

## Shmanners 452: Environmental Conservationists

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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:** How are you?

**Teresa:** Fine. How are you?

**Travis:** Good.

**Teresa:** [amused] Okay, good.

**Travis:** Okay, cool.

**Teresa:** [hearty laughter]

**Travis:** Good talk, good talk.

**Teresa:** Hey, you know what?

**Travis:** [exasperated] *What?*

**Teresa:** I wanna say on the internet that I'm very proud of our eight-year-old daughter...

**Travis:** And her crusade?

**Teresa:** ... and her crusade. As you know, internet... it was Earth Day on Tuesday, here.

**Travis:** I thought it was Monday.

**Teresa:** No, I thought it was Tuesday.

**Travis:** Yeah, okay.

**Teresa:** Anyway, our daughter decided that to celebrate, she wanted to pick up trash in the neighborhood.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm!

**Teresa:** And it was inspiring.

**Travis:** And *she* was inspired to tell us about it many, many, many times.

**Teresa:** Well, yes.

**Travis:** She— To be fair, this is a child that, basically since she could talk, if she saw litter by the side of the road, it incensed her to no end. We'd be driving out on the road, and she would just go, [yelling angrily] "*Urgh!*"

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** And we'd be like, "What is it? What's wrong?" She'd be like, "Litter."

**Teresa:** Yeah. I know.

**Travis:** Hates it.

**Teresa:** Hates it! And so she decided to do something about it. And I think that having our own little environmental activist was quite grand!

**Travis:** Hey, now. Dotty was there, too...

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** ... singing a song to inspire her sister, I'm sure.

**Teresa:** I'm sure, yes. As she is wont to do.

**Travis:** Yes.

You know, let me ask you this - because when I think about Earth Day and basically anything having to do with, like, conservation and stuff like that, I'm reminded of a public service announcement when I was a kid... that was like an animated thing, and I believe it was like a woodpecker or a cardinal flying around, talking about how great trees were.

**Teresa:** Hmm!

**Travis:** And the song, [singing jingle] "Trees, trees, it's the Arbor Day Foundation. Sing the song across the nation about trees! [speaking normally] Trees are terrific!" Something like that.

**Teresa:** Something like that. But that's Arbor Day, not...

**Travis:** Yes. But was that anything you are aware of, whatsoever?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay. 'Cause I remember seeing that and I think, even as a child, being like, "Why are they trying to make Arbor Day happen?"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Like, there wasn't— Yeah, I didn't get out of school. I didn't get any presents. I didn't go door-to-door, getting candy. And it's like, "Man, I'm like nine. You've gotta zhuzh Arbor Day up, if you wanna get me really invested in it."

And yet, somehow, our eight year old deeply cares about Earth Day.

**Teresa:** Deeply cares about Earth Day. I think that, for several years now, there's been a program here in Cincinnati that gives out trees to elementary school children...

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** ... for planting. Some of those trees— While *one* of those trees has survived...

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** ... in our yard, the others have not.

**Travis:** She also was big into, like... We planted some, like, flower seeds...

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** ... and she loves gardening, and stuff like that. We try to set up, like, pollinator gardens, and everything, every year. But Teresa.

**Teresa:** Yes?

**Travis:** What *is* Earth Day?

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** How even, what even... When's *Mars* Day, you know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Here's the thing. If you would like to know another very good episode about Earth Day where we covered *those* kind of questions...

**Travis:** Oh, we already talked about it? So I don't have to act like I...

**Teresa:** ... that was from April 2021. [chuckles]

**Travis:** I don't have to act like I don't know?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Okay. Awesome.

**Teresa:** No, this specific Earth Day episode is about some environmental activists you should know about.

**Travis:** Like Captain Planet!

**Teresa:** Like Captain Planet. "With your powers combined."

**Travis:** Growing up, my parents— So Clint and Leslie McElroy are wonderful parents, can't stress enough they were great. There was a lot of, much as there is today, a lot of people who were like, "Mm, if you wanna be good parents, don't let your kids do this, don't let them watch this, don't let them... whatever, listen to this."

**Teresa:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Travis:** So I remember there were a lot of TV shows that my parents were like, "I don't think... No, you can't... [reluctant] Eugh..." And one of them was *Captain Planet*.

**Teresa:** *Really?*

**Travis:** Because it had Gaia in it, Mother Gaia...

**Teresa:** Oh! I see.

**Travis:** ... and my parents were like, "[clicks tongue] I don't think... I'm pretty sure that's... Mm, I don't think Jesus would like..." [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** "... you guys learning about Gaia. Eugh, I don't know..." But we watched it.

**Teresa:** You watched it.

**Travis:** That was the thing. There was a lot of - I wouldn't say performative, but a lot of my parents being like, "Yeah, don't watch that." And then we'd be watching it, and they'd come in, and be like, [indifferent tone] "Eh..."

**Teresa and Travis:** [laugh]

**Travis:** "Eh, who cares?"

**Teresa:** That happened with my parents and *The Simpsons*.

**Travis:** Yeah, that happened with my parents and *The Simpsons*, and the idea of MTV in general.

**Teresa:** MTV. [sarcastically] Oh, no, music videos!

**Travis:** My parents were like, "I don't think... Uh, I don't think you— Uh— Eh, whatever."

**Teresa:** Anyway. So, here are a couple of, um, some bios of some people who have done some really great work. Groundbreaking, one might say.

**Travis:** Oh. Groundsaving.

**Teresa:** Ooh!

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** First, we are going to talk about Rachel Carson, who was born May 27th 1907 and died April 14th 1964.

**Travis:** Spoiler alert!

**Teresa:** Hey, listen...

**Travis:** She might be 118.

**Teresa:** [laughs heartily] So Rachel Carson was raised on a farm by the Allegheny River, and grew up an avid reader and deep lover of the outdoors.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, she also—

**Travis:** You know what's fun about that, with that conjunction there?

**Teresa:** Yes?

**Travis:** It could be read as she grew up an avid reader of *The Outdoors*.

**Teresa:** Mm!

**Travis:** "An avid reader, and lover of *The Outdoors*." She read *The Outdoors*, and she loved it.

**Teresa:** That's right. Reader and lover of *The Outdoors*.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** That's what you mean.

Um, and combined her love of nature and talent for writing by pursuing a career as, first, a marine biologist, which I think is a phase that all kids, maybe particularly girls, go through. I feel like there was a time in my life where *all* of the people, the girls I knew, wanted to be marine biologists.

**Travis:** Do you think that that was a lot to do with, like, Lisa Frank and technicolor dolphins?

**Teresa:** Maybe?

**Travis:** And maybe mermaids?

**Teresa:** Maybe mermaids.

**Travis:** 'Cause I think that was a thing. I don't think that it was necessarily a gendered ambition, because like, sharks, deep sea exploration...

**Teresa:** Mmm.

**Travis:** Frankly, mermaids, for me...

**Teresa:** I can only speak to my own experience.

**Travis:** No, I was fascinated by the idea. And then, as with a lot of childhood ambitions, when I realized, like... You know you'd have to, like, be *around* sharks.

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** And I'm like, "Oh! Never mind, then."

**Teresa:** Yeah, never mind.

**Travis:** Never mind.

**Teresa:** She worked for the US Bureau of Fisheries, and edited some short radio stories for the Fish and Wildlife Service, which I think is pretty neat. It's clear that she had an enormous talent for words, and by the 1950s, she was a well-respected author.

Her first book, *Under the Sea Wind*, was published in, actually, 1941. And then her second book, *The Sea Around Us*, won an award in 1953. A documentary based on that book won the Academy Award for Best Documentary.

**Travis:** Oh! Wait, but that doesn't mean *she* got the Oscar. But an Oscar from the book— Okay. I guess she could say, like, "I basically have an Oscar."

**Teresa:** I mean, it was based on her book, so there is kind of like a writing rights, I think? But I don't know...



**Travis:** Okay. They should give one to her, is what I'm saying.

**Teresa:** ... if she gets one.

**Travis:** She should get one!

**Teresa:** I think that maybe she did.

**Travis:** If it's a documentary based on a book, that's nonfiction based on nonfiction. Come on, guys.

Hey, this Earth Day?

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Give Rachel Carson an Oscar.

**Teresa:** She completed the trilogy in 1955...

**Travis:** She got an EGOT? She got an Emmy based on her book.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** She got— Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** But she got three books.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** The last one was called *The Edge of the Sea*.

**Travis:** Ooh! Starring Jack Sparrow!

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** No.

And all of these are great, yes? Very good. Lasting legacy. But the thing that she is most known for is fighting against DDT.

**Travis:** Oh, I know what that is.

**Teresa:** Do you know how to say it?

**Travis:** [groans in frustration] Ugh! No.

**Teresa:** Here, I'm gonna take it real slow. Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** And it was insecticide that was sprayed on plants, right?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** But it was bad.

**Teresa:** Right. Very bad, but they didn't know at the time how bad. Because what they needed it for was as a pesticide, like you said, during World War II.

So there were lots of insect-borne diseases like typhoid and malaria, and that made fighting kind of like the second cause of death at the time, during the World War. Because those diseases took out more soldiers than anything else.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, so the allied forces would clear the way for the troops by flying ahead, over the fields, and dropping the pesticides from planes. Which wiped out diseased fleas, and mosquitoes, and all kinds of stuff, right? And that was... *good*, in the way that they were trying to protect soldiers' lives.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** But it was *bad*, in the way of... spreading this chemical that they didn't actually know the environmental impact of.

**Travis:** Yeah. Like curing cancer by setting fire to the person.

**Teresa:** Kind of! [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah. "Yeah, you got rid of the cancer, alright."

**Teresa:** Yeah. It was very effective, and so people wanted to *use* it. However, what had started to happen was birds started to die...

**Travis:** Uh-huh. 'Cause it was poison.

**Teresa:** ... because it was poison. So the insects would ingest the poison and die, right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** From just a little bit. But the birds eat a lot of the insects.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** And then *they* would die.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** And the reason why is because she discovered - Carson discovered - that it doesn't dissolve in water, and it sticks to fatty tissue.

**Travis:** Oh!

**Teresa:** So if you spray it over a river, it could actually leech into the muscles of, say, salmon or whatever. And then *you* eat that salmon...

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** ... and then it's in *your* fatty tissue.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** And the buildup over time is what causes the death, right?

**Travis:** Oh! Okay.

**Teresa:** Um...

**Travis:** And that's bad?

**Teresa:** That is...

**Travis:** Just double-checking.

**Teresa:** ... bad.

**Travis:** That's bad. Okay.

**Teresa:** That is bad. So it's not just a pesticide; it's a biocide, right? So it kills indiscriminately. And so she published her findings in what would become her most famous book, *Silent Spring*.

**Travis:** Okay. Can I just say, her impact on conservation and protection of the environment, and people, and everything is wonderful. She is a master at naming these things...

**Teresa:** I know, right?

**Travis:** ... that if you're like, "Yeah, here's a book about how, like, DDT pesticide is bad for people," I'm like, [neutrally] "Okay."

And you're like, "Here's a book called *Silent Spring*." And I'm like, "Ooh, a thriller!"

**Teresa:** Mmm!

**Travis:** [chuckles] "Oh, okay!"

**Teresa:** She had a *mountain* of substantiated evidence, and that's pretty much the only reason why the chemical companies, who wanted this book *not* to come out, and her *not*—

**Travis:** [ironically] You mean they weren't excited, and voluntarily ready to stop using—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "Wait - oh, it's bad? Oh, I'm so sorry!"

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "I don't want this money anymore!"

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm! And so, I mean, it was the only thing that really protected her, right? Because they were coming after her, hard. But the mountain of evidence made it so that there was, eventually, a nationwide ban on DDT.

**Travis:** Good work, Rachel!

**Teresa:** And so not only...

**Travis:** Do you think that that moment was just very confusing for our editor, Rachel, who's listening to this episode?

**Teresa:** Oh.

**Travis:** And she was like, "Oh, thank you, Travis."

**Teresa:** [laughs] Probably not.

Anyway, she, through the writings, really made it kind of every person's problem to help protect the Earth. Which, *before* these books, didn't really seem like something that everyone thought they were able to do.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** And so it actually led to a grassroots environmental movement that *eventually* became the United States Environmental Protection Agency!

**Travis:** Oh, excellent! I like them.

**Teresa:** She passed away before that was created, but President Jimmy Carter posthumously awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her tireless work bringing scientifically-backed environmental efforts to the forefronts of Americans' minds.

**Travis:** Amazing! Hey, can I ask you a question?

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Do you think it's hard, if you're a biologist who works with the Marines, but you're not a marine biologist...

**Teresa:** Mm!

**Travis:** ... and you're trying to explain that to people when they ask what you do?

**Teresa:** Hmm!

**Travis:** And you're like, "I'm a Marine biologist, but... [laughs] But let me explain."

**Teresa:** I think it's your duty, then, to be more like, "I'm a biologist *for the Marines*, in the Marines."

**Travis:** Okay. So it's a...

**Teresa:** "I'm a biologist, and I am a Marine." [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** "I'm an avid reader, and lover of the Marines."

**Teresa:** [laughs heartily] Exactly.

**Travis:** We'll be back with more conservationist heroes in just a moment. But first, how about a word from another Max Fun show?

[theme song plays]

[calm, groovy music plays]

**Radio Host:** Good evening. Thanks for tuning in to 101.1 MaxFun. It's midnight here on Host to Coast, and we've got Sarah from Michigan on Line One.

**Sarah:** Hi! I'm calling in for some help. I used to love reading, but between grad school, having kids, and the general state of the world, I can't seem to pick up a book and stick with it, anymore.

**Radio Host:** Sarah, this is an easy one. Just listen to *Reading Glasses!* A podcast designed to help you read better. Brea and Mallory will get all the pressure, shame, and guilt out of your reading life. You'll be finishing books you love in no time.

**Sarah:** Great! That sounds amazing! Also, I do think my husband is cheating on me with Mothman. Can you help me with that one?

**Radio Host:** Ooh, I don't think they cover that!

*Reading Glasses*, every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[music shifts to action theme]

**Announcer 1:** WrestleMania is the biggest...

**Announcer 2:** *And* busiest!

**Announcer 1:** ... time of the year for wrestling.

**Announcer 2:** And the *Tights and Fights* podcast is more important than ever.

**Announcer 3:** We have so many questions to explore! How can *you* understand John Cena's motivation as a bad guy? Why is a car crash actually a great expression of friendship?

**Announcer 2:** You mean friendship, right?

**Announcer 3:** Of course.

**Announcer 2:** Whether you're a long-time wrestling fan, or coming back after a break, *Tights and Fights* has you covered.

**Announcer 1:** This WrestleMania, and every weekend after, on Maximum Fun!

**Choir:** [singing as epic music swells] *Tights and Fights* podcast! *Tights and Fights*!

[ad break ends]

**Travis:** Okay, we're back.

**Teresa:** Here we are. Let's talk about somebody else, too.

**Travis:** I'd love to, yeah, please!

**Teresa:** Yes! Yes. We're gonna talk about, next, Hazel M. Johnson. Born January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1935 to January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011.



**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** Is the *next* one still alive? Like, where are we at?

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** We're on our way forward...

**Teresa:** Um, okay. So she was born in New Orleans, and her family lived in a region of town that was so polluted by chemical companies that it was colloquially dubbed Cancer Alley.

**Travis:** Oh, I've heard about this. Yes.

**Teresa:** She was the oldest of four, but due to the horrific conditions resulting from the chemical plant in her neighborhood, she was the only child in her family to live past her first birthday.

**Travis:** Oh, man.

**Teresa:** So by the time she turned 12, her parents had also passed. Shortly after her wedding in 1955, she and her husband John moved to Chicago, where originally, she was involved in grassroots efforts to fight housing segregation in her community.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** But when she visited her brother-in-law's house, her life would completely change. Her brother lived in Altgeld Gardens, which is one of the first public housing developments ever built in the United States.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And she fell in love with the people there. She loved the community, she loved the way that they took care of each other. It was

really, like... It was what she deemed kind of, like, her perfect environment, right?

**Travis:** Got it.

**Teresa:** So they moved to that neighborhood, she and her family, in 1969.

Was so into it. Loved to throw block parties, and field trips, and organize things for the neighborhood kids, and was so popular in this neighborhood that she was nicknamed Mama Johnson.

**Travis:** Love that.

**Teresa:** And it was a great time! ... For a little while.

**Travis:** *Until...*

**Teresa:** Until her husband John was diagnosed with lung cancer. And cancer is always bad news, right?

**Travis:** Yes!

**Teresa:** But what hurt, specifically, the Johnson family is that doctors were at a loss as to explain why. He didn't work at any of these hazardous companies, he had no history of smoking or— and I have to assume that, at this point in time, secondhand smoke was probably not a big thing that people are pointing toward.

**Travis:** But it's at least— Like, if there had been an obvious cause, right? Even something where they had been like, "Oh, well, you were in a house full of smoke; that's probably it."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** If there had been something like that, they would've said *that*.

**Teresa:** But he had very few risk factors for the disease, and passed away just weeks after his diagnosis.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** He was only 41 years old. So Hazel got to thinking, as it turned out, several of her neighbors were going through their *own* cancer struggles.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And other issues were prevalent. Things like asthma, skin and respiratory illnesses. Even local mothers in the area giving birth to children who are born with birth challenges, or birth defects.

And so she wanted to start looking around. And she was a busy lady! She had seven kids, and her own job, right?

**Travis:** And now, a single mother.

**Teresa:** And now a single mom. And so, like, it was very important to her to try and figure out what was happening to her beloved community.

**Travis:** Yeah! So her little gray cells are a-churnin'.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And what does she figure out?

**Teresa:** She discovers that her community in Chicago has the highest cancer rates in the region. So something isn't right.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** It was the epicenter of a 14 square mile ring of pollution that stretched from Chicago's southeast side, all the way to northwestern Indiana.

Within that singular block of land, there was: a chemical incinerator, a water and sewage treatment facility, steel mills, paint factories, scrap yards, and more than 50 landfills.

**Travis:** And at this point in time, there was no pretense of a missions control, or controlling waste water runoff...

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** ... or any of these things, right? So not only was that bad by *today's* standards...

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** But like, even worse, because they weren't even making a show of pretending to care about that kind of stuff.

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And the neighborhood was directly built on top of a former industrial waste dump.

**Travis:** Okay. Well. Okay.

**Teresa:** Yes. And these are all things that should have been considered as no-goes for building this public housing development.

**Travis:** I'm picturing in my head— Like, you know in scenes like a movie or TV show where they're tracking a serial killer, and they're putting pins in a map?

**Teresa:** Mm!

**Travis:** And then they're like, "Wait! This is— There's a pattern here, right?" This kind of thing, except the serial killer is pollution.

**Teresa:** Indeed.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** She is quoted in the *Chicago Tribune* that: "I was stunned and angry. I decided to make it my mission not only to find out what was really going on, but also to do something about it."

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Totally.

**Travis:** Okay. I'm riled up on her behalf!

**Teresa:** I am, too. She founded a group called People for Community Recovery. And it started with the kind of tenant issues of this neighborhood. But it started to shift focus to eliminating the environmental hazards that were plaguing the community.

**Travis:** Well, yeah. Because it seems like at that point, it is important that where people live is taken care of, and the people living there. But keeping them alive...

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** ... is like step one of that, right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** And so this kind of incredibly high cancer rate and mortality rate kind of, like, supersedes. We're gonna keep 'em alive first, and *then* worry about quality of life.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** It makes complete sense.

**Teresa:** And under her leadership, water and sewage service improved, a new health clinic opened, asbestos and polychlorinated biphenyls were removed. And there was a moratorium set on new expanded landfills inside the city.

**Travis:** Okay! Good work, Hazel.

**Teresa:** Yeah! She was able to exact a lot of cha— enact a lot of change.

**Travis:** No, I liked “exact.”

**Teresa:** Oh!

**Travis:** ‘Cause it seems like a revenge thing that she’s doing, and I’m...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** ... kind of on board with it.

**Teresa:** Um, she mentored a *lot* of local college students and young activists, one of which was a young Barack Obama!

**Travis:** Get out of the town!

**Teresa:** For reals.

**Travis:** It’s— Time is a flat circle.

**Teresa:** [giggling]

**Travis:** I know who that is. Okay.

**Teresa:** In 1991, after speaking at the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC, she worked with peers across the country to create the *17 Principles of Environmental Justice*, which is a guidepost still used by organizers today!

And she would be crowned, after the Summit, the Mother of the Environmental Justice Movement. And in 1994, Hazel was invited to watch President Bill Clinton sign one of the very first environmental justice bills ever enacted.

**Travis:** Oh, that's gotta feel good. That's gotta be exciting for her.

**Teresa:** Certainly.

**Travis:** I'm excited on her behalf, I'm glowing. I'm all smiles.

**Teresa:** Isn't it so amazing that someone who starts out to just impact their own, like, city block, their own community, can have such a lasting legacy for environmental practices in the United States?

**Travis:** Well, I also think it's really interesting, because we will often— Like, take Prohibition, for example, right? When we talk about Prohibition, it's this weaponized righteous anger being used *completely* in the wrong, right? This thing of, like, "You are not actually dealing with the issues that you claim to be so upset about; you're tackling this other thing that isn't the problem."

And then we see examples of righteous anger being harnessed for good and to actually improve people's life, and get to the root of what the actual problem is.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And there's something so inspiring and wonderful, I think, about weaponized righteous anger being used for good...

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** ... and we see this kind of thing again, and again, and again. Where you're like, "Oh, that rules. I love this idea of, like, a... [sighs] crusade, for lack of a better word..."

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "... that is actually improving quality of life for people, and the world around them."

**Teresa:** Yeah. And it turned into a family affair. Uh, because while Hazel Johnson passed away in 2011 like I said, her daughter Cheryl continues the

fight, and has been - and obviously is more than qualified, you know. Has been working with her mother since the beginning. And so, you know, she's still working on it today.

**Travis:** Okay. I think we have time for one more, if you wanna give us another one?

**Teresa:** Yeah! Let's talk about one more, Wangari Maathai.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Born April 1st 1940, and died September 25th 2011. I'm sorry.

**Travis:** Aw, man!

**Teresa:** I'm sorry.

**Travis:** When you said, "1940," I was like, "Oh!"

**Teresa:** "Oh!"

**Travis:** "It's possible!"

[sighs] Ah... One of these days, we'll talk about someone [laughs] who's alive. One of these days!

**Teresa:** One of these days.

Wangari Maathai was an astounding person for a lot of reasons. But one of the reasons that she was very astounding is she's the first person from Kenya to ever win a Nobel Prize!

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** She was an avid environmental and political activist who changed the lives of countless people.



So some background: she received a scholarship to study at Mount Saint Scholastica College in Kansas, where she majored in biology. And then continued onto the University of Pittsburgh, where she received her first Master's Degree in biology.

**Travis:** And she wasn't a Marine.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Just to clarify, everybody. Don't get confused. Okay.

**Teresa:** She witnessed local activists fighting for an end to air pollution, and that was one of the first sparks in her crusade, right? And with her hard-earned knowledge, she received a second Master's Degree, and served for a time as a professor of zoology in Nairobi, at the University College of Nairobi.

**Travis:** Okay. Zoology was one that I thought about going into, by the way.

**Teresa:** Oh, yeah?

**Travis:** That's what I wanted to do. 'Cause I watched a lot of, like, Jeff Corwin and Steve Irwin, and stuff. And I liked the idea...

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And then it was like, "Oh. I might have to touch a snake, or a spider. No, thank you."

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So back home in Kenya, this is when she was like, "Let's get this party started."

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** She was ready to go. She would often visit one of Kenya's poorest communities, and saw firsthand how the degradation of Kenya's natural splendor was negatively impacting people, particularly the rural women. Swaths of the country were being bulldozed, and native biodiversity was being replaced with commercial plantations.

So that means fewer resources, greater droughts, and greater poverty for the native communities.

**Travis:** And it's also— You see this a lot of places. We talked about this way, way back in when we talked about Hawaii. This idea of when you get these plantations, and they're replacing native biodiversity, you end up with places that are a lot more dependent on outside...

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** ... interest, supplying them with that diversity that they need for, you know, farming, and building, and stuff like that.

And saying, "Okay, great. You're growing all of this stuff, but you don't have the variety of things that you need. So you'll ship that off to us, and then pay us for the things you *could* have been growing yourself..."

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "... and could have been building yourself."

**Teresa:** We talked about this a lot, when we had our Hawaii episode.

**Travis:** Yeah, that— Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I said that.

**Teresa:** What?

**Travis:** I said that.

**Teresa:** You said that?

**Travis:** I did.

**Teresa:** At the beginning of that?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** That's okay. You were so... You were so interested in what I was saying that you didn't hear it.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** I get it. That happens sometimes. That happens to me all the time.

**Teresa:** I didn't hear you say the word Hawaii.

**Travis:** I said it!

**Teresa:** Okay. I believe you.

**Travis:** I said it, but I love you.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** It's fine. That's what marriage is, sometimes: not listening to each other. And that's okay! That's what love is!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You hear me talk so much—

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** If I expected you to listen to every word I ever said, your brain would explode. Your ears would bleed. I understand!

**Teresa:** So it's a game of numbers.

**Travis:** Yeah, man!

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** I think you pay attention...

**Teresa:** That makes me feel better. I'm sorry.

**Travis:** You pay attention to at least 65% of the things I say...

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** ... which is easily 20% more than anyone else.

**Teresa:** [laughing] Okay.

**Travis:** So thank you for that.

**Teresa:** I'm sorry. I love you.

**Travis:** No, baby.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Baby, don't be sorry. I love *you*.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** This is why people listen to the show. This is the [clapping] nuts and bolts of marriage.

**Teresa:** [laughing] Okay.

**Travis:** I love it. Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay.

And in 1977, this is what Wangari was known for. She started planting trees. She started the Green Belt Movement. And by...

**Travis:** I love a movement, don't you?

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** *Love* a movement.

**Teresa:** From 1977 to 2004, they planted up to 30 million trees!

**Travis:** I wasn't expecting "million" to come after 30. Okay.

**Teresa:** Oh, really? Okay. Yeah.

**Travis:** Like, if you had said 30,000, I'd be like, "That's a lot of trees." And if you say 30 million, and I'm like, "That's a forest. I can see that for the trees."

**Teresa:** Yes. The Green Belt Movement was focused on empowering women, and reforesting the country of Kenya. Plantings have provided jobs, and firewood, and knowledge for countless Kenyans.

The women that she worked with benefited *immeasurably* from planting these trees! The trees repaired the soil. They provided food, and firewood, and ways to store rainwater. And Maathai made it so that every tree that the women planted, they would also earn a small amount of money.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And the money was a key component to the program, because it empowered these women, right? Giving them a way *out* of poverty.

And it sounds great to us, right now, but lots of people mocked this movement.

**Travis:** Okay. I don't like that part.

**Teresa:** Certainly.

**Travis:** Don't mock a movement.

**Teresa:** Well, because people are like, "How could this help? It's just a tree." Right?

**Travis:** *Ugh!*

**Teresa:** I know.

**Travis:** Oh, my God.

**Teresa:** I know...

**Travis:** Trees are terrific.

**Teresa:** They are!

**Travis:** I learned that from the bird, when I was nine years old.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And it stuck with me, to this day.

**Teresa:** And so these people found that there were incredible effects from restoring the integrity of their natural world, so that when Kenyan authorities started dividing up land to private construction companies, Maathai and her fellow activists sprang into action, continuing their fight despite police brutality and constant attacks to dull their voices.

And so her work not only brought to light the horrific actions of the Kenyan government, it exposed their lack of transparency, and the corruption in the

government at the time. And thousands of citizens saw what was happening, they made signs, they mobilized. And the outrage was so great that the government was forced to stop the deforestation project.

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** Um, so the Green Belt Movement not only restored and protected Kenyan natural resources; they became an active voice, and pushed their home country to create a more just government.

This is when she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work, 2004. In her speech, she said, "Although this award comes to me, it acknowledges the work of countless individuals in groups across the world. They work quietly and without recognition to protect the environment, promote democracy, defend human rights, and ensure equality between women and men. And by doing so, they plant the seeds of peace."

**Travis:** Amazing. *Amazing*. Listen, so... Takeaways. Takeaways, right?

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** This is a thing that I struggle with a lot, right, going back and forth when we talk about, like, Earth Day stuff, and conservation and climate change, and all these things, right? Is there is only so much that one person, the individual— like, that... I don't mean that one person could do. 'Cause we look at these three people, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And how much they kinda changed the game of conservation and protecting the planet, stuff like that. So it's easy to look at someone like that...

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** ... and be like, "Well, I can't do that," right? And then it's also easy to look at the stuff that *you're* trying to do in your own life, whatever that may be, and say, "And I don't see the impact that *I* am making."

And, one, it's better to be doing something than not doing something.

**Teresa:** Agreed.

**Travis:** And two, you're not wrong, right? There's a lot of, like... Individuals can only do so much, and there needs to be pressure put on the government, on companies... You know, these big... You get it. Companies, right? These people who are producing way more of this stuff than you could ever take care of as an individual.

That said, there are so many organizations that you can support, and that you can take part in. I looked it up real quick—

**Teresa:** And that's how you and I've changed.

**Travis:** Right. Because what it takes, if you're an individual, and you're like, "As an individual, I don't know what my impact is," right? You get a bunch of individuals together, and you know what you got there, Teresa? A movement. And I love a movement. We love a movement.

**Teresa:** We love it.

**Travis:** And so you need to find those groups, those groups of individuals that you can become a part of. I looked it up real quick: go to [earthday.org](http://earthday.org), and they have an education resource library that's great for kids.

And then they also have all kinds of stuff: initiatives on there, places that you can go, things you can sign up for. Um, organizations you can support, things you can add to your own day-to-day life. All of this stuff.

And you know what? I'm gonna coin a quote, make it out myself... "Be the change..."

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** "... you wish to see in the world." I just made that up.



**Teresa:** [laughs] It sounds— It has such a ring to it that it sounds...

**Travis:** Yeah. I think it's gonna catch on.

**Teresa:** ... really familiar.

**Travis:** It's gonna catch on. Well, I think it's one of those things where I say it, and everybody's like, "How has no one ever thought of that before?"

**Teresa:** Mm, yeah. Exactly.

**Travis:** Right? Like, here's another one. Like, "To be, or not to be?"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "That is the ques—" I just made that up.

**Teresa:** You just made it up!

**Travis:** So thank you— And you know what? Thank you to our daughter, Bebe, and of course our daughter... Who's the other one? Dot.

**Teresa:** Dotty. [laughs]

**Travis:** Dot doesn't have, I would say, the same deep-seeded anger and passion about the environment as Bebe does...

**Teresa:** But she's ready to help.

**Travis:** But she's ready to help.

**Teresa:** She's right there.

**Travis:** And it shouldn't take having kids and, like, another generation to make you care about the environment and the Earth. But it definitely helps. And seeing them get upset about it, and thinking about life existing outside of your own, kind of, lifespan is very important.

And I joked about the three people we talked about today being dead, right, but the thing is their impact makes the world better, even today. You know, a world that they will never see. Their legacy is like a garden... I can't remember that quote.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** But anyways... So thank you to Bebe and Dot for being an inspiration to us. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to our researcher, Alex, without whom we could not make the show. And thank you to *you* for listening. You're the plants in our garden of [unsure] listeners?

**Teresa:** Sure!

**Travis:** And we're watering you...

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** ... with our entertainment. And...

**Teresa:** And we're glad you're here.

**Travis:** ... fertilizing you with our knowledge.

**Teresa:** Great.

**Travis:** Cool.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** 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. 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.

Also, we are always taking your topic submissions, and your questions, and suggestions, and idioms, and... you know, send all those to us at [shmatterscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmatterscast@gmail.com), and make sure that you say hi to Alex, because she reads every single one.

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

**Teresa:** No RSVP required!

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

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmatters*. Get it!

[theme song plays]

[acoustic sting]

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