

Shmanners: Bloomers

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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: Well, my lips are a little bit numb. Just a little bit.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: Not so much that I think anybody will be able to hear a difference, but I can feel a difference.

Travis: Because you went to the dentist.

Teresa: I did, yes.

Travis: Not like, "Oh, I've been eating a lot of cold food."

Teresa: [chuckles] No. Did you—I didn't know this when I first started getting fillings; they don't last forever.

Travis: No, they don't. Especially the older ones.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Where they didn't have it figured out. Because, you know, your teeth expand and contract in the cold and the hot and everything.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And the old fillings that they put in didn't do that.

Teresa: Not even, not like metal—I didn't even have like, metal fillings.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I had—what—they were like... like resin fillings or something?

Travis: Yeah, I don't know.

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: 3D printed.

Teresa: [titters] No.

Travis: It was made out of old sap.

Teresa: So, I had to get some fillings replaced, and going to the dentist is a necessary evil.

Travis: Have we done an episode about like dentist... like, I don't know, etiquette?

Teresa: I don't think so?

Travis: Don't bite the dentist.

Teresa: Don't bite the dentist.

Travis: That's like number one.

Teresa: Unless they're your friends, and then you can bite them.

Travis: I guess, but probably not during the procedure.

Teresa: No. [laughs]

Travis: So, we are doing a little bit of a continuation.

Teresa: Yeah, a little bit of a piggyback... little leap frog.

Travis: Yes, we're doing the etiquette of piggyback rides.

Teresa: [chuckles] No.

Travis: No. Don't bite the person giving you a piggyback ride.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: If you're a scorpion and you're riding on the back of a toad, across the river, don't sting the toad—

Teresa: Unless they're giving you a filling!

Travis: No, I think we've gotten confused.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I think we've gotten turned around here. What is it that we're talking about?

Teresa: Well, so, we had so much fun with hoop skirts—

Travis: Hoop skirts!

Teresa: That Alex was like, "Hey, there is a super cute kids book about bloomers."

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: It's called, You Forgot Your Skirt, Amelia Bloomer. And at first—

Travis: It is very cute.

Teresa: At first I was like, Amelia, where's that... how does that—

Travis: It's Amelia Bedelia.

Teresa: It's Amelia Bedelia, but this is not Amelia Bedelia.

Travis: Listen, we could do—

Teresa: It's a different Amelia.

Travis: We could do a whole series of episodes on the etiquette mistakes of Amelia Bedelia.

Teresa: We totally could. That could like fold into our idioms thing too, because like her thing is like, everything is literal.

Travis: I read, when we were visiting your parents' house and they had a set of Curious George books—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And I read one with the kids called Curious George Gets a Medal. In which it begins with him spilling ink on the man in the yellow hat's carpet, and ends with him being the first like animal living thing in space. It's a wild ride. But I just kept thinking about how well Curious George and Amelia Bedelia would get on. And then I kept thinking about how there was just this like trend in children's books a while back, I guess, when those were being written, of like—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Look at these screw ups.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And like our kids, meanwhile, we're reading it to 'em and they're like, "What? Ow! No, don't do that!" And it was making them so uncomfortable.

[group chuckle]

Teresa: So, this book, which is written by Shana Corey, illustrated by Chelsea Lauren—McLaurin, sorry, is about Amelia Bloomer.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And the contrast in this book is about Amelia Bloomer versus, quote, 'a proper lady.'

Travis: Ooh. And they fight?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Fisticuffs.

Teresa: No, she has ideas about what she should be doing. And society has ideas about what a proper lady should be doing.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: So, Amelia Bloomer, in this story, is a suffragette.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: And a working woman.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: And both of those things are not what society says that she should be doing.

Travis: So she's fighting for women's rights and she has a job. Boo!

Teresa: Yes, and—

Travis: Boo in the story of the book.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: I don't want to make it seem like I'm against that. I'm all for women having jobs and the right to vote. I'm—yes, I know it's a bold stance. I'm going to go on record. Women should be allowed to have jobs and vote. And I'm gonna work tirelessly until women are allowed to have jobs and allowed to vote.

Teresa: Right. Continuing on. And Amelia thinks that society is silly in more than one way, right? She uses that word, silly.

Travis: Silly.

Teresa: So, society doesn't think that Amelia should be able to vote or have a job. And Amelia doesn't think that fashion that the ladies have to wear is very practical.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: She does not like the large, heavy skirts that drag on the ground. In fact, there's a very cute illustration about a skirt that is hung with bricks.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And a skirt that is picking up trash and refuse—

Travis: It does kind of—

Teresa: From the street.

Travis: It seems like a street sweeper, the way—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yes. And that is true. That is something that often happened. That, in fact, is one of the reasons why, in New York, brownstones are always like a walk up, right? They have like five or six steps from the street. Because early America, there was not trash collection, there was not a way to deal with those kinds of things. It just like went into the street. Horse manure, trash, all sorts of refuse. Even before plumbing, there was—there was trash and other fluids in the street.

Travis: Yeah. And so that was to like, raise your house above it—

Teresa: Right, exactly, so you weren't standing in it.

Travis: Is that where like—you see it in mostly cartoons, I guess in old movies—mostly, I see it in comedies, like a Charlie Chaplin kind of thing. Where the like gentlemen will like spread out their coats or whatever for women.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Travis: This kind of idea?

Teresa: Yeah, not muddy puddle. Probably not mud.

Travis: Yeah. Always a weird thing, right? To be like—I guess that's why it's chivalrous of like, "I'll ruin my thing so you don't ruin your thing."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: But it would be so wild now to see somebody like, "Ooh, a mud puddle," and like whip off, I don't know, their windbreaker or whatever, and throw it down, so you could step on it?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That's—ah, it seems so weird.

Teresa: It'd be weird. There's also, there's a small passage about how Amelia didn't like corsets either. And that's not substantiated by anything that she ever really said. But the idea behind a corset at the time was that you needed the corset to hold up all of your heavy skirts.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Right? Because if you didn't, then it was—it was much too much pressure around your waist. They were much too heavy. But at this time in history, women were also tight-lacing a lot more than they should have.

Travis: Yeah, so that's—I mean, it's pretty obvious, I think, in the name. But the idea of like using it not just to hold up by—but like reshaping.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: By lacing it so tightly that it was like pushing against your bones—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And organs and stuff.

Teresa: The idea of a corset is to support your body, right? Support not only the skirts, support also the bust. It does change the shape of your body, but in like the squishiness way, not like the bones way and the organs way. But when you tight lace continually, it can be very detrimental. It also makes it so that you can't breathe as well.

Travis: Especially if you started it very young, while the body was still developing.

Teresa: I suppose so, yeah.

Travis: Yeah. It always makes me think of those like forms you can get to like grow vegetables in so it'll make—you know, like you grow a squash in

the shape of like a spooky face, or whatever—you know, a pumpkin for Halloween. That, but with internal organs of a human being.

Teresa: Right, Amelia does mention that in this book, again, about children being kind of like miniaturized adults in their costume, right?

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: So, young children, young women, also started wearing corsets very early. They almost always wore from the time that they were in actual clothes, right? Because still at this point in time, most like toddlers, babies, wore dresses.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Long, loose dresses. Boys would, quote, 'be breached,' right? So they would move from dresses to breeches.

Travis: Uh-huh. A terrible terminology, though. I don't care for that at all.

Teresa: Oh?

Travis: Okay, go on.

Teresa: Okay. I mean, it doesn't—it just means that you've got shorts instead of a dress.

Travis: I know, but... kind of a different word. Anyways, go on!

Teresa: Anyway, and then girls would be moved into like miniature corsets or stays, and skirts and dresses, that look just like grown women.

Travis: That's gross.

Teresa: She didn't—she doesn't seem to like that very much in this book—

Travis: I agree!

Teresa: Either.

Travis: It seems like a practice put in place to be like, "Listen, if we don't do this like now, then you'll recognize how terrible it is later."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right? "At least this way, we get you used to the idea before you can really do anything about it."

Teresa: So, then what happens in this book is, Amelia gets a visit from Elizabeth Lady Stanton.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Who brings her cousin, Libby. Libby introduces Amelia to bloomers.

Travis: Bloomers?!

Teresa: Which are loose fitting throughout the leg pants that are then tight around the ankle. Think about like in Aladdin, Jasmine's pants.

Travis: Yeah, that's exactly—

Teresa: Right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's what bloomers looked like. And this style will show up again in like the 1920s in America. But like, bloomers were worn under a shorter dress, or like a tunic style, right?

Travis: Oh, like Little Bo-Peep. That's what I picture with Little Bo-Peep.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Definitely, yes, exactly like Little Bo-Peep. You could do a two piece with like a skirt and a vest, or you could do like a long tunic that was very free flowing at the bottom. Or you could do like a shorter dress. And she really liked it. She liked it so much, and she wrote about it so much at her job, which was—she owned a newspaper called The Lily—that her name, Amelia Bloomer, began to be associated with this style of—

Travis: Wait, is this a real person?

Teresa: Cloaked pantalettes. Yes!

Travis: *What?!* Twist!

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I thought it was just a children's book!

Teresa: It is—this is a children's book.

Travis: But is it a children's book of a real thing that happened?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: *Twist!*

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Okay, I need a minute to process this. So, we're gonna take a break for a word for another Max Fun show. We'll be right back.

[theme music plays]

Kumail: Are you a celebrity? Are you searching for meaning, connection and a little levity these days? Hi, I'm Kumail Nanjiani, actor, writer, and yes, a celebrity too. And I've got four words for you; Bullseye with Jesse Thorn. Are you tired of junkets, red carpets? Sick of the endless spicy snacks you have to eat? Do you want to connect with someone who gets your work, and laugh with you a little? Join me, André 3000, Tom Hanks, Tina Fey and many

more, and become a guest on Bullseye with Jesse Thorn, from NPR and Maximum Fun.

[break]

Allan: Walkin' About is the podcast about walking. It's a walkumentary series where I, Alan MacLeod and a fun, friendly guest go for a walk about. You'll learn about interesting people and places, and have the kind of conversations you can only have on foot. We've got guests like Lauren Lapkus.

Lauren: I figured something out about this map, like how to read it.
[chuckles]

Allan: Betsy Sodaro.

Betsy: I had no clue, that's awesome and nuts!

Allan: John Gabris.

John: This is a great first date for like broke twenty-somethings, you know?

Allan: And more! Check out Walkin' About with Alan McLeod, on Maximum Fun.

[break]

Travis: I—okay, were you—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Saving it as a surprise?

Teresa: Yes, I was.

Travis: Okay, because I was like, I've missed something. Somehow, I have been—just, I missed all of the times you told me this was based on a real person. Okay.

Teresa: She was an advocate for the bloomers, and so they became associated with her. And that's why—

Travis: So it wasn't named bloomer before her?

Teresa: No. Mm-mm.

Travis: Powerful.

Teresa: I know, right?

Travis: I'm just saying that if my name was like Travis Socks, and it was because of me that socks got their name?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Like that's—feels—I would feel really powerful.

Teresa: It became called—the new style became called the American costume. Okay? They had been always called something like pantalettes, right? But then this American costume, the pants specifically became known as bloomers.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: And I think that it would kind of like wane a little bit, like I talked about. But pants for women have been around for a long time. They just haven't been in fashion, and they haven't been—like, they've been ridiculed a lot, right? It wouldn't be until the the '20s and '30s that we would really start to see women in pants. Not in like illustrations, and not like on TV or whatever, when—I mean, you didn't have TV back then, but you know what I mean! Like, it wasn't—it was frowned upon.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Is what I want to say.

Travis: It was gauche.

Teresa: It was gauche. But—

Travis: It makes sense, though, like that this would be like kind of a little bit of a step towards that, when you're talking about like somebody working a job, especially in an industrial kind of setting.

Teresa: Yeah, you mentioned that last week.

Travis: Yeah, you need the freedom to move! You need to be able to move around and not have all that weight around you while you're working around hot machines and everything.

Teresa: It's also why the style worked so well for early swimsuits.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And that's like the second thing that I think about when I think about bloomers, after Jasmine from Aladdin, I think about the early swimming costumes. Which had those kind of like blousy pants, right? Sometimes even as high as the knee.

Travis: *Whoa.*

Teresa: And then like the tunic style kind of dress over top that definitely covered the... the hips and the bum.

Travis: Our children are in summer camp right now, and part of that's like swim stuff.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And they asked me the other day like, "Why do swimsuits have to be like so tight?" And I couldn't find the words to explain like—because all I could think of in my head—sprang into my head, Ophelia in Hamlet.
[chuckles]

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: And I was like, well, I can't... I can't use that as the example. But to be like, "For movement, don't worry about it. Just get ready. It's 7:30 in the morning, let's get dressed."

Teresa: Yeah... So, let's talk a little bit about Amelia Bloomer, not in the context of the children's story, but her actual life.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: So like I said, she started a newspaper called The Lily, which was supposed to be for home distribution among the Seneca Falls Ladies Temperance Society. But eventually had circulation of over four thousand copies, bi-weekly.

Travis: I really like that name, it—like there's something about it that seems very... theatrical is not the word I'm looking for, but something of like if you were writing like a Bridgerton kind of show—

Teresa: Oh, sure.

Travis: And you were like—you know, why am I forgetting her name? What's the name of the daughter who sees herself as fighting for rights and everything?

Teresa: Eloise.

Travis: Eloise. Like if she wanted to start a paper, it feels like—

Teresa: Sure!

Travis: The Lily would be like—it's a powerful name, but also, evocative of feminism and, you know, everything. I just like it.

Teresa: And so, it focused mostly on women's suffrage. But like I said, by the end, it was kind of like an all-encompassing women's newspaper. She says, "It was a needed instrument to spread abroad the truth of a new

gospel to woman. And I could not withhold my hand to stay the work I had begun. I saw not the end from the beginning, and dreamed where to my propositions to society would lead me."

Travis: I think that there's a reason that people were more quotable in that time period than they are now. Because when you speak like that, it feels like such a commandment. It feels like such a like—

Teresa: I mean, obviously, she wrote it. She wrote that.

Travis: I mean, I know, but powerful!

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Right now, everybody's just tweeting. [titters]

Teresa: [chuckles] And then about bloomers specifically, she wrote, "The costume of women should be suited to her wants and necessities. It should conduce, at once, to her health, comfort and usefulness. And while it should not fail also to conduce to her personal adornment, it should make that end of secondary importance." So basically, she's saying function first.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Right?

Travis: It's—listen, I'm not breaking any new ground when I say this, but it's—just highlights the like, when you think about men's work clothes, it has always been that way. Like a man wouldn't go into the mines wearing a three piece suit, right? There was this idea of like, yeah, I mean, you have your clothes that you wear like when you go to church or whatever. And then you have your work clothes that is about function and about—because that is your place, right? You're a functional, operating worker in society. And then this idea of like, well, yeah, no, women can have jobs, but still, first and foremost, fashion is more important than utility.

Teresa: I mean, I agree that that was like the general sentiment. Women have also had working clothes.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? But they weren't fashionable. It was the women who did not go to work and did not need work clothes, they were the ones that everyone aspired to. But like people in service or like, you know, there have always been shop girls. There have always been people like that, but they weren't fashion icons.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You didn't dress to aspire like them, you know?

Travis: Mm-hm, yeah.

Teresa: And so, just like in the book, in 1851, New England temperance activist, Elizabeth Smith Miller, AKA Libby Miller, was the one who—

Travis: Libby is a great name, by the way, for someone who's about like women's liberation.

Teresa: Oh, yeah! You're right.

Travis: Right? It's right there. It's powerful, it's evocative. Loving it. This is some great writing in real life history, is what I'm saying.

Teresa: [chuckles] Who visited bloomer, right? And promoted this costume to her. And Amelia Bloomer was taken almost immediately.

Travis: Costume, by the way, like not like Halloween costume, right? Like—

Teresa: Right, no, no, that's—

Travis: Yeah, one might say like dressing costume—

Teresa: Outfit—

Travis: Or swimming costume, right.

Teresa: This outfit.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Yes, indeed. And so, it was something that she was like, hey, this is great. This is great for everybody. It still looks pretty cute, and you can still wear your dress. But it doesn't have to be as extreme, and it doesn't have to be as—you know, it can be a little more function-forward. But she was ridiculed mercilessly in the press. Everywhere she wore them, people—stop and stare, right? And so, she didn't, she did not retain her love of bloomers as a—as an everyday wear. Especially when the crinoline came out, right? So we had petticoats before, we had crinolines and hoop skirts now. Which weren't as heavy.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Which weren't as hard to wear. And so, in the—in the book here, this beautiful children's book, she's seen as kind of like the hero that makes it so that everybody can wear these things. And isn't it great that she was such an advocate and wore 'em all her life? And that's—I mean, that's not really true.

Travis: Not quite. Okay.

Teresa: She remained a suffrage pioneer and writer throughout her life, but when she moved to a new place, she moved to, I believe, Iowa, she... she's largely like not seen as the poster child for this...

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: This fashion anymore. And like I said, it would move a little bit out. I mean, it was always out. Right, you know what I mean? But it would move further out to the fringes as society kind of like moved on from bloomers. And then it would come back in in the 1920s, in the US. And then it would slim down and widen at the ankle to become trousers for women in the '30s. And today, you know, there's so many different styles. I see the youngin's in their wide leg jeans again.

Travis: Their JNCOs, yes. Maybe not quite that wide leg.

Teresa: Not—some of 'em?

Travis: Some of 'em—are JNCOs back?

Teresa: A little bit?

Travis: [gasps] Hah!

Teresa: They're quite—some of them can be quite wide.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: And loose fit. A lot of jeans these days specifically are not nearly as tight as they were when we were in like high school.

Travis: Yeah, no.

Teresa: And when we were young—

Travis: Your Billie Eilishes and such love those big jeans.

Teresa: Yes. The big jeans, the very loose fit is back in.

Travis: Renee... why am I forgetting her last name? She was in the Mean Girls movie, Renee? Anyway, she likes the big jeans too, I believe. Lots of people like the big jeans. The big jeans are back in a big way.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Invest in denim.

Teresa: I do want to mention that there is a statue of her. In 1998, the state of New York erected an historical marker dedicated to Bloomer. It was placed along Route 20, close to Seneca Falls. And there was a statue

unveiled in 1999—a sculpture, I'm sorry, showing when Bloomer is introduced to Susan B. Anthony, which is something that happened.

Travis: Susan Bloomer Anthony.

Teresa: [chuckles] No.

Travis: Twist!

Teresa: And Libby Stanton. The sculpture is called When Anthony Met Stanton. And it's three women, life-size bronze statues, overlooking a lake in Seneca Falls. And I think that it's really cool that even though she didn't invent these things, she's—her name was attached to them in perpetuity.

Travis: That's very cool. Hey, everybody, thank you so much for joining us for this episode. I am going on tour this week. And I guess if you're listening to this, Friday, Saturday and/or Sunday—

Teresa: You're already gone.

Travis: I'm already gone. But we are doing shows in Anaheim, Friday night and Saturday night, and then Sacramento, Sunday night. Go to bit.ly/mcelroytours for all the information, as well as ticket links there. Go to mcelroymerch.com, check out all of the merch we've got over there for sale. It's a lot of good stuff, you're gonna love it. 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.

Teresa: Yeah, Alex, thanks for finding this little book for us!

Travis: The book, one more time, called You Forgot Your Skirt, Amelia Bloomer, if you want to check that out. And thank you to you for listening. We could make the show without you, but that feels silly. And I'm not a silly person, I'm a very serious business person.

Teresa: Business, business, business.

Travis: Business, business, business. 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. 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. And as always, we are taking your topic submissions, your questions, your idioms. Send them to 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?

["Shmanners Intro Theme" by brentalfloss plays]

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