

## Shmanners 241: Norman Rockwell

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**Travis:** Are you ready to rock?

**Teresa:** Well, I... yes.

**Travis:** 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 are listening to *Shmanners*.

**Teresa:** It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:** [David Attenborough impression] For ordinary occasions. You join us already in progress.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear.

**Travis:** How are you?

**Teresa:** I'm well.

**Travis:** [normal voice] I think I could keep that voice up for a little bit. It's kind of my David Attenborough?

**Teresa:** It is, a little bit.

**Travis:** [David Attenborough impression] Now, join us as we look at the lemurs. There they are. Oh! No, wait. That's a tree.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** [normal voice] Um, man. I'm pretty good at that! [laughs]

**Teresa:** You are a little good at that! Nice.

**Travis:** Pretty good. What do you mean, a little good? Pretty good.

**Teresa:** I mean—

**Travis:** I said pretty good.

**Teresa:** It's not... it's not quite David Attenborough, but it's okay.

**Travis:** How da—in front of our kids?

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** In front of our kids the listeners?!

**Teresa:** It's okay, children. Mommy and daddy still love each other, even when they fight.

**Travis:** About daddy's David Attenboroguh? [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** [David Attenborough impression] Whales. [normal voice] Alright. Um, so—

**Teresa:** Speaking of David Attenborough—

**Travis:** What?

**Teresa:** —who is a, uh—a fixture of BBC's—

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** —uh... [hesitantly] program running—

**Travis:** Where you goin'? Where you goin' with this?

**Teresa:** —let's—let's talk about Norman Rockwell—

**Travis:** I mean, I gue—

**Teresa:** —who is also a fixture of the—of United S—he's—

**Travis:** Uh-huh? [laughs]

**Teresa:** —recognizable—

**Travis:** Oh, I'm enjoying this.

**Teresa:** —completely recognizable.

**Travis:** Okay. You—you just fell down a conversational cliff—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —and bumped so many rocks on the way down. Are you okay?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** That looked very painful. So, here's the thing. I—I suggested Norman Rockwell as a topic.

**Teresa:** You did!

**Travis:** Because we often do bios on the show, uh, and sometimes it's people who have, like, directly influenced etiquette, uh, you know, like Emily Post for example. And sometimes it's people who have had a big impact on culture, right? That when we think about blank, it's unavoidable, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And so when I think about the term "Americana," one of the things that's like, "Oh, you know what sums that up? Norman Rockwell."

**Teresa:** Well, that's right.

**Travis:** I think Norman Rockwell's art had—and this is where it gets weird, right? Because I don't know anything about him beyond, like, him having a very definite visual style that, like, you see it and you're like, "That's Rockwellian." Right?

**Teresa:** It's a real illustrative style, and we'll go through it. Um—

**Travis:** But here's the reason I think it has an impact, is as someone who did not grow up in the time that Norman Rockwell captures in his illustrations, it has become a—like, that is what I picture when I think of those things. It's a lot like—I was thinking about it this morning. It's a little like Jean Shepherd, uh, and specifically *Christmas Story*.

**Teresa:** Yeah?

**Travis:** Where it's like a time way before me, and it has become a reference point for me with no idea if it's accurate or not, right?

**Teresa:** Right. Well, I mean, it's also a little bit like the movie *Grease*, right? Which is a portrayal of the 50's through a 70's lens.

**Travis:** It's something we do a lot here in the US, where we're like, "Oh, you know, you know, uh, the—the 20's. Like, *Great Gatsby*."

And it's like, I don't know if that's super accurate.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Right? And it's like we have all of these, like, historical fiction things, and that becomes our understanding of history. [holding back laughter] It's almost like we're bad at history, here in the US.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Almost!

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Well, so I'm gonna go through a little bit of Norman Rockwell's bio here. Um, and you will learn that some of the things that you associate with his illustrations, um, you knew, and some of 'em you didn't.

**Travis:** Can I say one more thing?

**Teresa:** Sure!

**Travis:** The thing that I think is most, uh, like—the thing that I think makes Rockwell illustrations so, uh, like, famous, and I think that has captured the hearts and minds of people who look at 'em, is they tell a story, right?

**Teresa:** Definitely.

**Travis:** Every illustration is like, "Oh, okay, this is a single snapshot in the middle of something that's going on. Whether it's kids on their way to go fishing or—the one that always pops in my mind is the little girl sitting outside the principal's office while the principal's talking to her parents, and she has a black eye, and it's like, "Okay, yep. I know exactly what happened before this—"

**Teresa:** The one I picture is the Thanksgiving one with the big turkey.

**Travis:** Right. And it's like, I know exactly what's happening in this without, like, any dialogue bubbles or whatever. It's a very clear story.

**Teresa:** Okay. Well, so if you, our listeners, are interested in Norman Rockwell, there's a PBS *American Masters* documentary—

**Travis:** Of course there is.

**Teresa:** —that's available on YouTube. Recommended. Okay. Um, so when you think about Norman Rockwell, what do you think about his upbringing?

**Travis:** You know, the only thing that pops in my head is I would bet 150 doll hairs that he was a boy scout. Like, that's it. That's the only thing. Maybe grew up near the ol' fishin' hole.

**Teresa:** Hmm.

**Travis:** Um, farmhouse. Uh, can I tell you, I'm completely talking out of my butt here, 'cause I can't even tell you what Norman Rockwell looks like.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Let alone...

**Teresa:** Well, you're not alone. You're not alone in thinking that perhaps an idyllic country lifestyle.

**Travis:** Yeah. I don't know necessarily—but definitely, like, small town—

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Oh! Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, Norman Rockwell was born and raised in New York city.

**Travis:** Oh! Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah, I was—

**Travis:** Not a lot of fishin' holes there.

**Teresa:** No, no. Um, he was a boy in New York, and his family was poor. He used to sit on the roof of the boarding house where they lived and watch Irish and German gangs fight.

**Travis:** Huh! [wheezy laughter] Okay! Okay.

**Teresa:** So, he grew up in kind of a rougher part of town.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Um, and really the only interaction he had with country life was his family's—his family would, like, summer in the country, which was not uncommon. Um, 'cause it was mostly just camping. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** Right. You have to imagine, living in a boarding house, no air conditioning, in the summer in New York City, you want to go somewhere where there's a breeze and you're not sweltering. Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, they moved to a smaller town later in his childhood, uh, in Westchester County.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, as a child, he is quoted as saying, "I was a lump, a log, a long skinny nothing, a beanpole without beans. All I had was my ability to draw."

**Travis:** Okay, so this is, like, drawing from a very young age. This was not, like, Dr. Seuss, right? Where it was like, "I don't know, maybe I'll try my hand at drawing after the war." Right? This was like, he had drawn since—he was born with a charcoal in his hand.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Well, he wasn't close with his family, and he didn't shine as an athlete or make really great grades. Um, but drawing was kind of, like, how he passed the time, how he had fun, and what he later became really, really good at and famous for.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Um, so he had—he obviously had some stellar talent—excuse me. [clears throat] Um, but like I said, his grades were poor. [laughs quietly] Um, he was called to the principal's office in early high school, and the principal sat him down and said he either had to get serious about school or he had to drop out and go to art school.

**Travis:** Okay. The art school thing—if you hadn't said the art school part I was gonna be like, "Not a very good principal."

"Hey! Get serious or, like, stop wastin' our time."

**Teresa:** Well, unfortunately, high school still is a numbers game, and a lot of failing students are kind of coerced into dropping out before graduation, or, you know—or suggested that they get their GEDs, because high schools want those good numbers.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm!

**Teresa:** Anyway.

**Travis:** Mm, mm, mm.

**Teresa:** Um, so he did go to art school, but it's really awesome that—he only had two years of high school education, and he really, like, excelled in the social strata, right? So he had a lot of social commentary, he had a lot of thoughts about the world, and he wasn't, quote, "highly educated," which is pretty cool.

**Travis:** Well, you know, here's the thing, and I—I—what I am about to say is a dangerous, dangerous thing to say, right? Because it's something, uh, especially as, like, a theater kid who went on to get their theater degree, it's a discussion that happens a lot with artists.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Which is like, "Well, who even needs school?" And the answer is people do. It is 2020. School helps.

But I do think that there is stuff that, like, you don't learn in school, and I don't necessarily think that, like, a social understanding of, like—especially when it comes to having a commentary in your art is necessarily, like—that grades reflect that. Uh, that said, I went to school, and enjoyed it [laughs] and I—I recommend it.

**Teresa:** Um, so—

**Travis:** If you can. I'm not sayin'—you know, some people can't go to college, and that's fine. But I'm sayin' if you want to, do it.

**Teresa:** So, this—

**Travis:** I'll be proud of you—

**Teresa:** [sighs]

**Travis:** —no matter what is what I'm saying. As your dad, I will love you and be proud of you no matter what.

**Teresa:** Thank you. Are you done?

**Travis:** Uh, for now.

**Teresa:** Okay. In the era before television—



**Travis:** What?!

**Teresa:** —um, one—[laughs] one of the most striking visual mediums was illustration, right? Uh, magazines, books, advertising—it was all pretty much drawn instead of photographed. Um, and so this was—Norman Rockwell landed, like, smack dab in the middle of this era, which is probably why he became so iconic and famous.

**Travis:** Right place, right time.

**Teresa:** That's right. They call it the golden era of illustration.

**Travis:** Hmm!

**Teresa:** Hmm! Um, he went straight into illustration, basically. A lot of people go to art school to, like, become, like, a—you know, a classical painter or, you know, study impressionist style or whatever. Um, but he was really good at illustrating, and they were really happy to have him.

**Travis:** You know, it's so interesting. I guess I've never thought about it before, but now it's really clicking for me that probably another reason he is so iconic is that his art was, like, going to people's homes all the time.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Right? It wasn't, like, hanging in a museum that you had to pay to go see. It was on magazines and in ads and, you know, everywhere. And so it just was so... so, uh, omnipresent that it became definitive of, like, the time period.

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** I've never thought about that before. It makes complete sense.

**Teresa:** And it also really helped that he was fast. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** He had a really great turnaround period, and so he could produce beautiful and thought provoking art by age 16, 17, and by age 19 he was the editor of a publication called *A Boy's Life*.

**Travis:** Oh, wait! *A Boy's Life*! That's—that's the, uh—the boy scout magazine!

**Teresa:** Hmm!

**Travis:** I used to get that. My favorite part of *Boy's Life* was the ad stuff on the back where it was like, "You could get binoculars!"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And, you know, x-ray specs or whatever. I loved that stuff.

**Travis:** Uh, but he's not as well known for *A Boy's Life* as he is for the... Saturday Evening Post.

**Travis:** Yeah, that's what I was gonna say. You just—

**Teresa:** That's what you were gonna say—I—I jumped into it.

**Travis:** —[simultaneously] you got there before I was.

**Teresa:** And he was only 22 when he gathered up samples and took them to the Saturday Evening Post.

**Travis:** Oh, wow.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Man, I haven't done anything with my life.

**Teresa:** Hey, you've done lots of stuff.

**Travis:** That's true! And you know what I'm gonna do now? A thank you note to our sponsors.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hey, folks! This week we are sponsored in part by Function of Beauty. And, listen. I don't know if you all know this. I am a bit of a beauty buff. I like feeling beautiful, and Function of Beauty helps me do that. Because, listen. One size fits all doesn't work when it comes to cosmetic stuff. And the fact of the matter is, I got a dry scalp, and I have dyed hair, and I need shampoo and conditioner and hair treatments and all that stuff that is fitted perfectly for me, and that's why I love Function of Beauty.

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and zero delivery fees for a month when you download the DoorDash app in the app store and enter code "shmanners." Don't forget, that's code "shmanners" for 5 dollars off your first order with DoorDash.

We also have a Jumbotron this week! We want you to tune in weekly to the *Kingdom of Thirst* podcast with Abigail Kelly to scratch that romance itch. Welcome to the *Kingdom of Thirst* podcast, where we celebrate romance novels: the outrageous, the lurid, the bone melting, and everything in between.

Every week, host Abigail Kelly chats with a romance novel rookie to break down a book of her choice in a loving, adult-flavored book report. She expects to win them over the side with all the smoochin', while makin' them laugh along the way. Find us on Instagram or Twitter at @kingdomthirst, and at *Kingdom of Thirst* wherever podcasts are available.

[music plays]

**Jarrett:** Hey, I'm Jarrett Hill, cohost of the brand new Maximum Fun podcast, *FANTI*.

**Tre'vell:** And I'm Tre'vell Anderson. I'm the other, more fabulous cohost, and the reason you really should be tuning in!

**Jarrett:** I feel the nausea rising.

**Tre'vell:** To be *FANTI* is to be a big fan of something, but also have some challenging or anti feelings toward it.

**Jarrett:** Kinda like Kanye.

**Tre'vell:** We're all fans of Kanye, he's a musical genius, but, like, you know...

**Jarrett:** He thinks slavery was a choice.

**Tre'vell:** Or like *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Like, I love the drama, but do I want to see Black women fighting each other on screen?

**Speaker 1:** [singing] Hell to the nah, to the nah, nah, nah!

**Jarrett:** We're tackling all of those complex and complicated conversations about the people, places, and things that we love.

**Tre'vell:** Even though they may not love us back.

**Jarrett:** *FANTI!* Maximum Fun. Podcast.

**Tre'vell:** Ew!

[music and advertisement end]

**Travis:** Okay. When we last left off, we were talking about all the amazing things that I've done with my life. What are some other things that I've done with my life?

**Teresa:** Uh, well, you can't really quantify it, because it exists in the ether, the internet.

**Travis:** If you don't want to talk about how good my life is, that's fine. It's great. I got a great wife—

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] Uh, you have—you got a great wife—

**Travis:** —I got two great kids.

**Teresa:** —two kids, two dogs, one cat. I mean, your house is full.

**Travis:** Too full! I'm gonna get rid of one of those, and I'm not gonna tell you which one.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, alright. Here we are, in the year 1916.

**Travis:** [makes whooshing noises] That's us traveling back to 19—19—what year?

**Teresa:** 1916. And the Saturday Evening Post was considered the absolute highest honor in the illustration world.

**Travis:** I have no concept of when anything happened.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You say 1916, you might as well say in Ancient Rome. [laughs]  
Americans are so bad at history! Why don't I—I went to school! Why don't I know anything? Aw, man. This is a real roller coaster episode for me.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Oh boy.

**Teresa:** Um, by the way, we talk a lot about, quote, "The Post," which is a—a name for a lot of different newspapers.

**Travis:** Right, just like Times.

**Teresa:** Um, so I'm going to refer to the Saturday Evening Post as the Post. Uh, please, you know—there's also the Washington Post, there's—all of these other ones.

**Travis:** There's the fence post.

**Teresa:** Ehh. But this—I'm talking about Saturday Evening Post.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so he was accepted—[clears throat] excuse me. Okay, wait. I need to back up a little bit.

**Travis:** [whooshing noises]

**Teresa:** If you watch interviews, Norman Rockwell talks about his own awkwardness and nerves, saying that he had a special box made for, um, carrying—well, he made it himself—carrying his work to and from editors and things like that. Um, and he says that he must have looked like some skinny boy bringing in a funeral contraption to his meeting, because there was this—this box—huge box, little guy, right?

Um, and he was so nervous going to the Post that he was surprised that they even, like, accepted his work at all. Um, and art historian Karal Ann Marling said, "This would be sort of like winning an Oscar the first time you made a movie."

**Travis:** Oh, wow.

**Teresa:** Um, and so he really won the illustration career lottery. They only used red and black in their color prints at the time, the Post did, um, but mass color printing is really where Norman Rockwell is about to shine, right?

**Travis:** Oh yeah.

**Teresa:** Uh, he—

**Travis:** Detail.

**Teresa:** Detail.

**Travis:** Detail is that dude's middle name.

**Teresa:** Exactly, exactly.

**Travis:** Norman Detail Rockwell.

**Teresa:** It was—

**Travis:** I almost said Reedus.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Norman Reedus, a completely different person from Norman Rockwell.

**Teresa:** Yes, yes. Um, so once the colorized detail printing was available, the sky was the limit for him. It was perfectly set for him to become an icon. Um, and it's said that he used the covers of the Saturday Evening Post in order to, like, construct a kind of daydream of the childhood he didn't have.

**Travis:** Right. So, I think that that plays into that, like, Americana fantasy, right, that we have. Of just, like, uh—like I said, just like Jean Shepherd and all these things of, like, remembering this time period with such rose colored glasses that it's like, okay, yeah, you're erasing a lot of bad stuff in this, right?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Like, we're not dealing with, you know, racism, and—

**Teresa:** Not yet.

**Travis:** Oh! Okay, go on.

**Teresa:** Um, so this period is kind of like Norman rewriting his own history, kind of like re-parenting himself is the therapy term. And Karal Marling says, "You don't get the sense when you read Norman Rockwell's autobiography that he had this kind of idyllic, barefoot boy with cheek of tan upbringing for so many years. About the first 15 years of his career, he created this mythical, wonderful land of mischievous boys and dogs, and is that fake or real? In some emotional way, Rockwell is painting an emotional truth. The truth is, he's a city boy from New York who clearly did not like that place, and I think that he didn't like the sense of emotional violence that robbed him of a childhood."

**Travis:** Okay. Yeah, I mean, I think that there's a reason that his art resonated the way that it did. I think a lot of people were experiencing that in America at that time. This idea of this—and—oh man, once again, there are historians and people smarter than me that could speak to this, but I imagine a loss of innocence at this time, as we move from the very late 1800's into the early 1900's, and we're having to deal with a lot of stuff that we had not dealt with before. You know, world wars, and depressions, and things like this, where people would see this kind of idyllic, uh, like, I—I either remember my childhood being like that, or wish I had gotten to experience that, where it becomes an escape in and of itself.

**Teresa:** Exactly. It was comfort personified, right? So we think about the Norman Rockwell painting as, "Ah, the good old days." But even those days weren't the good old days.

**Travis:** They didn't exist!

**Teresa:** It wasn't real.

**Travis:** The—the things that—the things that Norman Rockwell, like, created were, in a perfect world, that's what my memory would have been. Literally. Like, that's what he was doing.



**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And so people see that, and they want to remember this perfect world that didn't exist.

**Teresa:** So, [clears throat] after a while [old-timey American accent] you couldn't throw a stick without seeing a Norman Rockwell illustration.

**Travis:** Okay, when did Zooey Deschanel get here?

**Teresa:** What—

**Travis:** Zooey?

**Teresa:** —no! That wasn't Zo—that was just—

**Travis:** [stammers] It sounded very like your Zooey Deschanel impression.

**Teresa:** I guess it did, but, I mean, it was—

**Travis:** [unintelligible] No, that's—that's April Ludgate, excuse me.

**Teresa:** It was April Ludgate is what I was goin' for.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and then since you couldn't go anywhere without seeing his illustrations, he also started to get a little bit of money. He moved to New Rochelle.

**Travis:** [gasps] New Rochelle?

**Teresa:** Yes, the suburb of New York where many famous illustrators had settled.

**Travis:** That feels very—is New Rochelle in *Great Gatsby*? Or is that just—

**Teresa:** Uh, isn't it in...

**Travis:** It's like New Egg or something, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah, but I feel like New Rochelle is in—what's that... [sighs deeply] musical, two ships passing...

**Travis:** Oh—oh! *Ragtime*.

**Teresa:** *Ragtime*. Um, isn't it? Maybe I'm make—

**Travis:** I have no idea. Who cares? Go on [laughs]

**Teresa:** Maybe I'm making that up. Anyway, okay. Uh, and it is there that he met Irene O'Connor. Irene was his first wife. He would go on to marry three times. Uh, but he told his son—

**Travis:** New Rochelle is *Catch Me If You Can*.

**Teresa:** Ahhh.

**Travis:** Hmmmm.

**Teresa:** Okay. Um, he told his son that his—

**Travis:** And you were right, *Ragtime*!

**Teresa:** —first wife was more of an impulse decision than really a deep romance.

**Travis:** Oh, cool. What a cool thing to say, Norman.

**Teresa:** Well, I mean... here's the thing. Things were on the up and up for him.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Right? He was becoming, like—his art was everywhere. He was working at the post. He had moved to New Rochelle. Like, this was just—

**Travis:** And it sounds like he's pretty young at this point.

**Teresa:** Yeah, yeah.

**Travis:** Like, mid-20's.

**Teresa:** This was just the thing that seemed to be next.

**Travis:** And you know, it once again makes sense—not to psychoanalyze too much here, but hey, that's what we're doing—if you're looking for an idyllic, like, ideal life that you didn't have growing up—

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** —you know, house, wife, living in the country—you know, like, these are the things that you're like, "I've got it now. Money, marriage, house, like, I'm doing it! I'm capturing this thing I didn't have." Whether it's actually the thing you want or not is not really your concern at that point. Makes sense.

**Teresa:** Right. It seems—it seems—I mean, she was a pretty, young schoolteacher, and it seems that their relationship just wasn't very close. Uh, it is said that they lived a fairly carefree lifestyle that sometimes included affairs for both of them.

**Travis:** I wonder if nowadays they would've been polyamorous.

**Teresa:** Hmm.

**Travis:** If that would've been—if, for a couple like them, polyamory would have made for a healthier marriage?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Hm.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Um, so this is the 1920's. Norman is traveling all over the place. He goes to Europe, Central America, North Africa, lots of other places. Um, and you can actually see in a lot of his illustrations from the period that the children and dogs are daydreaming, or sitting at a typewriter, or holding a book with a cloud above their head, right? That they're imagining themselves in the story they're making. Um—

**Travis:** This is something we saw, uh, with Agatha Christie, too, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Is, like, she went to Egypt after her divorce, I believe, and then it was like, "Well, I love this place."

And so so many of her books after that—like, she had a bunch of books set in Egypt, set in, you know, that part of the world for a while, 'cause she was just so in love with it.

**Teresa:** Right. Um, the traveling really didn't do much for his marriage. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, that'll happen. Yeah.

**Teresa:** Uh, and so his marriage to Irene ended in late 1930's. Um, and Norman was—sorry, in late 1930, the year 1930. Uh, Norman was ready to, you know, try his bachelor—

**Travis:** He was gonna bachelor around, yeah, yeah.

**Teresa:** He was gonna bachelor around a bit. But... love found him.

**Travis:** [laughs] When you least expect it. This month, on Hallmark Channel.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Less than a month and a half—

**Travis:** *Drawing Conclusions.*

**Teresa:** —after his—

**Travis:** *Drawing Conclusions* would be the na—*Drawing... Conclusion—*

**Teresa:** [sighs]

**Travis:** —*Drawn Together.* No, *Drawn Together.*

**Teresa:** *Drawn Together*, that would be better.

**Travis:** *Drawn Together* would be better.

**Teresa:** Um, less than a month and a half after his divorce he met Mary Barstow, and according to their son, they were engaged a week later.

**Travis:** Wowww!

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, and... [laughs quietly] the New York Times ran the story as "Mary Barstow, California socialite, marries artist."

**Travis:** [laughs] Okay. You know what? Good for you, Mary Barstow.

**Teresa:** Yeah! Um, and the couple had three sons, and he was, you know, like we said, living the life he thought he always should have.

**Travis:** Yeah. And you know what? Now we know one of his sons very well, Sam Rockwell. [pauses] Probably not.

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] No, no.

**Travis:** No. No?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, Jarvis, Tom, and Peter.

**Travis:** J—*Jarvis Rockwell*. What a power name!

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm!

**Travis:** "Oh, me? I'm Jarvis Rockwell. [holding back laughter] Get out of my way." I love that name. Can we change Bebe's name to Jarvis Rockwell?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so at this point—you know, we talked about how he seemed to be, like, amassing the things: the house, the wife, the kids, all this stuff.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** But... he wasn't really fulfilled artistically at this point. I mean, his stuff was everywhere, but it's not like it was hanging in museums, or, like—this was not the age of, like, Norman Rockwell poster prints. He was basically just selling reproduction rights to his work to different magazines, right?

Um, so he wanted to get back to the soul of his work. And what do you think that artists do when they want to get back to their—the core of their art?

**Travis:** What do I think they do?

**Teresa:** Yeah! Where do they go?

**Travis:** Home.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** No, they go to... Paris.

**Teresa:** Paris!

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And this time, he took his family with him!

**Travis:** Ah, so he liked them better this time.

**Teresa:** I think so.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so they all settled in Paris, and his ambition—

**Travis:** [French accent] Ah, Paris.

**Teresa:** [French accent] Paris. [normal voice] His ambition was to transcend—

**Travis:** Wait, and this was the 1930's?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Whoa. Startin' to be pretty troubling over there in Europe, Norman.

**Teresa:** Uh-huh.

**Travis:** Are you sure about all this, Norman?

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, well, he didn't stay there long.

**Travis:** Okay, good.

**Teresa:** So, um, he wanted to [grandly] transcend the confinements of popular illustration.

**Travis:** Okay, sure. I bet that's the kind of thing that now, looking back on someone like Norman Rockwell you're like, "Oh, totally, pure artist."

But I bet then, if he said that to a friend they'd be like, "Alright, Norm. Alright. We get it, man. Just go enjoy Paris, dude, okay? We get you wanna [mockingly] transcend, blah, blah, blah. [normal voice] Just have some absinthe and, you know, enjoy yourself."

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Um, he continued painting his own personal American dream, even through the Depression. Um, and it—it's thought that at this point in Paris he really—he didn't, like, expand his horizons. He... he concentrated them. This is when his paintings get very, very detailed. Um, and I mean, it's painstaking, really, what he's doing at this point. Um... and... the charm starts to wear off.

**Travis:** Okay. How so?

**Teresa:** Well, so, he wanted people to have the picture of the American, like, unity, and virtual, and spirit.

**Travis:** Hmm.

**Teresa:** But, I mean, it's the Depression.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Um, and so he... his—his work doesn't sell as well as it should.

**Travis:** Well, this is a thing that we see in pop culture a lot, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Of just, like, there is a—"Oh, we love these beautiful memories, and this beautiful, idyllic—" and then at a certain point, there comes a, like, "Hey, this isn't the right time for that. This is the time for addressing what is going on in actual society now."

And then we swing back to, like, "Ah, now we're back to being—" like, you see it all the time! In—in the swing of art throughout the centuries.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Um, and so he—the family, at the end of the 1930's, moves back to the US, and they settle in Arlington, Vermont.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Interestingly, he really was just gonna, like, buy them a vacation home. [laughs quietly] But he fell in love with the area, and decided to stay as well.

**Travis:** Well, who wouldn't? Arling—beautiful Arlington, Vermont. You—I've talked about it on this show numerous times. The most beautiful city... in America. Uh, they have the—the trees, and, uh, all the—all—all the streams.

**Teresa:** Sure!

**Travis:** And I love the grass there. Oh, the grass. It's delicious!

**Teresa:** [laughs] So—and this is where his workaholic energy really pays off. First, he found a community in Arlington that he really enjoyed. Um, he made lots of friends, and people happily posed for him and, you know, he really developed friendships that he hadn't had before.

Um, but the one thing that really deepened his work emotionally... World War II.

**Travis:** Yeah. Yeah. Yep, yep, yep. That'll happen.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Uh, people in Arlington were deeply affected by the war, as were a lot of people. Um, and—



**Travis:** And you have to think, right now we're swinging back towards this, like, patriotism and, like, getting people to enlist, and feeling strong about your country, and very Americana.

**Teresa:** Right. And this is where Norman Rockwell goes into his Willy Gillis series.

**Travis:** Excuse me?

**Teresa:** Willy Gillis!

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, it's a character that he created as kind of like a frame of reference for his artistic experience. Um, he was an innocent-faced young military private with a dopey smile, who graced the Post cover several times. Um, and he went off to war to save his country. And, you know, there was lots of, um—lots of that, you know, "Go America!" "Over there," like, all that kind of stuff, right?

**Travis:** [singing] Over there. [normal voice] Oh yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, but the thing that made Willy Gillis different was that he never fired a gun.

**Travis:** Ohh! I'm looking at a picture of Willy Gillis right now. Indeed.

**Teresa:** Uh, he was never portrayed in battle he was not, like, liberating France or, like, storming the beaches. He didn't shake Winston Churchill's hand. But he would be doing things like cat's cradle, or reading his hometown newspaper, or being—you know, doing kitchen duty.

Uh, and Rockwell hoped that this portrayal of the hometown boy away from home would help people feel better about the war.

**Travis:** Well, yeah, you had to think at this point, a lot of people had family members over there, had sons, or had husbands over there. And we weren't able to, like, text back and forth, or email, or call easily. You were waiting on letters, if they got through. So, being able to, once again, project your hope for safety and

happiness onto this character is providing an idyllic escape that, at this point, people were looking for.

**Teresa:** Yes. Um, and so Norman would only paint one battle scene in his—in his painting career, and none of them are through Willy.

Um, so the next, like, milestone in this career was when FDR gave his Four Freedoms speech. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear. Um, and he wanted to do something big, right? Norman wanted to do something.

Um, and so this is the Four Freedoms paintings. Can you—look it up, take a look.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Yes, I will pull it up.

**Teresa:** Uh, the represented a tenet of each of FDR's dreams. So, the first one is a man standing confidently in a town hall meeting for freedom of speech. Um, and there are a large group of people facing the same way, with their hands clasped, almost in prayer, for freedom of worship.

**Travis:** Ohh, yes, yes, yes. Okay, I know this one. We've—I've seen this one.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Freedom from fear is a sweet portrait of a young father and mother, safely tucking their sons into bed. And, here comes the—the one that I always think of, the freedom from want. It's the table of the famil—uh, table full of family, smiling as they, you know, lay into a huge Thanksgiving turkey. Um, and I think that's—that's pretty cool. I guess I always assumed that that was kind of, like, a Thanksgiving week run. But to find out that this was inspired by the war, by FDR, by these freedoms, it's really cool!

**Travis:** Well, and what's interesting to look at these, and I think one of the things that makes them very special is, like, a lot of Norman Rockwell things had a little bit—not necessarily humor, but they were quirky, right? There was some kind of quirkiness to the way the character was, like, smiling or reacting to things or whatever, and these are all very, like—played very straight, right? And, like, I think it's part of what makes them very iconic, and very impactful, is there's not a, like—there's no quirk to them. It is very straightforward of, like, "This is the ideal of this thing in my mind."

**Teresa:** Right. Uh... there was—there was a little edge growing to his work, though. Um, at this time he's very interested in the war effort. Um, he hopes to try and use his paintings to sell war bonds, but, um, he inevitably is really only able to use the Post to—to help that sort of thing.

Um, and an unfortunate occurrence happened.

**Travis:** Oh?

**Teresa:** After the Four Freedoms gained popularity, his studio in Arlington burnt down.

**Travis:** [gasps] No!

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, so not only did all of his, like, props and paints and all that kind of stuff—he lost a lot of his artwork. He decided to travel around the country and make a lot of new art!

Um, so he—he was always very, uh, perfectionistisi—per—he was always a perfectionist?

**Travis:** Sure. Professioni—professionalistic.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Perfe—professionista, I think it is.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, so much so that the Facts of Life painting took 11 months!

**Travis:** Whoa!

**Teresa:** Um... and there—there had to be... there had to be something about this [hesitantly] perfectionalism... that—

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** —really showed a lot about his—his inner state.

**Travis:** Well, I mean, if you look, the Facts of Life painting is incredibly rich.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Like, if you look at just the depth of, like, the carpet, the boy's shoes, the cat, it's, like, so detailed. And once again, here's—ugh! Okay. Look at the Facts of Life painting as an example that I'm talking about, telling a story. Right? Obviously the story is the dad trying to explain the birds and the bees to the kid. But if you look at what's happening, you also see that it is a grown cat and two baby kittens crawling around, and you can think, oh, it's because these kittens were born, the kid asked where did the kittens come from, and it launched the dad into having to do this awkward explanation of, like, "Uhh, okay, okay, okay."

**Teresa:** Um, so a little more of personal trauma before we move on. Um, his wife, Mary, struggled with anxiety, and depression, and alcoholism. He himself also struggled with depression. Um, and they moved someplace where hopefully they could both get a little more help. Um, they moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Uh, and it probably helped? He still had this really kind of pull between selling, like, the beautiful illustrations, and his, like, deep, artistic, inner workings. And unfortunately, Mary died in 1959, unexpectedly, of a heart attack.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** This is where things get interesting.

**Travis:** Oh—they've already been interesting!

**Teresa:** [laughs] After Mary's death, Rockwell decided to take a poetry class from a retired teacher named Molly Punderson, and fell in love with her—

**Travis:** Oh boy!

**Teresa:** —almost immediately. Um, and it's said by everyone that knew the couple that Molly changed him for the better.

Um, and so they—they—art critics really think that she's the one we have to thank for his later and more opinionated work. Um, she had a very strong social conscience. Um, and so she didn't hesitate fighting for causes that mattered to her, um, and [laughs quietly] one of Norman's closest friends would say to him, "Thank God Molly made you a liberal."

**Travis:** [laughs] Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so here it is. The portrait of Ruby Bridges. The Problem We All Live With.

Uh, she—Molly knew that Norman could be a powerful influence for the civil rights movement if he used his talent for social justice. And this painting is a big deal, for a bunch of reasons. Um, it's the very first—it's—until this painting, we rarely see Black people in Norman Rockwell's paintings. Um, and that's probably not all his fault. The Post actually made it clear that they didn't want Black people on their covers, uh, unless they were in a subservient position. Um, which is... not—not out of character for the times, but not good.

Um, and the second one is that, you know, we hardly ever see any violence happening in Norman's paintings. Uh, but—

**Travis:** Wow.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I'm looking at this painting now. It's... it's so unlike any Norman Rockwell painting I've ever seen.

**Teresa:** Right. Um, you know—

**Travis:** Because it—it—it is—to go from paintings that are trying to capture this, like, perfect, idyllic, like—like, "Oh, don't you remember sitting around the radio with the family? Oh, Papa reading his newspaper!" To be like, "Okay, but here is actually a thing that's going on right now that none of us are, like, actually dealing with."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Whew.

**Teresa:** Um, so this is when he starts painting more of the civil rights movement, um, and... this is when his paintings start to come to terms with—instead of the myth, the ideal that he had, like, dreamed up, he started actually painting the America that people were living in.

So, you see this movement across his work, um, which I think is amazing. I think it's so great, not only where it ends up, but the journey, right? His personal journey, America's journey... it's great. He did illustrations for NASA, he did illustrations for the Peace Corps, um, and picked up brand deals with color televisions.

**Travis:** Oh boy!

**Teresa:** Uh, Purina cat food was his big thing.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Yeah. [laughs]

**Travis:** Alright! Get paid!

**Teresa:** Yeah, right! Um, so if you know where to look, you can see that much of Rockwell's work is profound tributes to common people living through history, right? Um, and this is kind of why people try and, like, hold him up as some kind of, like, conservative icon. They kind of say, like, "Ah, the good old days. This is the way it used to be."

Um, but he—he felt that... in his later works, that he was a good enough artist to be, like, a famous painter and had, like—you know, although he was passed over, over and over again, as just kind of an illustrator, he wanted to have—

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Isn't that so weird to think of now?

**Teresa:** —the heart in his work.

**Travis:** But that's so weird to think of now that anybody would be like, "Oh, well, Norman Rockwell... oof. Kind of just an illustrator, right?"

Like, I—I don't know. It's just so iconic of, like, a—he seems to me to be [holding back laughter] one of the greatest artists of the 20th century?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Like, one of the most well known artists of the 20th—one of the most recognizable artists of the 20th century, that if you were to see one of his

drawings without knowing anything about it, if you have seen one Norman Rockwell drawing, you could pick any illustration of his out of a lineup pretty easily.

**Teresa:** Right. Um, so his life had ups and downs and stuff, but he is said, uh, "The story of my life is really the story of my pictures and how I made them, because in one way or another, everything I have ever seen or done has gone into my pictures."

**Travis:** This is fascinating. I'm glad I had this idea.

**Teresa:** So fascinating! Great work.

**Travis:** Thank you. Hey, everybody. That's gonna do it for another episode of *Shmanners*. But before we let you go, uh, you have one more day—well, not—I guess—okay. So, here's the deal. Uh, tomorrow, Saturday the 19th if you're listening to this today, on the 18th, we are doing our Candenights special. It is going to be going up. Uh, you can watch it I believe at 8 PM tomorrow. Um, tickets are at [stammers] [bit.ly/candlenights2020](https://bit.ly/candlenights2020). Um, it is pre-taped, but it is spectacular. There are video segments from *MBMBaM*, *Sawbones*, *Shmanners*, *Wonderful!*, *Still Buffering*, *Neat!* and special guests. We've announced some of those special guests, and one of this is Strong Bad—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —and it makes me very happy. Um, tickets are pay what you want with a \$6.25 minimum, and all proceeds go to Harmony House.

One more time, you can get those tickets at [bit.ly/candlenights2020](https://bit.ly/candlenights2020). Uh, *Wonderful!*, one of our sister podcasts, is doing a live fundraiser for the Austin Bat Cave, which actually has nothing to do with bats. It's a nonprofit organization which empowers students to find their voices and tell their stories. Tickets are \$5. That's on December 29th at 9 PM Eastern Time. Uh, more info and tickets available at [bit.ly/wonderfulabc](https://bit.ly/wonderfulabc).

Uh, we have a podcast book coming out called *Everybody Has a Podcast (Except You)* that's gonna teach you how to make a podcast you're proud of, and we're doing a book launch event for that, January 26th at 9 PM Eastern Time. It's a free virtual event, and we've partnered with six independent bookstores. If you preorder from them, you'll get an exclusively designed bookplate, assigned by

one of the three McElroy brothers, while supplies last. You can go to [bit.ly/mcelroypodcastbookevent](http://bit.ly/mcelroypodcastbookevent) for bookstore links and more.

Uh, let's see. *The Sawbones Book* is out in paperback December 29th. It's newly revised and updated for 2020, and you can get that at [bit.ly/sawbonespaperback](http://bit.ly/sawbonespaperback), and I think that's enough for now.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. Well, but let me thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. That's where we get our questions for our topics, uh, @shmatterscast. Um, also thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmatters* Fanners. Join that. Uh, we're always taking idioms.

Alex, our wonderful researcher, thank you Alex.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Thank you, Alex.

**Teresa:** Uh, reads every email at [shmatterscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmatterscast@gmail.com). Um, and we're always taking idioms and topics. Please send those in.

**Travis:** And that's gonna do it for us. Join us again next week.

**Teresa:** No RSVP required!

**Travis:** You've been listening to *Shmatters*...

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmatters*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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