

Shmanners 190: Gingerbread

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Travis: [in a silly voice] Pod, pod, as fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the podcaster man!

Teresa: It's Shmanners.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners!

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: I'm so pregnant.

Travis: Very pregnant! I wasn't gonna say anything, but... you're pregnant.

Teresa: So pregnant.

Travis: Sooo pregnant! What do you think is the most pregnant thing about you? Is it the baby in your stomach?

Teresa: Uh, it's the baby in my belly.

Travis: Yeah. Hey, so last night, Teresa and I, we were falling asleep, so very peacefully.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And uh, I... and she said, "I don't really sleep well, 'cause I'm so pregnant." And I said, "Well, how about for tonight, I'll put the baby in my tummy?" And she said, "You couldn't handle it."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And here's the thing... she's never been more right. 'Cause then I started thinking about, if I suddenly have a 35 week old, like, fetus in my stomach, a-wigglin' around, I would freak out so bad!

Teresa: Yep. You totally would.

Travis: But that's not what we're talking about.

Teresa: And then she got the hiccups.

Travis: The baby.

Teresa: The baby.

Travis: That's weird.

Teresa: And I stayed awake for another hour.

Travis: 'Scuse me, hold on, my dog is nesting into my clean clothes. Hey! Stop it!

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Okay, we're fine now. So, we're not talking about any of those things.

Teresa: No, not today.

Travis: What are we talking about?

Teresa: We're talking about gingerbread houses, specifically.

Travis: Now, I'm so curious. 'Cause this is yours and Alex's dark machinations all explaining. What does... does gingerbread have, like... socio—like, etiquette implica—

Teresa: Yes. Yes.

Travis: What?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay. But let's not start with that.

Teresa: Well, let's start with the fact that I don't really like gingerbread.
[laughs]

Travis: Well, here's the thing. Okay. This is what I've realized over my many, many years. All 25 of my years on earth.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And also a lot of Great British Bake-Off. Is that, when we talk about gingerbread, that there's really, like... I mean, we're talking about cookies. Two different kinds. But like, a third kind. There's like, bread, right? There's gingerbread bread.

Teresa: Yeah, totally. Mm-hmm.

Travis: And—but if we're talking about gingerbread cookies, there's like, the hard, like... hard to eat gingerbread that you would use to like, build

things, or for decorative gingerbread, y'know, people. Or, there's like a soft gingerbread that rules.

Teresa: And as—if we're talking about Great British Bake-Off, what we're talking about is, they are constantly trying to find that perfect balance between the bread—the gingerbread that is architecturally sound, and still tastes good. Because it is very hard to find.

Travis: Yes, and still—and still edible. That's the thing is, I'm not gonna knock it.

Teresa: Well, ehh, technically it's edible.

Travis: Edible, yes. Uh, what's an easier—chewable?

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Um...

Teresa: Swallowable.

Travis: Yes. And here's the thing. Oh... I hope we don't get any angry tweets about people who just love gingerbread. Give me a molasses cookie any day.

Teresa: Amen. Amen. Love that molasses.

Travis: But, so... but—and it's weird to me that you don't like it, 'cause you usually like—you like, like, ginger candy. You like ginger things. And I don't.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But I like ginger—I like soft gingerbread.

Teresa: I like molasses cookies better.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. So, here's the thing, right? We associate gingerbread, especially gingerbread houses, which I will get to later, with Christmas.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: But the thing is, like, gingerbread is waaay older than Christmas.

Travis: Is that why it's so hard?

Teresa: [laughs] There are gingerbread recipes in ancient Greece that date back to 2500 BCE.

Travis: Wow, really?

Teresa: Yes. In fact, in the remains of ancient Egypt, forms of gingerbread known as honey cakes were found along with references to spiced bread that dated all the way back to 1500 BCE.

Travis: Okay, but they weren't like, doing gingerbread houses, right?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: No. But these cookies, uh, these honey cakes, were "a gift from the gods," and held the power to banish demons, heal ailments, and give life to those who had passed. Probably not, right?

Travis: Okay. Once again, hey, this is another shout out to Sawbones. It didn't. And that seems—

Teresa: It didn't, and they should've known right away.

Travis: That seems easily testable.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: “Hey, have you noticed how we've given gingerbread to a lot of dead folks, and none of them have come back?” The only thing I can think is that somebody fainted, and somebody like, put some gingerbread in their mouth, they woke up like, “Why is there gingerbread in my mouth?” And they're like, “I did it! I saved you!”

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, but ginger, specifically ginger, probably wasn't incorporated into these honey cakes until around the 10th century. Uh, because, ginger was cultivated mainly by the ancient Chinese and Indonesian peoples. But again, it was used very similarly, baked into cookies and used as medicine.

Travis: Oh, okay. See, that doesn't surprise me, 'cause ginger has a very powerful... I don't want to say medicinal, 'cause I think that that is like, a bad sounding word. I don't mean like, y'know, I don't mean like acidic or bitter or anything like that. But it feels like it's something, y'know?

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah. I can see that. Um, and then, uh, this is about the time where we start working on trade routes. Um, and y'know, the silk road, and things like that. So, ginger as medicine, and these cookies that carried the medicine, spread very quickly.

Um, but like I said, this wasn't dessert. It wasn't like, a Christmas, like, thing that you would recognize now. Um, it was, y'know... [sighs] At some points, used to like, ward off plague or whatever.

Travis: Okay, but once again, no it wasn't. [laughs]

Teresa: No, it wasn't.

Travis: I mean, it might—they might've attempted to do that, yeah.

Teresa: Right. Um, okay. So, when we start to think about gingerbread the way that we see it, it's not really until it hit Europe, and um, really until after

the Crusades. Um, because... so, it was billed mostly as a German delicacy. And any soldiers who were lucky enough to return from the Crusades brought with them the ginger that they had acquired in the middle eastern areas.

Here's the thing, though – they weren't shaped like people for a long time, either.

Travis: What were they shaped—just cookie shaped?

Teresa: They were, uh... sometimes flowers or birds, or just general kind of shaped.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I mean, not just like, round, dollopy cookies. They were made prettier than that. But like, people shaped didn't happen until, um, the... let's see, until... okay. So there are a couple of different ways that it happened.

Travis: Okay. 'Cause here's—before we get to it, I want to say, before this very moment, I've never thought of it before. But the fact that you keep saying the phrase 'people shaped' makes me think about how very weird it is that we're like, "Hey, here's this cookie. Bite its head off."

Teresa: [laughs] Okay. Uh, well, so, they were started to be people shaped once they were first crafted in the Belgian city of Dinant, and then adopted and modified by the people of Acton, Germany.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And then, even further, they were refined into more better people. I mean, like...

Travis: With ripped abs, and huge pecs.

Teresa: [laughs] In uh, in Franconian convents. These places were the first to actually like, serve them as cookies, as dessert, and called them pepper

cakes, because for a while, people just couldn't be bothered with talking about different spices, and they were all called pepper. [laughs] I think that's funny.

Travis: Oh, okay! Cool cool. So they were just like, spicy cakes, and so they were just like, "Ehh, I don't know, pepper."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and then, once it moved into the French Christians kind of circle, this is when they started to be used in like, religious ceremonies, and they were... they were made to look like saints, right?

Travis: Oh! Okay.

Teresa: So this is—that's people-y, right?

Travis: Yeah, that's people-y. I get—yeah. But once again, I will say... and listen. No knock to it. But it seems even weirder to me when it's like... and now they look like *specific* people. [laughing]

Teresa: Specific people.

Travis: And eat 'em. Right? Not only is this a generic person cookie, this is Fred. Eat Fred. You know Fred? Eat him.

Teresa: The saint. Saint Fred?

Travis: I don't know. You're the Catholic one, not me.

Teresa: I don't know. No. Mm-mm.

Travis: You don't know? There was no Saint Fred?

Teresa: Maybe? Listen. I don't want to get in trouble. I'm not a very good Catholic.

Travis: You—you were a Catholic. I'll put it there.

Teresa: I was raised as a Catholic.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay, anyway. Um, so, like everything awesome, finally, it made it to England, and they were like, "This is so great! This is ours now!"

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And instead of that, of uh, whatever like, pepper cakes, honey cakes, all this stuff, they were often found as kind of like, craft fairs. Y'know? So like, y'know, next to the person who does wood carvings, there'd be a stall for gingerbread shaped like birds or whatever, I guess.

Travis: Okay. Yeah, that tracks for me.

Teresa: Um, and they were called fairings, because they were found at the fair. Again, like, when did we get so lazy, right? We couldn't be bothered to call them ginger cookies, or ginger cakes, because...

Travis: People didn't know what ginger was.

Teresa: Everything spicy was pepper. And now, like, they can't even be called, like, I don't know, like... German pepper cakes. They're now called fairings.

Travis: I—okay. To be fair. Ahh.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I think fairings is a more interesting name than German pepper cakes.

Teresa: But at least it—at least German pepper cakes is accurate.

Travis: Yeah, but I don't need everything described to me that way! I'm fine with a little flare on it! That's fine to me, y'know what I mean? You could call it a dumpling. You could have to call it pale bread surrounding meat. That's fine.

Teresa: Alright. Aalright.

Travis: Y'know what's interesting? My brain has no problem with you saying that they were sold next to crafting, 'cause we literally bought our gingerbread, like—we built a gingerbread village. Well, we built three quarters of a gingerbread village.

Teresa: [laughs] One of the villagers was drunk making theirs.

Travis: Yeah, that house, uh... it had a rough winter.

Teresa: Fell down.

Travis: Too much snow on the roof collapsed it. But we bought it at a craft store. And then Bebe was like, "Can I eat it?" And we're like, "No!"

Teresa: We'll get to that.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Save that thought.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Alright. Here it is.

Travis: Here what is?

Teresa: Like I said, everything awesome, the English basically conquered and took for themselves. So, the person who's really credited—

Travis: And listen, before anybody says anything, we learned it from watching you, Dad. USA does it too. Don't worry about it. We learned it from you, England. It's fine.

Teresa: Don't worry about it. Um, and Queen Elizabeth the first commissioned gingerbread peoples to be made, uh, and gilded for visiting dignitaries, and suddenly, everyone was like, "That's cool."

Travis: I remember that from a really early Great British Bake-Off.

Teresa: Oh yeah?

Travis: Right? Where that—that was when they still did the little like, Mel and Sue going off into the world to learn about making the thing.

Teresa: I think that they might still have that part in... in the UK.

Travis: It just doesn't air on Netflix?

Teresa: It just doesn't air in America.

Travis: Huh. Okay. I like that part.

Teresa: I did too.

Travis: Well, we're big nerds.

Teresa: We are. Alright, so, then, everybody was like, "This is great! Let's do this! We can make it look like people. It's so cool." Uh, so, then they became used, uh, by folk medicine practitioners – ahem, maybe they were

called witches at the time – uh, would create them as love tokens for young women.

Travis: Oh, that's cute.

Teresa: The idea being that if you could get the man you were interested in to eat the gingerbread in your likeness, he would fall in love with you.

Travis: Oh boy, that's a big ask, isn't it? Is that—"Hey, Todd. Who's this cookie look like? That's right, yours truly! Eat my cookie, Todd."

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: "Uh, I don't really want to eat this, Deb. It has your face on it."
[laughs] "Eat it."

Teresa: Okay, so let's—let's do a little, uh, a little looksee at the house thing.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. Um, so, the first mentions in print of a gingerbread house are from Hansel and Gretel by the Brothers Grimm.

Travis: Yes, okay. Uh-huh.

Teresa: Uh, the story was popular throughout Germany and Europe, and the idea of a witch living in a gingerbread house to lure children... I mean, pretty crafty, right?

Travis: I mean, I guess. But think of the upkeep! What if it rains?

Teresa: What if it rains?

Travis: The bugs!

Teresa: And so, when the first—when the story first, like, was written down, it was based on the great German famine of the 1300s, where basically, uh, there was no food.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, children were turned out of their parents homes to go fend for themselves.

Travis: Aw, bummer!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: `Cause a lot of people don't remember – that's how Hansel and Gretel, the story, starts. Is the... in some versions, it's like a stepmother and their father, but like, their parents kick these two kids out.

Teresa: We can't feed ya. Get out. Y'know?

Travis: But it—I—oh, I was about to... I know, in the versions I know, but I also know the Brothers Grimm were pretty grim.

Teresa: Pretty grim.

Travis: In the version I know, they end up living in this house made of cookies and candy, so they have plenty of food. Not a lot of vegetables, though.

Teresa: Hmm, well... sugar is calories.

Travis: I mean, I guess. Not vitamins.

Teresa: Well, no. Uh, let's assume that they also...

Travis: Foraged.

Teresa: Foraged. [laughs] Anyway. This story wasn't actually published until 1812.

Travis: Oh, really?

Teresa: Right? But it was really around as kind of like, folklore for a very long time. So which came first? The story, or the house?

Travis: Or the house or the story?

Teresa: The chicken or the egg? Y'know?

Travis: There's a chicken in Hansel and Gretel?

Teresa: No.

Travis: I think you're thinking of the Baba Yaga.

Teresa: Anyway. So, did the story create gingerbread houses? Or, were gingerbread houses already a thing, and the Brothers Grimm were like, "Let's just use that."

Travis: Okay, my two cents? Just based off of nothing but my own deductive reasoning? I have found that anytime we get any kind of doll figurine toy for Bebe, immediately, she wants somewhere to put it. A doll high chair. A doll house. A doll car. Right?

Teresa: A doll bed.

Travis: If you're making gingerbread people, I guarantee it is not—there was not just one person who thought, "[gasp] A thing to put them in!" Like, there were probably lots of—especially if we're talking about them being used in like, Christian services. There were probably gingerbread nativities, right? Gingerbread crèches?

Teresa: Sure. Um, so then, this is how...

Travis: We do it.

Teresa: [laughs] ... it really started being associated with the Christmas holiday. Um, during what we have come, Alex and I, to call the great Christian rebrand.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: She came up with it. I loved it. I love it so much.

Travis: So now you're rebranding it as your own.

Teresa: I'm rebranding it. [laughs] No, I'm not rebranding.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I am continuing her quest.

Travis: Okay, yes.

Teresa: Anyway. Um, and it was, y'know, German in nature. It was popularized by Prince Albert. Y'know, part of the whole—

Travis: Oh yeah.

Teresa: Of course. Of course, right?

Travis: That big—the big Victorian Christmas amalgamation that is Albert and Victorian ideas, and Dickens, and...

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Absolutely. Um, but... technically, it took off a little better in the United States, then the Colonies, than it did in, uh, in England. Where it was just kind of relegated to Christmastime, to the celebration, where the Colonists were like, "Hey, this gingerbread stuff. Everybody likes it all year round." In fact, the cookies were used to incentivize elections.

Travis: Huh.

Teresa: Y'know, vote for me! I'll give you a cookie!

Travis: Y'know what's weird? Y'know what's weird, Teresa?

Teresa: What's weird?

Travis: You were saying all that, and I thought, "That's so strange." But then I think, the cookie ginger snap I've had all year round, and I never think twice about that. But if someone in say, mm, June, said, "Do you want a gingerbread man?" I'd be like, "How old is that? Gross! What's wrong with you?"

Teresa: [laughs] Um, and George Washington's mother is said to have served a version of gingerbread to the Marquis de Lafayette when he visited her in Fredericksburg.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Um, and—

Travis: And he rapped a great thank you.

Teresa: [laughs] And... the treat was so popular that a whole architecture movement was taken from it.

Travis: I'm not surprised by that. You see lots of houses here in Cincinnati specifically where they have gingerbread house-esque kind of, uh, design.

Teresa: Right. These are carved, white architectural details on Colonial American, particularly seaside homes. And yeah, it's called gingerbread work.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Pretty cool.

Travis: Well, let's talk about more gingerbread stuff, but first... a thank you note for our sponsor.

[theme music plays]

Teresa: This week's Shmatters is sponsored in part by Mod Cloth. At Mod Cloth, they design vintage-inspired apparel made relevant for right now. It's crafted by a team of in-house designers, and its signature styles include bright, hand-drawn prints, and an inclusive size range. So you can find quality pieces that are versatile enough to wear to work, or on the weekend.

I actually have several Mod Cloth pieces in my closet. I do enjoy. They've—I have explored the "vintage inspired" tab a lot, and I really like how it's not just all the same pattern. I mean like, the same design of dresses. That's what I usually look at. It's not all the same design and just different prints, because they actually are inspired by a bunch of different decades. I've got some really great knitwear kind of inspired dresses, from the late—from the early '70s looking. I've got some really nice kind of sculpted dresses. Day dresses. Like, I really enjoy just going and like, favoriting everything.

[laughs]

So, um, what we have for our listeners today is um, an offer that is really only valid for a very limited time, so you do need to hurry. It's 15% off your purchase of \$100 or more. So, go to [ModCloth.com](https://www.modcloth.com) and enter the code 'Shmatters' at check out. One more. That's [ModCloth.com](https://www.modcloth.com) with code 'Shmatters' at check out for 15% off your purchase of \$100 or more for a very limited time.

Travis: You know when you were a kid, and like, the running gag on any kind of kid's programming about Christmas and bad gifts was always, "Aww, socks!" Right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But now you're an adult. And you know what you never buy for yourself?

Teresa: Socks.

Travis: Socks! You never think about it until suddenly, you're looking in your drawer and you're like, "I hate all of these."

Teresa: Or like, your toes pop out of them at the end.

Travis: Right! And all the elastic is all stretched out. Or just, they're just not doing anything for you. Right? If you're looking for a present for... let's say an adult. Maybe a kid who's got their head screwed on straight. Well, you might want to think about Bombas socks.

Because here's the thing – not only are socks great in general... now, as a discerning adult, I can also tell the difference between like, run of the mill bad socks, and like, super high quality awesome socks like Bombas. Because Bombas has extra cushioning, arch support, and no toe seam. They're designed to be comfortable for all your activities, so no matter whether you're walking the dog, or chilling at home, or playing drums, or saving the world... you'll be comfortable.

Uh, and isn't it important to be comfortable when you're saving the world? Nothing worse than blisters while you're saving the world.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: They even have a line of merino wool socks that are soft, warm, and naturally moisture-wicking, never itchy or rough. And did you know that socks are the number one most requested item in homeless shelters?

Bombas socks were created to change that. For every pair you buy, Bombas donates a pair to someone in need.

So, go to Bombas.com/Shmanners today and get 20% off your first purchase. That's Bombas.com/Shmanners. Bombas.com/Shmanners.

[music plays]

Lisa: Hey, if you like your podcasts to be focused and well-researched, and your podcast hosts to be uncharismatic, unhorny strangers who have no interest in horses, then this is not the podcast for you.

Emily: Man, what's your deal?

Lisa: [laughs]

Emily: I'm Emily.

Lisa: I'm Lisa.

Emily: Our show's called Baby Geniuses.

Lisa: And its hosts are horny, adult idiots. We discover weird Wikipedia pages every episode.

Emily: We discuss institutional misogyny.

Lisa: We ask each other the dumbest questions, and our listeners won't stop sending us pictures of their butts.

Emily: We haven't asked them to stop, but they also aren't stopping.

Lisa: Join us on Baby Geniuses...

Emily: Every other week...

Lisa: On MaximumFun.org.

[music plays]

April: Hi, it's me, April Wolfe, the host of Switchblade Sisters and co-writer of the new horror film, Black Christmas.

Katie: And I'm Katie Walsh, film critic and occasional host of Switchblade Sisters.

April: We're here to announce that, for one episode, we will be doing something a little different. Much like Jeff Goldblum in David Cronenberg's The Fly, I will be going through a truly disturbing transformation.

Katie: April will transform from the interviewer into the interviewee. I will be asking her all about her new film, Black Christmas, her writing process, and ongoing existential dread.

April: But I will also be discussing John Carpenter's perfect masterpiece, Prince of Darkness.

Speaker 1: You guys seen any movies you like?

Katie: So tune into Switchblade Sisters for a one of a kind episode with April Wolfe, and me, Katie Walsh.

April: See you then!

Speaker 2: Only the corrupt are listened to, now.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: So we've got houses.

Teresa: We've got... we have got the titular house of gingerbread.

Travis: The gingerbread house. The gingerbread person. Maybe even a gingerbread reindeer.

Teresa: Hmm, perhaps. So...

Travis: So...

Teresa: So today... millions of gingerbread houses are made each year.

Travis: Yeah, there's gotta be like, competitions and stuff, right?

Teresa: Absolutely there are competitions! The Guinness Book of World Records says that the world's largest gingerbread house spanned nearly 40,000 cubic feet.

Travis: Huh.

Teresa: It was created at Traditions Golf Club in Bryan, Texas. And I gave you a little eye, because everything's bigger in Texas.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Uh, the house was so large, it required its own building permit.

Travis: Huh.

Teresa: And it was built much like a traditional house, where the bricks are made out of gingerbread. [laughs]

Travis: Oh, I see. So it wasn't just like, single pieces.

Teresa: No.

Travis: It was made *of* gingerbread, but they were bricks.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Four thousand gingerbread bricks.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Oh man. Uh, and... [laughing] Alex has gone so far to tell us that that requires 1,800 pounds of butter, and 67 pounds of ginger.

Travis: Huh. Y'know, I know this isn't the point of that, but what a waste of food.

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: Ugh.

Teresa: Anyway. So, okay. Here's the thing.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: You probably shouldn't eat that gingerbread house, right? 'Cause it's being displayed, and like, people are walking through it. And it's more... I mean, walking through it. People—it's more of a decoration than a food stuff, of course, right? But that's the question. To eat, or not to eat?

Travis: I mean, no—no. Right? No. Ye—no.

Teresa: There are some circumstances where I would say, dig in. Because gingerbread... can be delicious, if you like that. The candy that you cover a gingerbread house with is definitely delicious. But the thing is, you really need to find out its origins, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So the kit that we bought at a craft store.

Travis: Who knows how long...

Teresa: Exactly. Who knows how long? And who knows who's touched it? And where did, like—and that weird frosting that didn't really work. What's in that?

Travis: Well, it worked three out of four times.

Teresa: Okay. Still.

Travis: Yes. I think the only circumstance in which I would eat a gingerbread house is if it was like, I helped bake it, and the same—like, that night after it had cooled, I decorated it, and then like, we took a bunch of photos for Instagram, and then like—and it was like a party or a family thing, we ate it.

Teresa: Yes. That is probably the circumstance people will run into most often. Um, a homemade gingerbread house, taken to a celebration for eating.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So what you would do is, you would spend most of the evening admiring it, maybe picking off pieces of gumdrops or whatever. But at the very end of the party...

Travis: You smash it up with a baseball bat.

Teresa: And everybody takes a piece home.

Travis: Oh, okay. I thought I was joking. Probably not with a baseball bat, but...

Teresa: Maybe with like a meat tenderizer. Or a rolling pin.

Travis: And y'know what's special about that is, the only kind of comparable thing I can think of is like an ice sculpture, and at the end of the night, people don't break it up to put it in their drinks.

Teresa: [laughs] Maybe they do.

Travis: Maybe they do. That ice has gotta go somewhere. Maybe an old fashioned.

Teresa: So like, you... I would say that I want to put myself in the place of the gingerbread house maker.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: I would love to bring a gingerbread house to a party that I lovingly homemade, and saw—and see everyone take a piece home.

Travis: Yes. And not have to take food home.

Teresa: Yes. Absolutely. Um, but we have to say that like, not all gingerbread houses are created equally.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And if it comes in a box, odds are, it's been in that box for a long time.

Travis: Well, and that's the thing. Here's my—this is my number one gingerbread etiquette recommendation. Never assume it is to be eaten. Like, if you go to somebody's house, and they have a gingerbread house, I wouldn't like, just pluck a piece of candy off it and pop it into my mouth even. Right?

Teresa: Exactly. Some people keep that stuff for years.

Travis: Right. Or even if it's not that, even if it's not old, even if it is freshly baked, they might've made it for decoration. Y'know? That it's like, y'know, you wouldn't walk over and chop a piece off the Christmas tree to throw it in the fire. Right? You don't know. It might be fake.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: Um, but like, I think you should always ask, like, "Is this for eating, or for looking?" Y'know?

Teresa: Sure. Definitely. And I would say that a lot of those kits, those pre-made gingerbread house prefab kits...

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: I want to talk about them like they're prefab homes or something. [laughs]

Travis: They—honey, they are.

Teresa: They are! Most recipes that are made in factories like that, they probably don't add molasses or honey, so they're probably not very sweet.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: They probably use shortening instead of butter. Again, butter is delicious. Um...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But it also is like, not as shelf stable as margarine.

Teresa: Exactly. Um, and some companies don't even use eggs in order to make it more stable and architectural.

Travis: I mean, I'll tell you – the pieces we got are, uh... like baked clay.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: They're also very pale, which definitely tells me there's no molasses in them.

Teresa: So, some stats on this. The Swiss colony in Monroe, Wisconsin, sells more than 35,000 gingerbread houses a year. Their gingerbread houses come premade from an assembly line, and once the houses are completed, they actually let them just sit out on shelves so they can dry out.

Travis: Yeah. That makes sense.

Teresa: That doesn't taste—sound like it tastes very good.

Travis: No. It sounds like, uh, I would say, uhh, the opposite of that. Gross is the word I'm looking for.

Teresa: And according to their website, it takes about two months to make a gingerbread house from beginning to end. So think about... I mean, even if that's not two months of it sitting, like, together, collecting dust on a shelf, that's still—like, I would throw out cookies that I made after two months.

Travis: If not sooner.

Teresa: Yeah. So, can you eat it? Technically, yeah.

Travis: But don't.

Teresa: Yeah, you can. But why put yourself through that?

Travis: But don't. But don't. Um, listen, one last thing I want to say... I will post pictures of the three out of four, and the one collapsed house that we have. I'll post that on our Shmanners Twitter account. Only if people who have also built gingerbread houses in their homes send us pictures of theirs. So we'll do a little gingerbread house exchange. Uh, does that sound good to everybody?

Teresa: Sounds great.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, I do have a few more tips.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, it is recommended that, if you want to keep your gingerbread house looking fresh, uh, and it is strictly for display, you may want to spray it with lacquer.

Travis: Huh.

Teresa: You also, when putting it away, you will want to cover it with some sort of moisture-wicking material, and then uh, maybe put it in like a plastic vessel to prevent varmints from getting into it.

Travis: Oh, you're talking about like, if you store it over time.

Teresa: Yes. Over time. Some people, like, it's a thang. They keep it. They bring it out every year.

Travis: That's weird to me. Mostly because I can't imagine putting that much work into something. Not like I'm judging you, but I just know how much work I'd be willing to put in it, and then the hubris of thinking, "This deserves to survive," is... no. Mine would be some kind of horrible Doctor Moreau creation.

Teresa: [laughs] Well, if I'm gonna lacquer that sucker, I'm gonna keep it.

Travis: Yeah. That's what I always think, too. Once again, not to judge. But when I see people who have like, lacquered puzzles they've done, that just seems to me like someone going, "I never want to do that puzzle again."

Teresa: [laughs] This is it. I'm done. I'm never doing it.

Travis: I did it, and I'm never doing it again.

Teresa: Um, it's also recommended that uh, you dust it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Obviously. And those cans of compressed air are perfect for that. Um, if you find that that's a little too harsh on your gingerbread... mound, then you can also use soft paintbrushes. Things like that. But again, um, something where you're not actually really like, rubbing it or touching it, because the oils from your hands can degrade the materials.

Travis: Also, here's another little—this is just a decorating tip for everybody. If you can, what you should do is use that royal icing, right? To connect all the walls and roof and everything. And then leave it alone for a while before you decorate it.

Teresa: Yeah, not like we did, because our child was very impatient.

Travis: Well, yes.

Teresa: She wanted to put candy on it!

Travis: She wanted to put candy on it! But that's the thing is the—the royal icing, it needs time to set. It needs time to harden. And then, once it does, that stuff is like cement, right? But until it does, it's just like icing. So give it some time before you start decorating.

Teresa: And um, the internet has a general consensus of, eat your gingerbread men head first to put them out of their misery.

Travis: [sighs] That's horrible. Alright, that's gonna do it for us. Uh, listen, folks. If you are a fan of The Adventure Zone, the actual play RPG podcast me and my brothers and my dad do, we are putting out a cooperative storytelling card game based on The Adventure Zone: Balance. We're working with Twogether Studios to make what I think is a really great game that I'm really proud of, and the preorders open now! So you can go to TheAdventureZoneGame.com and go ahead and place that preorder.

Uh, let's see what else... Candlesights is coming up, and Shmanners isn't going to be there, but a lot of other McElroy shows are. We're so excited to see you there. It's apparently—

Teresa: Wonderful is gonna be in town. Love that show.

Travis: Wonderful's gonna be there. Apparently, it's going to be tropical themed. So... like, an island Christmas. So keep that in mind! It's got very Margaritaville-esque feeling to it. Uh, so—

Teresa: Did Justin have a hand in that?

Travis: Mary did.

Teresa: [gasps]

Travis: Dress accordingly!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Uh, let's see... go check out all the other amazing shows on MaximumFun.org. they're all incredible, and you'll love them. Uh, you can tweet at us. Like I said, tweet us pictures of your gingerbread house. Or if you just want to do like a thread, we'll post a picture of ours, and then you can respond to that. Uhh, if you have ideas for topics, you can email us, ShmannersCast@gmail.com.

Also, on that Twitter account, when we have episodes that we think will get questions, we'll say, "Hey, this is that episode! If you have any questions, let us know!" And you can post them there! What else, Teresa?

Teresa: Well, we always say thank you to Brent "Brental Floss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. Um, and like Travis said, when we call out for questions, that's where we do that. But if you would like to submit a topic—

Travis: I already said that one.

Teresa: You did not.

Travis: I did too.

Teresa: ShmannersCast@gmail.com.

Travis: I said it.

Teresa: Maybe I was not listening.

Travis: No, I think you were zoned out, looking at the little dragon I have wrapped around the microphone stand.

Teresa: Anywayyy, also thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for our beautiful cover picture of the fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. Please join that if you love to give and get excellent advice. Several threads going at this moment, and they are amazing. Thank you so much to our wonderful fans for giving and getting that excellent advice.

Travis: And thank you, of course, to our research assistant, Alex, without whom we would not be able to do this show anymore. At this point, between our one and a half children, we just wouldn't be able to do it. So thank you so much, Alex.

Teresa: And thank you to all of our Max Fun supporters.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: Because without you, we wouldn't be able to pay Alex for her work.

Travis: So thank you, everybody!

Teresa: And we wouldn't ask her to volunteer for this. We want to pay people for the things that they do.

Travis: You get paid for your work. Alright, that's gonna do it for us. Join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it!

[theme music plays]

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