

Shmanners 432: Sarah Winchester

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Travis: Hey, folks! Travis here. Just wanted to do a quick content warning up top. In discussing the life of Sarah Winchester, we do touch on the topics of infant and child mortality. If that is something you'd rather not hear, you can skip from around the 23 minute mark to the 25 minute mark. Just wanted to give you a heads up. And now, on with the episode.

[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. Spooky sounds!

Teresa: Hellooooo!

Travis: Ohh, thunder! Wait. This comes out on the 1st.

Teresa: Aww. Well—

Travis: Nah, it's still spooky season.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Listen. As long as you're spooky in your heart...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Do you have spooky—I keep spooky in my heart all year long.

Teresa: You sure do.

Travis: You know, ever since those three ghosts came to me.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And they were like, "Hey. You could be spookier." And I said, "Oh—okay, cool, man." And I was like, "Ghosts exist?" And they were like, "Yeah, absolutely." And I was like, "Wild that I'm just finding this out now." And they said, "Yeah. Don't tell anyone, especially not on your podcast, Shmanners."

Oh, noo!

Teresa: Oh no. So today—

Travis: Speaking of g-g-g-ghosts!

Teresa: Ghosts! So, we—

Travis: Except not really.

Teresa: We're gonna talk about the Winchester Mystery House. Now, we have been to this location, and we've talked about this before, but never quite so in-depth.

Travis: It's one of my favorite topics. Here's the thing. Folks, sometimes... a special interest evolves with you over the years. And as you get older, do you know how wonderful it is to be, like, I think 38 years old—I'm 40 now, but 38 years old when I was like, "Everything I thought I knew about the Winchester Mystery House, a thing that I have been interested in since I was a kid, is wrong."

Teresa: Yes. We'll get to that.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, first let's talk about the story that people tell. Okay?

Travis: So the story that people tell is that Sarah Winchester... and this is top of my dome, so tell me if I'm wrong...

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Sarah Winchester married into the Winchester family.

Teresa: That's more 'biographical.' Tell me about the house.

Travis: Okay. So the story is that Sarah Winchester, haunted by ghosts of all the people who had been killed by Winchester rifles, at least as far as she was concerned. She was being haunted by ghosts, and built this house to be a, uh, confusing labyrinth and maze for these ghosts to try to appease them, or keep them away from her. So you have doorways to nowhere, and uneven stairs, and, like, hallways that loop back on themselves. And it's this confusing geometry of architecture made to befuddle the supernatural.

Teresa: Yes. That is the story. That's probably not true.

Travis: No.

Teresa: So... let's talk about her specifically for just a moment. She was a brilliant but reserved woman who bought the original farmhouse, so the very center of this mansion was a farmhouse in San Jose.

Travis: [spooky voice?] Now in the middle of a parking lot, near a Foot Locker! [normal voice] That is true.

Teresa: And she was ex—she was—

Travis: It's just weirdly you have this, like, historic house that everybody goes and visits, this huge thing. But, like, time has moved on around it.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So now it's like, literally like, it's not like, oh, drive to the top of a hill and it's this spooky—it's just like...

Teresa: There's, like, a strip mall on one side.

Travis: If you turn right you're at the McDonald's. You know? And it's—it's... it feels weirdly out of place.

Teresa: So what she did was she was inspired by the grand Victorian architecture of the time, and by her father's carpentry career. Um, and would recreate parts of these, like, extraordinary displays in her home so she could have, like, tea and picnics with her sisters among, like, unusual and beautiful things. Right?

Travis: And what I should do—I wanna do a little caveat here. A little prologue. Whatever. You know what I mean. No. I don't know what I mean.

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: And having been there, nothing we're going to discuss or debunk or talk about or whatever should take away from your interest in visiting this house.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: It is gorgeous. It is interesting. It is absolutely worth the visit. I have been to several kind of roadside attractions and, you know, those kinds of kitschy things where, like, oh, I can't wait to see this! And you get there and you're like, "I paid money? I drove here to see this?"

That is not the case with the Winchester Mystery House. It is absolutely worth the trip. I think I've been there, like, three times now, and I love it very much and I will go again. It's totally worth it.

Teresa: So this woman, Sarah, she was probably... designing herself out of her grief. Right? She did have a very tragic life. And so to keep oneself busy, if you have a ton of money, why not design and build everything you've ever dreamed of? It takes a lot of planning and thought, and maybe she didn't always do such a great job doing that. There are thoughts that maybe she

had some sort of ADHD situation. She would often sketch pieces of things without really worrying about how it fit in with other things.

Travis: Let me—I'm gonna give this context. Think about every, like, celebrity house tour you've seen where they're like, "This table? Ah, it's a old barn door. Um, and when I put things on it, it's not even, so it falls— 'cause there's all the little lumps and bumps on a door, so it falls over. But isn't it beauti—" and you're like, "Why did you spend so—"

The other one being, having worked with contractors when we did, um, you know, some work on our house, it's also possible that they were like, "We did some extra stuff and that's gonna cost you another, you know... "

Teresa: [laughs] By all accounts, she was a very good person to work for. She gave large construction breaks, and she also hired dozens of immigrant workers.

Travis: We should mention when we talk about—

Teresa: And paid them very well.

Travis: —her history, right? Like, so there was a lot of loss.

Teresa: Yes, we will talk about her history.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, one more caveat about the house, right? If you have—like you said, if you've ever seen any of those, like, rich person house tours, they are kind of a product of, like, the cutting edge of design, right? And the cutting edge of design at this point, because the wasn't, like, central heating, right? There wasn't central air. The way Victorian houses were built was that a series of small rooms, often connected to each other not even really with a hallway—a hallway is a modern construct.

Travis: Yeah. It was just room to room to room to room.

Teresa: It was room to room. Because if you were going to be in a room and you wanted it to be warm, you didn't want to heat the whole house. You wanted to heat just the room that you were in. So it is not uncommon that mansions of this time period look more like dollhouses, right?

Travis: Yeah. It's also important to note when we talk about, like, when someone has a lot of money and a lot of space in their house, function takes a backseat to form. Right? Because you could have a room specifically dedicated to a thing, right? And that room didn't have to be useful for multiple things, right? It didn't have to be like, this is our living room, and our dining room and, like, the main room where we sit and do our work, or whatever.

And so you had a lot more, like, little pocket rooms. And when you're thinking about, like, designing a thing, I think about this a lot with the Winchester House where it's like, yeah, but that's not a convenient way to get from this place to this place. It's like, yeah, man. She wasn't touring the house every day. Right? It's not like—I think of—I think there's rarely a day goes by that I'm not—that I don't set foot into every room of our house at some point, looking usually for kids' shoes.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But, like, this idea of, why would she have this room connected to this place? She wouldn't even go there! I'm like, yeah, man. Probably.

Teresa: Probably not.

Travis: She probably didn't go there. It was probably because she had enough money and, let's phrase it, probably was kind of eccentric in the way that when you get rich enough a lot of people are eccentric. Just thought, like, "Oh, that's a cool room to have. Yeah, put that anywhere," or whatever.

Teresa: Yeah. And then the other hand of this is the idea that she was having continual, like, séances and she was interested in the occult. And that's like, everybody of this time period.

Travis: Everybody was.

Teresa: Literally everyone who was interested in—

Travis: Even Arthur Conan Doyle!

Teresa: Indeed, right?

Travis: Everybody except Houdini.

Teresa: Everybody except Houdini, you're right. You're right.

Travis: Houdini out there debunking it left and right. I guess he was interested in it in that way.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: He did attend a lot of séances.

Teresa: Yeah. Attending séances, going to see lectures by mediums, going to other people's houses for this kind of stuff. She didn't really do that. She was kind of like, you know... uh, occlusive that way. But you know—reclusive, that's what I meant.

Um, but you know, everybody was doing that kind of stuff. So if that's part of the narrative, that's because everybody was doing it.

Travis: You also have to—once again, the context of her being rich... she could afford to do more séances, and go to more of these lectures, and have dining parties with, like, mediums and stuff there, right? So if she did it more than, say, the average person, it's 'cause she could afford to. She didn't have a job, either, right? It's not like she had to go to work or worry about that, so she had a lot more free time, and all of these things. There's a lot of context to it that if you remove that it's like, "Whoa, she was such a weird lady!"

And it's like, everybody was weird. Everybody was weird at that time.

Teresa: And here's the last piece of the puzzle. There was an enormous earthquake in 1906, right? And so the repercussions of this earthquake in San Francisco echoed all throughout the state of California, right? Parts of the mansion were damaged so badly that the idea of starting over on those sections was way too much, right?

Travis: Also if I remember correctly, she was quite old by that point. And it's like, "I don't care."

So when we talk about like, the door to nowhere, which is a famous thing—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: —it didn't used to be a door to nowhere. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: That's right. So a lot of the damaged sections were either torn down and sealed off or just sealed off.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? So, like, there's a staircase that goes to the ceiling. Probably went to a room above that that was damaged, and so just closed off, and they didn't take down the staircase. Right?

So there's a lot of, like, normal things that have been kind of sensationalized.

Travis: Yeah. And once again, I can't stress enough, that part of it... like, the "This house is wild and a mystery," I love that, right? Because it's like, we're selling a thing. We're selling a story.

It's when we get into selling a story about her that that's where I'm like, mmm, I don't like that part so much.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: But the building up of an attraction to be like, "There's a wi—there a lot here."

Everybody does that! That's every haunted house ever, right? It's fine. It's the stairs to nowhere, the door to nowhere. Love that. Love that!

Teresa: So obviously those kind of like physical, tangible things are explained when you look below the surface, right? But there's a third level here where perhaps people did not like to see this very rich woman without any kind of, like, male oversight doing exactly whatever she wanted, right?

Also, she did not really care about other people in high society in California. She had grown up in high society in Newhaven, and when she moved to California it was kind of like a starting over for her, and we'll talk about kind of her biography, there.

Travis: A real Lady Danbury, you might say.

Teresa: Exactly. So she—well, not even that, because Danbury hosts balls and stuff.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: But she didn't want to host people. She declined presidential invitations. She didn't care about being seen in society. She grew great big hedges around her property. She didn't want to be part of that.

Travis: Which rules. Man, I'd love to do that.

Teresa: She just wanted to hang out.

Travis: Every time—our kids like the idea of the Secret Garden and we had, like, a kids' book version of the Secret Garden. I remember being a kid and, like, learning about the Secret Garden. And anything that was like, especially outdoor, but was like, "And this is my secret place to go." I'd be like, "That sounds great."

Except I know in real life what would happen is I'd do that, I'd go to my secret place by myself and be like, "Now what do I do? I'm super bored."

Teresa: [laughs] Also, she had a lot of Asian-Americans working for her, which was frowned upon at the time, right? The idea that you would hire people who were, quote, "unseemly," right? Um, made her a kind of, like, a source of ridicule in the community. Here's this recluse who doesn't tell us about anything, doesn't talk to us, and yet she's perfectly happy to hire these, quote, "undesirables." Right?

Travis: This is a thing that we also see when we talk about biographies a lot of just historical context. Of like, a thing that seen as incredibly eccentric or weird in that time period that now you're like, well, that—I can justify that. That makes sense. That's not that weird. That's not that wild a thing to do.

And it's like, yeah, so you get a reputation then where it's like, she doesn't wanna go to parties will people will judge her and make her feel bad for not being married and spending her money however? Why not?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And it's like, well, I think we all know why! That sucks! [laughs]

Teresa: And because journalism at this time was pretty much exclusively for entertainment purposes. Because she wouldn't talk to people, people talked about her, right? And so—

Travis: Speaking of talking about her...

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: I would love to talk more about her. But first, here's a word from another Max Fun show.

[theme music plays]

[music plays]

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[music and ad end]

Travis: Okay. Back to talking about Sarah Winchester, a thing I bet she loves.

Teresa: [laughs] Oh. Okay.

Travis: No, she's dead now. It's fine.

Teresa: No, okay, alright. Sorry, sorry, sorry.

Travis: Oh, I'm sorry. I jumped to the end. Sorry, spoilers: she's dead.

Teresa: So, there are lots of people who love to talk about the kind of legend about it. But if you go to the Winchester House—

Travis: Which you should.

Teresa: There are also—there are—

Travis: It's great.

Teresa: Yes. There are also many people who will talk about probably this actual part, right? That she was just minding her own ding dang business doing what she liked to do. Because... let me go through kind of her tragic life.

Travis: I would also like to point out, before we do that, that when we talk about, like, a woman minding her own business, she must be whatever, that's true of, like, the Salem witch trials, and all throughout history. Of like, think about how many—I bet... either our listeners or someone they know grew up in a town where there was, like, that woman who never comes outside or just does it to yell at kids on her lawn or whatever. Everybody dislikes her. She's terrible. She's a witch. Right?

There's something that kind of story pervades. And it's never just like, I don't know, maybe they're sad. Maybe they just don't wanna deal with it anymore, and they don't feel like making new friends or whatever. You know? Or maybe they just like being by themselves. Maybe they'd rather sit and read a book and, like, hang out and, you know, pet their cat than, like, go to a party where they're judged by all these people they don't care about.

Teresa: Yeah. We can't talk about Sarah without first talking about Oliver. Oliver Winchester was her father-in-law. Oliver Winchester...

Travis: I just found it—I was trying to make it my—without talking about Oliver, all-of-her money!

Teresa: Ehh.

Travis: There was something like that. I knew it was there, and like, but it—all of her money did come from... this, so it kind of makes sense. It works. It plays.

Teresa: It does.

Travis: [crosstalk] would say "Oh, it'll pass." Okay.

Teresa: So the Winchester rifle is a comprehensive term describing a series of lever-action repeating rifles that were manufactured by the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. Okay? So that means that the Winchesters, this series of rifles, did not need to be reloaded after every single shot.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So most of the smooth bore guns, which is like guns with smooth barrels as opposed to rifles which have—barrels are spiral-carved for greater accuracy.

Travis: It's called rifling. That's why it's rifle, and rifling, and—yes.

Teresa: So during the Civil War you would've used one of those rifles, right?

Travis: Smooth bore or rifles?

Teresa: You would use a smooth bore.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right? But it still needed to be reloaded every time.

Travis: Yes. They were, you know, barrel-loaded or whatever, where you go in through it. And you see people tamp, tamp, tamping down and pouring, you know, gunpowder and stuff like that.

Teresa: Exactly. Um, but the Winchester model 1873 could fire up to 15 rounds without being reloaded.

Travis: Hmm.

Teresa: So that's ten seconds worth of fire.

Travis: Rifling, by the way, gives better aim. It's why it's there, right? Because the projectile—so, when the, um, combustion happens in the back, right? And it fires, you get enough of this, like, rifling that it, like, spins the bullet as it goes instead of just being shoved out and it kind of bouncing around a little bit. So you get better aim as it spins, and it's gonna keep a better trajectory as it spins than just going out of a smooth bore thing. Thanks, Mythbusters!

Teresa: Yeah! And this is often called the gun that won the West. And by "win," we mean that countless died at its mercy.

Travis: Uh-huh. A lot of 'em indigenous people.

Teresa: Indeed. The story of the Winchester rifle is much more bloody and depressing than we would like to go to.

Travis: But hey, listen. If you don't know about it, educate yourself. There's plenty of resources who will cover it way better than us. It's not something to be glanced over or glossed over just because it is bloody. Just not what we're talking about here today. But if you don't know about how much white people stole from other people, you need to learn about it. That is important to learn.

Teresa: Yeah. And let's just say that Oliver was a very shrewd arms dealer, where he supplied arms to both sides of this conflict in the West. The indigenous population benefited from the Winchester rifle for hunting,

because it was a lot easier with the reloading, right? Once they were crammed onto their reservations, um, they had a lot less territory and a lot less game, so they needed to get something more accurate, right? And then of course the settlers across the West also used it, because—

Travis: Conquerors. Thieves. Whatever you want to call it.

Teresa: Yeah. Uh, used it because again, it was much faster than the single-load.

Alright. Oliver Winchester was already rich when he acquired the rifle company.

Travis: Isn't that how it goes?

Teresa: Yeah. His family built a business in shirt manufacturing, which I thought was interesting. You know, buttons and collars and laundry presses, and things like that. But when he expanded, it became wildly popular because he was so good already at business. This arms dealer type stuff.

And if you put him in, like, business category, he did a great job. But he was a terrible person. Doing these terrible things.

Travis: [crosstalk] Hey, babe? I could've guessed that. I could've guessed that through context clues. If you had just told me, like, he sold a bunch of guns that killed a bunch of people and he really capitalized on both sides, and he was a businessperson...

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: ... then I'm like, oh, you know what I can bet?

Teresa: Not cool. Alright, so let's scoot over to Sarah here for a second. Sarah was born—

Travis: Scooot!

Teresa: —Sarah Pardee in Newhaven, Connecticut.

Travis: Not P-A-R-T-Y, though, surely.

Teresa: No, P-A-R-D-E-E.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, in 1839. And her family actually was fairly progressives for the time. Her father, Leonard, was a skilled carpenter and a keen Victorian designer. And so, with her father's talents, she grew up amongst skilled craftsmen, and architects, and construction workers. And so even though she was a little bit reserved, her love of home design comes, you know...

Travis: Comes by it honest.

Teresa: Comes by it honestly, that's right. Once they had ascended to Newhaven upper crust, her family moved on to the same street as the Winchesters, sometime in 1850. And the families got along really, really well, particularly... Oliver's son, William, and Sarah.

Uh, and eventually they were courting. They were married in 1862. And here's the thing. William had always been rather frail and sickly. Probably tuberculosis, because everything at the time was probably tuberculosis.

Travis: It was all—it was tuberculosis all the way down.

Teresa: And from what we can figure, he had kind of a secretarial, almost, like, treasurer kind of role in the company.

Travis: Nepotism.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah, but he wasn't really, like, involved in any kind of physical labor, or—

Travis: He just got paid a bunch of money.

Teresa: And did some books, right? He did the books. And so once they were married, she actually moved into their family home while their home

was being built. And shortly after that, tragedy struck their family. William's sister, Annie, passed away in childbirth, followed by her infant son, and then followed by her two-year-old son. And so these deaths shattered the Winchester family, right? It was very quick succession.

And so William and Sarah stayed in the ancestral family home a lot longer than they intended. And by 1865, Sarah was pregnant, which was great, but also terrifying, right? Because you had just lost so many family members. She did successfully give birth to a little girl, who she named Annie in honor of her late sister-in-law.

Unfortunately, she was born with a congenital defect that made it impossible for her to eat or keep food down. And so she passed away six weeks after birth. And they were devastated, right?

And in those years following their infant's tragic death, they oversaw the construction of design building of a brand new Winchester home in Newhaven. This was gonna be their house. And it was not only breathtaking but also, like I said, offered the pair a chance to funnel their energy into something, right? Which is something that people who are grieving often do, and is often helpful for people.

The tragedy doesn't end, though. Because between May of 1880 and March of 1881, Sarah would lose her mother, and her father-in-law, and her husband.

Travis: That's a—that's a lot.

Teresa: That's a lot.

Travis: For anyone to process in that short a time frame, anyone to process, period, let alone in that short of time. And once again, just to keep reiterating, so when you hear people talk about like, well, she was obsessed with, like, spiritualism and contacting the other side. One, everyone was during that time period. But it was also, as you mentioned, like, tuberculosis. There was a lot of very dangerous and very contagious stuff going around, and people died a lot. There was a lot of loss. Especially, unfortunately, children.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? And so part of the reason there was such a rise in spiritualism during this time was this, like, unprocessed grief, you know, where we weren't necessarily great at therapy.

Teresa: And the Civil War, right? A lot of loss there, too.

Travis: And so it wasn't like an eccentric, "Oh, she's lost her mind!" kind of obsession with spiritualism. A lot of people wanted to find comfort in spiritualism, and that's what spiritualists and mediums and stuff were selling. Of like, "Well, I can give you that closure, that comfort that you seek." Right?

So it wasn't... one, unreasonable; and two, unique to Sarah Winchester.

Teresa: Right. So undoubtedly she needed a place to start over, right? And she had just heard of this brand new place called California.

Travis: Hmm. Where the streets are paved with weird mansions.

Teresa: I suppose. And so California was the place to be at this time, because it had the railway system. It had wonderful weather, right? If you're coming from the east coast to the west coast, the weather is very different. Um, and so—

Travis: What year was this? When did her husband and mother and stuff pass?

Teresa: Everybody passed between May of 1880 and March of 1881.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And she bought that farmhouse in 1886.

Travis: Okay. What year was she born? How old is she at this point?
[pause] I'm not good with numbers.

Teresa: No, you are good with numbers, but I don't remember. 18—

Travis: I'm good with math.

Teresa: —1839.

Travis: Okay. So at this point she's 47? Would that be right?

Teresa: 89 to...

Travis: '39 to '86.

Teresa: Yeah, '39 to '86.

Travis: So 47, yes, okay.

Teresa: Yes. You can't ask me that stuff. I don't know.

Travis: Yeah. It's just so funny to picture her at 47, right? 'Cause I—since we've been talking, in my head she's 92 years old, right?

Teresa: Oh, really? [laughs]

Travis: Like, I can only picture her—the only context I have for Sarah Winchester as a picture is like, you know, 80 to 90-year-old Sarah Winchester.

Teresa: So it took some time to put all the affairs in order.

Travis: [simultaneously] 'Cause that's how everybody talks about her in this story.

Teresa: That's true.

Travis: No one's ever just like, "This 47 year old lady just rolled up and was like, I got an idea for a house."

Teresa: Yeah. It takes some time to get your affairs in order, to get everything ready to move to California. It took a long time to get there. All this kind of stuff, right? Um, but this is where she was able to start over, right? And then she built up on top of this farmhouse for decades, right? From 1886 to 1922, the original eight room farmhouse would grow into the world's most unusual and sprawling property, coming in at 24,000 square feet with 10,000 windows, 2,000 doors, 160 rooms, 46 stairways and fireplaces. There are six kitchens. There are 13 bathrooms. Right?

Travis: Nice.

Teresa: It is breathtaking.

Travis: You could poop in a different room every day for two weeks. About. One day off.

Teresa: About.

Travis: One day off. One day off, no pooping on that day. Start the cycle over again. Here's the other thing to think about. Once again, more context for Sarah Winchester. She had no relatives that she was leaving all this money to.

Teresa: Oh, she took all of her sisters with her to California.

Travis: But what I'm saying is like, her child had died, right? And her husband had died. And she had no interest in remarrying. So this was a very much like, can't take it with you, let's have some fun designing a house, a thing she's always been interested in. Carpentry, always interested in.

Teresa: And there was leftover. There was leftover money. She founded a hospital in her husband's name with the leftover money.

Travis: But this was another thing that people at the time did not like, where wealth was meant to be hoarded, and passed on, and grown over time. And like, yeah, you spend your money, right? We're gonna spend money. We're gonna be lavish. But just enough for, like, society and stuff. And then it's like, you keep some of it back. Why are you spending, like, so

much on this huge house for, like, basically yourself? Right? Maybe give that money to us rich people who will truly appreciate it.

Teresa: Hmm, yeah. So—and we've talked extensively about the parts of the house that are so interesting. Right?

Travis: And they really are.

Teresa: They really are. But—

Travis: I would live there, hands down.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: I would live in the Winchester Mystery House without a moment's hesitation.

Teresa: Well, if you wanted to buy it today, it's worth roughly 71 million dollars.

Travis: I didn't say I wanted to buy it. I said I would live in it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: There's a big difference.

Teresa: If you wanna go to the Winchester House, here are a few things—

Travis: Take a left at the McDonald's.

Teresa: —that you need to know. I mean, is it left? You can't tell people that if you don't know.

Travis: I think as you're pulling in the driveway, I wanna say the McDonald's is on the right and the Winchester Mystery House is on the left. I think.

Teresa: There's a daytime tour that is quite family friendly. Um, but if you go to the Halloween experience it's quite dimly light, because Victorian stuff is kinda spooky, right? I guess.

Travis: [spooky voice] And poorly light!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: [spooky] They didn't have a lot of ectri—electricity at the time!

Teresa: Although she did refit several—like, a large amount of the house with electricity.

Travis: Still, it wasn't like they were breaking out 120 LED Watt or whatever.

Teresa: No. It has loud sounds, and special effects, and fog, and strobe effects, and stuff like that. All just kind of atmospheric stuff that may not be suitable for people who have allergies, or light sensitivities, or young children.

Expect many stairs and narrow passageways, so it's not recommended for expectant mothers, or guests with asthma or heart conditions or seizures. Now, I was able to go through, and the last time we took Bebe through, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: We did have to carry her a couple times, I think.

Travis: But that could also just be laziness.

Teresa: Yeah, she was young.

Travis: And lazy.

Teresa: No outside food or drinks. You have to have a ticket to enter the property. No smoking or open flames. No flash photography, right? Because

they are interested in preserving this, and all of those things can ruin the actual house.

Travis: I don't know how. I think—here's the thing. Okay, listen.

Teresa: What?

Travis: This is just pulling back the curtain. When someone's like "No flash photography," that makes sense to me when you're using, like, flash bulbs and stuff. My phone flash releases stuff that's bad for it?

Teresa: It's light sensitivity stuff. It can make paintings—

Travis: From my phone flash?!

Teresa: —fade and stuff. Yeah!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Bright lights.

Travis: I believe you. It just seems like wizardry to me.

Teresa: Um, again, no large bags or backpacks because they don't want to hurt anything or bump into anything. Um, there's a security screening. No face paint or heavy makeup or masks are allowed. On Halloween, Halloween-type masks. I'm sure if you wanted to wear a surgical mask or something for your own safety, you could. Halloween costumes are welcome, though; on Halloween, of course.

There is a basement, but if you want to go you need to be able to walk yourself, and you may need to wear protective gear, because basements were not known for being really spacious at the time.

Travis: Yeah. They weren't like rumpus rooms like we think of now.

Teresa: No, no. Um, and the mansion does not have central air due to how old it is, of course. They have heaters in winter and fans in summer but, you know, if you're going you have to be prepared for the weather.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: One interesting fact. We talked a lot about the so-called legend, right? One of the things about the Winchester House is they do not allow ghost tours, okay? Because out of respect for Sarah Winchester and the beautiful home, right? They don't want you to feel like this is, uh, like, just— it is a tourist attraction, but not—

Travis: But it's not spectacle.

Teresa: —spectacle. Exactly.

Travis: You're not there to, uh... to be disrespectful.

Teresa: Um, certainly there are people who might feel some sort of presence. And there is a frequently asked questions section of their website that encourages visitors to post pictures of anything mysterious, and allow the community to decide what it is, right? And there is a question on there called, "Is the house really haunted?"

And what they have written is, "That's part of the mystery," right? "Since 1923, many guests and employees have experienced strange phenomena while inside Sarah Winchester's beautiful mansion. Although we've been listed on plenty of 'world's most haunted places' lists, we encourage you to come and find out for yourself."

Travis: I would just like to volunteer, as someone who has been to many a place that says they're haunted, or like, we—I've watched lots of, like, ghost things about most haunted and that kind of thing. And... that is unique in that most of the time, when you ask, like, "Oh. Hundreds. Everybody here has a story about a ghost. Blah, blah, blah."

And for them to be like, "I don't know, man." [laughs] Is very—is very, I think a unique way for them to go.

Teresa: I would say if there is any presence, it's probably Sarah, because she loved her home. And that's all she wanted to do was hang out there. She didn't want to go anywhere else. She wanted to chill.

Travis: I think Sarah... listen. Do I believe in ghosts? No. Am I open to believing in ghosts? Yes. That's where I'm at. I don't think Sarah's haunting her house. I think she's fine. She's off doing whatever.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Speaking of off doing whatever, hey, everybody. Thank you so much for listening. We want to say thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not make this show. And thank you to you for listening. We could make this show without you, but I would never do that. Do you hear me?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Do you hear me? Sorry, I just get so passionate. Uh, I want to tell you a couple things. We got some new merch up at the merch store. Specifically we've got a do not drink mug. If you have watched McElroy Family Clubhouse, it's also called the Mickey Mug. I'm gonna be at Twenty-Sided Tavern in New York making my off Broadway premier at the end of November.

Teresa: Debut.

Travis: Debut. Um, and Twenty-Sided Tavern is just an absolutely fun, chaotic improved D&D Broadway show. I'll be playing the trickster role, which could be one of three different roles. It's audience interactive. You're gonna help shape the story. It's a different performance every time. Get your tickets at thetwentsidedtavern.com. Go check it out. 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. The Facebook group is Shmanners Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today. We are always taking topic submissions, and questions, and idioms, and all that kind of stuff, so send that to shmannerstcast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, our writer and researcher. She reads every single one. And thank you, Alexx, for your research. Thank you, Rachel.

Travis: I did that.

Teresa: You did that already?

Travis: I did that! Remember? And then I said, "But I wouldn't do it without you. Do you hear me?"

Teresa: Ohh.

Travis: Right. Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. It's okay that they get thanked twice.

Travis: Yeah. Hey, listen. That's the thing about gratitude. There's always more.

Teresa: That's right.

Travis: Alright, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you for listening. 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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