

Shmanners 22: Funerals

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Travis:

Hey Teresa, do you have a lot of interesting funeral etiquette for me?

Teresa:

I do, and I'm dying to tell you.

Travis:

It's Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

Travis:

Hello internet and welcome to Shmanners. I'm your husband host Travis McElroy.

Teresa:

And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis:

And you're listening to Shmanners. [laughs]

Teresa:

It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis:

...for ordinary occasions. I think I might have messed up. I think I said Shmanners too many times.

Teresa:

Oh, I don't think so.

Travis:

Shmanners, Shmanners, Shmanners, you know you say a word sometimes and it loses all sense of it's meaning?

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Shmanners, Shmanners, Shmanners, Shmanners, Shmanners, Shmanners.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

Yes. What does it even mean? Nobody knows. It's gobbledygook. Hey, Teresa.

Teresa:

Yes, Travis?

Travis:

The topic we have to talk about is one of those that since we, uh, since the inception of this podcast, since we started talking about etiquette, definitely like funeral, um, etiquette has been a thing that we've kicked around for a long time and it's difficult because I think while the...

A funeral itself is a very respectful, somber occasion, this is not necessarily a super somber podcast, so I think we can do it, I think we can make it interesting and talk about it in a fun way while still observing that funerals are... kind of suck, they kind of suck, funerals suck.

Teresa:

Well, yes, um, but lately the trend has been less towards grieving the dead and more towards celebrating life.

Travis:

Which is always better.

Teresa:

Um, and the thing about funerals, the more I read about it, the more I find that they can be extremely personal. You can customize them to your own wishes, your family's wishes, um, and, you know, unless there is a very strict religious element that you wish to include, uh, a funeral director can basically coordinate whatever it is you would like to do.

Travis:

I think this is also a good time every so— Every couple episodes we should, uh, reestablish this point, what we're got to talk about is kind of the, like, by the book, like, etiquette and Shmanners of it, but especially with something as personal as remembering a deceased loved one, you're entitled to do whatever you want.

So if you hear this and you're like, "That's not what my family does," we are not at all saying that you're wrong, just that this is like what the book says to do, so...

Teresa:

Well, and even though I definitely, you know, I rely a lot upon Emily Post and Ms. Manners and online etiquette sites, a lot of them say listen, these things vary from religion to religion and even region to region, there are lots of regional things that people do differently.

Travis:

Well, so let's start with a little bit of the, uh, history.

Teresa:

All right. Scientists have found what they believe to be neanderthal burial sites using flowers and antlers to decorate the dead, um, as far back as 60,000 BCE.

Travis:

That's like super far back, you guys.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Just to give you an idea, that's like way far back. Like, picture, like, 10 years, multiply that by, like, a lot.

Teresa:

[laughs] Well, and one of the things that this shows is that it demonstrates to scientists that there is almost a human nature to the ritual of burial.

Travis:

And, um, that makes sense 'cause this is another thing kind of like what, uh, what we've talked about when we were talking about apologies, the idea like even if you had no idea medically what was going on, you can tell that there's a difference between when something is alive and when something is dead.

Teresa:

I believe so, yes.

Travis:

Or like, it is, like, oh, that thing is no more.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And it's like, okay, well, bye.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

But like, but there's definitely a moment of, like, oh, there's some kind of transition has happened here.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And that makes sense that you wouldn't necessarily need to understand it to feel the need to have some kind of memorial thing for someone who has passed.

Teresa:

Yes. Um, we move all the way up from there to 3,300 BCE which is really the height of Egyptian mummification.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So it probably started about 1000 years before that, um, but it was something that was highly unusual at the time and they were still perfecting their techniques but around 3,300 BC was when they really were like, "We got this down." And you could order a mummification according to the rank and the cost that you were able to pay.

Travis:

Um, and what I remember from middle school history and stuff was that, uh, I remember the Egyptian burial services, the mummification, all of that, to be so incredibly intertwined with their religious beliefs so like the process of the embalming and mummification was done that way...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Because how they believed you moved into the afterlife.

Teresa:

Right. Moving into the common era, um, around year seven of that time, they have found evidence of Native Americans burying their dead with actual goods and jewelry.

Travis:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, and in, um, not in Huntington, but near where I grew up, we had this, uh, huge burial mound that was found, um, that was, like, full

of stuff like that, where people were buried with, you know, pots and buried with items that maybe would have been... had some kind of significance to them when they were alive.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So for a long time in the early Christian religion, and certainly even today in the, in Judaism, it was always considered most respectful to the body to bury the dead instead of to cremate the dead.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, and so for a long time, cremation was outlawed in certain countries and it wasn't until 1884 that cremation became legal again in England.

Travis:

Now when you say bury, I also want to be clear that that is kind of a blanket term because that also includes stuff like entombing...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Um, it doesn't necessarily mean, like, below the ground 'cause, like, when I think about, like, when they buried Jesus, you know, they rolled the stone away, put him in a cave, rolled the stone back, or like a mausoleum or...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Or catacombs.

Travis:

Yeah, that you get interred.

Teresa:

Right. Someway that leaves the body whole...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

...perhaps, uh, and stows it away.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Whether that's in the earth or not. Um, but like I said, cremation was illegal for a very long time and it became...

Travis:

That's—

Teresa:

Legal in England as late as 1884.

Travis:

That's interesting to me that it was illegal because I understand, at least, uh, being raised Southern Baptist that a lot of the kind of, like, oh no, we're kind of against cremation is that in, uh, a lot of, uh, especially the, like, resurrection, you know, Christianity faiths where it's like, oh, there will be a rapture and our bodies will actually, will come back.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

We need those bodies to be in some sort of condition that, like, they can be resurrected and we actually go with our bodies up to heaven and not just our spirits.

Teresa:

Right. And of course, nowadays, we have eco pods that you can be buried in, um, there's different green cemetery spaces where they plant trees overtop your body and, and all sorts of things, so you know, it really has become a highly personal ritual.

Travis:

Yeah. And if you're interested in a little bit more of the, like, more weirder side of, uh, a little bit of the history of burials or that kind of thing, I highly recommend, we did a Bunker Buddies episode about premature burial and we did, and they did a, um, a Sawbones episode about, oh, what were the grave robbers called? Resurrection men.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Yeah, they did that that's fascinating, people that would, like, grave rob and use the bodies and sell them to, like, medical schools and that kind of thing. It's some interesting stuff you guys.

Teresa:

[laughs].

Travis:

But maybe not really in the Shmammers arena.

Teresa:

Well, so, I'd like to talk specifically about the American ritual of the funeral.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um, which really became more of a, uh, a widespread phenomenon during the Civil War.

Travis:

Now, is this, like, funeral, like, including say, like, a wake or a viewing or... because I was thinking about that today...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

When we were talking about, like, the topic of funeral that... 'cause we got a lot of questions where it's like at the funeral, go to the funeral, and like it's kind of two separate things.

Teresa:

Right. And I'll definitely go over that. There are three generally accepted, um, gatherings associated with funerals.

Travis:

Okay, great, go for it.

Teresa:

Um, but first I want to talk about the Civil War and one of the things that has...

Travis:

I feel like I should be playing some Kim Burns music.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Some like gentle, like, country, like—

Teresa:

If you want to add a soundtrack...

Travis:

Note to Travis...

Teresa:

Go for it.

Travis:

Okay wait, this may be the time. Travis, begin that music now.

[soft, country violin plays]

Teresa:

So, during the Civil War, um, soldiers were obviously killed very far away from their family units which wasn't something that happened very often before that. Um, of course, there were wars before the Civil War, um, but even when you were deployed in your military group, you didn't travel very far, it just wasn't very, uh, economical.

Travis:

And also, the Civil War was a huge war for America...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

'Cause it was fought on our soil with, like, our people, everybody, it wasn't like... There were twice as many 'cause we were fighting amongst ourselves. You know what I mean?

Teresa:

Right, and so with the event of train travel and really this idea of actually going into battle, going places to do battle, um, soldiers were very far away from their families and so it became common practice to embalm soldiers so they could be at least recognized while they were sent back to their families for their one last kind of viewing.

Travis:

Gotcha.

[music fades out]

Teresa:

Um, and, it, you know, embalming has changed over the course of, what, the last couple centuries.

Travis:

Man, I hope so.

Teresa:

[laughs] But it always is pretty much the same where a fluid of some sort is injected into the circulatory system and replaces the blood and changes the cells.

Travis:

Such an interesting thing when you think about that what we're doing is we're, like, preserving a dead person. You know what I mean? That, like, that we're preserving— But I don't know, and it makes sense to me that there's a feeling of, you know, whether we're talking about Egyptian mummification or we're talking about modern day embalming.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

The idea of, like, we should do something.

Teresa:

Right, well—

Travis:

Why? I don't know, we just should, right?

Teresa:

Well, nowadays there's a lot of legislation surrounding the embalming of people just because of blood-borne pathogens...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

...and other sort of, um, bio diseases that can be contained in a dead body so if you're going to touch or, you know, handle a dead body, they want to make sure that it's sanitary and safe for you. And legislation goes into

specifics for religion purposes, um, but if you're going to bury a body, it needs to be done very soon if you plan to skip this embalming process.

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

So, like, before a week goes by.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um, but this embalming process was really made famous by Abraham Lincoln.

Travis:

Oh, I know that guy.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Well, I don't know him, know him.

Teresa:

Well, so his body traveled on a train across the, then, United States. Most of them, I'm not sure if he made it specifically from coast to coast, but a lot of people wanted to see and pay their respects, so he was embalmed in order to keep him looking a little, you know, fresher.

Travis:

A little more presentable.

Teresa:

Yeah, but a lot of these rituals that we do, including some of the three segments I told you about actually have a lot of pagan roots.

Travis:

Okay, well isn't that, isn't that a lot of things? A lot of those pagan stuff got co opted into a lot of different religions...

Teresa:

That's true.

Travis:

Because it was like people aren't got to stop doing 'em so let's just include 'em in our stuff.

Teresa:

Right, so a lot of these pagan parts of rituals, they revolve around the idea of the spirits...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Evil spirits in particular leaving a body as it dies.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

And moving into living people.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Right? So...

Travis:

Wait, hold on, what?

Teresa:

Right, so—

Travis:

Roll that back.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

The spirits move from the dead to the living?

Teresa:

Yes, because as the body dies, the spirits are released...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

And a lot of the rituals that we do are to keep those spirits from going into living people.

Travis:

Okay, sure.

Teresa:

Um, so like wearing, uh, wearing special clothing...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

...was meant to keep the spirits away. Um, there are a lot of ancient tribes that cover the face with a sheet.

Travis:

Oh okay. Wait, face of the dead person or face of the person that...

Teresa:

Yeah, face of the dead person.

Travis:

'Cause I was thinking like a veil, which we do.

Teresa:

Well, you would cover the face of a dead person because the spirits escape through the mouth and nose which are like...

Travis:

Yeah, of course.

Teresa:

The most easily recognized holes in the body.

Travis:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, that and the butt.

Teresa:

[laughs] Travis.

Travis:

Sorry.

Teresa:

And then, uh, lighting of candles, the use of fire is to keep...

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Uh, is to protect the living from the spirits.

Travis:

Yeah, that's a pretty, like, understood, I think, kind of concept of, like, fire is purifying, fire is protective.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Same thing with the ringing of bells, comes from the common medieval belief that spirits would be kept away by the ringing of a consecrated bell.

Travis:

All spirits have tinnitus.

Teresa:

[laughs] I suppose so. Um, and then funeral music has its origins in ancient chants designed to placate the spirits.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Uh, the idea of a 21 gun salute probably originates from the idea that spirits are airborne once they leave the body and, uh, ancient tribes have been throw spears up into the air to kill the spirits.

Travis:

And then host a bunch more funerals afterwards. [laughs]

Teresa:

So the 21 gun salute—

Travis:

"Oh whoops, whoops, whoops, whoops. Oh, we shouldn't have thrown spears, you guys, that was a bad call, that was bad."

Teresa:

Is to attack the spirits.

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

And of course, all of this is up to interpretation. There aren't a lot of these, uh, there aren't a lot of pagan sort of, like...

Travis:

Yeah, and we—

Teresa:

... books anymore.

Travis:

History wasn't always written down. You know what, you guys?

Teresa:

Exactly, some of these rituals are very old.

Travis:

Yeah. We still don't know what the Stonehenge was for, so like, you can't be expecting for us to know everything about these pagans.

Teresa:

Right, so that's just a few of the things that we do today that, uh, have been incorporated from the pagan religions.

Travis:

So you talk about like the three different kind of main ceremonies or events that would surround, I guess, or be part of the umbrella term of the funeral.

Teresa:

So those three different types, well three different segments...

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

...of the modern day funeral are, the first one is the wake or the viewing.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

The second one is the funeral or memorial service...

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... and that is delineated between a funeral has a body present...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... where a, um, memorial service generally does not.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

And then the last one is the graveside service.

Travis:

Gotcha. Oh okay, yeah, that makes sense.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

That all tracks for me.

Teresa:

And so according to what you've planned for your deceased loved one, you may choose to have all three of these segments.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, you may choose to just have a very quite graveside service and usually when that happens, that's just the immediate family. Um...

Travis:

I wonder if that's a thing that, like, a lot of, uh, just based off a lot of the questions that we got, a lot of the discussion that I saw happening like on our Facebook group..

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, that maybe people don't think about those, like that there are different levels to do that or like a viewing or a wake is very kind of open...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

...and very, like, that's everybody's chance, even if it's, like, they were a friend of a friend's uncle and you're there for the friend and not for the deceased, like, that kind of thing.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And then a funeral is more of a, and that's more for, like, family and close, you know, friends and like people who were maybe more connected. Then the graveside service is even more, like, that's maybe just for like immediate, super close family.

Teresa:

Right, and again, this really depends on your religious beliefs and your, and the regional, uh, customs that you have, but in general, it kind of dwindles like that...

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... like you've said and, um, in a death announcement, what they'll do is they'll usually place the viewing hours for the wake, um, where it is to take place and if there's a separate service after that, they'll mention that as well, but normally when that kind of thing happens, it's taking place at the same place.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

I suppose unless it's at a church, because normally you would, if you had a funeral at a church, you wouldn't have the wake at the church as well.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

Um, but it should all be listed in the announcement, in the obituary.

Travis:

Gotcha. We've got to talk a little bit more about those segments and answer a whole bunch of your questions, but first, here's a word from another Max Fun show.

[theme music plays]

Adam:

Hey guys, this is Adam Conover. You may know me from my true TV show, Adam Ruins Everything. Well, guess what? Now we're doing a podcast version right here on Maximum Fun.

What we do is we take all the interesting, fascinating experts that we talk to for just a couple minutes on the show and we sit with them for an entire podcast, really going deep and getting into the fascinating details of their

work. Find Adam Ruins Everything wherever you get your podcasts or at maximumfun.org.

[ad break ends]

Travis:

So, uh, the, in general, what, uh, so, I think the thing that most people, like, because I think it's the biggest kind of catch all segment of that...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

...is like that wake viewing memorial thing because that's also, in my experience, um, because, uh, I have, I have been to some funerals and viewings in my time.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

That's also the area in which you have the most interaction...

Teresa:

Right, the viewing or the...

Travis:

...with, like, the family.

Teresa:

...the wake.

Travis:

Yeah, 'cause that's the one where everyone's kind of milling around and, like, either you're, you know, going up to the casket or you're talking to friends and family and, like, that's kind of the event one.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, so that's probably what we're going to deal with most in answering these questions. Um, and just as far as I understand it, the main difference between a wake and a viewing is a wake is more of a party, it's more of a social engagement and a viewing is more of, like, we go to a funeral home. Is that true?

Teresa:

Well, these days, they're mostly interchangeable. I would say that in the early days of wakes and viewings, one was definitely more somber than the other, but at this point, they tend to operate the same. Um, you would have open hours where the family would be present, or sometimes not.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, and then, people would be encouraged to pay their respects in whatever manner, whether it's going up to the body and, you know, just kind of being contemplative or some places will have little kneeling stools and you can say a prayer or I've even, uh, read about people have remembrance boxes..

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

...where you're encouraged to write little notes to the family about how much the deceased meant to you.

Travis:

Um, so let's get some questions, we had a lot on this one. I think that this is, um, as someone who, who lost a pretty major— I lost my mother when I was 21 and so I've been on a pretty major receiving end of the other side of a lot of this and I can say a little bit of a, uh, a little tidbit to give out from someone who's been on that side, you're thinking about it way too much if you're worried about what to say.

And so for example, this question comes from Rachel Rosing, "I'm sorry for your loss seems so cliché. Is there a phrase that won't feel so plastic coming out of my mouth?" And this reminded me a lot of when we talked about thank you cards and that fear of like, well, if I just put thanks for this, I appreciate it, it feels so hollow and I need to come up with...

I don't think you do. Is this, is this a circumstance in which sentiment is way more important than the actual words that you say?

Teresa:

I absolutely agree. Uh, my condolences, so sorry for your loss, we're thinking of you and your family, that kind of stuff. I know it does seem a little cliché, but as long as it's sincere.

Travis:

Yeah. I think the thing is people want to say a thing that's got to fix you...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

...or make it better and that's just not got to happen.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like there's no combination of words you can say, especially at a viewing or funeral or something like that...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

That's got to be like, "Oh, you know what? I feel so much—" Like, you're just giving a little piece of, like, "Hey, I'm sorry that this happened. I'm here,

like, I represent a certain amount of support in your life." That's really all you're saying.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Um, Emily Post does recommend a few phrases that you should not say because they tend to, uh, not offer as much comfort as we think they do, things like they're in a better place.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Um, and it's God's will. Um, although, there is a particular saying I read about in Islam that it's a— That it is acceptable to say, it's part of a prayer and it does sort of translate to it's Allah's will.

Travis:

Mm-hmm. I think that that's, you have to really take into account the, the... I'm sorry for your loss is a great catchall.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, if the person you're talking to is very religious, I think it's okay to have some, uh, religious input there if you know that...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

...but like if you don't know where they stand on that whole thing, I say you're best just to stay away from it 'cause as you said, something like it's God's will could sound really empty to someone who's an atheist or...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

...so that kind of idea of, like, hey, that might be something you want to hear but that doesn't mean that's something they want to hear.

Teresa:

Right. And she also recommends to stay away from things like, "I know how you feel."

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

Which brings it back to yourself instead of really concentrating on the family that you're offering your condolences too.

Travis:

And the other side of that, too, of like, "I can't imagine how hard this is," or something like that or it's like, "Okay, great thank you." I— This is a thing that I learned from being on that side too is, like, don't try to compare your worst thing to their worst thing, good or bad.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like I can't imagine or I've been there too, that kind of thing of, like, I don't want to hear that right now. I just want you to say I'm sorry for your loss, maybe give me a hug and then move on.

Teresa:

Right. Right.

Travis:

Um, so this is from, this, okay, this was kind of surprisingly for me, kind of our elbows on the table question, we got this in, in so many different forms. Eric asked on Twitter, "My side of the family has a long tradition of taking photos of the deceased at funerals. Is this as weird as my wife says?"

We got a lot of like, "Is it okay to take pictures at funerals," is it okay, whether that was pictures in general if, you know, or pictures, like, with the deceased, pictures, uh— Which is not a thing I'd ever heard of or observed...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

What are your feelings on this?

Teresa:

Well, if you're got to take pictures, well, okay. Oftentimes, in this busy, busy world where families are spread out across the United States especially, um, we don't see each other as much and funerals are one of those coming together family moments and so you may be tempted to take a picture of all the cousins.

Um, that sort of thing should be done after the funeral service, after the graveside service, after all of that is over, maybe back at someone's house for dinner or something like that.

It really should not be done near, around, inside the service at all, um, because it tends to, even though, you know, you're family and you got together, maybe you've never, you haven't seen each other for a very long time it, it tends to appear disrespectful, um, to the somber occasion that a funeral can be. So it should— It can be done when you're all together, but it shouldn't be done at the services at all.

Travis:

As far as the, like, picture of the deceased or something along those lines, I want to tie it in with this question from Julie, "do you have to go up to the casket? Um, I hate the idea of funerals in general, I really hate the awkward staring at the dead person thing."

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Well, so the first part of the question as far as pictures of the dead, uh, there's actually a longstanding Victorian tradition to take pictures of deceased loved ones just because...

Travis:

Also paintings...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Have you ever seen in a painting where wow, they kind of got like a glassy eyed stare and they seem unnatural, that's why.

Teresa:

Well, because that's probably the only picture you'd ever have of that person.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Especially if they were very young, um, you might not remember at all what they looked like without a picture, so it was very common in the Victorian era and it has experienced a slight resurgence in the way of professional photographers asked there by the family to take pictures either of the deceased or of the living who are celebrating the life of the deceased. U

m, and so if that is the case, if there's a professional photographer there, please don't take pictures. It's the same, the same idea that you would do at, like, a wedding or something where you don't want to get in the photographer's way.

Just behave naturally and do what you're going to do and you can ask to see those photos later. Um, if it is very important to you to take a picture of the deceased, you need to ask the immediate family.

Travis:

I agree. That's what I was going to say is that I think— The reason I tied these two questions together is my kind of, in general, now adult person takeaway of funerals is that they're there for people to do what they need to do...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

To kind of like deal with it on that day, to kind of start the grieving or, you know, continue the grieving process in a significant way for them, um, but I agree with you, especially if you are not immediate family, if you're like, "I— A picture's important to me," seek out an immediate family member who seems to be the one who's, like, you know, who's the one who's, like, not grieving the hardest.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

'Cause you don't want to disrupt someone's grieving process to be like, "Can I take a picture?"

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Right? Find the person who's, like, the one who's bouncing between everybody checking in on everybody...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... and talk to them.

Teresa:

Well, and a lot of families will respectively say no because they want you to remember the person that you knew as they lived.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

Not the way they look when they're dead. So a personally reasonable explanation if you are ever approached, uh, you can say, "No, please don't take pictures, but what I can do is give me your email address and I'll send you a lovely picture of them that you can remember them by."

Travis:

Yeah, I think it's okay to say, "That's really not how they would prefer to be remembered."

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Which I think is probably true in general. But as far as, like, going up to the casket, do you have to go up to the casket?

Teresa:

You do not have to go up to the casket. However, oftentimes there will be a receiving line that passes by the casket. Um, there's no reason to stare or linger if you don't want to, um, but do prepare to stand next to the casket if that's where the receiving line is.

Travis:

Yeah, yes. I think that's a great point of, like, if you get in the line, you're in the line.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

But especially if it's like I'm there for my friend and they knew the person or they were related to the person, I'm there to support them, you do not have to. Especially if you don't feel drawn to, don't do it.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like, it's for you. The day's for you to feel better. It's not for the person in the casket, at least in my opinion. Funerals are for the living. The dead are dead. Yeah, I said it.

Teresa:

[laughs] He's giving me all kinds of, like, neck sass going on.

Travis:

Yeah, well I have a lot of strong opinions. I feel like there's a lot of people, man, more than weddings, more than births, more than anything, I think funerals people really psych themselves out about, like, what they're supposed to do.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

How they're supposed to feel.

Teresa:

Well if you have any particular questions, feel free to contact the funeral home.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

This is what they do.

Travis:

Yeah, they're really good at it.

Teresa:

And so if you need to know either specifics about the funeral that you are attending or about funeral services in general, contact them.

Travis:

This question from Tyler is a great example of this. Tyler asks, "Is it weird that I feel like I have to cry at funerals? I feel out of place if I'm not sad at one."

Teresa:

Um, you should be solemn. I don't recommend that you go around with a big old grin on your face, but people grieve in different ways.

Travis:

And it's a really read the room kind of thing where, like, I've been to funerals for, like, 90 year old, you know, people where everybody just stands around telling funny stories they remember about that time that he did such and such or she said, like, just the sweetest thing and it's a very...

While still respectful, it's a very like they lived a good life kind of event and I've been to, like, you know, taken before their time kind of events where that is not what you're... what to do. Every funeral is different, every person's life is different and it's remembered in different ways.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

But no, I don't think you have to feel sad. I've been to some of those funerals too, and I've talked to people where they're like, "I don't under— I just can't cry." And it's like, okay, well, don't be mad at yourself.

Teresa:

Well, nobody wants any sort of false emotion out of you. That's not what our society today expects. They expect you to be sincere. So if you want to cry, you should cry. If you don't feel like crying, don't force it.

Travis:

This is another question from Rachel, "how much is wearing black to a funeral still important/customary?"

Teresa:

In certain religious ceremonies it is important and customary, um, but if you find that that's not what's happening, then very dark colors, conservative wear is often appropriate. Um, if you find yourself in a church of really any denomination, it's usually recommended that you cover your shoulders if you're a woman.

Travis:

And if you're a dude, no tank tops. Come on, man.

Teresa:

[laughs] No tank tops. Uh, shoes should be comfortable but still appropriate, so no flip flops. Um, generally men wear darker suits with dark ties. Um, and, it should show a very respectful atmosphere, although nowadays you could do a very dark print dress. Um, but if you're going to wear any color, it should be muted, I think.

Travis:

Uh, this question's from Tori and we talked a little bit about the religious thing but from the other side of that, uh, what to say, this is how to respond to, "I'll keep you in my prayers," or some other faith-based thing if you are an atheist.

Teresa:

Um, I think it's always appropriate to say thank you and just move on but if you are not comfortable saying thank you you can say, "That's very sweet of you."

Travis:

Oh, that's good.

Teresa:

Because that doesn't delineate that's not what I believe, but it also says if that's what makes you feel better, you're welcome to keep the person in your prayers.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

So you can say, "That's very kind of you."

Travis:

This is from Caitlin. "I've seen recently that a lot of people post about their losses on Facebook. Is it appropriate to respond on this platform, or should we reach out in a different way to connect?"

Teresa:

If someone posts on Facebook or social media, you are welcome to respond. Um, I would say as far as posting goes that you should really leave posting until after everything has gone through because you wouldn't want someone who was close to the bereaved to find out via Facebook.

Travis:

Oh definitely, but like what about saying like, such and such has, has passed and we'll be having a viewing at, like, using it as an announcement for the viewing? 'Cause like it used to be in the papers...

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And that kind of thing and I feel like that's not so...

Teresa:

Well—

Travis:

...normal anymore.

Teresa:

Because a lot of these services conclude at funeral homes, it is appropriate that you say so and so has left us, information can be find at this site.

Travis:

You've just, okay— You've just left me with a really... okay, I want to bring this up.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

Carrie Poppy asked about this.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

She asked about, like, terminology, euphemisms for it, because for example, if someone is religious, you'll often hear them say, like, they've passed on.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Or something that denotes they've moved onto another plane of existence, whatever version of religion or afterlife they believe in, while other people, if you were to imply that they've moved onto another existence would be offended because they are not religious and don't believe that there's an afterlife and I've also heard that people, like, don't like any of, like, the ones that are too, uh, concrete like, they're dead.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And I like the term passed, just... No passed on or passed away, just they've passed, that person has passed. Um, but, in general, like, what are your feelings on some of the different terms?

Teresa:

Well, I would say that the one that I like the most is either they have left us or they are no longer with us.

Travis:

Oh, I like that.

Teresa:

Um, because you can add to that if they were religious, "And we'll see them in the next life," or anything like that, but it does, it's a little nicer than, "They are deceased," and it's not as flowery as, "They've gone to a better place."

Travis:

Yeah. Um, yeah, I think in general too, just once again, find what you're comfortable saying and, you know, as the bereaved, as the family of the deceased, like, whatever you feel comfortable saying.

We had a question about like, what do you say when people ask like, how it happened if it's a— If they died in a way that you don't feel comfortable discussing? I think you say, like, well, you know, we're not really comfortable discussing it, but thank you. Like, cool. If you're not comfortable discussing it, you don't gotta.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

So, I think that... make decisions every step of the way that make it easier for you to deal with.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Uh, I think that that's the best way to go, and I think it's what your loved ones would want. They wouldn't want you to, like, be uncomfortable during the whole circumstance, so...

Teresa:

I agree.

Travis:

This is from Elizabeth, uh, "when should children attend?"

Teresa:

Um, I believe, and Emily Post backs me up on this, that children who are old enough to sit still for the duration of the ceremony and, you know, be quiet, not necessarily understand, should attend.

Um, if you need to quiet a crying child or if there becomes some sort of, um, you know, unrelated temper tantrum or something, you should excuse yourself and go out to the lobby or outside to take care of it.

Travis:

The thing is, until we perfect that magic potion I've been working on...

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Death is a part of life.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

And I don't think that that's a thing... I think that if you try too hard to keep that away from kids, it will be even harder for them to deal with when they do finally have to face it and I don't think that you— Especially if it's, like, a great grandparent or something, somebody who, you know, lived a good, full

life, as they say, I don't think that you have to program kids to be terrified of death. I was terrified of it when I was like four or five, still am to some degree, but the idea of, like, it being this looming, terrifying thing, I don't think you have to, like, teach kids that by hiding them away from it.

Teresa:

Well, and I mean, really at that point, um, if a child is too young to understand, they really just need to be able to behave respectably.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So if they can't sit still or they can't be quiet for the amount of time that the ceremony is, then they probably should stay home, but a great idea that I read about in Emily Post is to perhaps bring a babysitter with you to the funeral or the service and should the child, um, begin to get squirmy or need to go home and take a nap or whatever, the sitter can then take them home or take them elsewhere.

Travis:

Um, Darcy asked the question, why do, uh, "why do some people put three pennies on the coffin before it is lowered?" Um, I think that the, the common understanding, um, uh— I love [laughs] I love Greek and Roman history—

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, I believe that the accepted, uh, region is that it has to do with you got to pay the ferryman, you got to pay Charon. Charon, however you want to, Charon, however you want to pronounce it. Uh, however it's pronounced I should say. Um, and the idea being that when you're ferried across the river to the underworld, you got to pay, uh, you got to pay the toll. Um, you got to pay to be ferried across.

Teresa:

Interesting.

Travis:

Um, now I've also seen, um, some people that, uh, that it has nothing to do with religion or anything like that, that it was just, just like leaving flowers on a grave, sometimes people just left currency on a grave.

So I think that, like, if you see it in the context of, like, for example, a coin in the mouth or a coin in the deceased's shoe or like inside the coffin or on the coffin when it's lowered, it probably has something to do with paying the ferryman, um, and if you come to a grave and you find some coins like on the headstone or something like that, it's probably more of just like they left something, you know, just...

Teresa:

Like a remembrance.

Travis:

Yeah, exactly. Uh, Courtney asked, "is it okay not to have a funeral? Like if you specifically ask, uh, your friends or family not to hold a ceremony after your death?"

Teresa:

Yes, if that's, if those are your wishes, I think that it's all right for your family to uphold your wishes. However, um, you should probably make some kind of...

Travis:

You're dead.

Teresa:

Well, hold on, hold on. We want them to, we, as the living, want to honor the dead's wishes, but there, I think that there needs to be a compromise whereas okay, I don't want a funeral but, you know, your family getting together to talk about how much they loved you shouldn't be something that you say no, absolutely not to; that's my opinion.

Travis:

I think, 'cause I've thought about this a lot, 'cause I hate funerals. I think funerals are bummers and I hate them. I hate, I will say, I hate the idea of

them, but I also love the idea of, like, viewings and wakes and all that stuff. But you're dead.

Teresa:

Because it's more of a party.

Travis:

Yeah, I love a party. Um, there's a, uh, there's a great book, hold on, let me look it up, *Stiff*, by Mary Roach, um, that's like all about basically what happens to bodies after they die, um, and whether it's, like, medical testing or burials or anything like that.

I— Once you're dead, you're dead and I— So I would say my answer to this would be you should feel comfortable saying to your family, "You do not need to have a ceremony for me unless it is important to you to do so," because what you don't want them to do, is not want to have a ceremony but feel like you would want them to.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

You know what I mean? I think...

Teresa:

I think that if you say explicitly I don't want one, they wouldn't feel like you want them to.

Travis:

But what if they want one? You know what I mean? So I'm saying rather than saying, "You're not allowed to have any kind of ceremony after I die," I think to say, "You don't need to feel the need to," or, "It can be as small as you want it to be, but it is not important to me that after I die you have any kind of ceremony for me."

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

I personally want to be cremated and scattered over the Superbowl, but that's just me, you know what I mean?

Teresa:

I think there might be health codes.

Travis:

Oh, that might be an issue, you're right. This question comes from Aaron on Facebook. Uh, "what do you do in the case of wanting to be polite but an older extended family member keeps talking with you and you'd really rather move on?"

I've seen that a lot especially, as you said, that sometimes at a funeral it might be the first time that you've seen somebody for a long time, you know, death brings people together, that kind of idea and sometimes you get cornered by somebody who you're trying to grieve or you're trying to, like, have a very personal moment and they want to talk to you about how they remember how small you used to be, or the first time they met you, or the first time they met your, your departed loved one...

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like, what do you do?

Teresa:

Um, I think that especially if you are part of the immediate family, please just feel free to say, "Excuse me, I need a few moments."

Travis:

Yeah, yeah.

Teresa:

And walk away. [laughs] Everybody's got to understand. Every, uh, you know— It, uh, you can use that to your advantage that you don't have to

say why you need a few moments. You don't have to tell them that you're about to cry, just, "Excuse me, I need a few moments," and leave.

Travis:

Um, I want to, I really wanted to talk about this 'cause we talked a lot about like, uh, you know, various Christian and like how pagan customs evolved and that kind of thing. Um, Hannah asked, uh, "I just wanted to request that you go over Jewish funerary traditions so the uninitiated who find themselves at a Jewish cemetery aren't too confused."

Teresa:

Well, first of all, I'd like to say that if, uh, you are invited to a Jewish ceremony and you are unfamiliar, a lot of synagogues have, um, have, have staff that will happily explain to you what it is you need to do and also there's, there's a lot of literature that you can find that is also synagogue specific.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um, but in general, flowers are not acceptable at a Jewish funeral.

Travis:

Oh, really?

Teresa:

Most often you will be asked to either donate to, uh, a beloved charity or to the synagogue itself. So like I spoke about earlier, um, in Judaism, it is not common and it is typically not allowed to embalm the body.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

So services are started as soon as possible, um, sometimes within 24 hours.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

And then, after the service, um, which is typically a religious service, proceeded over by a rabbi, um, you are to— The family, the immediate family, retires immediately to the home where they begin to sit shiva.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um...

Travis:

I've heard of that, but I don't know what that is.

Teresa:

Which is a seven day mourning period...

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

Where they don't, um, leave the home for business or social obligations and, uh, visitors and family members are encouraged to come and pay their respects, uh, in a mournful way to the family.

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

Um, but at the actual service, there are, uh, specific prayers that are said. Uh, sometimes just by the rabbi, sometimes by the entire congregation, and oftentimes, the men and the women are separated for this.

Um, and then, if you're invited to a Jewish service, that's pretty much, unless you're immediate family where you stop. Um, usually only close friends of the family and the family follow to the cemetery.

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

Um, at the graveside, there's another memorial prayer and then, uh, which is called the kaddish and then male mourners are usually invited to drop a handful of earth onto the grave followed by all other men and in some customs women as well. Um, and it is customary to stay at the site and watch the coffin be buried completely.

Travis:

Got it.

Teresa:

Um, so then, I talked about shiva a little bit and like I said, the moment that the family gets back to the house is when shiva starts and it's a mourning period of seven days, um, and typically the family who is sitting shiva will sit on lower stools and, um, oftentimes cover their head and sometimes cover the mirrors as well.

So, uh, one last thing about it is if you are visiting someone who is sitting shiva, especially if you knew them to be an orthodox Jew, you do not ring the doorbell to visit them. Um, oftentimes the door is left unlocked so that no one has to get up and, and take care of it. You should knock or open the door and announce your presence.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

And that in a nutshell is the Judaic custom, but like I said, contact the synagogue, contact a close family friend. I would say leave the immediate family alone...

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

But if you have any questions, um, I'm certain that there are people around who would be happy to help you.

Travis:

I think in general, um, every single person on this earth, whether you're talking about customs or... you're talking about customs or you're talking about religion or you're talking about anything. Every single person on this earth is going to experience loss differently, um, and that is why there are cliches like I'm sorry for your loss, right?

Because to try to understand what every person is going through during a loss, you're never got to be able to and so there's probably stuff that we didn't talk about of, like, but what if you're Irish versus—

Uh, yeah, yeah, yeah, because everybody experiences and has different customs and different things that they... that surrounds the concept of loss. So one, if there's anything that, like, you and your family or like you and your religion or you in your nation do, please let us know. I am fascinated by that stuff. Tweet at me all day long.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

You can treat at me @TravisMcElroy or @ShmannersCast—

Teresa:

Or you could start a thread on the Facebook group.

Travis:

Exactly. S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S, anything that you're, like, "in my country..." I loved having pen pals as a kid so I could hear all about that, so let us know, you can email us, ShmannersCast@gmail.com, um, you can join the Facebook group as Teresa said, just search for Shmanners.

Um, you should follow Teresa and tell her what a great job she does on this show. Uh, you can find her @TeresaMcElroy. Um, so this is going to go up on Friday and then we're going to have a little bit of a special episode next Friday and then the Friday after that you'll be hearing our live show, our first ever live show.

Um, we're going to be talking about pregnancy and pregnancy etiquette and manners so if you have any questions, uh, just like we normally put the call out for questions, feel free to go ahead and email us now or tweet them at us now, so that we can get a bunch of stuff together for the live show. Um, if you're got to be at the live show, uh, we're so excited to see you. We'll be in DC Friday night and we're really excited to see you there.

Teresa:

I'm excited and scared.

Travis:

Yeah, it's got to be our first ever live show and we'll see how it goes. Um, you should go check out all the other amazing shows on the maximumfun.org network, including a brand new show that just put out its first episode this week.

Um, you might know the TV show but this is the podcast version of Adam Ruins Everything. I'm a huge fan, um, not just of Adam but of Adam Ruins Everything and he's joined Maximum Fun and basically what they do is...

So on the show, they will often have experts on, uh, that they get to talk to you for a few minutes 'cause it's like a TV show where they have to do a bunch of stuff, and the podcast is, like, an in depth discussion with that expert, so the first episode is all about transit. Um, it's really good, I'm a big fan of it already and you should check it out.

Teresa:

You should also check out Brent Black or Brentalfloss's, uh, stuff on YouTube and we're grateful to him for writing our theme song.

Travis:

Yeah, and you can find that theme song, uh, on the iTunes store if you go through one of your Apple devices, um, and maybe use it as a ringtone. You should do that. It'll be super cool, you guys, and then your phone will ring and someone will be like, "What is that fascinating tune?" And you can be like, "Well, let me tell you about this really great podcast."

And if you like the show, you should tell all your friends about it, it's the fastest way, uh, to kind of get the word out there. We don't really have, like, advertising in the podcast world in that way and you are our advertising, word of mouth is the fastest way to help us grow.

Um, if you've got a second, you can go on iTunes, rate, review, and subscribe. Uh, last night we read through some of the reviews that people have written of Shmanners and they are just incredibly lovely and wonderful.

Teresa:

Thank you all so much for taking the time out of your days to do that.

Travis:

It made us feel really special. Um, so if you get a chance to do that, please do.

Teresa:

Also, thank you to Kayla M. Wasil, please check out her portfolio, she did our banner art and our thumbnail.

Travis:

I think that's got to do it for us, join us again next time.

Teresa:

No RSVP required.

Travis:

You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa:

Manners, Shmanners, get it?

[theme music plays]

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