

Shmanners 444: Lois Long

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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: How are you?

Teresa: Fine.

Travis: Yeah, you got some sick.

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: You got some sickness.

Teresa: Just a little cold.

Travis: [in a silly voice] 'Are you down with the sickness?' Yeah. Sinus stuff.

Teresa: Sinus—you know.

Travis: You reach a point where I don't know if it's age or time of year, or a confluence of events, where it's like, "I feel bad, I'm sick." And it's like, "What's wrong?" It's like, "No, no, no, I just told you. That's it."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "I can't pinpoint, I don't know. I feel icky. I feel crummy." Or as Bebe would say, "I feel miserable."

Teresa: Ah, yes, of course.

Travis: That's how baby describes herself when she is not feeling well, because she is an old poet.

Teresa: Well, it starts at the head, where there's congestion and headache and sinus drainage. And then it goes down the throat, where it itches and hurts and coughs. And then it goes into the lungs, where it's full. And then the stomach—

Travis: Your humors are in balance, I think is the problem.

Teresa: Oh, is that it?

Travis: Yeah. I mean, listen, I'm no doctor.

Teresa: Too much yellow bile.

Travis: It sounds like you have... not enough blood and too much phlegm.

Teresa: Okay?

Travis: And so I think we need to put some blood in you and take some phlegm out?

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Did they ever—I guess you eat red meat, was that it?

Teresa: Maybe.

Travis: Okay. Anyways, listen, we shouldn't be giving out medical opinions.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: We're not trained professionals. Please don't take anything we see as a medical opinion. Now, Teresa.

Teresa: Yes?

Travis: What are we talking about this week?

Teresa: We are talking about life of the party, Lois Long. We—

Travis: Superman's girlfriend!

Teresa: [titters] No, Long.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Lois Long.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: We did... we did a fair amount of prohibition episodes, and she is one of the characters from that era that maybe we talked about, maybe we didn't, but it's kind of like one of those like, "Ah, we'll come back to her," kind of things.

Travis: Ah, and now we have come back to her.

Teresa: Now we come back to her.

Travis: Full circle!

Teresa: She was a pioneering party reporter.

Travis: A pioneering party reporter?

Teresa: Yes, a fabulous flapper.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: And the epitome of the Roaring '20s.

Travis: She was the epitome of the Roaring '20s?

Teresa: Yeah. I mean, when you think about a flapper, what you're thinking about is Lois Long.

Travis: Oh, okay? I'm picturing a very tubular dress with lots of fringe and like—

Teresa: No, no, that's an anachronism. They didn't have lots of fringe. But yes—

Travis: Did they have beads? Did they have beads?

Teresa: There was beads, yeah.

Travis: Because it made noise, right? Wasn't that what flapping was about?

Teresa: Perhaps.

Travis: And kind of moving your hands like Betty Boop.

Teresa: [titters] Sure.

Travis: We tried to explain Betty Boop to our children—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And we're like, "And one of her catch phrases was like booby-boo-doop." And Bebe was like, "What does that mean? Why—"

Teresa: She just said that a lot, I guess.

Travis: "It was a catch phrase she said."
"In what way?"

Teresa: I mean, the thing about the flapper dress is that it was very loose, and so it flapped around. Not necessarily that it made a lot of noise. But unlike the dresses before that, which were like a tightly fitted—well, not quite tightly, but like a fitted waist and—

Travis: Very structured.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yes. Okay. So, Lois Long. Pen name, Lipstick. That's pretty cool, right?

Travis: Get out of town!

Teresa: Yeah. Let's start the early—

Travis: That's great!

Teresa: Early life first. Born December 15th, 1901, in Stamford, Connecticut. To Francis Bancroft and William J. Long.

Travis: Oh, for some reason I thought these were bullet points you were listing off like, "One, born. Two—"

Teresa: [laughs] No?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But kind of. So, her father was a smart guy, Harvard educated, well-traveled, had a doctorate.

Travis: In partyology.

Teresa: No. Also worked as a pastor, which is kind of hilarious considering how scandalous her writings turned out to be later. But like he also wrote a best-selling book called Long's History of English Literature.

Travis: What a party animal!

Teresa: Yeah, well, I mean, she got her writing from him, but not the subjects.

Travis: Yeah, maybe, yeah. Can I just say, I can't get over that her real name is Lois Long, which is such a wonderful alliteration. And she also had a pen name, Lipstick. So she was Lois Lipstick Long. And it's just wonderful. She sounds—

Teresa: There you go.

Travis: Like a comic book character.

Teresa: She sure does. She was the oldest—

Travis: I bet Lois Lane—

Teresa: Of her siblings.

Travis: Was inspired. The name I bet was inspired.

Teresa: Maybe. She was a reporter, Lois Lane. She went to Stanford High School and then to Vassar. And she studied English and French, and she was an editor for the campus paper.

Travis: So, very well educated.

Teresa: Yes, yes. In 1922, she graduated and moved straight to [in a silly accent] New York City to be a big fancy writer.

Travis: Was that— sorry, was that a Laszlo Cravensworth creeping in there?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: New York City!

Teresa: Citay.

Travis: It used to be you couldn't say New York City without the piece—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: The content commercial. New York City! And now it's becoming, "You really are..." Yeah.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: [in a silly accent] New York Citay.

Teresa: So, everything was going really well. She was first a copywriter at Vogue.

Travis: Ooh-la-la.

Teresa: And then she became a staff writer and drama critic at Vanity Fair.

Travis: Waka-waka.

Teresa: So like, all accounts, she's killing it, right? She's achieving her dreams. She's a young woman.

Travis: She's out there. She's—

Teresa: New York City.

Travis: She's doing it on her own.

Teresa: The 1920s.

Travis: Young women doing it for themselves. She can bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan.

Teresa: That's right. In 1925 is when she met her destiny.

Travis: Oh?

Teresa: She was hired at the New Yorker.

Travis: Okay, so she went from Vogue to Vanity Fair to The New Yorker.

Teresa: Yes. The New Yorker was newer at this—

Travis: The new-new New Yorker.

Teresa: The new New Yorker.

Travis: The newer New Yorker.

Teresa: It had just begun weekly publication in 1925 and it was—I mean, it was still considered to be witty and sophisticated and quote, "Not for the lady in Dubuque." I don't know what that means, what's wrong with her, but like—

Travis: Yeah, throw—I guess at that point you could get away with like throwing a lot of shade on other cities, because they probably just wouldn't get it.

Teresa: I guess not.

Travis: And I don't mean like, "They wouldn't get it, they're too dense."

Teresa: [titters]

Travis: I mean like—

Teresa: They wouldn't—

Travis: They wouldn't hear about it.

Teresa: They couldn't buy it.

Travis: Yeah, they wouldn't hear about, they wouldn't know. It was like maybe three weeks later someone in Dubuque would be like, "Wait, what did they say?" And you're like, "Ah, don't—ah, don't worry about it. It's fine."

Teresa: So, the inaugural year of the magazine, Harold Ross hired Lois Long because he needed someone young and hip to cover the night life in New York City. And so, she...

Travis: Was young and hip.

Teresa: And hip. And was happy to cover the night life. It was prohibition, though, so any night life she was engaging was probably illegal.

Travis: Hence the pen name.

Teresa: Hence the pen name.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Illegal. In quote—

Teresa: In quotes. We talked about this. [titters] Quote, illegal. So, she started reviewing speakeasies on the New Yorker's dime. She took over the column from a man who had called himself Top Hat to conceal his anonymity.

Travis: And then next was—

Teresa: And so—

Travis: Race car.

Teresa: No. [titters]

Travis: And then little dog. And then I think shoe.

Teresa: Which is how she came to lipstick, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: And she renamed the column from When Nights are Bold to Tables for Two.

Travis: Ooh.

Teresa: Which I think is much better.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Personally. And then she went out to, quote, 'report' on what happened. [titters] She chronicled her nightly escapades of drinking and dining and dancing and general hobnobbery throughout NYC.

Travis: So was it more like a... it sounds more like a diary in the form of reporting, and less like reviewing this place or whatever.

Teresa: Well... I mean, she definitely did review places that she went. For example, here is an excerpt from one of her reviews, which I'm going to read as.... what's April Ludgate's character?

Travis: Oh, eh... it's... ah, no... Snake Juice? Was that her last—

Teresa: Janet Snake Hole.

Travis: Janet Snake Hole, that was it.

Teresa: Yes. All right, ahem. "The place is dimly lit, comfortable and decorated in modernistic, Bohemian fashion. The review is as bad as ever. I don't want to put any deserving black bottom dancers out of a job, but I don't see why Barney bothers with entertainment at all. In a place as dark as that, people ought to be able to entertain themselves."

Travis: Ooh. Oh, that's... okay—

Teresa: Right?

Travis: That's such a good... it's percussive, which is fun—

Teresa: Yes, it is fun.

Travis: To hear you do that.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: But it also is like fun and a good like insightful—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You know, kind of cut.

Teresa: It's an insightful review.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: For one, right? But also, biting and witty. And, I mean, she's kind of like... it's hard to describe.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: But it's good.

Travis: It's, I mean, witty I think is the thing you said.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? Of like, why do you bother? It's so darkly lit. They should be able to—like there's so much... innuendo and so much entendre and so—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: But like the meaning is clear and fun. Like you would read it and feel kind of in on the joke. You would feel like you were a part of the thing. You're like, oh, I get what she's saying. And it feels like kind of a wink review where you feel smart, you feel funny.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: To get what she's saying.

Teresa: Yes. She also reported on the raids that happened while she was there. So, here's another review of a raid that happened. "My girlish delight in bar rooms received a serious setback a week or so ago in a place that I shall not to say should remain nameless. The cause was a good old-fashioned raid. It wasn't one of those refined modern things where gentlemen arise suavely in evening dress beside ringside tables and depart arm in arm toward the awaiting patrol wagons. It was one of those movie affairs where burly cops kick down the doors and women fall fainting on tables and strong men fall under them. And bartenders shriek and start throwing bottles out the windows."

Travis: It's so descriptive and fun at the same time, where I could picture it like a movie scene. I also like the turn of phrase that "shall but not necessarily should remain nameless."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's very clever, right? Of, "No, it was great, but I can't tell you about it."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: It also invokes a sense of like adventure, right? Where I was talking about like a diary feeling, right? Where it's just like, not only would you read it for information, but you also feel like it's a bit of a character who's living this life that you're a part of.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? Which I don't—it's kind of like Anthony Bourdain, right?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Where Anthony Bourdain is, yeah, teaching you about like the places that he went to. Or was teaching you. RIP. But there was also like a vicarious feeling to it, right? Of like this life that he's living, this adventure that he's on.

Teresa: Let's do one more.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: This is about the emerging jazz scene.

Travis: I've heard about this. I've heard about this music, yeah.

Teresa: "Another thing that your most high-hat friends have recently discovered is the Cotton Club in Harlem. I can't believe that most of them realize that they're listening to perhaps what is the greatest jazz orchestra of all time, which is Duke Ellington's. I'll fight anyone who says different. It's barbaric and rhythmic and brassy as jazz ought to be, and it's all too much for an impressionable girl."

Travis: And I'll fight anyone.

Teresa: Yeah, right? [chuckles]

Travis: I love that.

Teresa: Well, this is why people loved her column, right? So, she was an absolute wild woman, right? Not only was she writing this column in this very original voice, she was living this also, right? There were reports that she would come into the office at 4AM, intoxicated, still wearing the gown from the evening before. If she had forgotten the key to her cubicle, she would like climb over the walls of the cubicle. Her and her assistant, reportedly, at one point, had their offices at opposite ends of the... II guess they call it the bullpen?

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: And so, tired of walking back and forth, they took to going through the alleyways on roller skates. Like you know, she was just—

Travis: A character.

Teresa: Like I said, everything that we think about flappers is Louis Long.

Travis: And it's interesting too because even in the writing and the stuff,, like it doesn't give off—it gives off a wild but fun, right? Not like wild like, oh, I'm worried that this person's gonna light me on fire.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But more of like, you don't feel bad reading the columns. You don't feel bad enjoying her stuff, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Right, it's a great way to live vicariously.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Because not everyone was as privileged as her, certainly. But by reading the columns, you could feel like you are participating, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: You could delight in the fantasy that she was describing.

Travis: And you can delight in more fantasy right after this word from another Max Fun show.

Teresa: Ooh.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Okay, we're back. More—delight me with more fantasy.

Teresa: Yes. So, she was enjoying her liberation, of course. She was appearing in numerous formats, obviously. And she also got attention from the New York Morning Telegraph. She was also at one point under contract to Paramount Pictures to be in movies.

Travis: Really?

Teresa: And so like she was really living it up for a while. About 1927 was when she started to like mature in her writing style and also in her life.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: She got married to another New Yorker columnist, a cartoonist named Peter Arno. They had a daughter, but that doesn't mean that she stopped doing the column or going out and doing stuff. She continued to run Tables for Two, her column, until 1931. I mean, albeit a little more—

Travis: "This speakeasy didn't have any high chairs!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "I found that their macaroni and cheese had too much truffle oil in it, and my daughter wouldn't eat it!"

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "More coloring placemats at these back-alley bars!"

Teresa: But I mean, it would take more than marriage to settle her down. At one point, their boss, Harold Ross, if you remember, actually opened an in-house speakeasy to try and like corral the night life a little bit. Like his—it's like, 'If they're gonna drink, they should be here with me.'

Travis: Oh, okay, like a cool wine mom? Yeah.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "I'd rather my reporters drink here."

Teresa: Right. But they had to shut it down when they opened the offices the one morning to find both Ross and Lois entangled naked on a sofa.

Travis: Wait, the boss?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: But she was married?

Teresa: I'm sorry, wait, no, back that up. The boss found them.

Travis: Oh, found her and her husband?

Teresa: Her and her husband.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Peter and Lois.

Travis: Peter and Lois?

Teresa: What?

Travis: What? Like Family Guy?!

Teresa: Oh, no! I just put that together.

Travis: And their daughter, Meg.

Teresa: I don't know what her daughter's name was.

Travis: And her talking dog.

Teresa: [chuckles] This is when the column changed. Or she changed her focus from nightlife to fashion. Her new column was called On and Off the Avenue. And it started in the middle of—so, around 1927, like I said, right?

And that was when she became the fashion editor. The voice of the column was still really great. It was still rich and witty and thoughtful and observant and, you know, hilariously opinionated.

For example, at this point in history in the United States, French design was all the rage, right? And she really wasn't into it in the way that you would think. She loved the way that they looked, but it was very insightful when she said, "It is true that nobody can design clothes better than the French, but the big and popular houses are decidedly giving the lie to the tradition of exquisite French workmanship.

Go ahead and buy an original Chanel around here if you want to, and watch it drop to pieces on your back on the second wearing. The franc is going up, French prices are going up and duty is as heavy as ever, but the clothes are slung together. Copies, either here or in Paris and reproductions may not give you the same feeling as a celebrated label, but they do stay together longer."

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Wow! Okay. I like that writing.

Teresa: Yeah, it's great!

Travis: And I—it's a good review too! To be like, "Yeah, man, listen, do you really want to pay designer prices for a thing that's going to fall apart? Or get a knockoff that's going to last you longer?"

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Like that's just—feels like a thing you wouldn't expect to see in a review. And I really like it.

Teresa: So it's been said by William Shawn, who was an editor of the New Yorker, that Lois Long invented fashion criticism, right? She was the first American fashion critic to approach fashion as an art and criticize women's

clothes with independence, intelligence, humor and literary style. It was a novelty, right? And she didn't care about anyone, including, like the labels, right? But her readers. So the intention was to instruct and entertain by taking clothes seriously and writing about them honestly.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, her columns stayed well into the 1960s.

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: She had an immense following and her work would show up in lots of different formats. She would even help publish a couple of books. It was, you know—

Travis: She wrote Game of Thrones.

Teresa: No. [chuckles] It was said that her opinions could fill a bar at a new club or shudder new department store before it had barely opened.

Travis: I wonder if like—my theory would be that because if you start writing like this culture column under a pseudonym, under a pen name, and you get very comfortable with the idea of honest opinions and like telling it like it is. You know, of, my readers are more important than the people I'm reviewing or whatever, because it's not like I'm catering—like I'm not trying to get more acclaim, more preferential treatment from the places I'm reviewing, right? And so then, as your career goes on, that's just the trajectory that you follow.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of like, I don't care if I offend this person and they stop sending me samples. I didn't like their stuff to begin with. Right? That kind of thing.

Teresa: Exactly. Exactly. One cannot live the high life for so long and not slow down at the end of their life, right? She did settle down much later and she ended up still in still in New York, but she did die a grandmother of two.

Travis: She's dead?!

Teresa: Yes...

Travis: Oh, I guess she was born in 1901.

Teresa: Yeah, 1974. She didn't want a traditional funeral, obviously. I mean, how could one give this untraditional woman a traditional funeral? They had a party, of course, at the Algonquin.

Travis: Oh, really?! Like the round table with all the witty people.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So there were plenty of drinks and laughs and anecdotes about Lois. And apparently, the biggest part of this sendoff was that for her obituary, they printed a different Lois Long who was a dressmaker that she had cordially but undoubtedly disliked. Everybody loved it, they thought that Lois would have loved such a gaffe.

Travis: I love that.

Teresa: So her flapper delights and witty witticisms live on, undoubtedly. But let's close with one more quote of hers about the calamities of the 20s. "The calamities that were predicted for us from home and from the pulpit came all right, but there was never a day of any of this nonsense about nervous breakdowns from boredom. We smiled as we danced."

Travis: I love that.

Teresa: Yeah! Pretty cool. I mean, when I think about her, I do think about Aubrey Plaza as April Ludgate as Janet Snake Hole.

Travis: Obviously.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: It's like, it's... it just fits too well and I love when you do your impression of her.

Teresa: Oh, thanks.

Travis: Hey, everybody, thank you so much. A bit of a shorter episode, but... fascinating. I love when we do bios about people I don't know about. And then I'm just like, what a cool person! I want to see a movie about their life. Go check out mcelroymerch.com if you haven't. We have a lot of great merch there.

My Brother, My Brother and Me and Adventure Zone are coming to Florida in like... six days? Yeah, I was gonna say this week, but it's not really next week. You get it. Anyways, we're doing for TAZ, it's TAZ versus Romeo versus Juliet. It's our first ever live TAZ in Florida. And then we have the two My Brother, My Brother and Mes, we're going to be in Jacksonville and Tampa.

Get all the information and tickets at bit.ly/mcelroytours. If you have My Brother, My Brother and Me questions you would like to have answered, you can email it to mbmbam@maximumfun.org, and put which city you're going to be at in the subject line. Speaking of which, we're working on an episode about genie etiquette, genie wish etiquette. So—

Teresa: For our bonus content next Fun Drive.

Travis: For our bonus content. So if you have a genie wish, email it to shammnerscast@gmail.com, and we're going to talk about the wish and how we think a genie would try to subvert and be like, "Ah, you wished for this, but you weren't careful enough in your language, so I did this!" And that will be part of what we talk about.

So email that to shmannerscast@gmail.com with the subject line 'genie wish.' We 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. We could make

the show without you, but that would be rude! Let's be honest, it would be rude! What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent Brental Floss Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone, where those are found. Also 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, in addition to your genie wish submissions, we are always taking topic submissions, idioms, questions, all kinds of things. Send them to shmannerscast@gmail.com and say hi to Alex, because she reads every single one!

Travis: And that's going to 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?

["Shmanners Intro Theme" by Brental Floss plays]

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