

Shmanners 197: Friendship (PART 2)

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[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: And hello, my friend. [pauses] You're—well, okay—

Teresa: Oh, yes.

Travis: —the person at home, and also you. Hey, everybody, just a side note. Speaking of friends and, uh, by extension, girlfriends: today, the day we're recording this, February 13th, is mine and Teresa's dateaversary.

Teresa: Awww. Our first date, ten years ago today.

Travis: Ten years ago today... we intended to go see the movie *Crazy Heart*, and instead ended up talking in a bar for, like, three and a half hours. And that was the day I knew I loved her, and wanted to marry her.

Teresa: Aww. We closed the bar down that night, I think.

Travis: We did! And we missed *two* showings of *Crazy Heart*. And then our friends got us a copy of *Crazy Heart* for I think our first anniversary, and we never opened it. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: Nope! Still had the plastic on when we donated it to... something, I think.

Travis: Yep, yep! Aw, what a love story.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: So, speaking of love stories, because I think that friends should love each other, we're talking about friendship! This is part 2 of friendship.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Uh, last week we talked a lot about the history of it and the psychology of it—

Teresa: [gasps] Oh, oh!

Travis: Oh, oh!

Teresa: Today is Galentine's Day, too!

Travis: It is Galentine's Day.

Teresa: Celebrate your friends today! Galentine's!

Travis: Now, I saw yesterday, Palentine's Day? Is that anything?

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: I don't know.

Teresa: Not—not a *Parks and Rec* reference, but, I mean... gals—Galentine's Day can be for ya boys as well.

Travis: Well, here's the thing. I remember—I was thinking about this the other day. I remember in, like, elementary school, just givin'—givin' 'em to everybody.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Goin' to get some cool Ninja Turtles Valentine's, givin' 'em to everybody! Stuff like, "Ah, I'm shell shocked by how awesome you are!" Or "You're totally tubular!" You know, that kind of thing.

Teresa: *Totally* tubular.

Travis: You get it.

Teresa: I do.

Travis: Um, so, let's talk a little bit first about kind of the, uh 21st century kind of thing of friendships. How have they evolved?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Well, um, psychotherapist Karen Seeger says that true friendships are based on unconditional concern for the other.

Teresa: Which is a little different from our last episode, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Because we were talking about mutual benefits, and it was more like, tangible... uh, tangible benefits, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: But this is more about the emotional, uh, connection.

Travis: And I also—I really like the use of "unconditional" there, right? Because here's the thing—and I don't often like to wave this particular flag, but as a parent, I now have a deeper meaning of what the word—like, the phrase "unconditional love" means, right?

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: Because, like—listen. I love Bebe unconditionally. I cannot think of anything Bebe would do—or Dot, but right now Dot doesn't do anything—but I can't think of anything our kids would do that would make me stop loving them.

That said, I sometimes have, like, you know, heart-to-heart talks where it's just, like, I'm not telling her what she wants to hear, and I'm saying no, and I get frustrated, and I get angry—

Teresa: Sometimes you feel two feelings at the same time.

Travis: [simultaneously] The same time. Yes, as Daniel would say.

Teresa: As Daniel Tiger would say.

Travis: And that's the thing, is unconditional love for a friend doesn't mean I'm always going to, like, make you happy.

Teresa: Right!

Travis: Right? We don't need that. That's not what that really means.

Teresa: Well, happiness is another thing.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: You know me. You can't make someone happy.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Anyway. Anyway.

Travis: Karen Seeger also mentions that friendships can provide grounding, safety, comfort, trust, respect, and the feeling of being understood and valued.

Teresa: Check, check, check.

Travis: Yes, yes, of course. So—but what does this mean for the 21st century? Well, uh, Dr. Robert Holden says, "21st century friendships are soul friendships." Ooh.

Teresa: [simultaneously] Ooh.

Travis: They are about supporting each other to live a life full of purpose, courage, and creativity.

So, basically we talked about last episode—think about, you know, cavepeople being protected, you know, with friends. Saying, "You watch my back, you take care of this task while I take care of this task," right? Well, our needs as a society have evolved beyond that, right? We're not so much worried about being attacked by wild animals. So our threats are more psychological, right? More metaphysical.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Of, like, am I living my best life? Am I happy? Am I taking care of myself? Am I doing the things I need to do to, you know, make my life fulfilled?

Teresa: I also think that a lot of this—these roles were filled by family members at one point, right? Um, so you had kind of your family safety net of trust and respect and things like that, but—

Travis: Hypothetically, in a—

Teresa: Hypothetically.

Travis: —in a good scenario, yes.

Teresa: But now, because people don't live in such large, extended family units—

Travis: Right, we tend to disperse more.

Teresa: Exactly. The—the role that your family used to fill is now filled by your friends. This kind of psychological comforting, right?

Travis: Yes. And not only that, the way that we've looked at society has changed. Dr. David Hamilton, who wrote *Why Kindness is Good For You*, points out that the heart of our Western culture is that we are incredibly independent, right? And so one of the biggest happiness blocks we've experienced is a phenomenon called dysfunctional independence, which is basically that, like, "I'm gonna do it on my own. I don't need help. I can do—" I mean, we've seen it with Bebe, right? Like, this—

Teresa: Of course. "I do it myself."

Travis: "I do it myself," right? And then she'll struggle and get frustrated, where if she had just said, "Will you help me?" it would've been done quicker, and she would've learned how to do it, because we could demonstrate it, right? And so this is a thing we see a lot, uh, in our modern day interactions with people. Man, it happens with me!

Teresa: Well, I—I wanna backtrack just for a second.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I think it's important to let children do things themselves, obviously.

Travis: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Teresa: Maybe the first couple times, you could let—you could help, but then they do need to explore and do things themselves. That's another show. It's another show.

Travis: Yes. This is what I think of when I think of dysfunctional independence, right? You have a big arm full of packages, right? You're clearly having trouble holding all of them, and somebody says, "Can I help you?" And you say, "No," because you are embarrassed that you can't do it, or you're confident that you can do it without help. All of these things, where it costs you nothing to say, "Yes, thank you so much!" Right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That is kind of, to me, the summary of dysfunctional independence. And we—we see—we all wanna be success stories, right? And I think that there is a certain branding and messaging in a lot of advertisement and—

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: —that kind of thing of, like, "You can do it!" And, "By your bootstraps!" And that kind of thing. When I think the people who are most successful, and usually happiest, are people who allow themselves to rely on others, and are not disappointed by those other people.

Teresa: Sure, to a certain extent.

Travis: Yes. Um, and this is evidenced by—in a lot of cases with therapists, at least with mine, and I know a lot of others, that when you come in and say, like, "I am going through a—you know, a depression episode," that one of the first pieces of advice that therapists give is, "Go spend time with friends."

Um, because being able to talk about your problems with someone who, even if they don't understand what you're going through, even if they don't have any helpful pieces of information or advice to give you, just have—just saying it out loud to a receptive, loving audience can do a lot, and even if you don't talk to 'em

about it, getting out of your own and going and having fun with someone will make you feel better.

Teresa: Yeah, sometimes it's better just to talk about anything else, you know?

Travis: Right?

Teresa: And that's a really great thing that a friend who maybe doesn't understand where you're coming from or can't empathize with you can still talk about anything else.

Travis: Or let's just go bowling, you know? Don't—don't think—"Yeah, that sucks, and I know that sucks, and you're allowed to feel that way."

Teresa: I don't really like bowling.

Travis: Okay. Go... see a movie?

Teresa: Okay. Well, but you can't talk while you're in a movie.

Travis: Okay. That's my point, is you're gonna do something fun. It's not important.

Teresa: It's not important.

Travis: So, let's go over—

Teresa: Here's why I don't like bowling: it's because it, like—

Travis: It hurts?

Teresa: —no, the ball is so heavy, and I get tired so fast by carrying it—like, the first couple frames, really good, but the diminishing returns of bowling... ugh.

Travis: This is true. Also, I have never once walked away from bowling and thought, "I felt better than I did before I started."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Both psychologically and physically. Okay.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So—and let's just put the bumpers up, you know? Who are we kidding.

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: Like, we're here to get strikes! I—okay.

Teresa: I can get behind bocce ball.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: That's kinda like bowling.

Travis: I like candlepin bowling. There's a, like, duck—duckpin bowling is also maybe what it's called—but it's, like, tiny bowling. Light balls, like, six pounds—or less, three pounds—anyways, it's not important—

Teresa: Anyway.

Travis: So, let's go over some friend do's.

Teresa: Okay!

Travis: Right? And maybe some don'ts in here too, but—and all of these are going to sound, when we say them out loud, obvious, right? But obvious doesn't always mean the same as easy, or—

Teresa: Yeah, easily accomplished, even.

Travis: Right. So, one: pick your friends wisely.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And this can be really hard, because when we meet someone, we don't know all of their characteristics. We don't know all of their qualities. So they may seem at first to be a good pick for a friend, and then as we get to know them, we find out that maybe that is not the case.

Teresa: This is why I'm a fan of pruning, like, your Facebook friends.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, like, it's great. Every person you meet? Fine, be Facebook friends with them, but don't be afraid to be like, "Mm, this friendship is not what I was looking for."

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And then you can, you know, separate ties.

Travis: Yes. Um, it's been found in studies that, um, having a friend who disappoints you in time of need can actually be worse than no friend at all in a time of need.

Teresa: Wow.

Travis: So it's—you need to be careful who your friends are. And here's the thing: that doesn't mean you should only have, like, the closest, tightest personal friends, someone you can depend on 100%. But I do think it is important to know who amongst your friend group those friends are.

Teresa: Yeah, fills that need, yeah.

Travis: Right. Like, I have lots of friends. There are many people in this world that I love, but I have, like, ten or so that I'm like, "That person is the person who's always there. That is the person I call. That's the person that I can go to."

And I think it's important that you know who those people are in your life. Now, it is also important to make time. And listen, I think we've all been there.

Teresa: Gosh, it's difficult sometimes.

Travis: Right! Right now, you know, we've got two kids. Uh, we work, we travel a lot. Um, there's a lot that can get in the way. And also—not only that, but man, I've been in positions where I've made plans with people and then when it comes to the day of, I'm like, "I don't wanna leave the house. I don't feel like puttin' on pants." Right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Yeah! But it is important that we do, because nine times—

Teresa: Do put on pants.

Travis: —do put on pants.

Teresa: To leave the house.

Travis: When it's required.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Nine times out of ten, when I have made myself get up off the couch and go do those things, it has made me feel markedly better.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah. That's—that's kind of a—is it—is the right word "paradox?" Where you feel like you feel so much better at home, but then you make yourself be uncomfortable for a minute, and then you feel better afterwards? I don't think it is. Maybe it isn't.

Travis: Well, I think of it more of, like, Newton's laws, right? Of an object at rest stays at rest, when an object in motion—like, I think once you start going, you feel better about going than if you're just, like, sitting there. Right?

Teresa: Yeah. I think that's it. That's right. That's a good metaphor.

Travis: It's also good to spend time with people! Um, and this is maybe one of the tougher ones on here, which is "practice vulnerability." Right? It's one thing—

Teresa: And it goes back to that kind of, uh, you know, bootstrap individualism thing.

Travis: Right. And I will not name names, but I have a friend who I love very much who is a very sympathetic ear, who will be there for you, and listen to whatever your problem is, and help you in any way that they can, and as soon as I say, "And how are you?" They say, "I'm good!"

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And it—it's pulling teeth to get them to actually open up and tell me about the stuff they're going through, right? And the thing is—

Teresa: Or it has been.

Travis: It has been. They're getting way, way better. Um, but the thing is is, like, the people that you love, right? Love you. And very rarely is that a one way street. And if someone who is your friend who loves you, who says, "How are you?" They don't want the walkin' down the hallway at work answer. They want the real answer! They want the, "Yeah, you know, I've been—" like, this is a thing—

Teresa: They're not just being polite.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: This is a thing, um, that has actually—Teresa has, uh, indirectly helped me with, which is every time I talk with Justin and Griffin, Teresa will say, "How are they?" I'm like, "Oh, I—I don't know—"

Teresa: "Ah—uh—"

Travis: "We didn't talk about that. We just talked about... I don't know. Whatever TV show we were watching."

And so me and Justin and Griffin have gotten better about not just talking about surface stuff but, like, "How are you doing? How—how's, you know, the kids?" Right? Actual, in depth conversation.

And this can be very scary, right? Because when you are vulnerable, you are... vulnerable!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right? Like—

Teresa: Who would'a thought?

Travis: Right! As soon as you say, "I'm worried about this thing." You know, the other person could laugh and say, "That's a dumb thing to worry about," and you feel bad. But this is where we go back to, "Choose your friends wisely."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: This is a thing Teresa and I do, and have done since day one. Is say, "I would like to tell you how I'm feeling." Or, "Right now I am feeling this." And we're not looking for feedback on that. We just need to be heard.

Teresa: Sometimes I even just say, "I'm having a lot of feelings right now."

Travis: "I'm having a lot of feelings right now, and I can't—"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Or, like, "I just want you to know, and I know this is childish, but, like, I'm feeling like I deserve ice cream." Or whatever, right? And, like, saying that out loud helps you be understood by the other person, and helps you feel understood.

Now, this is a small thing, but ooh, it matters. Remember birthdays and important days, right? Like, it's such a little thing, but in this day and age where everybody has, like, calendars and reminders in their phone or whatever, put birthdays in there.

Teresa: I think that's why it feels so nice on Facebook, to have a Facebook on your birthday. I mean, people—it's largely reactionary. Facebook tells you when the birthday is. But it's not hard to write those three letters. "HBD!" You know?

Travis: Right. And that's the thing. Even if it's not that—maybe it's, like, a bigger deal where it's, like, going to surgery or a parent who's going to surgery, right? Those kinds of things that show, "Not only was I thinking about you, I remembered about you."

That's a big deal. And this is a thing for me that in my adult years I have made an active, like, effort at. Which is, I am going to contact this person. I am going to not just think about them, I'm going to contact them.

Teresa: And, you know, Travis loves birthdays.

Travis: I *love* birthdays. That's true. I think they're very—well, this is from me growing up sharing a birthday with Justin.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That I always felt like I got, at best, 60% of a birthday. But that's another episode. Um—

Teresa: You were the first person in my life really to make such a big deal about birthdays. It wasn't my family.

Travis: It's a day where it can be all about you!

Teresa: Oh—yeah, another episode.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Have we done birthdays yet?

Travis: I don't know.

Teresa: [gasps] We need to look.

Travis: Uh, another thing: play games. Do events. Right? I—and I maybe feel personally strongly about this one because I am a big fan of, like, table games and board games and stuff. But I think that by playing games, uh, be they competitive or cooperative, you get to know the person. Like, you get to see their mind work. You get to see them approach problems. You get to see them deal with issues. You get—and, like, you get to kind of role play—I think D&D is a great way to build friendships, frankly, because you, like, get to role play and do different scenarios and try different things and be creative, and it's a very, uh, like, improv-based game, where you're building that trust with one another. Uh, I get—

Teresa: That's another great way, improv.

Travis: Improv! Oh, yeah. Play games, improv games included.

Teresa: Larping.

Travis: Oh, yeah! Theater. Um, now, this one is another one that I think maybe people don't think of, but be boring. Because a big thing for me—

Teresa: I am breathing a sigh of relief. I love this list!

Travis: I know.

Teresa: Oh, I love to just chill.

Travis: Once again: big thanks to Alex. Alex, thank you. Um, but here's the thing: I count—I can count on two hands, um, the friends that I have where I can be comfortable sitting with them in silence watching TV for an hour without thinking, "I am boring them." Right? Like, back when I lived in Huntington, me and Bradbury and Bob used to just, like, get together once a month and watch all three of the original trilogy of *Star Wars*.

Teresa: Yeahhh!

Travis: And that was just, like, what we did on a Saturday. And, like, the people who it's like, I'm comfortable just sitting around where I don't feel the need to entertain you. You don't feel the need—we don't have to be *on* with one another.

Teresa: I love it. I love it.

Travis: Um, this is another one that's especially tough for me, which should be no surprise to anyone listening, but... it's listening.

Teresa: [laughs loudly]

Travis: Um... and—and not just being there, not just hearing the story, but don't wait for your next turn to talk.

Teresa: Active listening.

Travis: Right. Because here's thing: if you're like me, the problem is is that I know that the thing *I* have to say is way more important—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —than the thing the other person has to say. But, that is not a good way—

Teresa: This is a psychological study in itself. [laughs]

Travis: Perhaps. That is not a good way to make your friend feel heard.

Teresa: And one way to make your friend feel heard is ask them to talk about themselves, right? Because people love talking about themselves. We've talked about this before.

Travis: Follow questions, and—you know, bring back, like, "Hey, how did that thing go?"

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "That you were—you know, you told me last week you were gonna talk to your boss about this. How did that go?"

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Right? That kind of stuff matters. And finally, if you can't go above and beyond, which we can't always, do the minimum. Right? It doesn't have to be massive. It doesn't have to be, you know, "I—I traveled across the globe to be with you today." But just, like—

Teresa: Sometimes it's enough to say, "I see you."

Travis: Right, right, yes. Text 'em like, "Hey! I was thinkin' about you. Hope you have a great day." Right?

Teresa: Yeah. For example, I got an invitation to a—a get together from my friend, Lauren. Uh, go check out *Messy Bun* podcast. I've been on there before.

And I'm not sure if I can go, but I text her back and I was like, "Hey. I saw this. I'm lookin' at it. I want you to know that I will let you know if this is gonna work out for me or not."

Travis: Right.

Teresa: And that's enough!

Travis: Right. Now, uh, before we get to questions, I wanna go over some famous friendships that make me really happy.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: Uh, first—this one's pretty famous, so I wouldn't be surprised if A: people already know it, and B: we've talked about it before. But John Addams and Thomas Jefferson.

Teresa: Mmm.

Travis: Uh, they—they were very good friends for a very long time. They wrote letters to each other, and they were hugely impactful on each others' career. But they had a huge political falling out that ended in some slanderous insults during the 1800 presidential campaign. Can you imagine? A falling out after a presidential campaign?

Teresa: Oh... [laughs]

Travis: And then they didn't speak for several, several years. And then in 1812, the silence was broken by Addams. Jefferson responded, and they began, uh, to rekindle their relationship. And maybe one of the most famous things about this is they died on the same day, within hours of each other, on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Teresa: Man.

Travis: Right? Can you imagine? Can you imagine.

Teresa: I love how these things kind of work out, you know?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Like, the coincidental is all, like—all the stars align, as they say. And it's fun.

Travis: Um, I was also fascinated to learn, Groucho Marx and T. S. Eliot were friends.

Teresa: Really!

Travis: Yeah, they began writing each other when Eliot reached out for an autograph from Groucho, and Groucho said he wanted a picture of Eliot in return, and they wrote for years, bonding over mutual respect and their shared love of literature. Uh, Marx would often tease Eliot for being so proper and respectful, and tried to get a rise out of him—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —by writing things like, "I would be interested in reading your views on sex, so don't hesitate. Confide in me, Tom!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: When they finally met in person in 1964, Marx wrote that he and Eliot shared three things in common: an affection for good cigars, cats, and a weakness for making puns.

Teresa: Aww... yeah, that makes sense.

Travis: Uh, Lucille Ball and Carol Burnett were very close, despite the fact that Ball was 22 years older than Burnett. They would often guest star on each others' shows, and Burnett would often refer to Ball as her mentor. Lucille Ball called Carol Burnett "kid," and once even threw her a black tie baby shower, which Carol described as "one of the funniest evenings ever."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Lucille Ball died on April 26th, 1989, Carol Burnett's birthday.

Teresa: [gasps] See, there it is again!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: That day, Carol Burnett received flowers from her friend with a message that said, "Happy birthday, kid."

Teresa: Aww...

Travis: Yeah. Um, this one is probably one of the most bonkers. This one made Alex and I very happy. Um, so, absurdist playwright Samuel Beckett was friends with... [holding back laughter] Andre the Giant!

Teresa: Oh boy!

Travis: In 1953, Beckett moved to a small commune in France. Uh, when *Waiting for Godot* was published. In the commune, he became friends with a man named Boris Roussimoff AKA Andre the Giant's dad. The story goes that Andre outgrew the school bus when he was 12 years old, so Beckett had a pickup truck and normally would go to town and throw baby Andre the Giant in the bed of his pickup truck and take him to school. Uh, Andre apparently loved to tell this story on the set of *Princess Bride*. So, there's that.

Uh, and finally, to go back to presidential friends—

Teresa: You can't hear me, but I'm smiling.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Presidential friends, um—so, in 1837, Joshua Speed was 23 years old, and a gawky man came into his store asking for a bed, and that man was 28-year-old Abraham Lincoln.

Teresa: Oh, wow!

Travis: When a bed seemed out of Lincoln's price range, Speed, who was immediately taken with this stranger, said he had a bed upstairs he was happy to share. Without missing a beat, Lincoln walked upstairs, set his stuff down, came back to the store, smiled and said, "Well, Speed, I'm moved."

Um, there are also those that theorize that perhaps this was a romantic relationship as well as a friendship.

Teresa: Hm!

Travis: Um, and this would begin one of the most important friendships in all of American history. Joshua Speed is quietly credited with being the man who redeemed Lincoln when he was at his darkest. Speed brought him out of several suicidal bouts of depression that threatened both his political career and his marriage to Mary Todd. It's quite possible that without Joshua Speed, the Lincoln we idolize today never would've been able to flourish.

Teresa: How nice!

Travis: So, we'll be back with some of your questions. But first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

[theme music plays]

Travis: Can you say, "Hi, everybody!"

Bebe: Hi, everybody!

Travis: And say, "Thank you in part to Zola."

Bebe: 'Ank you in part to Zola!

Travis: Bebe, did you know that right now we're in the thick of engagement season?

Bebe: [hums]

Travis: You know, mommy and I got engaged at one point. And we didn't know *what* to do. We had to figure out how to organize our wedding and our registry and all that stuff all on our own. But you don't have to figure it out on your own when you get older! You can Zola. You can choose—

Bebe: [baby noises]

Travis: —yeah, I know! Isn't that exciting? You can choose from hundreds of gorgeous designs and create your website in minutes. Even add custom URL or password protection.

I don't know if I mentioned it: from free gorgeous wedding websites designed to the highest rated registry of all time, Zola makes wedding planning easier and less stressful with everything you need all in one place.

Zola has helped one million couples get married. Let Zola help you, too. Well, not you, Bebe, 'cause you're only three and you shouldn't get married yet? But you can register for gifts, experiences, and honeymoon funds. They have an online RSVP page, an FAQ page, which is great for tackling awkward questions like "Are kids invited?" Uh, like, is Bebe invited? Always, and everywhere. And all the

benefits you and guests want! Free shipping and returns, free and easy exchanges, 20% off post-wedding discount, price matching, group gifting, all of that stuff.

You can shop your whole paper suite at Zola with beautiful, affordable invites and papers, all designed to match your website. So, shop your whole paper suite at Zola, from save-the-dates to invites and thank-you's!

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We also wanna say thank you to Quip! Here in the McElroy home, uh, dental hygiene is very important. Bebe *loves* brushing her teeth. Don't you, Bebe?

Bebe: I!

Travis: Hi, Bebe!

Bebe: I love brushing my teeth!

Travis: You love brushing your teeth? It's important to have good, clean teeth, isn't it?

Bebe: Yes!

Travis: Yeah. Did you know that Quip helps people keep their teeth clean?

Bebe: Why?

Travis: Well, they have toothbrushes with built-in timers and gentle vibrations, and they also make floss that's pre-portioned so you don't worry about getting too much or too little. And, they make daddy's favorite toothpaste. Did you know that?

Bebe: What fav—[gets further away from the mic] What?

Travis: Uh, well, it's like kind of a minty flavor, but it's not too strong, and it's very good. And, did you know that Quip delivers fresh brush heads, floss, and toothpaste refills every three months with free shipping?

Bebe: [distantly] Why?

Travis: Well, because you need new stuff all the time! Bebe, did you know that you could go to getquip.com/shmanners right now for your first refill free? Spelled get, G-E-T, quip, Q-U-I-P, getquip.com/shmanners.

Bebe: [hums]

Travis: Quip: it's the good habits company.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Okay. This question is from Project Aeolus. @projectaeolus on Twitter. I don't think that's their real name.

"At what point in friendship is it okay to refer to someone as your best friend without it being weird or putting them in an awkward position?"

Teresa: Hmm... [pauses]

Travis: I am not a good person to ask about this, 'cause I call everyone my best friends. I have—

Teresa: [laughs] Well, that's the way that you do it. Is everyone's your best friend, so then there's not—[laughs] there's no awkwardness.

Travis: I have had to start, like, breaking it down as like, "This is my Cincinnati best friend. *This* is my Los Angeles best friend. This is my best friend I've known the longest. This is my best friend with red hair. [laughs quietly] This is my... best f—best left-handed friend."

Teresa: "Let us be friends for all our lives."

Travis: "Let us be friends for all our lives."

Teresa: That's, uh, a line from Bram Stoker—

Travis: *Dracula*, yeah.

Teresa: —from *Dracula*.

Travis: But I—I think that... I don't know. Maybe it's like "I love you," and it's just something that happens?

Teresa: I think your right. I think it is. Um, and you know, best friends... sometimes come and go.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: You know? You can be a best friend to someone for just a little while, depending upon your and their needs.

Travis: I—a long time ago, I realized, at least for me, that best friend doesn't mean number one, top friend.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: But rather you have entered this category of a best friend to have, right? Of, like, you are the best kind of friends. And much like saying "I love you," I don't think it has to be reciprocal, right? Like, there are people who I don't think I'm their *best* best friend, right? But we are best friends, right? This is a person that I can trust, and I hope that they trust me. But whether they trust me or not, I know I trust them.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: But I also think that this is, you know, communication. Be vulnerable, right? One of those notes is I think that if you are feeling like someone is the best kind of friend to have, I think it's okay to say, "I consider you one of my best friends."

Teresa: Certainly. And I also think it's kind of—it's kind of a feeling. It's that—that extra long hug feeling, a little bit? Um, and so—I mean, maybe you're not a hugger, and that's okay too. But it's that. It's that comfortability, and as, you know... as someone who has different levels of comfortability with different people, I think you're right. I think you can have multiple levels and circles and Venn diagrams of best friends.

And, you know, labeling it—maybe, like, that is important to you. Maybe it's not important. Um, and if you wanna call somebody your best friend—if somebody called *me* their best friend and I was like, "Aww!" Maybe I'm not their best friend, but it means a lot anyway.

Travis: Right. It's not like making someone your, you know, maid of honor or whatever. It doesn't carry with it specific responsibilities.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? It can sometimes just be a delineation between "You are someone I know and someone I am friendly with, and someone I consider very close."

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: Uh, this question was from Sailor Sammy.

"How much is too much to put on a friend? They offer to let you unload on them, but do you don't want to actually be a burden on them. Where is that line?"

Aw, Sammy!

Teresa: Aw.

Travis: That bums me out a little bit. Okay.

Teresa: But it also shows that you are—you have, um, concern for your friend, because friends are not therapists—although your therapist can be your friend, I suppose. Um, the—

Travis: Uh, I don't know. That's debatable.

Teresa: [laughs] The emotional load is what you're talking about.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And so you don't want to put the entirety of your emotional load on your friend's shoulder, and I think that the way that you make each others' loads lighter is you do that for your friend as well.

So if you—if you are, you know, concerned about bumming them out, maybe try and focus the relationship a little more on them for a while, you know? Trade—what'd—the friendship bank, right?

Travis: The friendship bank, yes.

Teresa: Trade back and forth with this.

Travis: First of all, Sammy, the reason it bums me out a little bit is don't ever worry about being a burden. I think that's a bad way to think about it. The only way that that can happen is—I don't know that it's about the amount of information or what you're telling them. It is the expectation, right?

So never expect your friend to fix your problem, or to be able to give you an answer, right?

Teresa: I agree.

Travis: Right? And so I think that if you're worried about it, lead off by saying "I want you to know, I don't expect you to fix this and not looking for answers. I just need to say this out loud. I just need to talk to someone about it, but you are under no obligation to try to solve it for me," right? Because that for me is the only time—and it's not that they're a burden. It's that I worry and I internalize their problem, 'cause I want to fix it for my friend. I love them very much.

Teresa: That's what makes it heavy.

Travis: Right, is I wanna fix it, because I love them. I'm—I'm never like, "Oh, this person has burdened me with this." It's just, like, not every problem is something that can be fixed. Sometimes all you need to do as a friend is listen, and I think—

Teresa: My mom used to call that venting. That's a thing, right?

Travis: Yeah, right. Vent—

Teresa: People say that.

Travis: —I need to vent.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Um, I do think along these lines, though, is there is a thing—let me see if I can find the question. Um... oh, okay. So, this is from Hannah.

"If I have an issue that I'd like to talk to my friend about, is asking if they're able to process or help me actually necessary? I don't want to overstep my boundaries, but it also seems like asking for permission to talk about anything negative is overkill."

I think my first inclination with that is, like, use your best judgment, right? In that, I mean—

Teresa: Read the room.

Travis: Right. Right? It's like, if it's something—for example, if it was, like, I saw a car accident and it was really gory, right? That might—you might... wanna talk to a professional about the details of that.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: But, that doesn't mean you can't say, like, "Well, seeing that car accident really messed me up, and I'm just kinda shaken right now." You know? But if there is something... like I said, if you have a friend that you know is also going through stuff, um—well, let me put it this way. I think it's not about asking to see if they're able to handle it so much as it's like, "Do you have time to talk? I've got some stuff that's really bumming me out. Is this a good time to talk? Are you able to, you know, help me with it now? Do you wanna schedule a time to talk about it?"

That's usually the way *I* would phrase it.

Teresa: Yeah. Because I don't think that you need to couch it so much as, like, "This is a really bad thing." More as, "I need more time. I need your time."

Travis: Or—and, you know, here's the thing. If you are worried about it, if it's something you feel like you need to say—let's put it this way. We're talking about vulnerability and communication, right? As you're establishing your friendship and you're getting to know this person, I think you can say, "Are you the type of person that if I have something, you know, negative to talk about, if I have something that's pretty heavy to talk about, would you like me to check with you to make sure that you're in a place to talk about it?" Right?

Because listen, I go through depressive episodes and I go to a therapist for it. There may be a time where I am in the middle of one of those episodes where maybe I'm not at my best to be the person a friend vents to, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: I acknowledge that about myself. But that's something that I would tell them. I don't need them to check with me first, right? So I think it's all about communicating with your friends and being, you know, vulnerable. Um—

Teresa: Sidebar. How does it make you feel when I quote you back to you? I see a little glint in your eyes when I say things—

Travis: Oh, it makes me so very happy.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Like, friendship bank and things like that.

Travis: It makes me feel like finally you've heard and understood how wise I am.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, now, this is a tough one. This one's from Grace.

"Suggestions on how to end a long term friendship?"

Now, there are two kinds of this I can think of, and the one that Grace references is "Me and my friend grew up together, but ended up going to different high schools and growing apart. We are in our 20's and only see each other about once a year, and I always find myself dreading it."

Now, with that specific example, Grace, what that makes me think of is... at least for me, right? When I find myself in these circumstances where I'm like, "Ugh. I'm gonna go see this person that I barely now, and have to pretend like we're best friends still."

You could counteract that by making an effort to, like, "You know what? I'm going to get to know them again."

Teresa: Yeah, reconnect!

Travis: But, if you're done with that friendship, I would say maybe just don't make those plans. And if that's—ugh, no, that's ghosting.

Teresa: Maybe just... I mean... it's not ghosting to let it fade organically.

Travis: Hm.

Teresa: Ghosting would be this person texts you, "Hey, I'm excited to see you at the bar this year at Christmas," or whatever, and you never responding, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That would be ghosting. If this person doesn't text you, don't text them! That's a natural kind of, like, fading away. Or if, like, it doesn't—don't go out of your way to make the plans work if they don't work out.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Or, I mean... you could even I think say to the person, "I'm not—I... I'm not gonna go to the bar this year, and, you know, it's been—it's just been too long."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Or... I mean... [sighs]

Travis: It's tough, right? Because what—

Teresa: It's tough because you don't want—you don't want to ghost, but you also—if you are not interested in this friendship, I think you can say that. Because—because—okay, yeah. Because we're always talking about, you need to decide what this relationship means to you. If you... don't want to be this person's friend anymore, and you say, "This is not working out for me." If they get mad at you, they get mad at you. That relationship doesn't mean as much to you. You know?

Travis: I think when we think about, like, breakups, it's way easier to contextualize breaking up with a romantic partner, because—

Teresa: Or in some sort of, like, blowout, right?

Travis: Well, but what I mean with a romantic partner is because the stakes seem higher. That there's—there's—it's more important to end a romantic relationship, because if you are someone who practices monogamy, that is a one kind of relationship that has a lot of, um... [sighs] the only word I can think of is burden, and that's not what I mean. I love you so much.

Teresa: It has a one in, one out scenario.

Travis: Well, but more than that, when you're in a romantic relationship, that's a higher level, you know, of relationship.

Teresa: Responsibility, even.

Travis: Yes, thank you.

Teresa: That's what you're talking about. Not burden.

Travis: Whereas friendships, you know, you can be in a friendship where you only see someone once a year, and if you were dating someone who you only saw once a year, that might be an issue, potentially.

And so—but I still think that relationships are—relationships are important. And if this is something you dread doing... man, chances are the other person might feel that way, too. But I would say, like—it's important to say, like, "Hey, you know, I understand that we've been doing this for many years and we've known each other for a long time, but I just really feel like we've grown apart and I don't know that it is important to me that we see each other this year. If—you know, I'm happy to stay in contact if via, like, email or Facebook Messenger or whatever, but I just don't know that I have the time to make plans this year."

Which is hard. Now, what about a toxic, big, blowup—and not just, like, "Aw, me and my friend got in an argument," but, like, "This person has shown time and time again to not be the kind of person I want to be friends with."

Teresa: Right. That is harder emotionally, but almost easier. [laughs quietly] In a way? [laughs]

Travis: 'Cause I think it's more—it feels more important, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: I think that's what I was getting at, is a friend that you've grown apart from... there feel—it feels less urgent to do something about. Whereas a toxic friendship feels urgent, feels more important to deal with, so it's easier to find the motivation to deal with it.

Teresa: I think the best way to do that is, "I can't do this anymore. I need space. Don't contact me. I'll contact you if I want to start again."

Travis: Right. And an—hard—something being hard doesn't mean it's wrong.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? And sometimes the rightest thing to do is the hardest thing to do. But if they are way overdrawn at the friendship bank, right? Like... I'm sure that you want to help them and you want to be there for—but at a certain point... it's not just a—a neutral for you, it is a negative for you. And if a friendship is negative for you—

Teresa: It's not a friendship!

Travis: —it's not a friendship. It's not a relationship you should be in, um, and it will be hard to end it, but you should. Uh, this is from Maya.

"What's the best way to stay neutral when two friends are fighting?"

[pauses]

Teresa: Um, I think the best way to stay neutral is to not be an emissary between. Uh, because inevitably someone is—one of them is going to think that, um—that you are on, quote, "the other's" side.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So I'm not saying you have to pick a side, because I don't believe that you do. But I think that you cannot carry messages from one to the other.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: You can be a good ear for both. You can give genuine, heartfelt advice to both. But don't tell the other about what you have said to one, right?

Travis: And I think—I think this is something we talk about all the time, which is setting expectations and communications, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: It is saying to them, "Listen. I understand that I am connected to both of you and you are fighting, but I am going to ask you to not put me in the position of being in the middle of this, because you are both important to me and I will not pick a side." Right?

Teresa: And like I said, that doesn't mean that you can't talk about the issue and give advice.

Travis: Right. But I would also say, if even talking about the issue makes you uncomfortable—

Teresa: Then you don't have to.

Travis: —then you don't have to. Right? It's like, you—just because you are connected to both parties doesn't mean you are obligated to be a part of it. And I think that if they are your friends, they will respect that, right? And I think that it is—it is important to say what you need and not just assume that they will know that you are uncomfortable being in the middle.

Uh, so one last question. This is from Ashley, and this is probably the question everyone wants to know.

Teresa: [laughs quietly]

Travis: "How to make friends in your 30's." Or, I guess, after school, as an adult, however you want to phrase it.

Teresa: Right, right. And I think that the—the real key to this if you have to actively do it.

Travis: Right!

Teresa: There is no passiveness about making new friends, and that's the hard part, right? You have to go places, you have to talk to people, you have to participate in activities, you have to make a concerned effort, and that is what's hard.

Travis: If you go back through the episode, we already told you how to do it. And the answer is, be vulnerable. That's the thing is, like, when a lot of people say, like, why it's more difficult as an adult to make friends, they will reference, like, as a kid, you would just walk up to somebody and be like, "We're friends now."

And it wasn't that it was magical when you were kids. It's that you weren't... you didn't feel weird doing it.

Teresa: Right. You weren't all hung up on the what-if's and I feel awkward's and things like that. You were willing to do the work because it was just, like, "Hey. I like to play with dinosaurs, too. Let's play together." Done.

Travis: Right. And so what I started doing a long time ago, and has really worked out for me, is if I meet someone new—normally I tend to meet new people through other people, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mutual friends.

Travis: Go to someone else's party, go to an event hosted by someone—whatever, right? And I like this new person. I say to them, "Hey, I've really enjoyed hanging out with you. Let's hang out again sometime." I become friends with them on Twitter and message them and make plans to hang out with them. And there is still a part of my brain that says, like, "Oh no, they feel pressured to hang out with you and they don't really want to and this is awkward for them!"

But, like, every—the thing I've learned, from this show and *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*, and every social interaction I've had, is everybody wants to make friends. Like, the majority of people are all trying to figure out how to make friends as an adult.

Dot: [baby noises]

Travis: And they're just waiting for someone to say, "I wanna be friends with you."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Now, if you want more practical advice, join a club. Uh, take a baking class. Go to things where new people are and meet them.

Dot: [baby noises]

Travis: And now, if you hear that, that's the sound of our baby waking up—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —which means, as always, this episode is coming to an end. Thank you so much for listening. Uh, listen, we've got the Max Fun Drive coming up.

Dot: [baby noises]

Travis: Uh, and we've got a really fun, special, you know, bonus episode planned that I think you guys are really gonna enjoy. Um, go to mcelroy.family and click on "Merch," check out all the merch there. Uh, you can click on "Tours" and find out about those.

Speaking of which, uh, *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*, along with *Sawbones*, is going to be performing in Cincinnati on February 19th, and *The Adventure Zone* on February 20th. Uh, you can still get tickets for that here in Cincinnati. Come see us. Uh, mcelroy.family, click on "Tours." Go to Maximumfun.org, check out all the other amazing shows there. Let's see. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: As always, thank you to Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art, @shmanners. That's where we get—
@shmannerscast.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: That's where we get all of our great questions for all of our episodes and watch for, um, fun things during the Max Fun Drive this year. We always go on Twitter. We love to give thank-you's and things.

Um, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for our cover photo of our fan-run Facebook group. You can join that—it's called *Shmanners* Fanners—uh, if you would love to give and get excellent advice from other fans.

Um, thank you to Alex, our research assistant and writer for most of our episodes.

Travis: Without whom we *would not* be able to do this, especially now with two, uh, rugrats running around.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Well, Dot's not quite running.

Teresa: Not yet.

Travis: But, uh—

Teresa: She will.

Travis: —it's ama—thank you so much, Alex. You're incredible.

Teresa: Um, and... is there anything else?

Travis: No, I think that's gonna do it for us! So 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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