

Shmanners 25: Hand Gestures

Published June 17th, 2016

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Travis:

Teresa and I think this episode is going to be A-okay.

Teresa:

You shouldn't do that gesture. We might have listeners in Brazil.

Travis:

It's Shmanners.

[theme music plays]

Travis:

Hello, internet. I am your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa:

And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis:

And you're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa:

It's extraordinary etiquette—

Travis:

... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my darling. How are you?

Teresa:

I'm doing well. How are you?

Travis:

You know what? I'm having a real good day.

Teresa:

Oh, good.

Travis:

Slept good. I woke up. Uh, my hair looks really good today, well, not right this second because I just took a nap. But I went to E3. It's been a wonderful day. E3 is filled with people hustling and bustling around with no sense of how much space they take up or if anyone's trying to walk behind them. It is a world filled with people who think that they're amateur videographers, um, and just stop right in the middle of everything. So I got to observe, um, the need for Shmanners in its natural habitat.

Teresa:

Oh boy.

Travis:

No, I don't think anyone was being intentionally rude. I don't think that those are the people that we're making this show for. I think that we make this show for people who are like, "I didn't know that. I didn't know you weren't supposed to do that. I didn't know that was a thing."

Um, and going along with the idea of "I didn't know that was a thing," our friend Amy suggested an episode on hand gestures, and I thought that that was brilliant, um, because I know, for example, that's there's uh, like, gestures that we do every day here in America that if you were to do in other countries, you would get, like, a glare or... at the very least, um, if not upset a lot of people. It's, it's not even counting sign language. Hand gestures are kind of a language all themselves, and then when you get into sign language, there's so much more to talk about. So we wanted to talk about hand gestures.

Teresa:

That's right. So, um, I'd like to start with the one that we put in our little intro, which is the A-okay sign, which is three fingers up, pointer finger and thumb touching in a circle. And if you have your palm pointed toward yourself, that could mean in Japan that you would like to be paid.

Travis:

Really?

Teresa:

"Pay me," it means.

Travis:

See, we also have a secret hand gesture in the McElroy household called "eat a big'un," and it's kind of that same thing.

Teresa:

No, I think that, uh, that Carol has mentioned that many a family photo, she feels, has been ruined by this hand signal.

Travis:

We, we have snuck an "eat a big'un" into a hand signal or two. It's bas— or into a photograph or two. It's basically very similar. You just make a circle with your thumb and forefinger. But usually when you see in photos, someone's hand is around someone else's shoulder in the photo, and they're making kind of like a "eat a big'un sign." Um, I... it's... You're go to have to ask my dad what the origin of it is and what it really translates to. For us, it was just a sneaky thing that we snuck into photos a lot.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

I think it was kind of like a, uh, more of a teasing thing that you would do to someone, like punch them in the arm or something like that, and not as rude as I think maybe it has grown to be in our older years.

Teresa:

Well, the rude part of that signal is, in places such as Germany, Greece, Spain, Turkey, that area, it may be construed as an insult.

Travis:

Really?

Teresa:

Yes. The next one I wanna give a brief overview is the V sign.

Travis:

Like a peace sign?

Teresa:

Like, like a peace sign, al— that is one iteration. It is the first and second fingers spread apart and then the thumb holding the third and final finger down. This can be presented thumb out, which usually means "great," "peace," "victory," all that stuff.

Travis:

Hippie, hippie hand. You know what I mean?

Teresa:

And then if it presented palm towards you, that is an "up yours" in places like Australia and the UK.

Travis:

Okay, all right. So—

Teresa:

Um, in fact, "up yours" is a very common sentiment that people often portray, and there's another one, uh, which is nearly universal, where you, uh, keep the palm towards yourself and raise only your longest middle finger.

Travis:

The bird.

Teresa:

The bird, yeah.

Travis:

It's important. You just did it to me. I know what you mean. You didn't have to do it.

Teresa:

[laughs] It's just fun to do.

Travis:

You didn't have to demonstrate it to me.

Teresa:

So—

Travis:

I remember being a young man and finding the bird for myself—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... and feeling very oddly empowered by it when I was like 10 years old and, like, sneaking it behind, like, books and stuff at people who made me mad. It's kind of... When you don't do it to someone, it's one of the most, like, fruitless, futile gestures you could possibly do. If you hide it and do it, there's something kind of sad and pathetic about it.

Teresa:

Yeah. Well, it, it is nearly universally to mean "up yours," um, but in parts of Indonesia, it can be used to just signify one of something. And in parts of India, it could be used as the pointer finger.

Travis:

Really?

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Interesting.

Teresa:

So that's a brief overview of some of the, the, the m— the general meanings. There are lots of ways to say "up yours." As I said earlier, there is the pulling of the hand from the back of the throat... sorry, from the front of the throat to the top of the chin.

Travis:

Is that an Italian gesture? That's what I feel like I incorporate. Uh, the, the Italians, uh, have a lot of gestures, as a lot of our listeners pointed out.

Teresa:

It can be used in Italy, uh, France, Belgium, those areas.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Um—

Travis:

Kind of like you're flicking your hand from underneath your chin.

Teresa:

Right. Um, again, you can place two fingers, the first and second finger on opposite sides of your nose with your palm facing towards you, indicating a fishy smell to mean that they find you untrustworthy.

Travis:

Okay, so, but like we're saying—

Teresa:

And that's in, like, southern Italy.

Travis:

But we're saying you could do these things, but you should not. These are all rude, right?

Teresa:

No, you, you, shouldn't do these things. These are the rude ones. [laughs]

Travis:

Well, okay. I just wanted to clarify that because some of these... I think the thing that we're hearing is, like, just like we said early on. A lot of these, we don't think of twice, you know?

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like the peace sign or, like, that kind of thing, where it's just like, "Yeah, we just do that." And then it's like, "Yeah, if you do that sign, A-okay..."

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

You know, we joked around in the intro, but if you do that in other places, it's offensive.

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

And we don't think of it.

Teresa:

Right. So all of those have a, have a generally offensive meaning in other parts of the world, but, um, I'd like to go over the American meaning for some of those now.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

So we know about the A-okay sign. We, we talked about the three fingers, the touching of the first and the thumb. Um, this is often used and is very important in diving because you can't... If you're... you know, you have scuba equipment on, there's no way to talk to somebody else.

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

So that sign is important in there, and again, it means A-okay. And in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, uh, the gesture, when done with the right hand, uh, can convey safety and reassurance.

Travis:

Is that... Okay, yeah, 'cause I've seen that in statues and that kind of thing, where you see, uh, the figure holding its hand like that but maybe in, like, a flattened way. I've also seen it straight up and down, but where they kind of had their hand flattened and parallel to the ground.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Gotcha. Okay, that makes sense.

Teresa:

Right. So moving on to some other meanings between, behind the things that we do, you mentioned the V sign, right?

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

And it didn't have the connotation of peace until the early '60s because the gesture was used widely at the time of World War II in order to symbolize V for victory.

Travis:

Gotcha.

Teresa:

Um, and sometimes, in Japan or places like China, South Korea, and Thailand, the V sign is often used to tell a person that they're looking cute, especially while being photographed.

Travis:

Aw, that's nice.

Teresa:

Um, but like I said, don't, don't turn it the other way 'cause that's an insult.

Travis:

Gotcha. Now, can you tell me about the origin? Because I have been told before what the palm facing you, V fingers origin was.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Is that true?

Teresa:

Um, well, there's a couple of different, uh, different legends, the first one being that, um, there was a, a Battle of Agincourt about 600 years ago where, um, the French, when they would capture people, would cut off their index and middle fingers of the right hand to, uh, keep the English from shooting arrows.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Right?

Travis:

Yes, this is the one that I have heard.

Teresa:

Yeah, and so if you were spared and you didn't get your fingers cut off, you showed them around, saying, "Ha ha, you didn't cut off our fingers. We can still fire arrows."

Travis:

Up yours.

Teresa:

Right, yeah, up yours. Um, but there's a little bit of problem of that—

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... because most of those bow and arrows, um, especially the ones that were probably used at that time, uh, were the longbows, right, as opposed to a compound bow or a smaller bow that used—

Travis:

Or a short bow.

Teresa:

... or a short bow. They used longbows, and that might need you to use at least three fingers to draw back the arrow. And so this meaning of the "up yours" of the V sign may have lasted until as long as World War II...

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... because a Belgian politician named Victor de la Laveleye, maybe...

Travis:

You said that very well.

Teresa:

... who fled to England after the Nazis occupied Belgium. Um, while he was in exile, he suggested that the countries of Europe use the letter V as a symbol of resistance...

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

... because in Dutch, it means freedom, uh, the word... oh boy.

Travis:

You can do it.

Teresa:

[foreign language], maybe.

Travis:

Sure. Hey, you know what? Even if it's not right, you said it with a great accent.

Teresa:

Thank you. Um, he hoped that seeing all of these Vs across the coun— the countries would demoralize the Nazis.

Travis:

Gotcha. In case anyone was wondering, I just look up... Do you know what "okay" stands for?

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

It's an abbreviation... This is really weird, but this is what I'm finding on Wikipedia... for "all correct." And it was a variant spelling that I... It's weird, but it's under, uh, a heading of "Boston abbreviation fad."

Teresa:

Huh.

Travis:

But that apparently, O-L-L-K-O-R-R-C-K or even O-L-E-K-U-R-R-E-C-K... If that's not true, please let me know because I've suddenly just become very

interested in where "okay" comes from and what it stands for. Anyways, we used V to stop the Nazis. Got it. Is that what I was supposed to take away from that?

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

The V sign stopped Nazis.

Teresa:

[laughs] Yes, it did.

Travis:

Okay, we did great, V for victory.

Teresa:

V for victory. Um, so the next one I'd like to talk about is the thumbs up, thumbs down because again, there's a little bit of, of, um, conflicting lores—

Travis:

I have heard—

Teresa:

... around the thumbs up, thumbs down.

Travis:

Is this true, or is this one of them, that it's from, like, gladiators and that...

Teresa:

That is one of them.

Travis:

Okay, 'cause I remember learning about that in middle school, and it all made so much sense to me at that point.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Is that not true?

Teresa:

Well, so, the story goes that, um, pointing a thumb in really... in the up, right? Pointing a thumb up of all of the, the spectators of the gladiatorial sports, that that meant that they should kill him. He's gone.

Travis:

Yeah. Basically, it's what you see in, like, where the, the, the Roman emperor, like, holds his hand out with his thumb pointed sideways. What I was told... In movies, it's always like, they want to do it like, if it's up, he lives. If it's down, he dies. But I understood if it moved at all—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... they died, that that was the symbol of, like, do it, like turning a switch.

Teresa:

Um, it, it seems that way. From all of my research, it seems to me that pointing a thumb in any direction was meant to represent the stabbing of a sword.

Travis:

I gotcha.

Teresa:

So you would point the thumb, like I said, up, down, sideways. However, if they raised their hands with the thumb up or down, you know—

Travis:

Whatever.

Teresa:

... then that meant that he was to die.

Travis:

Okay, so yeah, that was the one that I had heard.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

What are the other ones?

Teresa:

So the other one is that that whole story is probably a bad translation—

Travis:

No, my childhood.

Teresa:

... probably a misunderstanding.

Travis:

No.

Teresa:

Yeah. Well, you know, like a few things, a lot of things, that, um, the Europeans might have rewritten history just a little bit and used the meanings that they now ascribe to as thumbs up and thumbs down to kind of, you know, tell a story to make the Romans fit into their, their way of life.

Travis:

Well, why don't we just ask someone who was there?

Teresa:

We can't.

Travis:

Oh.

Teresa:

We, we can't.

Travis:

Oh.

Teresa:

Because in—

Travis:

Are we fighting with them? Do we not like them? What's the problem?

Teresa:

[laughs] They're dead.

Travis:

What?

Teresa:

In reality, there are no references in any kind of written or scribed or, um, pictures, you know, uh, drawn pictures of thumbs either going up or down in the Coliseum.

Travis:

Okay. I mean, I think I saw it in The Gladiator, but I—

Teresa:

Well—

Travis:

I get what you're saying, yeah.

Teresa:

Yeah, but that's a movie.

Travis:

Oh, I know.

Teresa:

That that's, that's a movie.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Not real.

Teresa:

Well, there are a couple of quotations in the Oxford English Dictionary and in Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. Um, the first one is written as,

1880, to close down the thumb was a sign of approbation, to extend it a sign of disapprobation.

Travis:

That is the least specific thing I have ever heard.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

To close down and to extend, what do either of those words mean?

Teresa:

Well, let me see if this helps. Brewer's Dictionary in 1870... This is probably where the, uh, the myth comes from. In the ancient Roman combats when a gladiator was vanquished, it rested on the spectators to decide whether he should be slain or not. If they wished him to live, they shut the thumb up in their fists. If to be slain, they turned their thumbs, giving our popular saying thumbs up, expressive of a pleasure or approval. Is probably a perversion of this custom.

Travis:

Got it. This sounds a little bit like Wikipedia, which I have referenced but moments ago, where everyone kinda went, "That sounds true, right? Right? Great. Great."

Teresa:

Yeah, and the fact that it really wasn't written until 1870...

Travis:

Yeah, they were probably doing it by then at that point.

Teresa:

Absolutely they were doing it by then, so they, like I said, they probably just ascribed modern references to something old.

Travis:

Okay. Um, you mentioned early in the episode that the A-okay gesture in other countries could be meant as an insult, like what?

Teresa:

Um, well, in, in several cultures, it is used to symbolize either the evil eye or a zero worth.

Travis:

That seems so mean.

Teresa:

Uh, I mean, I think that it just really attempts to communicate that they, the person you're making the gesture at, is the lesser.

Travis:

Ugh. You know, here's the thing, and I think what I'm learning from your lesson about hand gestures here is that the trick of it is it kinda means whatever you say it means when you do it.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And we all, as a society, have agreed on some of these gestures, while different societies have agreed they meant different meanings. And as soon as you kind of go, "Yeah, but why?" Everyone kind of goes, "It just does. That's just what it means." And everybody just knows what it m— It's a lot like words where you sit there going, "Yeah, but why do we call it ocean? Why is the word ocean for ocean?"

And everybody's like, "'Cause that's just what the word is." And you're like, "Yeah, but it's not, like, written on the ocean. Where did that word come from?" It just did. And there are probably people out there who are listening to this like, "I, I could tell you why." And if that's true, you should start your own podcast where you explain to people where words from, because I would listen to that every day.

Um, the last question I had is, uh, the middle finger gesture.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

The bird.

Teresa:

The bird.

Travis:

Is that an iteration of the two—finger, like, up yours? I've heard that it was kind of the same idea but just shortened to "I still have that finger to hold an arrow." But is it... is it... Are they, like, brother-and-sister gestures, or is it a completely different thing?

Teresa:

Much like the thumbs up, it has kind of a convoluted start probably going back to Rome again. Who knows, um, but the idea is that that middle finger looks the most like a male's reproductive organ.

Travis:

Oh, I see.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

I see.

Teresa:

Yeah.

Travis:

Okay. And you know, up yours... It all makes sense in an upsetting, gross way. We here at Shmanners HQ in no way endorse the use of any of these hand gestures whatsoever.

Teresa:

Yes. Well, in, in a malicious context. Peace sign?

Travis:

Peace sign's fine.

Teresa:

I can get behind.

Travis:

A-okay is fine as long as you're not around Brazilians and Germans, it sounds like.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, you know, it's... It reminds me a lot of, like, when you see people use words in other cultures that are upset— as upsetting as the obscenities that we do not use in, you know, public and nice society here. But because they're from other cultures, they're kind of cute.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And like, I, I think the same thing. Like, I picture the, you know, the hand under the chin, the flick gesture that we talked about. Like, I grew up seeing people do that here because they thought it was funny to reference somebody else's gross gesture because it didn't carry the same weight and connotations here in America.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

But, like, it does carry weight and connotations other places, and we're j— like, it's like if you... and you see it sometimes in photos where people in other cultures who the middle finger means nothing for—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... that, like, someone has very clearly gotten a bunch of like, people to do the middle finger at a camera. And you're like, "That's very upsetting to me."

Teresa:

[laughs] Yeah.

Travis:

Don't do the middle finger. [laughs] It's like... It's the most upsetting gesture. Um, we're going to talk more about gestures and their meanings

and maybe answer some of your questions when we come back after a word from another Max Fun show.

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Carrie:

Okay, I've got a list of things we can do for our podcast, Oh No, Ross and Carrie!

Ross:

You got some ideas?

Carrie:

Yeah, I think so. Okay, you ready?

Ross:

Yeah, yeah.

Carrie:

Okay, we could ear-candle.

Ross:

Uh, no, that was one of our first episodes.

Carrie:

Oh right. Okay, we could get hypnotherapy.

Ross:

No, we went to, like, a, a school for it.

Carrie:

Oh, okay. Uh, we could join the Mormons.

Ross:

Um, we got baptized. Don't you remember?

Carrie:

Okay, well, what if we went to, uh, an occult meeting or cryotherapy or took a juice cleanse or ate only Soylent for a month?

Ross:

Yeah, we did 'em.

Carrie:

Reiki?

Ross:

You're a practitioner.

Carrie:

We could join Christian Science, we could go to pet psychics or do astrology or go to the Queen Mary where they have all those ghost hunts.

Ross:

Done 'em all.

Carrie:

That's my whole list.

Ross:

Well, what else can we do? I mean, this is Los Angeles.

Carrie:

Well, I guess we could do that one thing.

Ross:

Oh.

Carrie:

The scary thing, ugh.

Ross:

The one that everybody's asked us to do since we started the show?

Carrie:

Yeah, for like five years. Am I being clear?

Ross:

Yeah, let's do it.

Carrie:

Okay, but if I die, you have to tell my family that I love them and that they can hear the episode on iTunes or at maximumfun.org.

Ross:

I'll tell them.

Carrie:

Thanks, Ross.

--

Travis:

All right, so before we head into question, is there... are there any other gestures, anything else we want to touch on in this episode?

Teresa:

Well, I do have one more indecent gesture I'd love to... love to, uh, touch on.

Travis:

Okay, you have the most wicked face on. What is this gesture you would like to speak of?

Teresa:

[laughs] Mooning.

Travis:

Yes, uh, I believe we've all, uh, been teenagers, maybe mooned from time to time.

Teresa:

Well, so the story goes again—

Travis:

Well, hold on. For those at home, maybe we have some people who were raised in good, good homes, healthy homes and ever— where everybody was nice to everybody all the time, and nobody mooned. What does mooning mean, Teresa?

Teresa:

Um, it was where you remove your pants and undergarments and show someone your bottom.

Travis:

Um, and there's another version of this where you press it up against a window, and it's called pressed ham.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Um, I believe there's also a censored version where you do not actually remove your underpants, but I cannot remember what the name of that version is called. But basically, it's wagging your butt in some form or another in someone else's direction.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

And like I said, again, this has been attributed to a Roman gesture.

Travis:

And this is one of those ones where I think this is probably universally understood. If you waggle your buttocks in somebody's direction, then somebody... nobody's here going, "I wonder what they mean by that. Hmm."

Teresa:

Right. Right. Um, so the story goes that a Roman soldier, when seeing passing Jews on their way to the temple during Passover, he turned around and flashed them his backside—

Travis:

Mm-hmm.

Teresa:

... and made a farting noise.

Travis:

As one might be like to do.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

So I like... Like I said, that one, I think, is pretty universal. I don't know that there's a culture where that actually means good luck.

Teresa:

I couldn't find one.

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

But there actually is a great story about how mooning may have saved a town.

Travis:

Go on.

Teresa:

So, uh, at the siege of Nice in 1543, a woman named Catherine Ségurane, perhaps... She was a washerwoman, and she supposedly stood before invading forces to her town and exposed her bare bottom, making them either laugh or run away so that they didn't attack her town.

Travis:

Okay.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

One, laugh, I get, where they're like, "You know what? She's all right. Let's spare nice." Run away? Hold on. What kind of weird superstition is that that I am not aware of? A woman's butt, run away.

Teresa:

Well, you know, um, and it was used in the movie Braveheart, um, where a hundred... hundreds of Scottish soldiers mooned the English enemies from across the battlefield. Um, and it was... but it was probably the other way

around, as it happened, because historian Peter Langtoft says that it was probably the English who mooned the Scots.

Travis:

Okay. That doesn't fit the narrative of Braveheart as well where it's like—

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

... the Scots are kind of the wild and crazy ones, and the Brits are, "Oh my, people's buttocks. Ho, ho, whatever shall we do, Basil?" It doesn't fit that as well, I guess.

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

Though I think that that would have been way more fun to see in the movie if they... if the Scots were like, "We're going to go over the— what are the— what? Wait, that's our move. Hold on." I would much rather... My Scottish accent wasn't as good as my weird British accent.

Teresa:

No, really, no, it wasn't as good.

Travis:

Um, we've got some questions from, uh, the Shmammers audience, so let's get right into them. This first one, this is more of, uh, an opinion question—

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

... from Rachel Rosing. "Is making a rude hand gesture in public the same level of uncouthness as swearing in public?"

Teresa:

While I wouldn't recommend making a rude gesture in public, um, I do think that because it doesn't travel really as far, and you probably are not flashing it above a crowd, uh, it, you can hide it a lot better.

Travis:

That's true. I guess it depends on the intention with which you do either.

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

Like quietly muttering a, an obscenity to yourself, you can better than your hand.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

But if you are yelling the obscenity—

Teresa:

Right.

Travis:

... you could hide your hand better.

Teresa:

Yes.

Travis:

But which is... If, if I were looking at you and in a fight with you in public and both were done with the same intensity, what do you think is, is more upsetting?

Teresa:

I think that the swear word is more upsetting, um, because those have a more globally recognized meaning, and anyone within earshot could see... could hear it, whereas if I make a hand gesture, you might not know its meaning. And it might not offend you.

Travis:

This question is from Maeve. How about hand gestures while driving at/from drivers of other cars, when to wave, when to do an angry waggle? And in response, I would like to tell the story of the time I... the, the hardest I've ever been flipped off in my entire life.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I was driving home from work. Uh, this was a summer when I worked in Charleston and lived in Huntington, which is about 45 minutes' to an hour drive away. I was driving home, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw a car in the lane next to me, keeping pace with me exactly. If I sped up, they would speed up. If I slowed down, they would slow down.

And I was like, "I don't know what's going on," but I didn't want to look at them. I knew that if I looked at them, maybe they were, like, angry. I was... I started to get scared. Maybe they're angry at me. Maybe... There's always talk of, like, road rage and shooters on the road, and I was terrified.

And finally, after like 10 minutes, I had to look. And I looked to my left, and this dude looked at me, made very direct eye contact, and, like, flipped me off with such force and, like, threw his head back and laughed and zoomed away. He flipped me off so hard, I could feel it hit my chest. Like, he did it, and it was not in an angry way. But he was celebrating the moment so hard, I was left dumbfou—still to this day, here I am, like 12 years later, still so confused by what happened.

Teresa:

I mean, it, it sounds like a product of boredom—

Travis:

I think very much so.

Teresa:

... is basically what he's done.

Travis:

Yeah, and it... Any other time that's happened in my life, I've looked, and, uh, the car keeping pace. I've looked, and it was someone I knew. I did not know this person. They just, I guess, were bored driving home.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Um, but back to the question at hand.

Teresa:

As far as the wave goes, I think that that's a generally recognized thank you.

Travis:

Yeah, more people should do it, in my opinion.

Teresa:

Yes, I believe so too.

Travis:

If someone lets you in or, like, you see make the decision, like, don't go, like, you also see the wave of, like, go ahead—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm, right.

Travis:

... you know, where it's kind of the side-to-side hand gesture.

Teresa:

Exactly. That is very useful in California, as we are merging, it seems, constantly.

Travis:

Yes, indeed. Um, as far as... I don't know. As far as, like, flipping the bird when driving goes, I, I don't do it, um, as cathartic as may feel—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

... only because I don't know who's in the other cars. I don't know what their scenario is.

Teresa:

Right, you haven't walked in their shoes. You don't know their story.

Travis:

Exactly. Maybe they were having, like, the worst day of their life, and they're sitting there crying while trying to just get home from work.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

Granted, they should pull over and have a good sob before heading on, but, like, I don't know what's going on. And every time I've seen someone do it, I've never thought, "You get 'em," you know? It's also more like, oh, come... grow up.

Teresa:

Right. It doesn't really add to anything, and the odds that about is going to see it, um, are probably pretty low, first of all, so, uh... and then second of all, it, like, it only serves to just increase the rage around you. It doesn't... It doesn't add to the situation at all.

Travis:

Uh, this is from Rachel, Rachel, uh, Richardson. She asks, pointing, maybe including the Disney point.

Teresa:

Well, so, what I... what I read about the Disney point is that, just like your mother always told you, it is a bad idea to point at things because it's rude. Well—

Travis:

It also looks very accusatory. It's very dramatic to point with one finger.

Teresa:

That's probably it. Um, so it's a... it obviously indicates something, and if you are to point at something, you are pointing it out, obviously. And that's, that's kind of rude, you know?

Travis:

Yes. It's also, like, I've seen people, like, do the finger, and it looks like they're stabbing you with their finger.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

And I think that it's, it's very easy, uh, to be offended by someone jabbing a finger at you.

Teresa:

It's full of blame—

Travis:

Yes.

Teresa:

... is what it is, um, and so I have... I have seen different articles about how, in order to remedy this, flight attendants and Disney crew members, um, some international, uh, cruise members or cruise... What do you call them?

Travis:

Uh, I believe it's pirates.

Teresa:

No.

Travis:

Uh, cruise staffers? Crew... yeah.

Teresa:

Sure. I want to say cruise crew, and that's not right.

Travis:

Aw, but that's real fun, though.

Teresa:

That's real fun... will use two fingers in order to differentiate between an accusatory point and a point where it may need to draw your attention to something.

Travis:

I've also seen people use, like, full hands.

Teresa:

Yes. Um, I had a professor in college that always said it's very weak.

Travis:

Is that Bruce Kromer?

Teresa:

It is Bruce Kromer.

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

It is very weak to point at something with one finger when you have five fingers on your hand. You should use all of them.

Travis:

Because it is. Uh, I think that's why I think of, like, lawyers—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm

Travis:

... and stuff like that and politicians gesturing with their whole hands. It's a much more dramatic moment, and I'm talking like a politician right now. Speaking of, Kat asks, "Talking with one's hands in either public or professional interactions, acceptable or not?"

Teresa:

I believe it is acceptable, um, uh, more so in other countries than in the United States, where gesticulating wildly in the United States can be a, a symbol of you not really knowing what you're talking about.

Travis:

Yeah, I think that's the thing, is, like, if you're doing it with purpose—

Teresa:

Exactly.

Travis:

... but it doesn't look contrived. I think that's the... 'cause I talk with my hands all the time. Um, and I have to be very aware, but sometimes... 'cause sometimes it's just, like, the equivalent of babbling but with my hands.

Teresa:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis:

But I also don't want to look... because sometimes you see it in, like, presentations in videos where you see someone doing almost robotic gestures.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

And you're like, "What are you doing? Stop it. You're freaking me out."

Teresa:

So it should be purposeful, um, but... and... but it shouldn't be too planned. And it should be genuine.

Travis:

Um, the... I love this. This is from kittenwitch on Twitter. "What do you do you do if you think someone is waving at you but they're waving to someone else, but you've already waved back?" Embarrassing.

Teresa:

[laughs] Well, hopefully, then the only two people who are embarrassed are you and the person who was not waving at you. I would say, try and move on with your life because short of going up and saying to that person, "I thought you were waving at me. Isn't that so funny? Ha ha ha—"

Travis:

Yeah.

Teresa:

... there really isn't much that you can do. Um—

Travis:

I say you lean into it.

Teresa:

Oh yeah?

Travis:

You wave at them, and you realize they were waving at someone. And you kind of lean between them and the other person, and you wave at them again.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I think that the world would be better place if everybody waved at everybody all the time like—

Teresa:

Constantly?

Travis:

Uh, no, maybe not constantly.

Teresa:

Okay.

Travis:

You might get tired. Blood would drain from your hand. But, like, I think most Midwestern people have practiced the kind of head nod good morning like, "Hello."

Teresa:

Mm-hmm.

Travis:

"I'm acknowledging you. I see you there." And you know, I long for the days gone by of Main Street where one might wave to the milkman, the paperboy, even the TV. Wait, that's a song.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

Uh, but I do think, like, I often have a weird impulse to just wave at people I make eye contact with on the street. But I don't want to be run out of town, so I don't do that. But I think that that would be fun if everybody would just

start waving at each other only if you make eye contact with someone, just like, "Hi. Hi. I'm happy to see you. I'm glad that you're on the Earth."

Teresa:

Yes, Travis. I agree. That would be fun.

Travis:

It would be fun if everybody just waved all the time. Um, this is from Christine. Is it really that bad to gesture at someone to come over to you with your hand facing up? I've heard that it means some very bad things in different cultures, uh, and to always gesture with your palm down. But is it really that bad, or are people just blowing it out of proportion?

Teresa:

From the things that I've been able to discover, um, a waving hand with your palm up is used to call livestock to you in other parts of the world, and so to use that would be an insult, calling someone an animal. Um, so instead, they call someone to you with your whole hand down and waving... wave them towards you that way. Um, as—

Travis:

I also don't know if this is true or not, but this is completely anecdotal. When I think of waving someone to come over with your palm facing up, I think of, like, fight movies and fighting—

Teresa:

Mm-hmm

Travis:

... of, like, kind of a challenge. Um, you know, in, like, kung fu movies, you see people do that a lot and that kind of thing. So maybe it is, like, a challenging gesture of, like, come over here. You're in trouble. But as I said, I've done no research in that. That's just what pops in my head when I think of gesturing for someone to come over with your palm facing up.

Teresa:

Well, I mean, but like I said, the palm facing up is used in other parts of the world, um. And, and sometimes could be construed as a sexual thing where, you know, they want, want to use you for sexual pleasure.

Travis:

Sure.

Teresa:

Um, so, but that's, that's in other parts of the world. In, in the United States, we often beckon people to us with the palm facing up. Often with just a single finger, uh, you may ask someone to come to you. Um, and so I think that one really just depends on where you are.

Travis:

So would you say general rule of thumb, if someone were traveling to a different, uh, country or different culture that this... that it's definitely, like, you should Google what hand gesture should I not do in Ireland, that kind of thing?

Teresa:

[laughs] It could always help.

Travis:

Yeah. Rarely does that hurt. Rarely checking on stuff before you go somewhere does that hurt. Well, I think that's going to do it for us. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for listening. Um, thank you for sharing this episode with a friend and say, "Hey, thought you would like this one, Steve. You always talk with your hands." Um, we have some thank-yous for some stuff we've received in our PO box, which is PO Box 909, Van Nuys, California, 91408. What kind of stuff did we get?

Teresa:

Well, we got a very lovely onesie that says "I heart mangoes" on it. Um, I don't know exactly who that's from. Uh, there didn't seem to be an accompanying note, but if it was you, thank you very much.

Travis:

Uh, we also received a ninja bib, uh, from Jeremy. Jeremy, thank you very much. Um, let's see. We've gotten some nice letters, some postcards, lots of stuff for my brother and my brother and me too. It all goes to the same PO box. But we got some baby stuff, and we appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Um, we also want to say thank you to Maximum Fun for hosting us. They have lots of great shows. You're going to find some other ones on there that you like. Uh, go check them out. Try out something new today. Why not? Don't be scared. Listen to a new podcast. We're right here with you. We'll keep you safe.

Teresa:

Uh, thanks again to Brent Black, "Brentalfloss," for writing our theme song. That theme song is available on iTunes as a ringtone if you'd like to purchase that. Um, and thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our banner and thumbnail art.

Travis:

Um, also, go check out our Twitter feed. It's @shmannerscast, S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S cast. Um, you can also follow us on Facebook, join the Facebook group. Just search for Shmanners in the Groups tab, and you'll find us. And, you know, just, uh, stick around, and we'll, we'll see you again in the future.

Teresa:

[laughs]

Travis:

I think that's going to do it for us. Join us again next week.

Teresa:

No RSVP required.

Travis:

You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa:

Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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