

## Shmanners 459: Idioms Part 17

Published June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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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:** I was trying to be on. I was trying to be on. This happened the other day, I think on *Clubhouse*, with Justin. I spoke and Justin was like, "I wanted to finish my joke," and I was like, "Justin, can I tell you what's weird? I thought it was done. I thought I started talking after you finished talking, but I started talking before you finished talking, and I did— It didn't even occur to me until you said something, because I was listening in the future."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** 'Cause my brain filled in like the last three words, I think, 'cause I was like, "Yeah yeah yeah, what about me?" and [chuckles] it was like—

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** That— This is the problem sometimes. We're not talking about this, but this is the problem sometimes with ADHD, and maybe just me, I don't know. But where you're like actually paying too much attention that you're like... there before the person gets there.

And it seems like you're interrupting, but if it— I'm paying such close attention that I've filled in the end of your sentence as you're talking,

'cause I'm so onboard with what you're saying that I wanna show excitement in responding to you.

**Teresa:** And so you're filling in my words from your mouth? That's interrupting.

**Travis:** No no no no no. I'm responding. This happened once in college when we were doing like a scene study class, and I said to the professor, I was like, "I don't understand... Like the thing I'm responding to, the thing my character is responding to, is something they say like halfway through this paragraph. So why do I not respond then?"

**Teresa:** Hmm.

**Travis:** And the professor goes, "Because your character's listening to them?" and I was like, "Oh, okay."

**Teresa:** Ohhh.

**Travis:** Alright. Yeah. Ah, yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "I didn't even think about that. Cool. Okay, yeah, gotcha."

**Teresa:** My favorite is the other night while Bebe was waxing poetic, you explained to her that she was talking in paragraphs, and I just wanted to say, "Mm."

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** "I know someone else who does this."

**Travis:** Listen, I know, I'm just trying to—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** — make her better than me. But that's not what we're talking about.

**Teresa:** No, it's not.

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** We're—

**Travis:** We're doing another idioms.

**Teresa:** Indeed, si— 16? We think it's—

**Travis:** Sweet 16.

**Teresa:** We think it's 16. What— Here's the thing, we do about four of these a year, sometimes more because we get a lot of suggestions, and we want you listeners to continue to send in those suggestions. Please, please do.

So if you have an episode idea, and idiom, *Shmanners* question, or whatever, please send it really at any time. Alex is continually going through these things and sorting them into lovely folders, so that we always have some when we need some. So if you have some, we need some.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Send `em in.

**Travis:** Alright, let's get started.

**Teresa:** Alright. Ha-ha. This is great, because the idiom is "get off on the wrong foot." We're getting started on the wrong foot, but we're getting started on the right foot, because we're starting the show. But the idiom is "get off on the wrong foot," submitted by Wayne B.

**Travis:** Thank you, Wayne. So this is like... Once again, and I know I say this like every time we do an idioms episode, but there are things that are so pervasive—

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** — in the language that it doesn't even occur to me that they're idioms.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** But it's just like, "Yeah, you know, like no that's just what it means." Right, so like, "get off on the wrong foot" is like, "we got started poorly," right?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** "Like you know what? This is not a good start. We got off on the wrong foot. Let's start again" is usually the rest of that thing.

**Teresa:** Yes

**Travis:** You know what, we got off on the wrong foot. Let's try that again.

**Teresa:** It does usually require kind of like a hard reset, right?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** 'Cause the idea is that the impression, the first impression that you give is so bad that it's gonna be difficult to recover from. So when things happen like that, you wanna try and cut it off and then restart.

**Travis:** You know, when you're a kid and you get taught like, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," and it's like, "Oh okay, cool." That's not true because how often have you met someone, and then you don't see them again for like two years, and they've completely forgotten who you are? Second— It's a second chance.

**Teresa:** Second chance, first impression.

**Travis:** I assumed that this... probably started fairly literally, about like going on a trip or a journey, or something where it's like it started poorly, like you got off on the wrong foot, like... "I stepped in a puddle right away" [chuckles] or something.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] That— I mean, that certainly makes a lot of sense, and it— and from what Alex could find, it is literal. And has been traced back at least in print to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And it originates from when as a military, soldiers were required to march in time in formation, right?

**Travis:** Oh, and if you— everybody started on the right and you started on your left, you look like a real doofus.

**Teresa:** Yeah, you're not gonna have a great time marchin' around if you literally start on the wrong foot.

**Travis:** That's where you have to do that little *rrriip!*

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** And you like jump step to get back.

**Teresa:** Touch step, I guess, yeah.

**Travis:** Yeah, and just hope you don't get noticed by the general, like, "What's that guy doin' over there?"

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "Oh yeah, he got off on the wrong foot."

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "But he did a little like run in midair like Wile E Coyote, and now he's back."

**Teresa:** Marching nowadays really only happens in like military parades and such like that, and—

**Travis:** And marching band.

**Teresa:** And marching band, in the US.

**Travis:** That would be a— Honestly—

**Teresa:** Although I can't speak to military maneuvers throughout the world.

**Travis:** But they probably have those hoverboards.

**Teresa:** You think?

**Travis:** The one-wheel things.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Segways.

**Travis:** Or the— Yeah. Not Segways. No, like the one-wheel things, you know, where you stand and there's the one wheel in the middle, and you kinda lean back and forth. I don't know.

**Teresa:** Oh.

**Travis:** You've never seen those?

**Teresa:** Maybe?

**Travis:** It's like a—

**Teresa:** But it's still not a hoverboard.

**Travis:** No, I didn't say it was a hoverboard.

**Teresa:** I thought you said, "hoverboard."

**Travis:** Maybe I did. Oh no.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** You know what? We got off on the wrong foot.

**Teresa:** Ha! Here's one that I have heard come out of your mouth on occasion.

**Travis:** I say a lot of stuff though, that doesn't mean anything.

**Teresa:** "I swan to John." This was submitted—

**Travis:** Wait, who says—

**Teresa:** — by Little Mel.

**Travis:** Okay Little Mel, thank you. It's probably because I've said it.

**Teresa:** Yes, maybe.

**Travis:** Little Mel, oft guest in my Twitch chat, hello Little Mel.

**Teresa:** Oh yeah.

**Travis:** This is one that I would have, swan to John...

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** My mom made up.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** But it's like a— Like a— I always took it as a non-blasphemous way of saying like, "I swear to God."

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Right, but you would use it like an oath of like, "I'm going to do this," but usually like in terms of like, "You're not real—" Like almost like a figurative oath, right. Where you would be like, "I swan to John, if you kids say that one more time, I'm gonna throw you out the door and make you play outside," like that kinda thing.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Where it's like you're not really gonna throw 'em out the door, right. But that idea of "I promise you" or "I, you know, I'm making a promise," but usually said in exasperation or kind of heightened, you know, you're not really going to do literally the thing you're saying.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** So much as you're letting them know it's kind of a threat.

**Teresa:** Yeah. So your mom is a really great place to—

**Travis:** Your mom.

**Teresa:** — have gotten this from, seeing as how she grew up in Appalachia, and a mix of kind of like the American South, 'cause you have mentioned Kentucky—

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** — as very central to her upbringing.

**Travis:** My mom grew up in Ashland, Kentucky, my dad grew up in Ironton, Ohio, and then they moved to Huntington, West Virginia. And if you're like, "Whoa, three states," all of those are within 15 minutes of each other, so.

**Teresa:** Yes. Wow. But "swan" is actually a phrase in Appalachian culture, and the American South, and it's like rhyming slang, right?

**Travis:** Oh yeah, okay, like Cockney rhyming slang?

**Teresa:** A little bit.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** A little bit. So... "John" rhymes with "swan," right? So when "I swan," "swan" means "to swear." And so you put it together, "I swan to John," right.

**Travis:** It's also just fun to say.

**Teresa:** It is fun, it is kinda like Cockney rhyming slang.

**Travis:** It's very— It's not like percussive, you know, fun to say, it's rhyming and it's fun to say. But "I swan to John" has like a good rhythm to it, has a good like musicality to it.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Try it in your own life.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** I think you'll like it.

**Teresa:** And I mean it's definitely appropriate for that cultural area where there's the idea of taking the Lord's name in vain, right?

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Is very— Is taken very seriously, and even though that's not ostensibly what taking the Lord's name in vain means, people are very good of like tiptoeing around it, right? So they say, "I swan to John."

**Travis:** Yeah, a lot of— There's a word for this that I can't think of, but when you have a curse word, but you would say like, "Dang it" or "Shoot" instead.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And it's like side-stepping the blasphemy a little bit, and it's like, "Hey listen, I know what I mean, and you know what I mean, but I'm gonna say it in code so God doesn't know what I mean." [chuckles]

**Teresa:** [giggles] Alex wanted to make sure that I mention that there's buzz online, the phrase could have originated in 2013 from something called *Monster Factory*, but that sounds fake and whoever's in charge of this factory of monsters can get their own podcast.

**Travis:** That's fair. It didn't start there though. I mean maybe it started with Leslie McElroy, but I don't know, I don't think that's true.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] It didn't, no. It didn't. Here's another one, "stopped on a dime," submitted by Laura H.

**Travis:** Okay, well this is like... you stopped immediately. A hard stop, like picture somebody running, you know almost like a cartoon, and then they stop like their feet, like imagine there's a line, they stop right there. There's no slowing down, right? It's like... [screeches]

**Teresa:** Yeah, I think that it definitely requires quickness, right? Quickly and precisely stopping, I think.

**Travis:** Now, it is used for like actual movement, you know, like, "Oh yeah, they were running, I stopped on a dime," but I've also heard it used more figuratively of like a conversation stopping on a dime, or like the person's energy, or something like that right. It doesn't have to be talking about literal movement.

**Teresa:** Mm.

**Travis:** So much as it can be like, "Oh, and you know, this person burst in and the conversation stopped on a dime," right. It could be used more about like the thing is cut cleanly off right away.

**Teresa:** Yes, I do think it can be used that way, but originally it was mean to be quite literal. The dime is the smallest denomina— Like the smallest physical coin.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** In United States dollars. Even though nickel is five cents, and is bigger.

**Travis:** You're blowing my mind.

**Teresa:** I know, it's weird, but the dime is the smallest one, it's the 10-cent piece.

**Travis:** And let's— don't even get me started on pennies.

**Teresa:** I know.

**Travis:** That thing's even smaller, but like monetarily.

**Teresa:** But it's not as small as a dime.

**Travis:** What?

**Teresa:** A penny is physically larger than a dime.

**Travis:** This doesn't make any sense. So you're telling me that the dime— Okay.

**Teresa:** Yeah, I know.

**Travis:** I'm worried, I gotta play this out.

**Teresa:** Okay. [chuckles] So, the phrase first shows up in a 1920 volume of driving instructions. Which—

**Travis:** Really?

**Teresa:** Which command that the operator of this newfangled invention remember that they can't stop on a dime.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So it's used originally in the negative, because these large automobiles obviously cannot stop as quickly as you would think something smaller would, right?

**Travis:** Okay, but there's no way— Like that might be the first time it's in writing, but that is such a specific and kind of evocative image, right?

**Teresa:** Mm.

**Travis:** I doubt that like that person, no pun intended, coined that phrase. Because like—

**Teresa:** Well no, but it— What I'm saying is it was used more as like a warning, right, in the negative.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Like something can't be done, as stopping on a dime, because stopping on a dime like literally would be very difficult because it is so small. So when you talk about something, it's just an interesting way of creating in idiom, where it's used in the negative connotation that way.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Where things can't stop on a dime, but then we understand because stopping on a dime would be so difficult.

**Travis:** Got it.

**Teresa:** Yes, that's what I'm talking about.

**Travis:** That's what I'm talkin' about!

**Teresa:** Interestingly, [chuckles] some other sage advice in this manual are things like, "Don't follow other vehicles too closely" and "Don't try to emulate the snake."

**Travis:** I like that.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Which would mean "Don't weave in and out of traffic," right. But that's... pretty funny.

**Travis:** That's also just good advice. I mean I maybe in some ways emulate the snake, snake's not all bad.

**Teresa:** Not in an automobile.

**Travis:** Not in an automobile.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** That's true, 'cause snakes don't have arms, they don't— they can't hold the wheel.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** What if they just kept using that, of like, "Don't emulate the snake, use your feet," right like.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] There are lots of things that are different about snake movement than other like things that we do.

**Travis:** I think that the—

**Teresa:** It's pretty singular, I think.

**Travis:** There's also lots of ways in which a snake wouldn't be able to drive a car.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Right, they can't hold the steering wheel.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Most of 'em wouldn't be able to see over the dashboard.

**Teresa:** Mm.

**Travis:** No feet to use the pedals, they're cold-blooded so they'd have to keep the air conditioner off.

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** Like there's so many things. Oh, how would a seatbelt even do anything, right? They don't have shoulders or hips or anything to hold them in place, they'll, *fwoop!* Right out.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] I know. Very—

**Travis:** I'm just saying.

**Teresa:** Very difficult.

**Travis:** There's— The book should be called *Don't Emulate the Snake, You're Driving a Car*.

**Teresa:** Do you remember the Richard Scary, those illustrations with the worms that drives—

**Travis:** Oh yeah, *The Busy World of Richard Scary*, yeah.

**Teresa:** — the drives the car?

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** That's very similar. And I think that that is dangerous.

**Travis:** He drives an apple car.

**Teresa:** He does, yeah.

**Travis:** Of course I remember it because—

**Teresa:** How does he do that though?

**Travis:** Well how's an apple—

**Teresa:** He is a worm, right? Not a snake.

**Travis:** He's a worm. Well, what is a worm but a [chuckles] small snake?

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** Don't come for me, scientists.

**Teresa:** They're very different.

**Travis:** I don't think so!

**Teresa:** They move—

**Travis:** They both wiggle on the ground!

**Teresa:** Nope

**Travis:** No arms, no legs.

**Teresa:** They move very differently.

**Travis:** Well that's because it's so little, [chuckles] it's—

**Teresa:** The musculature is different.

**Travis:** When it grows up into a snake, it figures it out. Worms are just baby snakes, don't come for me scientists. And on that note, we're gonna

take a quick break for a word from a sponsor, and then we'll be right back.

[transition theme music plays]

**Travis:** Teresa, let me ask you a question.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** What's a story worth?

**Teresa:** Ooo, its weight in gold.

**Travis:** [gasps] Ooo, good question. But it's also the sponsor of this episode, yeah so.

**Teresa:** Oh okay. [laughs]

**Travis:** So both of those answers can be correct. Make this Father's Day extra special with a unique, heartfelt gift that will truly make him feel loved. It's called Storyworth Memoirs. So—

**Teresa:** Oooo.

**Travis:** Recently.

**Teresa:** Memoirs.

**Travis:** For me and Teresa and the children, we were watching *Disenchanted*.

**Teresa:** Yes, we were.

**Travis:** I love *Enchanted*, I love *Disenchanted*, and it was the first time, and there's a big plotline about like memories and stuff, and the power that they have. And I wept.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Because I am in touch with my emotions.

**Teresa:** Indeed.

**Travis:** And then Bebe asked me like, “Why are you crying? What was it that got you?” Not like, “Why are you crying?!” but like, “What were you feeling?” And I explained about like the memories, and like, you know, thinking about your children as they change and grow, and all this stuff.

And it just makes me think about the importance of memories and stories, and that’s why Storyworth is so amazing to me because each week Storyworth email your dad, or other loved ones, a memory-provoking question that you get to help pick.

Questions like, “Did you ever get in trouble in school?” or “What were your favorite toys as a child?” and they can respond to it over email, or record it over the phone, and Storyworth will transcribe it. And after a year, Storyworth compiles your loved one’s story and photos into a beautiful keepsake hardcover book.

Photos are printed in vibrant color, and it’s a treasure you’ll be able to share every visit for generations. So, give the dads in your life, or anyone. Anyone could be a dad, as far as I’m concerned. Even, I don’t know, your dog, I don’t know!

**Teresa:** Well, your dog would have a hard time telling stories, but...

**Travis:** Well, they could transcribe it.

**Teresa:** Oh okay.

**Travis:** Give the dads in your life a unique, heartfelt gift you’ll all cherish for years, Storyworth. Right now save \$15 during their Father’s Day sale when you go to [storyworth.com/shmanners](https://storyworth.com/shmanners). That’s [storyworth.com/shmanners](https://storyworth.com/shmanners) to save \$15 on your order. We also wanna say thank you to a sponsor this week, Teasperience. Now Teasperience sent us a box, and—

**Teresa:** A beautiful box of teas.

**Travis:** They sent us a box, I opened it up, and I was like, “Oh yeah.” I’m pulling it out, and it’s just jar after jar after jar of amazing teas. My favorite so far is the Thai tea, which is a delicious black tea that I

thoroughly enjoyed. Yeah, oh yeah, we also got some like honeys in there.

**Teresa:** I really liked the Valentine's one.

**Travis:** [whispers] It's incredible.

**Teresa:** It's—

**Travis:** They're all great.

**Teresa:** It's the one of those teas that smel— that tastes as good as it smells.

**Travis:** Oh, I love that.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** That's rare, and I love it. They're dedicated to delicious, premium, loose-leaf tea, that will have you sipping in style. I love that. They have hand-picked loose leaf blends for the best taste and quality, they have balanced flavors, aromas, and health benefits in every sip.

And something for everyone, there's energizing blends, calming teas, everything. You're gonna love it. Ready to experience premium tea like never before? Head over to [teasperience.com](https://teasperience.com), and use code "shmanners" to get 15% off your first order.

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**Jordan:** Actor Samantha Sloyan has played a lot of characters. Bev Keane in *Midnight Mass*, Ms Rorbacher in the new film *The Life of Chuck*, Lily the mother who diligently watches over her son in the hit medical drama, *The Pitt*. But what character really made Samantha Sloyan feel seen? That is Special Agent Dale Cooper from *Twin Peaks*.

**Samantha:** When you see somebody swing for the fences with almost like no sense of embarrassment, or you know just with total abandon, I'm just captivated.

**Jordan:** Join me, Jordan Crucchiola, for that and the latest *Feeling Seen* from maximumfun.org.

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**Mallory:** Hey there. Do you like books about various shades of gray?

**Brea:** Maybe 50 of `em? Or books about winged men searching for soul mates?

**Mallory:** Is your e-reader full of stories that would pair well with... Barry White in the background?

**Brea:** We're Brea and Mallory of *Reading Glasses*, and we have a brand-new show for people who crave reads with just a dash of sriracha sauce.

**Mallory:** That's right, every other Friday, we dive into books that could be measured on the Scoville scale, and talk to the people who love them.

**Brea:** You can find our new show by visiting [maximumfun.org/spicy](http://maximumfun.org/spicy). That's [maximumfun.org/spicy](http://maximumfun.org/spicy).

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

**Teresa:** Here's the next one, "It's all downhill from here."

**Travis:** Okay, now this is a tricky one.

**Teresa:** Another one from Wayne B, thank you.

**Travis:** Thank you, Wayne. This is a tricky one, and I may have talked about this before on a previous idioms episode, because it is like a contranym, which is one of my favorite parts of speech. Contranym is a one word that has opposite meanings, right.

Because you could say, "It's all downhill from here," like, "We've done all the hard work, and now we just coast down," right? Like, "Well, it's all downhill from here. It's easy, we worked hard, and now it's all downhill

from here." But you can also say, "Everything is going downhill. This is as good as it's gonna get, and then it's all downhill from here."

**Teresa:** Right, "It's never gonna get better."

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** "It's gonna get worse from here on out."

**Travis:** Yes. You can use it in both ways, I've heard it used both ways.

**Teresa:** Isn't language great?

**Travis:** Language, oh, it's so funny, this American language.

**Teresa:** Indeed.

**Travis:** Welcome to *This American Language*, with Ira Glass.

**Teresa:** And this contextual flexibility of the phrase is a lot more interesting than its origin, because...

**Travis:** You know hills.

**Teresa:** You know hills? [laughs] You ever— Have you ever climbed one?

**Travis:** You ever thought about how hills aren't usually flat on top?

**Teresa:** Well you get—

**Travis:** And they just kind go up, and then—

**Teresa:** And then!

**Travis:** — here's where it gets you.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You go down.

**Teresa:** Yeah. That's where it's from, it's just from the idea of cresting the hill.

**Travis:** It's from the idea that hills go down, or it's a plateau.

**Teresa:** But here's the thing, right, for me I think that it really just depends on how— You know, it's the climb, because [chuckles] how hard was it? Was the climb really hard? 'Cause then I'm excited to start goin' downhill.

**Travis:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**Teresa:** And then was the climb not so hard and you're sad that it's over? Then—

**Travis:** Then it's all downhill from here.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Then it's all downhill from here.

**Travis:** This is where tone is so important.

**Teresa:** Either way, it's all downhill. [chuckles]

**Travis:** [gravely] "It's all downhill from here."  
[pleasantly] "Well, it's all downhill from here." Ha.

**Teresa:** Yeah. You know. Everyone, feel free to discuss this amongst yourselves, but I like to choose— I like to choose the first one, where it's, you know, it's all downhill. We're coastin' now! And I think that the great— another one to say that is "smooth sailing," right? 'Cause that's good all around.

**Travis:** You know it's funny, I'm trying to make sense of if you could use it the other way around, of like, "Well, it's all uphill from here." Maybe, but like you rarely do you stop—

**Teresa:** No, but I don't wanna go uphill, I wanna—

**Travis:** Yeah, right?

**Teresa:** I wanna go down or flat.

**Travis:** But it would be nice to just have it to keep, like, "But it's downhill from here. Ah, nope. Sorry, oop. Ground's turnin' around."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** "It's uphill from here. Oh! Downhill again, okay great."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "Then it's flat hill for a while, but then. Then we gotta go round hill and swirl down the valley for a while, but then... It's through the hill, I've built a tunnel."

**Teresa:** [laughs] That happens sometimes in the US in the glacier plains.

**Travis:** You swirl down?

**Teresa:** No, no.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** It's just flat.

**Travis:** Oh, okay. I think that's the ground.

**Teresa:** No. Not on all the ground, just he glacier plains.

**Travis:** Oh okay.

**Teresa:** In the US. There's a lot more mountain area in the US—

**Travis:** Than you know of.

**Teresa:** In the—

**Travis:** It's all hidden by the government.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] No.

**Travis:** They buried all the hills inside of mountains, you'll never find them.

**Teresa:** Anyway, let's continue. Here's one. "Double-edged sword" from Paul M.

**Travis:** Okay, I use this one all the time.

**Teresa:** Yes, you do.

**Travis:** So a double-edged sword, I've heard the rest of it, like, "It's a double-edged sword because it cuts both ways." Right, the idea being, I think, and correct me if I'm wrong, maybe I've been using it wrong my entire life. But the idea being like, "Yeah, that will do the thing you want, or that does have a benefit to you, but also there's a downside to it there," you know.

So the idea of like oh yeah, like one might say being the son of a famous person is a double-edged sword. Because yeah, it gives you all these advantages and nepotism and stuff like that, but you have to deal with a lot more scrutiny and being in the limelight your whole life. Is that—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Am I using that correctly?

**Teresa:** Well I mean yes, yes. That's the very— the metaphorical side, right. It could also mean literally, something that cuts you while you're trying to cut something, right.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** The earliest places that we see this phrase is in the 1687 poem *The Hind and the Panther* by John Dryden.

**Travis:** Oh, good name.

**Teresa:** 2600 lines.

**Travis:** *Hind and the Panther*.

**Teresa:** That's a lot. It is a rich allegory, discussing Dryden's religious conversion to Catholicism, and here is the couplet that we're interested in.

"Your Delphic sword,' the panther then replied,  
'is double-edged, and cuts on either side'."

**Travis:** Yeah, there we go. Man, I was so glad, I started explaining it, and then halfway through I was so worried that you were going to be like, "That's not what it means."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And then I would be like, "But I say that like once a day. What do you mean that's not what it means?"

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** And I'm so glad that not only was I right, but it even said the "cut both ways" things in the poem, and I'm like, "Aw yeah. I am at least sort of as smart as I think I am. Cha-ching."

**Teresa:** And those—

**Travis:** Bazinga.

**Teresa:** Bazinga. [chuckles] Oh no. Scholars agree that when Dryden wrote this, he was commenting on the fact that his religious conversion, while it had its upsides, for example the king at the time had just also become Catholic, it came with the risk of political backfire. And so, you know, it would— it started there and has kept its complicated nature all the way til today.

**Travis:** Now I will often— I do have a problem like switching "double-edged sword" and "two sides of the same coin."

**Teresa:** And "catch 22."

**Travis:** And "catch 22."

**Teresa:** You say that one a lot too.

**Travis:** Yeah, right. Because it's like, "Okay, one of 'em—" Hold on. One of 'em— "Double edged sword" is it cuts both ways, it have benefits and it has negatives. "Two sides of the same coin" is like you can't have this thing without this thing, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And so when you're saying like, "Well I love this," like one might say, "I love the new restaurants that opened up in this neighborhood, but I hate gentrification." And you'd be like, "Well it's two sides of the same coin," right, because what you're describing is connected and you can't have a—

And then "catch 22" is when it's like, for example the one that's always used is like anybody— You can get out of like— I think the one that's like from *Catch 22* is like getting out of armed services by saying that you're crazy, but only crazy people would wanna stay in the armed services I think is what's in the book.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** And so that idea of like, "Ah, but it's a self-negating statement, because in order to do that, you're gonna have to do this. But if you're gonna do this, then you're doing that."

**Teresa:** Is that kinda like you're— people who are cr— aren't crazy— Wait, people who are crazy don't think that they are? Is that the same thing?

**Travis:** Yeah, one of those two.

**Teresa:** Or like if you can say that you feel insane, then you're not insane, because—

**Travis:** I don't— Yeah.

**Teresa:** — people who are insane don't—

**Travis:** I'm actually losing it right now.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Yeah, okay.

**Travis:** Trying to separate out those three sayings.

**Teresa:** Alright, let's try again. "Mint condition," submitted by James.

**Travis:** Okay. I know exactly what this one is.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** So "mint condition" is when something is like brand new, perfect, just the way it was when it was made. And I assume it's related to like minting like currency, and minting coins and everything. So it's like fresh off the line, just minted, brand new, like you would sell a comic book mint condition, you would've thought that this was hot off the presses, the second it was printed.

**Teresa:** Yes. It was first used by coin collectors in 1897 to describe a pristine coin. Because of the minting of the coin.

**Travis:** Now why—

**Teresa:** It was a verb that became an adjective.

**Travis:** Now why it's called "minting," I bet that there's a really good reason, and I have no idea what that one is.

**Teresa:** Mmm, yeah I don't—

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** I don't really know, but also—

**Travis:** Maybe it's really cold, and they use spearmint to make them.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] But also, this also explains the phrase, "making a mint," right?

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Being that you are doing so well financially that you could have your own factory to make your own money, right? So it also goes with that. It does not mean mint the herb, because it has nothing to do with the herb, mint.

**Travis:** Oh okay. Yeah, no I— Yeah.

**Teresa:** Well.

**Travis:** I know. If I get a comic book and I'm like, "This is mint condition," I don't chew it for good breath.

**Teresa:** Maybe mint was the best herb in a medieval village.

**Travis:** Oh, maybe.

**Teresa:** And so they decided to... say it was like mint.

**Travis:** I wonder if there's something about, and listen this is a big leap because the words rhyme, but like you would print paper money, and then you would mint metal money.

**Teresa:** "Print" and "mint?" Metal— Oh.

**Travis:** Maybe? I don't know.

**Teresa:** Okay. Alright, I was— I didn't believe you, and now I'm thinking maaaaybe?

**Travis:** Yeah, why do they rhyme? [chuckles]

**Teresa:** [laughs] And metal starts with "M."

**Travis:** I'm just saying.

**Teresa:** And... paper starts with "P."

**Travis:** And I've decided to look no further into it.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** As soon as this sentence is done, I will lose interest in this topic.

**Teresa:** We're making our own, what is it, conspiracy theories?

**Travis:** Oh, I don't care anymore.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay. [chuckles]

**Travis:** Did you not hear what I said?

**Teresa:** Alright, done.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Alright, here's one submitted actually by Alex. "Whistlin' dixie."

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Do you know what this means?

**Travis:** I know that it's like used in the same way— This would be like, "You're not lying, or you're not just saying nonsense," I think, right?

**Teresa:** Opposite, so it— If you are whistling dixie, you are engaging in fanciful or preposterous conversations or belief systems.

**Travis:** Oh, see I was thinking about I'd heard "And you're not just whistling dixie."

**Teresa:** Ah yes, okay.

**Travis:** Is how I've heard it.

**Teresa:** Yes, right.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** So if you did it that way, then you would not be engaging in fanciful or preposterous conversation or conditions, right.

**Travis:** Yeah, but I have no idea where it like comes from.

**Teresa:** Okay, so. It is a direct dunk on the Confederates at the time of the Civil War in the US.

**Travis:** Oh, sick.

**Teresa:** And so what it is is "Dixieland" is the name of the anthem that the Confederate states of America would use, and so when people said, "whistling dixie," right, it was to describe someone who wasn't being logical, right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Because the idea that the Confederate states seceding from the rest of the Union—

**Travis:** Was stupid.

**Teresa:** — was illogical.

**Travis:** Oh okay, yeah.

**Teresa:** Was illogical for them, and so then they would be singing the "Dixieland," right? And if you were singing "Dixieland," you were being illogical.

**Travis:** Yeah, that tracks.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Hundo. Hundo percent.

**Teresa:** And I think the— this is a common theme within like at least American songs, right? Because—

**Travis:** Same with...

**Teresa:** "Yankeedoodle."

**Travis:** "Yankeedoodle."

**Teresa:** Is— Also comes to mind.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Where they were making fun of American's macaroni being like fancy and high class.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And then, "Oh, Yankeedoodle? Oh, he's such a silly guy that he put a feather in his cap, and he was like 'Nah, I'm fancy', 'cause he put a feather in his cap." And then America was like, "Alright. Now we're gonna take that song and we'll sing it while we beat you up. Ha ha ha."

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Here's one, "a bad Larry."

**Travis:** Excuse me?

**Teresa:** I had never heard this one.

**Travis:** I've never heard this one either, I don't even know what it means.

**Teresa:** This is from Caleb R.

**Travis:** A negative Lawrence, I assume.

**Teresa:** It is a catch all phrase that can mean anything, from calling someone a really cool dude, or being a synonym for really anything you need it to be. For example, "That dude who can juggle knives blindfolded is one bad Larry," right.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** That's pretty awesome, right, cool dude. Or, "I need a wrench, can you hand be that bad Larry over there?"

**Travis:** Okay. Yeah.

**Teresa:** Like a just kinda like catch all thingamabob. Insert thingamabob.

**Travis:** Yeah the— I guess it makes sense in the like those catch all terms of like, “Hand me that thing, hand me that guy.” You know, like, “that dude,” I will use that.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Where I will say like, “Hand me that dude over there. Give me that guy. Oh, you know the that thing.”

**Teresa:** This phrase—

**Travis:** “Doomaflotchy” was one my dad always said.

**Teresa:** “Doomaflotchy.” [chuckles]

**Travis:** Now once again, I don’t know if he made that up.

**Teresa:** Thingmajigger.

**Travis:** Yeah. “Dooma— Hand me that doomaflotchy.”

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** I don’t know— That might’ve been a Clint McElroy original, it might’ve been—

**Teresa:** I’ve heard “whatsamacallit.”

**Travis:** A whatsamacallit, yeah. Yeah.

**Teresa:** Those things.

**Travis:** That thingamabob.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I’ve got 20.

**Teresa:** So you can put lad Barry in— Lad Barry. [laughs]

**Travis:** Lad Barry?

**Teresa:** Bad Larry in there. [laughs]

**Travis:** “Lad Barry” sounds like somebody who is trying to remember the word “library,” and just really beefed it hard. Or trying to remember my friend Bradbury’s name, and— put they’re calling his son. Oh actually, that’s good, they just had a baby. I could call the son Lad Barry, that’s Bradbury, or Dad Barry and Lad Barry. That’s pretty good actually, I love that.

**Teresa:** We’ve really— [chuckles] We’re really off the rails here.

**Travis:** Oh, there’s another one.

**Teresa:** It comes from Boston, okay.

**Travis:** Of course it does.

**Teresa:** And the sweet scholars of the internet say that it is— it started popping up in the cultural lexicon of the late ‘70s, early ‘80s, because... Boston Celtix power forward legend, Larry Bird.

**Travis:** Lawrence Birdman, of course. He was a bad Larry.

**Teresa:** He really was.

**Travis:** That dude was a baaaad Larry.

**Teresa:** The unofficial king of Boston, at the height of his career.

**Travis:** He was good at like trash talking and messing with people. Bad Larry, yeah, that makes complete sense. I love that.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I’m gonna use that.

**Teresa:** So like, he was one of the monsters of the court, right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Ruled— Ruled on the Celtix and was the one of the first people to tell you how awesome that he was.

**Travis:** Yes, he was.

**Teresa:** And so in the '80s, if you were cool and you knew it, you were—

**Travis:** You were a bad Larry.

**Teresa:** You were bad, you were cool and you were a bad Larry.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah. So I think that's pretty cool. I— Let's do some more of that with some other cool dudes.

**Travis:** I'm gonna use that.

**Teresa:** Alright.

**Travis:** Hey everybody, that's gonna do it for us today. Thank you so much for another wonderful idioms episode submitted by you. We wanna say thank you to our researcher Alexx, without whom we could not do this show. Thank you to our editor Rachel, without whom we could not do this show. And thank you to you for sending in idioms! We couldn't do this episode without you, and we wouldn't make the rest of this show without you.

We've got some tour dates and live shows coming up, we're going to be at Origins Game Fair in Columbus coming up in just a couple weeks, doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* and *Adventure Zone*. We're going to Anaheim and Sacramento in July, doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me*, *Adventure Zone*, and a bunch more.

You can find all of those at [bit.ly/mcelroytours](http://bit.ly/mcelroytours). Also it's a new month, so make sure you go to [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com) and check out the merch there. 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 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.

Like I said at the beginning, we are always taking topic submissions, and questions, and queries, and idioooms, woot woot. Send those to [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com), and say hi to Alexx, 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 *Shmanners*.

**Teresa:** Manners, Shmanners, get it.

[outro theme music plays]

[ukulele chord]

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