

Shmanners 360: Free Fridges

Published June 2, 2023

[Listen here on themcelroy.family](https://themcelroy.family)

[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?

Teresa: I'm already. How are you doing?

Travis: Doing pretty good!

Teresa: Yeah? Well, that's it. Let's go.

Travis: Yep. Woke up from a nap. Had my Coke Zero, because now my transition into my father is complete.

Teresa: [wheezy laughter]

Travis: Sorry, excuse me?

Teresa: Just thinking about the transition into your father, is all.

Travis: Yeah. Yeah, I know, man.

Teresa: He's a nice guy, but—

Travis: I'm thinking about getting into original Battlestar Galactica now, and prop collection.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay! I'll tell my father you said that.

Teresa: [laughs] Your father knows how I feel about his toys.

Travis: Yeah. We know how Carol feels about his toys.

Teresa: [laughs] Anyway, let's stop dragging on Clint.

Travis: Yeah, we do that enough on all my other shows! No, I love my dad. I love my dad so much. It's just he's a huge dork, and—

Teresa: I also love your dad. But I did not marry him. I married you.

Travis: Okay. So if I become my dad you'll divorce me? Is that—we'll talk off mic.

Teresa: You won't. You won't.

Travis: No, I'm way cooler. Look at me.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Oh, I got purple hair. Clint McElroy'd never. Um, we're talking this week about free fridges.

Teresa: We are!

Travis: And I want to talk about something that has almost nothing to do with that whatsoever.

Teresa: [laughs] Go ahead.

Travis: When I was growing up there was a football player named, uh, William "Refrigerator" Perry.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: And this might surprise you. Wasn't a big sports kid growing up. So the reason I'm very familiar with William "Refrigerator" Perry is there was a GI Joe made based on William "Refrigerator" Perry in which, uh, he's a big guy who's—the fri—"Refrigerator" Perry. Um, and his, like, weapon, one of his accessories was basically, like, a big, long mace, but instead of, like, a hammer on the end like Thor's hammer, it was like a football on the end. And as a kid I was like "Ah, this rules."

But now as adult I'm like, "That's an ineffective weapon."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like, don't get me wrong. I don't want to get hit by a football. But, like, if I'm in a fight and I have, you know, a baseball bat and they have a football, and they hit me with a football and I hit 'em with a baseball bat...

Teresa: Okay, yeah, but—

Travis: I also think he was like a—

Teresa: —it's the arm. Right? The arm that's attached to that football is probably very, like, muscular. So he could hit you with anything.

Travis: I guess. But I also think he was, like, a defensive lineman? I don't think he, like, threw the ball. I don't think he was a quarterback. So, like—

Teresa: I'm not saying that he would throw it. He'd just hit you with it.

Travis: I guess.

Teresa: Like, just, bam.

Travis: I guess. Anyways, we need to nickname more professional sports players after appliances. Um, because I would not want to, like, go up against a baseball player with the nickname Dishwasher. How'd he get that nickname? I don't know, but it's terrifying!

Teresa: [through laughter] I don't know!

Travis: Watch out!

Teresa: What about Disposal?

Travis: Awww, are you kidding me? That's terrifying.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: That's—oh, Hair Dryer.

Teresa: [laughs] Not as terrifying.

Travis: No, I guess that's not.

Teresa: Not really. Uh... Curling Iron?

Travis: Can I tell you? That was the next one I thought of as well.

Teresa: Lawn—Lawnmower. [laughs quietly]

Travis: Lawnmower's scary. That I would see as, like, if you're a baseball player and you're working, like, the outfield, and you're, like, scoopin' up grounders, right? And like, "Oh, he's Lawnmower, 'cause he's constantly, like, diving for it and scraping up big areas of the turf. He's the Lawnmower Man."

Teresa: Or is that an Excavator? That's not an appliance, though.

Travis: Well, he's not going into the ground.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: If the baseball player is diving to catch a grounder hard enough that he's going into the ground, we need to come up with some new rules and regulations. That is not safe.

Teresa: [laughs] Anyway, hey. Let's talk about what we're actually talking about today.

Travis: Free `frigerators.

Teresa: Yes. Yes. We are. Um, so this topic actually got a lot more popular during the global pandemic, right?

Travis: The what?

[pause]

Teresa: Don't do that. But it remains a very steadfast and wonderful grassroots form of mutual aid that anyone can participate in, as long as there's one near you. Um, so a free fridge is exactly what it sounds like. It's a standalone refrigerator. Sometimes they have adjoining microwaves or dry storage or water dispensers, right? It's located in a publicly accessible space, although we'll continue on that line a little later. Um, and has—everything in it is available to anyone who needs it. Um, and colloquially they are sometimes referred to as free... dges.

Travis: Freedges.

Teresa: Freedges.

Travis: Wha—hey. Why did that—

Teresa: [laughs] It was hard!

Travis: Why did that trip you up so bad?

Teresa: [simultaneously] It's a weird-lookin' word.

Travis: It looks word. But if you think about fridge, but now instead of the I sound you put a double E sound in there, it's freedges. But for you it seemed painful.

Teresa: It did. It was hard.

Travis: It was painful to say it.

Teresa: Anyway, they're open 24/7.

Travis: I would like you to try again.

Teresa: No. [through laughter] I don't want to.

Travis: Come on—I want... let's grow together.

Teresa: Later. Later. Later. I'll try again later.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Here's a frequently asked question. Is it a food pantry?

Travis: Is it?

Teresa: Kind of? Kind of. So, traditional food pantries operate usually on corporate donations from retailers or local businesses or restaurants, and obviously please donate to your local food pantry. But they usually only accept monetary donations from everyday citizens, and that's for a good cause. They usually can get better deals from grocery stores as a food pantry than you can get, right? And so if dollar-for-dollar they can get more food than you can, they should do that, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Also the local food banks are often nonprofit organizations, so they have very specific guidelines as well as usually a board that they have to adhere to, right?

Um, free fridges on the other hand might be a 501(c)(3), but they could also just be someone who has a plot of land with electricity for a fridge to run.

Travis: Ooh.

Teresa: Lots of free fridges have the ability to take monetary donations as well, but the difference between a free fridge and a food bank is that you can donate anything to it at any time. If you have extra cash for some extra veggies, you can leave them at the fridge. You can leave extra baked goods, if you have a bag of donuts that's gonna go bad, you can leave that there.

Travis: A Joey bag o' donuts.

Teresa: Joey bag o' donuts, that's right.

Travis: Now, let me—let me ask you a question.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: This is very important.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Did you ever watch any extreme couponing shows?

Teresa: You know, I did dabble in that just a little bit when it first came on TLC. But, like, they're basically all the same show.

Travis: Well, yeah.

Teresa: It's the same show over and over again with different people in it?

Travis: Like ghost-hunting shows. They are—yes, exactly the same show. But I always found it funny about the extreme couponing shows where it's just like, they're trying to plan it like, "Look at this wacky person trying to do all those coupons!"

And then it's like, "And they did it, and they're donating all that food and stuff to the local food pantry. Anyways, back to how wacky they are! What a silly—"

Teresa: Yeah, I know, right?

Travis: And it's, well, hold—now, hold on. You're just kind of glossing over the fact that they did all this work so that they could donate a bunch of food and goods and stuff to people in need. They're like, "Yeah, but aren't they silly geeses?"

It's like, well, now, hold on. Hold on, hold on, hold on. Go back, go back, go back.

Teresa: I mean, and they always did the thing where, like, they're scanning the coupons, and will the grocery store let them scan all the coupons? And...

Travis: Yeah. They really did a lot to inject drama into there. And I used to think, "You know that there's real bad stuff happen—like, you could do—you don't need to create drama around coupons to make interesting television, right?"

Teresa: Anyway... unlike traditional food pantries, these grassroots projects encourage everyone in the community to put food in and take food out without limit, right? So this is helpful to remove stigma around anyone who is food insecure. And also, these things are open 24/7, right? They don't have to be staffed. Um, and so there's no waiting in line, and no worrying that as soon as you get there, you know, you'll have to get there right off work or whatever, right? You can go when you have the time.

I mean, obviously it's just a single fridge usually, and there's not a ton of space for food, so I'm not saying that people don't worry that they won't be able to get food from the free fridge. But it's kind of a more, like, community response idea, right?

Travis: Yeah. It's interesting because it's definitely not something that's like, "And we put a free fridge in here, so everything's taken care of now." Right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: It's like, if there was a free fridge on, like, every corner, right? And people were constantly filling them... yeah, hey, what a wonderful world that would be. But it's more of like... you know, this isn't everything, but it's something. And maybe it helps somebody who wouldn't have been helped otherwise, because they wouldn't have been able to access whatever thing they needed, right?

It's not a, like, "Oh, cool! Well, that's done." Right? Kind of thing.

Teresa: Right. Um, so a little bit of background. The first community fridges started to show up in Germany actually around 2015. Um, they were created by a group called Food Sharing, which is also an online platform that saves and distributes surplus food in Germany and Austria. Um, and these community fridges draw inspiration from other programs throughout the 20th century, especially the 1960's Black Panther free breakfast program. And by 2015, inspired by Food Sharing's work, Spain also had community fridges. And that was really just the beginning. So very early on, these fridges started showing up in the UK, um, including in London and Oxford. Um, by 2017 Hubbub UK offered free support service to these kind of new projects.

So, now there are free fridges all over the world. New Zealand, Canada, India, Israel, The Netherlands.

Travis: I know those places.

Teresa: Toronto alone has seven free fridges. But things weren't really, like, in the United States at the moment. And then COVID hit.

Travis: Now, I would love to talk more about that. But first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

[theme music plays]

Travis: Let's thank Zola. Not just for sponsoring the show, but for making the entire wedding process from "I do" to "Man, I'm glad that's done... "

that's not what it says, but I think that's a better way. "Pop the question" to, like, "We're doing the—" whatever. "I do" to—

Teresa: That's kind of how I felt.

Travis: "I do" to "I'm done," you know what I mean?

Teresa: [simultaneously] Like, "Whew! We did it."

Travis: "We did it." And they make that whole process easier. Start to finish, and even beyond finished, because they have their free planning tools. It's gonna help you every step of the way. And they, you know, they have connections to venues and vendors and save-the-dates and invites, free wedding websites and amazing registries, all designed by wedding experts for couples like you. Uh, you know, couples like us, we planned a wedding. And you know what? Here's the wild thing. If you've never planned a wedding before and you're getting married, so your first wedding, right? You finish the wedding and you're like, "Okay. If I could do that again... "

Teresa: Yeah. [laughs]

Travis: "I know so much more now."

Like, I think that—and we're, like, almost a decade past our wedding, and I keep thinking like, "Man. I love being married to you, but we could've done—there are so many things I would've done different."

Teresa: It's true.

Travis: And so now imagine if you had wedding experts at your disposal who had already, like, been through this process countless times, right? Because the Zola community is your place to share, celebrate, and vent with other engaged couples who know exactly what you're going through. If you need expert help, there's Team Z. It's amazing. So from just engaged to the only thing left to do is say "I do," Zola is here for all the days along the way. Just go to Zola.com/shmanners. That's Z-O-L-A.com/shmanners.

[music plays]

Ellen: You probably already have a favorite animal. Maybe it's a powerful apex predator, like the tiger. Or a cute and cuddly panda. And those are great! But have you considered something a little more unconventional?

Christian: Could I perhaps interest you in the Greenland Shark? Which can live for nearly 400 years? Or maybe the jewel wasp, who performs brain surgery on cockroaches to control their minds?

Ellen: On *Just the Zoo of Us*, we review animals by giving them ratings out of 10, in the categories of effectiveness, ingenuity and aesthetics. Listen with friends and family of all ages to find your new favorite animal with *Just the Zoo of Us*, on Maximumfun.org or wherever you get podcasts.

[music and ad end]

[music plays]

Jordan: I'm Jordan Crucchiola, the host of *Feeling Seen*. Where we talk about the movie characters that make us feel seen.

Marissa: And I'm the show's producer, Marissa. Jordan, you've interviewed so many directors, actors, writers, film critics, and I like to play this little game where I take a sip of coffee every time someone says, "That's such a great question."

Guest 1: That's such a fabulous question.

Marissa: Or they tell you how smart you are.

Guest 2: I think you are rather brilliant.

Marissa: And of course, the big one is, when they—

Jordan: When they cry unexpectedly.

Marissa: ... Cry unexpectedly, yes, yeah.

Guest 3: Jordan, I don't wanna cry on your podcast.

Guest 4: I was not expecting to cry!

Jordan: [laughs]

Guest 5: I mean, it makes me kind of wanna cry.

Jordan: Feeling Seen comes out every Thursday on Maximumfun.org. Listen already! What are you waiting for?

Marissa: Jordan, that's such a great question.

Jordan: [laughs]

[music and ad end]

Travis: So, how did it change in America?

Teresa: Well, so, because so many people were out of work and afraid to go to work and there was really no government network at the time to really help the most vulnerable, communities sprang into action to protect each other. Um, like a lot of big things, it started in New York City in the US, and these named Friendly Fridges were introduced in February, 2020 by a group called In Our Hearts. And at the time of this recording, that group is responsible for setting up at least 14 of the 70 free fridges in New York City. Philly was next, when Dr. Michelle Nelson launched a Mama-Tee community fridge in North Philly. Now 18 throughout the city there.

Uh, soon after we got LA, Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and countless other cities, right? Um, as—

Travis: I think we have two here?

Teresa: I believe so, yes. Um, as of September—

Travis: I know we have at least one, 'cause we've put stuff in it. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: Yes we have. LA has 14, Atlanta has 5, Chicago has 26. Um, and so this was really a really great jumping off point to help other countries around the world start their community pantries and fridges, and it became customary, at least in the United States, that local artists would illustrate them to make them more cheery.

Travis: Love that.

Teresa: And welcoming. And paint, you know, flowers and fresh produce and, you know...

Travis: Maybe a happy little tree.

Teresa: Happy little tree!

Travis: Maybe a cloud, a mountain. You know, cool stuff.

Teresa: And so—and a lot of these community driven fridges started having, like, little slogans like "Take what you need, leave what you can," things like that, right?

Um, and so it's really helpful, this movement, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't have a challenge, right?

Critics express concerns about cleanliness, food safety, making sure that the mutual aid the service provides is not taken advantage of, right? Like, maybe somebody taking the food and reselling it or something?

Travis: Can I get up on a soapbox for a second?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Can I get up on my soapbox for a second?

Teresa: Get up there.

Travis: Thank you. If you're like, "Well, the problem is, 'cause it's—oh, the cleanliness is a problem, and what if people take food for—" And it's like, okay, great. The—yeah, I see where there's a concern. So what is then your idea that's better than this, that is also accomplishing the same goal?

Because as I said earlier, this isn't like, "And we solved it."

This is like, "Listen. Somebody's gotta do something, and there's definitely gaps there that aren't being taken care of, right?" There's room to help people that aren't being helped. There's things that we can do that aren't being done.

If we just wait around until a perfect solution comes around where no one has any concerns about it whatsoever, nobody's doing anything.

So if you have concerns about it and you have a better idea, share it. But until then, do something. Right?

Teresa: Right. And there are definitely ways to prevent all of these critiques, right? In the UK, for example, setting up a community fridge requires a rota of volunteers to clean the fridge and check the food. It requires public liability insurance and the support of a local environmental health officer. And, I mean, that's just, like, the back behind the scenes paperwork, 'cause you still need a space, a working refrigerator and, you know, garbage cans, waste bins.

Um, and so here's the thing of what I mentioned earlier. Free fridges need to be on private property for legal reasons. Right? So the length of time a fridge can stay somewhere is dependent on the property owner's willingness to participate in the mutual aid work, right? Several fridges have been forced to move, including one here in Cincinnati, because the owners were no longer willing to house them.

But when it comes down to it, the community benefits from this kind of work. People who are food insecure have an accessible option. It also offers other community members the ability to give what they can, right? You might not be able to make a sizable monetary donation to a food bank. You might feel like, "Well, there's nothing I can do." But this is a very small thing that lots

of people can do, right? Um, and the free food fridge movement is so much more than about actually fighting food insecurity. It's about fostering community, which is something that I feel like as especially, like, in the US is something that we kind of for a while prided ourselves on not being needed in a community, right? We just go to work and do our thing and don't get to know our neighbors, and all that kind of stuff?

Travis: Hey, babe. There's a lot to dive into there. You're absolutely right, it has to do with late-stage capitalism and the idea of separating people out and being like, "Hmm, don't share things. Don't spread things. Don't compare how much you make. Don't talk about things that are bad. Just go and buy your thing. Everybody buy separate things. Don't share things. This is bad. Don't carpool. No, don't carpool! Everybody drives their own car. That's better." There's a lot.

Teresa: There's a lot.

Travis: There's a lot!

Teresa: But like you said, this is a thing that helps people, so we should do it even though it's not perfect.

Travis: I also enjoy anything where it's, like, preventing food waste. Anything where it's just like, "Oh, I've got this stuff. I'm not going to eat this. Right? But somebody will eat this. Right?"

It's a great way—and you know what? One of the things that for a long time—I think we've stopped doing this, but one of the things here in Cincinnati that, like, Alex, our researcher and Alex, who we work with, um, we were stocking a lot of COVID tests into pantries and stuff, especially when they were either hard to get a hold of and we had extras for various reasons, and we could, like, take 'em down, and there was a pantry you could put 'em in, stuff like that. Stuff like sanitary products for people who need those. Um, and anything like that.

Teresa: Even toothpaste and shampoo and things like that. So if you are interested in getting involved with a free fridge near you, uh, here are a couple steps.

First of all, you need to find one.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: There are a number of websites that act as free fridge catalogs so you can—they let you type in your zip code or your city, and they'll show you where one is. Um, and these sites are amazing, but they aren't always up to date, because new fridges are popping up all the time, and unfortunately sometimes fridges need to move. When in doubt, you can always—

Travis: Is your refrigerator running?

Teresa: Hmm...

Travis: Hmm?

Teresa: Google the name of your town and "community fridge," right? Something should come up. And once you've found them, you can go look and see if they have an online presence or if they have a donation guide or, you know, there might be—they might have listed something especially that they need right now.

Um, and if you don't have one in your community, maybe look into starting one. There are lots of resources out there for that, too.

Um, so step two.

Travis: Also, you—you know you have that, like, one cool friend who's, like, always participating in stuff and you're like, "Huh. Hey, participant friend. Do we have a free fridge around here?" You know the friend I'm talking about too, right? Ours is Alice.

Teresa: [laughs] So, step two. Um, gathering food. So, here are a couple of options that you can do. You can do a pantry clean-out, as long as the canned goods are box mixes or whatever, uh, is still in date, right? Same thing with your linen closet. If you have extra shampoo or toiletries or

whatever, most free fridges will have some dry storage and they'll take that too.

Um, you can always also make extra of the thing that you're making anyway. Um, since it is a refrigerator, things like casserole or dessert or even salad could be placed in the refrigerator to be used immediately. But do make sure that it is labeled, dated, and includes a list of ingredients. Because, you know, just because someone is food insecure doesn't mean they don't have allergies or food sensitivities.

Um, you could even do a special grocery trip. We've done this. Where you, you know, mark out your budget, and then head to Aldi or the farmer's market or any grocery store and grab the things that you normally use. Things like toilet paper and paper towels, fresh produce, um, especially bananas, because Alex wrote a note in here that she especially met someone at a fridge that said bananas are great if you have leg cramps from walking around a lot.

Travis: 100%.

Teresa: Bottled water, cereal, lunchbox things for kids like pouches and pudding cups and individually packaged... carrot strips, and—

Travis: Stuff.

Teresa: —stuff like that. Um, like you said, menstrual products. Also, milk, eggs, butter, and bread. These are things that people eat and use every day, but aren't always available at food pantries, because they spoil so quickly. But with a fridge, you can put these in the fridge, and then they will last a little longer. Um, step three. Go and find one, right? Go put it in there. Again, making sure that you have labeled and dated and included a list of ingredients.

Things from the grocery store, even if they're, like, you know, boxed cookies or, like, bagels or whatever, right? When they're already labeled with an expiration date, that is really, like, chef's kiss, right? Um, and you know, when you get there you can look around and see what kind of stuff is already in there, what kind of stuff people are leaving, right? Same thing

with, like, if the fridge doesn't have a, um, a water tank, right? Maybe bottled water is the thing that you bring and leave there next time.

Travis: Get 'em a whole bunch of Clearly Canadian. Listen. Everybody loves—

Teresa: [laughs] You're on a big, a big Clearly Canadian kick.

Travis: It's just that when we were doing our Columbus shows, right? There was one day. Griffin was feeling a little down. I happened to have a Clearly Canadian with me. I give it to Griffin. And perked him right up! 'Cause it's full of sugar!

Teresa: [through laughter] So much sugar.

Travis: There's so much sugar and flavor in it. And if you're used to drinking LaCroix, and then you bust into Clearly Canadian... whoa! It's like going from black and white to color, my man. Whoa! There's so much flavor!

Teresa: You can also bring cleaning supplies to give the fridge a quick wipe-down. That's a great idea. And then make sure that you don't, I don't know, block any parking or whatever. Leave your blinkers on. You know, just be friendly while you're loading and unloading.

Travis: I love it.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Hey. Thank you. Do you want to take another run at saying free fridges as a portmanteau?

Teresa: Freedges.

Travis: Yayyy, you did it!

Teresa: I did it.

Travis: I'm so proud of you. Hey, everybody! Thank you for listening. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we would not be able to make this show. Also without whom we probably wouldn't have time to take stuff down and donate it to the free fridge. She has just started including our stuff with her stuff, and we really appreciate it. Thank you so much, Alex.

Thank you to Rachel, our editor, without whom we wouldn't be able to make this show. Thank you to you for listening. We could make this show without you, but then we'd just be speaking into a void. And from what I understand, that's not an okay thing to do.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: At least not for a prolonged time. You can do it, like, one time. But if you just keep talking into the void, people start to get worried. I don't know. It's a whole thing.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: If you're listening to this before the end of the month, go check out all of the great May merch over at mcelroymerch.com. If you're listening to this after, uh, in June 1st or beyond, we've got some new merch there. It's very, very fun. Uh, and all the stuff for June is going to go to benefit equality Florida, which is dedicated to securing full equality for Florida's LGBTQ community. Uh, there's a lot of fun stuff there.

Also want to let you know, in June me and Griffin are going to be at Awesome Con in Washington, DC, from June 16th through June 18th. Uh, you can get passes at bit.ly/awesomeconmcelroys.

Also, I'm going to be at Gen Con in August, August 3rd through 6th. Details on badges, tickets, and appearances are available at bit.ly/mcelroytours.

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. We also thank 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, we are always taking topic submissions and, I mean, idioms. I'd love to do another idiom episode. We gotta get those together.

Um, and you can submit those to shmannerscast@gmail.com. Make sure that you say hi to Alex, because 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]

Maximumfun.org.
Comedy and Culture.
Artist Owned.
Audience Supported.