

# Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

## **Season 2 - Episode 3**

*9/25/24*

**"Coming to America"**



# 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 & Easter 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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# Coming to America

## Season 2; Episode 3

9/25/2024

Hosts: Jan, Rob, Jim

*Our friend Emaniël Brifil; his family's journey from Haiti; his values; the history of Haiti; current troubles in Haiti; the asinine buffoonery of political rhetoric; EB's hope in view of it all, and his hope for his son.*

**JIM:** Do you have any coffee nearby? Do you have coffee where you work?

**EB:** We do have coffee where I work, but I'm not a coffee drinker. I'm more of a water and tea drinker.

**JIM:** Okay, well then what we'd like you to do is get some water and tea, have it later on today, and let that be our thanks to you for joining us here on Making Our Way podcast.

**JAN:** Oh gosh.

**ROB:** Absolutely.

*[Music]*

**JAN:** So we're doing a podcast today on Haiti and the Haitian experience. There are two reasons why we thought this was a good time to do it. One is our love for Haiti and for Haitians who we've gotten to know over the years. That love goes back to now commissioners, retired Kellners, who took the divisional band in Florida to Haiti in 1984. For Rob and me, that was the first time we had ever been outside the United States or Canada. Not to overstate it, but it was life changing.

**ROB:** Yeah, it was.

**JAN:** It's the classic, "I'm going on a mission trip and we're going to go spread joy." What happened was we were all overwhelmed. Everywhere we went, people were happy and they had no economic reason that we could see for being happy. So from that time, from the Kellners, we became interested in Haiti. And then since that time, we have gotten to know many people of Haitian descent, again, through the Salvation Army in Florida. But the other part of the other side of the coin is our dismay with the conversations that have been happening in the last few days. So today, Emaniël Brifil, who's been my friend now for probably 10 years, I got to work with him at The Salvation Army. We had many wonderful conversations. So E.B. is a smart, informed, faith-loving, Christ-following person.

**ROB:** That's right.

**JAN:** But most importantly, he's my friend. So E.B., now that I've rambled on here...

**ROB:** So E.B., welcome to Making Our Way.

**JAN:** Yeah, I'm still making my way here.

**JIM:** It's nice to have a eulogy before the funeral. You can hear it yourself.

**JAN:** The last thing I want to say, I've known EB as a single person, but now he's married to Judith, his wife Judith. And then, lo and behold, he has a one-year-old boy...

**ROB:** Beautiful boy. Beautiful boy.

**JAN:** EJ, just celebrated his first birthday and probably pretty much changed EB's life. So EB, we'd like to have you talk about yourself a little bit here.

**EB:** So a little bit about myself. And as Jan just mentioned, I am married to Judith. We got married in the, I guess, fall, I don't know, November of 2019. And Rob and Jan had the privilege of being there. And I know Jan is so kind to say that we're like friends, but I would even go as far as saying we're essentially like family. Sorry, Jim, extra family who you may or may not have known about. But definitely love Rob and Jan, and just what they mean to Judith and I, and many others who we have a bond with. And as she mentioned just over at this past week or so - weekend - our son who is Emani, Jr. celebrated his first year on earth. And that definitely has changed me in more ways than none. When I found out Judith was pregnant, definitely teared up and was just couldn't hold back emotion, so to speak. Part of it was because of a joy of bringing life into this world. But then the other part of it was, hey, I've never done this before and I am nervous. Like I don't know what it means to be a dad. So that was definitely a learning curve and it still continues to be that, but it has been a joy.

I come from a very relatively, I would say large family. I am the last of 13. So my mother and father heard the words "be fruitful and multiply," and decided to take that literal. And so I joke with my siblings. I joke with people in the family and say, my parents decided to call me Emani because they knew, one, they were finally done, and two, "God be with us." That's why none of my other siblings have that name.

I'm being a sibling of 12 others. I am - self-proclaimed at least - world's greatest uncle to 31 now. Education-wise, I am an alumni of the University of South Florida - "Go Bulls!" - have a degree in Psych. there, and then a master's in Org. Leadership. But I just love learning things and love meeting new people. I try my best to keep the grind relentless as one of my models and just try to be better each and every day and do what I can, but also just to love God and love others in all that I do.

In July of 1979, middle of the week, my dad heard several of his cousins saying they're going to get on a boat to go to America. Now this boat is essentially a makeshift raft. He had the conversation with my mom, and in that moment they decided to say, "Hey, we're going to leave seven kids behind, and hope for a better future." He hops on a boat, they go and they thought, or they saw landmass, and they thought they made it. And upon them making it, they found themselves in Cuba. And thank God for good people and good Cubans where they were provided dry clothes, they got Cuban coffee, and they got bread. And then they got directions of how to get to, essentially, the U.S. They ported in Miami. They spent about two weeks in Miami, about a month and a half in Belle Glade, and then they migrated to Winter Haven that following year in 1980, and essentially had been in Winter Haven. My dad is still there. My mother passed away in 2013, but they have been there since then. And then you have just family from all over who have left Haiti and just

found their home in Central Florida in some way, shape, or form. Whether that's Winter Haven, whether that's here in Tampa, whether that's Orlando, but that's like the main places that most of our family tends to be. And to this day, we still have family who travels from Haiti to come here, whether that's through things like just wanting a better future or just knowing a lot of their family is here stateside. So they make that voyage in whatever means that they can.

**JAN:** So have the rest of your siblings all come to the States now?

**EB:** No. So we still have two siblings still in Haiti. I have a brother who is there and then my sister, Monique. My sister Monique is one of the ones with nine kids. My brother has two kids. So all of them are still in Haiti. My brother has no desire to come to Haiti. He teaches at a school in Haiti as a professor. I'm not sure of the subject, but it might be math or science. And then he is very faithful and active in his church as a praise and worship leader and his wife leads praise and worship for him as well. So they feel good and comfortable where they are at.

My sister, on the other hand, she has a desire to come here, but for whatever reasons, every time my father makes some form of headway with her on this process, she finds a way to use the resources sent to her in other means as if her coming here is not a priority. So she's still there with a desire to come here while my brother is still there with no desire to come here. But the other siblings are here in the States.

**JAN:** Do you - have you talked to your brother at all or your sister about the current conditions in Haiti? Like, there's not a good solid government. There are some gang issues going on. I looked up just to see could I go to Haiti if I wanted to right now, and it's a Level 4 risk with the advisory not to go.

**EB:** So those who are listening to right now to the podcast, if you look at a map of Haiti, you'll see Haiti in a sense shaped similar to a horseshoe. So a lot of where you'll see some of the problem is kind of in the bottom, I won't say the bottom left of the horseshoe, but kind of before the bottom left starts to go where the capital is, Port-au-Prince. And that's where a lot of you would say challenges are. But where my family is on my dad's side, they're in a small island called [Zil] Lagonav. So it's in the middle of that horseshoe on that island. So there is, I can tell you, no gang violence, no craziness, no madness where my siblings are at. So if you look at flights to Haiti today, flights who have got there, it would have landed and they would fly back. Flights would go there tomorrow and the following day. Now there had a period where it went two or three months where no flights were going in or out of Haiti due to the civil unrest. So some days you go, there are gang members who are, you know, chiseling out concrete in the roads near the airport, and burning tires, you know, I'll say six, seven feet high, where now no traffic is passing through. And for some of these individuals, it's like, "How do I basically cause madness and harass every person coming in and out?" And for others of them, this is their livelihood where, "Hey, there's tourists who come here, there's rich business owners, there's citizens who have money. How do I strip them of their vehicles, of their house, of their funds to just find a way to make ends meet for me and my circle, or me and my crew?"

But I would say all of Haiti is not in that situation. Like my father-in-law, Judith's Dad, is in Haiti and he's in the south of Haiti, the southwest. And he hears of situations, but it's not as bad where he is. He wakes up, he goes to work every day, he owns like three or four hotels

on the water. People are still traveling to his hotel, spending their night there. One of his best friends has a construction company where people are still building houses and building roads and building businesses. So it's one of those hit or miss things. Though, yes, the U.S. government has it as a travel 4. So I, E.B., would not recommend flying in the Port-au-Prince unless you're flying there and then you're getting on one of those smaller propeller planes to like the north where there's, or the south where there's less issues or challenges. For those who are, I would say, desperate to go to Haiti. I have not been since 2015, and I am eager to go, but I am heeding the counsel of my father, and I'm just saying, "Hey, could we fly in the Port-au-Prince and just go to like the north or the south?" And his words were, "Absolutely not."

**ROB:** There's no where else to fly into. You've got to go through Port-au-Prince.

**EB:** Unless you have a private charter flight, I think you're one of the smaller ones. But as far as the main airport, that's the only place that you'll fly in. And then while you get into Port-au-Prince, you'll fly from there to one of the other airports from there.

**ROB:** And you said your parents didn't leave because of unrest or anything like that...

**EB:** No, so my mom left, essentially, because my dad said, "Hey, we're out." And my dad said he left because one of his cousins just said, "Hey, we're going to sea." Now, during that time, there was the, you know, Papa Doc and Baby Doc, for those of you who are familiar or unfamiliar with that. I would just encourage you to do some research. Basically, they had our president and the son of the president who, when they ran the country, when you ask certain people, some of them appreciate it with our government. And I say our government. What governments in the past would consider a law and order, and just didn't want things to, I guess, run in a sense of lawlessness at that time. That's how they managed it. But it was also full of corruption and greed and sometimes killing, essentially, people who had nothing to do with anything, like just burning down small villages and saying, "Now we as the government own this." So there are some people who were cool with it because it did get some of the gangs. But as you all know, where you go into certain places, as you're trying to stop a problem, sometimes the people who get hit in the - I guess - by a stray bullet, so to speak, figuratively speaking, or metaphorically speaking, they didn't have anything to do with what a few, a select few were doing. So it's good and bad, but they did not have any issues for them when they said, "Hey, we're leaving because our country is out of whack."

**JAN:** You know, I think we've talked about this before, E.B., the challenging history of Haiti, back from when the French, when they were colonized by the French all the way through to independence. And then, but also some of the issues with independence, like having to pay reparations to the French. The things that have happened economically that have caused Haiti to be a depressed economy. And then, politically, some levels of corruption, as we all have had in our government at different times, but what that's led to in Haiti. I wonder if you could just - I'm not looking for you to have to recite all of Haitian history, but what do you think are the high points that have led to where we are today, and why people would feel the need to be, to leave in a certain amount of desperation, to leave that island?

**EB:** Yeah, absolutely. So even, and I can speak because, you know, it doesn't matter now, they're good, they're here, but you're talking even in the past few years, I can go from 2016 to 2017 up until now, where almost every year, and maybe missing a year or two of maybe

2019 and 2020, but I can say 2016, 2017, 2018, I can confirm those. And then I'll say 2021, 22, 23, and even this year, 2024, where I've had family come from Haiti to the United States, where some of them, and I know we'll probably dive into that later naturally, because it's part of just our news cycle, but some of them right now are in Springfield, Ohio, and others of them are living here in Florida, some are in New York, some are in Delaware, just in that brief period.

Now I would want our listeners to just take a moment, think about for those of you who work, or those of you who are retired and you receive some form of money from the government, think about that amount of money, and say that you have to give up about 80%, roughly 80 to 85% of those resources to someone else. That would be very, very challenging for anyone to do. I don't care what economy you're in, what world you're in. So what essentially happened with Haiti is, as they fought for their freedom, shout out to Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, but they fought for their right to just be free, and the powers that be, France and other powers at the time forced them to give up 80% of their GDP back to France. And that lasted roughly, I want to say like 147, 148, some people say it was 150, some even say 155 year, but over almost a century and a half essentially, of paying up everything that you're essentially making, but still saying, "Hey, I want you to run a country on the best way that you can with what I'm leaving you," which essentially makes that entirely impossible. That's like America giving 80 to 85% of their GDP to Great Britain right now, or to the Queen, I don't know who, or the King, I guess now, but whoever, but it would just be wild to even think about. And for powers that I'll say, people like the US who consider themselves allies of Haiti, and you can put that in quotation marks, who allow this and say, "Well, that's okay."

And now part of that issue also stemmed from America at that time, you know, just getting free about 20, 25 years prior for their fight or whatnot. And then they sit there and hear about this small little island causing a revolution and making the France essentially flee. I'm like, how can this powerhouse of a country - this juggernaut - can't defeat just this small little his Hispaniola island. And of course, for those of you who love history, or even if you don't, them essentially destroying France and their army led to France having way less resources and way less men, which led to us as a country. And I'm saying us as in America expanding because that made it easier for us to acquire the Louisiana Purchase, which people don't think about those parts, which also you can go to the Battle of Savannah, where you'll find out that, you know, Haitians fought in that as well as they help what I would consider help the South out. And you just find moments - or help them, I guess the North and not allowing the South to do what they wanted to do - but you have moments where they help out. And then you have places, I want to say 1950 [1915], and it probably happened before that as well. But then America decided to occupy Haiti.

And then at various times throughout their history, and even sending in the UN. And we know how - for those of you who love history, you can look this up - but then had UN essentially raping and molesting and sex trafficking and bringing in guns and all types of corruption and greed with the government and with the people of Haiti. And now currently having Kenyan and Jamaican forces led by the UN, but a spearheaded by Canada and the US to just intervene in the matters of Haiti. Now, would EB say Haiti needs some form of intervention? Absolutely. I would say that. But I also feel that through history, it seems as though the country that I reside in, the country I pay taxes in, the country that I'm a citizen of, have felt the way to show face that they're helping. But also, as many would say, put

their knee on the neck of Haiti at the same time. And say, "I'll help you" as in "I'll hold your hand, and I'll pat you on your back, but I'll also not allow you to progress in any way." Because, and this is just me speaking, I have no facts in this. So I haven't said in any department of defense or internal security clearance meetings, I'm saying, "Hey, what's going to Intels?" But it's like, I think part of them is just some form of I would say notion of like, "Hey, what could happen if Haiti were to rise out of the ashes again?"

**JAN:** Yeah

**EB:** ...because of what their history have shown...

**JAN:** Yeah.

**EB:** ...and so I think there's a sense of just nervousness from the world as a whole, of just saying, "Hey, we don't want to see unity, though, that's what's on our flag, right?" Or it says, "In unity, there's strength," or "Strength in unity," where this is how we as a people feel that we have to operate. And so with continued intervention - intervention - from various countries, and many of these countries not having a clear cut plan outside of, "Hey, we'll just occupy it, and we'll see what happens," it causes a distrust in government on top of a corrupt government in Haiti, who helped or who enables these actions to happen.

**JAN:** Yeah.

**JIM:** The Haitian history is so vast and rich, you have necessarily been summary over it. And you've kind of clumped some things together. One bit of the Haitian history I want us to kind of declump and look a little bit closer, and that is the UN peacekeeping force that was there for a while. It was the it was called a stabilization force. That was a group of a whole bunch of different countries coming together. It wasn't one thing. I mean, you had a Brazilian army was part of the the armed part of it, the Sri Lankan army was part of that. And a lot of the atrocities you were naming could be targeted towards certain groups within that larger UN mission that was there. My sister-in-law's brother, or a better way to say it is my wife's brother's brother-in-law...

**JAN:** There you go.

**JIM:** ...was part of the UN peacekeeping mission there. He was a civilian, he spoke French, he was also a world traveler. He's from Newfoundland, where they speak Newfoundland, then he went to school in Quebec, he found work in Vietnam, he found work in Togo in West Africa, he found work in Benin in West Africa, and then he found work in Haiti. And if you're geographically astute, you'll notice I've just named French speaking places...

**EB:** Correct, you did.

**JIM:** ...because he spoke French. And he also, while in Vietnam, he picked up Vietnamese. So he was on the fifth floor of the UN building in 2010, when the earthquake hit...

**EB:** When the earthquake happened.

**JIM:** ...and he was working in information, and he worked as a translator, and he worked to help the UN interface with people in a more positive way. And so when the earthquake hits, and all the power is out, and people don't hear from him, they're just naturally assuming that he's out helping people as he would. And it wasn't until about a week later, when the government asked my brother-in-law, "Do you have dental records?" And then they were



able to identify his remains as part of this thing, when the when the whole place - the whole place - I forget how many hundreds of thousands of Haitians, a quarter of a million or so - the palace isn't there anymore. I mean, so many things were just devastated. There are always, in whatever group you look at, there are always individuals in that group. And we want to be careful always not to stigmatize a group, or praise a group, simply because of certain individuals. It's the individuals that kind of stand out in our way of looking past political rhetoric. But looking at EB, we get to see a little bit also of looking at Haiti, looking at immigrants through your family, looking at that. So it's from the inside out. It gives us, I think, a very clear picture. And I thank Jan and Rob for bringing the idea of let's talk to EB over this.

**JAN:** One of our goals - one of my goals, I would say for this podcast is it comes out of the fact that frequently we "other" people, you know, we make them something other than ourselves. And so my one of my goals is to share information with from what you from your perspective, EB, about Haiti and Haitians. And because I think we've had a gift in Florida of being exposed to Haitians, Haitian culture, the joy of the Haitian lives that we know. So I guess I would say the values of Haitians that both in this country - in Haiti and in this country, that people don't know, or would be totally unaware of. I'll just point to the fact that you have a strong family ethic that I've seen in you. And I've seen that in every Haitian I've ever met. Family is important. There's a strong work ethic. Just go ahead and talk to me a little bit about what would people not know that you would want them to know about Haitian culture?

**EB:** Yeah, absolutely, and you mentioned some of that, right? So you have a sense of, I would say, a relentless bond to just be one as much as possible. Most times I would say, right, wrong, or indifferent, you side with family. But there are times where you hold family accountable for their actions and the choices that they make. And that's why sometimes you even see that in currently in Haiti, like there's this group called Bwa Kale, which essentially is a group of community leaders and activists who is going after the gangs, who is saying, like, "Hey, yes, you brought in the Kenyan forces, but they're not going to help, and they're not helping. They also don't know these streets. They don't know these alleys. They don't know these back corners," where they have had gangs essentially flee towns and areas because communities have essentially just risen up and just say, "Hey, yes, like you're a fellow Haitian, but you're also terrorizing your people and we can't allow this." So you have community leaders saying, "Hey, how do we stop? Our kids are struggling to go to school. Hospitals are shut down. We can't pass through streets. We can't go shopping at markets or at flea markets to get food, to just make ends meet. People are burning down gardens or agriculture in towns that they have no business in." It's like, "How is this helping? Because you're upset or fed up with a corrupt government. Like that's not helping us as your fellow people who you say you're fighting for."

But you have that just that strong bond of family.

Then you also have just people who have a big, big heart who just love unconditionally. Like they don't have to know your story. They don't know how to know how you operate. They don't have to know your background. They don't have to know your faith belief. They just essentially love you for who you are, especially if they see you as a true and genuine person. Now, when they see that you have some where your actions or, I would say, your integrity, well, they might come off as mixed emotions to them. There might be some

hesitancy to love you or embrace you as many of them naturally would. And it just might have some things, some more questions that pop in their mind of like, "Hey, how do I strengthen this relationship with this individual?" But you don't necessarily see, I would say, a group of Haitians who just like, hey, I hate people just to hate people.

For those of you, especially those of you who might be listeners or people who travel to Florida, a lot of I would say I can say this. A lot of people of African descent who you see in hotels are likely of Haitian descent, specifically Haitian descent, because that's one of the either the very first job or like one of the only jobs that they feel that they are qualified for. But that also lends to who they are naturally of their hospitality. My father has been working in the hotel industry since the mid 90s and has been at the same consistent hotel since I was 97. Right? So he still works at the hotel today. And he's 71 years old, still pushing along because he chooses or he wants not to retire because he can't go back to Haiti as right now because of the civil unrest. And he said it would drive him crazy. And my siblings would just ask him to be a live-at-home babysitter...

**ROB:** Yeah.

**EB:** ...and he can't do that. And even just recently I was telling him to just, "Hey, come stay with us. We have rooms for you." "No."

You also have a sense of loyalty with these people, with Haitian people. I feel. I don't come across many. I'm not saying every Haitian person is loyal, but there are more times than not where if they say something, then you can for the most part count on it.

**ROB:** You know, we got to meet EJ not too long ago. He is a beautiful little boy. And I just wonder, what do you and Judith want EJ to know about his Haitian heritage? What do you want him to know about that?

**EB:** That's a good question. Most times I'm trying my best to speak to him in Creole only and Judith is speaking to him in English. And shout out to Maggie, the director at the school, or the daycare, that he goes to, but his teachers, both of them are Hispanics, well they're teaching him Spanish. So like for me, I'm like, "This man is about to be well-versed." So I want him to know essentially his roots, like, where we have a people who just love people where like whatever you do, just love people, like love God, love others, but have a deep sense of love for mankind as a whole. Being known that people will let you down, but that doesn't direct or decide how you move forward in life and the choices that you make. Life doesn't go your way all the time, but there are places and ways where you can carve or like our podcast here, where we're making our way, where you decide the way that you want to make and the imprint that you want to leave on this world. So, you know, I want him to be able to leave a legacy of his own, but when it comes to his Haitian roots to know that naturally you're a fighter, so don't give up. Naturally, you're a person who loves, so do your very best and we'll do our best for him to love God and love others, but we also know that we can't force that on him because that has to be something personal for him and something that he truly believes in and give people your word, you know, mean what you say and say what you mean at all times.

**JAN:** You know...

**EB:** Those would be some of the pillars that I definitely would want him to know outside of just the history of, you know, how great our cuisine is, and the history of how people

operate within our country and the ebbs and flows of the moments that were what many will consider great and grand and also just the challenging times of that led to corruption and greed and infiltration of governments, and be true to family in a sense, like, what that loyalty of course has everybody, but like you come from now you're a cousin and you have 30 to 32 quick ones right there just, you know, your uncle's kids, like love on your family and just know that family is important, you know, and I can be open and honest here of course, but just seeing even, you know, church members who would never necessarily interact with my family, not because they don't, it just they won't ever be in the same place most times, and then I have my drug dealers who are cousins and brothers who are at this [unintelligible] Salvation Army church, and they're all just having a great time together. If I would have just started introducing people and just introducing occupations alone, you know, how comfortable that might make people, but knowing that even when you don't always agree with lifestyles of people that you still love them, no matter what.

**JAN:** How did you react when you heard the former president make the disparaging comment about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio?

**EB:** Yeah, so it was, I would say two things with that. The first one is, because I did go back and have to watch it again just to confirm, like, so in the, I guess you could say in the debate, right, he said immigrants, but then he continued after the debate, definitely directly to the Haitian people in his verbiage and his words. So the first one, I can say I literally just chuckled, because you have to get to a place mentally where you, this is me, you have to get to a place mentally where you don't allow asinine buffoonery to dictate or decide how you respond or you to react in life. I tried my best to learn that early on, but you can't control the actions of other people, but you can control the way that you react to those. If I ever expect something articulate, something intellectually inclined, something of great value to come out of the mouth of the former president, then I would be essentially fooling myself. So the first thing I did was essentially just chuckle and laugh it off. Then it led me to a lot of frustration where I had people who I knew, whether it be via online or people who asked the question of, "Hey, is this true?"

**JAN:** Oh, geez.

**EB:** It's like, "How could you, as another individual who I thought was intellectually inclined, allow something like that to infiltrate your mind and not just do basic research?" It's like, "Hey, is this true or not?" And you could be able to easily fact check it. Even if you watch the debate, it was fact checked right on the spot where it's like, "Hey, there's no claims of this." And to be able to push that narrative and continue that narrative, I would say is probably the most asinine of it all, because it means that people are believing it and people are clinging on to just those words. But then it's also the fact that we live in a world of a lot of uninformed people. It's easy to connect to the base of a lot of uninformed people. It's like saying, "Hey, the sun came out today," and you're looking at the sun. And someone will tell you, "Well, how do you know that's the sun? How do you know it's not the moon during the day?" And that's essentially what you get from when the former president, well, that's essentially what I get when the former president speaks. So a chuckle and then just a gut feeling of like, "Oh no, people really believe this."

**JAN:** Yeah. He's trying to use the topic of immigration to his advantage. This is an example of it. And if we can dehumanize a group of people, it's easier to, number one, I heard we were sending the Haitians that are there back to Venezuela, which showed a little geographic

challenge. And then I heard Haiti referred to as "Haitia" at one point. And so I thought, okay, these are ignorant people.

**EB:** Never been there.

**JAN:** Yeah. One of the things I learned, I looked to you for understanding on, is the experience of being a black man in America. So in some ways, you're carrying this dual identity. Well, you carry multiple identities. So you're Haitian, you're black, you're a US citizen born here. You carry a lot of that with you. How do you maneuver that? And how do you keep from deep resentment for all that can go with all of those things?

**EB:** So, I would say it's definitely, like I know I mentioned earlier, as far as you can't control how other people react, but there's definitely deep resentment in the way our country is operating as a whole. And especially within this election with, I would say, with Trump and Vance, right, where their rhetoric becomes essentially law and facts for their base.

Like here in America, right, we have the Black Party Panther, and I would encourage anybody go just do a deep dive on the Black Panther Party, go do a deep dive on Fred, Fred Hampton and Huey P. Newton, just look at the things that they did. But the Black Panther Party is considered a terroristic organization by the US government, by the FBI. But the KKK, who we all are fully aware of in this world, and if you're not, I'll tell you, go do a deep dive on the Ku Klux Klan as well, and do a comparing contrast sheet, and tell me which one should be and should not be on the terrorist watch list for an American organization. They marched into Springfield recently.

**ROB:** Yeah.

**EB:** Post these comments. So as far as a resentment, like you are putting essentially lives at risk. Now, granted, they do that just about every time they talk.

**ROB:** Yeah.

**EB:** But you hit it on the head because I have, like, as I mentioned earlier, like have relatives who are there who work at a Dole factory in Springfield. Some of them are dealing with different lettuce heads on forklifts and [hikes?] and jacks, forklifts, jacks, and just putting it in trucks every day. So for those of you, if you get Dole fruit or Dole vegetables, it's likely coming - it's possible, not going to say likely - but the possibility it's coming from a factory in Springfield, and it's a likelihood that the person who touched it last before I got to the store that you pick it up from was a person of African descent, or in this case specifically, a Haitian individual who is here on temporary protected status. But you have, where these individuals are in a town where some of them are American born, right? Or they were born here just like me where they migrated there because that's where family went. They went there because, "Hey, there's jobs there and we can work in this country and we pay taxes just like everybody else in this country. And also because we're on TPS, so we're going to pay some of it."

Like, I'm just thinking of their kids who are there who's dealing with the school streets in college and high school, middle school, getting bullied by their peers, school shutting down for the day, stuff like that. But you're having parents who pay taxes, go to work every day, but they can't reap the benefits. Now I know there's a notion out there that Haitians who are on TPS can, "Hey, you can get \$25,000 for a house," or, "You can get food stamp,"

or, "You can get this." But some of them are literally saying, "What can I get? What is available to me?" Only to get there and find out, uh, there's actually nothing or there's actually very little, or there's actually, "Here's \$30 on a food stamp card because that's all we have for you specifically because we see you have a job or we see that your rent is only this and it's five or six people an ounce and you have to figure that out on your own."

Or you have some of them who are going to college and they can't receive financial aid because they're not a U.S. permanent resident, or they're not an American citizen. So, when people think like, "Oh, they're going to school for free," actually they're not. But they're still paying the same taxes that go into the same stuff of everybody else, but they don't reap the benefits of those things.

So as far as me feeling, how do I manage it? How do I maneuver in these times? It's getting to a place of realizing as a whole, this country was never meant for me. When the founding fathers and when it comes to a point where these individuals considered me as an individual two-third of a human being, when they told me I didn't have a right to vote, when they told me I'm good as an enslaved person. When they told me like, "Oh, well you're free but you're not really fully free because if you get locked up then you're back to being enslaved again," or, "Hey, we're going to actually have these slave patrols, then we're going to turn them into police officers, then we're going to have mass incarceration." Then you have somebody like me who, in my visor, I have one driver's license; in my wallet, I have another one. But for my sanity and for my sake, I know that if I ever get pulled over, I can never go into my wallet. So I can just pull down my visor and say, "Hey officer, do you want to grab my license, registration and car insurance, or do you want me to just hand this from here?" Because if I go on my back wallet or if I go on my glove department, then, likelihood, something may happen.

Like you just find the time, right? Last election it was, hey we're gonna, all the Mexicans, even though people were coming from Colombia, people were coming from Venezuela, people was coming from Brazil, people was coming from Chile, people were coming from all these places. But we're going to say, "The Mexicans, they're stealing all your jobs. Like because if I target one group" - you know, the average person, if I say, "Hey it's Mexicans, it's Colombians, it's Chileans, it's people from Venezuela," then it makes the average person become a critical thinker and think, "Hey where's this person from? What's their story? Let me get to know this person on an intentional basis." So now if I just say, "Haitians, then it's just, "All the black people you see in your town likely aren't there legally. So we're just going to monitor this or magnetize this as much as possible." And that's, as you mentioned earlier, that's just how essentially in this case, this is how Trump operates, where "I'm going to bash immigrants as a whole. But I'm going to put one face on it specifically, last time it was Mexicans, this time it's Haitians." So then you just start, when you say immigrants, people start to see everything in, I guess, in color for them. Just like, hey anything in color, anything that's moving, it's likely not meant to be here in Springfield.

And then in other cities who have influx of migrants in their cities as well, will think the same thing. Where it's like, "This is not just a Springfield problem, this is in my city problem as well." So I try my best to remind myself that it was never meant for me, though I have this deep resentment at our government at times. And so you get to a place where you just don't care. So I have to channel that resentment, channel that anger, channel that frustration into being an informed, law abiding citizen, and informing those who I interact with. And



those who may not view things the way that I view them, but then challenge them to be critical thinkers and not just choosing things because their leader told them that that's the best way to move, or that's the best way to go, or this is factual.

**ROB:** Do you have hope that that's going to make a difference?

**EB:** I have hope that it would possibly limit crazy remarks from people who are in my immediate community, mainly, and I'll say it, mainly, my church. Okay. Right now, and I can say this, because it's Jan and it's Rob and it's Jim, but in those who will listen to Making Our Way, but there's people right now who bash immigration, who have no idea that my wife has been going through immigration situation since 2002.

**ROB:** Yeah.

**EB:** And it's been going on since we've been married, definitely since 2019. And we're still in this cycle of, like, "Hey," and I would say I don't know her thoughts, but I will speak for her in this moment specifically. "I'm just trying to become a permanent resident, but started working in 2010 and I paid taxes every year from 2010 up until now. Went to college debt free," graduated with her degree in public health from USF, graduated from Rasmussen, put all of that out of pocket. Like, "Hey, I'm going to find a way to save funds to go to school because I know education is important to me." And then for those who have migrated to Springfield, literally, are only there because they heard of this influx of like, "There are jobs here." Like, "If you come here, you get your stuff together" - essentially they have people, of course, working on cases there - "you will find a job and you will get paid."

**JAN:** To that city's credit, they have worked very hard to try to bridge the gap, to try to bring together the resources that are necessary for the influx of people that are there. I watched the mayor interviewed on CNN. He was wonderful - Republican mayor, by the way. Republican governor - both of whom have spoken to this issue, talked about the challenges of an influx of people to a smaller community, but, also, all the positive things that are coming out of that experience. And it's been - I know there have been threats of violence that have followed Trump's words, and schools closed, which is appalling. On the other hand, there have been many citizens in that community that have come together. In fact, I just read an article today about, over the weekend, people were patronizing Haitian restaurants in an effort to show support. And so, I guess those are the little moments of hope. I don't have those moments of hope all that often. I do, when I talk to you, EB, I'm reminded of - I do - because the challenges of just getting to this country are so significant. And to want to be here, to be a productive member of society, to be in a community, are something that my family has no experience with. I came here as a white person many generations ago. I've never faced anything like what the current people who are currently immigrating to this country have faced. I don't. I can't - I can watch it. I can feel bad. I can vote. I can inform myself. And I suppose that's what I'm asking of our listeners today. Inform yourself. Listen to the witness of somebody whose family is from another place who has faced the challenges that we've never faced. Okay. I went to Ruthanna Kellner. So she's the daughter of, you know, commissioners, because she lived in Haiti for a time. And I said to her, "We're going to interview EB. What one question would you ask of him?" And took her—at first she didn't have any, and then she came back because she's distraught by what's happening right now. But she came back with this. "No one has encountered Haiti without being changed in some way. Why do you think, EB, that is true?"

**EB:** Oh, that's a good question. In a short - and I say short - in the best way, I think people who have either traveled to Haiti or have met a Haitian person, I think they will find a sense of a genuine human being who essentially cares about them without fault. Now, granted, there are some Haitians who are a little hard around the edges, as we all are at times. But I think naturally a person will just give - a Haitian person, or Haiti, just gives you the benefit of the doubt. But like you just land there, and you just look around, and the mountains are just there. The smell of the air is just slightly different, for whatever reasons. You walk into the airport, and there's small ensembles of bands of people just playing instruments in a cheerful way, just saying, "Welcome here. Welcome home," essentially. And I think people go there, and you sense that you're at home, even though you're in another place. They will do everything in their power to make sure that you are good. And I think most times, whenever you go to a place and you feel safe, you feel welcome, you feel loved, it just naturally feels like, "This was different. I need to be more like this in my everyday life," or, "I wish this was the way it was everywhere that I went." And then when you start to meet people -and I challenge everybody who's listening - maybe it's somebody who you've known for a while, who might be from a different place. Just hear their story. It might even be a fellow American who might not be from the city that you're in with that person. And you just learn different things about where they're from, their city, their town. And you'll learn so much through the experiences of other people. And I think when people travel to Haiti, I think that's some of the joys of it, because they start to hear, you know, even maybe a language barrier or just maybe just a gentle smile, but they sense something different about that person that they're interacting with or the group of people that they're interacting with. And they just say, "This moment was special, and this moment was different."

And sometimes think of the people that you've met at home and the joy that they bring to you. And like for me, I could just literally think of you three right now, of just being in your homes, having meals with you guys, having Christmas times together, where we're just like, "This is just good," and like, "I wish it can be more of this," or "I prefer this," or, "Other people could be this way." So that would be one of the things that I would say is just you meet genuine people who just have an unconditional love, and you feel safe and secure in their presence. And then just that natural, gentle smile just keeps people warm.

**JAN:** I can't thank you enough for doing this with us. I wish everybody could meet you personally.

*[Music begins]*

**JIM:** You have a podcast.

**JAN:** Not anymore.

**EB:** So, yeah, we cut the podcast. But if anybody want to connect with me, you definitely can connect with me on Instagram @ebrifil. So first initial, last name. If you want to catch me, or if you want to touch bases, or maybe something sparked an interest in your mind, then we can connect there.

**JIM:** We do offer transcripts of our podcast at [cheynemusic.com/podcast](http://cheynemusic.com/podcast). You'll find a transcript that we have done. So you can go there and find it. It'll be a PDF that you can click on the link directly, and expect a bunch of fan mail.

**JAN:** Oh yeah. Oh, of course you will.

**ROB:** Hey, we love you, man.

**EB:** Love you guys too.

**JAN:** Thank you.

**ROB:** Give our love to Judith and that beautiful little boy.

**EB:** I definitely will.

**ROB:** Yes.

**JAN:** All right. We set you free.

**EB:** Appreciate you guys.

**JAN:** Thank you.

**JIM:** Thank you.

**ROB:** Thanks for doing this.

*[Music ends]*

*Links:*

Reach EB through Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ebrifil/>

Making Our Way is also available at our website: <https://www.cheynemusic.com/podcast>

Transcripts of the show (like the one you're reading right now) are also there: <https://www.cheynemusic.com/transcripts>



EB, Jan, Rob, Judith, & EJ