

## Shmanners 74: Miss Manners

Published June 26, 2017

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**Travis:** This week we're talking about Judith Martin?

**Teresa:** Miss Manners, if you're nasty... uh, I mean, polite.

**Travis:** It's *Shmanners*!

[theme music plays]

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

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

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

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

**Travis:** For ordinary occasions. How art thou, my dove?

**Teresa:** I'm well, my dear.

**Travis:** Indeed, ver— ver— verily.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** It's Sunday. We don't normally record *Shmanners*. I'm just feeling very relaxed.

**Teresa:** Oh, nice.

**Travis:** It's nice. It's nice to have this time with you, you know? Away from the rat race. Our baby is asleep, so I'm in a really good place.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, so, welcome. Welcome to our first Monday, or our first official Monday episode. We're so glad you all time traveled with us. Um, Teresa?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** You were excited to talk about this. This, uh, we've done a couple biographies before.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** I would say, maybe, one of my favorite episodes ever was our Emily Post episode.

**Teresa:** It's a *fantastic* episode.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** And if you haven't listened to that, listeners, you should go back and listen to it. 'Cause it's awesome.

**Travis:** Now, this is no exaggeration, folks. As I heard Teresa researching this, she would occasionally just make, like, exclamations of, like, "Oh man! Oh, wow! [gasps] What?"

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** And, like, I'm so— listen, I don't want to oversell it, because I don't want to set expectations too high, but I'm very excited about this episode.

**Teresa:** Well, one of the things that I really enjoy...

**Travis:** Our cat is rubbing herself against the microphone.

**Teresa:** Oh, my gosh.

**Travis:** She's so excited too. She wants to learn everything about it.

**Teresa:** One of the things I really enjoy about Miss Manners is she's unapologetic. Completely unapologetic.

**Travis:** So, just in case somebody skipped our intro, our wonderful, hilarious reference to Janet Jackson. [laughs lightly] Come on. We're talking about Judith Martin, who— she was an advice columnist.

**Teresa:** She— well, okay.

**Travis:** You know what it was. I don't know why I'm the one doing the intro. You actually know it.

**Teresa:** Okay. She started out as a journalist.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And then began an etiquette column.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Which morphed into a advice columnist, sort of. Like, an etiquette advice. Like, a write in column, kind of.

**Travis:** Gotcha.

**Teresa:** You know what I mean?

**Travis:** Yeah. Like Dear Abby?

**Teresa:** Sort of.

**Travis:** But Dear Abby was more like life advice.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Miss Manners was more like, "How do I tell people to leave the party?" Or whatever.

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Okay. And folks, that is as much as I know.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Now, to hand it over to Teresa, who knows actually about the subject.

**Teresa:** Okay. Well, let's start off. So, Judith Martin is the daughter of Jacob and Helen Perlman. Um, and way back in 1898, Jacob was born in a part of Poland that used to be part of the Russian Empire.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and he emigrated to the United States in 1912.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** After that, he attended the University of Wisconsin, married Hel—

**Travis:** Go, Badgers? I think that's right.

**Teresa:** I guess. Uh, married Helen and then they moved to Washington DC, where Judith Martin was born in 1938.

**Travis:** Alright, so, we're going to take a break here, but—

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. Uh, so, she's been in Washington DC for a very long time. She spent—

**Travis:** Wait! Hold on. Is she still alive?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Oh! Okay.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Um—

**Travis:** I don't know why that's surprising. I think it's because you said a number like 199— er, 1898. And I was, like—

**Teresa:** Oh, that was her dad.

**Travis:** Yeah. I mean, I realize that now, in retrospect, but I heard that number and was like, "So a long time ago."

**Teresa:** No. Um—

**Travis:** I live in the moment. I'm kind of, [clicks tongue] ya know, like that. I just don't think about the past.

**Teresa:** But she didn't spend her entire life childhood in DC. Uh, her dad moved her around because he was an economist.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** For the United Nations.

**Travis:** Oh, wow.

**Teresa:** So, they moved around a lot. Um—

**Travis:** That's, like, a big deal. That's awesome.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Pretty awesome to live in, like, foreign capitals and stuff for the United Nations. Pretty cool. Um, so—

**Travis:** I bet she got to experience a lot of, like, steak dinners and fancy events and such.

**Teresa:** She absolutely did. Absolutely did. Um, and so, she graduated from Wesle— um, Wellesley— sorry, Wellesley College.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** And began the advice column. She was a journalist. And one of the things I thought was really cool, I did not know, that she used to cover social events at the White House and embassies.

**Travis:** Wow.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Also, film and theater critic.

**Travis:** Really?

**Teresa:** So, she wrote a *lot* of stuff.

**Travis:** So, she was kind of like, a go-to source. I mean.

**Teresa:** Absolutely. And we'll come to it later. A lot of her books about etiquette. Also, wrote two novels.

**Travis:** Really?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Huh.

**Teresa:** I mean, here we go again with its all, like, "Did you know?" Again.

**Travis:** Well, that's the thing. Is, I think that there's—I think— just speaking for me. I don't want to speak for the listeners. But from my point of view, I think that with, like, Emily Post and Miss Manners and these kinds of people, you get in your head of, like— you kind of pigeonhole them. As kind of like, stodgy— it's the same as, like, when you watch *Great British Bake Off* and you see, like— you know— and you see Mary and you're, like, "Oh, yeah, kind of stodgy, home baker w—" and she's funny and kind of, apparently, if you read anything that, uh, Sue and Mel have to talk about Mary, Mary is very foul mouthed. [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs lightly]

**Travis:** But that's the kind of thing. You, kind of, in your head, get this picture of these people.

**Teresa:** Right.



**Travis:** And then you dig, like, a little bit. And you're, like, "Nah, they're fascinating. They have a lot going on."

**Teresa:** Uh, so, her advice column, which is distributed three times a week by Universal Uclick, is also carried in more than 200 periodicals worldwide.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** That's a ton.

**Travis:** Way more than me.

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** Mine's in zero periodicals.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I'm working on it.

**Teresa:** Um, one of the cool things that I found about her is she says that manners are, kind of like, the laws, and etiquette is the way that you interpret it. So—

**Travis:** Interesting.

**Teresa:** Yeah. So, like, manners, one would say a good-mannered person would not, um, make a disgusting display of their food at the dinner table—table.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** But in etiquette, where you are determines how you do that. So, some places it's a knife and fork. Some places it's a communal dish with, like, bread to pull out your food. All sorts of stuff. So, that's really cool.

**Travis:** Interesting.

**Teresa:** She did a really awesome interview with Smithsonian magazine. Um, and the interviewer was Arcynta Ali Childs. Uh, she asks, "How did you become Miss Manners?" And—

**Travis:** She was bitten by Emily Post.

**Teresa:** [laughs] No. Uh, she says that like Napoleon, no one was authorized to crown her Miss Manners, so she just penned the name herself. It came from, uh— she says that when she was covering the White House, that was considered at that time to be social coverage. So, it was, like, the lifestyle section of the magazine, so— or the newspaper. Uh, so she got kind of, you know, *used* to that idea of covering what was going on in, kind of, the upper echelon of society.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** We would say the White House usually is.

**Travis:** Usually.

**Teresa:** So, she just crowned herself Miss Manners. That's pretty, uh...

**Travis:** Bold?

**Teresa:** Bold, yes! Bold.

**Travis:** It's like if I started calling myself Mister Awesome, Mister Cool Guy...

**Teresa:** [pause] Um...

**Travis:** This is where you were supposed to agree with me about how cool I am.

**Teresa:** Oh, sorry. I was too busy reading the notes.

**Travis:** Let me try—well, we'll do— we'll do a take two. Take Two. Take Two. Bwroop. [rewinding noise] Alright. It's like if I did a column called Mister Awesome or Mister Cool Guy.

**Teresa:** [cheerfully] Yeah. Like, the Fonz, "Ehh..."

**Travis:** Again, really... hmm.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** I was looking for more of an affirmation. Like, "But you *are* a cool guy."

**Teresa:** Oh! Oh!

**Travis:** Take— take— no, it's fine. It's fine. That's the beauty of podcasting. I can edit this all out. Bwroop. Alright, here we go. Note to self: Make sure I edit this.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Okay. It's like, if I did a column and called it Mister Awesome or Mister Cool Guy.

**Teresa:** [upbeat] Yeah, 'cause you're so cool.

**Travis:** [holding back laughter] Hey. Thank you for that unsolicited compliment.

**Teresa:** [sighs loudly]

**Travis:** Moving on.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** I'll clean that up in post.

**Teresa:** Like I said, she's really, kind of, well known for being, like, unabashedly honest.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** But she doesn't consider honesty to be impolite, even though she says that "Honesty in a social life is often used as a cover for rudeness." But she says that "There's a difference between being candid in what you're talking about, and voicing insulting opinions under the *guise* of honesty."

**Travis:** I love this so much. I feel like this is, like, kind of, my go-to response a lot in the questions that we get.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Where everybody's so afraid to be direct because they interpret that as being rude. Or, like, being honest. They interpret that as being rude. But if you are not rude in your honesty, your honesty is not rude. So, people try to find creative ways to say what they mean because they feel like being blunt and direct is rude.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And I love to hear Miss Manners, who thinks the same thing I do. Which is, you can be honest and not rude, if you don't say something rude.

**Teresa:** She has a really great quote about that. She says, uh, let me read it verbatim because it really is good, "If you can't be kind, at least be vague."

**Travis:** That's pretty great.

**Teresa:** I think that's pretty awesome.

**Travis:** I like that.

**Teresa:** Uh, speaking of questions. She was asked in this interview if she ever gets stumped.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** And she said, "No, I don't."

**Travis:** Okay. Cool.

**Teresa:** You get it, Miss Manners. She adds that she has also always had an interest in historic manners and manners of different societies at different points in time. Um, and so, she feels very familiar with etiquette traditions and, the normal like— in the addition to, like where it is in history. So, she hardly ever gets stumped. Not to say, uh, that she doesn't always give people the answer that they want to hear.

**Travis:** Well.

**Teresa:** If you read some of her columns, um, it's [sighs]... sometimes it's a little bit of tough love, you know?

**Travis:** Yeah. Listen, I do.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Yeah. I'll read a little bit. I'll read a couple or maybe, like, one of her advice columns. But on that same vein, she doesn't believe that it's ever acceptable to be rude.

**Travis:** Well, I should— I should hope not.

**Teresa:** Even if someone is rude to you.

**Travis:** Oh. Okay. Well, sorry, Miss Manners. There, you and I—well, okay, I should clarify. I think I agree with that. I think my standpoint on it is, like, you shouldn't be so worried about being polite in the face of someone who is being rude to you. By which I mean, that's the time to be direct and blunt and say what you want and say— yeah.

**Teresa:** Exac— well— you two, I think, really *do* agree even though on the surface you say that you don't. Um, because she's quoted as saying, "That doesn't mean you have to let people walk all over you. Etiquette does not render you defenseless. If it did, even I wouldn't subscribe to it. But rudeness in retaliation for rudeness just doubles the amount of rudeness in the world."

**Travis:** Okay. I do agree with that. We're on the same page. Whew! That was close.

**Teresa:** Isn't she— isn't she eloquent?

**Travis:** She's very— you read me some quotes of hers. And, like, yeah, she can turn a phrase *really* well.

**Teresa:** Totally. Um, she has a really great website where you can read all about her. Um, and her writing style—

**Travis:** Do— it's JudithMartin.pizza?

**Teresa:** No, Missmanners.com. Uh, and I think it really reads like she actually wrote it. Which is pretty cool.

**Travis:** She— her quotes, no joke, like— I— I often bemoan that, I think we live in a time where we don't really have people like [clicks tongue]

Oscar Wilde and— this— or, uh, you know Winston Churchill. These like quotes, you know? I think Dorothy Parker too, but I'm not as sure. But these, like, quote smiths that, like, they spin. Like, they open their mouths and or write— you know, write them down and these quotes fall out.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Except that, like, Miss Manners. Miss Manners says things, where it's, like, please somebody put that on a quilt or cross stitch or something. Put that on a pillow and give it to me, please, so I can remember it forever.

**Teresa:** [laughs lightly] Um, like I said, her little bio thing is very eloquently written. Um, and something that I certainly didn't know is that she has been given The National Humanities Medal.

**Travis:** Get out!

**Teresa:** Totally. Uh, in recognition to her contributions to society as America's foremost etiquette columnist and author.

**Travis:** That's pretty cool.

**Teresa:** That *is* pretty cool. It honors individuals or groups whose work has deepened the nations appreciation of the humanities. Super cool.

**Travis:** That's also something I don't have.

**Teresa:** No, you don't. You don't have that.

**Travis:** Well, maybe someday.



**Teresa:** [playfully] Maybe.

**Travis:** I was right. I looked it up. Dorothy Parker was known for her wit. I thought so.

**Teresa:** Ahh.

**Travis:** I wanted to make sure I wasn't making that up. It's Dorothy Parker. Nailed it.

**Teresa:** Um, so, I'd like to read a couple— a few more of her quotes because they are awesome. Uh, here's one: "It is far more impressive when others discover your good qualities without your help."

**Travis:** You see, that's so good.

**Teresa:** It's like a zinger. You know?

**Travis:** That's so good. That's like those— is that an aphor— aphorism? Is that what that is? I think it's called an aphorism. Man, I'm going to have to look *this* up too.

**Teresa:** Oh, man.

**Travis:** But I think it's like that, you know, *Poor Richard's Almanac*. A kind of aphorism, right? Um... okay, you say another one and I'll google what an aphorism is. So I can sound smart on my podcast. A...P...

**Teresa:** She has written a new book, um, called *Painfully Proper Weddings*. Oh, sorry, *Miss Manners on (Painfully Proper) Weddings*. And we do a lot of wedding stuff and I think that this is also very poignant, what she's written on this. "A small wedding is not necessarily one to which very few people are invited. It is one to which the person you are addressing is not invited."

**Travis:** Ooh.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** That is good. I was right. Aphorism, yeah.

**Teresa:** Oh, man. You're two for two on Google. [giggles]

**Travis:** I know. We'll see. I'll probably blow it on the third though. We'll see.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Googling.

**Travis:** I've googled very well. I— I'm— listen, I'm not ready to go pro, but I've got this googling thing down.

**Teresa:** Before I read some of her columns and we talk about the advice that she's given, how about we take a break and write some thank you notes to our sponsors?

**Travis:** That sounds real good, let's do that.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Our sponsor this week— oh goodness, we are excited. We are, here in the McElroy home, a big fan of meal subscription services. Um, we tried a bunch of them. And you know what? We're pretty happy with them across the board. And one of our favorites is Sunbasket. I'm going to, um, do a thought experiment here, where I try to pretend that I believe there are people in the world who don't know what a meal subscription service is.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** So, basically...

**Teresa:** I'm on board.

**Travis:** Okay. It goes like this. Uh, every week, or however often you want. Every week a box of food is delivered to your door. Now, oh, slow down there, person.

**Teresa:** Wait, is this food delicious, healthy, organic, non-GMO?

**Travis:** Yes. If you subscribe to Sunbasket. And also, it's not just, like, loose, rolling around, random foods. These are foods that are grouped together and they're proportioned out so that you can *use* them to make specific recipes that are also included in the box. That's a really roundabout way of saying, they give the ingredients you need to make really amazing meals that, maybe, you wouldn't normally think of.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, and they have lots of different options, uh: paleo, gluten-free, vegetarian, breakfast and family options. So, you're going to find something that fits your needs, and your family, and your home or whatever. And it's all going to come right to your door with instructions on how to make it. So,

even if you don't know how to cook, you just follow the instructions and you're going to *feel* like you can cook.

**Teresa:** You know what was really cool about the last Sunbasket we received?

**Travis:** What's that?

**Teresa:** So, um, I have— in some of our other subscription services, and indeed before this, um, we received recipe cards.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** So, it would tell you the recipe for the food that you received. But *this* time, they sent us, like, a recipe brochure.

**Travis:** Mm.

**Teresa:** So, included in that brochure were all the recipes for all the meals that you had the choice of bringing— of sending to your house.

**Travis:** So, it becomes, like, a recipe book.

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Awesome.

**Teresa:** Um, so even though you didn't get— we didn't get those ingredients, we only got our three meal ingredients, I could, or you could, or we could, make *any* of the recipes that they sent us.

**Travis:** So, if this sounds interesting to you go to [sunbasket.com/shmanners](http://sunbasket.com/shmanners), S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S, today and get your first three meals free. That's [sunbasket.com/shmanners](http://sunbasket.com/shmanners) for three free meals. [Sunbasket.com/shmanners](http://Sunbasket.com/shmanners).

[wrestling match bell ringing and music]

**Hal:** I am Hal Lublin.

**Danielle:** I am Danielle Radford.

**Michael:** I am Michael Eagle.

**Hal:** And we are the hosts of *Tights and Fights*, Maximum Fun's newest podcast dedicated to all things wrestling.

**Danielle:** We'll be talking about Sasha Banks, the woman's revolution, Sasha Banks, the brand split and Sasha Banks' wigs.

**Michael:** And we'll also be talking about wrestler fashion. Some wrestlers wear too many clothes. Some wrestlers don't wear enough clothes at all.

**Hal:** And I'll be doing impressions of all your favorite wrestlers. [Randy Savage voice] New episodes Thursdays on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts. Oh, yeah, dig it!

[music ends]

**Mark:** A lot of times my instincts are wrong. They're mostly wrong, but they're not wrong in the sense that, like, I misread somebody. They're just extremely limited to my— you know, to my *idea* of who they are.

**Jesse:** That was Mark Barren. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm the host of NPR's *Bullseye*. I'm so excited to tell you about my new show, *The Turnaround*. Join me as I sit down with some of the best interviewers in the world and ask them about how and why they do what they do. We'll go deep with some of the biggest names in media. Everybody from Terry Gross to Jerry Springer to Combat Jack, and it's all on *The Turnaround*. Two episodes a week this summer. Subscribe now. Tell a friend.

[music plays, ad ends]

**Travis:** Okay. So, are you ready? Tell me more about Miss Manners.

**Teresa:** Um, well, I would like to read an example of some of the tough love uh, advice...

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** ... that Miss Sh— Miss Manners will give.

**Travis:** Miss *Shmanners*.

**Teresa:** I almost called her Miss *Shmanners*.

**Travis:** You're Miss—

**Teresa:** Is that me? [gasps]

**Travis:** Oh my God! [gasps loudly] Is Teresa Miss *Shmanners*?

**Teresa:** I'm doing it. I'm Napoleon-ing myself. I'm Miss *Shmanners*.

**Travis:** Okay. I want to be Captain Awesome.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Alright. And I will abridge this because it is a column, so it's quite long. "Dear Miss Manners: I recently accepted a date on Valentine's Day from a gentleman I have known and gone out with from time to time for some four years. While I didn't think it was going to be the ultimate romantic evening, I thought we would at least have fun as friends."

This writer goes on about how it was very much not up to her expectations. Um, got a microwaved meal. Uh, there were no, like, flowers at the table. They didn't even get dessert. And they said, "Am I wrong to have— to think that he would have done something more to make the evening a little more festive? I asked if I could bring anything and was told no. I just felt that he could have asked me out another weekend if he didn't wish to celebrate with me, and I could have made other plans which would have been just fine."

Alright. So, here's what she says, "Gentle Reader: What other plans? Miss Manners doesn't mean to be harsh, but surely if you had had Valentine's Day offers from a gentleman in whom you did have a romantic interest, perhaps you would not have accepted one from one whom you did not expect romance from.

"Perhaps if the gentleman had a calendar, he would have avoided a day so loaded with expectations. But then, you said you didn't expect a romantic evening, so perhaps he fulfilled yours. Miss Manners' advice is to choose more carefully next year."

**Travis:** Ooh. 'Tis good. Listen, it's tough but fair.

**Teresa:** In a roundabout way, this is the kind of advice that we give all the time. That if you expect something, you need to voice your expectations.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Or you're probably not going to get it.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Communication is key for this. If this person had said, "This is Valentine's Day. Are we doing something special for Valentine's Day?"

And the gentleman might have said, "Yes, let me see what I can do to make this a special day for you on our date." Or, "No, uh, I was unaware that Valentine's Day was so important to you. I have just made a very casual dinner date plan."

**Travis:** "I thought we'd just hang out."

**Teresa:** Right. And, so then, she could have said either, "Well, that's fine, thank you for letting me know," or, "No, thanks. I'm going to go find something special to do." And then nobody's feelings would have been hurt.

**Travis:** Yep. I think it's great advice, Miss Manners.

**Teresa:** Um, here's another one. Again, quite long, so I'm going to paraphrase a little bit.



“Dear Miss Manners: I hosted one of those home shopping parties for a group of friends and had a very good turnout. However, the one thing I noticed was that a very close relative of mine didn’t purchase anything. Now, I know that you shouldn’t have to feel obligated to buy anything at these functions; however, I have attended several home parties for her in the past, and I felt that it was not courteous of her to support her— to not support her host.”

And she goes on to say, um, that a few of her girlfriends think that if you’re going to go to a party, you should buy something to make sure that everybody has a good time. The host, basically, uh, put out refreshments for you, so this is the way of thanking your host. Helping them get whatever kind of special, uh, you know, they have, like, party gifts or whatever that you get.

“What do you think would be the correct courtesy going forward at these parties? We all know that they have a bit of a gang mentality pressured into them.”

And here’s what she says. “Gentle Reader: And your complaint is that the gang mentality didn’t kick in to make your relative feel obliged to buy something that she didn’t want?”

“Miss Manners asks you to bear in mind that when you give such a gathering, you should be acting as a saleswoman who incidentally serves refreshments, not as a social hostess who incidentally embarrasses her guests into spending money they would not otherwise have spent. A respectable salesperson presents and touts the opportunity to buy but does not bludgeon potential customers into paying for things they don’t want.

“A reason not to invite this relative to a shopping party would be that she is not interested in the kind of merchandise you are selling. For the same reason, and not to punish her, you needn’t attend hers.

“But what would be the point of your selling unwanted things to each other? Who would profit besides the companies you represent? Wouldn’t you both come out just as far ahead, and not have your hos— your houses full of unwanted clutter, if you saw each other over a freely offered cup of tea?”

**Travis:** Also excellent advice.

**Teresa:** And something that we also talk about. There are lots of, uh, put-upon social pressures that don’t really have to exist.

**Travis:** Yeah. I think that that’s a thing that we see a lot in the questions that we get. Of like, “How do I pretend to be nice?” And it’s, like, no, like, that’s not— that’s not what manners and etiquette is. Like, it’s about—

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** It’s more about, like, how do we be open with each other without hurting each other’s feelings.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Not how do we hide what we really think without hurting. You know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Exactly. And this question asker, um, wasn’t sure how to, quote, “retaliate...”

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** ... against her relative for not buying something. And Miss Manners really nails it on the head when she’s like, “But she didn’t buy something

that she didn't want and so you're going to punish her by not inviting her to your other parties?" I mean—

**Travis:** Especially when you went to her house and bought something you didn't want. So—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** What you're *really* feeling is, like, resentment.

**Teresa:** I think so.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Whereas you're kind of mad at yourself for doing that. And were like, "Well I didn't know I wasn't allowed to— I could have just not bought something if she doesn't. But if I bought something I didn't want, she has to buy something she doesn't want."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** And if they had been honest and open with each other in a nice way and made it so this social construct, this social pressure, that we put on ourselves was, like, out in the open, we could all feel free to just not buy it if you don't want it, you know?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Well, that's the thing is, like, we talk about stuff, like, um, we— I don't know if we've done an episode on breakups yet, but, like, when someone asks you to, like, make plans and you don't want to, like, figuring out a clever way of getting out of it? That's not manners. Figuring out a way to say no to them *nice*ly is manners.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Yes. Exactly. It's the same kind of thing I think— did we talk about this on our social media? When you get invited by Facebook invite?

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Did we talk about this? I think we did.

**Travis:** I think so.

**Teresa:** If we didn't, it's one of— it's very difficult, um, as a host, to receive 70 maybes for a party.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** And *I*, as a host, would very much more appreciate to get 50 no's, um, instead of those maybes. Uh, I know that people are trying to spare my feelings when they say that they canno— that they *might* attend an event.

**Travis:** But in doing so, it's very impolite.

**Teresa:** Exactly! This is, uh— she really is just so eloquent, and she really just gets that point across, I think.

**Travis:** Well, I think that and— but I also see where, like, if I— that there are probably people who don't want to hear that level of, like, "No, it's not a shield to hide behind. You don't pretend in manners." I mean, don't get me wrong, there is a certain level of, like, social niceties in everything. But, like, coming up with a really clever excuse, you know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Is just it's something you're hiding behind, instead of addressing the real issue.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** I saw that there was a question that we got recently. We didn't use it, but, like, uh, I'm trying to remember. But basically, it was something along the lines of, like, "I have a friend who I don't like hanging out with and how do I deal with them?" And all I could think was, like, then they're not your friend. [laughs] That's not a friend.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** If you don't like spending time with them, and they bother you, and they annoy you, and you don't enjoy their company, why *are* you hanging out with them? Why— like, they're not your friend. Anyways, it's just an example of everybody's trying so hard to be nice, that they're not being nice.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** It's time to start nice and start being real. Real polite, that is.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Hi, welcome to *Shmanners* and Captain Awesome.

**Teresa:** Is that our new intro?

**Travis:** No, but it's not bad.

**Teresa:** [laughs lightly] That was really off the cuff. That was great.

**Travis:** Yeah. Hey, thank you.

**Teresa:** Um—

**Travis:** I wrote that. [laughs] I did script that. I've been working on it for three weeks.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I had a panel come in and workshop it.

**Teresa:** Uh—

**Travis:** Lin's been helping me. [laughs lightly]

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Sounds like it. Um, about her column, um, in that magazine I told you about the question and answers, she was asked, "Have the etiquette questions you answer in your column changed much over the years?"

She says—

**Travis:** A lot more emojis. [laughs]

**Teresa:** Mm. "They've changed as philosophies change. The philosophy of society. They've changed as technology changes; um, and every once in a while, we get rid of an old problem. And that's the cause of— that's a cause of triumph. But then, of course, the new ones come along."

I think that she's really speaking about, like, the internet, the social—

**Travis:** Oh goodness, yes.

**Teresa:** The social problems on the internet.

**Travis:** She also said that— what did she say was the most common question she got? You told me that and now I can't remember it.

**Teresa:** She reports that the most common question she receives is how to politely demand cash from potential gift givers. She says, "There is no polite way to do this."

And the second most common one is how much guests should spend on a gift. Um, and that she says, "Should be determined by the giv— what the giver can afford, not the event relationship or the related expenses or other factors."

**Travis:** I don't know how I feel about that there's no polite way. I mean, I guess. I guess, in that maybe she— alright, okay, I'll give her the benefit of the doubt and say that I think that in the society that we exist right now in which, for whatever reason, everybody's very taboo in talking about money and how much money they have and how much something costs. Okay, I can believe that right now there's— I think that maybe in the future— in the utopian future, where everybody's very comfortable talking about money, it'll be totally fine.

**Teresa:** So, the last thing I want to talk about is the idea of how etiquette is changing around the internet. We touched on it in— just a few minutes ago. Um, but she was asked in the magazine article, "Do you think the level of anonymity made possible by the internet has contributed to the rise of rude behavior?"

She says, "Yes, anonymity always does. For instance, some people who think they're anonymous when driving their car behave in an extraordinarily rude manner that you wouldn't normally expect from them. They seem to forget that cars have windows and we can see who they are, so they suspend the necessity of keeping the good will of others."

**Travis:** I also think— I think that is not limited to the internet though. 'Cause I also think as, uh, you know, the disconnect grows in real life too. Like, there used to be a time where you knew the name of everybody living on your street. And you knew, you know, what the name of the guy who ran the grocery store or the woman who owned the— you know, who worked in the post office.

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** And, like, we just don't really connect like that anymore. And we don't really—we don't really think of each other on those personal levels. I think, just in general. I don't the internet is the only place where we see that happening. I think it happens in real life too.



**Teresa:** It's a microcosm for sure, though.

**Travis:** Yeah. I do think so, um, but I mean— just in general, like you said, I don't think it necessarily means— and like Miss Manners said, I don't think it means that we have *stopped* being, uh— that we need to stop focusing on it. It's just that we need to focus on it in a different way. You know? We need to focus on it more.

And I think that is an excellent point by both you and Miss Manners. Um, I should have asked this. When was she born? In this bio-episode, we might want to give her birthdate.

**Teresa:** Oh. Um. No, I did.

**Travis:** Really?

**Teresa:** September 13th, 1938.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** She's 78 years old? Is that right?

**Travis:** Sure. Yes. Yes.

**Teresa:** And her column started in 1978. So, she's been writing about manners and etiquette for a very long time.

**Travis:** Is her column still running?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Excellent. Well, way to go, Miss Manners. Um, I think that's going to do it for us. Thank you for joining us on this biography episode. If you have anybody, if you know anybody and you're, like, oh, this person big in, I don't know, social, or, um, manners, etiquette... You know? You know the scene. You know what we're talking about. And you would like to hear us do a biography episode, you can email us at [shmatterscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmatterscast@gmail.com). You can tweet at us, but that's so easy to get lost in the shuffle. I think an email is probably the most direct.

**Teresa:** And easily searchable.

**Travis:** Um, if you liked this episode, tell a friend. Um, go on iTunes, rate, review and subscribe. Go to [Maximumfun.org](http://Maximumfun.org), check out all the other amazing shows there. Um, let's see, what else, Teresa?

**Teresa:** As always, thank you to Brent "brentalfloss" Black for our theme music, and that is available as a ringtone where those are sold. Thank you also to Kayla M. Wasil for our banner and thumbnail art. Um, what el— let me think. Thank you to our listeners for putting up with our haphazard release schedule, and we are endeavoring to make it so that Monday is our day.

**Travis:** Yes. Also, thank you, Miss Manners.

**Teresa:** Yeah, thank you, Judith Martin.

**Travis:** For being pretty awesome and funny and clever and being a great role model. Really appreciate it. And our topic next week is going to be coffee houses. So, if you have any questions about coffee houses, you can email us at [shmatterscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmatterscast@gmail.com) or you can tweet at us @shmatterscast. Uh, and maybe you'll hear it on the show next week. So, that's going to do it for us this week. Join us again next week.

**Teresa:** No RSVP required!

**Travis:** You've been listening to *Shmanners*...

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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