

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

Season 2 - Episode 10

11/13/24

And They Were Heroes

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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And They Were Heroes

Season 2; Episode 10

11/13/2024

Hosts: Jan, Rob, Dee, & Jim

Guests: Mark Welsh (Honor Flight), Master Sergeant O'Neil Ducharme (U.S. Marines - retired, WWII veteran)

Exploring the service and sacrifice of veterans from "the greatest generation."
Frank Robb's experience at D-Day + 4. O'Neil Ducharme's experience in the Battle of Okinawa.

JIM (voice-over): This episode contains descriptions of war which some might find disturbing. Listener discretion is advised.

This past September, in preparation for this episode honoring veterans, we welcomed Mark Welsh and O'Neil Ducharme to our table. O'Neil Ducharme is a veteran of World War II who fought as a Marine in the Battle of Okinawa. Mark Welsh works with Honor Flight, an organization that provides trips for veterans to visit various war memorials and monuments in Washington, D.C.

While preparing this episode, we also explored our own family histories where we found six World War II veterans, three who fought in the Pacific, and three who fought in Europe. As we begin, Jan and I are talking about our Uncle Ray, who was Dad's brother-in-law, and Uncle Frank, who was Mom's youngest brother. Jan and Rob recorded Uncle Frank in the later years of his life. You'll notice that Frank's voice is giving out due to his advanced age and perhaps also due to a lifetime of cigars. His will be the next voice you hear.

[Music]

FRANK: What changed my life with December 7, 1941? That changed my life.

[Music]

Part One: Our relatives who served

JIM: I never really heard Ray or Frank say, "Gather around, children. I want to tell you stories of the war."

JAN: I remember Ray being very reticent to talk about the war. Frank would answer questions. And eventually we recorded him talking about it.

JIM: Ray, I understand, was shot through the shoulder, and it's one of these where the exit wound was worse than the entry wound, but it went right through him. I also know there was a story about a foxhole. He was in it and was joined by a Japanese soldier. It's one of these that only one of them was coming out. I think that's why they don't like talking about

it.

JAN: Yeah.

JIM: And then Frank was in the European theater. And I don't remember - maybe he says it on the video. We'll check it - I don't remember if he said he was D-Day plus four or D-Day plus seven.

JAN: Four.

JIM: It's plus four. So that's the fourth day of the invasion.

JAN: When we went to Omaha Beach, Rob and I, I collected a little bit of sand from the beach in honor of Uncle Frank. Um, yeah. "Collected from Omaha Beach, Normandy, France, on October 31, 2016, in honor of our Uncle Frank Robb."

JIM: When Dee and I were there, it was low tide. So when it's low tide, you can walk way out. So I said, "Dee, let's go see this." I mean, we'd already seen "Saving Private Ryan." And you just think of the horror of coming into that because you turn out and there's still a pillbox in place there. So we went way out, turned around *[music starts]* and just then I just thought I wouldn't have what it takes to come ashore here and face the fire like that. Then they have the cemetery up on top there. And of course, while we're there, it's a quiet place, as cemeteries should be. And then the flag lowering happens and everyone just freezes without anyone saying anything. Everything just stops.

FRANK: On D plus four, we landed on Normandy, and I'll never forget coming off that boat at daybreak, pushing the bodies out of the water - out of the way in the water - and going up on the beach, walking around the men that hadn't been picked up yet, and that was four days after the battle started. And there was only a mile inland at that time.

ROB: Yeah.

FRANK: And we moved in on it, got off the boat, went up that valley that they had blown in the line when they invaded and we followed them up there and got to the top of the cliff, I mean the bank. And we were just green troops the States. We'd been trained. You don't learn anything in training, you learn it in war.

ROB: Yeah.

FRANK: And it's not the same. And you learn fast. And we started digging our first foxhole in Europe. And Robin's and I was digging and it was getting late. They finally called for chow and chow line was going we had a foxhole that was only halfway done, and it was getting late. And all the guys said, "We're going to go eat. We'll fix this tomorrow." I said, "What do you want to do Robin?" He said, "I'm going to finish it tonight. I'm not going to go and stop until we get that thing down." We still had another two feet to go down digging with trenching tools. And we learned how to dig a foxhole that night. And we got in it. We was laying right beside it. And our first taste of fire, they bombed that field. They never hit anything, but they bombed the heck out of it. We - Robin and I was in the bottom of the hole and the rest of the guys were digging theres. We heard those *[unintelligible]* and they didn't stop until the bottom was hit. That was our first taste of fire. And believe me, you pray. I'll tell you what you did. We had them whipped with more planes than they had. And more men and more troops, better equipment.

Next morning, we had to move on in town a little further and set up a base camp. And that time we picked a apple orchard. Already had the foxholes dug [by] the Germans. And they'd run. They'd run out.

And then I knew what war was. We were sitting there. We were still green. But we sure learned a lot in five seconds. There was an apple tree there. One of the guys said, "Look at that big apple up there." He said, "One of you guys picked that off and threw it over to me." And a couple of guys got up and started to go get it. A little ten-year-old girl - she couldn't have been over eight or ten years old - said, "I'll get it. I'll get it." And she started climbing up on that apple tree to get that apple. And she got to it. Unfortunately, it was booby-trapped. And she was blown apart. I mean, killed her right up. And there wasn't a man in that place that could do anything but just stare. That poor girl never had a chance. After that, we knew what war was. It's no game. It's no game. All I wanted to do was get it over with and come home.

JAN: Have you been back since...?

FRANK: [drops his head in silence]

JAN: Okay. There's a cemetery now, you know?

FRANK: I never went back. I saw 'em bury 'em there. I have respect for every man in the army.

[Music starts]

JAN: I know.

FRANK: Every one of them is entitled to a Congressional Medal of Honor just being in it, as far as I'm concerned. But I never wanted to win one of them. Never wanted to win that medal. Because Rowana didn't want to be a widow. And most guys that won it never lived to wear it.

[Music]

ROB: I have two uncles that served in World War II and two great uncles that served in World War II. My uncle Stan, whose birthday is the 13th of - excuse me, the 14th of November, will be 104. And he lives in Stewart, Florida. He and his wife, Juanita, my aunt. And he served in Italy. And he was a navigator on bombing runs that they did into Germany. But the base was in Italy.

JAN: There's a neat story about him. Our cousin Randy, his son, has a photograph of Stan sitting on this hillside in Italy. And Randy's been able to figure out the location of where he was sitting. And he's going back there next month in October.

ROB: October, right.

JAN: So it'll be prior to this broadcast. But he's going back there to try to sit in the same spot his dad sat in during World War II.

JIM: And this is your mom's brother?

ROB: Brother. The oldest of the four children. He's the only one left. Um, yeah.

JIM: Randy has figured out this location.

JAN: Yeah. Randy's he's really good with tech - well, he worked for the NSA. I'm just saying maybe his skills from NSA.

JIM: That's all we're allowed to talk about at this point.

JAN: Yes, he'd have to kill us.

JIM: That was your uncle Stan.

ROB: That's my uncle Stan. My uncle Ken, the second oldest of the four, my uncle Ken. He was in the Battle of the Bulge. He was also in Europe. Yeah, he was in again to make sure that services were in place, food, medical, etc.

JAN: He was in the army.

ROB: Yeah. My two great uncles on my grandma McMahon's side, that's the Sherman side. Robert Sherman was in the Navy and involved in the Battle of Midway in the Pacific. My uncle Jay Sherman was in the Marines and he fought at Iwo Jima. The only one I ever knew was my uncle Jay. And that was just for a short period of time.

JAN: A side benefit of us doing this podcast is finding out some things we didn't know about our families and recognizing their service about which I knew very little.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: So it's been a neat discovery.

ROB: Yeah.

Part Two: Master Sergeant O'Neil Ducharme

JIM: So we have some different folks at the mic today. Jan, could you make some introductions, please?

JAN: Yes, they are friends of ours from church. We met both of these gentlemen through Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. I'm going to get emotional here. I'm sorry. So, O'Neil.

NEIL: Yes.

JAN: O'Neil and we knew your wife for many years from church.

NEIL: Patricia.

JAN: Patricia. And then Mark is here too with us. And Mark is with Honor Flight, Mark Welsh. So we thought it'd be nice to have a conversation about veterans and Honor Flight, and the important work that's done to making veterans - to helping veterans feel honored for their service.

JIM: And Master Sergeant?

NEI: Yeah, just, just Neil.

JIM: Just Neil?

NEIL: Just Neil.

JAN: Just Neil.

NEIL: We don't need any ranks.

JAN: I don't know if I can do that.

JIM: I think if I had achieved Master Sergeant, I would insist on everyone addressing me that way.

NEIL: Neil was born in the southeastern Maine.

JIM: Southeastern Maine.

NEIL: A little community called Bowdoinham [unintelligible]. Population 11.

ROB: 11.

JIM: 11. Born January 11th, 1925.

JAN: Would you tell us a little bit about how you ended up enlisting in the Marines? What made you do it and what was going on in the world that led to you...

NEIL: I will take you back to 1934.

JAN: Okay.

NEIL: Even then my ambition was to be a fireman because I had a firehouse in St. Easter Sunday, April, 1934. I'd just come out of church. It was a beautiful day. About 35, 40 degrees. Sweater weather. My next door neighbor, Burberry, was cleaning up his yard and he saw me. Came over. Something caught my eye coming down the street. "What are you looking at?" "Look at him." Because he saw him. [unintelligible] "What is it?" He says, "Young man, that is a United States Marine." So right then and there, the Marine Corps was so - Now being nosy, I started to get books on the Marine Corps. And then, of course, Pearl Harbor came along and that opened up the door for me. But I had to have permission from my dad to go in.

JAN: Because you were young?

NEIL: Yeah. Well, I was 17 and a half so I had to wait. So, "We'll let you sign up, but you cannot come in. You have to go and finish school." So I went and finished school. Then I rushed back and I said, "Here I am." He says, "Okay, you're all set, but we have no room for you at Parris Island. So we'll call you in a couple or three weeks." So about 10 days later, I got a call. "You're set." So now I'm heading south. And so we got out into Yemassee, South Carolina. I think that the station was probably a quarter of this room here. I said, "What did I get myself into? Oh, my god." He says, "Well, you have to go across the river there to Parris Island." Which we did so that I went through recruiting there, basic training. 12 weeks when they started. Later on, when they wanted more troops, they cut it down to 10 weeks, however, I was there for 12 weeks. And I must have done a pretty good job because they had four promotions available for PFC. I picked one of them up, so I was lucky. "You're heading to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina for reclassifications." So I went there for -- I spent 17 days there total being classified with A-minus Security. And they said, "You are heading to Washington, D.C., at Marine Barracks." I arrived at Marine Barracks. Guard duty. Got my blue uniform. Now when I put the blue uniform on, now I say, "I always thought about

being in the marine. Now I is a Marine. I am in dress blues, so now I am all set. Now I'm on Marine.

ROB: Dress blues.

NEIL: Then they says, "You're being reassigned." But before that happened, the great, great grandson of Robert E. Lee was a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps, and a mess officer for mess halls. And he says, "I was looking like you did a good job for 30 days on this duty. You seem to know about cooking. You know anything about cooking?" I said, "Yes. My mother and sister were in a restaurant for five years during The Depression. We worked in that." So, "Oh my gosh. Would you mind to go up to Shangri-La and do some cooking? And they're short." I said, "No." So, I - I must have done a pretty good job 'cause six weeks later, I was a corporal.

ROB: Corporal!

NEIL: Yeah.

JAN: You met some famous people while you were at Shangri-La.

NEIL: Well, I've talked to Mrs. Roosevelt for four times. Three times up at Shangri-La once in Portland, Maine, at the Lafayette. And she saw me - saw us - across the street. I didn't know she was there. But she recognized me for some reason. She said, "Young man, young marine. It's a tall, elegant woman, beautiful woman. And so, I guess we stood about 10 or 15 minutes with her, and that was like [hand motion]

JAN: Well, and for our listeners, what would they know Shangri-La as today?

NEIL: Camp David, named after Ike's grandson David. It's still known as Camp David today.

JAN: Who said these words? I wrote this down from one of your interviews. "There are two types of Marines, those who are overseas, and those who are joining them."

NEIL: Those are Major General Lemuel C. Shephard, my Commanding General of the 6th Marine Division. And he did not call us Marines. He was an enlisted men's general, and he called us his boys. We were his boys. And he later on became Commandant of the Marine Corps.

JAN: So, during the war, you ended up in Okinawa.

NEIL: Yes.

JAN: Can you tell us a little bit about how that happened, how you got there?

NEIL: Well...

JIM: Could I do it this way?

JAN: Yeah.

JIM: If I were Steven Spielberg, listening to his story, I would be: Easter Sunday, 1934, a nine-year-old boy sees a Marine and says, "That's what I want to do." Then I would jump ahead to Easter Sunday [1945], and that boy is now a Marine, and we're about to get Operation Iceberg, as the Marines are about to land on Okinawa.

NEIL: April 1st, Easter Sunday, April Fool Departure Day, Landing Day. And we landed there at 7 o'clock on the China Sea side. And then the 1st Marine Division landed on the Pacific side, and then we came ashore and we joined, opened up the road to get our supplies in. And so, in the meantime, the Forth Marine Regiment made a shooter and headed to take the airport to Yontan Airstrip. So, we're heading towards Yontan Airstrip and said, "We secured that by late afternoon." And then it says, "Okay." So, we went out and we played softball and then say, football, say, "My God, the Navy made a mistake. They picked the wrong island."

[Laughter]

Well, they [the Japanese] went on for about 60 hours. What they were doing, actually, is letting us come in. They had a full army of 128,000 men there.

JIM: The Shuri line, that was the - there's this one mound called Sugarloaf, which is notorious.

NEIL: That we were on Sugarloaf for 22 days, gaining 100 yards, going back 100 yards, gaining 100 yards, going back 100 yards. And this is where I got my most fearful experience of my life there, is when they came in with the rockets. 32 rockets on its shelf, shooting over those hills there. And one of them landed about 12 feet from me, a dud. And boy, I was in that - my head was in that foxhole. I didn't want to come out. I didn't want to come out because I wasn't a little messed up too.

ROB: Yeah.

NEIL: But it was, uh...

MARK: The battle was roughly 84 days, so, Neil?.

NEIL: No, 87.

MARK: 87, excuse me.

NEIL: Around May 5th was decided by the new General Geiger, Marine General Geiger, that took over the whole operation after the General Buckner died there. And we also had there the second largest fleet that ever went to sea. 2,200 ships and aircraft, after Normandy, which was 5,300 ships, so...

MARK: Whenever you shared your terror that you felt when that shell hit close to you?

NEIL: Oh, I was.

MARK: But the terror that was ongoing. Would you like to explain metal rain?

NEIL: Well, we were hit by suicide, the Kamikaze.

ROB: Yeah.

NEIL: Now, for 87 days on Okinawa, we got hit by 1,900 suicide planes. Now, the main big ships, of course, are in the harbor. And so, the Kamikaze did not care about the island. The ships. The aircraft carriers. They didn't touch any aircraft carriers they had that. They did hit 365 ships that were damaged, a few lost. So, now, when they came over, the fleet opened up one of them. They're like, "Listen, the metal is coming up." So, coming down here. So, the people said, "Oh my God, metal rain." We called it metal rain. So, by that time,

everybody is under anything you can find. And the foxholes we had were well covered, because if you got caught out there, you were a casualty.

JIM: With all those casualties, I understood that you volunteered as a stretcher bear.

NEIL: I did.

JIM: Is that right?

NEIL: I had Sugar Loaf Hill, they ran out of stretchers. So, two of us volunteered, and we picked up other volunteers there. And instead of having a four-man stretcher team, we made a five. Because we figured if we're going to have to run down in front, we get tired, we could rotate. I did this for about 10 days while we were there. I lost three of my buddies on my stretcher team that didn't make it, so I was not...

JIM: Well...

MARK: After the surrender at Okinawa, would you care to share with us...?

NEIL: No, I want to go back...

MARK: ...what you did.

NEIL: ...before the second landing of Okinawa, May 5th.

MARK: Okay.

NEIL: They decided to make another landing. So, they made another landing around the horn.

JIM: This was in Naha, right? The capital city.

NEIL: The capital Naha.

JIM: I understand that when you actually came in to secure the city, there was a lot of rubble.

NEIL: Rubble.

JIM: And abandoned mostly.

NEIL: Most of the people pushed out, they pushed out and entered the caves. There was about a thousand caves in there. And I almost got caught in the cave one time, too. My former drill instructor, Parris Island, Everitt Street [?] from Tennessee, I went across him and he says, "Let's go into that cave there." So, we went in about 50, 60 yards, almost half a football field. Now there's tunnels to the right, tunnels to the left, tunnels up and down. So, we're in there trying to see what's in there. And we heard a noise. He just said, "There's somebody else. Let's get out." I took off. He went after me. I never saw him go by me. And when we got outdoors, we went around the mound and then we called for a tank to come in with a flamethrower through the nozzle. And he put one shot in there, then he sees where we were. You could see the smoke come over. It's like an ant nest all over the place. Yeah.

MARK: Keep in mind, the military was outnumbered five to one, five ally versus one. They entered Okinawa many years before this battle.

NEIL: Ten years.

MARK: They had - ten years - and they had been building these tunnels for ten years in anticipation...

NEIL: Massive tunnels.

MARK: ...of this kind of being Custer's Last Stand type thing.

JAN: Yeah.

MARK: And they had also had ten years to brainwash the Okinawan civilians to the point where - [to Neil] What were the Japanese telling the civilians?

NEIL: We were baby eaters. We're cannibals.

ROB: Oh, cannibals.

NEIL: Cannibals. And that is why out of 128,000, surrendered at the end there, about 10,000 Japanese. Because they'd rather die. They'd really die. And then so they'd push the people over the cliffs. The mothers, the woman with babies. They didn't have to be pushing. They didn't want their babies to be eaten by the cannibals. By the thousands, that was just, uh, was just horrible. It was a horrible mess. So now after 87 days, they decided to finish with all these tunnels. We had two choices there. To try to find the ant nest, or to bury them. So first we gave them a shortened neighborhood, cleaned it out, and then depth charges all the entrances. The first of July, most of the troops had gone back - were ready to depart, to go back to where they came from. But I stayed on the island until the 6th of July working with demolition. C2 and C3 compound to seal the tunnels.

ROB: When did you go to Japan? After the surrender, you went to Japan?

NEIL: After Japan, I was on Guam there. We were getting refitted.

ROB: Uh-Huh.

NEIL: You have to understand, the 6th Marine Division was put together for two operations: Okinawa and Japan.

ROB: Okay.

JIM: So now by the time we were all set, after Okinawa, we trained to hit Japan.

ROB: Yeah.

NEIL: We were going to head Japan the first of September, with about a million troops. Australians, and all six Marine Divisions, all assembled. But on the 15th of August, 1945, we got, through the bullhorns there, "All [quiet?] and listen." The Emperor came on. And he says that the war was over, they were going [to] capitulate. That was after two atomic bombs on the 6th and the 9th. The next day, I got my orders to go board ship. We boarded the ships, the 3rd Battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment, and we sailed outside of Tokyo Bay for about 10 days. Then on August the 30th, that night we got the order, "Go in." So 750 chosen went in. We came in at 6:30 - 7 o'clock in the morning. We landed at the sub base, suicide sub base, with 30 suicide subs there. And then the Major and three of us staff N.C.O.s, 2 chiefs decided to go down to Yokosuka. Took their flag down and put our flag up there. And then later on, our flag came down, we all signed it. And it's in the archives of Washington today.

ROB: During the occupation in Japan, you were there for a few months, weren't you?

NEIL: Oh, I was there for eight months.

ROB: Yeah.

NEIL: I was there...

ROB: How did you find the Japanese people?

NEIL: You may not believe this at all. I loved them. We didn't fight the people. They didn't know. They just didn't know.

ROB: Yeah.

NEIL: But we took good care of them because we had a mountain there full of food for the old Japanese base there because - so we used to sneak off food and take it to the village for them.

ROB: Oh wow.

MARK: O'Neill, we frequently talk about defining moments in our lives or in the war for you. When did you and your fellow sailors, Marines, become aware of the atomic bomb? And in what context did you understand the power of the atomic bomb?

NEIL: On 6th of August there, they told us that they dropped an atomic bomb. And I says, "Oh, my God." It was explained in the big puff of smoke, of course, which we saw later. I just couldn't comprehend it. A hundred thousand people. Well, it killed 100,000 people. But what the people don't know there, B-29s firebombed Tokyo. And they kill about 150,000 people there. They burned them alive with firestorms though. And then the other atomic bomb when they dropped it, about what, 70,000? Give or take 10,000 this way. But it's damn atrocious.

MARK: But that hadn't facilitated the capitulation and unconditional surrender.

NEIL: No.

MARK: Both the Japanese and U.S. governments agree...

NEIL: Yeah.

MARK: ...that it would have cost an additional one million allied lives and four million Japanese lives.

JAN: Sorry, O'Neil. It just is incredibly difficult story.

ROB: I just want to say again how impressive it was to hear you talk about the Japanese people. Because a lot of veterans, well, we knew one when we were at school in Colorado - Jan's roommate was Korean - and he was ve[ry] - well.

JAN: He was reticent to welcome my friend Bev into his home because she was Asian.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: And so there was a trigger there.

ROB: An experience.

JAN: And yet your story tells a whole different story...

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: ...about the people of Japan.

JIM: Have you been back? Have you ever been back to Japan?

NEIL: No. I, uh - I - I can't - I've been asked, "Have you been to Okinawa?" I just - I ca- - I just can't, I can't, I can't go back, I just - I can't, [whispering] I just can't, I can't.

[Music]

JIM (voice-over): Did you notice? At the end just now with O'Neil Ducharme about Okinawa, and at the beginning with Frank Robb about Omaha Beach. "Would you ever return?" they were asked. They both choked on their answers. However many times they have recounted these stories of the war, which is done not for their glory, but is done as a kindness and a caution to us, those carefully bound volumes of scrapbook memories cannot cover the open wounds inflicted by such places of horror.

With these stories from World War II, we'll pause our salute to veterans. Our next episode will share stories from other family members who served during more recent conflicts, Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East. Also, we'll fly first class with the Honor Flight organization and our personal guide, Mark Welsh. These folks serve our diminishing ranks of veterans with visits to Washington, D.C., and then provide them the welcome home they might never have received, but so richly deserve.

Let's meet to talk about this again.

Until next time.

[Music ends]

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