

Shmanners 239: Holiday Shopping

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Teresa: I didn't get you anything.

Travis: That's okay. Your presence is present enough. But seriously, nothing?

Teresa: It's Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

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

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

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

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

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: Hello, hi. A sleepy evening. [sings] Hey, sleepy evening... that's nothing.

Teresa: That's nothing

Travis: Man, folks, Baby Dot did not sleep good!

Teresa: Yeah. We're crossing our fingers, or whatever it is people do now.

Travis: Crossing our fingers and a-stomping our feet, singing doo-wah-doo...
[laughs] diddy-doh, diddy—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: [laughs] Oh no! It's gonna be a weird one!

Teresa: Mm hmm.

Travis: Now, I know we've talked about this before, because we've done holiday shopping episodes before.

Teresa: We have.

Travis: What kind of, uh, like gift giver are you?

Teresa: Um... well, first of all, I firmly believe that a gift isn't something that you earn or deserve. You give someone a gift because you want to show them how much you appreciate them, not how much they've done for you or, you know. It's not a tip on their wages, it is a freely given gift. Also, I like it when people make lists. [laughs]

Travis: Aw, yeah. That's true. You know? Ugh. The thing is, now, in my late— in my twilight years...

Teresa: Your what?

Travis: In my twilight years.

Teresa: That's not what this is.

Travis: Here at the end, here at the end of my life...

Teresa: Nope.

Travis: I enjoy the list in a practical sense.

Teresa: Mm hmm.

Travis: There's still a part of me that remains that's like, yes, but what if I solved the mystery of you? That wants to like, find the thing that you would never think to ask for that fits into your life like a missing cog in a machine. But the thing is, for most adults, that doesn't exist, and it does, they own it already.

Teresa: Yeah. That's the thing, right? We pretty much have all the things that we need, it's just something that we didn't know we need, that is the gift.

Travis: Now, that is a fairly privileged position, to be able to say, like, I have everything I need so there's nothing I can ask for. But for me, it's more like, thinking, "Ah, I bet that person wants a terrarium." I don't know, something like that, where it's just like—

Teresa: I don't want a terrarium.

Travis: Right. If they want a terrarium, they'd probably have a terrarium by now. Or they would have asked you for a terrarium.

Teresa: I know.

Travis: You know?

Teresa: It's a— you know, it's a fine, fine, tightrope line.

Travis: Sure. Yes, it is. But I like, more and more, when someone— you know what I like? The gifts that I like to give now?

Teresa: The ones you ask for?

Travis: No, the ones I like to *give*.

Teresa: Oh, sorry,

Travis: [French accent] The experience.

Teresa: Experiences, yes.

Travis: [normally] When someone's like, "I wanna take a cooking class." Now, that's a lot harder this year.

Teresa: Yeah. Uh, but you know, there's a lot of apps.

Travis: That's true. That is true.

Teresa: You can buy a subscription to an app that will show you how to cook.

Travis: What are those— Masterclass? The Masterclass series?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So, we're talking about holiday gift shopping and I know we've talked about it before, but the fact of the matter is it's a big one.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: It's a big topic, because there's a lot of places to go wrong.

Teresa: Mm, well, so I think that we've talked more on the physical gifting that we have on the actual acquisition of gifts.

Travis: Like the shopping part.

Teresa: The shopping part, that's right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, that's what we are going to talk about today.

Travis: When did people start buying things?

Teresa: Okay, um—

Travis: That was a while ago, right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That was at least 50 years ago?

Teresa: So, probably between the second and eighth centuries BCE, long before any Europeans had ever travelled to America, this is when we start seeing the root of Winter gift giving. So like, around this time, but you know, we've talked a lot about the great Christian rebrand, so there were— it wasn't really like a Christmas time festival yet.

Travis: No, but it makes complete sense when you think about it, right? Because the time when you would need generosity for others is both when there's a scarcity of resources, like in the cold months, and when you are feeling most disconnected from one another, like you would when it's cold outside and you're not travelling as much, you're not spending as much time outside your domicile or whatever, and so, it's a lot more of like, I'm gonna go check on this other person and make sure that they're doing okay and take them some stuff if they need some stuff. It makes sense why you wouldn't have a gift-giving ceremony as much in like, the summer.

Teresa: Because you have... bounty. The summer's harvest.

Travis: Right. And you don't need an excuse to go see people.

Teresa: So, these were kind of like large, community events. Different pagan festivals, harvest festivals, things like that. So, the gifts were very simple and

often reflected the spiritual aspects of the season. Things like candles, earthenware figures, other handcrafted goods were offered to family and close friends to symbolize the strength of their bond.

Travis: I'll say it again, if you look at the calen— if you look at the northern hemisphere, you know, US calendar especially, all of— like, the majority of our, like, celebrations fall within certain periods of time. And I think the reason, my theory as to why there's so many during cold months is that, like, when do you need cheering up? When do you need a festival? Need it during the cold months.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: And when's the best time to celebrate? Well, that's the middle of summer. So, you have like, Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving, you have all these things as it's getting colder, and then you have stuff like 4th of July, Labor Day and stuff when it's really nice out and you wanna go outside. There's not as much during the spring. There's not as much during, like, September. Because it's like, eh. It's fine. This is all okay.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: That's my theory. Please don't @ me. [laughs]

Teresa: Alright. [laughs] So, I mentioned the great Christian rebrand, this is about the 17th century. Holiday celebrations were becoming incredibly popular, a lot of the pagan traditions had already been incorporated into the winter celebration of the Christian faith.

Travis: Uh huh. The tree. The yule log.

Teresa: Yeah. And we've talked about this.

Travis: Mistletoe.

Teresa: And these included gift giving, and let me tell you... Christmas was bananas in the 1600s. Especially in England.

Travis: Oh? How so? Oh, was this like the figgy puddings and...

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: Where people were going from house to house and threatening people—I think I've talked about this before, too. It was chaotic. They had, like, they had to make laws—they outlawed Christmas.

Teresa: Mm hmm. Because it was full of feasting and drinking and gambling and dancing and music and indulgence and sweets and gifts and all that kinda stuff, that the puritans—

Travis: That sounds way cooler, by the way.

Teresa: It does.

Travis: I'm just saying— not the like, "I'm gonna rob your house if you don't give me some figgy pudding because I sang outside," but just the like, "Hey, it's a wild party time and nobody's worried about what color cups the coffee shop is selling." Sounds good to me.

Teresa: [laughs] Yeah, and the puritans, especially Oliver Cromwell...

Travis: That guy.

Teresa: We've talked about that kind of Christmas celebration, and also, like, the birthday celebrations, right? Where there is none.

Travis: There's nothing.

Teresa: There's nothing. Everything was against the law. Um, so we somehow made it past that. Let's just skip it. [laughs] Skip that—

Travis: [fast-forward sounds]

Teresa: Skip that sad, sad time.

Travis: That was me fast-forwarding.

Teresa: Oh, yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Lead back into the reformation.

Travis: Okay. They reformed Christmas, brick by brick.

Teresa: Well, they reformed— the English crown was reformed after Cromwell's death, and so things that had happened during his kind of, I guess coup, his reign, but not a king, um were very protestant, right? Puritan. And because a lot of the Christmas celebrations were associated with the Catholic church, once the reformation came in, England started to get their Christmas back.

Travis: Okay. And that's how England got its Christmas back.

Teresa: [laughs] The newest holiday movie.

Travis: Mm hmm. I would watch that, actually. There's probably some movies— okay, it's not important.

Teresa: Right, right. And the thing that really came back with gusto was the gift giving.

Travis: I can see that, yes. Especially, as you said, with the Christian rebrand, we're saying Jesus is the gift to earth, let us celebrate— that, plus Jesus's birthday, we're gonna give him for birthday gifts, and the wise men bringing presents. There's a lot of, uh, excuses to give gifts in Christian Christmas.

Teresa: Exactly. And this was, like the one tradition that really kind of bridged the gap between the reformation and— what?

Travis: I just think it's funny, this idea of people like, [gruff voice] "No. We will stolidly celebrate— I mean, I do like stuff... "

Teresa: [laughs] "Please give me presents."

Travis: "If you wanna give me some— that's fine. No cakes! No candles! No singing! But, I mean, if you wanna give me a present, I'm not gonna say no."

Teresa: "Money pwease?"

Travis: "Money pwease!"

Teresa: So, Christmas didn't return to its full splendor until Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in England.

Travis: [normal] Yes, of course.

Teresa: Now, it's still being incorporated within the Christian church and, you know, the culture of other places, especially in Europe, um, but, so here is—

here's something that really kind of, I think speaks to the season. And this is written by queen Victoria.

"Christmas, I always look upon as a most dear and happy time. Also, for Albert, who enjoyed it naturally still more in his happy home, which mine certainly as a child was not. It is a pleasure to have this blessed festival associated with one's happiest days. The very smell of the Christmas trees are pleasant memories. To think, we have already two children now and one who already enjoys the sight. It seems like a dream."

Travis: I was transported.

Teresa: Oh good.

Travis: That was, uh, transportive? Transportative.

Teresa: Transportive.

Travis: [stammers]

Teresa: Transportationive.

Travis: Yep. The transporter.

Teresa: Right. Uh, so at that time, Christmas has returned. Christmas 2: The Return.

Travis: Christmas 2: The Christening.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. Up until the 19th century, handmade gifts were still the rage, right? Um, we have talked about how there were a lot of kind of rules over how much money you could spend on a gift and making it was seen as better. Hand favors, you know, like embroideries or, like, hand— what is it? Stripped quills, or you know, things like that. Things that everybody needed, but you could make very nicely by hand, were still around, really until the 19th century.

Travis: Well I think, as you're thinking about those things, right, it's stuff that could all be handmade, but were probably a pain to do. So it's like, "Hey, you don't have to do this. I did it." And not only is it something that they needed, but the present was also, like, you don't have to do this yourself.

Teresa: Exactly, exactly. This is time I spent something doing something so you don't have to. Please write me a love letter.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: With the time that you saved.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Right, right, yes.

Travis: For a second, I thought that was just directed at me.

Teresa: [laughs] I would like a love letter, yes.

Travis: Okay, fine. I'll write another one.

Teresa: [laughs] Sidebar: This is also about the time that wrapping paper began to be a thing. Usually gifts just kinda like, sat out unwrapped and you had to, like, look at them.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Until it was time to get them, I guess.

Travis: Oh, I can't even imagine that. We've started to get some stuff in the mail that are Bebe's presents and she's like, "Well, let me just look at them." And we're like, [laughs] and we had to say to a 4-year-old, like, "That's not how that works." Can you imagine if they were just sitting there under the tree and she was like, "I can see it, just let me have it." And we're like, "No, no, child. We must arbitrarily wait three more weeks!"

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: No. no, no.

Teresa: Around this time is when wrapping paper started to come in. Now, it was usually still, like, kind of like, brown, shop paper, right? But, at this point, it was starting to be decorated with all kinds of like handicrafts and cut flowers and stamps and drawings and things like that. So, wrapping paper begins its blossoming at this point.

Travis: And it makes complete sense if you think about it from, like, once again, branding but also psychologically, right? Because if I'm going to get something that I need, like say, you know, a carved wooden toy or a blanket. Very practical or very like, you know, fun, but not flashy, right? And so, how do you flash it up?

How do you make it a decorative thing to look at under the tree, make it more special without having to spend a ton of money? Ah, we're going to craft it up and make some—

Teresa: Put a bird on it.

Travis: Put a bird on it. We're gonna put some fancy paper on it, you know, spend a little bit of money and more time into decorating it, and now it looks even fancier.

Teresa: Mm hmm. 1843 is when Charles Dickens published A Christmas Carol. It was a smash-bang hit.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Another one we've been trying to explain recently to Bebe.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And she's like, "Why does he like money?" and we were like... I eventually got to a point, because we were having this, like, cyclical, like—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: She was like, "why does he like money?" and I was like, "Well, he likes money more than people."

"Why?"

"Cause he can buy things with money."

"Yeah, but why does he like money?"

"Because he can buy things."

"But who's he buying for?"

And it just kept going, and eventually I said, "Imagine if instead of money, it was candy, and he kept all the candy and wouldn't give it to anybody."

And she was like, "What?!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "No. That is wrong."

Teresa: The currency of sugar.

Travis: And she totally understood that.

Teresa: And it is featured heavily in A Christmas Carol, the gifts that are given amongst each other and, you know, how it's, you know, there's some sort of sacrifice sometimes for gifts, and that's how Scrooge, at the end, really shows that he's changed. He gives everybody presents. You know, that kinda stuff.

Travis: You know me, I am a sucker for that moment. The one that always sticks out to me is in Muppet Christmas Carol when Beaker hands a scarf to Michael Caine as Scrooge, and he says, "A gift? A gift for me?" and it's very clear that it's like, the first time in a long time anybody has just been moved to like, give something to Scrooge because they wanted to, not because they had to.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And it's such a turning point of like, reciprocity of kindness. That like, that moment, where it just like, he's suddenly realizing, like, "Oh, I feel good about this thing, because I did something nice, and you did something nice back for me and this is the best I've felt in a long—" It's wonderful. Gets me every time.

Teresa: Best Christmas Carol ever.

Travis: Well. It's tied. It's tied for 1970s, Albert Finney's Scrooge, which is a wonderful version if no one's seen it, the songs are amazing. Now, admittedly, Muppet Christmas Carol is more fun. I mean, it's Muppets. It's better.

Teresa: It's easier to watch with kids.

Travis: Yes. This is absolutely true.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: The 1970 Scrooge is very dark.

Teresa: Okay. Alright. Now, here is the big moment—

Travis: Oh, I can't wait, but you know—

Teresa: In United States history.

Travis: But first! A thank you note for our sponsor.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Listen. We're all different. Every single one of us in an individual, and that means we need an individual beauty routine. Something that's as unique as us. And for that, let me recommend Function of Beauty.

I have used their haircare products for a while now. I have got the shampoo, I've got the conditioner, I've got a leave-in conditioner, I've got a hair mask and I've got hair serum. One, all of them smell amazing. Two, all of them do exactly what I want. And three, none of them do things I don't want, like dry out my hair or make my scalp itch. None of that stuff, right?

And I have a pretty sensitive scalp. I'm not gonna lie. It's 2020, I can admit it. I've got a sensitive scalp. And so, I went through the Function of Beauty quiz, and told them what I needed. Said I have a sensitive scalp, said that my hair was dyed purple, all of those things. Even said what fragrance I wanted. And then I got a personalized formula. It was blended, bottled and sent right to my door in cute, customized bottles that say Function of Travis. Which is one of my favorite things about it, because I like my own name.

Function of Beauty uses only clean ingredients and all of their formulas are vegan and cruelty-free. They never use sulfates, parabens or any other harmful ingredients. So, what are you waiting for? Go to FunctionofBeauty.com/Shmanners to take your quiz and save 20% off your first haircare order. Go to FunctionOfBeauty.com/Shmanners to let them know you heard about it from our show, and to get 20% of your haircare order. That's FunctionOfBeauty.com/Shmanners.

Teresa: Shmanners is sponsored in part this week by Billie. Self-care and routines are more important now than ever. Whatever you're using to get ready for the day should make you feel amazing. Meet Billie, for those days when you need an extra smooth shave. No pink tax, no visit to the drug store, and no breaking the bank. Now, I don't share— I don't shave every day, but when I do shave, I need it, right? Because—

Travis: And you want that close shave.

Teresa: I do. I do. And it just, sometimes, after I shave, it just feels so nice to cross one thing off my list, you know?

Travis: That is true. Isn't it nice to be able to do one thing?

Teresa: One thing. Just one thing. Go to MyBillie.com and get their starter kit for just \$9. It's so affordable and includes their award-winning razor, two refill blades and a magnetic holder. I have to say, I love the shaving lotion. It smells so wonderful, it is super, super soft— does that make sense?

Travis: The lotion is soft? Yeah.

Teresa: The lotion is soft—

Travis: Better than a hard lotion.

Teresa: It goes on well. Smooth. Nice. [laughs] And they just launched new limited-edition bundles for their bestsellers for the first time ever. They make a good gift, and they come wrapped and ready. So, to express a little love for our show, go to MyBillie.com/Shmanners. It's a small way you can support us while getting the best razor you'll ever own. It's just \$9 to get your starter kit, plus free shipping always. Go to MyBillie.com/Shmanners. Spelled my B-I-L-L-I-E.com/Shmanners.

Travis: We've got a personal message here for Future Joseph from Past Joseph.

"Hey, it's May 2020 right now and things aren't great. Also, I've just started listening to Shmanners, so it's going to be a while before I get caught up to this message. Hope the world still exists in the future!"

Good news Joseph, it does.

"Also, hi to Erin the Red, who listens. You bring me as much joy as these McElroys."

Aw, thank you so much, Past Joseph. Hi Erin! And hi, Future Joseph.

[Maximum Fun ad plays]

Travis: Tell me of this big moment, Teresa.

Teresa: June 26th.

Travis: I remember it well.

Teresa: 1870.

Travis: Nope. Wasn't there.

Teresa: The United States declared December 25th a national holiday.

Travis: Oh. Okay. I guess— man, I have no scope of time. I can't tell if that's sooner or later than I expected.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay, well, so we've talked about, in different communities, Christmas was either celebrated or not celebrated depending upon the religion, like, that had set up the village or whatever, remember? About how we talked about getting up on Christmas and it's the same?

Travis: Yeah, I remember. What year was it?

Teresa: This was 1870.

Travis: Yeah, I mean, I guess it's only been a couple years since the Civil War, huh?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I guess that's pretty early, if you wanna think about it. I don't know why, but in my head it was like you had said 1992. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. And this is just in time for the industrial revolution in the United States, and so now, we had things that were being produced, we had money, we could buy things to give to people.

Travis: And not just practical things. You could buy, because of the industrial revolution, it lowered the cost of production on, like, fanciful items.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And also, with the industrial revolution, not long after came catalogues, right? Because you could mass produce things, and someone could look in a catalogue and say, like. "Oh, this dress. Oh, this razor. Oh, this thing. I want that." Instead of just the things that were practical that— you know, I guess a dress and a razor are practical, but you know what I mean.

Teresa: Right, yeah. In 1858, America got it's first— sorry, the US got its first department store when Macy's was founded. So, we're right there.

Travis: Yeah. And so, at this point, you start to have, uh, items that are purely for consumption.

Teresa: Mm hmm.

Travis: And it's like, "Yeah, we can get by without this thing, but if I have this thing I will feel special. I will feel fancy."

Teresa: And this is also the advent of the middle class in the United States. So, more people had more money to buy cheap things and give to other people.

Travis: And they also had free time, right?

Teresa: Right. They could go shopping.

Travis: And the things that they would want, they could want for hobbies.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: They could say, like, "Oh you know what I want? I want something to go along with this I do for fun, and not just the thing I need for work or the home."

Teresa: And, you wanted to show off at stuff that you could have for fun.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Which was big in the Victorian era, of course. Because you wanted to show how cool and awesome you were, and the more that you could show it, the cooler you were.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: In the early 20th century, consumer spending during the holiday season was such a commercial powerhouse that it became the main economic driver in the US. By 1903, things had gotten so bonkers that The Consumer League of New York launched a nation-wide marketing campaign in an attempt to relieve the long hours retail staff worked over the holiday season. They began to call on customers to start their seasonal shopping earlier. Which is how, like—

Travis: Part of the Black Friday thing, to get that.

Teresa: Part of the Black Friday thing we talked about last time. And just, like, spread it out so that it's not so hard on people working, like, the night before Christmas. The mad dash, as you will— as it will happen.

Travis: I will say, I talked about it last week, but I remember working a Christmas— I think it was a Christmas Eve at Best Buy. And it was strangely practically empty.

Teresa: Really?

Travis: Like all day. I remember a friend of mine Trey and I, um, played over the headset the whole time that we were like, hunting each other throughout the store. And then we kept getting yelled at, and we'd just respond like, "There's nobody here." And they just made us switch to a different channel to continue our game.

Teresa: Ah, yeah. I've never worked retail.

Travis: I know, Teresa. We talked about it.

Teresa: What I know from movies and TV is that it's always super crazy, because people leave their shopping for the last minute.

Travis: Yeah, but I think that after a certain while, like, I dunno. Yes, but, like, they would come in in the morning. There would be people, it wasn't as if there weren't people there, but we would like, close, at you know, 2pm or whatever.

Teresa: Okay. Alright. Alright, so here is, if we're growing the shopping curve.

Travis: Uh huh.

Teresa: The 1950s is where it begins to exponentially accelerate.

Travis: Well, yeah. This is post-World War II, this is, uh, if you look at it, like, plastics is now a thing...

Teresa: That's number one. And number two is television.

Travis: Oh yeah! You can advertise toys.

Teresa: Exactly. The commercial, sponsorships of programs, everyone sitting around the TV watching the same thing. Kids see the toy on the TV, say, "Mom, Dad! I want that for Christmas!"

Travis: And then, you know, up til that point, commercials had been radio. Which, at a certain age, kids aren't really processing what they hear in a visual way, where when you see it, you're like, "Oh, that's it. That's the thing."

Teresa: And so, this lead the way for the big box store, where the kind of like, culmination of, "We can buy everything at one place", right, for the Christmas season. You can get your decorations, you can get your wrapping paper, your presents, your food, like, all of this stuff at the same place. In 1962, Meijer Superstore was founded in Michigan, which is the first big box store in the United States that sold all those things. Toys, housewares, food, everything in between. And by the time the 90s rolled around, we had Amazon and eBay, right? And so—

Travis: And you know what really helped with that? Especially eBay? Beanie Babies, Furbies, Tickle Me Elmo, all of that resale started to become a thing, where it's like, "Oh, if I can get my hands on ten of these, I resell them for a profit on eBay, and now I have more money to use to buy Christmas presents or, you know, pay bills," or whatever.

Teresa: Exactly. And now, it's estimated that 8 of 10, uh, consumers— eight... wait... mm. 8 out of 10, there it is.

Travis: You said 8 of 10, I understood what you meant.

Teresa: I did? Okay.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: 8 out of 10 consumers in the United States research and buy gifts online on their smartphones.

Travis: I mean, I will say that's another thing, because I was— so, the years I was working at Best Buy, I mean, you know, once you get into, like, yeah, 2008, 9, 10, when I was working there, that's when people would come in, ask us all the questions, and then you would see them immediately pull up Amazon on their phone and walk out the front door. And you're like, "Okay, bye!"

Teresa: Oh, great.

Travis: You know, here's what I'll say. Ethically, there's a lot of issues with Best Buy, right? Especially when you start to get into the, you know, wealth inequality of Bezos and people like that.

Teresa: Mm hmm.

Travis: Now, but convenience wise, especially nowadays, this year, when its like, "I can't go to the store. I can't go do that thing," and then when you also get into cost of stuff like— you mentioned the big box store being like a culmination of it, but I think, like, everything has been funneling more towards online shopping. And what's really interesting is, having worked retail the years that I did, I saw the, like, cross, right? Where it was like—

Teresa: Crossfade.

Travis: Right. Where it was like, brick and mortar stores were losing business to Amazon hand over fist, so that's when you started to see BestBuy.com become a thing, and Walmart.com become a thing, and up until then it had been, like, little Mom and Pop shops are losing out to Walmart and Best Buy and Target and stuff, and then it was like, well now they're losing out to Amazon. And I don't know what the next thing will be that consumes Amazon, maybe it'll be like we're all sleeping and in our dreams we get new presents. I don't know.

Teresa: [laughs] Who knows?

Travis: But like, it is interesting the way that all broke down. Hey, do you wanna do some questions?

Teresa: I would love to.

Travis: Excellent. Let's do some questions. We got very practical questions, very good questions, and I'm not killing ti— here we go.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, this is from Chrisbaemon. "My stepdad and I don't get along. I want to get my mother something for the holidays, but I feel no obligation to get him anything. She disagrees and thinks I'm being rude. Is there a hard rule for family gift-giving?"

Teresa: Uh, no. No, there isn't a hard rule. But here's the way that you can get around it.

Travis: Mm hmm.

Teresa: Um, you can give something to your mother that they will in turn use for...

Travis: The house.

Teresa: The house that your stepfather lives in, right? So, if your mom likes to cook, get her some cookware or baking stuff. You know, things that can be masqueraded as a group present, that really are just for her.

Travis: But I— you know, here's what I will say, and this is— you know, we talk a lot on Shmanners about what is, like, the difference between etiquette and being polite and that kinda thing, and like, of course, the polite thing, the quote-unquote, capital P, "Polite" thing is to get present for the members of your family that will be there.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That's a thing that you choose to do to avoid confrontation and avoid issues and all that thing.

Teresa: Right. We always talk about how you need to think about what this relationship means to you. And if your relationship with your mother means enough to you that you don't want to— [banging noise] oh, sorry— that you don't want to make this a Thing, capital T, Thing...

Travis: That's what I'm really saying. Cause it's not like, "Well, you have to get him something because of your relationship with your stepdad."

Teresa: No.

Travis: It's more that if you have a good relationship with your mom and you love your mom and you don't want it to be a Thing, you do need to, like, figure a way around it, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: This next question is from Moody Dog Lady. "Is it rude to just straight up ask someone if they want a gift that's more practical or sentimental?"

Teresa: I don't think so.

Travis: No.

Teresa: I am always happy to elaborate to people what sort of things I would enjoy receiving, and I think that there's a way that you can broach the subject. Instead of saying, "Do you want something practical or sentimental?" you can say, "Our time means a lot to me, I would like to make you something. What do you think about that?" Or something like that, right?

Travis: Or— I mean, here's the thing. If you know the person well enough that you have to make this decision, I think you are within your right— I think maybe offer a third option, where you say, "Would you like something more practical, more sentimental, or do you wanna be surprised?" Right?

Teresa: Oh, that's a great idea. I do not like surprises.

Travis: Yes, correct. Correct.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And you know, what? Frankly, neither do I. And so, I like when people ask me questions like this and say like, "Would you like something like this? Something like this?" And it's like, yeah, great. I don't wanna be surprised, I want something that I'll actually use.

Teresa: Mm hmm. And you know, I think that you can, you know, you can kind of dance around it just a little bit if you want. Talk about your new hobbies, what are into, what have you dropped off lately and that kinda stuff.

Travis: Yeah, but I feel like we're saying two different things. You're saying like, the way to be sneaky about it if you're worried about being rude. I'm saying that I'm willing to bet if they're anything like me, and who isn't?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Then they probably want to just tell you what they want.

Teresa: And what I'm saying is, "Yes, and."

Travis: Okay. So, let's see, this is from Load Starting. "Is it better to get something someone asked for, or get something you know they'd like, but it'd be more of a surprise?"

Teresa: It depends. Does that person like surprises?

Travis: And if they asked for a thing, this is— this is... if— okay. I think it all depends on how they asked and what they asked for and how they did it. Right? If they, for example, made a wishlist and said “Here are some ideas, here are some suggestions, if, you know, you’re looking for something.” If they said, “This is what I want,” like, I asked Bebe today, like, “What would you like Santa Claus to give you?” and she gave me a very detailed answer.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And so, in that circumstance, that wasn’t a suggestion for me to take and run with, that was like, “Thank you for asking father, as you can see, I’ve written out a detailed list.” And so, like, that is like—

Teresa: That’s one of the things about writing letters to Santa, um, you know, it not only makes you figure out what it is exactly you want, it’s a great jumping-off point for other gifts given.

Travis: Yes. But if they were like, “You know, if you can’t think of anything else, here’s a wishlist,” then I think you have room to maneuver. You have room to play with, you know what I mean? But I think that the tricky needle to thread, and this is something that I think a lot of people, including myself, struggle with, is when you’re getting a surprise present for someone, you have to remember that you are buying something for them to enjoy, not something that you would enjoy and so you assume they would, too.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: And that’s a very— that can be very hard sometimes to even realize you’re thinking that way. This is something I used to accidentally do for my brothers all the time, where I’d be like, “Oh, I think this is cool and so they will, too.”

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And you have to think like, “Nope, they’re different people than I am with different wants and needs and everything and like, I really need to make sure that I’m buying this because I think they’ll like it, not because I like it.”

This is from Grace. “Imagine we have a more typical holiday season. How would someone give gifts to a handful of friends in school while not making other people upset and uncomfortable?” Um, I would recommend if this is a plan, make a plan. Or saying like, you know, text around before school, or I dunno, instant

message— no, no one does that anymore. But say, like, “Hey, let’s meet up at lunch to do a gift exchange,” right?

Teresa: Exactly. The worst idea is to go to an event that you know is going to be full of the people that you don’t want to give gifts to, right? So, make a plan to make it just between then gifts giver and receiver.

Travis: And not only that, I mean, if you’ve got present for your group of friends and maybe you have in the past all exchanged gifts before, or you, you know, can safely assume they’re probably gonna get something for you too, you wanna make a plan so they know to bring the stuff.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: So, it’s not like, “Oh, I— oh— it’s at home. Oh, oh no.”

Teresa: Speaking of which.

Travis: Uh huh?

Teresa: If someone surprises you with a gift, you can say something like, “I’m so flattered and delighted, but I’m a little embarrassed that I don’t have anything in return,” right? You needn’t say, like, “Oh, I totally have something for you! I just don’t have it with me!” That whole thing makes everything awkward, so cut right to the chase and say, “This is how I feel about this gift. It’s amazing. Also, I am embarrassed that I don’t have anything for you to reciprocate with.”

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And that is where you can, in normal times, offer, “Can we go spend some time together?”

Travis: “I’ll take you to dinner, like, my treat.”

Teresa: “Take you to dinner, can I buy you a cup of coffee? What are you doing right now, do you wanna go watch a movie?” or any of that kinda stuff, right?

Travis: Or, I think you could say, like, “Now that I realize we’re exchanging gifts, let me think about it and see what I can come up with for you,” you know what I mean? But I don’t think you need to lie. [laughs] Like, “Oh, my other pants... uh... had a car for you? Oh no!”

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Let's see. This is, I think this is straightforward. I got a straightforward, and then a tough one. You ready?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So, @CatBoyDamon asks, "Where do you begin to shop for the person who always insists they don't need anything when you ask what they'd like?"

I think this is where an experience is great, of like, okay, cool, I got you this online thing. A consumable, like food, is great then, because it's like, "Okay great, even if you don't want it, it's not gonna take up room on a shelf while you feel bad about throwing it away." It's like, yeah, if they don't eat it, they throw it away. And, if they're the right kind of person who would enjoy this kind of thing, you can always donate money in their name.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: That's a thing that I like when people do for me. Now, not when I was a kid. God knows. And so, yeah.

Teresa: And in this age of online shopping, as kind of, because we don't wanna go outside, I think that this is the year where gift cards are totally okay.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: Because gift card is no longer a "Here, you go out and find something you like" errand, now it's "You're going to surf the webs anyway, here's some play money for that."

Travis: Indeed. Now, here's the tough one.

Teresa: Okay, I'm ready.

Travis: Sarah asks, "is there a polite way to ask for a gift receipt after receiving a gift?"

Teresa: Uh... let's make a PSA that if you give someone a gift, include the gift receipt.

Travis: Yes. Yes. But especially if it's not something they asked for.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So, here is my answer, and you tell me what you think. But I think you'll like it, because we've been doing this for a while and I've known you for over a decade.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So, when you receive a gift, you are not thanking the person for the physical thing you are receiving. You are thanking them for the time, effort, all of that, that they took to get that thing for you. The thought that counts.

Teresa: That counts.

Travis: Right? And so, I would say that what you want to do is let that moment live. Be careful with your words and say things like, "Thank you so much for getting this for me." You know, "I really appreciate you getting me this gift." Not saying, "I love it, I'll use it forever, I'll cherish it," any of those things.

Teresa: Cause those might be lies.

Travis: And then, when the moment is over, when the gift exchange is over, when Christmas morning is over, maybe take them to the side and say, "I really do appreciate this, but this isn't my style," if it's clothing, or, "I'm allergic to this," if it's food, you know, if you are. I assume. Or like, "I already have one of these," all those things, and say, "Is there any way that I, you know, do you have a gift receipt so I can exchange it, so that I'm still able to enjoy not only your thoughtfulness, but also the present."

Teresa: I think that is beautiful, Travis Patrick McElroy.

Travis: Yeah, nailed it.

Teresa: Great work.

Travis: I nailed it. Okay, so let's *wrap* this up!

Teresa: Ah!

Travis: Ah! So, yeah folks. Hey, thank you so much for listening to the show. Um, coming up, oh this is very exciting, coming up we have a Candlesnights— I was about to say live show, but that's not the case. See, in the past—

Teresa: Pre-recorded extravaganza.

Travis: Indeed. In the past, we've done Candenights in our— well, in my hometown of Huntington, West Virginia, but of course this year we're not able to. We're not able to travel, we don't want people getting together in a big group. So, we're doing, as Teresa said, a pre-recorded extravaganza on December 19th. It's going to start showing at 8pm. It's going to include video segments from My Brother, My Brother and Me, Sawbones, Shmanners, Wonderful, Still Buffering and special guests, which... yes, like—

Teresa: Super, super special guests.

Travis: Trust me, y'all, we're calling in some favors and we got some cool people for this. You're gonna like it. Tickets are pay what you want, with a \$6.25 minimum. So, what that means is that you can get a ticket for \$6.25, but if you would like to give more, you can because proceeds are going to Harmony House, which helps people who are experiencing homelessness in our home city of Huntington, West Virginia. Sydnee works with them a lot. It is a great organization. You can get those tickets at bit.ly/Candenights2020. So, please do that.

Teresa: Not only experiencing homelessness, but also maybe experiencing food scarcity, if they don't have, maybe, a medical facility that they can go to. Harmony house is a really fantastic organization.

Travis: We also have some new merch out and the first one, I think it's really cool, it's a Festo pin of the month from The Adventure zone.

Teresa: Do the voice.

Travis: [squeaky voice] It's me, Festo! Hey everybody, it's Festo!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That would make a lot more sense if you listen to The Adventure Zone: Graduation. But that pin of the moth benefits The Transgender Law Center, which employs a variety of community-driven strategies to keep transgender and gender-non-conforming people alive, thriving and fighting for liberation. We also have a new Thunderman LLC patch, which will also make a lot more sense if you listen to The Adventure Zone: Graduation. We still have the Candenights merch available. All of that at McElroyMerch.com.

You can pre-order our book, go to TheMcElroyPodcastBook.com, that's our how to podcast book. You can pre-order The Adventure Zone Crystal Kingdom, which is

book four of the graphic novel series, you can get that at TheAdventureZoneComic.com. The Sawbones book comes out in paperback December 29th. It's newly revised and updated for 2020. You can get that at bit.ly/SawbonesPaperback.

And one last thing. The My Brother, My Brother and Me Angels are back. Basically, how that works is in our hometown of Huntington, West Virginia, there's a list that goes out every year called Empty Stockings. And it's something where people say, "This is what my family needs this year," and it's practical things sometimes, like winter coats, or a new refrigerator, or a tent to sleep in. Some of them are incredibly heartbreaking. And a couple years back, some My Brother, My Brother and Me fans took it wholly upon themselves to fulfil all of those. And ever since then, they have been doing an amazing job making sure all of those empty stockings got filled. It has nothing to do with us, and fully to do with the charitable hearts of our listeners.

Teresa: But it is a great way to give back to the town that gave us the McElroy brothers.

Travis: I mean, if you wanna look at it that way, that's fine. You can go to MBMBaMAngels.com to claim a stocking and to help out. Let's see, what else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, we thank Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. @ShmannersCast is where we get all of those wonderful listener-submitted questions. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group. Join that group, Shmanners Fanners, if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans. And please, please, continue to send in your topic suggestions, your idiom suggestions, to ShamnnersCast@gmail.com. Our lovely researcher and script writer and all-around—

Travis: All-around cool person.

Teresa: Great gal, Alex, checks and reads all of those. And thank you, Alex, for your help on this show.

Travis: And 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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