

Shmanners 384: Ornaments

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[theme music plays]

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

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

Travis: You're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: Or should you say reindeer? [singing] It's beginning to look a lot like the holidays.

Teresa: Jing-jingle-jingle-jingle-jingle bells.

Travis: Is that where that goes? Is that in that song?

Teresa: No, I was just trying to—

Travis: You're remixing?

Teresa: I'm jazzing it up with you.

Travis: You were jazzing it up? You feel that my song...

Teresa: With you!

Travis: ... wasn't jazzy enough?

Teresa: Jazzing it with you.

Travis: It felt like you were jazzing against me. Are you jazzing with me or against me?

Teresa: Always with—

Travis: Jazz is about the jingle bells you don't jingle.

Teresa: What?

Travis: I don't know. Listen, last night, Teresa and I were on a date. Yeah, that's right, we're still in love. And, uh, we are also parents, though. So it's like, every Tuesday...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... the most romantic day of the week. And, uh, we went to this place in town called Overlook Lodge, but they've redecorated, they've re-themed it for the—

Teresa: It's a pop-up miracle event.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: It's an outside company that comes in.

Travis: Yes, and then something like 10% of it goes to charity and stuff, but it was Christmas themed, right? So it's like all these Christmas themed drinks, and they play Christmas movies, and Christmas music, and Christmas decorations everywhere. And ding-dang it, if it didn't put me in the ding-dang spirit for the holidays.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And— The weird thing though, is that people listening to this, it will be the day after Thanksgiving, which is traditionally when I allow Christmas into my heart.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Right when it's like time to take down the fall decorations, put up the Christmas decorations. But we're recording it the day before Thanksgiving, and I'm battling that inner turmoil of like, "yes, but we haven't finished fall yet, fall's done after Thanksgiving." But I'm allowing Christmas into my heart for this episode.

Teresa: Just sneak it in the back. The back door.

Travis: I'm gonna hide Christmas in my garage for this episode to talk about ornaments.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Christ-a-mas orna— Holiday ornaments.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: We don't have to limit it. We'll probably say Christmas a lot because I'm 40 years old and I've only ever put up Christmas ornaments. But if you put up ornaments, nondenominational, Hanukkah. Uh... Kwanzaa.

Teresa: [overlapping] I know people who have all-holiday tree. They put up Halloween decorations on the tree. You can put up Valentine's Day decorations on the tree. You can put general spring things on the tree.

Travis: Do you know... I don't think you're doing it on purpose, but I think just years of Linda Belcher in your head...

Teresa: [laughs] [imitating Linda Belcher] Aw, look at the tree!

Travis: You're saying it like you have like, a New Jersey accent.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I love it very, very much. I don't think I could, uh, deal with that.

Teresa: No, you don't wanna have a holiday tree?

Travis: I love the decoration for Christmas, right? 'Cause it's attached to it. But it is an impractical— It takes up so much space...

Teresa: Yeah, it does.

Travis: ... in the room and like, I already— There are times where it's like, I wish I could shrink this couch down just for a little bit and then throw it back when I need it.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: And so the idea of like, taking up that much space for like, I don't know, a spring tree? It's, like, there are trees outside. That's the whole point of spring. They're outside, you can go see them now. Anywho. That's not what we're talking about.

Teresa: That's not it.

Travis: We're talking about holiday decorations, but specifically ornaments.

Teresa: Yes, specifically ornaments, because we've covered holiday villages, lights, decorations in general, I think, um, Christmas trees themselves, I think, but ornaments specifically, I don't think we've covered until today.

Travis: And the thing about ornaments is they're ornamental.

Teresa: They are, indeed.

Travis: Let's begin there.

Teresa: [laughs] So, the practice of bringing evergreen boughs or even full trees into the home during the winter months is a tradition that dates back thousands of years.

Travis: Thousands? Thousands.

Teresa: It is a prime example of one of the recurring themes here on Shmanners.

Travis: The great Christian rebrand.

Teresa: That's right, the great Christian rebrand. So almost all the traditions that we associate with Christianity were actually pagan traditions first.

Travis: Yeah. Cause it's all related— I think we talked, if we haven't, we definitely talked about it in the Christmas tree episode.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: But we talked about solstice before, where this was like, the, hey, we're about to head into winter, so this is our chance to like, hey, thanks for a great harvest. Let's all stay warm and safe together. We're all looking out for each other. It was very much a, this is our last big feast before times get tight.

Teresa: Yes. In Old Germanic and Norse mythology, evergreen trees were decorated with tiny carvings of gods and food offerings to entice tree spirits to return and bring spring back with them.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And so they are the ones that we think started the ornaments specifically, although decorating trees with berries and twigs and pine cones and all that kind of stuff...

Travis: Squirrels were doing that long before us. Squirrels are really the first Christmas tree decorators when you think about it.

Teresa: Oh, really?

Travis: You've seen that Chip and Dale? And Mickey chops down their house and brings it inside and oh, Pluto's so mad. Ugh.

Teresa: I have seen that.

Travis: Oh, Pluto's so mad. And in the end, Mickey's like, hey, Pluto, it's Christmas. And I'm like, hey, Mickey, there's two chipmunks in your house. You should be freaking out. You should call animal control.

Teresa: No, they're cool. They're cool.

Travis: You're only saying that because you know they're Chip and Dale. If today I set up our Christmas tree, and this would be wild, because it's artificial, but if I set up our Christmas tree and there were two chipmunks living in it, you wouldn't look at Buttercup and Lily and be like, "hey guys, you're being irrational."

Teresa: Well, because they're actual animals, whereas Pluto is a cartoon.

Travis: Listen, I understand the words that you're saying...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... but I choose not to understand the meaning behind them.

Teresa: Let's shine a spotlight for our purposes on 16th century Germany.

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: One legend around this time...

Travis: John Legend.

Teresa: Ha-ha, no, no, stay with me, babe.

Travis: Okay, I'm trying.

Teresa: Is Martin Luther.

Travis: Oh. When he nailed the thing onto a Christmas tree and that was the first decoration.

Teresa: No, that's not what happened.

Travis: No?

Teresa: No. Specifically this time, Martin Luther, not that time. But this time, Martin Luther...

Travis: Is it a different Martin Luther?

Teresa: ... was walking home. No, it's the same one.

Travis: Okay, I see, okay.

Teresa: He was walking home one winter evening and the stars and the sky inspired him to put gold and silver ornaments on the tree that I guess he was already decorating?

Travis: That doesn't sound— I don't know a lot about Martin Luther, but the little bit I do know, it doesn't seem like he was like, "you know what? I like extravagance."

Teresa: Mm. Another legend is that his wife, Katie, made paper roses and placed them in their windows on Christmas Eve. Apparently Martin saw it and loved it so much that he cut down a small fir tree and brought it inside so she could decorate it with her creations.

Travis: Okay, I'll give you that one.

Teresa: Because if your wife makes something pretty, you got to put it on a tree, that's the law.

Travis: Yeah, that's true.

Teresa: These were originally known—

Travis: Can you imagine if that's what happened? And he was like, "oh, those are beautiful flowers. Hold on." And he came back and he dragged a tree in the house and his wife was like, "what are you doing?" And he's like,

"I saw the roses and I thought—"

"You thought what?" Why was your— Hey Martin, your logical conclusion was, "You know what she's gonna want? For me to drag a tree in the house."

Teresa: Well, so churches at this time were already decorating what they called paradise trees...

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: ... for the Christmas place. Because, you know, these first ornaments would have been, like, apples and nuts and berries and candles and stuff because the apple in particular stands out as, um, it used to be, in medieval Germany, Adam and Eve were also celebrated on Christmas Eve. It made a good kind of, like, pairing.

Travis: Oh, so Christmas Eve.

Teresa: No.

Travis: And the next day is Christmas Adam.

Teresa: No.

Travis: No.

Teresa: Good try though.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I like it, but not what happened. Um...

Travis: It's— I—

Teresa: What?

Travis: I think being raised Southern Baptist, the idea of celebrating Adam

and Eve is weird to me.

Teresa: Well, so here's the deal, right? It made a good kind of pairing, like, an antithesis of here's Adam and Eve original sin, right, and then on Christmas...

Travis: Ohh.

Teresa: ... the dude who's supposed to take the sin away is born, right? It's like a yin yang kind of thing.

Travis: I guess. Okay. Sure.

Teresa: A balance.

Travis: No, I get it.

Teresa: It brings balance to the universe.

Travis: To the force. Yeah.

Teresa: Yes. So then you would have your little Christmas play that would be paired with, so you would do like the Adam and Eve story and then you would do the Christ birth story and this tree could be moved and used in both stories, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: You had the apples on it.

Travis: Economical.

Teresa: Yeah, absolutely. And so this is why, quick tidbit, a lot of ornaments are apples, right? A lot of people have apple ornaments on their trees.

Travis: Is that why?

Teresa: That is one reason.

Travis: 'Cause growing up, my mom had a lot of apples on the tree, but I just always, well, because I'm confident it was, I was there, that it was because my mom did like a very like country living, southern home kind of decoration where there was a lot of like little ornament sheet pans with little Christmas cookies on them and little apples and things with apples on them. And it was very like, you know, gingham and...

Teresa: Yeah. But I mean, if it's—

Travis: I don't think my mom was thinking like, "just like those 16th century Germans did it."

Teresa: Well, but I mean, the apples were available in the store to buy.

Travis: True.

Teresa: Probably because the German, like, tradition of the apples on the tree.

Travis: Well, that does make sense too, because I've never really thought about it, but it's not like, you know, Christmas. Christmas tree, apples, like wait, hold on.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: You skipped— Shouldn't it be, like, pine cones and stuff? Like, no, you know how apples grow on fir trees? They don't.

Teresa: They don't.

Travis: That's not how that works at all. And it's also like, apple is very fall to me. It's a very fall kind of fruit. There's not a lot of, like, Christmas things that I associate with apples. Don't get me wrong, I'm sure apple ciders and all that stuff, that's fine. But even apple cider, I would say is a fall thing.

Teresa: Yeah, I know, right?

Travis: I've never thought about it before.

Teresa: We always had one or two apples on our tree. And I mean. The tradition of it was, you know, not, I wasn't aware of it, but we had them.

Travis: Alright.

Teresa: So it came from somewhere and maybe came from there. Not everyone, as always, is a fan of the paradise trees. And in particular, the Catholic Church. I mean, Martin Luther wasn't, you know, he did his own divulging from the Catholic Church.

Travis: Yeah, they didn't get— Diverging.

Teresa: Diverging, yeah.

Travis: Yes, yes. But they weren't fans of each other to begin, they were frenemies, I think.

Teresa: Indeed, yeah, yeah. So in the 15th century, they took their official stance against the Adam and Eve day and they banned mystery plays across the board. But people still love to decorate evergreen trees.

Travis: We've talked about this before, by the way, but just a reminder, as long as we're talking about the great Christian rebrand, also to point out the only people who have ever been against Christmas are Christians.

It's the only time when we talk about the war on Christmas and people trying to outlaw Christmas and saying, "you can't do that thing for Christmas." The only time historically that that's ever really happened has been some church organization saying, "you know what, we've decided this isn't okay. You can't celebrate Christmas that way." It's never the other way around.

Teresa: It definitely happened in the United States, right? The Puritans.

Travis: Yeah. Puritans outlawed Christmas in like the 1700s or something.

Teresa: Way before that.

Travis: Yeah, 1600s?

Teresa: We have a whole show on it.

Travis: It's true.

Teresa: Uh, we go through a Puritan Christmas Day.

Travis: Oh my gosh.

Teresa: It's a lot like other days.

Travis: It's pretty drab.

Teresa: Anyway, so the evergreen tree being decorated still persisted and you know, like, a lot of stuff that the Catholic Church says is bad spread even faster, really.

Travis: Yeah. They were the original Streisand effect. As soon as they're, like, "You can't do it," everyone's, like, "Oh, then I'm going to now."

Teresa: "Watch me do it." And it really exploded in the US when German-born settlers immigrated during the 17 and 1800s, and they brought the Christmas tree firmly in their grasp with them. And then this is when it got fancy because in the 1800s, a glass blower is going to blow the ornament game out of the water.

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

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

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Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You should go back and listen again, then listen one more time, and then maybe a fourth time just for good measure. Maybe just put this ad on a loop. You're welcome. Podia has a website builder. They can host and sell online courses or digital downloads. They can distribute your email marketing and run your online community.

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Teresa: [laughs]

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[ad break ends]

Travis: Okay, I'm not gonna lie. When you were talking about the 1800s and things getting fancy, I thought we were about to bring out Victoria and Albert.

Teresa: Oh no, we still will.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: We still will.

Travis: So people were blowing glass.

Teresa: But, so, in the mid-1800s, a German glass blower named Hans Greiner found himself in the middle of a dilemma.

Travis: Too much glass. He had too much glass. What do I do with all his glass?

Teresa: No, no, no.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: The story is, he was unable to afford apples to decorate his Christmas tree. I guess they were pretty spendy, but...

Travis: So, okay, I know where this story's going. I can see a beat ahead and he was like, apples, too expensive. I'll make glass apples, that'll be cheaper.

Teresa: Maybe he had the leftover materials in order to make them.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: He began glowing glass ornaments by hand, recreating fruit as delicate baubles. And then these could be like, if you look at it today, there's a lot of strings or garlands of these little glass beads or they look almost like

marbles. It's really cool. And so these became the first official Christmas ornament because it's not stuff you found outside and, like, food and, like, candles.

Travis: And it's hypothetically something that you're like, I'm gonna use it this year and very carefully put it away and use it again next year, which to me is like, pretty pivotal Christmas ornament criteria.

Teresa: Yes, these are referred to as glasschmuck, which is roughly translated to glass jewelry.

Travis: Ooh.

Teresa: So he implemented a unique hand blown process combined with special glass molds for the shapes and filled the inside with mercury or lead to make them kind of shimmery.

Travis: Oh no.

Teresa: And later, he would achieve the same effect using a special compound of silver nitrate and sugar water.

Travis: I don't know if that's better.

Teresa: I mean, it is.

Travis: If only glitter had existed.

Teresa: It is a little better than mercury and lead.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Definitely.

Travis: Just to think about though, if you have small children in the house and you're like, "I'm gonna make something look like food and fill it with silver nitrate or lead or mercury."

Teresa: So mercury and lead, I think lead especially could leach out. I don't know what the porous properties of glass are. But mercury tends to stay kind of like, solidy, you know, that quicksilvery...

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: ... inside of glass, so as long as it didn't break, right? But then quicksilver, I don't think has any kind of like, no—

Travis: Silver nitrate.

Teresa: Silver nitrate, I was talking about quicksilver. Silver nitrate, I don't think has any kind of like leaching abilities.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So as long as it stayed together, the kids are all right.

Travis: That's a big ask though, you know? Anyways.

Teresa: Anyway, they are gorgeous. And so, of course, people started placing orders and local businesses started stocking his ornaments. And not long after, they began to be exported. Hans' sons and grandsons, Ernst, Otto, Willy, and Kurt.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Very German, I love it.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, carried on the Christmas ornament tradition. And in fact, Hans' sons and grandsons were the first ones to create those glass marbles and so, you know, the town where they lived in Germany, still known for these delightful Christmas ornaments. And if you want to take a look, you should Google Lauscha, Lauscha? Yeah.

Travis: Probably spell it.

Teresa: L-A-U-S-C-H-A.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It's beautiful. They have a big Christmas market.

Travis: I love a Christmas town.

Teresa: I sure do too.

Travis: I like to go there and then I run into the boy that I used to kind of have a crush on in high school. And now he's a weatherman for the local town and he's predicting, what? Snow on Christmas, but we haven't had snow here in over 25 years.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I've hardened my heart because I'm an important business lady. And then it turns out it does snow Christmas and we dance together on the ice and we fall in love. And I move back to my Christmas town. Coming this winter on the Travis channel. Yes.

Teresa: Which is directly opposed to the Hallmark channel, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Yeah. All of mine are weather based.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: All of them are weather based.

Teresa: Got it. So then in the 1870s, these ornaments found their way to Britain and right into the hands of our Queen.

Travis: Beyoncé.

Teresa: Queen Victoria. No— [laughs] You really got me.

Travis: Queen Victoria.

Teresa: And so here we have it. I don't know if it's a Shmammers first, but it definitely is today. We have the great Christian rebrand and we have Queen Victoria in the same episode. I think we get a prize.

Travis: Yeah, bingo cards, checking them off left and right.

Teresa: That's right. Anyway, Queen Victoria was popularizing the Christmas tree for her beloved Albert, right, who is German. And so she was like, "let's get that German stuff in here. Let's do all that fun, cool stuff."

Travis: Also though, it fits in with a Victorian pattern of outlets, right? Of like, we've talked before about people have this image in their head of, like, all the Victorians were really uptight and they were really pious and all this stuff.

And while a lot of the aesthetic was in darker colors and maybe more conservative dress, they loved a party, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: They loved an excuse.

Teresa: Christmas was definitely the big excuse to party.

Travis: They loved an excuse. to behave badly and act out and everything and say like, "Well, it wasn't me. It was because of the time."

Teresa: "It's Christmas!"

Travis: And so the opportunity to be like, let's decorate things brightly. Let's put decorations everywhere. And especially at a time where like, as we talk about maximalism becoming a thing, the idea of like not an inch, you know, is undecorated.

It makes complete sense. Why not only is Victoria like, "oh, I'm doing this for Albert," but why it would catch on so quickly is an excuse to decorate and an excuse to like fill your house with more stuff.

Teresa: Absolutely. It was so popular. You've probably seen it. We've all seen it, that picture in the newspaper of her and Albert around the Christmas tree and all of the childrens. It's beautiful. It was so popular that it even made its way back to the US and Christmas was back on in a big way.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um...

Travis: Have you ever seen the decorations, I've only ever seen them in Christmas Carol adaptations, but where it's like live candles in a tree, but it's like live candles in a bowl with like some kind of liquid around it?

Teresa: Do you remember we've talked about this?

Travis: Have we?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You and me or you and me and the audience?

Teresa: You and me and the audience.

Travis: Okay, we've all three talked about this?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: We've talked about it together, the candles on the tree.

Travis: Why would somebody do that?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I understand that they didn't fully understand how germs work, they didn't understand how death worked, but they knew how fire worked, right?

Teresa: They also— Yeah, but they didn't do it for all the times. It was lit very specifically and then put out very quickly.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Anyway, and when it got to America, they went, "How can we make money on this?"

Travis: Sure, hey listen, I've held my tongue, but back when you were talking about Hans and him being like, "I can't afford apples, so I'll make—" He was thinking, "I could sell the crap out of this."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Like, there's no way Hans wasn't also in it for money. When you make things, when you make goods and services, you wanna sell them to people. So check out Podia to sell your— Okay.

Teresa: Okay, all right.

Travis: What I'm saying is like, we might be more cutthroat about it here in America. I think we're just more blatant about it.

Teresa: Maybe that's it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: In the 1890s, Woolworth's department store was a retail giant looking to capitalize on the Christmas season. One executive probably said something like, "Hmm, people like shiny stuff, right?"

Travis: And he probably said exactly that.

Teresa: Probably.

Travis: Yeah. "People are like ravens and magpies and stuff. Ho, ho, ho."

Teresa: And so they started importing these beautiful German glass ornaments, which paid off, like, to the tune of \$25 million.

Travis: And that was, like, in early 1900s money.

Teresa: 1890s money.

Travis: 1890s money?

Teresa: So..

Travis: That's probably, like, 500 million.

Teresa: \$845 million today.

Travis: Whoa.

Teresa: To give our audience some perspective, do you remember when Sony launched the PS2 in 2000?

Travis: I do.

Teresa: It's hailed as one of the bestselling game consoles of all time and they made \$155 million. Yeah.

Travis: Wow.

Teresa: So a lot. Are you wrapping your head around that right now?

Travis: No, I'm mostly just thinking like, I thought they sold more PS2s.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay. And of course, everyone else wanted in on the action. Other countries, Japan, Poland, Eastern Europe, all these other countries started making and exporting decorations as well. And here comes another little Christmas giant.

Travis: Macy's.

Teresa: Hallmark.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: In 1973, Hallmark Cards began manufacturing their iconic Christmas ornaments. The first set is 18 ornaments, including six of the traditional glass balls.

Travis: It's sold, okay— It's important, I looked it up.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: The PlayStation 2 sold 155 million units worldwide.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: Not \$155 million. I was like, there's no way that's true. But still, it's a lot for ornaments.

Teresa: It's a lot.

Travis: Baby, it's a lot for ornaments. I agree.

Teresa: Sorry.

Travis: It's okay. That's why I was like, I can't believe that that's true. Okay. It's the most units. Still, still, hey, I love you. Okay. So, anyhow.

Teresa: Anyway. Hallmark.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: The idea that the Hallmark keepsake ornament collection would be dated and available for just one year.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: So you could sell more every year.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: By 1998, 11 million American households had collected Hallmark ornaments and 250,000 people were members of the Keepsake Ornament Collectors Club.

Travis: What year was this?

Teresa: 1998.

Travis: Okay, so my mom was definitely in there.

Teresa: Definitely.

Travis: Okay, great, correct. Okay, cool.

Teresa: Yes. And the Hallmark website— I mean, they run this club like a kind of like chintzy mafia, okay?

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: So, uh—

Travis: Okay, another Travis Network movie coming up, The Christmas Mafia, right? I would watch the crap out of it. Two rival Christmas mafia, like their offspring fall in love and it's Christmas, Romeo and Juliet fight mafia. Oh, we're looking for backers. Kickstarting it next Christmas.

Teresa: So, here is an example of for 2024.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Spring 2024, for keeps arrives with coupon. April 2024, dream book and dream box begin shipping.

Travis: Ooh.

Teresa: Summer 2024, for keeps arrives with coupon. July, early access to shop ornament event. Later in July, members-only ornament release. More coupons, October, early access, and then another members only, and then, winter, more coupons, and then a last early access to shop ornament event for 2025 in December.

Travis: I guess I just kind of thought you would drive to the store and buy them. I didn't realize it was so exclusive.

Teresa: It is very exclusive.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: At one point, there were as many as 400 local Keepsake Ornament Collectors Club chapters in the United States. And, you know, we got a lot of this information from Clara Johnson Scroggins, who has written a lot about this topic and maybe we'll cover her as a biography. It's very cool. Anyway.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: In 1996, the ornament industry had generated 2.4 billion in total annual sales. And industry experts estimated more than 22 million U.S. households collected Christmas ornaments.

Travis: Okay, so when did we stop using ornaments? Why don't we still use them today?

Teresa: Oh no, but we do.

Travis: What?

Teresa: There is still enthusiasm for the Christmas ornament. And there's more variety than ever before.

Travis: You can get green ones, you can get red ones.

Teresa: [laughs] They could be woven, blown from glass or plastic, molded from porcelain or metal, carved from wood, expanded polystyrene, no matter what, right? People keep buying them, they keep selling them, keep putting them on trees.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Most people have collections that are a mix, right? You get some of the shiny balls, you get some of the matte balls, you get some of the keepsakes, you get some handmade stuff, right? And you know, part of this is the annual unboxing of the Christmas ornaments.

You look through it and say, "Oh, I remember when my aunt got me that," or "I made that in third grade," or like, whatever, right? It's very, very like, family oriented, like nostalgic trip every time you open it up and start putting them on.

Travis: Sure. We have ornaments where I have some that were on my mom's tree, and that were divided between me and my brothers and my dad. And then you have some that were on a grandmother's tree, on your mom's tree that have been divided between you and your sisters. And then there are ones that the girls have made.

We have ones that have like, you know, baby's first Christmas and those things. We have things of, like, these are the ornaments we first bought when we got our first tree, when we started decorating together. We also have a couple little trees that are like two feet tall or smaller, where we've picked out some aluminum ornaments of it's like, this is things that the girls like, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: We decorate those trees in their room, and stuff like that. It is a most wonderful time of the year.

Teresa: It is indeed. If you are looking for advice on how to decorate your own tree, first of all, there is no wrong way to decorate your tree. However, here are a few tips. You should put the lights and tinsel on first. If you are a tinsel family.

Travis: We're not.

Teresa: We are not. I have always had animals in the house and tinsel is very bad when animals eat it.

Travis: That's a mean thing to say about our children.

Teresa: [laughs] I gave him a stank face after that.

Travis: Yeah. But then I got a real laugh too, so it was worth it.

Teresa: But tinsel, I mean, it's that kind of stringy stuff, right?

Travis: That our cat likes to eat.

Teresa: The stringy, shiny stuff that animals and children like to eat. So we don't do that, but some people do. Also, you might need specific hangers for specific ornaments. Some ornaments are very heavy, might require a little more than just a ribbon, right?

Travis: Here's a pro tip for me.

Teresa: Oh yeah? Don't just hang them on like the end of the branches. Get some back in there.

Travis: That's right. Provide depth, especially if it's a heavier one, get that heavier one back in there, and then kind of like alternate and don't make them like in a row, right? You want different heights and depths and stuff and give it— Give it some depth.

Teresa: Absolutely. And then if you have children or pets, you might want to hang your most valuable, breakable, sentimental ornaments out of their reach.

Travis: Along that same line, if you're able to, like we have this little eye bolt that's like attached into like a stud wall, right? Where we put the Christmas tree every year. And then we run a wire from that to the top of the tree.

So like, even if an animal or a child tried to pull it down, it's anchored up there for safety so we don't lose a bunch of ornaments from it getting pulled down, highly recommend.

Teresa: And when we put it up, we don't just loop it around one time. I always kind of wrap the tree in it a few times up the center pole so that if the bottom gets kicked out, it doesn't fall.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So if you have— If you have need for that, here's some ideas other than wiring it to the wall. You can suggest that if children are helping, right? Maybe give them a specific job. Maybe they can figure out how the hooks work or hook the ornaments and hand them to you.

Or they can make their own ornaments while we're decorating the tree. We can glue some popsicle sticks together or. You know, there's some great ideas for like, edibles ornaments, or you could like, use marshmallows and candy canes and things like that.

Travis: You could also put together the countdown rings, right? Where it's like, you make little, like paper circles, and you tear the rings as you get closer to Christmas. That's the thing that kids can make.

Also, when Bebe was about like, four or five, and she was still too young to like, do some of the heavy, I would have her pick an ornament, tell me where to put it, and I would hang it up.

Teresa: Oh yeah, that's a good idea.

Travis: So she was, like, the foreman. Worked out. Another thing that we used to do that I think our kids are big enough now that we don't have to, is take, like, cardboard boxes, wrap them in wrapping paper, and then we kind of ran a rope through them, right? And that made a little barrier around the bottom of the tree.

Teresa: Uh-huh. So they couldn't get to the tree.

Travis: They couldn't get to the tree, but it made it look like it was just presents around it, instead of a gate around it. It was like, a gate of fake boxes to keep them from getting to the bottom of the tree.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Highly recommend.

Teresa: Um, sometimes what you just need to do is you need to have just multiple trees. I'm a big fan of this. We already talked about the tiny trees.

Travis: The little trees, yeah.

Teresa: Maybe if it is very important to you to have your tree decorated a specific way, you get your tree and then everybody else gets a different tree or gets their own trees. Because, you know, we all have, maybe there's a questionable ornament. There's always the back of the tree, that's my thought.

Travis: Yeah, there's always the back of the tree, yeah.

Teresa: [laughs] But if there's questionable ornament style, if there's questionable decorating style, and you know, why not let everybody get their kicks, have their own tree?

Travis: Yeah, I agree. So that's gonna do it for us. First, I wanna say thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we would not be able to make this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to you for listening.

We could do the show without you, but we'd be so lonely. I also want to say, speaking of the holidays, Candlenights tickets are on sale now. They're only \$5. It's a virtual show this year. We're doing it to raise money for Harmony House in Huntington, West Virginia. You can go to bit.ly/Candlenights2023. That's Candlenights2023 to get your tickets now.

Also, as this is coming out Friday, yesterday we put out 'Til Death Do Us Blart. This year, it's where Justin and Griffin and I and our friends Tim and Guy watch and discuss every year and put it out on Thanksgiving. And we will do that until the day that we die. And then more people have to take over and the podcast will continue forever. This was year nine and it was a good one. We had a good time watching this year.

Teresa: Yeah, I heard some good laughs this year.

Travis: Yeah, it was fun. You can check that out. 'Til Death do us Blart, wherever podcasts are found. Yeah, what else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "Brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music and wherever— Wait, there's a ringtone. If you wanna buy it— I lost my train.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Oh, man.

Travis: Yeah, our Polar Express got derailed.

Teresa: Okay. [laughs]

Travis: Oh no, the tragedy struck today! Also thank you to Bruja Betty Pin Up Photography for the cover picture of our fan run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today. Also, we are always taking topic submissions, suggestions, questions, idioms, hey, send it all to. ShmannersCast@gmail.com and say hi to Alex because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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