

## Shmanners 290: Mall Santa

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**Travis:**

Ho, ho, ho. Mall-y Christmas.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] 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 [laughs] extraordinary etiquette.

**Travis:**

For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:**

Hello, dear. That was very cute.

**Travis:**

Sometimes-

**Teresa:**

And highly unexpected. [laughs]

**Travis:**

Sometimes, when I'm trying to think of what to do for the intro-

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

... a really dumb idea will pop in my head, but then my brain will be like, "I'm not working on anything else."

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

And I'll be like, "Well, I don't... Brain, I'm not sure if that's the final thing." And it's like, "Uh, well, it's good enough and I'm done."

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

And I'm like, "Okay, but what if we just brainstorm some more?" "I said I was done." "Okay, well, it's done."

**Teresa:**

I love it.

**Travis:**

Hmm. Hey, uh, just a quick note, I thought about this this morning. Um, if you usually listen to *Shmanners* with children, which I know a lot of people do, while they're, like, driving and such, uh, we're going to be talking a lot about Santa today. And if that gives you any kind of whiff of where the discussion might go, uh, just maybe listen to a different one with your kid, you know what I mean? Wink, wink. You get me. All right. All right. We don't wanna give away all of Santa's secrets, you know what I mean?

**Teresa:**

Of course not.

**Travis:**

So, we'll give you a chance to switch to, I don't know, a different episode.

**Teresa:**

Have you, Travis, ever been to a mall-

**Travis:**

Yes-

**Teresa:**

And on [laughs]-

**Travis:**

Oh.

**Teresa:**

... and on Santa's lap in said mall?

**Travis:**

Yes? Yeah. I mean, de- it's one of those things where I don't have any distinct, like, stand out memories of it, but it is, like, a thing where, one, having grown up specifically, like, the core of my life in, like, the very late 80's and... I was born in '83. And so, like, by, you know, seven, when the 90's started. So, I would say I grew up mostly in the 90's, it would be weird if we didn't, right? But, like I said, I don't know that I ever remember seeing pictures of it or anything like that, but definitely. Definitely did.

**Teresa:**

So, my experience is- is a little different. Um, I had never been to the mall for Santa.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Because-

**Travis:**

You need to say that faster.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

'Cause, like, both times is... Okay.

**Teresa:**

Well, so, you've been to my hometown. There is a rather large mall.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

But it has not always been there. Um, that mall-

**Travis:**

Hey, that's- that is how malls work. Eventually they have to be built. They're not naturally occurring, you know that, right?

**Teresa:**

I- I understand that [laughs]. But within my lifetime-

**Travis:**

Oh.

**Teresa:**

... that mall wasn't always there. Until I was in, uh, probably fifth or sixth grade, that mall was corn fields. So-

**Travis:**

Hard to shop there.

**Teresa:**

Hard to shop.

**Travis:**

Unless you were shopping for corn.

**Teresa:**

Maybe. So, all of my Santa lap, uh, experience, comes from, uh, my church, where they had a, um, what they called the bazaar, right? Which is just, you know, a little festival thing. There were raffles, you could buy fudge, you could buy books and handicrafts.

**Travis:**

I wish that it was just the first two. Like, there were raffles, and you could buy fudge.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

That was it. And we were happy to have it.

**Teresa:**

And, uh, we had a small kind of, like... So, there was, like, the church, and then the school attached to the church and in the, um, the gymnasium of the school is where main bazaar was held. But there was a little, like, annex, like, a- like, across a parking lot, where they held Santa's workshop.

**Travis:**

So, this is a thing too. So, a- another problem with my memory in general is, like, um, it's- it's fu-... like, uh, you know this. Of, like, I remember pictures more than I remember, like, specifics, right?

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

Dates or, like, time or names or anything. But I can, like, picture the thing. Like, I can picture the mall Santa in, uh, Huntington Mall. There was, like, a train, right?

**Teresa:**

Ooh.

**Travis:**

That during Christmas, it was one of those, like, tiny-

**Teresa:**

Fancy.

**Travis:**

Yeah. It was, like, a tiny, you know, off-the-rails kinda you'd drive it around with little kids on it train.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

It was a thing, right? Can I remember, like, what, when I went, how... No. But I can picture it. But the other problem with my memory is, I have so many images of movie mall Santas-

**Teresa:**

Oh.

**Travis:**

... and TV show mall Santas in my head-

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

... that I can't always separate, like, my experience versus, like, what I watched on TV.

**Teresa:**

Hm.

**Travis:**

'Cause, like, the mall Santa in *Christmas Story*, where it's, like, uh, what, "A BB gun? You'll shoot your eye-" And pushed him down, 'cause he had asked for a football. Like, that stands out in my head. The Santa in, um, uh, *Home Alone* that gives him Tic Tacs, that stands out in my head. It's- a lot of that pops into-

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

... my head when I think about mall Santas.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

Now, what's fun is, Bebe's mall Santa experience is so far, I think, we've only really done it twice? And-

**Teresa:**

Well, she's only just now five.

**Travis:**

Right. The first time, uh, was in-

**Teresa:**

It- it's not like, she's, like, 10 years old and she's only been to Santa's lap twice.

**Travis:**

I didn't, I didn't say that.

**Teresa:**

Okay.

**Travis:**

Uh, the first time was in an aquarium in Las Vegas [laughs].

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

Where it was Santa Claus, and next to him, uh, a guy dressed as a shark named Santa Jaws, and that ruled. And then I think she has seen Santa in a bubble during pandemic times. And I think that's about it.

**Teresa:**

No, we have one picture of her on the lap of a mall Santa.

**Travis:**

Oh, yeah?

**Teresa:**

Or next to? I don't think she wanted to sit.

**Travis:**

No, yeah, I think it was next to. She was wise. She was like, "Nah, nah, nah."

**Teresa:**

She didn't wanna sit on the Santa's lap.

**Travis:**

"This is a stranger."

**Teresa:**

Which we're gonna talk about a little later.

**Travis:**

Hey, one last thing, everybody at home. This is your last chance to turn it off if you're around kids. Beep, beep, beep. All right. So, recently, I was talking with BeBe. I was like, "Hey, do you wanna go see Santa at the mall?" She was like, "That's not Santa." And I was like, "What?" She goes, "That's not Santa, how could it be? He's busy." [laughs]

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

And I was like, "What?" And she was like, "He's gotta make a lotta toys." And I said, "Yeah, but- but- but, like, the elves are there to help." And she's like, "Yeah, but he's in charge. He has to be there." I was like, "All right."

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

"Yeah, I'm not gonna argue with you."

**Teresa:**

That tracks.

**Travis:**

And I think I went with the same line that I think my parents gave me which is like, "This mall Santa works for Santa."

**Teresa:**

Yes.

**Travis:**

And then I think Bebe then was like, "So, he's an elf?" And I was like, "Uh, yeah. Let's watch ping pong."

**Teresa:**

He's an associate.

**Travis:**

He's an asso- He's a freelancer, he's a gun for hire. [laughs]

**Teresa:**

Oh, no.

**Travis:**

No, no, no. Yes, he's a mercenary Santa.

**Teresa:**

Uh, no. Um-

**Travis:**

Like the A Team.

**Teresa:**

So, uh, quick little background on what we now know as Santa.

**Travis:**

Sinterklaas.

**Teresa:**

Has been around in pop culture for *hundreds* of years.

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

In countless different cultures. So, there are dozens of potential origins. Um-

**Travis:**

Did you know, in Australia, Santa surfs in.

**Teresa:**

Pretty cool.

**Travis:**

Just a fun thing I know.

**Teresa:**

'Cause it's summer there.

**Travis:**

'Cause it's summer there. I know, weird, huh? [snorts]

**Teresa:**

But, you know, uh, I have seen several of the people I follow on Instagram live in Australia, still the decorations are snowy. Like-

**Travis:**

Yeah. Well, he lives in the North Pole.

**Teresa:**

That's true.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Okay. Uh, this is one of the most popular, especially in the, uh, the Western world. The legend of Saint Nicholas first emerged centuries ago, uh, through the canonization of a bishop named Nicholas from Turkey. He was a real life dude, did exist, was born in the third century, and was known far and wide for his selfless giving.

**Travis:**

Now, what's the Rankin/Bass movie? *The Life and Times of Santa Claus*, is that it?

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

Would you say... Now, I know you love it very much-

**Teresa:**

I love that movie.

**Travis:**

... but it's one of the weirder ones, right?

**Teresa:**

Oh, yeah. It totally is.

**Travis:**

It begins in the weirdest way, I think. It's, like, hey, you know Rudolph? You know Frosty? And of course you know, like, the elves that speak to all animals, and the lioness-

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

... that raised Santa Claus?

**Teresa:**

It's pretty cool.

**Travis:**

"What? Excuse me?"

"You know, how Santa Claus was raised by an immortal fairy who couldn't have children of her own? You know." [laughs]

**Teresa:**

It is wild. And I love every second of it.

**Travis:**

It goes there, man. It's wild. That one and *The Leprechauns' Christmas Gold*. This is the wild thing, is I think my favorite is *The Leprechauns' Christmas Gold*, and your favorite is *The Life and Times of Santa Claus*. Easily the two weirdest-

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

... Rankin/Bass Christmas stories.

**Teresa:**

Anyway, um, so, his story is that, uh, he gave away all of his inherited wealth to those in need, and dedicated his life to walking the countryside helping anyone who crossed his path with whatever they needed. And so, uh, he became popular in Europe because of his travels and acts of kindness, then was later honored with sainthood and became the patron saint of children... and sailors.

**Travis:**

Okay?

**Teresa:**

Uh, because, uh, of a story that tells of a- a terrible voyage across the sea, where the weather nearly capsized a ship he was on. But according to the story, Saint Nicholas was able to quell the storm with his prayers and undying faith-

**Travis:**

Sure.

**Teresa:**

... allowing the captain to steer the vessel safely back to land.

**Travis:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's no other way-

**Teresa:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Travis:**

... to explain that.

**Teresa:**

Because of this popularity all around Europe, uh, there are many different names people call Santa Claus. We've got Papa Noel-

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

... we've got Grandfather Frost-

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

... Father Christmas.

**Travis:**

Sure.

**Teresa:**

Uh, in fact, Santa Claus probably comes from a Dutch translation of his name, Sint Niklaas, or Sinterklaas.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Which is very easily Americanized into Santa Claus.

**Travis:**

Yeah. There's, uh, Santa Baby. There's, uh, Jolly... Old... King Cole. [laughs]

**Teresa:**

What? No.

**Travis:**

No, that's not it.

**Teresa:**

That's not it.

**Travis:**

That's nothing.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Santa Baby.

**Travis:**

Santa Baby. You know.

**Teresa:**

Yeah. So, um, whatever you call him.

**Travis:**

Would you say Santa has the original dad bod?

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Yes.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Well, I mean, like, now.

**Travis:**

Now. Because of-

**Teresa:**

Originally-

**Travis:**

Because of Coca-Cola?

**Teresa:**

Yeah, sort of.

**Travis:**

I mean, a little bit of the, uh, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, Right?

**Teresa:**

A l- a- a little bit. Um, so, he used to be depicted as a rather thin man, uh, as one would be if you, you know-

**Travis:**

Gave away all your stuff?

**Teresa:**

... and traveled around the country on foot.

**Travis:**

Getting your steps in.

**Teresa:**

Um, usually with a beard, yes. Again, because, uh, don't have time for shaving.

**Travis:**

No.

**Teresa:**

Don't have nothing to shave with.

**Travis:**

You gave it away.

**Teresa:**

Gave it away. And with a shepherd's crook. Probably, um, a little bit of, um, like, The Good Shepherd lore in there, but also it's a great walking stick.

**Travis:**

Yeah. Uh, yes. Yes, obviously.

**Teresa:**

Obviously. Um, so, capitalism is really what we have to thank-

**Travis:**

Sure.

**Teresa:**

... for the- the continued depiction of the jolly old elf.

**Travis:**

Well, that's the thing. If you listen to, like, the actual description of him in, uh- uh, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*... I'm gonna pull it up now.

**Teresa:**

Well, I mean, so, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*... Christmas, as we know it, was largely influenced by, uh, Albert and Victoria, of course-

**Travis:**

Uh-

**Teresa:**

... and we have a whole, whole episode on that. Uh, mistletoe, Christmas trees, yule logs, gift giving, all that stuff. It actually wasn't, like, a huge deal, until Albert and Victoria.

**Travis:**

It's also important to note, 'cause I get it wrong every time, the actual title of the poem is *A Visit From St. Nicholas* by Clement Clark Moore. The first *line* is 'Twas the Night Before Christmas-

**Teresa:**

Indeed.

**Travis:**

... and that is mostly... But, if you listen to the description, right? "Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound. He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot, and his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot; a bundle of toys he had flung on his back, and he looked like a peddler just opening his pack. His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples, how merry! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry! His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, and the beard on his chin was as white as the snow. He was chubby and plump..." I'm skipping around, but it's basically, as he describes it, he's very, he's not described as, like, a big man. He's a jolly old elf, he's a elf. He's a little guy.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

That's how I always interpreted it. That he's a little guy.

**Teresa:**

A smaller gentleman, still round and plum. Not, you know, obese.

**Travis:**

Oh, and especially because it says in the thing, a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

That's the thing that I think people always glaze past of, like, no, it's not full size. He's an elf.

**Teresa:**

He's tiny.

**Travis:**

In- in- in Clement Clark Moore's he's a ti... he's an elf. He's a, like, a small... not like a Legolas elf, but, like, a small elf, you know?

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

Anyways. And then, uh, we have, what? Coca-Cola?

**Teresa:**

Coca-Cola, for sure. So, uh, it was by the 1840's that the movement towards a full size, large man, long-ish beard, round belly, moved in. So, uh, what we, what we probably can point to as, like, the first mall Santa, first Santa at store, was actually a statue.

**Travis:**

What? You would sit on a statue?

**Teresa:**

Yeah! Uh, so, a, um, a man in Philadelphia, in his store, put a life sized Santa statue on display for the holiday season. And, I mean, they expected it to be good business, but what they didn't expect was that *thousands* of children and their parents would come to the store for a magical moment with the statue. And, uh, you know, people came to Philadelphia as far away from New York City.

**Travis:**

And this is, like, pre cell phones. So, this isn't, like, "We gotta get this picture for the 'gram." You know what I mean? This is, like, just coming and having the moment of, like, kid and parents, right?

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

This wasn't like, "If I don't get this picture, I won't be able to show my face at the office," right? This was just-

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

... it's nice.

**Teresa:**

It's just, we're gonna go see it.

**Travis:**

That's so cool.

**Teresa:**

Um, once we get to Massachusetts in the 1890's... uh, excuse me, *in* 1890, a local store owner named James Edgar, who was affectionately known by everyone as Colonel Jim-

**Travis:**

Sure.

**Teresa:**

... uh, decided that... "Statue? I could put on a suit, right?"

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

And he thought that it would be fun to kinda, like, wave to kids, wearing his Santa suit.

**Travis:**

We recently saw that, by the way, in, uh, Seattle-

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

... where there was a storefront where they had, like, a corner that was, like, blocked off from the store, and they had it set up like a, like, living room with a fireplace, and Santa had, like, a microphone and, uh, there was a loudspeaker outside, and he could, like, talk to people walking by and, like, wave at them.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

And I thought it was very nice.

**Teresa:**

Which is great for... in the times we are.

**Travis:**

Indeed.

**Teresa:**

Trying to keep everyone safe and healthy, I think that is a great idea. Um, so, he had a store on Main Street and just like, I mean, what we saw, he basically just waved at people. They came to see him. There was no, uh, sitting on lap and telling about what you want for Christmas.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Uh, that didn't come until later. Uh, this is actually what inspired the most cherished Christmas movie of all time, *Miracle on 34th Street!*

**Travis:**

You mean the one from- with, like, Mara Wilson and-

**Teresa:**

No, not that, not that one.

**Travis:**

... Dylan McDermott?

**Teresa:**

1947 version was actually-

**Travis:**

Hm. Eh. I prefer the Mara Wilson and Dylan McDermott version.

**Teresa:**

I mean, I do too. The lighting in that movie?

**Travis:**

So good!

**Teresa:**

Gorgeous.

**Travis:**

So good!

**Teresa:**

And lots of soft focus. Mm.

**Travis:**

And... Dylan McDermott.

**Teresa:**

I mean, yeah.

**Travis:**

Hey, hey!

**Teresa:**

He's not my type. Anyway, so, the writer was inspired by that story and came up with the idea for the script, again, while standing in line at a department store, trying to buy Christmas presents.

**Travis:**

Sure.

**Teresa:**

So, now, Santa is at the mall or the store. But how did the whole rigmarole change?

**Travis:**

Well, I can't wait to find out. But first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

[theme music plays]

**Travis:**

"[singing] Oh baby, it's cold outside! I don't wanna drive and go to the store."

You don't, you don't have, you don't have to. Hey, you don't need to whine anymore about how it's cold outside, because DoorDa-... Well, let me try again. "[singing] I don't wanna go to the store. Well, don't you worry, they'll dash to your door." There it is.

Teresa

Ooh!

**Travis:**

So, DoorDash. Ugh, the people at DoorDash, they're more important than ever right now. You know, you get home from the store and you're like, "Oh, so warm in here, so nice to be home. Oh, wait, I forgot the bagels," or whatever. Yeah, I forgot the bagels, Teresa's gonna be so mad.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

I bought all this cream cheese, what are we gonna do with it? Oh, no. Well, good news, that's what DoorDash is for. DoorDash connects you with the restaurants

you love, right now, at right at your door. And you can get grocery essentials that you need with DoorDash too. Get drinks, snacks and other household items delivered in under an hour.

Ordering is easy, just open the DoorDash app, choose what you want from where you want, and your items will be left safely outside your door, with the contactless delivery drop-off setting.

**Teresa:**

And they'll DoorDash through the snow.

**Travis:**

Sure. I mean, assuming it's snowing.

**Teresa:**

Uh, maybe.

**Travis:**

Okay. For a limited time, our listeners can get 25% off and zero delivery fees on their first order of \$15 or more when you download the DoorDash app and enter code SHMANNERSPOD. That's 25% off, up to a \$10 value, and zero delivery fees on your first order, when you download the DoorDash app in the App Store and enter code SHMANNERSPOD. Subject to change. Terms apply.

**Teresa:**

*Shmanners* is also sponsored in part this week by Quip.

**Travis:**

Quip.

**Teresa:**

I don't know about you-

**Travis:**

You don't?

**Teresa:**

But-

**Travis:**

Oh.

**Teresa:**

... I enjoy holiday treats.

**Travis:**

Sure.

**Teresa:**

But I also wanna keep my teeth.

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

I like, I like my teeth slightly more... Well, I like my teeth on sort of a more even level-

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

... than I like cookies. But I like cookies in bigger spikes than I like my teeth, I would say.

**Teresa:**

Yes, yes.

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

But in order to keep those teeth pearly and white-

**Travis:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Teresa:**

... you gotta brush, you gotta take care of them. You gotta floss. You gotta do all that stuff around it. Um, and you-

**Travis:**

Me?

**Teresa:**

... can give a gift of, uh, better oral care with Quip, the makers of the award winning electric toothbrush. And when you save up to 40% on holiday bundles, it's also a gift to your wallet.

**Travis:**

Oh, I see. Dear wallet, I love you.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

Signed, Travis.

**Teresa:**

So, you can have floss, gum, mouthwash-

**Travis:**

What? Yeah? Whoa.

**Teresa:**

... toothpaste, brush heads-

**Travis:**

Oh, boy.

**Teresa:**

... delivered to you every three months from \$5, okay? So, from \$5 on up. Shipping is free. So, you can save money and skip the hustle and bustle of shopping in-store during the holidays. We love our Quips.

**Travis:**

Yes, we do.

**Teresa:**

I have one that is in my, uh, my bathroom proper, one in my kid's bathroom, because Dot loves to brush her teeth. She also insists that I brush along with her. [laughs]

**Travis:**

See, I just bought a second one too, 'cause we started traveling again and doing that kinda stuff. And I- I wanna have one for home and one for business. [laughs]

**Teresa:**

[laughs] This is my business Quip.

**Travis:**

This is my business toothbrush, for business.

**Teresa:**

If you go to [getquip.com/shmanners](http://getquip.com/shmanners) right now now, on top of their holiday savings, you'll get your first refill free. That's your first refill free, and up to 40% off bundles, at [getquip.com/shmanners](http://getquip.com/shmanners), spelled, G-E-T-Q-U-I-P .com, slash *Shmanners*. Quip, the good habits company.

**Jo:**

Well, Manolo, we have a show to promote. It's called *Dr. Gameshow*.

**Manolo:**

It's a family friendly podcast where listeners submit games and we play them with callers from around the world.

**Jo:**

Oh, sounds good. New episodes, uh, happen ever other Wednesday on [Maximumfun.org](http://Maximumfun.org).

**Manolo:**

It's a, it's a fast and loose oasis of absurd innocence and naivete and-

**Jo:**

Are you writing a poem?

**Manolo:**

No. I'm just saying things from my memory. And, uh, it's a nice break from reality [laughs]. Is that, are we allowed to say that?

**Jo:**

I don't know, it sounds bad.

**Manolo:**

It comes with a 100% happiness guarantee.

**Jo:**

It does not.

**Manolo:**

[laughs]

**Jo:**

Come for the games and stay for the cats.

**Travis:**

Okay. So, how did we get to where we are now?

**Teresa:**

Well-

**Travis:**

That's a big, broad question. I mean spe-

**Teresa:**

That's a big, broad-

**Travis:**

... specifically about mall Santas.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Okay. So, uh, many people believe that the tradition of getting a picture taken of your children with Santa, at the mall, started in Seattle.

**Travis:**

Uh, wait, we were just there!

**Teresa:**

We were just there! A photographer for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in 1943, named Art "Happy" French, was sitting in his office across the street from the Frederick & Nelson department store. And the store was right in the middle of downtown Seattle, and French had a great view of the Santa Claus that was within the store, thanks to street side display window. He watched all of these children waiting in line to climb on Santa's lap, and saw an opportunity. Surely, these parents would love, and pay for, a photograph of their children with Santa Claus. And French could see himself making a lot of money with those pictures.

So, the next year, he took a leave of absence from the newspaper for the holiday season, got permission from the department store to set up a photo stand right next to Santa's booth, and used a hidden, large format camera to capture candid portraits of the children sitting on Santa's lap and offered to sell them to parents. He made \$10,000. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:**

That year?

**Teresa:**

That year. And that's in 1945 money.

**Travis:**

Yeah, that's a lotta money. That's a lotta money *now*. [laughs]

**Teresa:**

But today, that chunk of change is worth \$153,000.

**Travis:**

In, lets be honest, at most a month long period.

**Teresa:**

Yeah, yeah. That was more than three times his *annual* salary for the paper. And it was so popular that in March of 1946, *TIME Magazine* ran an article profiling French and his lucrative side business, uh, which had spread across the country.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Right? So, he might not be the person you think of, uh, with the idea. But he was certainly the most successful Santa photographer of all time.

**Travis:**

Okay. So, can we get to, like, more of, like, the modern day etiquette and stuff now? I know we have a lotta questions too.

**Teresa:**

Absolutely we can. It's hard work, first of all. And there are lots of professional Santa helpers, uh, affectionately named Kringles, and most of the time it's not about the money for them. Although money is how we live and buy food and- and things. Some Santas maintain their physique all year round, and they also, uh, hope to set a good example for children they encounter throughout the year.

**Travis:**

Well, yeah, everyone should do that. Hey, everybody-

**Teresa:**

Everyone.

**Travis:**

... be a good example to kids.

**Teresa:**

Um, so, first, let's talk about what we can do as parents.

**Travis:**

Yes, please.

**Teresa:**

You should make sure that your children actually *want* to see Santa.

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

Uh, you know, it's a good time to work in consent to your, to your, uh, relationship with your children. You can ask them, "Do you want to go see Santa? Do you want to sit on Santa's lap? Do you want a picture with Santa?" All of these

things, these little steps, help your children feel empowered and, uh, continue the, um, ownership of their own body-

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

... and image.

**Travis:**

It's also important to remember, uh, in this, and in all things, that consent can be revoked at any time.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

So, just because sitting at home, uh, your kid loves the idea of going to see Santa and getting a picture taken with him, and then they actually get there and they're two feet away from Santa and they freak out, that's totally fine. And saying, like, "Well, I'm gonna make them do it because they wanted to do it," no. They don't wanna do it anymore. That's not the memory they want.

**Teresa:**

Exactly. Sometimes just going and seeing and waving-

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

... is enough.

**Travis:**

I mean, that's mostly all that Dot wants to do.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

Is just see things and look. And you're like, "Do you wanna go over there?" And she's like, "No." That happened with trick or treat [laughs].

**Teresa:**

It sure did.

**Travis:**

Where we tried to trick or treat and we were like, "Hey, are you ready to go?" And she's like, "Hm, no trick or treat." And we're like, "Yeah, but then you won't get candy." She's like, "Hm, no candy." She just wanted to watch other people trick or treat, and she was fine with that.

**Teresa:**

That's just fine. Um, also, when you go to see Santa, there may be a line. This is another opportunity to explain expectations to your children, talk about, uh, how you'll have to wait patiently for your turn. Um, some children need a little more time than others. Maybe they're extra shy. Maybe they are so excited they can't speak-

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

... and they need a few minutes. Or maybe they have differences that need extra time, maybe wheelchairs or- or things like that.

**Travis:**

Or just, like, sensory issues, there's a lotta lights.

**Teresa:**

Sensory issues.

**Travis:**

And, you know, colors and sounds and stuff, going to see Santa. And they might need some time to process it before, you know, talking to him.

**Teresa:**

That's right. Um, so, also plan ahead. Um, usually lines get longer and longer as days go on.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

So, earlier is better. Earlier in the season, also less crowded, all those things.

**Travis:**

Just also, if it's young kids, give them a snack or something beforehand.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

Don't let their blood sugar drop if... especially a long line. And hey, good window before nap or after nap.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

Not, like, right before nap, where it's just like, "Yeah, we just need to get him home right now."

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Keeping the kids comfortable is definitely key. You know, too tight shoes or itchy Christmas sweater, hunger, tiredness, all that stuff plays into the experience.

**Travis:**

If it were me, right? I would do it as soon as we got to the mall, and then do whatever else we need to afterwards.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

So, that way, I'm not stressed out, I'm not tired, I'm... like, they're not tired, they're not cranky, right? Do the thing, and then do the Christmas shopping afterwards.

**Teresa:**

You know, but you can't prevent everything.

**Travis:**

Yeah, that's true.

**Teresa:**

They're-

**Travis:**

Well, *I* can.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

But that's because-

**Teresa:**

There *are* going to be tantrums. It may not be your child this time, but next time it might. And try and remember to keep your cool, and you can always come back tomorrow, try again.

**Travis:**

Right. That's the thing is, also, like, don't get... this is a weird parenting thing, but just for a moment, don't get angry at your kid if they get freaked out or if they make a scene or anything like that. They're kids.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

Right? They're not doing it to embarrass you. It's a lot, and it can be really overwhelming. And, you know, it, if this happened- you know, Bebe was getting her vaccination and it's like-

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

... yeah, man, listen, I'm frustrated and I am embarrassed and all of these things right now, in this moment. But you are also feeling feelings, and I'm older than you and can process those feelings a little bit better than you. So, it's okay if you're freaking out a little bit. The memory I want you to have is that I was understanding and patient, and not that this was a horrible experience.

**Teresa:**

Exactly. Lastly, one thing that parents, you can do for, uh, for your Santa, is lift your child, if they want to sit on Santa's lap, or sit on a chair next to Santa or what- whatever the setup is. Lift your child yourself, and place them where they are supposed to sit. It's a lotta kids, all day long. Lifting someone from a seated position to come up to your lap is a, is a very repetitive and difficult movement to do, especially for a lot of these Santa helpers who are a little older, right?

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Um, so, if you can, accompany your child, lift them onto Santa's lap. I'm sure that they would be very grateful.

**Travis:**

Uh, along those same lines, it's also a good time to have a conversation with your kids about how consent goes both ways.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

And talk about, like, not grabbing at Santa's face, or grabbing at Santa, or, I don't know, pushing, touching Santa, if Santa doesn't want to. You know what I mean?

**Teresa:**

Absolutely.

**Travis:**

Like, I, it's a thing, it's impossible not to. I would bet probably, like, four outta five kids grab at Santa's beard.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

Right? And like-

**Teresa:**

Well, they wanna see if it is attached to his face.

**Travis:**

Right. And this is, I mean, even now, my daughters know my beard's attached to my face and they still pull on it.

**Teresa:**

Yeah [laughs].

**Travis:**

So, like, talking to them about, like, "And you wouldn't want Santa to grab you if you didn't want that. And so, you know, we need to be respectful of other people's bodies too."

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

So, we got lots of questions.

**Teresa:**

Oh, great.

**Travis:**

You ready to do some questions?

**Teresa:**

I sure am.

**Travis:**

Okay. "Is it better to tell a child who believes in Santa the story that a mall Santa is the real Santa, or one of his helpers?"

**Teresa:**

Um, I would say helpers. Just because, um, there's-

**Travis:**

It's easier to tell the story that way, frankly. But-

**Teresa:**

It- it is. But they're going to encounter lots of different looking Santas. And the conversation will only get more and more in depth if you see, "Well, I thought that one was Santa. No, this one is Santa." So, I think that helpers is the way to go.

**Travis:**

Especially if you get there and the kid's like, "Why doesn't Santa know my name?"

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

"Why doesn't he already know what I want for Christmas?"

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

And if you say, "Well, it's all performative and this is just for the photo," the kid might not understand that.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

Okay. Uh, Haven-

**Teresa:**

Also a lot more, uh, Santas are looking very diverse-

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

... which I think is a- an amazing thing.

**Travis:**

Agreed.

**Teresa:**

You can go and see a Santa that looks very much like you.

**Travis:**

Um, Haven L. Hawthorne asks, "How might one deal with a child leaking, having an accident- "

**Teresa:**

Hm, mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

"... on the mall Santa? I feel like that's either a situation you're prepared for or a day ruiner, and there's no in between."

**Teresa:**

You are not the very first person to experience this. It is a common thing. And most Santas are prepared, in the way of, they have, uh, changes of clothing, uh, might even have some super absorbent, uh, towels or cloths or things like that. Um, and the only thing you can do is be very apologetic, because you don't want to spend too much time, uh, you know, offering to clean someone's lap.

**Travis:**

And sometimes making too big of a deal of a thing is what makes it a big deal.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

You know?

**Teresa:**

Right. And, um, you know, there's probably going to be other people waiting. Uh, so it just makes the deal bigger and bigger. An apology, and leaving as quickly as possible. Also, remember that, uh, urine, although it does smell, isn't really a big

stain, isn't really a big mess. It can be cleaned up very easily with soap and water.

**Travis:**

Also, take your kids to the bathroom before you go.

**Teresa:**

Great idea.

**Travis:**

A stitch in time saves nine. Um, "How old," Jamie Bash asks, "is too old to sit on Santa's lap?"

**Teresa:**

I like to think about... So, Bebe is five. Uh, she weighs approximately 30 pounds, because she's on the lower end of things. I am 5'2", so I am a smaller person as well. I can't really have her sit on my lap too, uh, too [laughs] ferociously for more than an hour. So, I'm gonna say that we scale things up, and if you are over 50 pounds, you're too much.

**Travis:**

Well, so, the general rule is, like, zero to 100 pounds, right? But I think that there are lots of people that I know that, into adulthood, see it as a tradition to go get... they started when they were kids, they've done it every year, and they go. Standing next to Santa to get a picture, it's okay. People might look at you weird when you're in line. I would recommend trying to go at a very, very, like, slow time for the mall, so that you are not having little kids wait behind you-

**Teresa:**

Hm.

**Travis:**

... while you do it, 'cause I don't think that's a good look, and you probably have a more flexible schedule than a five year old. But I would say, like, once you pass... hmm... teen years, for sure. But, like, over 100 pounds, I think, that is the time to m- maybe not.

**Teresa:**

Stand. Maybe stand.

**Travis:**

Stand, yeah.

**Teresa:**

Instead of sit.

**Travis:**

I also think that there are different circumstances, you know? Uh, Santa at an office Christmas party or something might be a different thing, or if they're doing funny pictures, right? Whatever.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

But I-

**Teresa:**

And you can always just sit for the moment that it takes to, uh-

**Travis:**

Or-

**Teresa:**

... take the picture.

**Travis:**

... or kneel next, right?

**Teresa:**

Yeah. There are lots of options. Um, and perhaps a group photo with Santa is in order. [laughs]

**Travis:**

I think so too. So, that's gonna do it for us. Uh, thank you so much. And thank you to everybody who came out to our- our panel at Emerald City Comic Con.

**Teresa:**

Oh, yeah. Thank you.

**Travis:**

Uh, we ended up, I think it ended up being a great discussion, our dad was our guest and we touched on a lot of topics.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

Um, we'll be putting that out as our episode next week.

**Teresa:**

Yes.

**Travis:**

And I'm really excited for you all to hear it. I hope you all enjoyed this episode, and if you did, please share it with somebody. Um, I had a lot of fun doing it. I hope you had a lot of fun listening. Thank you to Alex, our researcher, without whom we would not be able to make this show. Uh, and thank you to Rachel, our editor. Uh, once again, wouldn't be able to make this show. Also, very exciting, Candelights virtual-

**Teresa:**

Woo-hoo!

**Travis:**

... uh, is going out December 18th. We've got a ton of amazing guests, and, uh, it's just gonna be a lotta fun. We did a really fun *Shmanners* bit, uh, that has to do... it was, with some things the kids made, and us trying to make sense of them, and it's great. [laughs]

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

Um, and it's just an absolute blast. And it's for a good cause, it helps raise money for Harmony House, uh, which helps people who are experiencing homelessness in my hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. Last year we were able to just do a lot. Well, you, *you* people at home-

**Teresa:**

You were able to do a lot for them.

**Travis:**

... were able to do a lot for them. And this year I'm excited for the possibility of helping them more. Uh, so, you can check that out at [bit.ly/candlenights2021](https://bit.ly/candlenights2021). Tickets are on sale now for just \$5. It will go out, uh, December 18th at 9:00 PM Eastern time, but it is a pre-taped video spectacular, and it will be video on-demand through January 2nd. So, even if you aren't able to watch it on the 18th, you can still get tickets anytime after that before the 2nd. We got a lot of great people, uh, and you know what? I wanna tell you about it. But I don't wanna spoil any more.

**Teresa:**

Mmm.

**Travis:**

It's really good, I promise.

**Teresa:**

It's really good.

**Travis:**

Um, if you go to [mcelroymerch.com](https://mcelroymerch.com) our pin of the month, uh, is Steely Van [laughs]-

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

... which is a weird run we did on *Adventure Zone* talking about a- a Transformer named Steely Dan that then became Steely Van, which is a marijuana dispensing van in the *Transformer* world. [laughs] Uh, and that benefits the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, which is leading a transition away from an extractive economy based on profit and pollution, and towards local, healthy and life sustaining economies that benefit everyone. Uh, we've got, uh, once again, a My Brother, My Brother and the Man Who Ruined my For You Page sticker, because Justin introduced the Berries and Cream audio to TikTok and ruined everything for everyone.

We've got a Zone of Adventure enamel pin. A lotta great stuff there for you to check out. Um, let's see. Oh, got to Maximumfun.org and check out all the other amazing shows there. You can go to mcelroy.family and check out all the other McElroy projects. 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. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. That's @shmannerscast, uh, where we got all these lovely questions for this episode. So, give us a follow there. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for our fan run Facebook group picture, *Shmanners Fanners*. Oh, no.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

I- I messed it up real good.

**Travis:**

That's okay. We're falling apart.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, uh, join that group today. Also, we are always accepting and welcoming. We're always welcoming [laughs]-

**Travis:**

Everyone.

**Teresa:**

... topic suggestions and idiom submissions. And you can, uh, email Alex at shmannerscast@gmail.com.

**Travis:**

And 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]

[chord]

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