

Shmanners 2: Table Manners

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Travis:

Hey, Teresa. Can you pass the introduction?

Teresa:

Yes, but only if you get your elbows off the podcast.

Travis:

It's table manners!

Teresa:

With Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

Travis:

Hello and welcome to another episode of Shmanners. I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa:

And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis:

Shmanners is your guide to extraordinary etiquette for ordinary occasions. Hello, Teresa.

Teresa:

Hi, Travis.

Travis:

I want to say we're recording this before we actually launch. But I'm going to go ahead and say thank you to everyone for all the warm, uh, regards and the awesome reception we got for episode one.

Teresa:

We have gotten so many likes, mentions. I don't know. What do they call those on the interwebs?

Travis:

Don't act like you've never been on the internet before. You were on the internet all the... "What? What is it? Favorites? I don't know. Whatever."

Teresa:

Well, they are different on different platforms.

Travis:

People like us.

Teresa:

People do like us. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Travis:

And that's without even putting up a full episode yet. So, uh, we appreciate everyone. So this, uh, this topic is very near and dear to my heart. I will say that going along with the theme of Teresa making me a far better man, this is, um, I would say probably the one where I had the most room for improvement.

Teresa:

And I would say that the reason that you had so much improvement is you really just hadn't thought about it before. Um, a lot of these things are no longer really taught to anyone even though I know the story. You did go to cotillion, didn't you?

Travis:

I did go to cotillion and I would— I did not do great. Like, I remember— The memory I have, I think I was in sixth grade, is sitting down in, like, a rented little kid's tux, which, I was adorable. I had a huge head. I look like, uh, like a Tootsie Roll pop. Um.

Teresa:

I bet you looked like a little popsicle.

Travis:

I did, um, and I think by the end of dinner, me and Chilton Wise and Jamie Sullivan and Mandy whose last name I can't remember, um, she was my date and she's the one I can't remember, were just, like, playing with green beans and fake leaves on the table and, like, playing with our food, like toddlers.

Teresa:

Oh, boy.

Travis:

In tuxes and fancy dresses.

Teresa:

Oh, boy. I would not want to be that teacher.

Travis:

I'm better now though. I don't play with wet green beans on my table no more.

Teresa:

Right and you're better now because you think about it now and I think that that is probably the common thread throughout a lot of these manner behaviors is it's about consideration and thinking about what you're doing instead of just, you know, relying on your kind of caveman id. Got to eat. Got to do this.

Travis:

Well, and it's not surprising if you think about the fact that, like, a formal dining room, a sit down dinner is a little bit, you know, a little bit gone with the wind at this point because I just think about how from, like, 18 to 25, I wasn't, like, sitting down to dinner with anyone, you know?

I was, like, running to my dorm, you know, to the commons, grabbing a turkey wrap and watching TV while I eat in the common room. You know what I mean?

Teresa:

Well, but didn't you go out to dinner, I mean, in a less formal way? Maybe go out to have pizza with your friends, go out to the bar.

Travis:

Definitely. But we were probably drunk by that point.

Teresa:

[laughs] It is a lot harder to mind your Ps and Qs while you're drunk.

Travis:

Yeah, that's a fact. Take it from me, folks. It's harder to think of Ps and Qs.

Teresa:

And you know what? We're going to cover that. We'll go through and talk about that kind of stuff.

Travis:

We are?

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Okay, great. But I will say that there is a thing, like, especially once you enter into a relationship with someone and dinner becomes a much more communal experience and, you know, I started to leave my early twenties and it stopped being about, like, just getting food and sitting back down at the computer.

Instead, we were sitting down to dinner and, like, communicating with each other over a shared meal. It became a much bigger, um, part of our lives and that's when I realized I don't like it when people watch me eat.

Teresa:

Now, what is it, Travis, that you do when I look at you while you're eating? What's the thing?

Travis:

I have a tendency, much like a wild animal, that when observed while eating, I will freeze. I don't, I don't like it when people watch me eat. It's been described as, like, a dog who's afraid someone's about to take away their food and I think it's way better now. You...

Teresa:

It is. It is way better now and I would say that you probably don't play that game really with anyone but me anymore.

Travis:

Well, now it's just funny.

Teresa:

It is. It is funny.

Travis:

Now it's no longer a defense mechanism. I'm just trying to make you laugh.

Teresa:

Yes. Yes.

Travis:

So let's get into it. Let's stop talking about my weird eating behaviors or former, former eating behaviors because you fixed me and let's instead talk about some table manners.

Teresa:

Let's talk about some ancient weird eating behaviors.

Travis:

Oh, please. Please tell me about the history of this.

Teresa:

Well, so, um, I'm going to talk most specifically about utensils at the table.

Travis:

Which is a huge part.

Teresa:

Really.

Travis:

We had a lot of questions about that.

Teresa:

A lot of questions about that. Okay, so let's go all the way back to beginning. Uh, knife-like tools have been dated as far back as 2.5 million years ago.

Travis:

Okay, so knife-like tools, like shards of rock and bone and obsidian and...

Teresa:

Exactly. Right. Things for tearing meat apart, um, and distributing it.

Travis:

Not quite like precision tools.

Teresa:

No. No.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Uh.

Travis:

Well, then again, I have heard before that obsidian can get pretty damn razor sharp. So.

Teresa:

Yeah, I mean, you got to tear the flesh around. But people...

Travis:

You got to.

Teresa:

You got to.

Travis:

In this day in age, you've got to tear the flesh.

Teresa:

So instead of people, like, all just kind of taking bites from the same thing, people started divvying the food out and portioning it accordingly.

Travis:

Which makes a lot of sense because if you think about it, like, if-say you took down, like, I don't know, a mastodon, you couldn't eat that all at once. You gotta cut off sections to cook it.

Teresa:

That's right. That's right. I mean, I don't know when cooking started. That's a different show. Different show.

The utensil as we know it, uh, the very first metal spoon has been dated back to around 5,000 BC, um, just because I think that it was probably, you know, for, uh, slurping maybe water or gruel or something like that.

Travis:

It definitely seems like a very necessary tool if you start thinking. I mean, that makes a lot of sense to me because you've got knife covered with, like, shards of bones and rock and everything.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

But if you want to get, like, water out of a jar or you want, like, you need some kind of utensil and I think you could probably draw... I'm not an anthropologist, folks. This might surprise you. But I could see them drawing

a very quick line between, like, "Oh, a bowl. I scoop that out. What if I had a tiny bowl with a handle on it."

Teresa:

Great. Yeah. That totally makes sense and then metal knives, as we know them, about 2,000 BC.

Travis:

Now that surprises me because it took them 3,000 years to go from, "Wait, we have this metal scoop thing. We could just make the bone thing that." That— Why did it take them 3,000 years to make that jump?

Maybe, my bet is that they were probably metal, um, and if there is an anthropologist listening, please tell us, like, probably that there were metal, like, hunting, you know, war knives, weapons long before that.

Teresa:

Right, right. I'm talking, like, the actual knife on the table. I'm betting that when they say as we know it, it resembled something like what we have today.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

A smaller implement for cutting one bite at a time.

Travis:

And when did my favorite utensil come around, the hardest working utensil? Ladies and gentlemen, the fork.

Teresa:

The two pronged fork, 800 AD.

Travis:

Wow. Really?

Teresa:

Yeah, there's such a long time in between there. I guess people just used their hands. Um, the two pronged fork was the first one to break out on the scene.

Travis:

I love the fork. I want everyone... I'm not afraid of who knows it. I'm a big fan of the fork.

Teresa:

So that two pronged fork was really only used for, like, spearing and carving.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

And holding on to something, whereas the fork for scooping with the three tines didn't really come out until, uh, the Renaissance period.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Yeah, mostly people just used their spoon or, like, a piece of bread to kind of, like, shovel it.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Right. In some parts of the world today, they still just kind of use, like, bread or your hands.

Travis:

Well, non—

Teresa:

It's not really necessary. Anything you can spear with a fork, you can also scoop with a spoon, you know, historically speaking.

Travis:

What about, I saw this once on a weird fact show, the knife that had a divot down the middle for scooping peas onto. When did that come around?

Teresa:

Uh, that specifically, I'm not quite sure about.

Travis:

That's a real thing. It's a very specific unitasker and I don't know why it exists. But it's just to put peas onto a knife. Look it up, folks. It's real.

Teresa:

I bet—

Travis:

It's one of the few things I know about.

Teresa:

I bet that was one of those things when they were laying out six or seven different utensils for each course and then, uh, they had to bring that pea knife out for you to eat your green mushy peas.

Travis:

I guess. Well, we had a question about that, um, on Facebook. Jacob asked, "Why is there so much gosh darn silverware and what is it all for?"

Teresa:

Well, uh, Jacob, the thing is the silverware was really tailored to the specific food and the course during the meal.

Travis:

It used to be a way bigger production.

Teresa:

Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, there's this TV show, this show called Downton Abbey. Anybody, anybody, Downton Abbey?

Travis:

Oh, I was going to say Supersizers Go.

Teresa:

Well, I think that probably Downton Abbey is a little more mainstream than Supersizers Go, especially here in the United States. Um, but if anyone has ever noticed how when they have their big banquet scenes, there's, like, four or five footmen, like, lining the walls and they bring around the dishes and you serve the dish and then they clear the way, clear away the dishes.

And in all of that kind of hoopla and rigamarole, they developed roles for each specific type of utensil and I'm not saying that during the, you know, Edwardian and, um, Victorian times that's when they decided to do that. I'm just saying over time, more and more utensils were added, depending upon what you were eating and what your status was in society.

Travis:

And it also, it used to be back then that it was a lot more of, like, a test, you know? Like, it mattered a lot more that you knew what you were doing then than it does now. Even if right now you go to a dinner party and you're like, "I don't know what to..." Imagine back then, where it's like, "Oh, he picked up the wrong fork. He's cast out of society now."

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

That might be a little over the top. But that's what I picked up from TV shows and movies, that it was, like, "Oh, he reused his salad fork. He's dead to us."

Teresa:

Certainly. Certainly in times passed that may have been the difference between you, uh, bagging a wife or not.

Travis:

I feel like there's a general rule and I can't remember if it's you work from the inside out or the outside in with, like, it, so, like, if a course is brought, you start, I think it's outside in, right?

Teresa:

Yes, you start at the outside.

Travis:

So you would use the utensils and we had another question somewhere about asking. I feel like it's really easy. You used to be paired at dinner parties.

It used to be like, "We're going to put this person next to this person, this person across from this person," and it was, like, choosing seating arrangements at weddings.

Teresa:

Right, name cards and seating arrangements and there were always, um, they were kind of, like, unspoken rules where, like, you couldn't sit directly next to your husband.

Travis:

That's so boring.

Teresa:

You had to be seated across the table. Well, but it aided in—

Travis:

No, no, no. I mean, sitting next to your husband is like, "I could see your face all day at home."

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

"We're going out to, like, hang out with other people. Please don't sit next to me, George."

Teresa:

You weren't able to sit next to your husband or your wife because it didn't aid in conversation. But—

Travis:

And I think ... Isn't there a great joke about that in Importance of Being Earnest where it's, like, he spent the whole— Or she spent the whole time flirting with her own husband. It was disgusting, something along those lines.

Teresa:

[laughs] Right. But back to silverware. I want to give you a couple of touchstones. So, um, in the Renaissance period, when you went to a tavern or a pub or even to a friend's house, there weren't, like, sets of silverware. You brought your own with you.

Travis:

Really?

Teresa:

Yeah, you were responsible for having, you know, your knife and your fork on your person.

Travis:

Oh, man. I wish that were still true. So everybody could have, like, personalized, so it's, like, I pull mine out and on the end is a phoenix. Like, that would be so much cooler.

Teresa:

It probably was fun. But then people's disposable income raised, especially. There became a sort of merchant class or a middle class and so, uh, you showed your wealth by having these things already at your home.

Travis:

It makes sense too if you think about that there used to be way more of, like, um, you know, smiths, like silversmiths and that kind of thing where it's like you would go and be like, "I need a set of personalized forks, please."

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Man, I wish that was still a thing. That would be so much cooler. Let me ask you think questions, Teresa.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Regarding silverware. Why? Why were there different utensils for each course?

Teresa:

Well, because different food required different things and the more food that you gave to your guests at the table, the richer you seemed.

Travis:

I gotcha. So it was a little bit showing off to be like, "Here's your 16 utensils. What's in store for you?"

Teresa:

Exactly and you wouldn't exactly have 16 things on the table because I mentioned about the servants coming in and out and delivering things. You— The general rule is about four on each side.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Although, in, you know, my different sources, I seen that, depending upon the time period, there may have been more or less allowed on the table.

Travis:

I feel like the version I see most often of that nowadays when I go to some kind of fancy dinner thing is that you have, um, you know, maybe a butter knife, a steak knife, um, or some kind of, like, if there's a meat dish, something to cut with and then you've got, um, you know, your spoon and then a regular fork and then, like, a salad fork.

Teresa:

Right. I'd say that that's probably general in fine dining establishments.

Travis:

So if you see a small fork, that's your salad fork, right? The small fork is for, like, detail work.

Teresa:

Yeah. I know we didn't get a direct question about this. But in my experience, there was always some confusion for me between American style and continental style dining. If I were to say, "What is the continental style?" What do you think that means?

Travis:

Oh, well, I'm cheating because you told me before. I'll tell you what it is. It—

Teresa:

[laughs] What is it?

Travis:

Continental style is your fork never moves, right? Like, it stays in your left hand?

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

And you cut with your right. You cut and eat, cut and eat.

Teresa:

Correct and the thing that was so confusing for me is I always think of the continent, like, the Americas, right? Where, like, you are, you know, one of the colonies, right?

Travis:

But that's the difference. I think what you've hit on right there is the difference.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

That Europe is the continent.

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

No? Dammit.

Teresa:

[laughs] So what happened, uh, at that particular point in history, the American colonists were used to eating by switching, which everyone used to do. You would cut with your right and hold your meat or whatever with your fork. Then you would put your knife down, switch your hands.

Travis:

Uh-huh.

Teresa:

So that you had the fork in your right hand and nothing in your left hand.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Because you generally ate in all times with your right hand. That was the clean hand, instead of the left hand, where you wiped your bum.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, and the colonists did this. This is what they were used to.

Travis:

Because everyone was doing that.

Teresa:

Exactly. The British weren't cool with it. They wanted to be different. They didn't want to be, uh, associated with this rougher American crowd. So that is when they started doing fork in the left hand, knife in the right hand always, never switching.

Travis:

Can I be honest with you? Can I tell you a secret?

Teresa:

What?

Travis:

I prefer the British way.

Teresa:

I'm sure that you do. Um, but that's not really how our manners developed.

Travis:

Yeah. But I'm, uh, for me, there's something about the keeping your fork and your, uh, knife in single hands that kind of slows you down, um, because this is a thing that's, like, I feel like I've been... heard a lot of different opinions on, like, say you're sitting down for steak, right?

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

How much do you cut ahead of time and then switch your fork hand and then eat the pieces then switch back and cut some and with...

Teresa:

Travis, the answer is one. One piece at a time.

Travis:

That's so grueling if you have to keep switching hands. It makes so much more sense to just keep them in the same hands if that's what you're doing.

Teresa:

Well, if I may, Travis, if I may, the idea of formal dining, dining with someone isn't really about the food all the time. So getting the food in your gob isn't really what these utensils ended up being for. I'm sure at first, like we talked about, people needed these utensils in order to eat the food and not be... and not just shovel their food in their face with their hands.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Certainly. That's what they needed. But then all of these developments with the utensils were more about conversing and showing status and really anything other than eating, even though some utensils were developed for specific dishes. It's a little convoluted.

Travis:

I guarantee back in the day, there were people leaving dinner parties and being like, "I'm starving."

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I, you know? You know what I mean, everybody? Like, we just had, like, a 17 course meal. I am so hungry.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I feel like I didn't eat anything.

Teresa:

It may have happened. It may have happened.

Travis:

All right and, uh, especially with corsets.

Teresa:

Oh, yeah.

Travis:

There was probably a lot of, like, "Oh, I had one bite of bread and now I can't breathe."

Teresa:

Well, haven't you seen that scene in *Gone With The Wind* where they make Scarlet eat before she goes to a picnic where she's going to eat because she eats and then they put her in her corset and you can't eat anything else. So she was going to faint if she didn't eat anything before she went to go eat.

Travis:

Bummer.

Teresa:

Yeah. Totally.

Travis:

So, okay, so I feel like that covers utensils and that kind of thing. But, like, that's great. But we talked a little bit about seating and that kind of thing. Tell me more about the table. Tell me more about the actual arrangement of everything.

Teresa:

Okay, well, let's start simple with an informal place setting.

Travis:

Okay, informal like what? Give me an example.

Teresa:

Uh, a three course dinner like you would... like I would make at home.

Travis:

Okay, great.

Teresa:

Well, not that I make things in courses. I usually put them all on the same plate. But I digress.

Travis:

You know what we mean, folks. Vegetable, meat, bread.

Teresa:

Uh, starch, you know, some sort of thing like that. Let's start with the dinner plate.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

That's easy, right? Dinner plate in front of the chair where you're going to sit.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Right?

Travis:

That makes, that makes sense. Why would it be somewhere else?

Teresa:

It wouldn't.

Travis:

Your dinner plate across the table, you got to find it.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Follow these riddles three.

Teresa:

All right. Next, two forks to the left of the plate.

Travis:

Okay. Gotcha.

Teresa:

Right. Yes. Two forks. Dinner fork on the inside. Salad fork on the outside.

Travis:

Because your salad comes out first and you work from the outside in. Yes?

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

And that makes sense because you want your forks on your left because you're starting with your forks in your left hand.

You're cutting with your right and you're either switching or you're keeping them in one place. So if you think, it makes total sense to me right now the way you describe it. You want your fork on your left hand side.

Teresa:

Exactly, um, and then there would be a napkin that you can either place to the left of the forks or underneath the forks.

Travis:

Okay, but not on the plate because I've seen that in, like, super formal, like, dinners where they folded it to look like a little elephant or something.

Teresa:

Um, I would say that if it's part of the decoration, sure. Why not on the plate? You're going to move it.

Travis:

Yeah. Move it. Please move it, folks.

Teresa:

Please move it. Don't put your peas on top of your napkin.

Travis:

Don't put your peas on your napkin. We're adults here, folks. It's 2016. Don't put your peas on your napkin.

Teresa:

Okay, so that's it for the left side informal.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Next on the right side, closest to the plate is the knife.

Travis:

Gotcha and, correct me if I'm wrong, I'm remembering this from cotillion. Maybe this is not a real thing but what I was told. You want the curve of the blade, the sharp side of the blade toward the plate?

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

You want—

Travis:

From downtown, swish.

Teresa:

[laughs] You want to face that towards you. It's, uh, rude and offensive to place it to the next person. Um, in ancient times, it might have meant that you...

Travis:

It was a thing?

Teresa:

Yeah, it was a thing.

Travis:

There was always a thing with knives and open handshakes or whatever—

Teresa:

Right. Exactly. Exactly.

Travis:

Um, and so where does your, like, drink go? Is that...

Teresa:

I'm going to get to that.

Travis:

Okay. Okay.

Teresa:

I'm going to get to that. Next is spoon. Spoon goes to the right of the knife, so on the outside there.

Travis:

Is that, like, if, like, there's soup or just in general it always goes knife, spoon?

Teresa:

That— In general, it always goes knife, spoon.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

And you may have several spoons. You don't often have several knives. Knives are usually cleared with the course that's taken away.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um.

Travis:

Because you don't really need, like, a salad knife. That would be weird.

Teresa:

Right, you can use that knife. Uh, if you need a knife for another course, generally, the knife you were using is placed on your plate and cleared and then the next knife comes with the next course.

Travis:

Because when I think of knives, especially in modern day, it's like, I think of, like, a butter knife. But this was probably a little bit more of, like, steak knife and then there was a butter knife specifically if there was a bread course, right?

Teresa:

Okay, so there is a difference between a dinner knife and a butter knife. Um, even though all dinner knives, these days, are rounded at the edge and you guys can thank Louis XIV for that.

Travis:

He was constantly stabbing himself in the face.

Teresa:

Uh, no, he didn't want anybody to stab anybody else at court.

Travis:

Oh, okay.

Teresa:

So—

Travis:

Was that happening a lot?

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Oh, old timey dudes, you're just having dinner. You're having a cheeseburger. Don't stab nobody.

Teresa:

So in 1669, he ordered all knives to be ground down to a point at the dinner table.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Unless it was brought out with a specific course.

Travis:

But it still— Like, what's the— So a rounded— So what's the difference between the butter knife and the dinner knife?

Teresa:

Well, the dinner knife is longer, um, and the butter knife is much shorter and sometimes has a kind of squarish tip at the end.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

To kind of slice through the butter a little easier.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Yeah and then you asked about glasses. So the drinking glass is placed above the knife and spoon, um, and depending upon how many glasses you're using at dinner, it can either go slightly on the right of the knife or directly above the knife.

Travis:

Okay, so, like, if you have, like, a water goblet and also a wine glass.

Teresa:

Correct.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

So the water goblet goes in closer to the knife and then the wine glass will go on the outside.

Travis:

Okay, great. So that's, like, the informal. What's, like, a slightly more formal version of this?

Teresa:

Slightly more formal would be an addition of a salad plate, which can be placed directly to the left of the fork. So we're kind of, like, spreading out a

little bit here. So the more courses you have, the more kind of, like, bigger table set you need.

Um, oftentimes, in restaurants these days, it's placed directly on top of the dinner plate, um, which if that's what they're doing, leave it there. But if you are setting your own table, you can put it to the left.

Travis:

Now let me ask you a question, just, uh, for my own edification. Uh, maybe some people listening don't know what a charger is. What's a charger, Teresa?

Teresa:

A charger is a decorative plate, um, that you don't eat off of.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

So what do you do with it?

Teresa:

So with a charger, also called a service plate, um, it's like an under plate for the first course. So, like, the appetizer or the salad.

Travis:

Uh-huh.

Teresa:

But traditionally, if you're, um, serving in courses, once those dishes are through, you remove the charger or the service plate and put the dinner plate down.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Let's go quickly through the other things that you would add to this informal setting, such as a bread and butter plate with a butter knife.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

That goes above the fork. Um, you can add in a desert spoon and fork, which go on the inside of your other spoons and fork.

Travis:

Because you work from the outside in.

Teresa:

Exactly, um, and then you could add your coffee or teacup and saucer. You can put that on the table setting before the course. But usually, everything is cleared away and that is given with the dessert course.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Salt and pepper and condiments, um, you can put those on the table, usually in small dishes.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

And then butter and olive oil can be served on, uh, communal plates or individual plates, deepening on how much room you have at the table.

Travis:

So is there, like, a super formal version?

Teresa:

Oh, always.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

You add more and more and more and more and they generally go in the same sorts of spots. You can have oyster forks. You can have dessert forks. You can have soup spoons. You can have iced tea spoons. You can have dessert spoons. I would say that in general, they all kind of go on their respective sides, except for dessert fork and spoon, which can be placed directly above the plate.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Um, so it seems to me like a good rule of thumb here would be if you were planning a dinner party and you want to, you know, do a multi-course meal, plan the menu and then work backwards from there to determine what utensils you'll need rather than just grabbing everything in your drawer and putting it out because that could get very confusing for your guests if there are utensils out there that they don't need.

Teresa:

Right and overwhelming. Generally, I would say that no more than three of anything on either side. So no more than three forks, no more than three spoons. All that kind of stuff, you can just clear them as you use them and replace them.

Travis:

Okay, great. Um, so you've answered most of the questions that people had, uh, from Twitter and Facebook already. Um, but let me ask you this one. This one's from Mike D on Twitter. Um, "What are the rules for eating while

standing, if any? Either sandwich at ballgame or cups and plates at an office birthday party? Thanks."

Teresa:

Um, well, rules for standing are, um, really determined by whatever food you're being served. If it's, uh, an appetizer sort of thing, what'll normally happen is people with trays or if it's served buffet style, you will have a small plate that can be held in the palm of one hand and you'll have a napkin handed to you or you pick up a napkin and you'll place that in your other hand for kind of wiping your fingers as you use these finger foods off the plate.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, and then if it's something that requires a small fork, I would say that still you need to make sure that you can balance that plate on your hand and eat with the fork, replacing the fork underneath that plate in your hand so that it doesn't fall off.

Travis:

Gotcha and let me, uh... This is a little Travis McElroy insert here, something I've learned over my 32 years. If there's, like, a buffet table or there is something like that at a party where it's like, you know, you get a tiny plate, don't fill your plate like you're afraid everyone behind you is going to eat all the rest of the food and you'll never eat again. It's not a good look.

Nobody appreciates it. No one's ever going to look at you taking all the pork slider sandwiches and think there's a smart guy. I like him. Everyone's going to say, "Why did he take all the pork slider sandwiches? He can barely hold the plate without dropping it."

Teresa:

Right and these days, they have some really great things that I know, um, people use at wine tasting and parties where, like, you can put— There's, like, a little hole in the plate and you can put your little wine glass in there

so you can actually eat and hold your wine glass and all this kind of stuff. Um, but in general, you would do food and drinks separately if you needed to hold everything.

Travis:

We're going to talk more about this, um, and be back to tell you more about hosting a dinner. But first, here's a word from another Maximum Fun show.

[theme music plays]

Justin:

Hi, everybody. I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Dr. Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Every Tuesday, we bring you Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine, a show about all the dumb, weird, terrible ways that we've tried to fix each other over the years. You know, some light summer listening.

Sydnee:

Maybe you'll want to hear about yogurt enemas or why we tried to eat mummies for a while or why drinking cholera diarrhea sounded like a good idea.

Justin:

That and so much more is waiting for you every Tuesday, right here on the Maximum Fun Network with Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine.

[ad break ends]

Travis:

Okay, now, Teresa, you were going to tell us about, like, your host, how to host, host duties, hosting, host.

Teresa:

[laughs] Yes. Yes, Travis. Yes, all those.

Travis:

What am host?

Teresa:

[laughs] Well, generally, these days, being a host just means kind of having everyone to your house, where as in— Where in the past, it used to mean a whole lot more.

Um, you could host a party at a restaurant. You could host the part at your, at your house or, um, and you had a lot more responsibilities than you do now.

So I'd like to go over some of the lesser known duties, um, one of which is the host is supposed to invite everyone to be seated. We are not supposed to sit until the host says so.

Travis:

I see.

Teresa:

Same thing with leaving the table. Uh, in days gone by, you would have to communicate to the host if you were allowed to be excused to leave the table and they got to tell you who could leave and who could stay.

Travis:

Uh, that was a question from Steph. Why do you have to ask to leave the table and that makes sense to me as far as why, that it's custom and I think probably the reason why it became custom was because when they were a lot more elaborately planned.

It was, like, okay, but, like, the other 26 people here are not ready to move into the drawing room to have brandy and cigars. So, like, you can't just go

in there by yourself. So, like, please don't just, like, get up from the table and ruin my party, you jerk.

Teresa:

Exactly and the host had so many more duties. Um, we were talking earlier about sitting husband and wife, uh, across the table instead of next to each other and that's because the host decided which way the conversation was going to go. Uh, that—

Travis:

Is that why he was, like, the head of the table, so you could kind of see everything?

Teresa:

Exactly. So if the host or hostess, usually the hostess was in charge of this sort of thing, um, turned her head to the right, that meant that everyone was to turn their head to the person to the right to speak.

Travis:

Really?

Teresa:

So the host would dictate how the conversation would go. She turned her head to the right. Then you would speak to that person in pairs and it was called the turn, where, later on in the dinner, when she turned her head to the left, that you could switch partners. You were not supposed to turn without the host turning. That way, nobody got left out of the conversation.

Travis:

Oh man, wouldn't you be embarrassed if you missed the turn and, like, your partner that you were talking to saw the turn and was, like, suddenly, you were just talking to the back of their head and, like, oh, I guess and then looked around and was like, "Oh, uh, ha ha," and then you were kicked out of society?

Teresa:

I don't think that would happen. Hopefully, your dinner mates, Travis, would be nice enough to include you in on the turn.

Travis:

You think. But, like, Lady Brackersham, she was not cool. She didn't like— If she didn't like you, you knew about it. Um, so I mentioned earlier someone asking about, uh, points of etiquette.

Um, @pizzaunofficial asked, "If you're confused about a point of etiquette, how appropriate is it to ask? Who should you be asking?"

Teresa:

There are so many references online that I think that, uh, if you did a little bit of research, you'd be able to get a general idea. But, um, if you were to ask your host, you would need to ask them in a private conversation instead of in front of everyone at the dinner table asking what you're supposed to do.

Um, if you're confused before you go to someone's house, you're— You know, just ask them what they want you to do before you get there.

Travis:

And I would bet that most normal, layman people are not running into, "Oh, my God. You picked up the wrong fork. You've embarrassed yourself in front of the Queen." That's probably not happening that much and if movies have given me any indication.

If you're confused, you should ask the kindly elderly gentleman next to you and he'll be like, "Oh, [laughs] don't pick up that fork," and you guys will have a good laugh and then it turns out, he's actually the Duke. Something like that. That's what usually happens in movies.

Teresa:

In general, yeah, I think—

Travis:

He's usually the Duke.

Teresa:

I think Pretty Woman went a little differently. But—

Travis:

I've never seen it. Was he the Duke?

Teresa:

I'm sorry. What?

Travis:

I've never seen it.

Teresa:

I'm sorry. What?

Travis:

I've never seen it. I've never seen it.

Teresa:

Please excuse Travis and I while we go watch Pretty Woman.

Travis:

Okay, we're going to pause the podcast.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Oh, my God. It was so good. We just finished it. It was great. I love when they snap the jewelry box.

Teresa:

So, um, in addition to hosting good conversation and telling people when they can and cannot leave the table, the hostess was in charge of starting the service...

Travis:

Uh-huh.

Teresa:

...of the meal. Um, generally, if you were serving family style, you would take the dish, offer the dish to your left and then pass to the right.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

And really, it doesn't quite matter how you pass it as long as there's no, like, traffic jams.

Travis:

I do like that move, though because it's kind of, like, the last shall be first kind of move where it's like, "Hey, person on my left, this is going to get to you last. Do you want some before it has to go all the way around the table."

Teresa:

Right. But no one would start eating until the host started eating. So she would pass a, say... Let's say, the bread. You would offer your bread to the left, serve yourself, pass it to the right and then everyone would fill up their plate and wait because the hostess would be passing all of these different dishes or in, um, more formal settings, like we saw when we talked about Downton Abbey, um, a servant would offer it between people going down the table.

Travis:

As he butled around the table.

Teresa:

Exactly. Butle that dish around the table, um, and no one touched their food until the hostess did.

Travis:

Which in general, I will say is not a bad holdover. I think there's something about that. There's probably questions we'll deal with that later about how that still applies to the modern day.

But I do feel like there's just something inherently rude about eating your food before anyone else has their food. Like, you know? It just— I feel like it takes away from the communal experience.

Teresa:

Just like anything, there are exceptions and we'll cover those.

Travis:

Right, we'll get to them. Um, so this is a little bit more towards the informal side because I doubt they dealt with this on Downton Abbey. But Megan asked on Facebook if you make dinner, should someone else clean the dishes?"

Teresa:

Hm, you're going to have to work that out with the people with you.

Travis:

Right. Yeah, that seems like a very— I will say that in our house, if you make dinner, you clean the dishes.

Teresa:

Right because when one of us dirties every dish in the kitchen...

Travis:

Which is me.

Teresa:

...I don't want to have to be responsible for cleaning them all. [laughs]

Travis:

I'm not very good at conserving dishes. I'll use a separate plate for everything. I don't like when I'm prepping for stuff to touch and you know what? I'm not embarrassed. I don't care who knows it. I will use every plate in the kitchen.

Teresa:

So that's one of things that you want to kind of work out beforehand because nobody wants a fight at the end of the table.

Travis:

I feel like my personal advice is that doing your own dishes makes a lot of sense so you don't have to deal with that, like, "Why did you use this measuring cup?"

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Like, you just do it. Anyways, that's my personal...

Teresa:

But I mean, I know friends who, one person almost always does the cooking instead of trading off and on.

Travis:

Hm.

Teresa:

Um, and so they have offered if their significant other is always doing the cooking, to always do the cleaning and that's how you, you know, do your division of labor the way that suits you.

Travis:

I will say if you are a guest at someone's home and it's, like, an informal thing where it's, like, a one on one, like your best friend invited you over for dinner, it is nice to offer to help with the dishes rather than just, like, sit there and watch your host who made the dinner clean everything while you sit there. Like, it's nice to say, like, "Here, let me carry my dish and rinse my dish. Oh, where does this go?" That kind of thing.

Teresa:

Exactly and I usually offer. But I don't push it. In our society, it's a little different from, say, like, um, as Griffin McElroy's fond of saying, the Japanese style, where the social norm is to ask and refuse and ask and

refuse. In our society, basically, if someone says, "No, I've got it," they pretty much mean it.

Travis:

Gotcha. So that's a lot about, like, being the host. What if you're, like, just the diner? What if you're just the person there? How does that change and how does it change if you're at someone's home or you mentioned, like, hosting something at a restaurant? Like, how does it— How does it— What are your duties as the guest?

Teresa:

Your duty as the guest is to be—

Travis:

Duty. [laughs]

Teresa:

Travis. Is to be gracious and consider the host's feelings. So for example, if there's something on the table that you don't really like, you don't really eat and it's being served family style, um, in general, you're supposed to take about a spoonful and put it on your plate, even if you're not going to eat it.

Travis:

That makes sense to me.

Teresa:

Uh, it's called the no thank you portion.

Travis:

Huh.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

I like when things have names.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

That's— As I like when somebody took the time to coin a phrase to be like, "This is called the no thank you portion." It also says to me, I think that there's a... It— That makes a lot of sense to me because I feel like there's a big difference between refusing outright.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Versus, like, I will try a bite of this or I will, you know, metaphorically try a bite of this.

Teresa:

Right and there's a difference if you're, if you are allergic to something.

Travis:

Please don't eat something if you're allergic to it.

Teresa:

Please don't put that on your plate. If you are allergic to something, you are welcome to skip it. But it is a point of fact that you should let your host know so that the next time they don't serve that again.

Travis:

Now, does that include being, like, vegan or vegetarian?

Teresa:

Um, those sort of dietary restrictions that are more often voluntary, you should communicate beforehand. With an invitation that you respond to or someone who you're getting to know and would know you, you should let them know ahead of time so that they can prepare foods that you can eat.

Travis:

I will say that, uh, in this day and age, as we... Especially, like, when we moved to Los Angeles, we were making new friends, that when we invite

people over for dinner, it is a, like, what time can you come is question number one and question number two is do you have any dietary restrictions?

Teresa:

Exactly because as a host, I want people to eat the food I make and if someone has a restriction that they haven't told me about, I feel really bad. I don't want that person to go hungry. In fact, as a diner, you're supposed to leave almost a half of a spoonful of whatever it is on your plate so that your host knows you've had enough to eat.

Travis:

Really?

Teresa:

Yeah. That's what Emily Post says and in general, I think that she's right as a host. I would feel like everyone, if they left a little on their plate, was full. But I think that it really, in my personal opinion, I think that it really depends on your relationship with the person that you're with, um, because if you're not full, I want you to be full.

I want you to eat seconds. I want you to eat more. I want you to finish what's on your plate if that is something that we are accustomed to and I know that, um, during the Depression, like, my grandmother, for instance, uh, or during rationing, they were taught to finish everything that's on your plate.

Travis:

The Clean Plate Club was much more, uh, enforced during those days, um, and I'll say this when we talk about the idea of dietary restrictions, um, if you are...

So, say a friend invites you to a party and I just know this from experience from being a host and from living in the world, if you are going to bring a date, right? Or you're given a plus one and your plus one has dietary restrictions, communicate that to your host.

Don't just, like, show up with your date and have your date suddenly realize, like, "Oh, I can't eat any of this." It's, one, makes you look real bad, makes your host look real bad and can ruin an evening. So if you're the go between, let your host know.

Teresa:

Yeah, it's about being considerate and in general, um, I would say nowadays, ignoring a lot of this older sort of etiquette, just take into account and consider what's going on that evening.

Travis:

Be a little thoughtful.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Just for, like, five seconds. Teresa, can I ask you the biggest, most commonly asked question we got in preparing for this episode?

Teresa:

What is it?

Travis:

Elbows on the table.

Teresa:

Ooh.

Travis:

This is a thing that I know I struggle with constantly. I am a big man with big elbows and I have a, uh, more than once been told that I have monkey arms. They're very long and they tend to reach out to places. I get that. I have a real problem with elbows on the table. Why is this a thing? Why is it a problem? Should I really worry about it?

Teresa:

So here's the deal. Remember how we talked about how, um, you would put three and four forks on the table and three and four spoons and you had different plates and different glasses and all that kind of stuff? Not a lot of room for elbows. If you put your elbows on the table, you were crowding the other diners in addition to all of your accoutrement.

Travis:

But does that still apply now if you've only got, like, a knife and a fork and you're having dinner with one other person?

Teresa:

Well, I would like you to think about when you put your elbows on the table, you're basically leaning into the table and excluding people from the experience.

So keep your elbows off the table during the dinner. Um, my general rule is if there's food on the table, you're still eating. That's dinner. So don't put your elbows on the table. But one—

Travis:

Especially if you're drinking.

Teresa:

Especially.

Travis:

Oh, if you're drinking, it's so dangerous to have your arms just flying akimbo all over the table.

Teresa:

Right. But once the table has been cleared or if that, you're at a bar or it's one of those, like, tiny little café tables, if it is natural to you and it aids in conversation, why not? If it takes away from conversation, you probably should keep them off.

Travis:

Speaking of being out to dinner, how does it change if you're, like, out at a restaurant versus being at home?

Teresa:

I mean, I think that when you're at home, things are a lot less formal and when you're out at a restaurant, um, there needs to be some sort of, like, line that you draw to make it different. So I would say out at a restaurant, unless it is a standing table, like at a bar, keep them off.

Travis:

Um, I will say this. I've worked in the food service industry and let me give everybody a little tip from me to you. If you're at a place with waitstaff and a service and they come to you and you're there, especially during a super busy time, where there's, like, a line out the door and an hour and a half long wait, we want you to chat.

We want you to be friendly and have a good time with your friends. Please take a minute to figure out what you want to eat before we come back for, like, a third time or a fifth time and order your food and then take all the time you want to, like, eat it and have your conversation and all that. But start the conversation after you've picked what you want to eat.

Teresa:

Now, um, as a diner, you can signal to your waitstaff.

Travis:

I know this one. You go, "Waiter!"

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

No. No.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

I was talking—

Travis:

I missed on that one.

Teresa:

I was talking about—

Travis:

That was the opposite of a swish.

Teresa:

I was talking about a signal to order. Um, you can close your menu.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

It shows that you know what you like. You're no longer perusing and if you do need to get the attention of waitstaff across the table, uh, I mean, across the room, um, you may point one finger up, lift your elbow so that your finger is at the same level as your head and wait.

Travis:

So no snapping.

Teresa:

No snapping.

Travis:

No calling out.

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

No waving your arms. Don't start a small signal fire.

Teresa:

Nope. None of that.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

None of that and it's just your finger at your head and this is a cue that probably more finer restaurants have. Um, but in general, you waiter is going to come to you once your menu is closed.

Travis:

Tell me your thoughts on burping.

Teresa:

My thoughts on burping are if you have a condition and you must burp, you should shield it from your other diners.

Travis:

I think in, uh— I have a thing called dyspepsia, which basically gives me burps when I eat. Um, here's the thing, folks. There's a big difference between quietly burping behind your napkin or behind your hands and, like, T-rexing it up and, like, opening your mouth and going like, "Agh."

Like, don't celebrate it. Don't draw attention to yourself. Like, you wouldn't, like, sneeze all over the table without covering your mouth. You wouldn't cough all over the table without covering your mouth.

Teresa:

And if you can help it, you should probably leave the table, um, especially to blow your nose or to, uh, if you're having a coughing fit, please, if you're choking, really choking, don't leave the table. Get somebody to help you.

But if you can... If you know that it's coming, you should leave the table. It's a little— It's difficult for other diners to continue their conversation and, you know, it's kind of gross, a little bit.

But if you have a condition, um, just hide it. Hide it as much as you can. That, uh, hide it behind your napkin, behind your hand. Keep your mouth closed. Turn your head away from everyone. Um, if you have to burp and you can't stop it, that's the best thing to do. If you need to burp and you can stop it, you should excuse yourself for a minute.

Travis:

All right, well, we're running a little bit long. So I'm going to rapid-fire fire some questions at you and get your opinion in, like, two sentences.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

Are you ready?

Teresa:

I'm ready.

Travis:

Okay. This is from Kate. "In the case of communal plates of food, is it rude to take the last piece/bite?"

Teresa:

No. If you're hungry, take it. If there are several parties interested in it, offer to share.

Travis:

Great. This is from Erica. "What do you do if you need to spit something out? Gristle, bone, etc. Is it a bummer to leave it in your napkin?"

Teresa:

Yes, it is a bummer to leave it in your napkin because it's hidden from the person cleaning it up and it might fall on the floor or fall on them or it's gross. So discreetly remove it with your fingers and place it on the edge of your plate.

Travis:

This is from Cory on Twitter. "Is ducking your head towards or over the plate a super rude thing? I can't seem to break myself of the habit."

Teresa:

Super rude? Probably no, as long as you're not shoveling it into your mouth, like it's going to get taken away from you.

Travis:

This was the problem I used to have, um, and my justification used to be, I'm worried about the food, like, falling off the utensil. If that's the case, you're taking too big a bite. Take a smaller bite and it's way less likely to fall off the utensil and then you don't have to shovel it into your face.

This is from Alyssa, a very pertinent question to me. "If no one else is ordering alcohol, is it rude to order something for yourself? For example, a mimosa at brunch or a beer at dinner."

Teresa:

Um, this is kind of a loaded question. I would say is it rude for you to imbibe? No, it's not. Keep it to one though. If no one else is drinking, you don't want to be the drunk friend who gets all sloppy. Just one will be enough to satiate your need.

Um, and if you are worried about splitting checks and what not, um, I would say that if you... If you're the only one drinking, you should offer more money for splitting the check if it's not individual.

Travis:

Uh, so before we wrap up, I want to give kind of— I don't know that this is necessarily cynical, so much as just kind of a realistic view of it. I have this theory that I've developed as we were talking about this and as we've been

preparing for this episode which is we've taken a lot of the ritual out of eating.

We've taken a lot of the performance out of eating and when we talk about stuff like shoveling food into your mouth and, you know, how to hold utensils and which utensil, there used to be so much more etiquette to it that we ate a lot slower and we not only were more mindful of the food we were eating because we were really present in the moment and thinking about our appearance and how it appeared to other people.

We were also more present in the moment of communing with other people and now I feel like it's— We eat so quickly that we eat way more than we need to and we don't realize that we're full 'til, like, way after the fact because we ate so quickly whereas back in the day, when you were, like, mid-conversation and not talking with your mouth full and all that stuff that you were a lot more present and probably ate a lot less food.

So my bet would be and this is just a theory, but my theory is that if you're more present and you're eating more mindfully, you're way less likely to overeat and stuff yourself and you're going to run into a lot less problems, for example, burping and indigestion and that kind of thing because you're not just gulping it down.

Teresa:

I think that's a really interesting opinion and observation and I think that it— Different strokes for different folks. But that makes a lot of sense to me. I don't know if, um, correlation equals causation. But it's worth a thought.

Travis:

At the very least, if you're eating with someone, enjoy being in that moment with them and don't just take eating as putting fuel in your body to move on to the next thing because it can be a very nice moment that I enjoy sharing with my wife every evening.

Teresa:

Aw. I enjoy sharing my meals with you too, dear.

Travis:

Now it's time for thank you notes. We want to thank you for listening and we want to thank Max Fun for hosting our show. We're so happy to have launched. We're so happy that you're finally listening to this. We're also happy that we got to launch, uh, alongside Still Buffering, hosted by Sydnee McElroy and Rileigh Smirl, two of our favorite people in the world.

If you haven't checked it out yet, check it out. It's all about teen issues. Rileigh is the teen. Sydnee was a teen. Um, you know, stuff that they're dealing with and stuff that maybe people of more of our generation used to deal with. It's on MaximumFun.org. Go check it out. Check out all the other amazing Maximum Fun shows. They're all incredible and we're really excited to be a part of the network.

Um, thank you for telling a friend. We're a brand-new show. We really want to get the word out and the only way for us to grow is for you to share us with friends and it's very polite to share. Um, thank you for going on iTunes and rating and reviewing and subscribing.

It means a lot to us, helps us move up the charts and helps get us noticed by, um, some new listeners and we also want to thank-say thank you to Kayla Wasil, who designed our amazing logo. Check her out on Twitter @kaylamwasil, K-A-Y-L-A-M-W-A-S-I-L.

Uh, we also want to say thank you to Brent Black for our theme music. He's a good friend of mine. He should become a good friend of yours. Go follow him on Twitter @Brentalfloss and maybe pay him to make some music for you.

Teresa:

And I would like to send out a thank you note for everyone who asked us questions on Twitter and Facebook and emailed us. It was really great to get such a great response and we love that these groups are so active.

Travis:

Already! We haven't even put up an episode of this point. People are already very active. Uh, you can tweet at us @shmatterscast, um, or you can join our Facebook group. Just search for Shmatters or you can email us, uh, shmatterscast@gmail.com and if you would like to find our Twitter account and our Facebook group and all the other McElroy shows, you can go to McElroyShows.com and find links to everything there.

Um, next up, our next topic is going to be conversation and conversation etiquette. So if you have any questions, email us, tweet at us, all the things we just mentioned. So be sure to join us again next time.

Teresa:

No RSVP required.

Travis:

You've been listening to Shmatters.

Teresa:

Manners, Shmatters. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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