

Shmanners 451: John Muir

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[theme song 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: Right there, I think it was the first time in the... 1,000 times we've done this intro that I felt like a newscaster on like...

Teresa: Oh, really?

Travis: But we're a special, like, husband-and-wife team. Like, [newscaster voice] "I'm your husband host..."

Teresa: [imitates "breaking news" beeps]

Travis: "This is your wife host. Tonight, are your dogs..."

Teresa: [stops beeping, giggles]

Travis: "... planning... insurrection?"

Teresa: Do— [laughs] I don't watch the news like that, so I don't think that they even [imitates beeps] anymore. I think—

Travis: No, I don't think they ever...

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

Travis: I don't think that those—

Teresa: You know what I mean!

Travis: I don't think that the news anchors sat there, going,
[makes beeping sounds].

Teresa: Do you know what I mean?

Travis: I wish they would!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I think it would make the news watchable. I think I would check it out if there was no mu— if it was all done a cappella, I think that would be amazing.

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: But I'm also a big fan of *Pitch Perfect*, so... it might just be that.

Teresa: No.

Travis: No!?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Is that just you...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... ending the bit, now?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Just done. Okay.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Deep breath.

Teresa: [inhales deeply]

Travis: Let's do this.

Teresa: Okay, let's do it.

Travis: Okay, what are we talking about today?

Teresa: We are talking about John Muir.

Travis: Okay. I don't know who that is.

Teresa: Okay. Well, so...

Travis: Is it just some guy? That'd be wild...

Teresa: No.

Travis: ... for us to do that. No.

Teresa: That would be weird. Let's say that he is the father of the national parks that wasn't a president.

Travis: Okay. Ooh! I like that little twist at the end, 'cause I was about to say, "I thought Teddy Roosevelt was the father of national parks."

Teresa: Yes, but on— Teddy Roosevelt ran, because John Muir walked.

Travis: Oh! Okay. Okay.

Teresa: He walked a lot.

Travis: Okay, now— you got me on the hook, now. Reel me in.

Teresa: [giggles]

And I would like to mention that there are actually— there's a whole network of heroes in this story. Conservationists, scientists, nature lovers... poets, even.

Travis: Poets!?

Teresa: Poets!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and without... the concerted efforts of all of these people doing what they were drawn to do, we wouldn't have our national parks that we have today.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Am *I* part of the network?

Teresa: Y— ... Yes.

Travis: Okay. Hey, thank you.

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: I know I'm not. Go on.

Teresa: You might have heard his name in passing, or maybe never at all. Um, like I said, as a lot of the credit seems to go to Teddy Roosevelt, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, but—

Travis: Our Teddiest president.

Teresa: That's right. Which is fine, because Teddy Roosevelt did establish 230 million acres of public lands during his presidency, and set over half of it aside as nationally-protected forests.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But he couldn't do that by himself, and this is the story of the man who... I think it's okay to say "inspired." I think that Teddy Roosevelt was a kind of, like, outdoorsy guy already...

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: ... but John Muir really made it so that he felt the call to do this.

Travis: So John Muir is the Leslie Knope to Teddy Roosevelt's Ron Swanson.

Teresa: Sure, yeah! Yeah, I like that.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Little *Parks and Rec* for our fans out there.

Travis: Man, we need to rewatch that.

Teresa: Yeah, we do.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, he was known as John of the Mountains.

Travis: [in adoration] Oh! ... *Oh!* I love that.

Teresa: Do you want to be Travis of the Mountains?

Travis: I don't know if "of the Mountains" is— would be the title I would claim, but... I like that that, like, you get that kind of... "of the 'something.'"

"Of the 'something.'" I like that.

Teresa: Mm. Okay.

Travis: It's just— it seems so, as you said, poetic and romantic, right?

Teresa: Indeed! *Indeed.*

Um, he was Scottish-born. He emigrated to America. He considered himself a naturalist and environmental philosopher. A botanist, zoologist, glaciologist, author, and an advocate for the preservation of the American wilderness.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Through his writings alone, he'd inspire people around the world to do conservation work, and would save enormous swaths of precious wild land, most notably Yosemite and Sequoia National Park.

Travis: You just kind of threw "swaths" in there. I love it.

Teresa: [giggles] Does that give you your ASMR...

Travis: Yes, because...

Teresa: ... tingles?

Travis: ... "swaths" is one of those words that, at least for me, as someone with speech stuff, I can't just speed through. You kind of have to take— you have to turn it into, like, a two-syllable word. "Swa-ths," right? It—

Teresa: I mean, it is indicative of, like, a great expanse...

Travis: It's almost onomatopoeical.

Teresa: Eugh, yeah.

Travis: [unsure of word] Onomato... ono—

Teresa: “Poedical.”

Travis: No...

Teresa: No? No, you’re right. [giggles]

Travis: I think it’s “onomatopoetic.” Onomatopoetic— I don’t know; it doesn’t matter.

Teresa: [bubbling laughter]

Travis: But it sounds like what it— “*swaths*,” right? You could see it.

I’ve said it too much, now...

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: ... and it’s lost all meaning.

Teresa: Uh, John Muir was born on April 21st 1838, in Dunbar, Scotland. He was the third of eight children.

Travis: Sometimes— I know I’ve interrupted a lot...

Teresa: What?

Travis: ... but sometimes—

Teresa: I mean, as is usual.

Travis: Fair.

Teresa: This is the way the show goes.

Travis: I have to remind myself, when it's phrased like that, "The third of eight children," that it was birth order, and not like a ranking system.

Teresa: [laughs heartily] Correct, sir.

Travis: He was the third best kid... out of eight.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, his deep love of the natural world started early. Um, he's written that his earliest memories were of taking walks outside with his grandfather, and hunting for the location of birds' nests, which was a popular boyhood activity. Since, apparently, he and his friends compared notes on who knew where the most bird nests were located.

Travis: Okay, listen. What a cool group of friends. And I mean that...

Teresa: They didn't have TV, okay?

Travis: I mean that unironically. Like... here's what I would be willing to theorize, is that they didn't start up caring about that. But one kid, like, showed up one day, and was like, "I saw three bird's nests yesterday."

And another one was like, "I saw four."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And I was like, "You saw four? Where'd you see birds nests?" Like... "Uh, ask me tomorrow."

Teresa: [questioning tone] Mm!

Travis: And then he was like, "Yeah, okay. So they were here, here, and here." And another one was like, "Oh, I went out and found five." And they're like... "Okay." And then it became a *thing*.

Teresa: Um, so his childhood was not what people would call easy. His father, Daniel, was a *deeply* religious man, and a firm disciplinarian of the corporal punishment kind.

Travis: Yeah, the “spare the rod, spoil the child” kind of kind.

Teresa: And so dreamy young John, as in he would dream a lot...

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: ... uh, was often described—

Travis: Maybe he was handsome! I don’t know.

Teresa: I don’t know, maybe.

... as restless, and quite prone to his father’s lashings.

Travis: Hmm.

Teresa: Or being idle, it would seem. Um, and so whenever he could escape his tense home life, he would find great solace in the vibrant lowlands of his Scottish hometown.

Travis: You know, I... I’ve been enjoying the *Inspector Gamache* series by Louise Penny, of late. Listened to 19 books in, like, two months. And there’s a kind of recurring, like, idea that is put in there of because— you know, he’s a detective and everything, and I think that this is a hallmark of a lot of my favorite detective stories. That like, thinking is... an activity. Thinking is active.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: This is, like— they talk about, “Oh, we should be *doing* something. Oh, we’re just sitting around; we should be *doing* something.” And being reminded of, like, “We’re sitting here, thinking about it. We’re figuring it out. That *is* something.”

Teresa: The wheels are turning.

Travis: And I think that—

Teresa: They keep moving.

Travis: That idea of, like, he was sitting around, dreaming about things, thinking about the world, interested in this stuff... and being like, "Mm! [Idleness?]" It's like, what are you doing?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You're blowing it.

Teresa: Exactly. Um, in 1849, the Muir family immigrated to the United States. In the time-honored tradition of... seeking out religious freedom.

Travis: Oh, I thought you were gonna say, like, streets paved with gold, and...

Teresa: Because his family didn't think that the current church of Scotland was strict enough. [laughs]

Travis: Oy...

Teresa: Like I said, the time-honored tradition...

Travis: Yeah, listen, it's what America was founded on.

Teresa: [laughs] ... of the need for the religious vigor [through laughter] that they couldn't find in Europe.

Travis: I just think the problem is there's not *enough* religious judgment where I live.

Teresa: [laughs] Yep, we've gotta go to America to get some of that *real* strict stuff.

Travis: We gotta get the religious freedom of having less freedom under religion.

Teresa: [laughs] Yeah.

Um, they settled on what they would call Fountain Lake Farm, uh, in Wisconsin. And once settled, the family joined the congregation of the Campbellite Restoration Movement, which was also called Disciples of Christ. So...

Travis: [flatly] Cool.

Teresa: They were deep in it.

Travis: [sarcastically] *Cool*.

Teresa: So— alright. He turns 11, and according to his own testimony, he was able to recite *all* of the New Testament, and most of the Old by heart. So he was really trying, really trying to do as his family wanted him to do. Um... so—

Travis: That's hard, man. The Old Testament?

Teresa: [sighs] Yeah...

Travis: It's a lot of confusing, uh, just names, if nothing else, in there.

Teresa: That's true.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. His dad didn't like it, but you couldn't keep John down. John was gonna be John.

Travis: Man, doesn't that just show you that if you are the kind of parent that is disappointed in your child for not being good enough, that they'll never be good enough?

'Cause, man, if I had an uber-religious parent, and I... memorized [laughs] most of the Bible, and they were like, [unimpressed] "It's not all of it," then I think I, too, would be like, "I'm gonna go outside for a while..."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: ... and never come back.

Teresa: Yeah. Um, so although John would attend church, and pray when he was told, he would *also* get up in the middle of the night, and read secular books while his father was sleeping...

Travis: [gasps dramatically]

Teresa: ... to provide himself with a more *rounded* education.

Travis: Yeah. Round— yes.

Teresa: Rounded.

As he grew older, he would redefine his personal experience in faith. He remained a deeply spiritual man all his life, but was less focused on, like, a Christ-centric belief, saying, "I never tried to abandon creeds or code of civilization. They went away of their own accord, without leaving any consciousness of loss."

He would later write that the idea of God was, quote, "As purely a manufactured article as any puppet of a half-penny theater."

Travis: Okay! Dang, John.

Teresa: I mean, he is definitely on the other side of that, right, as he would grow. And I think that that's a common religious experience...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: ... that a lot of people who feel either— I mean... feel not good enough, right, or they experience religious trauma in one way or another, often end up kind of on the less-religious side.

Travis: Well, I think that— not to get too real on my own backstory, my own character backstory, but I think when you're raised, like— especially in this very, kind of, strict... There are a lot of rules...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and God is in, like, the rules and the strictness, right? That when you realize that that's not true, the— it's really easy to kind of slough off, like, the institution that made you feel not good enough, that made you feel that way. It's so intrinsically tied to your idea of, like, religion, and God.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Right? That you're like, "Whatever spiritual feeling I have, I cannot connect... to that thing, because I only see it as being embodied by... that institution."

Teresa: Right. Um, but he loved the Wisconsin wilderness.

Travis: Sure! What's not to love?

Teresa: Yeah! Especially in the 1840s, 1850s, right?

Travis: Was there more of it then?

Teresa: There was lots more of it.

Travis: [thoughtfully] Huh!

Teresa: There was almost all of it...

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: ... at that point, I think.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And when he was 22, he enrolled in the University of Wisconsin-Madison... um, and paid his own way. And that was where he took his very first botany lesson, which he would remember fondly even 50 years later.

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: Amazing.

Travis: Um, what did the flower scientist say— no, wait. I'll get there. Hold on. [panicked] Uh. Uh, what did...

Teresa: Take your time, honey.

Travis: Okay. Um, something, something, something. "I don't know, [rhymes with "bought any"] botany?" right? And it's about buying flowers.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: So work backwards from there, and you can come up with a joke. We're gonna take a break from our work...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... for another Max Fun show while I think about my life choices, and the fact that I consider myself a professional comedy person.

Teresa: [laughs]

[theme song plays]

Speaker 1: A special thank-you to the Max Fun members who joined, boosted, or upgraded their membership during this year's MaxFunDrive.

And as a thank-you to everyone who supports Max Fun, we're excited to announce that this year's pin sale is now open. This year's proceeds will go to Transgender Law Center, to support their continuing work and advocating self-determination for all people.

Everyone at \$10 dollars per month or more can purchase MaxFunDrive pins featuring shows from across the Network. And all labels are able to buy our 2025 exclusive pin featuring our rad pal, Nutsy the Squirrel.

For more info, head to maximumfun.org/pinsale. And as always, thank you so much for your ongoing support.

[ad changes, music becomes more upbeat]

Ify: Since 2017, *Maximum Film!* has had the same slogan...

Alonso: "The podcast that's not just a bunch of straight, white guys."

Drea: Ooh, we've learned something over the years! Some people out there *really* do not like that slogan.

Ify: Listen... [laughs] we love straight, white guys.

Drea: Well, *some* of them...

Alonso: But if there's one thing we can't change, it's who we are.

Ify: I'm Ify, a comedian who was on strike last year in two different unions.

Drea: I'm Drea. I've been a producer and film festival programmer for *decades*.

Alonso: And I'm Alonso, a film critic who *literally* wrote the book on Queer Hollywood.

Ify: You can listen to us talk movies and the movie biz every week on *Maximum Film!*

Alonso: We may not be straight, white guys, but we love movies, and we know what we're talking about.

Drea: Listen to *Maximum Film!* on Maximum Fun, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

[ad and music end]

Travis: And we're back. Okay.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I've rethought everything...

Teresa: [laughs] About your life?

Travis: I'm a conservation and naturalist, now.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay.

Uh, he would say about this first botany class: "This fine lesson charmed me, and sent me flying into the woods and meadows in wild enthusiasm."

Travis: Sweet.

Travis and Teresa: [simultaneously] Beautiful.

Teresa: Beautiful! Um—

Travis: I took a botany class in college.

Teresa: Oh, yeah?

Travis: And—

Teresa: I did not. I took *geology*.

Travis: And look at us, now. Um... 'Cause you rock.

Teresa: [laughs heartily]

Travis: And—

Teresa: That was a good one.

Travis: Thank you. I bring this up because it is a thing that I bring up often, to tell people going into college: please pay attention to every class that you take, as much as you can.

Because I had to take a science without lab, and I took botany, and I was like, "Okay, cool, man." And I... did not attend every class session. And I did enough to pass the class.

And then, 20 years later, I *love* gardening, and I love plants, and I've had to teach myself *so much* that I could've just learned if I'd paid attention in class.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You never know what's going to become very important to you. Please pay attention in classes, even if they're not part of your major.

[to Teresa] Go on.

Teresa: Okay.

It was clear to anyone that knew him that John had very little interest in traditional academic milestones. He attended classes for two years, but never got the particular transcredits that you need to be listed as higher than a first-year student, right?

So, like, the things like... English 101, or Language Arts, or whatever it is. Like, the general education courses...

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: ... he was like, "Nah. Can't have it."

Travis: I tell you, I know it's easy - and I think that this is... a bit of a, like, cliché to say, because I am a neurodivergent person with ADHD, and I think

it's really easy that people like to project... *their*, like, neurodivergence onto figures that they see.

But this kind of thing, of like... I'm very interested in the things I'm interested in...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and I have no— like, I think it's mostly when people talk about the schooling of someone, and I could hear, like, how they experience that schooling. I'm like, "It sounds a lot like me, John."

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: Uh— John... Sounds a lot like me, John.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: Botany sounds like a hyperfixation, is what I'm saying.

Teresa: Well, maybe!

So in 1863, his brother Daniel moved from Wisconsin to Southern Ontario to avoid being drafted into...

Teresa and Travis: [simultaneously] ... the Civil War.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. And a year later, John would follow him.

Um, he spent his first year in Canada exploring the woods, and the swamps, and the wildlife around Lake Huron. And, um, when his money ran low, his brother convinced him to take the winter off to work in a sawmill and rake factory, which was owned by two of his later devoted friends, William Trout and Charles Jay.

Travis: So it's a sawmill that also made rakes?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Interesting. I guess you have some wood left over...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... when you're done sawmilling, and you're like, "What are we gonna do with these?"

Teresa: Rakes and, like, broom handles, right?

Travis: Yeah. We'll make 'em into rakes.

Teresa: Yeah! That's good wood.

Travis: I know. I'm just—

Teresa: And don't just throw it out; sell it.

Travis: I'm just trying to think of how far you have to break down, like, a big log to get some handles out of it. Seems like a lot of work, when you can just make one *giant* rake.

Teresa: [bubbles into laughter] Or a lot of drumsticks?

Travis: We're gonna need Paul Bunyan!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: 'Cause we just took a big log... [laughs] and stuck a big rake on the end.

Teresa: Um, and so... William Trout wound up to be one of the best things to happen to John while he was in Canada, and would wind up living with the Trout family until 1866, so a long time. And... they had a lot in common, and because of his scientific background and inventive genius, John was able to improve the output of rake and broom handles for the factory.

Which is cool, right?

Travis: "I think we could get *multiple* handles out of one log. I don't think we need to turn each tree into one broom handle."

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: And they're like, "Oh, my God, John, you're right!"

Teresa: I know, right? Yeah!

And so he would remain friends with the family for years. They often discussed religion, and nature, and industrialization. Um, and he would correspond with them almost all his life.

Later that spring, 1866, he left his Canadian friends and headed to Indianapolis to work in a wagon wheel factory.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah! Just another place, right? Doing other things.

Travis: Rake handles to wagon wheels. That's the basic corporate structure of industrialism.

Teresa: I mean, he was definitely good at it. He became a supervisor, and made \$25 bucks a week, which would've been— which is about \$500 bucks a week, now.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: Yeah, so he was good at it.

Uh, in 1867, though, an accident would change the entire course of John's life. There was a day when he was using a, um, file to pry a belt off of a machine. The file would slip, and strike him in his eye...

Travis: Oh, no!

Teresa: ... I think his cornea, his right eye. And in response to the penetrating force against his right eye, his *left* eye also failed.

Travis: What!?

Teresa: Um, and so he was very suddenly blind.

Travis: Okay...

Teresa: Um—

Travis: This is a twist. I wasn't expecting this.

Teresa: This *is* a twist. He does not perish at this time.

Travis: I should hope not!

Teresa: Just so you know.

Travis: Because it would be wild. Thank you, narrator for *Princess Bride*.

Teresa: [bubbles into hearty laughter]

Travis: It would be wild if he was the father of national parks, but had nothing to do...

Teresa: [laughs] Had nothing to do with it.

Travis: ... with national parks.

Teresa: [laughs] Um... So he had to stay in a dark room for about six weeks, and everybody was very worried that the injury would be permanent. Um, *but* he did recover. But, I mean, obviously— that's kind of like a... what do we want to say? Like, a milestone? Um—

Travis: It's an inciting incident.

Teresa: Inciting incident for the rest of his life, right? A touchpoint.

Travis: Well, yeah, 'cause he had that brush with... physical disaster. I mean, I don't know if his life was in danger or not, but as a man who - it sounds like - loved the outdoors, loved exploring nature, to suddenly being at risk of one, losing sight...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and then two, having to spend six weeks in a dark room... seems like a very much, like, "Hey. All that stuff that's very important to you... could be gone."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: "In an instant."

Teresa: And so using this as kind of the catalyst for the next phase of his life, he was like, "Maybe I should not work in factories anymore."

Travis: Yeah. Especially during those early days of industrialism.

Yeah, man. I don't know that *anybody* should've been working in factories at that point.

Teresa: Mm. Good point.

Travis: Quite a dangerous time.

Teresa: Good point. Um, so... After that, we're at 1867, he began an *enormous* hiking expedition from Kentucky to Florida.

Travis: Whoa!

Teresa: *Yeah.* He would recount this later in his book: "A thousand-mile walk to the Gulf."

Travis: Okay. I'm trying to— once again, the joke's *almost* there...

Teresa: Oh, so close.

Travis: ... in my brain. It's too early. 'Cause there's something about "gulf" is like a good walk ruined, and he walked to the gulf, and I don't know.

Teresa: We'll workshop it.

Travis: I think there was also a part of my brain that was trying to figure out if that was the Appalachian Trail.

Teresa: Uh, no. But it was, uh, kind of a "catch as catch can." He didn't really have a plan. It was just, "I'm just gonna go that way." Walk towards the Gulf.

Travis: In sort of a gumption, "I'm just gonna start walking."

Teresa: Sure, yeah! A little bit like that. He would write that he had no specific path in mind other than going by the "Wildest, leafiest, and least-trodden way that I could find."

Travis: So very much that, like, "I came upon a fork in the road, and where the path diverged, I took the one less traveled," kind of thing.

Teresa: That's... that's so poignant. Thank you.

Travis: Thank you, I just made that up.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I've said before, by the way... If your options are the road that everybody takes, and everybody knows that it's safe, and a road that *nobody* takes - hey, man, listen. I'm not gonna tell you not to explore, but maybe there's some traps. Maybe there's bears on that road.

Teresa: I don't know, man.

Travis: I'm just saying, maybe there's a good reason that everybody's like, "That's the way you take." It works in— like, philosophically, but in real life... [laughs]

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Take the road that... you know that's safe. In real life. In *real* life.

Teresa: And it seems that at this point, the universe was definitely trying to tell him something. Uh, because... when he arrived, uh, in Cedar Key, he would... try and work at a sawmill.

Travis: Hey, John? John? It's me, from the future.

Teresa: I mean, a guy's gotta eat, right?

Travis: I *guess*.

Teresa: Um, but only three days into working at the mill, he would fall ill with malaria.

Travis: Okay. But he di— he probably didn't catch that from, like, a saw accident.

Teresa: No.

Travis: It wasn't like, "Oh, this belt slipped loose; it gave me malaria!"

Teresa: No...

Travis: That probably didn't happen.

Teresa: But it seems like the man was not meant for factory work.

Travis: Yeah. He might've been done with God, but God...

Teresa: [starts laughing]

Travis: ... was not done with him! Something like that.

Teresa: Um, and so as he recovered, he would often escape up to the roof, to watch the sunset. And one particular evening in January of 1868, he saw a ship in the harbor, and learned it would be setting sail for Cuba.

Travis: ... Okay!

Teresa: Not long after, he went to Havana.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: Um—

Travis: You know, it's interesting. It's just occurred to me, and I— my brain made the connection of, like, Teddy Roosevelt also... when he was young, right, spent some time sick in bed...

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: ... and reading about things, and it developed *his* love for the outdoors.

And I was like, "Oh, how— what a coincidence, that they both had this, like— there was a thing where they were laid up in bed for this long period of time, and found a love—" And then I was like, "Wait a minute. People are getting injured and sick a lot." I bet it wasn't that much of a coincidence...

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: ... so much as a lot of people spending a lot of time in bed, going, "I wish I was outside."

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, after that, he would go to New York City. Then, he would go to California.

Travis: Dude bounced around, man!

Teresa: Yeah. I mean, he wanted to go out and see. He wanted to go see stuff.

Travis: Well— and this is, you know, 1860s, 1870s. It wasn't like he hopped on a plane... to get to these places.

Teresa: Oh, totally.

Travis: Like, this was— this was travel in... like, in detail, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Yeah. A lot of boats.

Travis: A lot of boats. A lot of, probably, wagons, and stuff like that.

Maybe trains, at this point...? But...

Teresa: 1860s? Yeah.

Travis: I mean, but still not quite easy to get from, like, New York to California, to Cuba, and Indianapolis, and Florida, and Kentucky - all these places.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: There was travel involved.

Teresa: And in 1868, at 21 years old... he would've—

Travis: I would've guessed he was way older by this point!

Teresa: I know, right?

Travis: I completely lost track of time!

Teresa: [laughs] I know. Uh, he would set foot in the place that would change his life for forever.

Travis: Is this Sequoia?

Teresa: Yosemite. Yeah.

Travis: Oh, Yosemite. Okay.

Teresa: He was overwhelmed. He was, quote, "Overwhelmed the landscape, scrambling down steep cliff faces to get a closer look at waterfalls, whooping and howling at the vistas, jumping tirelessly from flower to flower."

Travis: Like a bumblebee!

Teresa: Man, that's amazing, right? Just the— the vim and verve...

Travis: The sheer joy— it feels like something out of a movie. Where it's like, the big reveal of, like, "They've reached paradise, and they're jumping around and so excited to just be off the road, and they've found the place they were looking for."

Teresa: Mm-hmm. It was clear that this particular location was a very deeply, uh, special and almost spiritual place for him, right? Um, so the Sierra Nevadas kind of, like, launched themselves in his heart, and he would return to that part of the country often.

I mean, he would even build a small cabin along the Yosemite Creek where he would live, and specially designed his home around the creek, making it so a small section of the stream flowed through a corner of the room.

Travis: Very, um, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Teresa: Yes, definitely.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. Um—

Travis: Or I guess the other way around: Frank Lloyd Wright, very John Muir.

Teresa: Ooh! [short pause] ... I mean, you're right. Definitely.

Travis: 'Cause one came before the other, right?

Teresa: Yes. [laughing]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Most definitely.

Travis: I'm just saying, John Muir would be *amazing* if he was somehow inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: He's a time traveler.

Teresa: After filling—

Travis: Is that the twist!?

Teresa: [giggles] No, that's not a twist.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: After filling countless journals, in 1871, he would publish his first piece in the *New-York Tribune*, dedicated to the description of the natural wonders of his new home in Yosemite.

Um, so this would be the first step of his lengthy career of a naturalist, and writer, and great thinker, in a time when... great minds were also kind of celebrities, right?

Travis: Mm. Yeah.

Teresa: Um, so he was kind of like... I mean, I don't wanna say "influencer," but I do wanna say that he was one of the philosophical leaders of this stage...

Travis: He was influential.

Teresa: Yes. He was definitely influential.

Travis: Especially at this time. I mean, post-Civil War, right? Where there was such a big push for, like, "Alright. Let's bring this country back together; let's focus on how great of a country we can be."

And then here's this guy who's like, "Hey. Out west, where most of you have never even dreamed of going, there's this paradise land unspoiled by us that makes you feel like the Garden of Eden. Makes you feel like, 'Ah, this is paradise.'" It sounds like exactly what people, like, were looking for to feel good about the country again.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Um, but being out there all by yourself, alone, for a long time, you *can* get lonely. And so he did eventually leave his cabin, um, and wound up in Martinez, California, where he would meet Louisa Strentzel, who became his wife!

[pause] In 1880.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And he was born when? So how old is he now? What year is it? What's happening?

Teresa: What? It's 1880, and he was born in... 1838.

Travis: 18... [counts quickly under his breath] 42?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I don't really do math. But you can do it.

Travis: I love it! I love math.

Teresa: You love maths.

Um, so Louisa, or Louie as she was often called...

Travis: Love that.

Teresa: ... was really, like, kind of his— I'm gonna say other half. In a way that I also— I mean, I don't believe that people are halves at all. I believe people are [rhymes with "holes"] wholes. You know, the... whole— [erupts into laughter]

Travis: I'm just gonna let you keep talking. People *are* wholes.

Teresa: [laughs heartily] But they really balanced each other out...

Travis: There you go.

Teresa: ... is what I mean to say. [starts laughing again]

Travis: No, no, no. Keep going. People...

[pause as Teresa laughs quietly]

Teresa: You know what I mean.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Not... Not H-O-L-E.

Travis: No, I know—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Listen. I know— hey, listen. I’m just here for it.

Teresa: [laughing] Oh, no.

Travis: Sometimes, I make the jokes, but sometimes the jokes make themselves.

Teresa: [bursts into uncontrollable laughter]

Travis: You know? Sometimes, it’s not up to me. The universe provides.

Teresa: [calmly] Okay. [exhales]

The Strentzels were accomplished ranchers, and John would work for 10 years, managing the family orchards, which encompassed a 2,600-acre farm.

Travis: Wow, okay!

Teresa: That’s big. They would go on to have two daughters, and by all accounts, he absolutely *adored* his daughters. There are samples of his writing to them, where he would, like, press flowers in the envelopes, and include small, little rocks, and things that he had found. It’s so sweet.

Travis: We are all about... the healing of generational trauma...

Teresa: Indeed!

Travis: ... here on *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Yes. And his— his family, his work, all thriving, and yet he continued to feel the call of the wilderness.

Travis: At this point, he’s like 50 years old.

Teresa: I know, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And Louie would let him go, right? She was like, "You obviously need to do this."

Travis: "You're a wanderer."

Teresa: "And that is okay."

Travis: "You're a wandering man."

Teresa: So she held down the fort, right? She would— And be *highly* accomplished at it. She did a really great job doing basically what women at the time were not allowed to do, right?

Travis: She ran things.

Teresa: Yeah, she ran things! And that was awesome. She was an intelligent businesswoman, and sent a lot of encouragement to John to allow him to do the thing that he really loved doing.

And so... not only did she let him do the things he loved to do, also encouraged him to write about the things that he loved to do, and said that... uh, her husband's experiences deserve to be shared in an Alaska book, and a Yosemite book, that he would write later.

And I think it's just so... It's so great to have someone who supports you. Like, you know, I feel supported, and I love that, and I want that for other people.

Travis: Who's— who? Who's supporting you?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You're married to me! You should— Oh, I see.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah. Um, upon his return—

Travis: Although it would be funny if the other side of that was like, he didn't wanna go places, and she was like, "No, please go."

Teresa: "Get out." [laughs]

Travis: "Please... You should really travel." Like, "No, honey, I'm fine." And like, "Please travel, John. John... *please travel.*"

Teresa: Upon his return at this point, he would find that the sequoias were being chopped down...

Travis: [gasps] By beavers.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: He...

Travis: *Oh.* Way worse than beavers.

Teresa: Um, and there were also shrewd capitalist plans to reroute the flow of Yosemite Falls.

Travis: [gasps] Capitalism is the real villain of the story!

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and so his fury at this was published in a national magazine. And what he would say was, "Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away. God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling, tempests and floods. But he cannot save them from *fools*. Only Uncle Sam can do that."

Travis: Dang, John! Spitting fire.

Teresa: Yeah. So at the beginning of the 1890s, Congress set aside 1,200 square miles of wilderness as a national park.

However, the Greater Yosemite Valley and the Sequoia Grove remained under *California* jurisdiction. Um, luckily, the 1890s is just when he kind of reached, like, his pinnacle of his celebrity and influence.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and so the Greater Valley...

Travis: In his 50s.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: In his 50s was when he reached his final form...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, the Greater Valley and the Grove would be protected by 1906, so he took care of it.

And so, like... This is when we find America at kind of this crossroads, right? The idea of, like, industrialism and conservationism kind of hitting... hitting heads.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, and what he decided he needed to do was recruit, like, the regular people. Like... he was working on one side with, like, Congress and the industrialists, and trying to fight against them, and make it so that he was protecting the wilderness.

But he wanted to recruit everyman, right?

Travis: Yeah. To teach them, like, why it was being done...

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And why it was important.

Teresa: So he was named the first president of the newly-formed Sierra Club, which is a grassroots conservation organization that has chapters in *all* 50 states, and continues to protect America's wilderness to today.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I mean, his writings are so important to conservation history. And, like, that was how he got out the word, as he was able to— he had the prestige that he could... put, like, op eds in every newspaper. It was amazing.

Travis: He used the pen! Which I've been told...

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: ... is in many ways mightier than the sword. But I don't— swords don't sound like they were mightier than the axe. Mightier than the log— mightier than the lumberjack.

Teresa: Indeed. [laughs]

Travis: The pen is mightier than the lumberjack, as they say.

Teresa: As they say.

And in 1903, this is when he would get to take the President camping.

Travis: What!?

Teresa: The best and worst camping trip ever...

Travis: Go on.

Teresa: ... was when Teddy Roosevelt reached out to John to *personally lead him* on a trip through the Yosemite Valley.

Travis: And the whole time, President Roosevelt just complained, like [whining] "I'm hot!"

Teresa: [amused] No...

Travis: "The bugs!"

Teresa: No...

Travis: "I wanna go home!"

Teresa: So there was definitely good, right? They went on hikes to see all of the Valley's most amazing sights. Dazzling waterfalls, and the sequoias, and things like that.

But it wasn't easy. Because the first night, there was a snowstorm...

Travis: [gasps softly]

Teresa: ... and the weather was *very* rough for most of the trip. But, you know, it didn't stop them. Muir was able to drive home to Roosevelt that these lands needed protecting against developers and, you know, all the kinds of stuff.

So this is when they started planning out the future of America's national park service.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: They put their heads together, and they were like, "We gotta do something." And Teddy was like, "I got you."

Travis: Yeah. Okay. "But I'm gonna take credit for it." And John Muir was like, "What?" And then Teddy Roosevelt said, "Forget I said anything. Let's go!"

Teresa: [bubbles into laughter]

They would— they would be kindred spirits; I think that they had, you know... Teddy had the power, and John had the...

Travis: Passion.

Teresa: ... the passion. Absolutely. And so returning to the White House, Roosevelt began using his presidential powers for conservation. This is when he signed the Antiquities Act, right? Which is the one that gives the President the authority to establish monuments on federal land.

Um, and by the end of his presidency, he would have saved over 147 million miles of forest reserves, establish five national parks, and 18 national monuments. 55 bird sanctuaries, and 150 national forests.

Travis: Okay! Cool!

Teresa: Um...

Travis: Inspired by...

Teresa: Yeah, of course!

Travis: ... John Muir and a camping trip.

Teresa: There's a famous photo of them standing at Glacier Point. Um, and it is— it's so cool, and Alex wanted to make sure that I mentioned that "it looks like the Monopoly man went on a hike and became best friends with a wizard."

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [bursts out laughing]

Travis: "And in *my* book, what *I* think..."

Teresa: [laughs] So... we are in the early 20th Century.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: And things seem to have only been going up for John. At this point, there are some setbacks.

Travis: Oh?

Teresa: The first one being that he fought a losing battle that ended with one of his favorite mountain valleys, the Hetch Hetchy, being dammed for drinking water. I mean, this valley not only was considered sacred to John, but also to a long line of indigenous people who had cared for it for thousands of years. And the damming was such an isolating battle that Muir felt that he was fighting mostly on his own. And so it really broke his heart, when the order was given to flood the valley. Really sad.

Travis: I am angry on his behalf.

Teresa: Good.

He wrote down, "Now that the fight is finished, and my education as a politician and a lobbyist is finished, I am almost finished, myself."

Travis: [sadly] Aw...

Teresa: Really sad. Not only that, but his beloved wife, Louie, would pass away in 1905...

Travis: Aw.

Teresa: ... and then 10 years later, in 1914, he would pass away as well.

Travis: Aw, man! What? Spoiler!

Teresa: Sorry! You didn't think he was still alive, did you?

Travis: I mean... Listen, clean livin'... [laughs] Maybe he's doing good.

Teresa: [laughs]

But his work continued, obviously, and in 1916, the national park service was created. Right? And was obviously influenced very profoundly by his work. And to this day, he is described as the father of the national parks. More than 83 million acres are currently protected under the national park service.

Um, his home and his gravesite are national historic sites, and the Sierra Club today boasts more than 3.5 million members!

And there's also a gorgeous 211-mile trail that cuts through the most beautiful parts of the Yosemite Valley. It's a section of the Pacific Crest Trail that is named the John Muir Trail.

Travis: Amazing.

Teresa: The construction of that particular trail began a year after his death, and *took 46 years to complete!*

Travis: Were they doing it with spoons?

Teresa: I don't know how they were doing it...

Travis: By *hand*?

Teresa: ... but I think that it's more of a testimony to the sheer scale, right?

Travis: Okay. Yeah.

Teresa: I mean, it's not like you can just drive a forklift through...

Travis: Yeah, I guess that's true.

Teresa: ... and make a trail.

Travis: If you're trying to make a trail dedicated to conservationists and nature, you probably wouldn't be like, "Alright! [laughs] Let's tear it down!"

Teresa: And like I said, he... he was really romantic about his conservationism, so much so that he was friends with, uh, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Travis: Mm-hmm. Makes sense.

Teresa: He loved to read Thoreau.

Travis: Yeah, makes sense.

Teresa: Of course. And so, you know, he had a lot of really great touchstones in his life, but he would always return to the wilderness. And that, I think, is really what makes him the father of the national parks.

Travis: I love it. Thank you.

And thank you, John Muir. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to *you* for listening. I don't wanna make a show without you, and you can't make me.

Teresa: We won't do it.

Travis: Wanna let you know it's a new month, and that means there's new merch over at mcelroymerch.com, so go check that out. We've got live shows coming up throughout the rest of the year. You can check that out at bit.ly/mcelroytours. Um, what else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners* Fanners! If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

As always, we are taking your topic submissions, your questions, your queries, your idioms... Send all of those to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alex, because she reads every single one.

I also wanna say thank you for everyone who joined us for MaxFunDrive.

Travis: Of course. It was— we did a lot of fun stuff, and had a lot of fun putting out all kinds of things. And the support you guys show us every year is truly heartwarming, and uh, makes me feel good about making this show, and making stuff for you. So thank you all so much.

Join us again—

Teresa: Hear, hear.

Travis: Yeah. Join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required!

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

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme song plays]

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