

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

Season 2 - Episode 23

3/5/25

Dave, Bev, & Jane

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

This transcript of the podcast, Making Our Way is housed at
cheynemusic.com/podcast/transcripts.
©2025 by James Cheyne, all materials, unless otherwise noted.
All rights reserved.

Dave, Bev, & Janes

Season 2; Episode 23

3/5/2025

Hosts: Jan, Rob, Dee, & Jim.

Jan presents 3 people who have had a significant influence on her as she has been Making Her Way: David McMahan, Bev Minn, and Dr. Jane Goodall.

[Music]

JIM: Jan, you have an idea for us and I want to make sure that I get it right. So could you tell us what you'd like us to do?

JAN: Well, I've been thinking about how we make our way, and obviously that's the topic of our whole podcast, how each of us have important individuals in our lives who have influenced us and maybe directed us in our way. And I thought it would be a positive experience for us just to reflect each individually on the people who have influenced us along the way, and what that influence has been for us. And also maybe to encourage everybody else to reflect on their lives and the significant people who have helped to shape them and send them on their way.

JIM: Well since we were supposed to pick three, obviously I'm looking at the three most important people in my life right around this table. So having said that, I didn't pick any of you. That's like Desert Island discs. They're going to give you a Bible, the works of Shakespeare. Now what are you going to take to read? Okay. So parents, people around the table, now who are you going to pick for your three? Did you pick three?

JAN: I did pick three.

JIM: Okay.

[Music begins]

JAN: And in all fairness, I broke the first rule of not picking a parent. [laughing]

[Music]

JIM: Whose parent did you pick?

JAN: Well I picked David McMahan, Rob's dad. And I picked him because when I think back to one of the earliest influences of my life, there's Dave. Big guy, quiet guy, unless you got him talking about certain topics. It was never a secret where Dave McMahan stood on any important issue. And without a doubt, he stood for others. That's what I think about him. Dave was elected to the Michigan Education Association presidency in the 70s. And from that you might think that he was a political person. But the truth is that he did that out of integrity and wanting to work on certain issues. He was never a politician. From - when you

think about what that is. You know, sort of gearing your message in a - oh gosh, I'm not saying this well. He didn't change his message based on the circumstance. His message is always the same. And so the highest honor I can think of, or the way to describe him and how important he was, is that the Michigan Education Association named an award after him. They named the David McMahon Human Rights Award after the work of Dave. The award is given every year now to individuals or groups which distinguish themselves by courageously accepting the challenge of moral and ethical leadership in the field of human and civil rights. And when they named it after Dave, this is the way they described him. "Dave McMahon as a teacher-leader, a MEA member, and as MEA president acted on his beliefs and initiated policies that resulted in an organizational commitment to protecting and enhancing the human and civil rights of all MEA members."

That pretty much sums up what Dave was for me. He did that on behalf of the association and the people in the association, but it extended into all the personal decisions he made in life. And we've had a lot of fun in thinking about this over the years because one of my earliest memories of Dave is that he would not buy his gasoline from Shell Oil to the extent that if he's running out of gas and there's a Shell station, he's not going to stop there. And the reason was that he did not appreciate Shell Oil's policies in either the environment or human rights. And so he was not going to give his \$10 to Shell Oil. He made that connection for me, that connection between our personal actions and our ethics that we live with today as we're driving down the road. And there are gas stations at which we will not stop for gas, even when we're running out of gas. I learned that standing up for something like that can come at a cost and at the very least an inconvenience. And a lot of times people don't understand why you don't just stop for gas when you're running out of gas, if there's a station there. But his decision to pass Shell Oil is forever in my mind when I'm thinking about where I'm going to spend my money or where I'm going to do business because Dave taught me that it matters and Shell Oil may not feel it, but I feel it, and I know that where I give my money is an important decision in my life. So, my salute to Dave McMahon who continues to influence my life decisions and I'm grateful that I married somebody who follows in his footsteps. So there you go, Rob. Handing it off to you.

JIM: There's a principle you mentioned there that I'd like to highlight and that is: who are we against a corporation? And the important point is it's not what my money would do for them or against them. It's how it impacts me.

ROB: Right.

JIM: Someone will say, "Your money, yes or no, that's not going to hurt or help that company." That's not the point. The point is what does it do to me? Dave, we met him 63 years ago. He's always been in our life.

JAN: Yeah.

JIM: Wouldn't you say that for you, Rob?

JAN: It was an interesting thing when he passed away. He was 51 years old. It was the year we moved to Florida, and we walked into that service for him and it was packed with people, not just from The Salvation Army, but so far beyond that, that you got to see the influence. Well, both of somebody who dies in their prime, that's part of it, I know that, but his influence was changed the crowd in that room, ethnically, culturally, racially changed the

climate in that room. And it was a testament to the people who knew where he stood.

JIM: I remember when he became the president of the Michigan Education Association, so he's going to move to Lansing for that. And I remember Ken Rose, who was the Corps Sergeant Major doing announcements and he announced that from the pulpit. And I remember the teachers were on strike. And I remember Ken Rose saying, "Well, maybe you can do something" - addressing your dad directly - "maybe you could do something about and getting those teachers back in the classroom." And I remember your father's perfect response: that smile. That's all he did. He just smiled. *[laughter]* The other thing I remember also is in our services, if there was something particularly striking he would give an "amen."

ROB: Yeah, he was an "amen"-er.

JIM: Now we're up there for the service. I don't think it was in the service, but I was sitting nearby you and something was going on. And Rob took over that voice and said that at a certain point.

[Music]

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, the Colorado State University Fight Song. Fight on you stalwart Ram Team.

JAN: Okay. My next person is Bev Minn. And Bev Minn was my roommate in college when Rob and I went out to Colorado State. And it was our first time away from home at school. There's a story for how I ended up at Colorado State for a year and a half, but that's not for here. I was put in a room. I was roomed with Bev Minn. Bev and I come from entirely different backgrounds. We're different culturally, racially, religiously, pretty much in every way. She's my Asian friend as I would - she was my maid of honor in our wedding. When you live with someone who comes from a different background and sometimes a different worldview, you question some of your assumptions, perhaps for the first time, about how the world works. And we kind of all, I think, are mentioned, well, in the course of this conversation, mention people who caused us to step back a little bit from what we thought and maybe our world becomes bigger because of this person.

Bev is also the most disciplined person I've ever known. She makes her list at the beginning of the day of what she's going to accomplish, and Hell or high water will not keep her from doing that, or A Trip to Disney World, or whatever may come up, she's going to complete what's on her list. What she modeled for me was independence. She thought for herself. She never let the opinions of others or what they thought of her impact what she was going to do. She was also the friend who asked me questions. If I had an opinion about something or thought something was a certain way, she might look at me like I have three heads, like, "Why in the world do you think of it like that?" She would ask me, "Why?" And I had to be ready for the follow-up, sort of like we've done in one of our podcasts. What's the next question? Why do you see it that way? So it helped me to think more critically.

Bev is a lifelong learner. I gravitate toward lifelong learners, I recognize that. She taught me how much I was bound by my Western worldview because that was not her worldview. She made me smarter, she made me think better, and she made me see the world in a bigger way. She also made me laugh because she could laugh at herself. She thought Rob was funny when she got his jokes. Frequently, she did not get Rob's jokes, which was all the funnier.

ROB: I think I'm probably one of her greatest influences in her life. I'm pretty sure.

JAN: I'm sure that's it. I think the most important thing was she helped me learn to stand alone in a room full of people who might see the world differently. I can stand on, assuming that I've thought through something well, I can stand on my conclusions and not be swayed in a mass opinion way. She's one of the best people that I know, and we're still in touch. And I have great admiration for the life she's lived, and I will always be grateful that we were put in a room together.

JIM: She ended up in Alaska for a time, and you visited her in Sitka, right?

JAN: Yes.

JIM: And she and her husband, how did they make their living there?

JAN: Originally, well, originally they both worked for the federal government and wildlife management, but eventually they went into business for themselves. And so they had a wildlife and fishing charter in Sitka that mostly served the people who stopped there on cruises or who traveled through Sitka. And so we got to experience her life, which was on an island in Sitka Sound, again, very different life than what I had, very nature oriented.

ROB: I always remember, Bev, when you would say something, express an opinion or a thought or something like that, she'd always, she would look up to the right or to the left and just kind of blink her eyes like she was thinking, "Okay, let me process that." She did that a lot. She wasn't immediately, "Okay, yeah, yes or no." It was like, "I'll think about that."

JAN: Always. To this day. It's one of the reasons I'd like to FaceTime with her, because I want to see those reactions.

ROB: It's not a great reaction when you're trying to tell, say something funny when she does that. It's like, "Okay, Bevie, never mind."

[Laughter]

JIM: Where is she now?

JAN: They are in Bandon...

ROB: Bandon.

JAN: ...Bandon, Oregon, which is right on the coast. It's absolutely beautiful.

DEE: That's where you can go down to the beach and they do designs.

JAN: The circles in the sand, yeah. And they actually, where she lives now, they worry about tectonic events. They just recently were worried about a tsunami because of an earthquake, and so they had to evacuate and they have a whole system for that. She can pretty much see the ocean from her house, close.

ROB: Close, yeah.

JAN: In the same way that Dave wouldn't have shopped at Shell. She thinks through the impact of her decisions and the impact on the planet. They built their house with that in mind. Everything they do considers their impact on the planet and puts me to shame when I

think I'm like that. That is her life ethic.

ROB: They have another complete home lot that Kent, her husband, has turned into a farm and they raise their own vegetables and then he fishes a lot. A lot of, you know, they're self-sustaining in terms of what they do.

DEE: Well, they did that in Alaska, right?

ROB: They did that in Alaska, right.

DEE: So it kind of comes naturally.

JAN: Yes.

ROB: Yes. And they hunt in the winter in Canada. They go to Canada.

DEE: Oh, okay.

ROB: And, yeah, it's just a different kind of lifestyle but it's, like Jan said, they're very conscious of their effect on the planet.

JANE GOODALL: *My mission was to get close to the chimpanzees, to live among them, to be accepted. I wanted to come as close to talking to animals as I could, to be like Dr. Doolittle. I wanted to move among them without fear, like Tarzan.*

JAN: I don't know when my interest in the environment and animals and the connections of all those things - my love of it all - came from. I don't remember that. I do know that Jane Goodall impacted it. She just won the, she was just awarded, I'm sorry, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She's amazing because she studied with really not all the formal education that a person would normally have to be in her position. But she studied through observation of chimpanzees, individual chimpanzees. Like she looked at them as individual creatures, and her study changed the way we see animals today. That she lessened the distance between humans and everything else. And she did that by recognizing that chimpanzees used tools. They would use a twig to be able to get termites out of their nest that they could then consume. And the belief prior to her observations was that humans were the only ones that used tools. So it was a revolutionary discovery. Again, she got to know the chimpanzees as individual beings. And that was foundational for me in how I view animals.

You know, we have a dog in our life. We currently have Skye. Our previous dog was Juno. When Juno died, there's a quick question people ask of, "Well, when are you going to get another dog?" And for me, you know, it wasn't just an exchange. Juno was an individual being. Skye is an individual being and I'm not replacing Juno with Skye. It's a new experience. It's a new animal. That's something I think I gained from Jane Goodall, that individual approach to animals. She connects so much the environment, animal advocacy, ethical treatment of animals. And she challenged - I actually wrote this down because I like - she challenged human exceptionalism. We are not so unique as we think we are.

There's a quote. I'll just leave it at that. "What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." So all the people I've chosen kind of fall into that headline. You can make a difference. You will make a difference. What do you want that to look like? And be conscious of that. So Jane Goodall's always been just one of those

people I look to, to just quietly say, "This is" - and she is, she's a soft-spoken woman - "this is what I believe. This is why I believe it." Oh, "This is why I don't eat animals." That was an important one for me. You know, all these things kind of come together because that decision for me became an ethical one. So Jane Goodall, and that's a shout out to my niece, Karie, who also holds Jane in very high regard and who acquired for me at one point a book by her with her autograph in it that is always on display on my house. So that's my last person.

JIM: I think the thing with the tools is it's not only that they would stick a twig into a hole to get termites out, but they'd also shape the stick.

JAN: Yes.

JIM: They would trim the stick. So it's a creation of something. I think another one also wasn't it, it was a chimpanzee that would take a leaf of some tree, chew it up to make it more absorbent, and then put it into like a puddle where there was water. So it's not just like a spoon, but it would be like a sponge. They would create that out of that leaf, which is a big difference, a big difference.

Our dogs are right around us right now. What are they thinking? Well, we can project, but what are they really thinking? A chimpanzee has self-awareness. There's a test for it because it's just been discovered that the baboons do not have the same self-awareness. Orangutans do. The...

ROB: Elephants do.

JIM: Well, in the primates I'm thinking of the...

DEE: They have memory, really good memories.

JIM: Yeah, but like with a baboon, if you put a mirror in front of some animals, how do they respond to that? Is it another being or is it them? And how would you tell? How can you get inside? With the baboons, they did this. They would shine on the baboon a laser light on its head. And if you would shine that on their arm, they would see it, not through the mirror, but just on their arm, and they would try to grab at it. "What is that light? What is that light?" But when it's on their head, where they can't see that it's on their head, but they can in the reflection, a chimpanzee will go for the spot on its head of where its reflection is. The chimpanzee is aware that that reflection is her, or him. A baboon will not do that. A baboon does not react that way of, "Oh, that's me in the reflection," which I thought is very important to note that sort of thing.

ROB: She was a real advocate, one of the first really that would say that conserving the environment for the animals was as important for human beings as it was for the animal, to link those. I mean, that was a big part of her message and still is to this day.

JAN: She's huge.

ROB: Yeah.

JAN: Her impact still to this day, she does Roots and Shoots...

[Music begins]

JAN: ...which is a program for children and still teaching, still speaking, still acting.

JIM (voice-over): Here then are three from Jan: David McMahon, Beth Minn, and Dr. Jane Goodall. I wonder, who has greatly influenced your life? And are they still available to receive a note, a letter, a phone call? Think on how meaningful such a gesture would be.

Until next time.

[Music ends]