

Shmanners 438: Holiday Cookie Exchange

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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: [sings] 'It's the most wonderful time of the year.' A time when I'm able to convince my wife the importance of going to the store and buying a bunch of treats.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I can brand it as like 'a family event.' And like, "It's for the kids." And then I eat... about half of it.

Teresa: And then you eat it. You eat all the treats.

Travis: Listen, man, they're good.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I don't know if you know this, but like, yeah, man, candy and cookies and cake and stuff, it's really good.

Teresa: It is good stuff.

Travis: I'm a big fan of it. And you know, in my twilight years now—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I've had to cut out so many vices.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And that doesn't include chocolate-covered things.

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: I'm still allowed—

Teresa: You love a chocolate-covered nut.

Travis: You love a chocolate-covered nut. A chocolate-covered pretzel. I like things with bits in it, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like, I enjoy the mixture of textures in a thing. And like, man, we got this like sampler of chocolate covered-pretzels. It was like white chocolate—or yogurt and dark chocolate and milk chocolate. And then like coated—you know, sprinkled with like peppermint.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like bits, dust.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I could sit and eat those mindlessly for... 'til they're gone. 'Til they're gone.

Teresa: And they are gone.

Travis: And they are gone. And luckily, our kids are like really into like the yogurt ones and the milk chocolate ones. And I'm like, cool.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I know what I'll be taking care of. Don't you worry about it. Speaking of holiday treats—

Teresa: Mm-hmm!

Travis: *Speaking* of holiday treats, that's what we're talking about.

Teresa: [sings] Segue.

Travis: Segue. Am I Paul Blart? Because I'm riding a Segway.

Teresa: [chuckles] We are talking about holiday treats. We're talking about the holiday cookie exchange.

Travis: So, this is every day in New York, at six AM, holiday cookie exchange opens up. There's traders on the floor giving—saying like, "I'll take two sugar. Two sugar. Four chocolate chip! Sell oatmeal, sell oatmeal!" That's it, right?

Teresa: No.

Travis: But can you picture it?

Teresa: [chuckles] I mean, I can.

Travis: It's cute, right? It's cute.

Teresa: It is. Especially if like all of the little traders are like Keebler elves.

Travis: And you know what the best part of the cookie exchange is? You can make a fortune...

Travis and Teresa: Cookie.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: [laughs] Growing up, did you guys do like cookie baking for Christmas?

Travis: I mean, yeah, absolutely. We still, we do it now with our kids too. But like, the, I—we're gonna do cookie cutter shapes. Here's like four or five different like icing tubes. Go wild.

Teresa: You guys—so you guys did like the sugar cookie?

Travis: Yeah, but my—and my mom though was like big on baking, big on holidays. This is a thing that I've had to—

Teresa: This is why I ask. I want to know what was her, like what were her—her list, right?

Travis: Oh, right.

Teresa: Because cookie bakers—

Travis: So, but this is a thing—

Teresa: They make lists.

Travis: When we... when Teresa and I have melded our lives into one, gone from two halves of a person to one, two half—whatever. Is like for—in my family, from my friends?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like, when you do a holiday event, right? Especially if it's like Christmas dinner or Thanksgiving dinner, or something like that, right? As much as the main meal is important, it's not like, "And here's the one dessert." In my family it was like, "And now, here's the table of different desserts." Most of them prepared by my mother, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: So it was like... it was not out of the question for there to be seven or eight dessert options.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Or more. And a lot of that was cookies. So like we did the... like the little peanut butter ball cookies that you press a like Hershey Kiss into.

Teresa: Or a Reese's Cup, right? You could do that too. You can press a Reese's Cup in it.

Travis: We didn't do that.

Teresa: Oh, okay, that—

Travis: You could.

Teresa: That's what we did.

Travis: That wasn't our style.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: A lot of chocolate chip, a lot of... like, my mom did a holiday wreath every year, which I would count in there. That was like—

Teresa: Is that that cereal one?

Travis: "That cereal one..."

Teresa: Okay?

Travis: Yes, Theresa. So you would have the like corn flakes and mix in, you know like, kind of like a marshmallowy, sugary, green food coloring, heavy thing, make a wreath out of it. And then Red Hots as like little berries

around it. There was... oh, I was just thinking—oh, we—she did, because I loved it, puppy chow, is what we called it.

Teresa: Mm-hm, yeah.

Travis: I don't know—yeah. Where it was like, I think they're called like mud buddies too, or whatever. Mud po—I don't know. But it's like, once again, like a cereal mix with like Chex Mix. And they're like chocolate-coated and like powdered sugar and stuff like that. I love those. And a lot of things like that.

Teresa: So, at my house, we definitely did the Hershey Kiss one, right? We used the sugar cookie base and we put the Hershey Kiss in the middle.

Travis: Oh, you didn't do like a peanut butter base?

Teresa: Now, we did a peanut butter base—

Travis: For the peanut butter cups.

Teresa: The peanut butter cups—

Travis: Ah.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Now I feel bad for judging it so harshly. Okay.

Teresa: Mm-hmm... And then we had some kind of like inherited cookie recipes. My mom would do spits cookies, which is a—like a German shortbread.

Travis: Ooh?

Teresa: And then she would also do a Sicilian biscotti.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Which is more like a cookie, less like a bread, that regular biscotti is. It is not quite so hard. It's not twice baked, the way that regular biscotti is. She would also do like Italian wedding cake cookies. She would do thumb print cookies, which is where you put like your thumb in and you put some jam in the middle.

Travis: And it helps you identify criminals.

Teresa: Mm-hm. What else would she make... We didn't really do chocolate chip for Christmas, because my mom like did chocolate chip all the time. So that wasn't really—

Travis: I'm sure it did feel special.

Teresa: Yeah. And then she would also do—

Travis: Oh, we did the M&M cookies a lot too.

Teresa: Oh—

Travis: We'd get like the red and green M&Ms, the holiday M&M bags, and like do those.

Teresa: She did pizzelles, which is a waffle cookie.

Travis: Pizzelle also kind of sounds like something Pizza Hut would come out with. "New pizza, Pizzelles!"

Teresa: So, that's an Italian thing, Pizzelles.

Travis: Why are we talking about cookies and cookie—what is a cookie exchange?

Teresa: Okay, you're done with this. You're saying—

Travis: No! I'm just, I'm—

Teresa: Get to the nitty gritty.

Travis: I'm picturing myself as a listener going, "Listen, this is homey and great. But I'm not learning anything except for what kind of cookies they had when they were kids."

Teresa: Okay. What I am getting to is, at both of our homes, there were often several tins. Several, like probably up to 10 tins—

Travis: This is—

Teresa: Of cookies around.

Travis: The last childhood memory I'll say is, during Christmas, there was always this kind of like Let's Make a Deal style like, "When I opened this tin, is it gonna have cookies, or is it gonna have sewing supplies in it?"

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And I wasn't always sure what was about to happen, especially when I was trying to sneak cookies and I didn't want to ask. And I'm like, "Ah, yeah—ah, bobbins."

Teresa: So, a cookie exchange is a historical event, actually. And it is the coming together of people in a community, right?

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: To exchange the cookies that they've made, right? So each person only makes a certain—like one or two types, right? And then you can have different cookies. You can make your own kind of like box of cookies, right?

Travis: See, I was gonna ask about this because I was—I didn't know it was so—like when we started talking about this being the episode.

Teresa: Mm-hm?

Travis: Or it was like, yeah, cookie—I make cookies. You make cookies. We trade some cookies.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: What more—like what more is there?

Teresa: The practice goes back to the medieval period.

Travis: Get out of the town.

Teresa: I know, right? You would have thought that this was kind of like a '70s Midwestern thing, right?

Travis: See, I was gonna say like, you know, back from World War II, 1950s. Like we're all living in suburbia now, trading our cookie tins and Tupperware or whatever.

Teresa: All the way back to the Middle Ages of Europe.

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: So—

Travis: Can I say, and listen, I—this is gonna show—I will claim didn't think about it, rather than didn't know.

Teresa: Uh-huh?

Travis: There were cookies in the Middle Ages?

Teresa: Yes, totally. Okay, so the winter solstice, right—

Travis: I just assumed they were eating rocks.

Teresa: Let's set the scene. The winter solstice—

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Is a very prominent holiday throughout Europe, in different cultures, right? Not only like the kind of like spiritualness of it, but the practicality, right? So, you have animals that had been fattened at the harvest. They were served as hearty roasts with mead and with beer and with wine that had been fermenting since the spring, right? Things like sugar, lard, butter, were delicacies at the time. So, in order to cook those things, you had to have like a really good excuse.

Travis: Well, and you also have to think about it being kind of a turning point where, because of the way the solstice, you know, being 12 and 12, right? Is that you're really looking at it as like, everything up until this date has been heading toward—like this is it getting colder and colder and colder and colder, and darker and darker and darker. And now, this is the turning point. Where now, everything from this point is on the upward trajectory towards it will be getting warmer, it will be getting brighter, there will be more sunlight, right

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So we're heading the other way out of it, right? So it just makes complete sense that once you kind of clock that in society, of like, "Okay, this is kind of around when that starts, so we're gonna put it on this date."

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Of course that's an event that you would mark.

Teresa: So then, what happens with cookies, right? Is during the Middle Ages—

Travis: Or biscuits, if you're British.

Teresa: Biscuits, we'll go into that. New—

Travis: We will?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay,

Teresa: New spices are introduced into the European palette, right? Because of the Middle Ages, the Crusades and conquests, and things like that, right?

Travis: Start to get cinnamon in there.

Teresa: Right, we've got nutmeg, cinnamon, black pepper, citronella—

Travis: Vanilla?

Teresa: Apricots, dates, things like that, right?

Travis: Did they already have vanilla?

Teresa: I don't think so? I think vanilla is new as well.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That's a tropical—

Travis: That was, can I just say, just a baking game changer, vanilla.

Teresa: Mm-hm, yeah.

Travis: It's hard to find anything without vanilla in it these days.

Teresa: So, cookies had a specific advantage. Not only were they great carriers of flavor, they were portable, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Unlike cakes or pastry, they didn't go stale as quickly. They also didn't get smushed as easily, right? All that kind of stuff—

Travis: Easy to share, easy to throw in a bag and be like, "Here's some cookies," and not worry about it.

Teresa: Exactly. So, the first cookie swaps were medieval people giving special treats to their friends, right? I would make a certain kind of cookie because I had traded for some apricots, right? And so I would make like an apricot shortbread, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: And then I would give some to you, and you would give me some date cookies, or whatever, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So we would trade around the village—

Travis: Especially considering—

Teresa: Because each of us had the things that, you know, everybody wanted.

Travis: And it makes sense because like at this point, it wasn't like people were writing down their recipes. Most people couldn't read or write, you know, if we're talking about like the average person in the Middle Ages.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And it wasn't like everybody's got pen and paper at home or, "We can just copy these recipes down." So you would have someone in town who knew a recipe for this cookie, and you didn't know it, right? But you knew a recipe for this cookie, right? And like, so you're like, okay, I know how to make these, and you know how to make those. So instead of just like, hey, tell me your recipe so I can make them at home, I'll just make mine, you make yours, and we'll trade it. And we won't have to worry about it.

Teresa: And recipes, speaking of, do start to show up about the 1500s.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: But by the 17th century, it was like codified. Baking like tradition, right?

Travis: Well, once again, that makes sense, because even in the 1500s, it wasn't like your Joe Average could go to the bookstore and buy—like recipes appeared in, you know, the books of people who could afford it and whoever was making the books. But it wasn't like, "Oh, great. Nigella came out with another one."

Teresa: And one of the big cookie cultures with a lot of these recipes is the Dutch. And here's the thing, throughout history, lots of European countries have been the colonizing power. And at this point in history, the Dutch are the colonizing power.

Travis: Because of the—is that the east, west—East Indies? The trading company, you know what I mean? They were—

Teresa: Well, that's English.

Travis: No? Yeah, no, I looked it up. There was a quick pause, but I looked it up. I misremembered—

Teresa: It's all right.

Travis: The Pirates of the Caribbean movies—no, it's not all right.

Teresa: [titters] Listen—

Travis: You were right, and I questioned you—wait... yes.

Teresa: There are lots of European powers, and they all kind of trade and colonize not only each other, but other far parts of the world, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so the Dutch at this point, in the late 1600s, bring with them to the Americas all of their like cookie business. Along with the English and the Scottish, and all this kind of stuff—

Travis: Everybody's bringing their own, what I picture, poinsettia tins. Poinsetta? Whatever. Poinsetsha tins.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: With cookies in them.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And maybe sewing stuff. But not in the same tin, I can't stress this enough. Make sure the tin is empty before you put either cookies or sewing stuff in there. Not both.

Teresa: And so there was specific emphasis on what's called teacakes, right? Which are a little closer to what Americans would call like a cookie, right? But what we have as a touchstone for the US is a documented Christmas cookie swap in 1703, at a Dutch community event in New York City. And, this is where I promised to talk about the word cookie, is an—

Travis: I want to talk about the word cookie, but first, how about a quick break for a jumbotron? And a word from another Max Fun show.

[theme music plays]

Travis: So, I love a good book. Do I love reading a good book? No, who has the time?!

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I had to be very careful the other day. This was a while ago, I probably talked about on the show. Where I was going—when I flew to London for MCM. And I was telling Bebe I was going to be on the plane for a long time, and I was looking for things to do. And she said, "Oh, take that book you got." And I almost jokingly but in a serious tone said, "Reading is dumb."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And I didn't do that because, one, it's a bad thing, and reading is not done. Reading is great. I love reading. And when we got this jumbotron, I was immediately struck by how up my alley this is. So, we want to encourage you, Kyle wants to encourage you to go check out Space Whales Press. S-P-A-C-E, W-H-A-L-E-S, P-R-E-S-S, spacewhalespress.com, and buy one of Madeline Crane's excellent novels.

Madeline is an independent author of Queer Fantasy and Weird Tales for the People. She currently has two novels out, with a third on the way. The first I want to tell you about is called the Book of the New Moon Door. It's a steampunk, gothic horror, murder mystery novel. So far up my alley. It gave me chills when I just read that description. That starts with the protagonist hunting a serial killer, *by talking to the ghosts he is leaving behind*.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm so into it!

Teresa: This is scratching every itch.

Travis: I'm so into it. Beyond the Frost-Cold Sea, the second novel Madeline currently has out, is an old-school sword and sorcery title in the spirit of old pulp magazine stories. Basically, this is, in their words, Conan the Barbarian, but super gay. So if you're into those, go to spacewhalespress.com, check out Madeline Crane. Or Medeline Crane, it's spelled the same, but however you want it. There you go. Check out Madeline's novels, the Book of the New Moon Door, or Beyond the Frost-Cold Sea. I'll probably be checking both of those out. I'm always looking for new books, and those sound amazing. So go check those out. And now a word from another Max Fun show.

[break]

Dave Holmes: Oh my gosh! Hi, it's me, Dave Holmes. Host of Troubled Waters, the pop culture battle to the ego death. Okay, everybody, word association with Troubled Waters. First one to fumble loses. Go.

Riley: Comedy.

John-Luke: Panel show.

Christian: Guests.

Riley: Celebrities.

John-Luke: Games!

Christian: Oh, sound rounds.

Riley: Improvised speeches!

John-Luke: Puns disguised as trivia.

Christian: A very niche Flash Gordon clip.

Riley: Chappell Roan!

Dave: Ah, no! Riley, I'm sorry, she will not return our phone calls. I am afraid you're out.

Riley: A girl can dream.

Dave: Oh, but dreaming will not earn a girl any points. Troubled Waters! Listen on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts.

[break]

Rachel: [in a silly voice] I'm Yucky Jessica!

Griffin: [in a silly voice] I'm Chuck Crudsworth!

Rachel: And this is...

Rachel and Griffin: Terrible!

Griffin: A podcast where we talk about things we hate, that are awful!

Rachel: Today we're discussing Wonderful, a podcast on the Maximum Fun Network?

Griffin: Hosts Rachel and Griffin McElroy, a real-life married couple—

Rachel: Yuck!

Griffin: Discuss a wide range of topics, music, video games, poetry, snacks.

Rachel: But I hate all that stuff!

Griffin: I know you do, Yucky Jessica!

Rachel: It comes out every Wednesday, the worst day of the week. Wherever you download your podcasts.

Griffin: For our next topic, we're talking Fiona, the baby hippo from the Cincinnati Zoo.

Rachel: I hate this little hippo!

[break]

Travis: Okay, now we're back.

Teresa: Now we're back.

Travis: The origin of cookie?

Teresa: Yes, is an anglophone pronunciation of the Dutch word, koeje.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Koeje. Koekje.

Travis: That makes sense. I thought we were going to talk about—because we've talked about this on Bake On before, our Great British Bake Off watch along podcast, which we will be making the finale episode soon, I promise. It's just three weeks late.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: But like biscuit and cookie, the main difference is like a cookie is usually soft and a biscuit is usually hard.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because biscuit is like cooked twice.

Teresa: So, koekje translates to biscuit, right?

Travis: What?

Teresa: But the word sounds like cookie.

Travis: Cookie.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: But the like culinary separation has started to be, a biscuit is usually—like a biscotti, right? Crunchier, right? Shortbread is a biscuit, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And like a... like, chocolate chip cookie, for example, is a cookie, because it's usually softer and like hard—easier to chew. I don't know.

Teresa: I don't know—yes, yes. But like, you know, etymology speaking.

Travis: Etymologically.

Teresa: So, Dutch settlers—

Travis: That felt like too many syllables, but I think that's it. Etymologically?

Teresa: [chuckles] I don't know—continued on with their Christmas tradition. And so like the American settlers picked up on the custom. And

legend has it that George Washington even hosted a cooking party himself, where he served a wide variety of dessert. And where his recipes were heavily influenced by traditional Dutch baking techniques.

Travis: Now, I'm picturing... I'm picturing George Washington in like an apron. Just like futzing around, making his cookies, flower on his face. Did you ever see that Pillsbury commercial where it was like the take a bake—or like the break apart cookies?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And the mom them, and then she's like throwing like flour on her face and—

Teresa: Oh, yeah, to make it look like—

Travis: I'm picturing George Washington doing that now. And someone being like, "Is that true?" And he's like, "I cannot tell a lie. Yeah, I worked really hard on these cookies." *Wink*. And I'm way into it.

Teresa: Mm-hm. So, the US is a very large place, very culturally diverse. So, as we go throughout the centuries, we add things. Things like oranges from the West Coast. We add coconuts, to the south. We add—

Travis: Lime!

Teresa: All kinds of different things, right?

Travis: We add, oh, all kinds of nuts. Think about all the different nuts that you put into cookies.

Teresa: And then—

Travis: Thank you. Thank you to everybody who's ever immigrated to our country and brought their cookie traditions with them. It's what makes our country truly wonderful, all the cookies that we have. Thank you.

Teresa: [chuckles] We also have, in the 1930s, the ability to keep things cold at home. So, we have ice box cookies—

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: That are invented. Things that need to stay cold overnight before they are cooked the next morning.

Travis: I mean, think about how many recipes, just in baking in general, require the dough to be chilled, require things to sit overnight, require butter to stay, you know, cold for it to work.

Teresa: And Toll House cookies were invented. The Toll House chocolate chip cookies were invented in the 1930s. That's my favorite.

Travis: Well, that makes sense because at that point, you know, everybody's driving on the toll roads. And you would get to each toll house and they'd be like, "Yeah, here's your change, and a cookie," I assume.

Teresa: I guess so. So—

Travis: That's not true. It was just a clever name, I'm sure.

Teresa: [titters]

Travis: Ugh...

Teresa: December 22nd is—

Travis: 9PM, eastern standard time. [sings] From here on in I...

Teresa: Is national cookie exchange day in the United States.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So—

Travis: We need to get on it, man. I don't have any cookies made. Well, we did make cookies and we ate all of them.

Teresa: No, I mean, we haven't eaten all of them, but the children—

Travis: We've eaten all the ones we're allowed to eat.

Teresa: Yes, that's what it is.

Travis: There's the ones the children decorated, and for anyone with kids at home, especially ours who are like eight and almost five, it's hard to tell what cookie they're gonna care about. Because they will decorate a cookie, not think about it for like a week and a half, and then suddenly with perfect clarity of memory, be like, "But where is the kind of like snowflake where a piece broke off, and I did like three green squiggles on it?" And you're like, "I ate that." And it's the end of the world.

Teresa: Exactly. So we've eaten all the cookies that we're allowed to eat.

Travis: Yeah. Now we have to start asking permission every time.

Teresa: [chuckles] If you want to, dear listener, have a cookie exchange, here are some tips and tricks. First one is, it's a more intimate kind of gathering. You can very easily be overwhelmed with the amount of baked goods. And so, recommendations are like eight to 12 people, no more than that.

Travis: Okay, wait just to—let's start further back, right? Because I think up 'til this point, I've had it in my head of like, I brought a box of cookies, you hand me a box of cookies.

Teresa: No.

Travis: But this is—now I'm thinking about if you have that many people it's like, I made a tray of cookies. There's an empty container that someone would start with and go around and put some of those cookies in the box, some of these cookies in the box.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So the idea is—

Travis: So I don't have to prep 12 containers for 12 people?

Teresa: No. No, no, no. Everyone brings what their recipe makes. Recommendations are all the way from a dozen cookies to several dozen cookies, depending upon size, right?

Teresa: Okay.

Teresa: So everyone brings one type of cookie. A normal, regular amount of cookie, right? And then the host provides some kind of to-go container, whether it's bags or boxes or tins, right? Most people keep cookie tins.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: And you have those, where you will make your own box—

Travis: You can also just do like—you could do zip lock bags.

Teresa: I mean, totally.

Travis: If that's what you got. It's not about that.

Teresa: Absolutely, you could. You make a box from all the ones that other people have brought. So like, for example, let's say you have 12 people who each bring 12 cookies.

Travis: That's 144 cookies.

Teresa: Yes, but you leave also with 12 cookies, one of each cookie that comes.

Travis: Oh, see, but that's where I start to panic. Because what if I only get one of one cookie and it's the greatest cookie you've ever had? Do I take it home? Do I cut it into four sections so each of us gets one little bit?

Teresa: This is just to make the math math, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Obviously.

Travis: You do want—you do want, like if there's 12 people, I would encourage you to then bake in numbers of 12, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: So like 12 or 24, right? If it's eight people, eight, 16, 24. Right? And not like I made 12 cookies for a 10 person party. If that's what it—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: I think if that's what a batch is, right? Then keep two at home, right? But I think if it's a 10-person party, don't only bring eight. You know?

Teresa: I would agree. I would agree. Do bring more cookies. And some would say that etiquette dictates that you actually bring more than the people would take home, because you're gonna be eating cookies. You guys—

Travis: Yeah, that's true.

Teresa: You gon' be eating the cookies.

Travis: Also, I would have to assume that there's like a host tax implied.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You know? Where if like I'm putting it together and I'm—I would like extra cookies be left at my house.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: You know what I mean?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: That's my thing.

Teresa: If that's how you want to do it.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Another tip, do plan for allergies. As the host of such a gathering, it would fall on you to provide any allergen information to all of the people that you invite. Say somebody is gluten free, right? They might bring their gluten free cookies. But if they want cookies, all the other cookies have to be gluten free too.

Travis: Okay, I'm gonna ask this, with the caveat that this is like personal opinion and not like a hard and fast rule or something to judge other people by, right? But let's say that you know someone at the party has a walnut allergy, right? And your recipe that you always make is like a walnut based thing or whatever, right? Maybe it has—what's that, the thing wrapped around... like, it's around a Battenberg.

Teresa: Marzipan?

Travis: Marzipan.

Teresa: That's almonds.

Travis: Yeah, okay, so almond, whatever. Has an almond allergy. Do you not make it at all, try to change the recipe, or just make sure it's clearly

labeled? And that's just—like, there's going to be lots of other ones from the person to choose from.

Teresa: I think that is the thing, right? You need to talk to the host and see how many people are going to be there, right? How many cookies are expected. And if there are a lot of cookies expected, I think that as long as it is labeled carefully, then you can make it. But if there's only like eight people bringing cookies, and this person has an allergy, you want them to be able to take home your cookies too.

Travis: Yeah, that's fair.

Teresa: So I would make something else.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Also, as a host—

Travis: Or make two things.

Teresa: Make two things, sure.

Travis: If you're like, I'm really proud of this thing, and I do want people to be able to try it. But I want this person to feel included. So like, I made a batch with the regular recipe, and I changed the recipe in this batch. Or I made a second recipe.

Teresa: Okay. Yeah, yeah, again, do be—do communicate. Because there's also like cross contamination problems with some allergies.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: Do communicate. Also, speaking of communication, as the host, it would be part of the duties to be sure that we don't all just bring gingerbread cookies, right?

Travis: That's fair.

Teresa: A good variety of cookies. You know, people have different recipes. So I would say if one or two people want to bring the same kind of cookie, I think that's fine. But we don't want to all have the same kind of cookie.

Travis: A spreadsheet or some kind of sign-up list, or something where someone can put what they're bringing.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Or if you want to have it of like, "This is my recipe, and here are my like allergy concerns or food concerns," or whatever.

Teresa: Sure. And I think that the best idea for this is really stick to your kind of like niche family recipe thing. Because the odds that somebody else is going to have that are pretty low, right? And so you don't—you won't end up with all the same type of cookie. I would also say that do plan for this intimate gathering requiring more space than you would normally, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You do have to find a place like a table or a counter, where everything can kind of be like laid out for people to assemble their cookie boxes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so this isn't like, you know, you would be able to just have several friends around a coffee table. You need to have the room to be able to do the exchange.

Travis: You want to be able to lay things out for people to walk around and pick them up, and not feel like crowded.

Teresa: Exactly, right? And everybody loves a cookie display.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Wouldn't that be nice? But cookie exchanges are notorious for plus ones. [titters] Because you want to—people love cookies! Have extra cookies, okay? Because people bring plus ones. People bring kids. People bring people who like cookies. And so, you should have extra cookies to give to them and to eat.

Travis: But along the same—a lot of this, as with a lot of parties and things, is communication.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? So, if you would like to bring a partner or a friend or kids or whatever, make sure you communicate that with the hosts and other people attending, right? Because if the host is like, say, planning to have some kind of like special boxes made or prepared or whatever for people, and then you show up with like three more people and you didn't tell them—

Teresa: I mean, that's true.

Travis: Like, I would be very frustrated. Or if it's like, oh, well, like, I didn't get any like beverages or stuff that your kids would like. Or I did—right? Also, in general, let people know you're bringing kids, is always good. Let people know you're bringing kids. Because you don't know, right? Maybe they have dogs, maybe they have whatever. Communicate who you're bringing.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: "Is it okay if I bring Bob with me?" Right? That kind of thing, always better. And then be prepared, though, because I've seen a lot of like 'am I the asshole' stories of late around this. Like if you say, "Is it okay if I bring this person?" Is it okay—

Teresa: And then someone says no.

Travis: And they say no, that's your answer. Right? If it's like, "Well, I don't—like, I'm trying to keep this small because we only have so much space." Or like, you know, whatever the case is, whatever the reason is,

they're the ones hosting. You don't have to go. If you're like, "Oh, I don't feel like—I don't feel good about going somewhere where like my partner isn't welcome," or whatever. Or like, "I don't feel good, you know, I can't get a babysitter, so I can't leave my kids at home." Okay, cool. You don't have to go. But if they're like, "I'd rather not." And then you're like, "Come on!" That's not great.

Teresa: Yeah. So, we already mentioned to-go boxes, but here is an idea, right? If you do not have the ability to do to-go boxes or bags—

Travis: You hold your shirt out and kind of make a little basket in your shirt, and then you stuff the cookies in there.

Teresa: No. As—

Travis: Like a kangaroo pouch.

Teresa: What I'm saying is, as a host, have several other decanting surfaces, right? Plates or... or tins, like we've talked about. So that—

Travis: I like your phrasing of that. Decanting surfaces.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "No, you can't eat the cookie yet. You have to let the cookie breathe."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Swirl the cookie around."

Teresa: But what I'm saying is, if I bring a tin, right? With cookies in it. And I want to take other cookies home. I can remove those cookies from my tin, leave them on the host's plate, and then put other cookies in my tin, right? So then we don't have to have any kind of like extra stuff, and we don't have to have like bags or whatever. I can just—we put them out on the display from my container, and then I fill my container again.

Travis: I will also say, just as someone who's hosted many Thanksgivings and parties and stuff where I know that there's going to be leftovers and part of the thing is like, take the leftovers home with you. As part of my like, buying ingredients and buying supplies or whatever, I'll get like a, you know, 10 pack of cheap Tupperware, you know, stuff, and be like, take it with you. I don't expect it back, right? Because I don't want to spend the next year like hunting down my Tupperware containers or my, you know, casserole dishes or whatever.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Here are some—two quick tips. Tricks, perhaps. If you don't bake, that's okay, you can still go to a cookie exchange, go to a local bakery, get like 12 of their cookies or whatever. They don't have to be homemade, they just have to be able to be exchanged. Also, did you end up with way too many cookies? There are lots of places that will take extra cookies. Shelters, hospitals, fire stations, community fridges, all kinds of things. You can spread the love around. You don't have to keep all the cookies.

Travis: Do double check that, though, right? Because some places do have rules about like packaged foods versus like homemade stuff or whatever. So—

Teresa: Good thinking.

Travis: Yeah, don't just show up and be like, "Take these." Right? You want to—if nothing else, call ahead, you know? And say like, "Hey, I have a bunch of leftover cookies and stuff. Is it okay if I bring them down?" There you go.

Teresa: Absolutely!

Travis: Hey, everybody, thank you so much for listening. We won't have an episode next week, because it is Christmas. It's holidays. And we will be doing all of that stuff.

Teresa: We'll see you in the new year.

Travis: We will see you in the new year! Or my name's not Travis McElroy. And it is! So, before we let you go, speaking of holidays, the Candlenights holiday special is out now. You can get the video on demand and watch it through—

Teresa: Oh my gosh, it is so good.

Travis: Watch it through January 4th. Watch it a bunch of times. It is, can I just say, some of the best work I think we've done on a Candlelights special.

Teresa: Have a watch party, and everyone can put in the cost of their ticket.

Travis: That's the thing, it's only five dollars per person—or five dollars to watch per ticket. But you can always donate more, the proceeds from the show and the Candlenights poster and Candlenights ornament go to Harmony House in our hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. Harmony House works to help people experiencing homelessness. And especially at this time of the year, it's more important than ever. And it's always important, so just think about that.

You can go to bit.ly/candlenightstickets2024 to get yours. We have so many great guests, so many segments. There's music videos, there's skits and bits. We did one called Candlenights in Trav Nation. It's maybe the best segment we've ever done, I think, in my opinion. And there's like a four-minute long karaoke song at the end with me singing the 17 days of Candlenights in Trav Nation. It's so dumb and wonderful and great. I would say that the wonderful, speaking of wonderful, is Griffin and Rachel's segment this year was off the charts.

Teresa: Chef's kiss.

Travis: Ah, perfect. So, bit.ly/candlenightstickets2024. Also, packages for Champions Grove, the immersive tabletop gaming event that I put on last year. I'm doing it again. Packages are available at championsgrove.com. Come stay in a castle, in Ravenwood Castle. Hawking Hills, Ohio. Stay at the castle, play games with some amazing tabletop creators, make new friends, play all kinds of games. It's May 23rd through the 26th. You can get your

packages and get all the information at championsgrove.com. I want to say thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to you for listening. I don't need cookies because you're so sweet. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: Thank you to Brent Brentalfloss Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone, where those are found. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pin Up 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 and questions and topics and all kinds of stuff. Send your idioms to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alex, who reads every single one.

Travis: And the last thing we'll say, we talk about this just about every holiday, whenever we remember to. But be safe out there. You know? Don't drink and drive. Take care of yourselves. Holidays can be tough, mentally, physically, all of that stuff. So, be safe. Take care of yourself. And remember when you're out there driving, not everybody is being as safe and as careful as you, so sometimes you gotta be a little defensive. We care about you. I don't mean to hound you. Just be careful. Anyways, that's gonna do it for us. Join us again next year.

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, shmanners, get it?

[theme music plays]

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