

Shmanners 334: Christmas Lights

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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 your listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: I'm well. I'm getting into the spirit. That—

Travis: Of what? The November spirit, or...?

Teresa: Noo...

Travis: That Christmas spirit.

Teresa: That Christmas spirit. It is so much fun to have children who understand what's happening during Christmas.

Travis: My favorite thing that has happened so far is we have a fake tree, we have an artificial tree. And we pulled it out of the box, and it was in three segments.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And pulled it out, and Dottie, who is almost three, goes "Wait a minute! We're supposed to have a tall tree!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And so then after I put it together, about 20 minutes later, she looked at and she went, "That's more like it!"

Teresa: "That's more like it." [laughs]

Travis: And I was like, "Who is this, like, newsie-esque figure." "[exaggerated New York accent] Wait a minute! So this thing—"

Um, I was also— I was recently talking with our friends, Charlie and Lauren, 'cause they just had a baby. And I talked about Bebe, when Bebe was born in 2016, it was... uh, you know, the end of October. Uh, so that preceding two weeks between having a baby and the 2016 election put a real damper on any desire to, like, do stuff, like decorate, and Christmas.

Teresa: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Travis: So I manufactured Christmas spirit by watching as many Christmas movies and specials Christmas as we could, and documenting them and saying, like, "Ah, we watched this one today, and we've seen *Muppet Christmas Carol* three times, and have we watched this one yet? No." And it's a very bonkers thing to do, but it worked. It drove up—

Teresa: It totally worked.

Travis: It drove us to actually do decorations.

Teresa: And the children have enjoyed it, actually. You've kept it up.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: We have a collection.

Travis: I don't document as much this year.

Teresa: No, no.

Travis: I don't, like, do the same, like, spreadsheet I did before.

Teresa: Yeah, you had a list. You had an exhaustive list.

Travis: This was also the first year Bebe specifically requested the claymation Christmas special that I grew up watching. She was like, "Can we watch the one with the raisins?"

And I was like, "[gasps loudly] You mean—"

Teresa: "Yes we— yes we can."

Travis: "You mean the claymation Christmas? Yes, of course we can. And that was a very proud moment for me.

Teresa: Well, today we are specifically going to talk about Christmas lights. Not only the history, but also the etiquette surrounding outdoor lights.

Travis: Now, I don't know about your household. But for whatever reason, growing up my mom was like, the white Christmas lights were all we did. She for some reason thought, you know, the rainbow lights— she was like, "Those are tacky."

Teresa: Huh.

Travis: And was like, dead set, like, there were no colorful lights in our home. It was all white lights. And we would, like, drive by people that had the rainbow lights and she'd be like, "[sighs] Tacky."

Teresa: Aww...

Travis: And this is— I've been to her parents house. Like, both my grandfather's house and then my grandmother's house. They both had rainbow lights in their house! I don't know where— but my mom was also very much, like, the decorations for Christmas— we still have some of 'em— were very much, like, what she called country Christmas. And it would be, like, little apples that hung on the thing, or like a little miniature cookie tray with, like, carved wooden cookies in the shapes of things.

Teresa: And, like, the pink and white— no, the red and white ribbons.

Travis: Yeah, red and white, red and gold. Like, she was— she was going for that Christmas tree you could submit to a decoration competition look. You know? So, like, it was always like all of the planned— this makes my mom sound like, very controlling, but—

Teresa: What was that magazine? Tasteful Home?

Travis: Oh, it was more like, uh, what is it?

Teresa: Taste of Home?

Travis: Country Living or something.

Teresa: Country Living. [laughs]

Travis: Home and Garden. Whatever. And so, like, all of the, you know, the handmade stuff, if it didn't fit, was on the sides and stuff. I can't stress enough, this makes my mom sound like a very controlling Christmas decorator. That was not true. She just had a vision.

Teresa: Yeah, yeah. She was an artist. My mom and dad, they definitely did the, uh— the multicolored ones. We were some of the first people in our neighborhood to do the icicle style lights.

Travis: Oooh!

Teresa: My dad was really into that. Um, my mom also has a very soft spot for the large bulbs.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Instead of all of, like, the mini ones, right? Uh, I think we always did colored Christmas lights on our tree. My mom did candles in the window for a while.

Travis: Like, actual candles?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: The electric candles in windows.

Travis: Oh yeah, my mom loved those. It's a thing that I feel like now with, like, battery operated things, it's gone the way of the past. But we had those, like, yellowy gold cords that plugged in everywhere and you had to, like, hand switch each of them off at night.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I remember— man, growing up with all of that stuff. Um, you know, before remote controls for everything. That it was, like, turning off the Christmas lights at night was, like, a full blown 15 to 20 minute thing.

Teresa: Oh yeah, totally.

Travis: Of just going around to, like, the mantle, and then the one— the lights, and going— unplug— crawling under, unplugging the tree. All that stuff.

Teresa: We had a big, beautiful blue spruce out in our front yard—

Travis: A blue spruce!

Teresa: —behind our mailbox that my parents for a long time decorated like a Christmas tree, putting lights on the tree, which was amazing. Um, my dad also was one of the first people that I knew of to get the netting lights.

Travis: I love the netting.

Teresa: That go over your bushes and whatever.

Travis: Looks nice, takes about five seconds.

Teresa: Yes, yes. Um, but when did your family start the decorating, and when did the decorations conclude?

Travis: Well, I think we've talked about previously that Thanksgiving, like, cooking holidays were big for my mom. And so, like, Thanksgiving was a thing in our house, so we did not decorate for Christmas before Thanksgiving.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So I want to say it was, like, the day after, the weekend after was when they went up. And it was always like, you know, we'd go to the attic, pull down the numbered boxes of Christmas, pull those out and then, like, going through the house. And there were— by the time, you know, I can remember it at, like, 14 or 15— I could remember earlier. But by the point in time I was a teenager it was, like, this goes in this room, this goes on top of this. This goes here. It was very prescribed. Um, like, oh, this box is for, you know, the dining room, and this goes here.

Teresa: Oh, okay. My... my parents I think really kind of scoped out, like, when is the last nice weekend before it starts getting cold, 'cause they did not like decorating outside, especially in the cold.

Travis: Well, we had a very small front yard. So, like, we didn't do any inflatables or anything like that.

Teresa: Oh, no, no. We didn't do those.

Travis: We did the icicle lights around the front, and then there were, like, a wreath on the door. And I think maybe, like, a wall— like a hanging next to the door. But, like, that was— for outdoor stuff that was it. But we had, like, uh, in the front windows we had the decorations inside there that you could see from the outside.

Teresa: Ohh. See, my dad loved to do the lights on the bushes. He did the roof lines in the lights, and then icicle lights along, like, the porch in the front. And then the big tree. And sometimes even little trees got kind of, like, a swirl of lights in them.

Travis: Seems like a lot of work.

Teresa: So a lot of outdoor decorating. And I think that's why they kind of, like, scoped out the nicest weekend in, like, November, I think. But they didn't turn them on until after Thanksgiving.

Travis: Oh, I see.

Teresa: But the actual putting up of decorations was more about convenience than about timing.

Travis: So tell me about the history of lights, because I do know— I reacted to the candles.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: People for a long time did put live candles onto trees and stuff.

Teresa: Indeed, and we'll talk about that. So there's a bit of a debate about where the tradition of Christmas lights actually comes from some people say that it's another holdover from the pagan tradition of the solstice. I mean, which is about light, which would make sense. But it might be part of that kind of, like, great Christian rebrand we've talked about with mistletoe and holly and Christmas trees.

Travis: Yule log, and...

Teresa: But it's pretty circumstantial. I mean, because a lot of pagan practices did, like, illuminate candles for the solstice.

Travis: Yeah, but you can't own lighting candles.

Teresa: Yeah. It seemed to be less decorative and more, like, symbolic of lighting things in the dark, right?

Travis: I mean, yeah. 'Cause if we're gonna talk about lighting candles, I mean, menorah's in there.

Teresa: Yeah, certainly.

Travis: There's a lot of other things. I mean, lots of stuff about lighting candles as a festival thing.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. And so whether or not it's actually related to the religious aspects is still kind of up in the air. But we do know that holiday lights to decorate the Christmas tree began in the 17th century in Germany.

Travis: Well, I was going to guess.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: Right? Well, no. I mean, that's what I would have guessed. That's what I mean.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Not like, "How dare you? I was going to guess."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Just because so much of our Christmas tree now, modern day stuff, comes from Germany.

Teresa: Germany at that time period. And, I mean, obviously they didn't have strands of lights, right? Electric lights. They would attach small candles to the actual tree branches using wax or pins, and it was kind of like a status symbol, right? Because candles were not cheap. Um, and if you could—

Travis: Neither were house fires.

Teresa: Yeah. If you could light up your whole tree, right? Then that was a show of wealth, and you would also be able to see, then, all the pretty ornaments that were also a display of wealth, how many of those you had and what they were made of.

Um, I mean, but exactly like you said, this kind of, like, how— the danger tree. Like, how long can we keep this lit before it becomes a problem, right?

Travis: 'Cause you know that they weren't on top of, like, having the reservoirs that the tree went into. I mean, even now there are still fires every Christmas with electric lights and, you know, fire extinguishers and stuff. I can't even imagine.

Teresa: Which is more— actually, if you want to go and, like, look it up on *Mythbusters*, which is more actually to do with the state of your lights than it is the dryness of your tree.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: But anyway. Um, so usually it would be kind of like an after-dinner activity, to light the candles, look at it, and then blow 'em out.

Travis: Mm-hmm. There wasn't a lot of other stuff to do.

Teresa: No.

Travis: They didn't have cable yet.

Teresa: No, they didn't have cable. Around 1890, candle tree holders were introduced. So, they were usually kind of like... like a small metal cup with, like, a clip on the bottom, right? To try and keep the distance between the branch and the fire smaller. But, I mean, again... it still wasn't the best idea.

Um, so between 1902 and 1914 you started to get more, like, small lanterns, right? So encased fire a little bit. And then glass balls, um, again to kind of, like, encase the flames.

Travis: Which are now— if you ever see— they make Christmas ornaments designed to look like those balls with, like, the circle that's kind of indented in the middle.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Travis: Where it's just like, yeah, this is like a representation of that, where you used to put the candles inside them. Now we just make ornaments that look like a representation of a candle inside a ball.

Teresa: Right. The real game changer happened in 1882 at the hands of a man named Edward H. Johnson.

Travis: Oh, see, I would've guessed, like, Edison.

Teresa: Oh, he's— I mean, he was a VP.

Travis: Or Tesla, really. 'Cause most— well, not— yeah, Nikola Tesla. 'Cause most strings of lights now are alternating current.

Teresa: He was the Vice President of the Edison Electric Light Company.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: And he, Edward Johnson, is regarded as the father of electric Christmas lights.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, he had this idea to use the electric light in order to light his Christmas tree. And he had the, um— the inventors at the company make a small, like, maybe 80-light string of incandescent, hand-wired, red, white, and blue bulbs.

Travis: For America.

Teresa: Well. [laughs quietly] I mean, those were the colors. White was obviously easy, right? And then you would have the paint from the red and the blue. I don't think it had much to do with America as it did to—

Travis: [simultaneously] For America.

Teresa: —had to do with...

Travis: It was easy.

Teresa: Easy. [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and it didn't... it really wasn't, like, the runaway success I think that maybe he was hoping for.

Travis: I have to imagine at that point, if you're talking about hand wiring, cost prohibitive.

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: And also, did everybody have plugs? Was everybody able to do this at home? This was— this seems like— I mean, clearly we all use them now. But it seems way ahead of its time as far as the demand went.

Teresa: Absolutely. Um, and each was about, I mean, the size of a walnut, so they were still the large size.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So on December 22nd, 1882, Edward H. Johnson unveiled his personal Christmas tree at his home on 5th Avenue in New York City as the first ever Christmas tree with electric light.

Travis: And everybody shunned him as the devil.

Teresa: Yeah. Nobody— nobody really cared.

Travis: Okay. That's— man. We've all been there, right?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Where you, like, have people over and you're like, "Look at my tree!"

And they're like, "Yeah, that's a tree."

Teresa: Um, all of the New York papers, who probably were a little annoyed at, like, the Edison kind of, like, antics, right?

Travis: Well, yeah. Edison's whole deal.

Teresa: He did a lot of publicity stunts for incandescent light.

Travis: He was kind of a butthead.

Teresa: Kind of. Um, and so they kind of, like, rolled their eyes and dismissed it as, like, a publicity stunt. But... a newspaper in Detroit got wind of it, and by 1895, the President of the United States at the time, Grover Cleveland, sponsored the first electrically lit Christmas tree in the White House. So, you know, that was three years later. Johnson's tree had 80 bulbs. The one at the White House had over 100 multicolored lights, so not just the red, the white, and the blue. But it was this first beautiful—

Travis: But then it would've been even better for America! It would've made more sense in the White House!

Teresa: He had multicolors.

Travis: Okay. Tacky. [snorts]

Teresa: [muffled laughter] That's what Leslie would say.

Travis: That's what Leslie would say.

Teresa: By 1900, businesses across the country began stringing up Christmas lights behind their windows, because again these were pretty cost prohibitive, and it was more of, like, a publicity thing. It wasn't, like, to be put in your homes. Um, but then...

Travis: [gasps]

Teresa: People started taking these lights to the outside.

Travis: [gasps] Get outta town. Well, when we come back I can't wait to hear more about this. But first, we should do a thank you note for our sponsor.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Alright, everybody. I want to tell you— this is a proud parent moment. Dot had her first dentist appointment, and she's doing great. Looking great, and can I tell you, one of the things she's most excited about now, being a big girl, is getting a Quip toothbrush just like Mommy and Daddy use, and just like Bebe uses. And it's like, she's been using those little kid toothbrushes, and she has been— like, every time we go into the bathroom she'll, like, point to Bebe's toothbrush and be like, "That's a big kid toothbrush."

Teresa: She wants to turn on Bebe's toothbrush and we keep it out of Dottie's mouth, of course. But I think that we're gonna give her one. Wrap it like a Christmas present.

Travis: For Christmas. That's all she's getting. No.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: She'll get other stuff too, but she'll be very excited to get a big kid toothbrush. Um, and the thing about it, Bebe loves it too. We use— we're a Quip family, frankly.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Because we love Quip teethbrushes. Is that right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And we— we really like the toothpaste. I'm a big fan. The kids love the watermelon. I like the mint. Um, and so, like, it is a great bundle to buy as gifts.

Travis: And if you're not using, like, a timed toothbrush, I guarantee you you're not doing it long enough. Quip has 30 second vibrations timed out so you get four of them, so it's like, hey. Two minutes, and here's a gentle reminder of when to move, like, this section of your teeth, this section of your teeth, this section, this section. And I guarantee without that I'm not doing it right.

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[music plays]

Dan: Hey! I'm Dan McCoy.

Stuart: I'm Stuart Wellington.

Elliott: And I'm Elliott Kalan.

Dan: Listen. You like podcasts, right? Sure you do, don't try and lie to me. You're listening to one right now. So why not try a different one called our one, *The Flop House*?

Stuart: Uh-huh. And on *The Flop House*, we watch a movie and talk about it, and then sometimes we also do other stuff.

Elliott: It's all meant to be funny and fun, and we think you'll have a good time. And just to be clear, the name of the podcast is not Our One: *The Flop House*. It's just called *The Flop House*.

Dan: [laughs]

Elliott: I do a lot of correcting Dan.

Dan: *The Flop House*: a lot of correcting Dan.

[music and ad end]

[music plays]

John: Hey, it's John Moe, inviting you to listen to *Depresh Mode* with John Moe, where I talk about mental health and the lives we live with all kinds of people. Famous writers...

David Sedaris, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

David: Thanks so much for having me.

John: Movie stars...

Jamie Lee Curtis, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Jamie: I am happy to be here.

John: Musicians...

I am in St. Paul, Minnesota. I'm talking to Aimee Mann.

Aimee: Great to talk to you.

John: And song exploders.

Hrishikesh Kirway, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Hrishikesh: Thanks so much for having me.

John: Everyone's opening up on *Depresh Mode*, on Maximum Fun.

[music and ad end]

Travis: Okay. So, now we're lighting the outside, fighting off the dark.

Teresa: That's right. We've taken Christmas trees from the outside. We've put 'em inside. We've taken the lights from the inside, put 'em on the outside.

Travis: That's a great point, baby.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's all— it's skewed view.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, so there are reports, 1904, San Diego, 1909 in Wisconsin, 1912, New York City. These were the first, like, recorded instances of outside Christmas lights. However...

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: This is— this is so strange, because everyone wants to get their name in lights, right? The town of—

Travis: Hmm, good pun.

Teresa: [laughs] The town of McAdenville, North Carolina, claims that they were the first to bring Christmas lights outside in 1956.

Travis: Well...

Teresa: I mean, obviously they weren't. They have credit, though, from the Library of Congress, which says that the town, quote, "invented the tradition of decorating evergreen trees with Christmas lights."

Travis: What?

Teresa: "When the McAdenville Men's Club conceived the idea of decorating a few trees around the community center."

Travis: But they didn't! They didn't!

Teresa: They didn't. But they didn't. But, like I said, everybody's gotta have their claim to fame, right? Um, so, you know. There's archival footage. There's, like, different... even so far as, like, newspaper articles predating this. But what are you gonna do? It's... [sighs]

Travis: Lies.

Teresa: Lies. [laughs] Um, again, regardless of your enthusiasm for Christmas decorations, these electric lights were still very expensive for the average person, and so they didn't replace candles as the majority of the light sources for Christmas trees until 1930, and then they didn't even become standard practice until the 1950's. Which is why a lot of community celebrations like Christmas tree lightings and drive-thru light displays are still a big part of the holiday tradition.

Travis: Because it was... uh, easier— or, I guess if you're gonna spend money, the community, like, the city would buy the lights.

Teresa: Yeah, to kind of, like, group source it.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right? Instead of spending the money for your own personal... enjoyment. [laughs quietly]

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Um, so...

Travis: But then you don't get the thing where you plug it in and everybody's like, "Ohh!"

Teresa: "Ahh!" And then you blow all the fuses in the house like that Griswold... one.

Travis: Like that Griswold one.

Teresa: [laughs] What's the—

Travis: *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation?*

Teresa: [laughs] Yes. [laughs]

Travis: Someone sounds like a real Grinch over here!

Teresa: It's not one of my favorites. Lots of awkward kind of comedy.

Travis: Yeah, Teresa can't do awkward.

Teresa: Awkward comedy is not my thing.

Travis: When people are awkward in a thing she's like, "No, no, no."

Teresa: Um, so the first—

Travis: She just likes good friends having good times together.

Teresa: I sure do. Throw some music in there and I'm golden.

Travis: Is there a Muppet? It's probably fine.

Teresa: [laughs] Or is it cartoons.

Travis: Not even then! There are some cartoons where you're like, "Oh, I can't."

Teresa: Oh, Mr. Magoo I can't do.

Travis: You can't do Mr. Magoo?!

Teresa: [loudly] You know this about me!

Travis: I didn't know you were so anti-Magoo!

Teresa: I just don't like... how he's always ruining things.

Travis: It's a cartoon!

Teresa: I know...

Travis: He's ruining nothing.

Teresa: [wheeze-laughs]

Travis: He's having fun. Everybody's having fun, especially the Christmas Carol? He's barely Magooing in there.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: His Magoo levels are so low in the Christmas one! He's bare— he's Magoo in the beginning, but then he's basically Ebenezer Scrooge the whole time. I think he Magoos once or twice throughout the whole thing.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: I'm just saying, babe.

Teresa: I need you to take three deep breaths.

Travis: [forcefully] I think *you* need to take three deep breaths.

Teresa: [through laughter] Stop yelling at me about Magoo.

Travis: I'm not yelling at you! You're just wrong about Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol!

Teresa: Anyway, the first commercially produced lights were manufactured in strings of multiples of eight but General Electric out of Harrison, New Jersey. So each socket took a miniature two-candela carbon filament lamp. Which, again, is a fire hazard.

Travis: Oh yeah.

Teresa: [laughs quietly] But not an open flame.

Travis: Better.

Teresa: Better?

Travis: And man, isn't that— that's just humanity. Isn't it? Just failing forward each time. Hey, this is still dangerous, but not as dangerous as it was. Come on down! Buy as many as you can carry.

Teresa: So, after that, Christmas lights moved away from the trees and onto the buildings and everywhere else you could put 'em. We've got mantles, and doorways, and rafters, and roofs, and railings, and—

Travis: Slow-moving dogs.

Teresa: [laughs] Sure. If you could string it up, right? Um, but here is one of the coolest places that Christmas lights ever showed up.

Travis: Up your butt. [laughs]

Teresa: No, you're gonna be— you're gonna be sheepish, because the Greenville Christmas Boycott.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: In 1963 there was a boycott of Christmas lights organized in Greenville, North Carolina to protest segregation that kept Black people from being employed by downtown businesses.

Travis: Okay, see, yeah. That's— okay.

Teresa: I told you, yeah.

Travis: And I said "Up your butt," and I feel terrible.

Teresa: You did. [laughs]

Travis: I feel terrible now.

Teresa: So the Black community at the time made up more than 33% of the population of Greenville, so they decided to protest this cultural and fiscal segregation by partaking in the Black Christmas Boycott, or the Christmas Sacrifice, as it came to be called.

Um, not only did they boycott traditionally racist businesses who refused to hire them, but they also refused to light anything decorative at any of their homes.

Travis: Ooh.

Teresa: According to the records, only six houses in the Black community broke the boycott that Christmas, with the rest of them holding strong. The nonviolent protest was inspired by Martin Luther King's work, and the blackout of Christmas lights was a show of solidarity and a form of silent civil disobedience. So in the next year it was reported that several more businesses in the area began to hire Black workers for the holidays.

Travis: Awesome. And I'm sorry I said "Up your butt." I apologize retroactively. Let's talk a little bit about etiquette.

Teresa: Okay. So, today obviously you can't throw a rock without hitting a sign for a light display.

Travis: Don't throw rocks.

Teresa: At the zoo.

Travis: Why are people throwing rocks at the zoo?! What?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Don't throw rocks at the zoo!

Teresa: No, the signs.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Or your park, or your local mall. I mean, and if you have one— if you don't have one that you can go to, you can drive around neighborhoods that often put out their lights in droves.

Travis: That was a thing we did growing up. We'd go to the rich part of Huntington, Stanford Park I think it was called.

Teresa: Ooh.

Travis: And everybody— you would also— man. It was, like, 99% of the houses in this neighborhood were decorated, like, to the nines. And then, like, the one or two houses that didn't, we'd be like, "[clicks tongue] Oh, shame. Shame."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Hey. We're poor and we'd like some free Christmas entertainment, please. What are you doing? Are you on vacation, rich person?" That's what we always assumed.

Teresa: Oh, that they were on vacation, that they weren't there.

Travis: That they went somewhere warm.

Teresa: Not that they maybe weren't Christian?

Travis: No, we grew up in Huntington, West Virginia, and we were, uh, ignorant.

Teresa: I see.

Travis: And poor.

Teresa: Um, so, if you would like to create one of those displays, there are a couple things that you should probably think about before you go killing power for the neighborhood. Is that what happened in the... vacation movie?

Travis: I'm not gonna...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm not gonna do this with you.

Teresa: [laughs] So you should probably, before a giant display goes up, you need to talk to your neighbors, right? See if there's anything you need to know beforehand, like do your neighbors have small children that need to go to bed super early?

Travis: So, I think there's two sides of it, right? 'Cause what you're talking about is, like, the actual in-person talking to people.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: It might also be that there are neighborhood, like, HOA or whatever, that there are actual restrictions as far as, like, sound ordinances, times that they can be on or off, and that kind of thing.

Teresa: Exactly. Or like strobe light effects, or inflatables, how many you can have. I mean, there is a noise associated with the inflatables, that kind of stuff. Um, so it's always a great idea to put your lights on a timer, um, because, I mean, literally you don't have to do anything but set up the timer. Then you don't have to worry about if you go to bed early, are your lights gonna stay on all night long? You know, you can try and coordinate with what time does the neighborhood turn on? Those kinds of things. And bonus, saves you electricity, right? If your lights aren't running all night long.

Travis: I mean, the best way to save electricity is to just not do it. But yes, what you're saying is correct.

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, be mindful of the placement of your decorations. Does your large inflatable block someone's driveway, for instance? Or maybe your letter carrier's route.

Travis: Also, make sure you tie down— as long as we're talking about inflatables— tie down inflatables, 'cause a stiff breeze gonna blow that inflatable into somebody else's yard, or who knows.

Teresa: Um, there's also these really great, like, projectable lights, right? That you can anchor in your yard and project on to your house, but make sure that you project it in a way so that it's not, like, shining into your neighbor's bedroom, right? Um, and also, like you mentioned, people love to drive around and look at

the displays. So, you know, keep it clean. A little bit of maybe some tongue-in-cheek is appropriate, but—

Travis: But no R-rated Christmas decorations.

Teresa: No R-rated Christmas decorations.

Travis: Are people doing those?

Teresa: Uh, I mean, foul language sometimes pops up.

Travis: How could they?

Teresa: Or maybe a sexual theme.

Travis: What?

Teresa: Might be present.

Travis: Don't they know that Santa's always watching? What's wrong with them?

Teresa: Well, Mrs. Claus can be a hot babe, right?

Travis: I mean, I guess so? But respect still exists. She's still Mrs. Claus!

Teresa: That's what I'm saying, right?

Travis: I'm just saying that there may be some things that I find sexy more than just hot babes. Maybe it's her intelligence.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Her big heart. Her— she's good at cooking. All of these things can be appreciated in someone, Teresa. Not just their physical form.

Teresa: Indeed. Which is why I like having, um... just lights. And presents. We like to put out those big stacks of—

Travis: I like the big stacks. You know what I like?

Teresa: —of— the big stacks of pretty presents.

Travis: I like making the reindeers out of lights where you stack [unintelligible] oh, it's a reindeer. But it's made out of lights. Love that.

Teresa: [laughs] Anyway, if you find that any of your neighbor's displays are committing some of these faux pas, please, please, please talk to them specifically about how you can't get out of your driveway, or the snowflakes are shining in your eyes. You know, be safe about it and face your problems head-on. It's not as fun to stew in it, right?

Travis: Yeah. Also, don't do notes. Notes are so passive aggressive. Like, try to talk to them. And, like, don't unplug things. Like, "[unintelligible angry noises] I'll show them." Like, don't be passive aggressive. Try to address it directly. And if they're not receptive, then you might have to escalate it, whatever that means in your neighborhood. But always try to be like, "Hey, uh, is there any way you could— you know, we got a kid that goes to sleep at, like, 8 PM, and that light shines directly in their bedroom. Could you redirect the light, or maybe make sure it's off by, like, 9 PM or something?" Um, and try to find— 'cause most of the time— I'll tell you as someone who decorates my house, I do it for me, for sure. But I want the neighborhood to appreciate it too. And I'm sure that if somebody finds out it is an inconvenience or an imposition in some way, that goes against what they're trying to do.

Teresa: Exactly. If you are of the— if you are driving around, right? Do make sure that you abide by the speed limit, right? And stay off of people's property. That would be pretty easy to do in a car, right? But also you don't want to sit and loiter in front of someone's house. It's nice to slow down, maybe stop for a minute or two to admire. But, you know, like, this is people's homes that we're talking about. Also, keep your visits to fairly early in the evening. It does get dark pretty soon here in this hemisphere, so 6 PM, 7 PM, I would say, is about the right time. Don't go driving in front of somebody's house at midnight. That doesn't seem great. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah, just slowly rolling by. "[creepy voice] I like your house."

Teresa: And if you are going to a commercial display, obviously follow all signage and rules. And, you know, just try and have patience if it's crowded, things like that. Um, so I think that having your outdoor decorations is actually a

great way to get to know the people in the neighborhood, right? Some people even have kind of, like, open houses or open yards, I guess. Where they—

Travis: Open streets.

Teresa: Open streets. [laughs] Where they invite people to come and see their decorations. Um, so maybe that will be you, and you'll be known as the Christmas house in the neighborhood. That wasn't us. That was a couple of doors down.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: There was the guy who always put the reindeer up on the roof, and my dad was not interested in that.

Travis: That seems like a lot of work.

Teresa: I mean, he liked it.

Travis: And also, if you put it there, where are the real reindeer gonna land, you know? You've gotta leave room.

Teresa: Mmm, gotta think about that.

Travis: Speaking of holidays, Candlenights is virtual again this year. It's gonna be December 17th at 9 PM Eastern Time. Video on demand available through January 2nd. Tickets are on sale now, bit.ly/candlenights2022. If you're listening to this on Friday, Griffin and I are going to be in person at Pax Unplugged in Philadelphia. That's December 2nd. Today, if you're listening to it. You can find all the info at bit.ly/mcelroytours. Also want to let you know, we've got some new merch up on the merch store. There's a *Besties* ornament if you're a fan of Griffin and Justin and Russ and Chris's video game podcast *Besties*, which I am. That ornament is designed by Evan Palmer. Um, there's a Candlenights mug back in stock. And 10% of all merch proceeds this month go to Harmony House, in our hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. Check all that out at mcelroymerch.com. Um, yeah, and thanks. Have a safe holiday season. We'll be back. This isn't, like, the last episode for the year. But, you know, it's a holiday season. Be safe.

Teresa: We always like to thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing out theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group,

Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

Also, thank you to Alex, our writer and researcher. Thank you to Rachel, our editor. If you have a topic suggestion, you can email us, shmannerscast@gmail.com, and if you have an idiom, we are amassing a new idiom show, so get your idioms in. And say hi to Alex in those emails, 'cause she reads every one.

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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