

## Shmanners 314: Frank Kameny

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[theme music plays]

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

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

**Travis:** And you're listening to *Shmanners*!

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

**Travis:** For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear.

**Travis:** How are *you*? How are you? How are *you*?

**Teresa:** How *aaare* you?

**Travis:** *How* are you?

**Teresa:** How are ya?

**Travis:** How be you? What say you, Montague? "Have at thee, Capulet!" You know those classic lines.

**Teresa:** Classic.

**Travis:** Famous. "Oh, no, Montague! I'm gonna bite my hand."

**Teresa:** Uh, well, we're in the—the first couple weeks of Beebs being out of school. That's, uh...

**Travis:** Tired!

**Teresa:** A lot.

**Travis:** Well, we're also in June. June is Pride Month!

**Teresa:** That's right.

**Travis:** Happy Pride Month to those who observe. Um, this is one of those times where we try to focus on some important historical figures that you may or may not have ever heard of, and I prob— usually haven't, and I usually by the end of it am glad that I have.

**Teresa:** Yeah! Due to our mainstream public education, we find that a lot of these figures are missing from our, uh, education, our history education. So, um, we've gone out to find the people who we should know already.

**Travis:** Now, there's some more serious nature to this one, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I need to know that ahead of time, 'cause I don't wanna be making a bunch of goofs up top, and then it's like, "And now, drama." And I'm like, "Oh no! I'm a butthead."

**Teresa:** [laughs] Well, it's not drama, per se. It's just, you know, a hard fight.

**Travis:** Okay. So is there any, like, specific— "specific." Oh my lord. Specific. Any specific, like, warnings we should give to anyone? Or is it just like, in general, it's tough.

**Teresa:** In general, it's tough out there.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay. So, we are going to talk about a brilliant scientist and activist. Um, he was an astronomer and a veteran.

**Travis:** Okay. So, astronomer... studies stars.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** But not an astrologer.

**Teresa:** Right. That's star signs.

**Travis:** I'm 38 years old and I'll never not have to think about it twice. Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and LGBTQIA+ rights activist, Frank Kameny!

**Travis:** Okay. What year was it? What era?

**Teresa:** This was pre-World War II.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** So, uh, he was born May 21st, 1925, and is often referred to as one of the most significant figures in the American gay rights movement.

**Travis:** Okay! I'm buckled in. I'm— I'm buckled up.

**Teresa:** Yep.

**Travis:** I'm ready.

**Teresa:** A New York City boy.

**Travis:** [radio announcer voice] New York City!

**Teresa:** Uh, Frank attended Richmond Hill High School, Queens City College. Um, you know, like... through and through, an American man.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And from the time that he was six years old, he knew he wanted to be an astronomer. Like, Bebe is almost six years old. Like, could you imagine a child being so focused on one specific career path?

**Travis:** I don't know what you're talking about. Bebe wants to be a ballerina astronaut, and I don't—

**Teresa:** A ballerina astronaut teacher.

**Travis:** Right, correct. Artist.

**Teresa:** Artist. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** I don't see how those four things conflict with one another!

**Teresa:** [laughs] That doesn't— I mean, concurrently or sequentially?

**Travis:** Actually, to be fair, she has a Coke bottle bank, one of those, like, you know, two-foot-tall deals, that maybe has about three inches of coins at the bottom, and she has recently told me she does not ever have to work. She'll just use the money in her bank.

**Teresa:** Perfect.

**Travis:** So...

**Teresa:** Um, and so one of the first things that he ever got as a gift was a telescope. Um, which is wonderful. His mother bought it for him, wanting to encourage his interests.

**Travis:** Yes, absolutely.

**Teresa:** Um, and he started the astronomy club at his high school.

**Travis:** Oh, that's a good look.

**Teresa:** Everybody around.

**Travis:** That's— that's great for college applications.

**Teresa:** Yeah! Everybody around knew him as longing to be an astronomer. He was a brilliant student. He entered college when he was still a teenager, so some sources say 15, some say 16.

**Travis:** Okay, 'cause I was gonna say, so did I. I was 18. [laughs] But still!

**Teresa:** I mean— okay, well, I turned 18... right after graduating.

**Travis:** Okay. But somewhere at 15 or 16, younger than average, okay.

**Teresa:** Yes, younger than average. Here is the first unforeseeable circumstance.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** The draft.

**Travis:** Oh, right.

**Teresa:** Yeah...

**Travis:** Oh, that old chestnut.

**Teresa:** He was drafted in World War II, and this started a kind of, like, lifetime... I would not say aspiration to be— to be in service of the US government. He was a respected soldier, and then went on later to serve 20 years on the Selective Service Board.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Did he get drafted out of co— I didn't know you could get drafted out of college. Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah. I think so. I guess so?

**Travis:** I basically don't know anything about the draft, uh, except that I had to register for it when I got my driver's license, I think? Or something like that. I don't know.

**Teresa:** Something like that. Um, and he was later selected to serve on the Selective Service Board. Um, and—

**Travis:** Okay. Which is the draft.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Selective service.

**Teresa:** Yes. Um, he returned to Queens College and graduated with a baccalaureate in Physics.

**Travis:** A ska baccalaureate.

**Teresa:** Yes indeed. [through laughter] In 19—

**Travis:** Scott— 'cause it's like Scott Bakula?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Did you know that it's named after him?

**Teresa:** What?!

**Travis:** I'm just trying to find jokes [through laughter] where I can.

**Teresa:** [laughs] 1948.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** We're almost done with his education background. Uh, received a doctorate in astronomy. Who's that named after?

**Travis:** A doctorate? Named after Doctor Who.

**Teresa:** [laughs] The Doctor, excuse you. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** Well... it's the— hi— in the original series—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —he was called Doctor Who, and then they changed it to The Doctor. But in the first, like, season, or first series, he was called Doctor Who a couple times.

**Teresa:** In 1956. Um, to give you a— just a flavor of kind of his personality—

**Travis:** Pistachio.

**Teresa:** [laughs] This is the name of his thesis.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** [clears throat] *A Photoelectric Study of Some RV Tauri and Yellow Semiregular Variables.*

**Travis:** Oh, so—

**Teresa:** Like, okay. Doctorate thesis statements and papers are not, like, super exciting. Um, but this guy really knew how to thread the needle, I think. Um... [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** Wait, was that supposed to be exciting?

**Teresa:** [through laughter] No, sorry.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** Sorry. [laughs]

**Travis:** I was like, "What did I miss?"

**Teresa:** Oh, I should really stay in my lane. Okay. Here's the thing. He loved doing that stuff. He loved being— like, nerding out over stars. He loved doing all the, like— the super cool, like, rule following and being a good student and—

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** I imagine him being—

**Travis:** He was a nerd. You can just say.

**Teresa:** He was a nerd. And he... enjoyed it. Loved doing this stuff. He was doing what he loved, and it was great. Following his dreams. Other personality traits... he had a lot of kind of, like, stand up citizen, um, important American kind of thoughts, right?

**Travis:** Patriotic.

**Teresa:** Sure, yeah, yeah. I guess so.

**Travis:** I mean, if you serve on the selective services board for, like, 20 years...

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** ... you're in it. You know? What's that word? Uh, civil duties, you know?

**Teresa:** Yes, that's the one! That's what I was looking for.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um...

**Travis:** Oh, very sons of Cincinnatus.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** When he first enrolled at Harvard, he had to sign a loyalty oath in order to work as a teaching fellow. He refused to sign it without attaching several qualifiers to the document.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Feeling that sworn blind allegiance to any institution was not something he was interested in.

**Travis:** Good call. Good call. Read the fine print.

**Teresa:** That's right.

**Travis:** I mean, I don't, but you should.

**Teresa:** So I guess that means that if someone is willing to serve in the military for so long, they have very, like, solid rock foundations of what they believe in, and it's not just about The Man, right? They're not just a—

**Travis:** Yeah, not just blind faith, yeah.



**Teresa:** Not a servant to The Man.

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** Which I think— I think tells a lot about what he would go on to later go. From what we can tell, Kameny always knew that he was gay. But he was much more focused on his studies than interested in exploring his sexuality, and I think that's cool.

**Travis:** Yeah, yeah, [mumbles]. Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, you know, he was just really dedicated to this career, to science, to, you know, the stuff that he wanted to explore, and that's great. Um, his first actual relationship didn't occur till he was 29. Uh, and he fell in love with a young man named Keith while completing graduate training in Tuscon, Arizona.

**Travis:** Okay. Ah, Arizona. Hot. I was just there.

**Teresa:** Very hot.

**Travis:** Very warm. But also, I have to assume, a good place to do astronomy.

**Teresa:** It does seem, though, that Keith was probably, like, the closest thing he really ever came to, like, a steady boyfriend, though.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, one historian of the mid-century gay movement said of Kameny, "He was not gifted with obvious charisma."

**Travis:** Okay. Oof.

**Teresa:** He didn't—

**Travis:** What a— what a— what a, uh, nerdy/poetic burn.

**Teresa:** I suppose. He didn't seem to have any kind of— like, we can't really find any interest in sports, or music, or movies, or... you know. He just seemed to have one kind of focus in his life.

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** So the reason why he took up the cause for gay civil rights—

**Travis:** I can't wait to find out, but first... thank you note for our sponsors!

**Teresa:** Yeah!

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hello. My name is Travis McElroy. What is that, you ask? Why am I here? Well, many reasons. But mostly right now at this second, I'm here to tell you about Bombas. That's why I was put on this Earth.

**Teresa:** [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** When I was born, my mother and father looked at me and said, "You'll be a sock man, son."

**Teresa:** [laughs] Not just socks. Your future is so bright, with t-shirts, and... lounge pants, and... socks!

**Travis:** And underpants.

**Teresa:** And underpants.

**Travis:** And I said, "Goo-goo ga-ga, wah, wah, wah," 'cause I was, like, just a— I was a baby.

**Teresa:** 'Cause he was just a baby.

**Travis:** Right? But Bombas isn't a baby! [snorts] Bombas is a company!

**Teresa:** I was wondering how you were gonna get back there.

**Travis:** Yes! Bombas's mission is simple. Make the most comfortable clothes ever, and match every item sold with an equal item donated. So when you buy Bombas, you are also giving to someone in need. There is a pair of Bombas socks for everything you do. They come in tons of options, like comfy performance styles made with sweat-wicking yarn, with John Wicking yarn.

**Teresa:** Hmm!

**Travis:** Which means your feet stay cool while the rest of you works up a sweat, baby!

**Teresa:** And cool. 'Cause John Wick is cool, right?

**Travis:** John Wick is cool. I don't think we should keep comparing Bombas clothes to John Wick.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I know I started it, but— okay. Bombas t-shirts are made with thoughtful design features, just like John Wick can be pretty thoughtful at times.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Hey, you can't tell me to stop if you keep going.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] I know.

**Teresa:** That's not fair.

**Travis:** Uh, design features like invisible seams, soft fabrics, and the perfect weight so they hang just right. And did you know that socks, underwear and t-shirts are the three most requested clothing items at homeless shelters? That's why Bombas donates one for every item you buy.

So go to [bombas.com/shmanners](https://bombas.com/shmanners) and get 20% off your first purchase. That's [B-O-M-B-A-S.com/shmanners](https://B-O-M-B-A-S.com/shmanners) for 20% off. [Bombas.com/shmanners](https://Bombas.com/shmanners).

Now, I also want to tell you about Storyworth. You might feel like you know your father figure better than anyone, but he's got stories you don't know. Let me tell you this. Personally, for me, it's my grandmother, my Nonnie, who I've talked about on many things. And I remember, uh, I think— it wasn't too long ago. It was about five years ago. And so at that point, I had known Nonnie for 33 years, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And she— I just randomly one day said, like, "And you used to live in Las Vegas, right?"

And she just started telling me stories about her time and Vegas in, like, you know, the 60's. And I was like, "Oh my God!" And, like, it was all these stories I had never heard before. And, you know, you learn something new about these people all the time, right? And you know what month it is? You know what happens this, uh, I don't know, week and a half from now? Father's Day. Right?

**Teresa:** Ohh, that's a great idea!

**Travis:** There you go.

**Teresa:** I was kind of like, "How are you— yeah!"

**Travis:** Storyworth is an online service that helps you and your dad, or father figure, or whoever, connect through sharing stories and memories and preserves them for years to come. Every week, Storyworth emails your dad, or whoever, a thought-provoking question of your choice from a vast pool of possible options. Each unique prompt asks questions you've never thought of, like "What is one of your fondest childhood memories?" Or "Have you ever feared for your life?" You know, something like that. Um, and after one year, Storyworth compiles all those questions and stories, including photos, into a beautiful keepsake book the whole family can share for generations. So give all the—

**Teresa:** Like a photo album! But with memories.

**Travis:** There you go.

**Teresa:** Not just— not just click memories, but, like, written memories.

**Travis:** And it's there, you know, for future generations. There have been people in my life that I have lost that I would love to be able to, like, hand these books over to Bebe and say like, "Hey, get to know this person you never got to meet." All those things, right? It's wonderful.

So give all the fathers or whoever in your life a meaningful gift you can both cherish for years to come: Storyworth. Right now, for a limited time, you can save \$10 on your first purchase when you go to [storyworth.com/shmanners](http://storyworth.com/shmanners).

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[music plays]

**Dan:** Hi! I'm Dan McCoy.

**Stuart:** I'm Stuart Wellington.

**Elliott:** And I'm Elliott Kalan!

**Dan:** And the three of us host *The Flop House*. It's a podcast where we watch a new bad movie, and then we talk about it.

**Elliott:** Dan, you say it's hosted by the three of us. We've had a lot of great guests cohost, like Gillian Flynn, Jamelle Bouie, John Hodgman, Jessica Williams, Wyatt Cenac, Joe Bob Briggs, Josh Gondelman, Roman Mars—

**Stuart:** Yeah, and you said new movies, but what about the time we did *Meatballs 2*?

**Dan:** Okay, okay, yeah. Sometimes we do older movies, and sometimes we have guests, but mostly it's about us talking about, like, recent bad movies.

**Stuart:** And don't forget about the ones where I made you do a roleplaying game where you played cartoon dogs!

**Dan:** Alright, yeah, but—

**Stuart:** Shouldn't a promo be a really simple explanation about what our show is about? So what's the show about, Dan?

**Elliott:** What's it about?

**Dan:** [sighs]

**Stuart:** What's it about?

**Dan:** It's about friendship, alright?! It's about our friendship and how we love each other!

**Stuart:** The Flophouse: it's a podcast mostly about bad movies, on Maximum Fun.

[music and ad end]

[*Star Trek* comm noise]

**Ben:** Do you sometimes wonder what ever happened to the kids at your school who really loved *Star Trek*?

**Adam:** You might remember a kid like me, the one who read the *Star Trek* novels and built star ship models. I also took music classes to avoid taking gym classes that required showering after, but I don't see what that really has to do with—

**Ben:** Or a kid like me. I introduced myself to kids at my summer camp one year as Wesley, but when the school year started and some of those kids were in my new class, I actually had to explain to my friends that I had tried to take on the identity of my favorite *Star Trek* character. The shame haunts me to this day!

**Adam:** I'm sure some of those *Star Trek* fans from your childhood grew up to have interesting and productive lives, but... we ended up being podcasters.

**Ben:** On *The Greatest Discovery*, you'll hear what happens to two lifelong *Star Trek* fans who didn't grow up to be great people, but just grew up to be people who love jokes as much as they love Trek.

**Adam:** Season Four of *Star Trek: Discovery* is here, so listen to our new episodes every week on Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[*Star Trek* comm noise]

[ad ends]

**Travis:** Okay. So, what— what got Frank into the gay rights movement?

**Teresa:** So, he was arrested in Tuscon by a plainclothes police officer for an incident that happened in a tea room, which at the time was gay slang for a

public restroom where men negotiated and transacted, and hid homosexual activity.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and at this point homosexual acts were illegal, and tea rooms offered a convenient and discreet option for men who were trying to understand or express their own sexuality.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, I mean, it was— it was understood that this is something that happened. And it was also really dumb that police officers were enforcing this kind of stuff, right?

**Travis:** Well... there are many things about the police in America that are really dumb, and we don't need to get into it right now.

**Teresa:** Um, and so this kind of charge on your record was particularly damaging to one's career, at this point.

**Travis:** Well, especially as we're talking about somebody who, you know, was involved in armed forces, selective services, and you'd have to imagine that at this point— what, we're talking, you know, going into, like, space race and a lot of stuff, yeah, with the government.

**Teresa:** Exactly. Exactly. Um, he was a gifted scientist and a veteran, and he was poised to be, like, at the forefront of the space race, right? But however, due to the badly named, quote, "morality sweep" of America in the mid-20th century, having this charge labeled you as a homosexual, which could potential take away your security clearance that you needed for any of these high-level jobs. Why is that, Travis? Do you know?

**Travis:** Uhh... you know, I'm gonna say I can't imagine how they're related, but communism?

**Teresa:** A little bit, yeah!

**Travis:** What— oh, that was just a guess! Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so the Red Scare, right? Tightened its grip around the nation. And in order to [sarcastically] fight the commies... the conservatives used this fear to stroke flames of discrimination and terror. Right?

**Travis:** Okay. Yeah, yeah.

**Teresa:** They argued that when confronted with a Soviet menace, the American government couldn't have any room for, quote, "weakness of character."

**Travis:** Ohh, okay.

**Teresa:** Um, they said that closeted homosexuals were vulnerable to Soviet blackmail, and any of those who were out— I mean, if there were any— would make the government look bad.

**Travis:** Okay. So, uh, a little bit of a Catch-22 there, huh?

**Teresa:** I mean, super messed up.

**Travis:** Yeah. But really, I mean, let's call it what it is. As you said, that whole Red Scare thing was basically just like... any kind of, like, punishment of quote, unquote, "abnormality," right? Of, like, "good old American values," quote, unquote. A thing that, don't get it twisted, ain't done today. Right? Hasn't stopped yet, right? But, like, that's all it was, right? Of just like, rooting out the quote, unquote, "other," right? Anyone who's not like you.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Ugh. Gross.

**Teresa:** Um, a lot of this was also, like, personally propagated by Hoover, right? Who was the former head of the FBI.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] And McCarthy. I mean, yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Um, and so... [sighs] he didn't do anything to fix the Great Depression, and he also was homophobic and racist, so...

**Travis:** Yeah. A bad— a bad guy!



**Teresa:** A bad guy.

**Travis:** Yeah. I'm just gonna go on record and say it. A bad guy.

**Teresa:** Okay. So, people like Hoover and President Truman and a bunch of other homophobic cronies made it their mission to ruin the lives of gay people.

**Travis:** Sure, okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and so in 1947, President Truman ordered the vetting of all federal employees and job applicants. To find out if they were gay.

**Travis:** Oh. Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, and so they quietly began forcing homosexuals to resign, on the grounds that their sexuality made them security risks, like I said earlier, right?

**Travis:** Okay. Alright.

**Teresa:** This would be known as the Lavender Scare.

**Travis:** Get outta the— oh my God.

**Teresa:** I know, right? I know. It was a mass firing and further marginalization of queer people.

**Travis:** Because of security risk?

**Teresa:** Yeah, supposed security risk.

**Travis:** But that was just the excuse, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Travis:** Like, that was just the thing. It was like, "Well, you're different, so we don't like you, and the justifiable," quote, unquote, "like, reason we've come up with is weakness of character, and we don't trust you to stand up." [stammers] Because all of these strong-willed gents kicking you out because you make them out because you make them uncomfortable could stand up to... ugh.

**Teresa:** Right. So this is when the FBI began checking records of arrests for homosexual activity against federal employment records. So if you got a ding on your name, they would forward your info and fingerprints to the civil service commission, and other various government agencies, and Kameny got in trouble.

**Travis:** I don't curse on this show.

**Teresa:** Not here.

**Travis:** So I'm just gonna say horseapples.

**Teresa:** I know, right? Um, he actually, when he was arrested in Arizona, was promised that his criminal record would be expunged after serving three years probation, and that his conduct would not be listed explicitly as homosexual. He thought that at that point he was in the clear, but...

**Travis:** And they lied to him.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, he was actually in D.C., and taught for a year in the astronomy department of Georgetown University before he was hired in July 1957 by the US Army Map Service, which sounds like a dream job for this guy.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** And then... he was found out of.

**Travis:** He was outed.

**Teresa:** He was outed. Here's what happened. This guy, this stand-up citizen—

**Travis:** This incredibly qualified individual, who anyone would be lucky to have in any field related to stars.

**Teresa:** —had listed this arrest on his job application without—

**Travis:** 'Cause he was honest!

**Teresa:** Yes, because he was honest— without explicitly saying what it was for, right? He just said he had been arrested. Some speculate if he hadn't even mentioned it, things would probably have played out way differently. But...

**Travis:** He was honest.

**Teresa:** He was honest. And the government got to him. Um, and so it— I mean, it took a while.

**Travis:** I'm getting angry. My whole body posture has changed.

**Teresa:** It's true.

**Travis:** I'm gonna fight somebody for this guy.

**Teresa:** It took a while, because they didn't have the internet. Um, but once it got up to the higher ups it took about a year, um, for that discovery to get out, and he was fired in October of 1957. He was actually doing fieldwork in Hawaii, and they yanked the rug out from underneath him.

**Travis:** [sighs heavily]

**Teresa:** The official sat down and said, "We have information that leads us to believe that you are a homosexual. Do you have any comment?"

**Travis:** And he said, "I'm just trying to do my work! Leave me alone!"

**Teresa:** He said, uh, "What's the information?" Right? Because that's what I would say. I'd be like, "So, what do you have on me?" Right? And then when they wouldn't tell him he said, "Well, I'm not going to comment. And in any case, I don't think it's any of your business."

**Travis:** Darn right.

**Teresa:** Darn tootin'. That was brave, and of course he paid the price. Um, so he was fired, and his security clearance revoked, which means he couldn't, like, get another government job.

**Travis:** [simultaneously] Get another government job.

**Teresa:** Um, and was barred from future federal employment because of his, quote, "immorality."

**Travis:** And you also have to think, man—[stammers]—trying to look into the future for this fellow. Like, once you have that on your resume of, like, I worked there, and they'd be like, "Why were you fired from that job?" Right? Like, future jobs that you're gonna apply for, it's not like everyone else in this time period was cool with it and just the government were being buttheads. It was like every—like—[sighs] okay, go on.

**Teresa:** He did turn this terrible situation into kind of a rising action, right? In June of 1959, he sued the Secretary of the Army.

**Travis:** Oh, okay!

**Teresa:** It was dismissed.

**Travis:** Aw.

**Teresa:** But he didn't give up. Um, he prepared for an appeal, and approached the New York Chapter of the Mattachine Society.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** The Mattachine Society.

**Travis:** For anyone out there, I looked at this beforehand. It's like if you took the word machine and put, like, Matt at the beginning. So it's M-A-T-T-A-C-H-I-N-E. So it's like machine, but Matt right there at the beginning, like the name. Okay.

**Teresa:** Was formed in California around 1950, and started its life as a pretty radical organization. Um—

**Travis:** But not like "[surfer dude voice] Radical!"

**Teresa:** I mean... yeah!

**Travis:** But not like... Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Radical.

**Teresa:** No, not—[laughs] not TMNT.

**Travis:** But I mean, that's one of those words, right? That mean— originally started for, like, fringe group, and it became, like, totally cool. [laughs]

**Teresa:** Um, so... originally the Mattachine Society wanted to— they wanted to demedicalize the idea of homosexuality. Um, and get their group recognized as a distinct social minority who needed to embrace their group identity, which I think is good. But—

**Travis:** Demedicalize, do you mean like in terms of, like, not having it listed in, like, the— uh, the D-S-M-V, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Yeah, okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah. And, um, they referred to themselves as homophiles.

**Travis:** For a long time homosexuality, if you don't know, was, like, a medical— like, a mental condition, basically.

**Teresa:** Right, and we'll get to that too.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** The organization toned itself down a lot after the Lavender Scare, and began focusing instead on assimilation rather than pride.

**Travis:** I said D-S-M-V. I meant DSM, and right now the current edition is DSM-V. V.

**Teresa:** Ohh.

**Travis:** Yeah. So I got— just want everyone to know, I know the difference.

**Teresa:** Okay. So, he approached the Mattachine Society and told them that he and his lawyer were going to strike a bold new line in their appeal, arguing that homosexuality was moral in a positive sense.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Because it's people being themselves.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and when it came to security clearance, they argued that a gay man who was open could not be blackmailed about his sexuality and, I mean, because you can't blackmail somebody about something they're not keeping secret. [laughs]

**Travis:** It is weird to say. "I'm gonna blackmail you. I'm gonna tell everybody that already knows the thing that I'm telling them."

**Teresa:** Exactly. Um, so what he said was, and I think this is great, "A homosexual who is willing, should the necessity arise, to stand up on his own two legs before the world as he is and to defend his right to live his life as he chooses, can get and retain a clearance."

**Travis:** Okay. Seems reasonable to me.

**Teresa:** I agree. These lawsuits, uh, allowed Kameny to, like, refocus his life, right? And put words to his anger and, you know, kind of process everything he'd gone to. 'Cause he was, you know, this kind of nerdy guy who had always played by the rules, right?

**Travis:** Yeah, but it's so interesting, right? Because this is— if this was, like, a— if somebody was writing this, right? This is how you would write it, right? Of, like, this person who didn't really care, and didn't have, like, a social life or anything like that, was just focused on "This is my work and I like my work, and that's where my focus is." And then their work is taken away from them, and they're like "What do I apply this laser focus to now? I'm gonna apply it to the thing that I'm angry about."

And it's like, that's the person you don't want to— and I'm going to say this word, and I don't know if this counts as a curse— piss off, right? Where they're just like, "Oh no, you don't understand. When I'm focused on something, I don't care about anything else."

**Teresa:** That is what it seems happened to Frank. Um, and so he did not have very much success in the legal system. His new appeal was rejected, he got dropped by his lawyer, he tried to take his case to the Supreme Court, they declined to hear it. But all of this support from the Mattachine Society made an everlasting impression, right? Um, he aligned himself with this particular chapter, and discovered that there were FBI informants among them.

**Travis:** Oh no!

**Teresa:** Not good. Um, but it didn't stop him. He started to see the crusade for gay rights as a potential political weapon, and started to discuss opening his own Mattachine offshoot in Washington.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** I mean, that's— that is pretty, like, courageous, right? It's kind of like starting an arsonist society next to a fire... house.

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** Don't you think? [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** I guess— yeah, I guess I could see... what you're saying.

**Teresa:** [laughs] So he founded it in 1961—

**Travis:** Don't start an arsonist society, though. I'm just gonna say. I don't know if that exists, but there's informants in there, one. Two, don't do arson. Don't do— hey, this is a *Shmanners* official: don't do arson.

**Teresa:** I'm not saying— I'm saying it was a very courageous idea. Perhaps—

**Travis:** You're saying that starting an arson society is a courageous idea?

**Teresa:** [laughs] No.

**Travis:** I thought I knew you.

**Teresa:** Next to a fire station.

**Travis:** I guess that would be bold, yeah. Okay, yeah. Alright.

**Teresa:** Alright. Um, and so while the New York and California branches moved towards preaching assimilation, Kameny had no interest in this. This branch of the Mattachine Society was going to be dedicated to pursuit of equal rights for homosexuals.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Let me tell you what he did.

**Travis:** Please do. That's why I'm here. It's why we're all here.

**Teresa:** They organized— he organized several pickets, the first one being the first gay rights protest at the steps of the White House.

**Travis:** Oh, okay!

**Teresa:** And he had this kind of, like, brilliant vision in a way. So, like, a lot of these protests, especially during the 60's, right? What do you think of when you think of a protest?

**Travis:** Uh, well, I think of two different things, right? I either think of, like, drum circles and, you know, people sitting around with signs. Or I think about, like, you know, sit-in and, you know, lunch counters, and walking, and marches and stuff.

**Teresa:** So he envisioned, when he thought about protests at this time, what the media was showing, the dirty hippies with signs.

**Travis:** Sure. I wasn't gonna say those words, but yeah, I didn't know where we were going and I wasn't gonna fall into one of your clever traps.

**Teresa:** Um, he stage managed this first, like— I wanna say this— it was almost like a PR campaign, right?

**Travis:** Sure, sure, sure.

**Teresa:** He— in 1965, he made it so that all the men were dressed in suits and ties.



**Travis:** Ohh, okay.

**Teresa:** All the women dressed in conservative dresses, not pantsuits, even though those were available at the time. And so everyone who was walking around the White House looked exactly like the people who were in front with signs.

**Travis:** So basically anybody who tried to say, like, "Look at these, you know, untrustworthy, these bad people," be like, "But they look exactly... "

**Teresa:** They looked just like everyone going to work.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm. Clever.

**Teresa:** So any kind of, like, media attention they got... you know, you couldn't say that this was the other. These were people just like me, is what he orchestrated, which is— it's brilliant. It's brilliant.

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** And he followed up at many different locations in Washington and Philadelphia, which became an annual event, and they were so strict under Kameny's guide that he even specified the number of staples to go into a protest sign on its wooden stick. It's ten, by the way. [laughs quietly]

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and—

**Travis:** This is what I'm saying. Too much focus. Maybe too much?

**Teresa:** Maybe— maybe a little... too much focus. In 1971, he became the first openly gay candidate for the United States Congress when he ran for D.C.'s first election for a non-voting congressional delegate.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** He was defeated. But he helped organize the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Washington, D.C., which continues to lobby the government and press the case for equal rights.

**Travis:** Awesome.

**Teresa:** Yeah! Um, and here comes the DSM thing.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** You said it, and I wanted to make sure that I said it right, 'cause you said it.

**Travis:** The Diagnostic and Statistic Manual, I believe?

**Teresa:** Of mental disorders.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** So they interviewed several psychiatrists, but they were only able to find one who was willing to testify in disguise, not wanting to ruin their— for fear of losing their position at Temple University. Um, so in 1973, the day is described as "the day we were cured en masse by the psychiatrists," because it was removed.

**Travis:** Oh, they removed it, okay. Everybody was cured.

**Teresa:** Everybody was cured instantly.

**Travis:** Excellent.

**Teresa:** So, this was just one of the many awesome things that Frank did for people in this era. It's documented that Kameny's work in advising several service members helped them receive honorable discharges, even after being discovered as gay. Um, because he found ex-marines to testify at this hearing for 18-year-old marine, Jeffery Dunbar.

Um, and they ran an editorial in the Washington Post, saying that "Dunbar was involved in no scandal and had brought no shame on the Marine Corp. We

understand that the undesirable discharge is a strange and, we think, pointless way of pursuing military justice." So he got upgraded to honorable discharge.

**Travis:** Still not great to discharge someone, but at least with honorable discharge you get the benefits, you get I think pension and all those things.

**Teresa:** Right. And he continued in this vein, working to, like, show everyone that, like, this is not an immoral, like, view of life.

**Travis:** Not a punishable thing.

**Teresa:** It's not a punishable offense. He found a service member with an impeccable record in order to initiate a challenge to the military's ban on homosexuals. Um, and so he found a Technical Sergeant in the United States Air Force, Leonard Matlovich, who had 11 years of unblemished service, a Purple Heart, and a Bronze Star.

He outed himself to his commanding officer in 1975. Then he read about Kameny's goal in the interview in Air Force Times and he got in touch. So eventually they were able to, like, stack all of the witnesses to make it so that everybody was able to articulate what an awesome guy this former armed forces guy was, and make it so that, like...

**Travis:** It looks ridiculous!

**Teresa:** It looks ridiculous for them to be discharged, right?

**Travis:** Right. Because at that point, you're losing incredibly talented, skilled, like, honorable members of the team. And it's just like, the one thing is this one thing that has nothing to do with their job whatsoever. It's almost like it's dumb!

**Teresa:** And they were successful for this.

**Travis:** Yay!

**Teresa:** Yay! Finally successful! And he was reinstated in 1980.

**Travis:** Yay!

**Teresa:** So there was a five year gap between his discharge, but then he was reinstated in 1980. Let me continue to list several accolades that Kameny had achieved, either within his lifetime or posthumously. In 2006, Kameny, along with Barbara Gittings, who we've spoke about before, received the first John E. Fryer, MD Award from the American Psychiatric Association.

In 2007, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History included Kameny's picket signs carried in front of the White House in 1965, in the Smithsonian Exhibit "Treasures of American History", and the Library of Congress acquired Kameny's papers in 2006 that documented his life and leadership.

In February of 2009, Kameny's home in Washington was designated a Washington, D.C. historic landmark. Uh, in 2009, John Berry, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, formally apologized to Kameny on behalf of the United States government.

Um, in 2010 he was voted unanimously to receive a memorial street sign designated 17th Street between P and R streets, N.W., as Frank Kameny Way. Um, in 2010, the Caucus Room of the Cannon House Office Building, Kameny was honored with the Cornelius R. 'Neil' Alexander Humanitarian Award, and was invited to attend the ceremony where President Obama signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010.

It just goes on and on. Like, everybody seemed to realize all at once that he did a lot of awesome things. Uh, he died on October 11th, 2011, which October 11th is National Coming Out Day.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** That's pretty cool. So in 2012, the American Astronomical Society held a public ceremony to present a posthumous certificate of appreciation to Kameny, recognizing his exemplary lifelong commitment to promoting equal rights for homosexual men and women. And how his activism removed discriminatory barriers that had cut short many careers.

I think what their saying is his, right? Also his.

**Travis:** Also his.

**Teresa:** Um, I mean, the list just goes on and on. He— I mean—

**Travis:** Everyone should look it up.

**Teresa:** Everyone should it up. Hey, google that guy.

**Travis:** Hey, spell his last name for everybody? I mean, they'll see it in the title, but...

**Teresa:** K-A-M-E-N-Y.

**Travis:** There you go. Look it up.

**Teresa:** Here's the last one that I'm gonna give you, and you guys can find some more. In 2012, the International Astronomical Union and the Minor Planets Center named asteroid 40463 Frankkameny in his honor.

**Travis:** That's the best asteroid.

**Teresa:** He took his place among the stars.

**Travis:** Oh, excellent. Thank you. Thank you, Frank, um, for all your hard work. Thank you to Alex, our researcher, without whom we would not be able to make this show. Thank you Rachel, our editor, without whom we would not be able to make this show. And thank you for you for listening! We could make the show without you, but what would be the—

**Teresa:** [simultaneously] But why?

**Travis:** Why? Why would we... that'd be silly.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** At that point. We'd just be talking in, like, tin cans on a string. Uh, thank you to our podcast home, Maximumfun.org. Check out all the other amazing shows there. If you want to listen to, or watch, or just enjoy all the McElroy projects and everything the McElroys have to offer...?

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Yeah. Go to [mcelroy.family](http://mcelroy.family). You can check out all the really cool merch that is there, uh, or that we have by going to [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com). 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. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. That's @shmatterscast. And when we get back to taking questions from y'all, that's where we will ask for them.

Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan run Facebook group, *Shmatters* Fanners. Go ahead and join that group if you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans. Also, if you have topic submissions or you want to submit an idiom, we're always looking for those. Please send those to [shmatterscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmatterscast@gmail.com) and say hi to Alex. She reads every email.

**Travis:** Uh, 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]

[chord]

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