

Shmanners 20: Birthdays

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Travis:

Hey, Teresa, I got you a very special, extra special, very special birthday present.

Teresa:

You did? What is it?

Travis:

An episode of Shmanners.

[theme music plays]

Travis:

Hello, internet. Welcome to Shmanners, I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa:

And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis:

And as I said, this is Shmanners.

Teresa:

It's extraordinary etiquette.

Travis:

For ordinary occasions. Oh, Teresa, the happiest of birthdays to you.

Teresa:

Thank you very much. My birthday was on Tuesday, and I had a very enjoyable day.

Travis:

What did we do for your birthday?

Teresa:

We went to Universal Studios, and in particular, we went to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

Travis:

Was the best part about it that you got a happy birthday button that said, happy birthday, Teresa, so everywhere we went people would look you and say, happy birthday, Teresa?

Teresa:

It was pretty awesome.

Travis:

What would you say was your favorite part of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter?

Teresa:

Uh, I think, I think it was walking through the castle—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... on our way to the, uh... What was the name of that ride?

Travis:

It's the... Yeah, it's the Harry Potter and the Forbidden Chamber, or something like that.

Teresa:

No, it's something like that. Not, not the Hippogriff ride, which is a little rollercoaster, but the one where you're on the broomstick.

Travis:

Yeah. It was absolutely magical. So we wanted to talk about, um, some of the etiquette, the manners, the history of birthdays, which is a huge topic. Um, but so, once again, we'll probably, specifically, mostly relate to, uh, like, Western American celebrations, but, you know, it's Teresa's birthday, she can do whatever she wants.

Teresa:

[laughs] I've gotta couple of tidbits.

Travis:

Okay, great. So let's start off with a little bit of the history.

Teresa:

Well, so probably the first birthdays were really celebrated in ancient Egypt by the pharaohs.

Travis:

Ooh. How very classy.

Teresa:

Right. And it wasn't actually their birthday that was celebrated, it was more likely their coronation day—

Travis:

Oh.

Teresa:

... because upon their coronation, the pharaohs, according to ancient Egyptian, uh, religion, became gods.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

So that day was very important to them.

Travis:

Why, as I, can I, uh, as I... I would also hold the day I became a god in very high regard.

Teresa:

Right. And, and, uh, there is mention in the Bible of, um, of pharaohs celebrating this day.

Travis:

Mmm, I see. I see. When did these, uh... Was it also, was it... So was it just reserved for pharaohs at that point and not, like, everybody talked about their ascension day?

Teresa:

Well, I mean, even when a birthdate was celebrated, it was kind of important people only—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... um, in ancient Rome. It was, uh, a lot of times declared as, as national celebration if it was some very important senator's birthday or emperor's birthday, um, and, you know, usually just men. [laughs]

Travis:

Do you think that that had a lot to do with, like, they just weren't keeping track of the everyday, like, peon, super poor person's birthday? Like, you were just born and then you weren't... Like, there weren't birth certificates, as far as I know, you know what I mean? Like, they just didn't know.

Teresa:

Well the Romans did keep, um, pretty good records, as far as, like, census taking, and, and again, that's mentioned in the Bible as well.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, but as far as, like, celebrating, it's just not something that we have a lot of record of. Maybe people did celebrate their own birthdays within their family, it's another year of survival after all. Um—

Travis:

But not in like, a calcified, like, way.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Not like, "This is what you do on your birthday."

Teresa:

Right. Records were kept of important people having birthdays.

Travis:

I see. So what, what happened after Rome?

Teresa:

So as far as birthdays go, um, the Greeks really kind of, s— uh, moved the birthday celebration forward when they offered moon—shaped cakes to Artemis as a form of tribute to the lunar goddess.

Travis:

Now is that the first we hear in records of, like, the birthday cake?

Teresa:

Uh, not as the birthday cake as, like, a celebration, but as a birthday cake— a little bit more like we know it as a cake with candles on it.

Travis:

Okay. But there was a—

Teresa:

So—

Travis:

... cake present in this, in this celebration, right?

Teresa:

Yes, in, in the lunar goddess's celebration, yes, cake, present with candles.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um, and the candles were made to make a glowing effect like the moon.

Travis:

And do they blow them out? [laughing]. Was that, was that a thing?

Teresa:

I, um, I don't, I don't know. I—

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... I bet if they were offered as tribute, people probably didn't eat them.

Travis:

Oh, okay. They probably left them at the temple.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Okay. I bet somebody ate it, though. I bet the priest were like, "Yes, leave it at the table. Okay. Now go away. [laughs] Go away so Artemis can enjoy the cake." And then they would sit down and just yummy down that cake.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

[laughs]

Teresa:

I guess. [laughs]

Travis:

I'm just saying, I doubt very much that those priest were letting a sweet moon pie go to waste.

Teresa:

So we, uh, uh... Back to the Romans for just a second. We do have record of, uh, particularly the 50th birthday being an important celebration within the Roman culture.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

And that's when they would receive a very special cake made of wheat flour, olive oil, honey, and grated cheese.

Travis:

Oh. Actually, that sounds really good. Not like a traditional that we have now, but I'm all about putting cheese in a cake.

Teresa:

Yeah, that's like a savory cake.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Um, and like I said, mostly just males, mostly rich or important males.

Travis:

Yeah, that sounds like the Rome I know. Yeah.

Teresa:

Yeah. And, uh, female birthdays weren't, uh, recorded as being celebrated until around the 12th century.

Travis:

Okay. Then what?

Teresa:

Well, so now that we've gone through Egypt, Greece, and Rome, we have to talk a little bit about birthdays within the Christian faith.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um, and for a very long time, the Christian church thought of birthdays being a very pagan ritual—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... because it was associated with goddesses—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... right? And gods, the pharaohs becoming gods and such. Um, but then around the 4th century, they changed their mind and started to reframe, um, their largest celebration, Christmas, around the idea of Jesus' birthday.

Travis:

And a lot of that from what I remember on various history classes I took, uh, one of which focused primarily on the history of Christmas, that, that had to do with, they tried to outlaw it, they tried to say, "Hey, this is pagan." Then they went, "Okay, that's not gonna work. So let's rebrand it and make it Christian holiday." So I assume those—

Teresa:

That certainly makes sense.

Travis:

Yeah. I assume there was a lot of that. The same with Easter, same with birthdays, I assume, where they were just like, "Listen, people aren't gonna stop doing it, so instead, let's just fold it in and make it more family—friendly and more kind of not, uh... 'Cause I've never thought of birthdays as a necessarily religious occasion, but if people aren't gonna stop doing it, make it a thing, you know.

Teresa:

Well, the idea, I think, of celebrating the singular day that you were born has a lot of roots in astrology—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... um, where the Christian faith has a lot of, um, kind of, prejudice against astrology. It's one of the things mentioned in the Old Testament, that you really shouldn't pay attention to. It's one of the evil sort of magicks—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... that goes on.

Travis:

All those evil magicks.

Teresa:

[laughs] So I think the, when you talk about a birthday, it is possible to be, it is possible to be a Christian and still celebrate your loved one surviving.

Travis:

But that's a thing with... Oh, what is it? Uh, not Church of Latter-day Saints. Um, Jehovah's Witnesses—

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

... don't celebrate birthdays.

Teresa:

Well, and I did, I did look a little bit into that, um, in my research, and there is some, uh, some articles online that talk about how you can, as a Jehovah Witness, celebrate a birthday in a way of a small celebration with family, uh, like that may include dinner and a dessert. Right?

Travis:

But it's not like a big hoopla.

Teresa:

Right. As far as things like presents, there, there are a couple of articles that I read talked about how I— it's just fine to give your— the child that you love things that they will enjoy on the day of their birth, but as far as, like, partyings, and candles, and, um, you know, the, the very large ornate celebrations that we often see, especially for young children, young ponies and streamers, and—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... and all kinds of things like that. It is frowned upon within Jehovah Witness faith.

Travis:

Now, uh, so that brings up through, like, kind of, the Christian. Is there more before we get to more of the modern day idea of the birthday where they're like, things that we used to do that we don't do anymore? Or is it always kind of been the way it has since the Christians said, okay, go for it?

Teresa:

Well there were definitely some additions and some things that made celebrating everyone's birthday a little easier as opposed to just rich people. Um, the idea of celebrating birthdays for children with cake and candles probably originated in Germany, where kids in the late 18th century got a candle on their cake for every year they've been alive, plus—

Travis:

Sounds family. Yeah.

Teresa:

... plus another to symbolize the hope for living at least one more year.

Travis:

One to grow on.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, and this was called a Kinder Celebration, right? Uh, or Kinder Fest.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

But then the Industrial Revolution, um, really brings the idea of the birthday party to the common man instead of just the wealthy people, um, because the necessary ingredients for a cake, you know, like, sugar and butter and, and things like that weren't always readily available for everyone. But with the Industrial Revolution, it allowed these celebrations to be more widespread because the ingredients became more abundant and bakery started offering pre-made cakes.

Travis:

I was gonna make a joke about the Industrial Revolution brought along the cake plants, but that's, like, kind of exactly what happened. You could get, you know, manufactured flour and butter and, you know, milk and eggs and

all of that stuff. Well not manufactured eggs, I guess. But [laughing] we made our own eggs—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... but, like, it was a lot easier to get a hold of those things and you didn't have to be rich to get them.

Teresa:

Right. And, you know, mass production made it so you could go and buy a cake and you didn't have to put so much time into it and, and maybe it was a little less expensive to buy a singular cake than it was to amass all the ingredients.

Travis:

And if I'm remembering from our, like, thank you card episode, this is also, like, the 1800s is when we started to see, like, manufactured cards and postage and stuff too, which probably—

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

... had an impact as well.

Teresa:

Absolutely. So then, um, the last stage in really, kind of, the Western birthday party celebration is the birthday song.

Travis:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Teresa:

Yeah. In 1893, Patty and Mildred J. Hill wrote a song called Good Morning to All—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... which was intended to be song at the beginning of a day, for a school day, or at, in, like, a camp or religious setting to kind of get everybody together, in the mood, that kind of stuff.

Travis:

Like my favorite good morning song—

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

... which I would like to sing for our audience now. [singing] Sorta like that.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Okay. [laughs] Um, but it really didn't become the birthday song until a man named Robert Coleman published a songbook in 1924, and he added those extra lyrics. So ha—

Travis:

Okay. So it was the music.

Teresa:

Right. The music was written by Patty and Mildred Hill—

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... but the words to the actual, just the repetition, happy birthday part—

Travis:

Gotcha. Which, that's not a lot of writing, my man. [singing]

Teresa:

Careful. Can we sing that?

Travis:

We can, actually. That was... We talked about it on an episode of Trends Like These—

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

... that it was actually over, the copyright was overturned because they said, like, "Yeah, you don't own the rights to the music." Like, their, that it's two completely separate things, and, like, yes. But long story short, it's very complicated case that you should definitely look into because it's very interesting. But the long and short of it is it's completely now legal, there's no copyright on happy birthday song anymore.

Teresa:

Okay. Well, so he added those lyrics as an alternate verse.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So he had the, the, there was the Good Morning to You first, and then underneath it, the second was the Happy Birthday To You first.

Travis:

That makes a lot of sense, 'cause I've seen that too wh— when I was growing up in the Southern Baptist Church, and we had, like, our hymn notes and stuff, but there was, like, all kinds of verses because—

Teresa:

Oh yeah.

Travis:

... it was always one of two things, either the music existed and people just play different words to it, or the words existed and everybody sang it differently. That was one of the things I found very interesting. I was doing a research to, to sound design for The Crucible, and they used to just send you the hymnals and it had all the words laid out, and then each church just sung it to whatever music they thought fitted or whatever tune or something, if they would just, like, sing it, everybody on the same note for the whole song without any music to it whatsoever.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And so i think that has a lot to do with the overturning of the case where everybody was just like, "Yeah, you can't do that, my man. You can't sing like—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... I own copyright to this music." [laughing].

Teresa:

So, um, I'd like to go over a couple of birthday traditions from around the world.

Travis:

Okay. I'm, I'm interested to hear these because I was gonna talk about, um, and maybe you know the answer to this, why there's stuff like the Bar Mitzvah... And Bar Mitzvah, is that right?

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And, like, sweet 16, quinceañera, and, like, those are, like, the big birthday celebration that I know of.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, and I'm curious if, like, there are other things like that in other cultures. And this is... Actually, I'm kind of crowdsourcing this to the people listening, because I'm very curious if outside of, like, those big three that I know about, if there's like a... Well in China, when you turn 14, or in this religion, when you're 17 this happens. Like that kind of thing.

Teresa:

Now I did some very general birthday, um, research about, um, just yearly birthday celebrating. But it's very interesting to me that on a lot of, um, research articles that I found, the idea that each culture is having a separate birthday tradition is slowly dying—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... um, with the Westernization of a lot of other cultures and that, you know, cable TV, and all that kind of stuff.

Travis:

The hula hoops and the disco techs.

Teresa:

[laughs] Um, the idea of a birthday celebration is becoming fairly homogenized.

Travis:

Okay. So what would some of the, uh, things from around the world that you found?

Teresa:

Well, um, I saw, I found that in Ireland and in Scotland and in some parts of the UK, children are often lifted upside down, or at least lifted from their, um, arms and legs and given little bumps on the floor. So a group of people would lift them up and bump either, I suppose if they're upside down, maybe their head—

Travis:

What?

Teresa:

... or if it's, uh, their arms and legs, bump their bottoms on the floor.

Travis:

Okay, the bottoms, it's, like, birthday spanking. So I can see a correlation to that. But it's, like, [laughs], bump their heads on the ground.

Teresa:

Well, you know, it's, it's all in good fun. It's just, it might—

Travis:

I guess as long as you're careful, but, like—

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

... I can see that getting out of hand real fast.

Teresa:

And, uh, a bump is given for each year, plus an extra for good luck.

Travis:

Okay. It's a little scary.

Teresa:

Um, I read that a birthday tradition in Australia is fairy bread is eaten on the birthday, which, um, is, uh, white bread, buttered and then covered with tiny sprinkles known as Hundreds of Thousands.

Travis:

Oh, okay. That's cute. It's a cute name—

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

... if nothing else.

Teresa:

Yeah, fairy bread sound delicious, actually. In Brazil, they have a similar, yet different take on the bumps, um, where they pull on the earlobes of the birthday boy or girl, uh, one pull for each year of their birthday.

Travis:

See, but... Okay. Once again, the risk of getting concussion from having your earlobe pulled on, very slight.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Unless somebody pulls it so hard that you flip end over end and land on top of your head, you're probably not gonna get a concussion from your ear pulled. I'm just saying, you're holding a kid upside down and you bump him on the ground, what if you slip? What if you drop him? You've got some frosting on your hands—

Teresa:

I—

Travis:

... and he slips right out, bunk, oh, no, he's unconscious, happy birthday.

Teresa:

I don't know. It's all in good fun. Um, I—

Travis:

That's what they say until the bunks turn bumps and the bumps turns to lumps and the lumps turn to concussions.

Teresa:

So maybe, maybe the bumps is the best, is the, is a better idea if you hold them by their arms and legs and bump their bottoms on the floor.

Travis:

Yes, that's a better idea, especially if they're, like, 17. That's a big kid to, like, bump their head on the ground. Just don't do it, people.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Just smack the bottom if you have to. But also, don't do that, 'cause that's a weird thing to do. [laughing]

Teresa:

Uh, this article reports that in Russia, children are often give birthday, given birthday pies instead of birthday cakes.

Travis:

Yeah, okay. I can get behind that. I like me a pie. I prefer cake, don't get me wrong. I'm a cake man, but pie, sure, that's great. You don't get concussions from pies.

Teresa:

Um—

Travis:

I guess it's dropping your head and it's really heavy.

Teresa:

[laughs] Can we, can we get away from the birthday bumps please?

Travis:

Yes, we'll stop talking about birthday concussions, I promise.

Teresa:

Um, often in Mexico, a birthday is celebrated in two separate celebrations. So one for the actual date of your birth, and one for your Saints' Day.

Travis:

Is that your confirma— Uh, no, wait. Is that... I mean, a guess, is that your baptism?

Teresa:

Um, not quite. So, um, it is, your Saints' Day is more like your patron saint, like, your namesake saint.

Travis:

Got you. Okay.

Teresa:

Um, and it's more of a religious celebration where you would go to church and be blessed by the priest, and then it would be a smaller, more subdued celebration.

Travis:

Okay, gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, so not, not really a, a confirmation of sorts. I think that, that's...

Travis:

But, like, who's got Patrick as a middle name, for example, would go on, like, th— the same Saint Patrick, not Saint Patrick's Day mind you. That was just my middle name, so it was the first thing I thought of.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

But, like, I— Saint, Saint John was your middle name and you're gonna go on Saint John's Day, that kind of thing?

Teresa:

Yes, I believe so.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

That, that is what this article led me to believe.

Travis:

Great. If we're wrong, let us know at—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Shmanners Guest.

Teresa:

Um, in India, uh, a tradition would be that a child receives a brand—new set of clothing on their, their birthday and they wake up at dawn and put 'em on.

Travis:

And, and they're happy about it.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

You, I only got socks, ingrates.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I happen to like getting socks, thank you very much.

Teresa:

And instead of cake, it is often served, uh, their birthday celebration is often served with a rice pudding type—

Travis:

Ooh.

Teresa:

... um, and that may include pistachios and almonds and raisins and cardamom and—

Travis:

That sounds delicious.

Teresa:

It does sound delicious.

Travis:

Um, so before we head to break, and then when we come back out of break, we're gonna answer your questions for advice on birthday etiquette. First, I wanna ask you, Teresa—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... and I will also answer. Did you, growing up, did your family have any, like, birthday or traditions, or is there a birthday that especially stood out to you?

Teresa:

Well birthday traditions in my family, um, were certainly very small.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Normally just the family members, maybe sometimes my aunt and uncle or my, my grandmother would come. But the best part about my family was we got a birthday dinner where my mother would cook very sweetly whatever it was that we asked for dinner.

Travis:

I see

Teresa:

Um, I often, and I think this is probably one of the reasons why we go so well together. [laughs] I often would ask for fried chicken and mashed potatoes.

Travis:

Yeah, there it is.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Attagirl. Um, in our family, it was very interesting, because as many may know, but some may not, my older brother and I, three years apart, have the exact same birthday. We were both born on November 8, he was born November 8th, 1980. I was born November 8th, 1983. Um, so we shared a birthday. Um, and when we hit that point, uh, that most teenage siblings hit where we could not stand each other, uh, we would alternate who got the birthday party that year. I mean, my family would still celebrate. It wasn't like we were locked in cabin under the stairs or anything—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... but, like, one of us would get the big party with all of our friends and everything, the other one would get like a dinner the next day. Um, but the interesting thing to me was always that, because Griffin was always the odd man out when he was very young, I would say up until he was, like, seven,

he would also get a birthday present [laughing] on our birthday so that he was not the only one not getting presents. But for us—

Teresa:

It is kind of hard to explain to a child—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... why two out of three of you are getting a gift—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... and the other is not.

Travis:

But I have very distinct, uh, birthday party memories of, like, going the... Okay. Super fun. I remember going to, uh... Well, most people would know this, Chuck E. Cheese, but in West Virginia, it's called Billy Bob's Wonderland, because... Okay. [laughs] So Shevy's Pizza—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... used to have Billy Bob, uh, and The Rockafire Explosion, right? And so when that split off, there's, as far as I know, there's like two operating Billy Bob's in the entire world. Um, everything else became a Chuck E. Cheese, right? But Billy Bob in Huntington had a Rockafire Explosion like animatronic performing. So I remember having some pretty rocking birthdays. And I remember and have video somewhere of having a full blown, like, 20 kid birthday party at McDonald's.

Teresa:

Wow.

Travis:

Yeah. Where they were like... we had party games related to McDonald's of, like, drop the straw and the cup, and, like... [laughs] And it sounds sad, but

it was incredibly fun. It used to be a thing that people did and they would have their birthday parties at McDonald's when that was, like, a big thing. Now, like, if you had a birthday party at McDonald's, now everyone like, "Oh my God, are you okay?"

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

But, like, it was super fun. Um—

Teresa:

I do remember attending other people's birthday parties either at McDonald's, and I know at one point I went to a birthday party at a Chuck E. Cheese. I also went to several birthday parties at a local establishment called Cap'n Bogey's.

Travis:

I'm sorry, one more time? [laughs]

Teresa:

Cap'n Bogeys.

Travis:

[laughs] Uh-huh.

Teresa:

You know, Captain Bo— with, like, some of those letters omitted.

Travis:

No, yeah, I got you.

Teresa:

Um, you know—

Travis:

An omission. Something like that.

Teresa:

Something like that. Um, and it was very much like Chuck E. Cheese. They had bumper boats and they had a miniature golf course—

Travis:

What?

Teresa:

... and they had, um—

Travis:

That's super cool.

Teresa:

... arcade games—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... um, two levels of arcade games at one point, and, you know, little party room where they give you pizza and cake.

Travis:

But, so this is what's interesting to me, 'cause I think we are very different in this respect that, I think mostly because I had to share my birthday with another person living in my house who I often competed with the birthday attention for. For me, birthdays are a huge deal.

Teresa:

Yes, I do know this.

Travis:

And I think for you, birthdays are like, "Oh, that's nice, it's my birthday. Okay." And, like, I kinda had to... [laughing] I had to force you to be, like, "We're gonna celebrate you, Teresa."

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, so—

Teresa:

Like I said, birthday parties were rather small in my house.

Travis:

I think it's just, we come from, you know, different strokes for different folks. And so I want everyone to keep that in mind as we answer your birthday questions right after this word from another Max Fun show.

--

Speaker 3:

A tie is a pedantic [laughs] person. I think when you pronounce [laughs] these words, it's, it's in a very show offy way. Jiro.

Speaker 4:

Ero.

Speaker 3:

Sacle bleu.

Speaker 4:

Sacre bleu.

Speaker 3:

Air is rock.

Speaker 4:

Uloru. And—

Speaker 5:

[laughing]

Judge John Hodgman:

What you are witnessing is real. The participants are not actors, they are actual litigants with real cases, they call in via Skype to Judge John Hodgman's court, the real people's court. Now I call you to Judge John Hodgman's internet court. Find it at maximumfun.org or wherever you download podcasts.

--

Travis:

So this, I would say this topic more than any is maybe the biggest response we've gotten in the last couple episodes as far as, like, putting the call out for questions.

Teresa:

Oh, really?

Travis:

Well, 'cause I think at the end of the day, everybody's got a birthday.

Teresa:

Yep.

Travis:

Whether you celebrate it or not, whether it's a thing for you or not, everybody was born at some point. Um, so let's see if we can, uh, knock our way through these question. This is from Joe on Twitter. "How long should I hold on to a received birthday card?"

Teresa:

I believe that birthday cards are a lot like thank you notes that you can look at them, enjoy them. If they are particularly lovely, save them or display them. But other than that, once you open it, you can get rid of it.

Travis:

I think that if you're gonna have a birthday party in your home or you've invited friends over, I think it's perfectly fine to set up some birthday cards across your mantle that you've received up to that point. But I don't think there's any reason to display them for m— like, as you said, like, they don't hold any power after you've read and enjoyed them.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, this is from, uh, Lou— I'm gonna say Louisha, maybe Lisha. Eeh. Um, on Facebook. "I turned 32 a couple weeks ago." Congratulations. Happy birthday. "I did not, however, party this year. I barely even acknowledged it. I feel awkward having a party at my age even though a handful of friends asked me if I was doing anything. So I guess my question is this. Am I too old to have birthday parties?"

Teresa:

Um, I don't believe that anyone at any point is too old to have a birthday party. There are some birthday parties that are more traditionally celebrated than others. Um, big numbers like 40 or 50 as adults are often celebrated. 21 is usually celebrated pretty heavily. Um, I would say amongst our friends that 30 has been celebrated quite often, just because it seems to be when you officially by age become an adult.

Travis:

You're the youngest old person at that point.

Teresa:

Yes. Um, but if you wanna have a birthday party at any age, you should be able to have one.

Travis:

I think that the key is, uh, and I think everyone should treat birthdays this way, but once again, I love birthdays. It's your birthday, um, so I— there's lots of etiquette and there's lots of, like, rules that we can discuss, but as far as, like, what you're supposed to do to celebrate your birthday, that's up to you, dawg. Like if you wanna have a party, you should have a party. If you don't wanna have a party, don't have a party. If you wanna get some friends for drinks, get some friend together for drinks. If you wanna have a fancy dinner at a restaurant, do that. If you just wanna, like, get your friends together for a movie night, do that. It's whatever you wanna do.

Teresa:

Now I would like to ask you, um, as far as the rest of our question go, did we get many questions about having birthday parties, dinners at restaurants?

Travis:

We got one or two. Um, we'll get to those.

Teresa:

Well that is something I'd actually like to discuss next because in forays on the interweb, uh, regarding birthdays, that is something that comes up a lot for adults. Um, if you have a birthday party at a restaurant, are you as the birthday person expected to pay for everyone you've invited or are your friends supposed to pay for their meals plus split your own?

Travis:

That's a good question. I think in general, what I would say—

Teresa:

Okay?

Travis:

... is that, say it's my birthday and I invite my friends out to dinner with me, um, the bill should be split equally between the nine people. Um—

Teresa:

So you should be treated to your birthday dinner?

Travis:

Yes. But the reason I feel that way is 'cause I think that is the alternative to presents.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

You know what I mean? Like... And I, I also say that you should split it equally nine ways only because that's the most convenient and least math. Because, uh, once again, I love my birthday. It's my birthday and the whole specialness and magic will be ruined if the last 30 minutes of the evening is spent with everybody on their phones trying to calculate how much their glass of wine costs versus how much everyone's glass of wine cost.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And I think part of the presents I— present is it's easy going, don't worry about it, we've got it.

Teresa:

I, I think that there needs to be a, a very, um, heavy distinction drawn between I inviting my friends to a restaurant for my birthday—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... and having a friend create a celebration for me—

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

... at a restaurant.

Travis:

That's a good question. We had a question from Christi who asked, "Throwing a birthday party for yourself, yay or nay?" And I feel like in this circumstance, it's kinda like you should pick a bride's maid or a, like, a, you know, a maid of honor or a best man or, or whatever you wanna call it, like, for your birthday where you, like, look at somebody and say, "Hey, Steven, I would like to go out to dinner for my birthday, could you arrange that for me?" For many reasons. But specifically one of the questions that we got asked was what if somebody wants you to, like, treat them for their birthday, and they pick, like, a super expensive restaurant that you can't afford?

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis:

So I think having a third party planning the thing for the person, even if you say, like, "This is what I want, please plan that for me." Makes it so that, like, that person can be like, "Where do we wanna take them?" And open up the discussion a lot more. That would be my advice.

Teresa:

I think, I think all of that is good. Um, I think the, the thing I really wanna get across is that it is important when going into an evening such as that that everyone understands what's expected of them—

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

... before they order their food.

Travis:

100%.

Teresa:

So if it is something where you are expecting your friends to treat you, I think you need to find a way to tell them that that is how the evening will go, because I have been to places... I always assume, going to a birthday celebration that I will be expected to chip in—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... for the birthday person's meal. That's not always the case. Sometimes I find that the birthday person wants to treat everyone for their own birthday as a celebration.

Travis:

I think that the... You are absolutely right. So I think the correct answer is this. If you're throwing a party for yourself, you should always say, "We will split it evenly," and then if everyone answers back, "Nonsense, we will pay for your part of it." Great. I don't think it's safe to assume that everyone knows that they're gonna pay for your dinner without it being discussed previously.

Teresa:

I— And, uh, I mean, uh, there needs to be... I think that on the Facebook group, maybe I'll work on some language to help out—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... with this, but—

Travis:

'Cause it's tricky, 'cause you don't wanna—

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

... like, "Hey, everybody, I wanna go out to eat for my di— um, birthday, and of course, you'll all be paying for me." That feels like a real, like, rude thing to do.

Teresa:

Right. And like I said, I'll, I'll work on some language that might help. Um, but it's just so, so, so important that the communication be open and honest in away so that everyone knows what it is they're getting into when they RSVP.

Travis:

Speaking of, um, Logan asked, "Is it okay to have an Amazon wish list of gift ideas to use as an answer to, what do you want for your birthday?" And we kinda got that kind of question a lot where someone asked, "Is it okay to tell someone what I want for my birthday? Is it okay to, like volunteer information as what I want for my birthday without being asked?"

Teresa:

Well I think, um, as far as I— if you are asked, let's, let's talk about that first.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

If someone asks you what would you like for your birthday and you have an Amazon wish list and you could, you could definitely say, "I have a couple ideas on my Amazon wish list. You can search me at blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I think that's perfectly acceptable. If someone asked, that means they want to know.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, as far as offering up that information, um, I think once you reach a certain age where it's no longer expected, you, I think... If you are an adult giving out the information of what you would like for your birthday, it's only appropriate if it is something out of, out of character, out of the ordinary for you. For example, this year I wanted help in offsetting the cost of our Universal tickets. So I told my family that in lieu of presents, I would appreciate a donation—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... to our Harry Potter fund so that I could buy more butterbeer, you know.
[laughs]

Travis:

Yeah. And I think that I— the, uh, there's also a point there of, like, as you become an adult, you should also only kind of volunteer that infor— Like, I would feel very confident saying to you, for example, like, "Hey, do you know what I want for my birthday?" Or to my brothers, or, like, my dad and Carol—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... that kind of thing. Like, but, I think to say it to just like a friend is assuming that they're gonna get you a present—

Teresa:

Right. Yeah.

Travis:

...which is a little bit, like, "Oh. Oh you... Oh, you want something for your birthday. Uh, yeah, yeah, yeah." You know what I mean? Like—

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

... I think part of adulthood is not expecting presents from your other adult friends. Like, the present is hang out with me and have a good time with me, because sometimes someone's presence is present enough, because it can be really hard to organize adult hangout times—

Teresa:

Or—

Travis:

... 'cause everybody is busy.

Teresa:

... Or a card, or a phone call, or a, a nice email or text, I think is also appropriate for adults, um, because it's more about time spent. And like you said, your presence is a good present. So if you show that you were thinking about them for their birthday, I think that that's, that's a really great thing to do.

Travis:

Um, so on the opposite side of that, Chrissy asked, "Is it okay to get someone you care about a present even if they asked you not to?" I love to buy things for people, and I love to try and make people's birthday special. I totally get you, Chrissy. I do the same thing.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I want everybody's birthday to be the most magical day of their entire lives.

Teresa:

Um, I think that if you feel moved to give a gift to someone even if they have said that they really don't want anything, it needs to be a very special, very personal gift. Um, I wouldn't just give, like, an Amazon gift card to someone who said I don't want any presents. I would make sure that it was something very dear to the both of you. That would, that, it's more of a sentimental gift.

Travis:

Or an activity you could do together, I think that's always a good one. Well—

Teresa:

That's a great idea.

Travis:

... Well, can I take you to dinner, or like, do you wanna go mini golf? Like you said, something that's, like, "Well let's do something fun then, that, like, you don't have to worry about adding more, you know, items of clutter to your home, but instead, we'll make a fun memory, just the two of us."

Teresa:

That's a great idea, Travis.

Travis:

Hey, thanks Teresa. I have those once every 10 years.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, this is from Robin. Robin asked, "Is it ever too late to give someone their birthday present? I have a friend whose birthday was in March, and I couldn't think of a gift, but I plan to give her one soon now that school has ended."

Teresa:

Um, belated birthday gifts are a thing. I think that that, that the sentiment is still there.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

As long as it's not out of guilt, um, then, then really any time as long as you, you know, talk to them about it and be, like, "I, it was really important to me to get you something for your birthday that was special, and I didn't, uh, have an idea at the time, but I do now. So happy belated birthday."

Travis:

Uh, Logan asked, "How close do you have to be to someone to be obligated to get them a present, uh, assuming they haven't asked, uh, not to get them." Parents, siblings and close friends have reasonable claims, but what about things like office pools?

Teresa:

A lot of people work in office environments where they take up collections for birthdays, and I think that that usually covers everyone's birthday.

Travis:

Or just like a signed card from everyone.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

That's usually a thing. Like, "Hey, we all knew it was your birthday and we wanted you to know that we knew."

Teresa:

I, I think that you, you should participate in those sorts of things. Um, but you, I don't, I don't know if you're really ever obligated to give anyone a birthday gift.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Um, certainly in, in my family, we, we do tend to send small birthday gifts, just more, you know, I'm thinking about you presents than anything else.

Travis:

I actually have a theory that I have been developing, that your obligation, or I guess I should say, the, um, the pull you feel to get someone a birthday present increases the closer their birthday is to yours.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

So, like, I have a friend... So Brad, a friend of mine, our birthday is, like, one week apart, and, like, I'm never gonna not get that fool a birthday present, 'cause, like, [laughs] our birthdays are within a week of each other. So I'm thinking about my birthday, and I know his birthday is the next week, you know what I mean? Also, we were, like, best friends, so that's part of it too. But, like, I feel like j— For example, the idea of never getting Justin whose birthday is the same day [laughs] as mine a present, it's ju— I can't even, I can't even contemplating not getting him a birthday present. Griffin, forget that fool.

Teresa:

[laughs] That's not true. You've always—

Travis:

That's not true.

Teresa:

... sent Griffin a birthday present.

Travis:

I know. Uh, oh, this was a big one. We got this one a lot. This is from Cameron. Birthdays on holidays. "My birthday is on New Year's Eve, and I find that often people have New Year's Eve plans and are busy. Is it weird of me to try to make that day about me, or should I celebrate my birthday before or after the day?"

Teresa:

I would encourage you to celebrate before or after, um, just because you, you would hate to ask your friends to choose—

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... between your birthday party or a New Year's Eve party or a Christmas dinner or, um—

Travis:

But it—

Teresa:

... you know, all those other things.

Travis:

It does sound like you've got a good kind of perspective on it, which is if you do wanna have a birthday on New Year's Eve, by all means, go for it, but be prepared that people may go, "I can't." And that's not a personal thing. It's not them choosing their other plans over your friendship. Just, people tend to make plans like that way, way, way in advance, you know.

Teresa:

They do. Yeah.

Travis:

Um, so it's not that you can't have your birthday on that, it's just, like, you have to change your expectations of attendance at that point.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, but on the other side of that, I would say if your friend's birthday is, for example, on, uh, like, Christmas or something that's traditionally and, a gift-giving day for other reasons, you need to give them a specific present separate from the Christmas present or Hanukkah present or Easter present or whatever it is—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... that you were gonna give 'em, only because, like, you would if their birthday was a month different. So, like, saying, like, "This is for your birthday and Christmas." We all know what you're doing. We all know that, but unless it's twice as great as everybody else's Christmas present, we know what's up.

Teresa:

Um, I would say that unless it is twice as great then, then perhaps a second gift is an order.

Travis:

Yes. Agreed.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Ooh, this is a good one. This is from Chase, and this is more of a, uh, uh, almost like a, a quiz, a standardized testing question.

Teresa:

Oh, boy.

Travis:

"If you have a friend who gives you a birthday present, but their birthday was earlier in the year and you didn't get them a present, what should you

do? Is it okay to just wait until their next birthday to return the friendly gesture?"

Teresa:

I, for one, would not want to receive a birthday present out of guilt—

Travis:

Yep.

Teresa:

... from getting, from, from giving a birthday present. So my advice in that specific situation would be to wait until their birthday next year.

Travis:

I 100% agree. Like, start a new tradition of gift giving, but to go, like, "Uh, yeah, I also got you a something." Like, okay. Like, that's so transparent, as to be awkward, you know. Um, oh, [laughs], but this is, uh... I like this question from Eliza. "What, what's the point of having a huge, huge party for a kid under three years old? The kid won't even remember it."

Teresa:

At that point it's not really for the children, is it? It's for the—

Travis:

It's for the family.

Teresa:

The family, the adults, the other people involved. Um, they definitely won't remember it. Um, and I, I do know of people who, um, will do one very special for a child under three, but they'll either, like, they'll get a smash cake or something, which is a new trend with birthday cakes. You know, you make a separate cake just for that child to kind of make a mess.

Travis:

Which is, I actually would like that as an adult. I think—

Teresa:

You would like that as an adult? You wanna smash—

Travis:

But, like—

Teresa:

... cake for your birthday?

Travis:

... I want it to be the size of, like, a wrestling ring and just everybody just, like, dive in, you know what I mean?

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

That seems crazy.

Teresa:

I'll work on that.

Travis:

Like, I'd get on board with that. Like, a bounce house, but made of cake, oh, that'd be incredible.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, this question is from Marnie. "Gift cards. Best thing ever or a job you give to someone else to buy their own birthday present?"

Teresa:

I am actually a fan of gift cards, um, especially for online retailers, I think that that's a really great idea. Um, if the store that you purchase your gift card from does not have an online selection, it is a little bit like a chore.

Travis:

See, I feel—

Teresa:

But, but if, but—

Travis:

... the opposite.

Teresa:

You really do?

Travis:

I... Okay. Here's the thing, though. In the McElroy household, and you've had to deal with this many times, gift giving is like a test we give ourselves to see how well we know the person—

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

... you know what I mean? Where it's just like, I... The idea of giving, like, Justin or Griffin or dad a gift card, or I— like Sydnee or Rachel or Carol, like, giving anyone one of my family a gift card seems like giving up, like, I couldn't think of anything. That said, I know that, like, Brent who does Trends Like These with me love getting gift cards, because he loves being able to pick out his own thing. He love being able... So, like, for me, if I'm gonna get—

Teresa:

Oh, and Rleigh said on Still Buffering, she loves iTunes gift cards.

Travis:

Exactly. So I think, the, it's kind of a, it depends on who you're giving it to.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

Because I think that there are people like Brent and Rleigh and you that if you give a gift card it's like a relief of like, "Great, I get to pick up my own thing. This is awesome." And there are people like me who if you gave me a gift card, I'll be like, "Okay, well, I guess I'll know myself. I'll pick my own present, I guess." You know what I mean? Where I like opening things. I like the reveal. I like... But that said, it's not like if someone give me, I'm gonna throw, if someone give me a gift card, it won't be like, "I can't—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... believe you did this, Jerry." Like, I would still be happy about it, but I think it all depends on who you give it to, you know what I mean?

Teresa:

I do think that there is an etiquette regarding gift cards. Um, if you get a gift card to a specific store, um, it needs to be an amount that you could actually buy something at that store with.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Like, I would not give a person a Tiffany's gift card for \$10.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

That's basically saying, "Here's \$10 towards you spending your own money at Tiffany's."

Travis:

Agreed.

Teresa:

Um, I also, unless it's, um, specifically requested, I probably would stay away from, like, MasterCard or Visa gift cards because it doesn't show a lot of thought. Although, um, for our honeymoon, we put together a honey fund, and a lot of that money was contributed in Visa or MasterCard gift cards because they knew that we were going to be amassing them together to pay for things like plane tickets.

Travis:

Yeah. I think that's the thing, if you have somebody who says, like you did, like, "What I want for my birthday is money to pay for things," a prepaid, you know, debit card is not a bad way to go. But I think otherwise, like you should say, like, "I know you like vintage clothing, so I got you, you know, like a gift card or gift certificate to ModCloth." And it's like, "Okay, great. Like, you knew about me, you decided this thing. Great." Or if you just said like, "Here's an Amazon gift card." At least, like, it makes it an

activity rather than just, like, "Here's money, you can spend \$5 on a bag of Cheetos." Um—

Teresa:

Though, I wouldn't say no to money either.

Travis:

Well, no. Cash is, cash always spends—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... you know what I mean? Um, so one last question. This is from Colleen. "I am the kind of person that hate surprises, and my family seems, and my friends seem to love them. They've thrown me several surprise parties over the years, ugh, to which I always feign happiness but really awkward and annoyed. Is it rude to say, I appreciate all your hard work putting this together, but please don't do this again?"

Teresa:

Oh, Colleen, I'm in the same boat.

Travis:

Yeah, me too.

Teresa:

I actually have been perfectly honest with my friends and family and let them know that surprise parties are not for me.

Travis:

I think the key—

Teresa:

And so I don't get them, which I enjoy very much.

Travis:

I think the key—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... Colleen, to your point, to avoid feeling rude but still get the point across, the night of the unwanted surprise party is not the time to turn around and go, "Hey, I hate this."

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

But, like, in the weeks leading up to your birthday, I think it's perfectly fine to say, like, "Hey, listen, I appreciate the effort you guys did last year, but I do not want a surprise party. I do not like surprises. I just don't enjoy them." I think that, like, there's enough time between the party they threw and then—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... they're not going to feel... It's not a fresh wound.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

But, so—

Teresa:

And hopefully you've, you've cultivated a, um, a relationship of honesty where people will believe you and not just think that you're gunning for the surprise party. [laughs]

Travis:

Yeah, exactly. That you'll be like, "Here's why, here's a list of reasons I do not enjoy—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

... surprises." I, for one, I love planning. I love plans. I love, like, prepping for things. So the idea of someone, like, "I'm not gonna tell you what you're gonna do." I'll be like, "Oh, I hate that. I hate that so much." Like, at least tell me, like, we're gonna take you to dinner. You don't have to tell me where, but at least tell me 'cause I'm gonna ask a thousand questions anyways.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

[laughs] Ooh, surprises. Ooh. Um, but yeah. So I think my kind of general advice to people would be, like... the thing about birthdays is it's both about, it's about you and sometimes the best present you can ask for is for people to just have a good time with you. And I think the same way in reverse is if you're looking at someone else. Like, I know Teresa, she doesn't like surprises, so why would I throw her a surprise party? Like, that's her ideal birthday.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Take a note Leslie Knope, you know what I mean? Like, give the person the birthday that fits them not the birthday that fits you.

Teresa:

Aw, that was such a great episode when she—

Travis:

Isn't it?

Teresa:

... pretended to give Ron a surprise party.

Travis:

Yeah, 'cause it's fun to mess with people on—

Teresa:

But it was really just, a really nice steak.

Travis:

... and then he got steak and he got to watch movies and drink scotch, which is an ideal birthday.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, make it about them, make it about you, but make sure everyone's having fun. Is that good? Does that wrap it up?

Teresa:

That is pretty good. I like it.

Travis:

Thank you. Um, so, I think that's gonna do it for us this week. Before we wrap up completely, on sale today when you're listening to this, Friday the 13th, May the 13th, um, at noon Eastern Time, uh, tickets went on sale for the My Brother, My Brother and Me live shows in DC and New York, and we're very excited to say Shmanners is going to be opening for My Brother, My Brother and Me in DC. It's going to be, uh, Shmanners and Sawbones, and then in New York, it's going to be, um, Sawbones and Still Buffering.

So if you're in DC and you wanna come see Shmanners, you should do that. And if you're in New York and you wanna see My Brother, My Brother and Me, you should do that too. So you should buy tickets to both of them, um, and then we commute between. It's going to be \$25, and you can find tickets at bit.ly/mbmbamdc2016, or bit.ly/mbmbamnyc2016. Um, at least one of them, maybe both are reserve seating, so don't wait too long, go get those tickets now, uh, and we hope to see you there.

Oh, those show by the way are going to be June 3rd and June 4th. Uh, DC is June 3rd, New York is June 4th. So it's pretty close. [laughing] It's less than three weeks away. So we really wanna see you there. Don't miss out.

Teresa:

Um, thank you very much to everyone who has joined our Facebook group and continues to post their stories. I love reading them. Um, and thank you to everyone who has, has really started to contribute to the discussion. I really enjoy what, what other people have to say, and so far, the discourse has been very polite. Thank you.

Travis:

Um, we really like to hear about... me personally, I'd love to hear, what's your birthday traditions? Or, like, what's a birthday that, like, was especially, you know, special for you that you were like, that's my favorite birthday party ever? Uh, you can Tweet at us Shmatters Cast, S—H—M—A—N—N—E—R—S, or you can go on the Facebook group, you can email us, Shmanner— Shmatterscast@gmail.com. Um, just let us know.

And, uh, I also wanna encourage everyone to go on iTunes, rate, review, and subscribe to podcast if you like it, and hey, maybe share it. You can always just click Retweet whenever we Tweet out the link for the episode, or you can share the link yourself or just direct people towards Shmatters to say, "Hey, I think you'd like this."

Um, I also wanna say thank you to Brent "Brentalfloss" Black, uh, my roommate from college, best friend for life, uh, one of my groomsmen, good guy, co-host of Trends like these with me. He also wrote the wonderful theme song for Shmatters, which is available as a ringtone if you go onto, uh, whatever your Apple device is and search in the ringtones in the iTunes app, um, you can buy the Shmatters ringtone.

Teresa:

Thank you very much to Kayla M. Wasil for our beautiful banner and logo. Please check out her portfolio. It's beautiful.

Travis:

And thank you to everybody who submitted questions for this episode. If you would like to that every week, usually on Tuesday, I'll put up what the topic's gonna be and you can submit your questions on Facebook, on Twitter, however you wanna do it. Uh, we also wanna say go check out all the other amazing shows on maximumfun.org. There's a ton on there that you're gonna find and love and make them a part of you. Um, I think that's gonna do it for this week. Join us again next week.

Teresa:

No RSVP required.

Travis:

You've been listening to Shmatters.

Teresa:

Man are Shmatters. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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