

Shmanners 191: Christmas Trees

Published December 21st, 2019

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Travis: [singing] Oh Christmas tree, oh Christmas tree, this episode's about you!

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: Oh... tired. Very tired.

Travis: [holding back laughter] Well, the Christmas season's finally upon us!

Teresa: [through laughter] F—finally!

Travis: Here it is! December 21st. It is—'tis but... 96 hours away!

Teresa: Hm.

Travis: 'Til it'll be Christmas! I haven't missed it! The go—

Teresa: Wait, is that true?

Travis: 96 hours?

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: I mean, by the—when this comes out.

Teresa: [whispering] Oh my gosh.

Travis: Yeah. But we're all ready! We've got everything up. We've put up all our decorations, got everything around, and underneath... our Christmas tree!

Teresa: Hmmm, what a segue.

Travis: Oh, sure. Sure.

Teresa: That was a—a Paul Blart perfect Segway.

Travis: Ohhh, that's great! 'Cause he rides on a Segway!

Teresa: Yeahhh!

Travis: Aw, great.

Teresa: Okay. So, um, I'm not coming to Candlenights. We have established that—

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: —by now. And this is probably the show I would've done at Candlenights, as you do.

Travis: So let—can I tell you the two things I know about Christmas trees?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: One: much like a lot of Christmas celebrations, based off of, like, druidic, pagan stuff, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: 'Cause it survives the winter. And two: popularized by Prince Albert. Are those two things true?

Teresa: Popurali—pop-u-lar-li—oh, no.

Travis: Pop—pop-u-lar-ized... in Victorian England.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: By Prince Albert.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: In a can.

Teresa: Before that, it was something—quite a staple of both Nordic and Germanic peoples.

Travis: Okay. But let's go... way back, to when the first Christmas tree was born. I think it went a little something like this.

An angel appeared to a regular tree, to a deciduous, and said, "There will come unto you a baby, and it will have pine-y stuff all over it."

Teresa: [snort-laughs]

Travis: And—and the deciduous tree didn't say anything back, 'cause it was a tree.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And then a brontosaurus walked by.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, I like it. I do.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I have a few notes.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: So...

Travis: More dinosaurs?

Teresa: Let's talk about, just in general, plants in religion, okay?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, not only are we gonna—we're gonna start at the beginning, we're kind of, like, zoom out.

Travis: Okay, big picture.

Teresa: But picture. So, people as far back as the ancient Egyptians would bring plants into their homes for religious purposes. These were probably palms, 'cause that's what they had. Again, it would be during the *summer* solstice, because that was when palms were, like, flourishing.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Uh, probably to celebrate Ra, the sun god, um, returning from the long, dark winter.

Travis: Do you know what they would say to celebrate him? "Rah, rah, sis boom bah!" It was...

Teresa: You are really on a roll tonight!

Travis: Listen. It's just—it's a late night recording. I can tell your energy's a little low 'cause you're workin' hard to build a human in your belly, and I just—I'm trying—I'm trying to give you *something*, some kind of heat to work off of, something to get—to get—I'm just trying to split those sides, you know?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Um, speaking of the solstice, the winter solstice, like I said, was celebrated by druids and vikings. Um, where they would bring the evergreen branches into their homes. Um, and in Scandinavia particularly, you brought in the whole tree, which—uh, and you would decorate it as a symbol of continuation of life and nature during the cold months.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So this is probably that kind of pagan root you were talking about.

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: Um, but here it is, once again. The great Christian rebrand.

Travis: Yes?

Teresa: TM, TM, TM.

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: Uh, so this probably happened around the eighth century. We have a record of a Christian monk who cut down a sacred oak tree, which was worshiped by the Germanic pagans. It—

Travis: They probably were upset, right?

Teresa: They were upset. It was not a—not a nice thing to do.

Travis: No!

Teresa: He did it as a symbol to help these, quote, "savage pagans—"

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: —quote, "understand God." You—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: —okay.

Travis: It sounds spiteful to me.

Teresa: Well, he wrote the history of it, so—

Travis: No, I'm—I'm saying, I don't know how *he* branded it, "I cut it down so you would understand God—" *sure*.

Teresa: Well, keep listening.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And he used the evergreen tree as an example, saying that the metaphor—the metaphor goes like this: unlike the oak tree, God's love never dies.

Travis: Okay, but if you cut it down, it does!

Teresa: Down a tree, it does, yeah.

Travis: So that's a fun—hey. Well, it's eighth century, so maybe he didn't understand... [sighs deeply] okay.

Teresa: Yeah... it goes to also say that maybe the triangular shape of the pine tree had something to do with the trinity. I mean, again—

Travis: It didn't.

Teresa: —Christian rebrand.

Travis: Listen. I—I—I think... I think it's often a thing that seems like people are poo-pooing it, right? But if you look through out history, there are literally countless examples of people, like, taking from other traditions and taking from other—like, co-opting that stuff, appropriating it, right? So that they can popularize their own thing.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: There's a reason that there are very similar mythologies across all kinds of different, um—like, different populations, because, like, as different people invaded other places they were like, "Yeah, we have that too! It's called, uh..." so that that way they could ingratiate themselves with these other cultures. Like—

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: —Christians aren't the only ones to do it, and it's not like they invented it or whatever. It's still not great. Like, it—I wish—I think the big problem is, I wish they would just say, like, "Well, we incorporated this thing these other people were doing," instead of saying, "Ah, this is the reason why. It's because of

the trinity," or whatever. Like, no, it's not! It's fine that it's not. Just say that it's not! It happened literally hundreds of years ago.

Teresa: Some more, uh, Christmas tradition, solstice things. Um, so, in the Middle Ages, once they, you know, Christmas-y tree took place, right? Uh, people would also bring cherry or hawthorn plants into their home hoping that they would bloom by Christmas.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right? So, self-decorating trees.

Travis: Oh, that's nice!

Teresa: That is nice. Um, and people who couldn't afford to bring their outside plants inside [holding back laughter] would make pyramids out of, uh, cut wood, and decorate them to look like trees.

Travis: Oh, see, that seems better to me. That's practical!

Teresa: That's the very—that's the very first artificial Christmas tree. Don't you think?

Travis: Yeah. You know, I'm also willing to bet—this has literally never occurred to me before, but I'm willing to bet that if you're talking about, like, 16th, 17th, 18th, you know, century/hundreds, that probably what they did is they'd use the Christmas tree, and then when Christmas was over, burn it.

Teresa: Probably.

Travis: Right? Which—

Teresa: I mean, you already bought it. Free wood, right?

Travis: Right? Or chopped it down. Free wood. Like, here's the thing. I think about now how often—like, how many Christmas trees just head on over to dumps, right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Just a waste of wood, where they could be burned, right?

Teresa: Or re-purposed somehow, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Um, speaking of the first decorations, they were probably things like candles, paper, and apples. Um, and the apples, again, developed this kind of symbolism, the Adam and Eve business with the apples.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Which were probably... I mean... I've heard—

Travis: I think it's just that they already look like decorations.

Teresa: —I've heard that people are like, "No, they weren't really apples, they were pomegranates, buh bleh, bleh bleh." Who knows.

Travis: It—hm. [laughs] I—

Teresa: I know.

Travis: —I don't think it matters. Let's put it that way.

Teresa: I don't think it matters either. Um, apples, right? Um... so, let's talk about the candles.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Seems like a really good reason to keep your tree hydrated.

Teresa: Yeeeah. Uh... here's the thing, right? We have to link it to somebody. This one was linked to Martin Luther, who is said to have been so moved by a winter's walk on a starlit night that he put candles on his tree for his children to enjoy. Um, he's also credited with being the first person to decorate a tree inside his home, but—

Travis: There's no way that's true.

Teresa: Probably not.

Travis: No.

Teresa: Right? Um, but fire, right? We'll—

Travis: Fire bad.

Teresa: —we'll come back to that. I wanna circle around to that when we talk more about—

Travis: Circle around like tinsel?

Teresa: —like—

Travis: Come back around to it? Like a garland? That's what I was [crosstalk]—

Teresa: —like a garland, that's what you're looking for. Yes. So, we'll come— we'll come back around to fire a little later.

Travis: Fire bad.

Teresa: Fire bad.

Travis: Fire bad! Okay.

Teresa: Yes. Uncontrolled fire bad.

Travis: Uncontrolled fire bad.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright.

Travis: That's a bit of clunkier line for Frankenstein's Monster, isn't it?
"[Frankenstein's Monster voice] Uncontrolled fire ba—ohh, only you prevent forest fires!"

Teresa: Uh, so a couple more of the Christian symbolism put on that tree.

Travis: Candy canes, like the crook of a shepherd.

Teresa: Certainly. Uh, the star at the top could be the North Star.

Travis: But probably not then. They probably weren't doin', like—they probably weren't doin' the candy canes back in, you know, 1600s.

Teresa: Well, I've heard a couple different stories about candy canes. Maybe we should do its own thing, but I've heard not just, like, the shepherd's crook, but also if you turn it upside down, it's a J for Jesus.

Travis: Sure. But if you hold it right side up, it's kind of a lowercase r for "radical." So.

Teresa: [snorts quietly]

Travis: If you think about it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And it's kind of striped like a barber's pole, for barbers.

Teresa: Uh, same thing for the angels on top of the tree.

Travis: Yeah. That one seems pretty one for one.

Teresa: Yeah. Um, okay. So, the first places to have a Christmas tree in their town squares, uh—

Travis: New York City.

Teresa: —Latvia and Estonia.

Travis: Oh. Okay.

Teresa: [laughs] Like—like, the 1400s. Um, both trees were put up by—whichever city, whichever city got their first—the trees were usually put up by merchants and ship owners, and that these sponsors may have danced around them in the times square and then set them on fire, according to the Yule log tradition.

Travis: Okay. Alright. Hey, once again, I think that's way more spectacular, frankly. If, at the end of every Christmas season, Rockefeller Square was like, "Alright everybody, stand back!" *Fwoosh*.

Teresa: Fwoosh! [laughs]

Travis: That would be, I think, way cooler.

Teresa: That would be pretty awesome, in the real sense of the word.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Of awe. Um, so the idea was that the fire grew brighter and burned hotter, and the logs turned into ashes, which symbolized Jesus's ultimate triumph over sin.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: But... I mean, it also sounds like a really fun party.

Travis: Yeah, it just seems like a cool way to go, you know?

Teresa: Yeah. If you gotta go.

Travis: Burn the tree.

Teresa: It's how you should go. Um, okay. Here we come, to the Scandin—

Travis: A waddling.

Teresa: [laughs] No. To the Scandinavian and Northern German tradition.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: In the 1500s, it was recorded in a German village that at Christmas-time, a tree should be displayed in a guild house in the town, and some of those early decorations were probably, again, paper flowers, nuts, and pretzels!

Travis: Oh yeah, alright!

Teresa: Yum. This was all fun and games in Europe—

Travis: Until somebody started eatin' those pretzels, and they were fulla needles.

Teresa: But, um, in the colonies, they were not into it, right? Couple of reasons.

Travis: Puritans.

Teresa: Yes, definitely Puritans. Second, the influx of German immigrants bringing this kind of, like, German, celebratory... *fun* business for Christmas—

Travis: Boo, fun!

Teresa: —uh, not only did the Puritans hate fun, they also didn't like foreigners, even though they were foreign. You know.

Travis: It's almost like—it's, like, a bitterly ironic hatred here in America.

Teresa: [laughs] It is!

Travis: "I don't like when people come into *my* country, even though *I* came into this country and took it away from someone else."

Teresa: Mmmm-hmm.

Travis: As we've talked about, I think I've talked about before on this show, there's also a long period of time—we did an episode of it! The war on Christmas. There was a long period of time where Christmas was outlawed in America because—uh, in—in the US, because the Puritanical religious leaders saw it as, like, a drunken, debaucherous celebration. Uh, and so I have to imagine there was a lot of, "Oh, people are gonna have fun and drink and be loud! Booo."

Teresa: Exactly. No trees. No decorations. No presents.

Travis: No presents.

Teresa: None of that.

Travis: Ugh...

Teresa: Um—so, Christmas... was church. You just go to church and you're done.

Travis: But that was also probably every day.

Teresa: Every day.

Travis: Church all the time, 24/sev.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. Now we come to it: our favorite power couple.

Travis: Yes? Uhhhh, Kanye West and—

Teresa: No! [laughs]

Travis: —Kim Kardash—no! I know. Ugh. I can't believe that was the only pull I had. I'm so sorry, everybody.

Teresa: [through laughter] That was the only thing! [laughs]

Travis: I was trying to think—ugh, God. I can't believe that that's where I went. No, it's of course Prince Albert and Queen Victoria.

Teresa: Of course, yes.

Travis: That you—you literally—if this is your first time listening to an episode of *Shmanners*, you can't have our modern day idea of Christmas without Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. In fact, I would say you wouldn't have, like, a solid majority of our current etiquette understanding if it weren't for Queen Victoria. Like, so much of this—like, wedding cakes? Queen Victoria. Uh, every—everything, these two.

Teresa: Everything! [laughs]

Travis: Everything, these two. Chri—notes, writing Christmas cards? Queen Victoria.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Uhh... all this stuff.

Teresa: Um, and in fact the Christmas tree in particular can be traced back to a single photograph printed in the newspapers in 1841—

Travis: Of Prince Albert dressed up as a Christmas tree.

Teresa: Nooo.

Travis: Nooo.

Teresa: Of the family standing in front of the German tradition of a Christmas tree.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And everyone—

Travis: And everyone said, "[holding back laughter] Plants indoors? What?!"

Teresa: Yeah, and without was like, "I love it!" Um, and, you know, less than 10 years after that, the colonies—no longer the colonies, the United States was like, "Hey. These cool cats like it. We like it too."

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Um, so then it was customary in the US to bring the tree home on Christmas Eve and decorate it that evening. They could then be kept up until January 6th, which is related to the whole, like, 12 days of Christmas, the Epiphany, magi coming—

Travis: 12th night, sure.

Teresa: What?

Travis: 12th night? Isn't that the, uh—the Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth thing, where it's, like, the 12th night after Christmas and it's, like, a big celebration? I don't know, don't worry about it. We'll look into it for a different time. 12th night? Yeah—[sighs]

Teresa: Yeah, okay, sure. Um... so then, uh, now it is an iconic symbol of Christmas all around the world. There are 25 to 30 million real trees sold in the US every year. There are close to 350 million currently—*currently* growing on tree farms in the US alone, and all 50 states and Canada boast at least one tree farm.

Travis: Oh, wow.

Teresa: Which I think is great. Um, it's a self-sustaining practice, because if you wanna keep your tree farm, every time you cut one down, you plant a new one, right?

Travis: Yes, that's true.

Teresa: So, um, that's pretty cool. Um, and one more super cool number fact is: the largest Christmas tree in the world, which measures a *whopping* 278 feet—

Travis: Oh, wow.

Teresa: —is the holiday arbor in Rio de Janeiro.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, it also... floats, in the middle of the city's lagoon.

Travis: Oka—okay? Cool!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Cool.

Teresa: That is pretty cool.

Travis: "12th night, also known as Epiphany Eve, is a festival in some branches of Christianity that takes place on the last night of the 12 days of Christmas, marking the coming of the Epiphany. Different traditions mark the date of 12th night on either the 5th of January or 6th of January, depending on which day one considers to be the first of the 12 days, the 25th or 26th of December."

Boom.

Teresa: Nice.

Travis: It's—that's—

Teresa: Travis googled it.

Travis: —Travis googled it. Maybe we'll do a whole thing. Okay. Uh, but before we answer some questions and talk more—

Teresa: And talk about etiquette—

Travis: —then we're going to—uh, let's send a thank you note to some of our sponsors.

[music plays]

Travis: [Santa voice] Ho, ho, ho! It's me, Santa Claus! Have you taken good care of your teeth this year?

Teresa: I didn't know Santa had jurisdiction over teeth.

Travis: [Santa voice] Well, I've borrowed it—I'm taking over from the tooth fairy. She's taking a gap year to travel around Europe. Ho, ho, ho, ho! So, anyways, back to the question at hand: have you been a good brusher this year?

Teresa: Yes, because *I* have a Quip toothbrush!

Travis: [Santa voice] Oh, so you're already aware of Quip's built-in timer that lets you know when you've brushed the appropriate two minutes, and gives you a pulse when it's time to move to a new segment of your mouth! Ho, ho, ho!

Teresa: I'm also a big fan of their toothpaste.

Travis: [Santa voice] Yes, *I* like their sleek and comfortable design, and the gentle vibrations that doesn't feel like it's jackhammering my gums! Ho, ho, ho.

Teresa: Hey, Santa?

Travis: [Santa voice] Yes?

Teresa: Can I talk to Travis again?

Travis: This is Travis.

Teresa: Okay, thanks.

Travis: Okay. Plus—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —Quip delivers brush heads, floss, and toothpaste refills every three months. They now have pre-marked floss in a dispenser, so it's got your whole thing: toothpaste, toothbrush, and floss. You're gonna get that every three months.

Teresa: They can really hold your hand through the whole process.

Travis: Yeah, trust me. Quip is great, and we love it, and you can join over three million happy customers and check everyone off your gift list right now. That's right, you can get this for people you love, by going to getquip.com/shmanners, and save on gift sets and get your first refill free with a refill plan. That's your first refill free at getquip.com/shmanners. [Getquip.com/shmanners](https://getquip.com/shmanners).

[music plays]

Janet: Hi! I'm Janet Varney, and like many of you, brand new sentient robots excluded, I used to be a teenager. In fact, just about all of my friends were, too! Including folks like comedian Danielle Radford.

Danielle: Then of course all of us—you take on that theater accent, and our teacher would say, "No, that isn't how people talk!"

Janet: Right?

Danielle: "Don't do the super theater kid accent! It's the worst!" But—so, when I was doing theater in high school, of course I immediately was talking about [posh accent] being in the theater. [laughs]

Janet: Uh-huh? [laughs]

So join me every week on the *JV Club* podcast, where I speak with my favorite women artists, innovators, and humans, as we reminisce about the past and how it led us to becoming who we are. Find it every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

Travis: Okay. I have a question for you, Teresa.

Teresa: Okay. I'm ready.

Travis: Artificial tree or real tree?

Teresa: Well...

Travis: Well...

Teresa: This is part of the great debate, really.

Travis: Ohh.

Teresa: Um, and *The New York Times* wrote an article detailing the real versus fake debate, and here are some pros and cons, okay?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, for real trees—

Travis: For *real* trees.

Teresa: For *real*. The pros are: picking a tree is a fun family activity. You can go and get, like, hot chocolate and walk around in the cold and be, like, "Look at this one! No, look at this one! I want a big one! I want a fat one!"

Also, real trees smell *amazing*.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Right? Um, they're biodegradable and recyclable, so even if your tree goes to the dump instead of being recycled, it will biodegrade, because it is a plant.

Travis: Okay. It is literally bio.

Teresa: It's literally bio. It's the most bio that you can be. Um, they support local businesses. I know that a, um—a church down the street from us often has a Christmas tree fundraiser—

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: —thing. Um, and, like I said earlier, most Christmas trees—in fact, pretty much every Christmas tree you're gonna get in the US—is made on a farm, so you're not, like, cutting down forest trees. You are purchasing a tree that will be replaced once it's cut down.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, here we go with the cons: needles.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Like, *everywhere*.

Travis: That is why—this is why my family, and now me, as an adult, will always use artificial tree. Is because when I was a kid, I got a pine needle stuck in my foot, and it got infected, and I had to go to the hospital.

Teresa: Yeahhh...

Travis: Not anymore—no more for me!

Teresa: No more. Um, also, fire hazard.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: We're getting to that—that point. Um, the reason, uh—well, no. I'm gonna wait just a little longer.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: To explain the fire.

Travis: Uncontrolled fire bad.

Teresa: Uncontrolled fire bad. Um, and even this—because of this, a lot of, like, apartment complexes forbid real trees.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Because really, if you don't keep 'em *moist*—

Travis: Okay. Hydrated.

Teresa: [through laughter] Hydrated! They can—they can totally go up in flames. And one of my, uh—one of my favorite episodes of *Mythbusters* has to do with the Christmas tree in—

Travis: When they're testin' all the different ways to keep it hydrated?

Teresa: Yeahhh.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeahhh. Um, and, like I said—and here's the thing: you have to care for them. Like, they're not maintenance free, because you have to water them, you have to vacuum up stuff, you—you can also get, like, sap and resin places.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And you wanna make sure that your animals don't chew it, eat it, attack it, that kind of stuff. And a lot of people are allergic to pine.

Travis: Yeah. And—and—yeah. I—I... I personally prefer, uh, the artificial tree. Um, mostly because I like knowing where it is, I like having it, and I like that the lights are already on it.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. That is—that is one of the pros of the artificial trees. No mess, no maintenance, reusable. Um, they're also cheaper than real trees, usually? Especially over time, because you can use them over and over and over again. If you keep good care of it, you could probably use it for the entire life of your...

Travis: Christmas.

Teresa: ... Christmases.

Travis: However many Christmases. you do... it'll be there for you.

Teresa: Um, like, you said, many come pre-lit. They have programmable, like, lights nowadays, the LEDs are really great, because it's not, like, the string lights

that people used to have where one goes out, it breaks the circuit, and then you have to figure out where the broken circuit is, and all this kind of stuff. So, the LEDs don't do that anymore. You can get colors, you can get lights, you can get it blinking. Like—

Travis: Listen. I'm sure people listening at home already have strong feelings about artificial versus real. What is the etiquette of Christmas trees?

Teresa: Okay. This is where the "when—" the *when* comes in. *When* can I put up my Christmas tree?

Travis: Whenever you want!

Teresa: Yes, that's the answer. [laughs] But—

Travis: Oh, yeah! Nailed it!

Teresa: [laughs] Traditionally, as—you know, as you do, as we talk about here, if we are talking about... before artificial trees, there was only the real tree. And you best make sure it's fresh, 'cause you're gonna decorate it with candles!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Sooo, Christmas Eve. Is when you put up—

Travis: Traditionally.

Teresa: —traditionally.

Travis: But nobody does that now, 'cause there's so much other stuff to do on Christmas Eve!

Teresa: Exactly! But, I mean, if you're gonna put a lit candle on a Christmas tree, you wanna make sure that it's as fireproof as possible in your home.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, you wait until Christmas Eve to even chop the tree *down*, right? 'Cause you want it to be super—what do they say in the—the, um, *Secret Garden*? Wick? You want it to be wick.

Travis: Listen: this is me, Travis McElroy, saying, don't do—any of this! Like—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —lit—lit candle on tree? No! Chopping it down the night before Christmas? No! Putting it up on Christmas? No! I see that now—we were watching something, a Christmas movie where they were like, "And we need to put up the tree!" And I was like, "*What?! No!*" [through laughter] Everything should be read—you should be able to go to sleep, and wake up, and everything's done! You shouldn't put up the tree, like, Christmas Eve! What's the matter with you?!

Teresa: I think it's anxiety-inducing, to say the least. Um, but, like—that was when—when people started decorating trees, that's what you did! That was the only option, unless you wanted to catch your house on fire. But now, there really are a ton of options.

I saw that there are some religious sects of the Catholic church that wait until after Advent, the last Sunday of Advent. Um, in order to make it more of, like, the whole—the waiting is the fun part—

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: —supposedly. [holding back laughter] Not for me. Uh, but then, you know, there are—you can decorate a tree for Halloween if you want!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Like, um—I... being—being massively pregnant... knew that I would not want to do *any* decorating in pretty much, like, the second week of December.

Travis: Yep!

Teresa: So, uh, we dragged out the tree before Thanksgiving!

Travis: Yep! And we didn't put decorations on it yet.

Teresa: That's true. It was lit, because it's a pre-lit tree.

Travis: Right, but we didn't put decorations on until after.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Uh, but we also did kind of a slow rollover from, like, fall, Halloween decorations to Christmas decorations. It was, like, one day at a time. We'll just take this one down and put this one up.

Teresa: Okay, all the pumpkins with *faces* come down *now*.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Uh, I have a question here.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: We have questions here.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: This is from Savage Lucy.

"How many trees is acceptable?"

Teresa: Um... you know? I think that you can put it into categories. How many *full* size trees—

Travis: Right. I wouldn't do more than one full size tree per room.

Teresa: Per room, right.

Travis: We have two, 'cause when we lived in a much smaller apartment, we got a very thin, uh, artificial tree. And then when we moved into our house and we had a big, open floor plan in the living room, we got a much wider tree, so we—

Teresa: Because that skinny tree looked so sad in our great big room.

Travis: Yeah, it didn't—it just wasn't the right scale. So we put the skinny tree is up in our upstairs hallway, and we put the, uh, big—big ol' tree down in the living room.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And then we also have all of these *little* trees, because before we got that skinny tree, we just decorated with, like, I would say one foot tall kind of trees?

Teresa: Yeah, some of—they're between, like, eight inches and—

Travis: Two feet, maybe?

Teresa: —two feet. They're, like, little tabletop decoration things.

Travis: Right, and we had, like, maybe five or six of those that we would put around our apartment, right? And then we transitioned to skinny tree, and then transitioned to full size tree.

Teresa: So, at this point, we have a lot of trees. So, put up as many dang trees as you please.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Um, but—

Travis: But I would—I would stick with just aes—aesthetically, no more than, like, one full size tree per room.

Teresa: Yes, I would agree with that.

Travis: Um, let's see. Uh, this is from Caralily. Uh—oh, I think it's probably Lily, or Caralily of the Bells.

"At what point does the tree go from festive and creative to obnoxious? I love special ornaments, and I've seen Christmas dress forms, wall decorations, and unconventional trees, but many people I know seem exhausted at the thought of doing anything aside from box decorations."

Teresa: Well, hey! They can just do box decorations, can't they?

Travis: Yeah. I think—I think, for me, it—I used to—so, my mom growing up—we had a, like, very thematic decorated tree, right? For our main, like, living room tree. And it was all very—what I would describe as, like, country kitchen, right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Lots of, like, apples and gingham—

Teresa: [simultaneously] Gingham.

Travis: —and, like, even down to, like, the decorations were, like, little metal baking trays with, like, heart-shaped cookies on them, and stuff like that. Like, it was a very, very cute—my mom was, like, Kentucky, and we lived in West Virginia, and my dad was from Ohio, so it was a very, like, country kitchen.

And so, there is a part of me that *loves* a thematically decorated tree. There was festival of trees growing up. I used to go to those as a kid in Huntington, and in the surrounding area, and seeing a tree of, like, "This tree is all about music, and this tree is all about trains, and—"

Teresa: I mean, I've definitely seen that. And also colored trees in the way of, like, uh—where, like, the lights are stark white, and all the decorations are blue and silver. And also, red and gold is a very common color combination.

Travis: But you do *not* have to do that. That's the thing is, like, especially now that we have a three year old, the idea of, like, "I'm going to design what this looks like," is out of the question.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: At this point, like, just keeping Bebe from putting all of the decorations on one branch is a singular triumph, so, like, that, to me, is really what—my only decorating aesthetic at this point is, "Don't clump them all together." Just try to spread it evenly across the tree.

Besides that, I think that it's perfectly justifiable to say, like, "All of these decorations are mismatched, but they all mean something to me."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That, to me, I think carries a lot more weight than, like, all of my decorations match perfectly.

Teresa: And, if you wanna do a dress form tree, if you wanna do a felt wall tree, if you wanna do a Christmas card tree, like, all of that stuff is great if you want to do it.

Travis: Yeah, and if you have the time to do it. Don't feel like you have to do it and, like, rush to get it done because you feel like you're not Pinterest successful if you don't do it. You know what I mean?

Teresa: [laughs] Right.

Travis: Uh, one last question, here. This is from Matt.

"What are some tips to keep kids safe around the tree?"

Uh, two that spring immediately to my mind is to anchor it to the wall.

Teresa: Yes, which we've done.

Travis: Yeah. Get, like, an eye bolt, screw it into somewhere in the wall that has a stud in it, and then just, like, run wire from that eye bolt to the top of the tree.

Teresa: I think we used just, like, picture-hanging wire, yeah.

Travis: Right. Uh, secondly, last year when Bebe was smaller what we did is we got a bunch of empty boxes from, like, Amazon, you know—

Teresa: Purchases.

Travis: —cardboard—cardboard boxes, right? All different sizes and shapes. Wrapped them like they were presents and then ran rope through them, it was like a little fence of boxes that Bebe could not get through to get to the tree, so we used that to, like, guard the tree without it—

Teresa: And because they were empty boxes, she didn't care about opening them, uh, like she *did* care about the presents [through laughter] that we put under the tree.

Travis: Right and even if she—if she ripped it open, who cares?

Teresa: Right, yeah.

Travis: It wasn't a present. We could just tape it back closed. So, it was a little bit more of a decoration, and also kept her from getting at it.

Teresa: I've seen people put baby gates around trees. Same thing for doggies and kitties who like to climb trees.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Eat trees. Um... I've seen people put trains around trees, and I think that that would probably, uh, keep dogs or cats away, because of the noise and the movement and—

Travis: A kid's probably gonna want to grab it.

Teresa: —right. Um, and then—I mean, you can always put it up on a table. Use the top half of the tree if it's a artificial tree. Uh, the last four feet or so, put it on a table so they can't get to it.

Travis: I mean, I would also recommend, like, no glass ornaments, or at the very least, no glass ornaments for, like, the bottom two feet of the tree.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Uh, anything like that. Unplug it at the end of every night. Uh, you know. That kind of stuff.

Teresa: That kind of stuff. Um, so, I have a couple of family stories [holding back laughter] I would like to put on the internet.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: The first one being: my grandparents were, um—were blue collar, Appalachian people. My grandpa always was looking for, you know, how to—how to save a dime, as they say. So my mom told me about how most Christmases., he would wait until Christmas Eve to go get the tree, one, because it was cheaper—

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: —and two, because he wanted *two* trees. Being an avid gardener, he understood how to graft trees together.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, so what he would do is he would buy one tall tree with, like, a straight trunk, even if the branches were very sparse. And then he would be a shorter, fatter, maybe twisty tree, and cut off the branches from the shorter tree and drill holes into the trunk of the taller tree and put more branches on the taller tree!

Travis: That's *so much work*!

Teresa: Well, here's the thing. Uh, he knew how to do it well. So well, in fact, that one year when he had actually purchased a balled tree, meaning that the roots came with it and it was balled up, uh, one year he purchased that and did the whole grafting business, and then they planted it in their yard. 28 years later, when they had to cut the tree down because it was interfering with some electrical wires in the yard, you could still see where he had grafted the branches, and they had grown into the trunk.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: It was amazing.

Travis: Okay. One more story, then we gotta wrap up.

Teresa: Okay. Um, my mother, again, says that her mom invented the tabletop tree.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [holding back laughter] Which I don't think is true.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But they did exactly what I described. Uh, once they had an artificial tree—I think after my parents moved out, my mom moved out, my grandma and grandpa were like, "Eh, we don't really wanna do the whole big tree thing." So they took the top half of their Christmas tree and set it up on the table.

Travis: Nice.

Teresa: Um, and my mom was like, "And I had never seen that before!" And I was like, "Ehh, probably not the first people to think of that."

But now, those are marketed towards people.

Travis: Incredible.

Teresa: You can put it right on your tabletop and not have to move your furniture around or anything and, you know, it still looks great. Eye level. That's what we're talking about, right? You see all this stuff at the eye level.

Travis: Alright, folks. Well, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for joining us. Uh, before we do all the other wrap-up stuff, let me remind you, it is the holiday season. Please take care of yourself. Don't drink and drive. Don't party too much. Don't overdo it. Just, you know, take care of yourself! We love you and we don't want anything to happen to you. And, you know, even if you don't, be aware that there are people out there who *will* drink and drive, so drive carefully, keep your head on a swivel, be careful. Um...

Teresa: We want you to have a safe time today, so you can party tomorrow, too!

Travis: Yeah, exactly. Yes. Um, so, if you have ideas for episodes, you can email us, shmannerscast@gmail.com. Uh, you can tweet at us @shmannerscast. That is also where we will post topics when it's time to gather questions. We're not gonna have an episode next week, because it is Christmas week. Um—

Teresa: And probably after that, because baby.

Travis: Yes. But we're going to re-air some episodes, so if you have any that you're like, "Oh, yes. This is Hall of Fame. Gotta redo this one." You can email us or tweet at us. Um... let's see. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: Well, we always thank Brent "brentalfloss" 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. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners Fanners*! Which you can please, please join, if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans.

Travis: Um, and thank you Maximumfun.org. You can check that out. Uh, we're going to be doing—oh! I almost forgot! *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* and

Adventure Zone are gonna do some live shows here in Cincinnati, February 19th and 20th. Those tickets are on sale now. Uh, go to mcelroy.family and click on "tours" and you can buy those. Uh, and yeah, that's gonna do it for us!

Teresa: Nope. Thank you to our wonderful research assistant and showwriter, Alex. Um, I—I don't always read verbatim everything she writes, but when I do, she writes it beautifully.

Travis: So, *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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