

Shmanners 400: American Sign Language

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[theme music plays]

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

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

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners!

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: It's the MaxFunDrive!

Teresa and Travis: [singing] It's the Maximum Fun Drive!

Travis: Hi, everybody.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: So... we'll tell you all the details, but just to kick it off real quick, once a year there is a two week super fun, mega blast, excite-a-rama period—as we've always called it.

Teresa: Always.

Travis: Where we come to you and say, "Hey. Do you like Shmanners? Do you like the other Max Fun shows?"

Teresa: And you say yes.

Travis: And you say yes, because why would you be listening if you're like, "Ooh, every week. I hate this! Time to listen again!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And we say, if you like it, maybe consider supporting us. Not just with your love and devotion, but perhaps financially, with them dollar dollar bills.

And so then if you're like, "I would love for them to keep making Shmanners," you go to Maximumfun.org/join and you pledge to support us with a monthly membership starting as low as \$5 a month.

And they go up. There's \$10, \$20, on and on. And with those you get different rewards and perks for being a member. But the number one best one is over 600 hours of bonus content.

Teresa: Oh man. It's so much.

Travis: This year, I'm very proud of the Shmanners one especially. We talked about the language of emojis.

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: And also did a video section where I did a flash card quiz with Teresa to see if she knew the kind of slang meaning of emojis. And all of that—

Teresa: Spoiler alert: I did not. [laughs]

Travis: Um... yeah. If it was pass/fail... you failed. But you gave it your— the old college try. You did your best. Um, and all of that and more, and all of the past years of bonus content, everything's there, um, in the BoCo feed.

But more than that, you know that you are not only supporting the art and artists you love with Shmanners and other McElroy shows—there are quite a few. Um, [laughs] but also, Max Fun is a very special organization in that we own the shows that we make. They support us without controlling the art

and media and stuff that we make, which is very rare. Um, and you can support that and support us by going to Maximumfun.org/join.

I'll tell you more soon. But first, Teresa...

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: I'm pretty darn excited to talk about this week's topic. We're talking about American Sign Language.

Teresa: We are!

Travis: Sometimes I pretend like I don't know what the topic is and I'm like, "What are we talking about this week?"

But I know. I know! But I pretend like I don't so that it gives a segue. But I'm so excited to talk about this. But I also want to say, sometimes... um, I get confused by very similar, uh, uh... uh, what is it called when it's—you use the first letters?!

Teresa: Abbreviations.

Travis: Abbreviations. Because when I was a cool young 10-to-18-year-old and we used AOL chat rooms and Instant Messenger, ASL meant—and man, it's so creepy to say it out loud now. "Age, sex, location."

Which at the time was just like, "Oh, you're in a chat room. Oh, hi. ASL, everybody?"

And in retrospect, it's so inherently creepastic to be like, "How old are you?" As, like, your first—"And where are you?" [laughs]

I know! But at the time, ugh.

Teresa: It was a different time.

Travis: It was the equivalent of when people talk about, like, "We used to ride our bikes all night all around the neighborhood, and as long as we were home for dinner our parents didn't care."

And that's, like, the equivalent, except it's like, "Yeah. We used to tell people how old we were and where we lived all the time! And nobody even thought about it!"

But I think about it. But that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about ASL, American Sign Language.

Teresa: Yes. Um, so we're gonna do some history, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But also the general etiquette of communicating with a deaf person.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Let's all agree that when a person is signing, right? The brain process of all the linguistic information is through the eyes and not the ears, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, and so the shape, the placement, the movement of a person's hands, as well as their facial expressions and body movement, all become essential to the communication style, right?

But that doesn't mean that there's only one way to say something. Just like the English language, for example, has many words for describing maybe sometimes the same thing, or different nuances between things...

Travis: Different emphasis.

Teresa: Different emphasis. There are lots of ways to sign things, and there are even lots of sign languages.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, each country has their own sign language and different regions have their own dialects.

Travis: [simultaneously] Well, you would have to!

Teresa: I know!

Travis: Because especially, like, there are lots of ASL words that are, like, uh, almost like letter combinations, right? Where you see them doing the signs for the letters in combination in a certain way that you know what that is, right? Or names or something like that.

Teresa: Yeah, but even the letter signs are different between different languages.

Travis: That's what I'm saying, right? 'Cause if you think about it, like, there's different symbols in different languages. You wouldn't be able to just use ASL for everything. Yeah.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So back when we started paying attention to this kind of thing, because there have always been deaf people, so there have always been sign languages. Um, but they were highly specialized to localities, right?

So, every village, every group had their own kind of way of delineating their own sign language. And people within that group could often recognize what another deaf person might have meant from a different sign language.

Travis: I think about it kind of like accents almost. You know?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Like, if you think about before there was so much travel between locations, right? When it was a lot more difficult to get from even state to state, let alone country to country—we were talking about this last night. I say that, right? And I saw a TikTok recently where they were like—like,

different, like, countries make fun of America sometimes for being so poorly traveled. And I saw this, like, British dude who was like, "And then I go to America. Do you know how hard it is just to get from place to place in America? It takes so long. So let's not give them such a hard time that they haven't been to Switzerland."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, but that idea of like, I think about, like, Appalachian for example, right? Where the Appalachian accent inherently comes from different people settling in that area, and then not really traveling outside of it for a long time. And so that accent developing as a very regional thing. And then... then you hear it and you're like, "What a unique thing."

And it's like, well, it's because it was, like, a Petri dish for that accent to grow without a lot of outside influences. And so I imagine that there was a similar thing with the sign languages being like, yeah, man. Maybe you only ever interact with, like, maybe your family on the farm, let alone, like, 800 people in your entire life. So, like, yeah. Whatever you are able to figure out that works for that community, of course you stick with that.

Teresa: And hearing or not, we all use our hands and our expressions to indicate certain things, right?

Travis: Some of us more than others.

Teresa: Some of us more than others.

Travis: I knock stuff over left and right. We have to work hard with Bebe to scoot her glasses back at dinner. Every night, let me just—if I could just... ooh, could you move that from the edge of the table? Ooh."

That's a thing that—once again, I've got a lot of energy this morning 'cause I'm excited about the MaxFunDrive. I didn't know as a parent how much time and energy would be spent moving my child's cups away from, like, halfway off the table. It's just a constant thing at dinner of just like, "If I could just—hmm—yep, let's just—just scoot that back. Can you say how it's

hanging over like we're gonna play flip cup? If you could just pull that back, that would be great."

Teresa: She doesn't know what flip cup is. Anyway.

Travis: Not yet. Wait till she's 12.

Teresa: So pointing at things, right? That's—

Travis: We're gonna use root beer.

Teresa: [wheezes] Okay. Anyway. Pointing at things, waving hello, those kind of things are a type of sign, right? Even though they are not recognized as, like, a language, it is a way of communicating, right?

Travis: Flipping the bird. That's a pretty clear one.

Teresa: Absolutely. Pretty clear one.

Travis: Had to have that conversation with Bebe the other day too.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: She didn't do it, but a kid in her class had said "Don't flip the middle finger." And she was like, "Why not?" And I was like, "Well, you know how you have, like, a thumbs up?" [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Now imagine... "

Teresa: So ASL as we know it today really didn't begin to form until the 19th century in New England. Um, it was where a kind of triangle of village sign language started to cement themselves. Particularly Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. I'm gonna do the best I can with this name. Henniker in New Hampshire.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And the Sandy River Valley in Maine.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: These villages in the eastern US that make kind of a lopsided triangle... they're not—I mean, it's not a perfect triangle. Anyway.

Travis: Can I reveal a thing about myself?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: I'm 40. I'm a 40-year-old man. I know it's not this. But every time I hear Martha's Vineyard, I picture Martha Stewart standing in a vineyard.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I think it's like when I was a child that Martha Stewart was so very prevalent—not as much now, but still... a concern. [through laughter] A concern? Watch out, she could be anywhere!

I used to always just picture, like, "Oh. That's where Martha Stewart lives." That's just what I believed.

Teresa: That's not it. But...

Travis: Okay. Do we know she's not there?

Teresa: I don't know off the top of my head where Martha Stewart is at any given time.

Travis: Like how Ina Garten lives in a garden, right? And Martha Vin—

Teresa: But—

Travis: What?

Teresa: She lives in a house.

Travis: Well, Bobby Flay peels people's skin off.

Teresa: [laughs] Gross. Do not. Do not go there. Okay.

So, due to the intermarriage of the original community of English settlers back in the 1690s, several different families have a genetic trait of deafness. Um, in fact, in Chilmark, which is a village on Martha's Vineyard, they had a high rate of genetic deafness which accounted for about 4% of their community.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So obviously they had to find a way to make sure that everybody was able to communicate, right? And so MVSL, Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, became very popular, also with the hearing residents. So you would use them regardless of whether or not they were speaking to a deaf member of the community.

Travis: Well, if you think about it, right? Like, this is... a lot of sign language, right? Whether you're, you know, a deaf person, hearing person, whatever, right? Is so effective across—like, think about it. Long distances, right? I don't wanna yell across the street. Like, "[yelling] Hey! Isn't it—"

Like, I can just kinda wave. Right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Or, like, saying thank you, right? Is a lot easier. Or, like, pointing at something. Like, there's a lot of, uh, maybe not codified signing, but that is so useful and effective to use. Right? There's a reason they use it in, like, tactical missions and, like, when you're doing a—I don't know. I see it in military and spy movies all the time. I assume it's real.

Teresa: Also great for whispering at church.

Travis: That's also true.

Teresa: Yeah. So you don't make any noise with the signs. You don't... yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You can talk to your friends and not pay attention.

Travis: Yeah. Or like your dad can tell you, like, "Stop. Stop it! Stop doing the thing you're doing. Boys, I'm looking at you right now."

Teresa: [laughs] So—but a completely standardized version of the language didn't exist in America until the American School for the Deaf was founded in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817. Not originally called that.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Unfortunately.

Travis: I'm sure that it was far less sensitive.

Teresa: Indeed. But the founder was connected to a very lovely little lady named Alice. Alice Cogswell was the beloved daughter—

Travis: What a great last name.

Teresa: I know. Of a wealthy doctor named Mason Cogswell.

Travis: I wish he made clocks.

Teresa: Um, and at the age of two—

Travis: Or he fixed clocks! If he fixed clocks and he made cogs well!

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: Ughhh.

Teresa: But no, he's a doctor.

Travis: Of clocks?

Teresa: No.

Travis: A clocktor.

Teresa: No. Peop—people.

Travis: A clocktor.

Teresa: No. Um, unfortunately Alice was very ill at the age of two with what was diagnosed as spotted fever, but probably cerebrospinal meningitis.

Travis: Fever is one of those things—I think they've talked about it on Sawbones where, like, it became kind of a catch-all. Like, "Oh, they've got a fever," right? Where it's like, clearly something's wrong. We don't know what it is. It's just kind of a blanket term for, like, that kind of thing, especially in, like, the 1800—"Ah, it's a fever."

Teresa: Yeah. And this is, like, a relatively difficult thing to survive today. Um, and so by some miracle she lived through this infection. It's the swelling of the protective tissues surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

Travis: Oh boy.

Teresa: Ooh.

Travis: All that stuff's very important.

Teresa: It is very important. So...

Travis: I'm not clocktor, but I know how important the spine and brain is.

Teresa: Yes. [wheezes] Clocktor. Oh, man...

I went—I passed that, came back to it. Now I'm... [laughs] Oh, man... Here in the 1800s...

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: Uh, there were some pretty dumb ideas.

Travis: What? Get outta town!

Teresa: One of those dumb ideas being that deafness was viewed as a mental illness.

Travis: Huh.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and not—not only was it widely believed that deaf people did not require any educate, that they were incapable of being educated.

Travis: Okay. Alright, guys.

Teresa: Ridiculous.

Travis: Alright.

Teresa: So at the time, unless your family advocated for you, a deaf person was mostly just educated to enough to, like, learn the Bible or something, right? Um, and not expected to have any kind of, like, higher education, other than maybe reading and writing.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: But this stigma is something that Alice would learn to overcome. Um, and that was at the intervention of a man named Thomas Gallaudet.

Travis: Sounds French to me.

Teresa: Yes, he is French.

Travis: So maybe it was [French accent] Thomas.

Teresa: Maybe.

Travis: Or was there an H in there? Does the H affect it? Then it's Thomas [with soft TH sound].

Teresa: [wheezes] Uh, I believe that the T-H in French is not pronounced thh. I think it's just a T.

Travis: I know. I know. I was just—it was just a joke that I was making. Um, 'cause that's all I can really contribute.

Teresa: Oh, right. That's it. So it was apparent to Thomas that Alice was very smart. Um, and he was able to communicate with her using pictures and writing and all kinds of things. And it was clear that she was very intelligent.

So he began to teach her, and to get together with her dad so that they could make it, like, not just available to her, but everyone who needed this kind of education, right? So they embarked on a mission—

Travis: [simultaneously] I just wanna say—

Teresa: —to get her the education she deserved.

Travis: I—[sighs] I—on the one hand, I really—I'm—I love that a parent was like, "If this has helped us, then there will be other parents out there that this will help too, and other children and other people."

Man, it sucks that it took until, like 1817 to kind of come up with that, right?

Teresa: Yeah. But like I said, um, communities have always supported their deaf people. This wasn't just—you know. There's a long history of people, like, creating their own adaptations, and the way that different learning styles and things like that. It's just like, at this point, there was kind of, like, a

convergence of the people who you lived with doing the best that they could, and the institutions, right?

Travis: Okay. Got it, got it, got it. I'm so excited to learn more about this. But first, I want the people at home to learn a little bit more about the MaxFunDrive.

Hey, it's me, Travis, and this is a MaxFunDrive break. Welcome to it! So, MaxFunDrive, I like I said, every year we come to you and say, hey. Consider supporting these shows. What you do, you go to Maximumfun.org/join. There you're gonna see a lot of different levels to support, starting at just \$5 a month.

For \$5 a month, you're going to get access to over 600 hours of bonus content. All of the years of Shmanners that we've done, plus all of the bonus content from all of the other shows. It's, like, 600 hours of audio and video. It's all kinds of stuff. Go check it out.

For \$10 a month, you get all of the bonus content, plus you're gonna get to pick an enamel pin that represents one of your favorite shows. There's, like, 30-some over there to choose from. I think the Shmanners one is really cute this year. It is a little teacup winking. It says, "Get it?" So cute. Check that out.

Um, and then, you know, it goes up from there. But any level of support that you're able to give means the world to us. Maybe you're already a member and you're like, "You know what? I'm ready to upgrade, go to the next level."

Great! We love that. That works too. You're gonna move from \$5 a month to \$10 a month? You're gonna move from \$10 a month to \$20 a month? That means the world to us.

Maybe you're not ready to upgrade but you do want to give a little bit more. You can boost your membership, which just means, you know, you commit a couple extra bucks on top of what you're already doing a month, that means the world as well.

And we also have a new thing this year where if you want to just do a full year up front, if you're like, "You know what? Rather than worry about \$5 a month, I'm just gonna pay \$60 and just be done with it."

You can do that as well. All of that matters. All of that supports our show. On the next break I'll tell you how that support works. But right now, just now that by going to Maximumfun.org/join, you can support Shmanners and all the other shows and Max Fun, and all of that stuff. Thank you. Let's get back to the show.

Okay. So, they're teaching Alice. Alice gets it. They're like, "This rules. Let's do a school. Let's tell more people. Let's spread this around."

Teresa: So, they wanted to go to Europe and learn from where people were already developing schools catered to deaf people. And there was a family in England that operated several schools for deaf students, the Braidwoods.

Travis: Another great name!

Teresa: Another great name. But they were focused more on oral education. So the students were expected to master lipreading and speech. Alice specifically because of her illness was also mute, so she could not speak. Um, and they also—the Braidwoods—you know, they had been working on this, so they weren't too keen on really, like, sharing it?

Travis: Oh no.

Teresa: Um, but... undeterred, Thomas and her dad met Abbé Sicard, the director of the Institut Royal de Sourds-Muets in Paris, France.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and that school had been operating since the 1700s. So they had a ton of experience, and also—

Travis: Money.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I would bet.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Some. At least some money.

Teresa: But, um, they met some graduates of the program who were very interested in carrying on this education, right?

Travis: Yes, okay.

Teresa: Um, so Thomas stayed in France to learn everything that he possibly could about the methods there. Um, and brought one of the students I mentioned, Laurent Clerc, with him back home to teach Alice. And so on the way home, Clerc taught Gallaudet the sign language that they used. And Gallaudet taught Clerc as much English as he could. So it went—you know, it was kind of an exchange.

Travis: Cultural exchange.

Teresa: Of ideas. Um, and so Alice thrived. She loved to read and sew and dance, and was fascinated by the concept of music, even though she couldn't really hear it, right? And so in April of 1879 in Hartford, Connecticut, Clerc and Thomas established the America School for the Deaf, opening their doors for Alice and then six other deaf students.

So Laurent Clerc was the very first deaf teacher in the United States of America. Neat!

Travis: Awesome.

Teresa: Um, and so he wound up changing the lives of a lot of people, and nicknamed the apostle of the Deaf in America. Um, and stayed there at his school for 50 years. Um, doing everything he could to shape Deaf education, instructing students, adapting what they needed. Um, and so this is where from his classes that American Sign Language as we know it today starts to take shape.

Students from Martha's Vineyard brought their sign language with them. And then, like we said earlier, um, students from Henniker and Sandy River Valley also brought their own sign language.

And so they had this kind of convergence of sign languages, plus the French sign language. And so—

Travis: Which once again, it just makes me think about as we developed things like radio and then movies, TV, I mean, newspaper, as printing became a big thing, like, so much regionalisms—especially in America where once again, so huge, the United States of America. So many different developing cultures. And then people start to pick up like, "Oh, cowboy slang, and southern idioms, and, you know, northern dialects and all this stuff."

And you start to get much more of that melting pot of language. Of like, "Oh yeah. Oh, well, I heard my cousin say this and I liked it. And we spread that around." And stuff like that.

Teresa: Yeah. Um, so then this spread all the way across the country in different societies, like the National Association for the Deaf, and the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf. They held conventions and attracted signers, and they are spreading this—

Travis: Cosplayers.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Probably different—different kind of convention, huh?

Teresa: Different kind of convention.

Travis: Okay. I bet at least one Power Ranger was there signing autographs, though.

Teresa: [laughs] But they spread ASL as a kind of, like, middle ground, right? Where, like, everyone would pretty much, like, have their own daily

sign language, but signers could communicate, and hearing people could also understand what was happening, right? If they had been trained in ASL.

Not everyone agreed with this standardization, because in the 1950s, many people thought that it was best for deaf people to be taught through oralism, like I talked about, right? So lip reading.

Travis: In the 1850s? [crosstalk]

Teresa: No. 1950s.

Travis: 1950s. Oh.

Teresa: So we moved through history, right? And then we've talked about this before, this kind of pendulum swing, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so oralism, like I said, is a focus on oral language, mimicking mouth movements, lip reading, things like that.

Travis: Kind of seems like—listen. I don't want to disparage anybody. There might be good reason for it. But it kind of seems to me like a way of saying, like, "Well, I don't wanna have to learn how to sign. So I would like them to just learn how to read my lips so I can just keep speaking 'normally,' quote-unquote."

Teresa: It does, it does sound like that.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, and so there was... unfortunately, there was a, um, a group of people called The Milan Congress who held the second International Congress on Education of the Deaf who really only contained one non-hearing person.

Travis: Hmm! Huh!

Teresa: And decided that oralism was the way to go, and we don't like sign language.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Later, they recanted and apologized.

Travis: "Hey, we're buttholes, obviously. Sorry, everybody."

Teresa: Yes, obviously. So as you can imagine, that was catastrophic to the Deaf community. But it didn't extinguish ASL, which is great. Um, and oralism is a tool that one can choose to use, but I don't think—I mean, like you said, you shouldn't be expected to communicate that way, because it may not be possible.

Like, I remember teaching Bebe and Dottie to talk, and it's not like [laughs quietly] I could hold their mouths and make them make the noises. It was just they are hearing children, they were able to replicate the sounds, and then that was the way that they did their mouth.

But if you can't hear it, you might not be able to do that. So it's really—it's not cool, is what it is.

Travis: I mean, the thing is, is it should be like any teaching tool where, as you said, have—you don't just have one tool in your toolbox.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Right? You have lots of things, and whatever works works. But having a common language to start from—like, I think it's why ASL is, like, so incredible and should be, uh, a core tenet of, uh, any kind of learning curriculum. Of, like, having that to build off of is so strong.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I mean, even, like, when our—before our kids learned to speak, there was a lot of, like, sign language that you teach to babies, and they pick up on it very, very quickly. And things like thank you, drink, hungry, more—

Teresa: Yeah. It definitely—I mean, you focus on them asking for the things that they need, which is really important, 'cause you can't talk when you're a baby.

Travis: And saying thank you, 'cause as soon as a baby can start showing gratitude...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It really—it helps so much.

Teresa: Um, there was a really great stride in 1955 for ASL where a transcription system was created. So that revolutionized both deaf education and linguistics as a field, which is really cool.

Um, and today ASL is used by an estimated half a million people throughout the United States and Canada, and is frequently taught as a second language.

Um, it's also considered a lingua franca in many parts of the world, which is like a bridge language or a link language, right? So I think that that is... from where we started, everyone communicating in order to get their needs met, right? And then to the point where it crosses over different communication divides, I think that's awesome.

Travis: That is awesome, and I want to hear some of the etiquette in just a second. But how about another little break for a little MaxFunDrive info?

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And thank you, frankly. Like, one of my favorite things about the MaxFunDrive is it's a chance for us to not only ask for your support, but thank you for it, and acknowledge that we can't do what we do without your support. So if these shows are important to you, if you listen on enough of a regular basis that you look forward to episodes and you enjoy the things that we make, please consider going to Maximumfun.org/join right now and becoming a member, or upgrading your membership, boosting your membership, whatever.

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But if you do want to give financially, one more time, Maximumfun.org/join. Thank you so much!

Okay, tell me some of that etiquette.

Teresa: So, if you want to know how to effectively communicate with someone who signs as their main language, here are a few things.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: You should always keep trying.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, saying hello to a deaf person, smiling at them, asking them questions, I think is important because if a deaf person does not understand what you're saying the first few times, giving up and saying "Oh, don't worry about it, it doesn't matter," can make them feel like they don't matter.

So even if it takes four or five times of rephrasing it, or writing it down, or drawing pictures, it's important to continue to work to try and communicate to each other.

Travis: It also, to go back to a little bit of my beef with people in the 1950s who, if I could go back in time, oh, I'd get 'em—uh, about oralism. It shows that you're putting in the work and not just like, "You know what? This is hard for me, and so I'm going to stop, deaf person, and you have to do all the work." Like, "Oh boy. Oh boy." To be able to say like, "I don't know, man. It's hard for me to learn ASL." Like...

Teresa: "So I'm just not gonna do anything."

Travis: "So I'm just not gonna?" Come on, man.

Teresa: Another one is to always face the deaf person. Um, make and keep eye contact while you're speaking. So do your best not to look away or cover your mouth, even though you may feel embarrassed trying to communicate. These visual representations are very important, right?

So, you know, deaf people need to be able to see your lips, if they can lip read. But you shouldn't count on them to be able to do that. Um, but facial expressions are really helpful. Gesticulating like hearing people do in regular life, pointing to things, waving your hands excitedly. I do that a lot.

Travis: Knocking glasses over.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Plus it just kind of normalizes the conversation.

Teresa: Yeah, absolutely.

Travis: Right? That's how you would talk to somebody else.

Teresa: Also, you don't want to be too close, right? So a little bit of distance is good.

Travis: That's true just in life. Just a good bit of distance when talking to someone is appreciated.

Teresa: But you know what I mean? It's easier to communicate with someone visually if you're sitting across from them at a table instead of next to them, right? 'Cause you can see more of their body. Noise and lighting are also really important. And I know that we're talking about deaf people, but not every deaf person is 100% deaf. A lot of people can still hear, like, planes, or dogs barking, or other, like, loud noises, right?

Um, so they also might use a hearing aid at some point. I know that there are different ways to do, like, colloquial—what is it? Implants, things like that. If there is a lot of—

Travis: Cochlear.

Teresa: Cochlear. That's the name. Thank you, dear. If there's a lot of ambient noise in the room it might be better to go someplace where there's less noise.

Travis: Do you ever find when you're trying to remember a word but you said the wrong word first—'cause you said, like, colloquial, and then in my brain it's almost like I picture myself having to push colloquial out of the way to see behind it? Like, no, I know it's not you. Move!

And it's like, "Is it me?" And it's like, "No, colloquial! Get outta here!" And behind that I can see cochlear and I'm like, "There it is."

Teresa: There it is. Um, you should speak clearly, slowly, and steadily. Try not to do any mumbling or shouting, right? Or too much exaggeration, because it does distort your lip patterns. So if a deaf person can lip read, it makes it even harder if you're shouting at them.

Travis: Also, that's weird.

Teresa: That's weird, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Inclusion is important, but so is normalization, right? And that thing of like, "[loudly] I'm yelling at you!" Right? Like, that... that doesn't make it feel like a normal conversation.

And that thing of like, yeah, man. If people are watching right now, it makes me feel that you're doing that, right?

Teresa: You don't need to speak in slow motion. That's what—you know, that's another thing that's distortion. But taking your time and saying exactly what you need to say very clearly is appreciated.

Take turns in a conversation. So not only are you trying to communicate with the deaf person, they need to be able to respond to you. So don't just, like, keep trying to hammer your point home. Let the other person respond to you in the conversation, 'cause that's how conversations work.

Travis: Indeed.

Teresa: Um, on the point of yelling. I understand. It's a human thing, right? When a person doesn't understand you, in the hearing world it makes sense for you to speak louder. But not at this time. That's not helpful in this situation.

Um, so if you are having trouble communicating, louder is not better. Try slower first. Not, like, slow motion, but try a more, like, mindful speaking pattern.

Like I said, be patient and be willing to try again. Try different ways. If you really find that someone that you're trying to talk to cannot understand while you're speaking with them, try things like writing it down. Try things like pointing to the things that you need, miming the thing that you want, even drawing in pictures, right? Try and find a way to communicate effectively, even if it's not your first way that you tried. Right?

Travis: I mean, I go back to imagine you're making friends with someone for whom, like, French is their first language, right? And you might ask the question, like, "How do I say this in French," right? As you're learning French.

That same thing of like, "How do I sign this?" Right? Even if you have to write down, "How do you sign this?"

And then you see them sign it, right? When we talk about for example the cultural exchange of Thomas teaching... Laurent?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Yeah, boom.

Teresa: You were listening!

Travis: And Laurent—yeah. Laurent teaching Thomas. Like, that exchange only happens with patience, and the ability to look like you don't know what you're doing, right? And listen, take it from me, a person whose biggest anxiety comes from not knowing the process, not knowing the thing, and having to be bad at it at first. I get it.

But the—like, the willingness to say, "I don't know how to do this, but I know that it's important and I'm willing to look a little silly as I learn, as I get better at it," is very important.

Teresa: Speaking of "learn," there are, like, hundreds of videos on YouTube about ASL.

Now, I am saying—I do think that you should not just go to the first one that pops up, because it's important that you learn sign language from someone who actually, like, uses it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: The same as, like, if you were trying to learn an accent for a part or something that you're in the play, eh, yeah, why not learn from—like, you're trying to learn a German accent? Uh, learn from someone who's from Germany. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: Something like that, right? So not every single one of those [crosstalk].

Travis: [crosstalk] diction teachers, if you're listening, you don't have to—I understand. You can teach it too. I'm just saying if we're talking about YouTube videos.

Teresa: Right, YouTube videos. Consider the source.

But if you google it, there are, like, seven million hits. So make an effort to learn one or two signs.

When I was a career lifeguard, my first career, we had to learn sign languages. Things for, like, thunder and lightning, right? Or get out of the pool, or walk, or things like that, right?

We learned that stuff so that we would be able to communicate to the Deaf community the things that we needed them to do for their safety. Right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It could come in handy. Go and learn some.

Travis: That is such a good tagline for ASL. "ASL: It can come in handy." Right?

Teresa: Yeah, love it.

Travis: Oh my goodness. Okay. Before we let you go, one last time for this week—we'll talk about it a little more next week. One last time for this week. Um, it's the MaxFunDrive, week one. We're recording this Thursday morning, but already going strong. And we really appreciate the support. The support not only allows us to do this show, but it also just allows us to focus on

this—Alexx, for example, our researcher, without whom we could not make this show—well, without your support, we couldn't have Alexx to help us make this show. And Rachel—

Teresa: Because people deserve to be paid for their service.

Travis: Exactly. Rachel, our editor, without whom we could not make this show. We could not pay her for her work without your support. And I joke about it every week, but we couldn't make this show without our Max Fun members. It's what allows us to make this our job, and to put it out consistently. And it also—man, it's just nice knowing that the thing that you make matters to people, and the thing that you make matters enough to people that they voluntarily, when they can—I understand not everybody can—but say, "This—I don't have to pay for this to listen to it and enjoy it, but it means so much to me that I'm choosing to support it."

I think that that is a really wonderful and nice—just a nice thing to do. It makes us feel pretty good. Also during this week it's not just about the gratitude. There's also a lot of fun things going on at the McElroy Family YouTube channel, over on the McElroy Family Instagram. Go to the Instagram first if you're not already subscribed, 'cause that's where all announcements and stuff about things that are coming up go out.

Um—

Teresa: Like special streams.

Travis: Exactly. Me and my brothers have started doing a new series called the McElroy Family Clubhouse where we will be doing, like—every other week, I think, doing episodes of us sitting at a desk doing some bits. Visual stuff. And then on the other weeks, still doing our gaming streams and all that stuff. But the first episode is up over on the McElroy Family YouTube, and a bunch of other stuff too, so go check that out.

And if you're thinking about becoming a Max Fun member, do it right now. Don't wait.

Teresa: 'Cause you'll forget!

Travis: Yeah, it's gonna fly right out of your head. Go to Maximumfun.org/join. Find the level that works for you. Maybe you're already a member. Maybe think about upgrading. Or if you can't move up to the next level, think about boosting by a couple of dollars. It all helps.

What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners!

If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

As always, we are taking topic submissions, questions, idioms. Send it all over to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every one.

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

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners...

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners! Get it?

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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