Lil?

[Laughter]

LIL: No, no.

LARRY: I have it, though. *[Laughing]*

ROB: The first night, we went to the Houseboat Museum, and on the way back, we passed this place that had these chocolate-covered strawberries. And it was like, "Oh, gosh, we got to get some of those." So we jump in there. I don't think we mentioned that we did this tour in November. It was cold in Amsterdam. And when the sun went down, it got really cold, and Rob was not prepared that evening. He didn't have enough on. So we stopped to get these chocolate-covered strawberries, and I'm walking, and all of a sudden, I stop and turn around. Nobody's there. And I look back, and Lil and Larry are sitting there, standing, eating these things, shoving them in their mouths as fast as they can. I got a picture of it, as a matter of fact. And Rob's freezing his butt off, saying, "Let's go." So anyway...

LIL: And we were very sympathetic.

ROB: Oh, yeah, very.

[Laughter]

JAN: Savor the moment. Savor the moment.

JIM: So, in Amsterdam, Lil, you had lived there before. Is there any other place that you went on this trip that was a second visit for anybody? Or is everything else a first time?

JAN: Larry, where did you live?

LARRY: I lived in Italy, so it was a first for me, everything.

ROB: Yeah, me too.

JAN: It was all new countries for us.

LARRY: I think that in Cologne, we saw the Gothic Cathedral. I think - was that in the 11th century that things started, they started building that?

ROB: Probably.

JAN: Let's go with "yes."

LARRY: But it was amazing to actually be standing at the foot of that thing, looking up, and think about back in those times, building something like that, and how much time and craftsmanship and everything.

JAN: This was one of the best experiences we had on the trip. We went because of Larry, but this was something that was very important to him, and he can tell you why.

LARRY: I happened to come across a brewery in Asheville, North Carolina, that brewed Kölsch. I had never heard of it. So, I tried it, and I liked it, and it was one of my favorites - a light beer. Then I find out, when I'm looking at this Viking, that Kölsch originated in Cologne, and that they're going to take us on this beer tour and serve us this Kölsch beer. We get a 7-ounce pour at each brewery, for three breweries, out of a wooden vat. Asheville doesn't use wooden vats. They're stainless. But it was so interesting. I said, "I gotta - I gotta do that." And then Rob and Jan talked about the concert that they wanted to do, and I said, "Well, I'll do that." And they said they agreed to do the beer tour. When in Rome.

ROB: Yeah, exactly. They serve it in these glasses. They're small glasses. They're called Stangen. And then they bring it around in a tray. It's a circular tray, and it's called a Kranz. And the guys are walking around all the time, and if they see an empty glass, they take the glass, and they put a full glass down. And they'll keep doing that until you take your coaster and put it on top of the glass. I don't think that ever happened, did it, Larry?

LARRY: I never did.

[Laughter]

JAN: Well, here's what was great about that night. I mean, I don't drink beer, and I'm along on this - it was one of the best nights of our trip. We had a great experience meeting people who were like-minded people. It was this community that formed over going to these three stops on the tour. It was so much fun.

LARRY: It was just incredible to experience that. And I was, uh, I was happy.

JAN: Yeah. Well, it's a local experience. It's like - it's getting in off of the tourist route and being more of a traveler experience.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: One of the cool things about the trip is the way it ended with us being able - well, I'll go to Vienna, I guess. Because Vienna was an amazing city, and we got there in time for the

Christmas markets, which we - I don't think I ever thought we would get to see the Christmas markets on this trip. It didn't even occur to me, but they were wonderful. And Vienna is a beautiful city. And, Lil, I don't know if you want to - do you want to share your...

LIL: I do.

JAN: ...family story about Vienna?

LIL: Several years ago, my dad had to go to Austria to work for a couple of months. And my mother didn't go. Had a lot to do with the ages of my sisters and my brothers and so forth, but he went alone. And they had always wanted to go back to Vienna. So when they passed away, two of my sisters took very small vials of their ashes to Vienna and left the ashes in Stadt Park in Vienna. So my main thing I wanted to do was to go back to Stadt Park and to go to the place where the ashes were. This place is called The Liberation of the Spring. And at the Liberation of the Spring, there is a statue of an old man and a young man, and they're struggling. They're struggling to remove a rock so they can let the spring run. This is symbolic of the struggle between fathers and sons and so forth, but it's really quite, quite beautiful. Very small spring. I was able to take a moment there and just kind of honor my parents, put my hands in the water, and have some good thoughts.

ROB: Mm-Hmm.

LIL: And so it was very meaningful to me. I started to take some pictures there. I took some pictures, and Jan and Rob took some photos, as did Larry, of me having that special moment. But I was looking at my notes this morning, and it says, "I put my hands in the water there. I also took some photos of the sculpture, but was limited as a woman was taking a bath there."

[Laughter]

ROB: Yes. Forgot about that.

LIL: So that's kind of that experience in a nutshell, but uh...

JAN: Going with Lil to the park was one of those things - she said, "You know, we can just go over there to the park, and we can meet you later." And I'm like, well, no. This is hugely important to you, not only that, but I've met your parents. And so this is a moment that I want to be there. I don't want to intrude. We know - we stood back. And I was kind of reticent to take any pictures, to be honest. I did take a couple. But it's like, this is a special moment for my friend. I'm going to be there for that, minus the woman naked in the river. It was a great, it was a great moment. Well, that was great, too, in a different way.

[Laughter]

LARRY: It was a bonus.

JAN: It was a bonus. A bonus viewing.

LARRY: We had to get back to the boat because we had to get a quick cat nap, because that night we're going to the Mozart/Strauss concert that Rob and Jan had picked. I'm sure they were concerned because I...

[Laughter]

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: ...didn't care anything about music or art. I was concerned that I would be sleepy during the concert. Oh, no. I was completely jazzed by that. And just in awe of watching these people play these instruments and think about how much practice have they done to play at this level. And the music was mind-blowing. I mean, just a beautiful sound. And so Jan was really relieved when I told her, "This is one of the best things we did."

[Laughter]

LIL: That's true.

JAN: To be with Larry and see - so again, when you can see an - when you can have an experience through somebody else's eyes when it's fresh for them, that's how that music concert was. I'm going in with fear and trepidation. "Just don't let Larry hate this" because, you know. *[Laughter]* And he came out. The very first thing he said was positive about the event. And it was just like, oh, this is so cool. To share an experience like this with people, there's nothing like it. So, um...

ROB: I wasn't worried at all, Larry.

[Laughter]

LARRY: Good.

ROB: I said, "If he hates it, I'll buy him a beer afterwards. So, you know, everything will be fine."

JAN: A note about the time of year we went, Jim, is, going in the fall made it less crowded. And you deal with weather in a certain way, but it's kind of a minor inconvenience because there are...

LARRY: Oh, yeah.

JAN: It really is. If you dress for it, you're fine. So if you go at that time of year, we didn't have any problems with the level of the water of the river. And we didn't have any problem with crowds. And in some cases, we were, like, the only ones around. And that's something to consider if you're going to travel to Europe is to avoid the summer. It's just a much better experience.

LARRY: Absolutely wonderful trip, and I'm so glad that we did all those things because it expanded my - I'm not big on art. And it expanded my view.

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: And it was amazing when you're looking at those pieces of art literally right in front of you. It's a lot different than seeing a picture of it.

LIL: And this is the thing about travel. It is what you see, but it's more what you feel. You take a picture, you bring it home, you show somebody, they're like, "Eh." But you remember what you felt.

JAN: Yeah.

LIL: And that's what travel is.

JAN: Yeah. You know, the day we went to Anne Frank was Election Day, and uh...

JIM: In the States.

ROB: Here.

JAN: In the States.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: And I was very conscious of that. Not that I had any anxiety at all about the election, but we had an introductory presentation before we walked through the house. And the person who did that presentation was exceptional. And so I look - at one point, I look over at Lil because - this is a bad thing that I did, because all that I did was explode my emotions - because as we're sitting there listening, we are very conscious of what's happening in our own country, and the anxiety we have over the current state of affairs. So here we are at Anne Frank on the day of our election. And to me, it was a poignant connection that we made there, as was the whole trip. Everything about that trip was both a blessing and a curse when it came to the election. We were away from home. We had a little buffer zone. But we're also going through Germany. And a lot of the focus of Germany was, um, was World War II focus. And so it was a challenging time emotionally and philosophically to be there. And a lot of how I'll remember this trip is about how I felt. That is exactly the thing that stays with me, is how did I feel in each of these places, given what was going on, so.

LIL: You know, in this life, you can live where you're always safe. You're always where you feel comfortable. You're always in your element. Or you can take a step out. And you can spend time with people that make you stretch, make you think, make you learn, you know, make you peel back the layers on things. People that, you look at a tree and you see a tree, and they look at a tree, and they see a 100-year-old oak.

JAN: Yeah.

LIL: That's what travel is about. And that's what this was for me to travel with Jan and Rob.

ROB: Yeah.

LIL: So I would say this is the best trip of my life.

LARRY: But also, you have to - I have always approached travel, like, if we go to a national park, I want to eat the local food. I want to, you know, do all of these things. So when I travel in every place, I want to do all of those things and see what is local. I'm not - I don't want to be just, here's what I want to do. Because I always use the saying, and I said it multiple times during our vacation, "When in Rome." *[Laughing]*

JAN: Our experience was joyful on this trip. And there's a reason that we talked about it being an epic adventure. And this has to do with, I think, an approach to travel that the four of us share, which is every day, there's going to be experience, and how you're going to approach that. You know, it could rain. It could snow. The ship might get stuck. I don't know. Any number of things can go awry. But when you're approaching it as an adventure, then those don't become debilitating. They don't become negative. They become part of the experience. And when you travel with people with that viewpoint, then it colors the whole experience as a positive thing. We laughed a lot on this trip. We had a great community time, and we had a great time with friends who see the world very much like us.

And so, I can't say enough good about that experience and about how we'll remember it. And so you hold that experience as part of who you are now in your life and part of what you've shared with other people. There's nothing really quite like it, like doing a journey like this and then doing it with people that share the joy with you. That is what makes it a rich experience.

LARRY: One thing I want to say about how this all started was, Jan and Lil knew each other, and I had met Rob several times. And we had always - we felt like that we traveled like-mindedly.

JAN: Yeah.

LARRY: So we always - I always wanted to do a trip with Rob and Jan, but it just never was in the cards. We were going at different times and things. So for me, it was so exciting that we could put this together finally. And then, you know, I'm sure that Rob and Jan were a little nervous about, "Well, what are we going to do with Larry?"

JAN: No. *[Laughing]*

ROB: Nooooo!

LARRY: But I will say, this was the best vacation I've ever had in my 70 years. *[Music begins]*
And a lot of that is because of the people that you're with and the people that you meet.

ROB: Yeah.

LARRY: In my mind, we had an absolute blast.

ROB: It was.

JAN: We did.

JIM (voice-over): And thus concludes Jan & Rob's and Lillian & Larry's epic adventure aboard Viking's Grand European Tour. A reminder that parts one and two of this journey are available wherever you found this episode. Next week, we'll return with memories of the past, observations of the present, and perhaps some predictions for the future as we continue Making Our Way.

Until next time.

[Music ends]