

## Shmanners 466: Road Trips

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[Shmanners 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:** I'm... as well as can be expected.

**Travis:** Is it the heat?

**Teresa:** It's the heat. I don't go outside anymore. [laughs]

**Travis:** Well, yeah. That sweaty corn underneath the heat dome. It feels more—

**Teresa:** You're really into corn sweat right now.

**Travis:** Well, it feels like we're living in one of the weirder, poorly-written Stephen King novels.

**Teresa:** Mm.

**Travis:** Where you go outside, and you're like, "I can't get past this barrier anymore!"

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** "Why is it getting so hot in here?" And it's like, "The corn's haunted." And it's like, "*What?* Um, okay. Cool... Um, I guess we need to fight a heat demon, embodied in a..."

**Teresa:** Yeah, some— Yeah.

**Travis:** It's weird.

**Teresa:** It's weird.

**Travis:** It's a weird thing. But it's summer— Okay, I know I've asked this a couple times, but we're *definitely* in the dog days now, right?

**Teresa:** I mean, yes.

**Travis:** When it's like 96...

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** I assume 'cause all the dogs are panting.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** That's my theory.

**Teresa:** I think that's it.

[pause]

**Travis:** I'm not willing to look it up.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** It feels like an idiom that I *should* look up, 'cause we do that.

**Teresa:** Save it for the episode.

**Travis:** Yes. But you know what summer makes me think of? Summer vacation!

**Teresa:** Road trip!

**Travis:** Road trips.

**Teresa:** We've taken a few down to Huntington. I mean, that's not super long, but...

**Travis:** Well, we've taken— If you mean just recently...

**Teresa:** I was thinking of *this* summer, yes.

**Travis:** Yeah. We've road tripped [chuckles] over...

**Teresa:** Ohoho!

**Travis:** When Teresa and I moved to LA – we lived in LA for two years – we drove... It ended up being a nine-day-long drive. Not constant, obviously. Averaging about, I think, six to seven hours of driving a day. But starting at Ohio, and driving to Los Angeles.

**Teresa:** Yes, indeed.

**Travis:** In our Toyota Matrix.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Hauling a U-Haul trailer. And our car, at that point, maxed out at like 57 miles per hour, is the best we could do.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** With Buttercup and Willow with us.

**Teresa:** Yup.

**Travis:** Oh, was it a long trip! Oh, Boise!

**Teresa:** It really was.

**Travis:** Across this great land of ours.

**Teresa:** There were... lots of tears. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, mostly because a couple days, we forgot to eat lunch.

**Teresa:** [laughter increases]

**Travis:** There was a day where, I think, we were driving in Arizona. And we suddenly— It was one of those sun showers where it just was pouring rain. Couldn't see the car tail lights in front of us, going like 20 miles an hour.

And Teresa just started sobbing. and she was like, "We've left everyone and everything we know behind! What are we doing?" And I was like, "What? We're way past that point now!"

**Teresa:** [laughs heartily]

**Travis:** "We can't have this discussion now!" And we're like, "Ahh!" And freaking out at each other, and crying, and sobbing. And suddenly, we both realized, it was like 3:00 PM, and we had not eaten lunch. So we bolt into a fast food place, and immediately ate lunch, and then immediately were like, "I'm so sorry. I love you so much."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "I don't know what that was."

**Teresa:** Good times. [bursts out laughing]

**Travis:** Good times! Meanwhile, Buttercup and Willow were just like, [with nervous tone] "Ooh! What's— Ooh, what's going on?"

**Teresa:** Yeah... But you know what?

**Travis:** What?

**Teresa:** The road trip has become ingrained in American culture as a kind of rite of passage. It's pervasive in TV and movies. It's kind of something where it's a checkpoint in people's lives at this point, you know what I mean?

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** You have one, that we just talked about. And it's a memory for the rest of your adult life, right?

**Travis:** It's so interesting, too, 'cause it feels like such a bygone thing. When we were still at Cincy Shakes and we did *Grapes of Wrath*, I remember thinking— At that point, I'd been out to LA a couple times.

And how wild it is to be like, there was a time, right, where you loaded up your old jalopy or whatever, that you converted into being able to carry multiple people and everything in your house. Or before that, like a wagon train, right? And thought, "Man, I really hope we all make it."

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** And then to now, where it's just like, "Oh, no, I can hop on a plane and be there in four hours."

**Teresa:** There was a kind of golden age, right, for road trips. And we're gonna talk about slightly before and after that.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay. So in general, right, we think about road trip. Especially in the US, we think about Route 66. You talked about the migration towards California

through the Dust Bowl, and things like that. But to be a road trip, it has to be in an automobile, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** Because we *did* have cross-country trains *before* we had automobiles, right?

**Travis:** Yeah. It's kind of an interesting progression, if you think about it. Because it went like, wagon trains and hiking. And then being like, "Well, we can do this better. Right? With train."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And everyone went, "Yeah, but now we can't go wherever we want to."

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** "We're kind of stuck on wherever we built rails, and where the trains run. And I can't just leave whenever I want to, or stop whenever I want to. Let's go back to wagons, but this time, they're faster and powered!"

**Teresa:** Yeah. And I mean, wagons were a *thing*, right? But you had horses, and you didn't have to bring your own gas with you.

**Travis:** Just carrots.

**Teresa:** Just food, right?

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** But horses also are grazing animals. So if you found a place, like if you were gonna stop for a couple days, you could find a place to graze your animals for a little bit.

There weren't necessarily roads, right? There were trails, some places. But if you hadn't really been there before, you didn't know where you were going.

**Travis:** Sure.

**Teresa:** So that was kind of a little obstacle that we had at first, to the great American road trip.

**Travis:** The obstacle being we don't know what we're doing?

**Teresa:** Yep! [laughs heartily]

**Travis:** A pretty significant obstacle. Someone should tell more stories about how difficult it was getting around before then.

**Teresa:** First, I would like to—

**Travis:** I have an idea for a video game! Where you're *trying*...

**Teresa:** [gasps]

**Travis:** ... to get to the West Coast! Ah, I can't think of a name!

**Teresa:** But it's so hard.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Right.

First, I wanna talk about the *world's* first long-distance road trip. It actually took place in Germany.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** August of 1888, a German woman named Bertha Benz...

**Travis:** Like the Mercedes-Benz?

**Teresa:** Indeed.

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** Threw her two teenage sons in the back of a motor car, and set off to travel 106 kilometers – which is 66 miles – from Mannheim to Pforzheim, to visit their grandmother. It may sound like a quick trip, but their car only went about six miles an hour.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** So it took a long time.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** I mean, a while. 66 miles, six miles an hour, is...

**Travis:** 11 hours, if you drive straight.

**Teresa:** ... 11 hours, driving straight.  
Alright. Here's the thing.

**Travis:** Show me the thing.

**Teresa:** Her husband, Carl, was the inventor of the very first patented automobile.

**Travis:** *Oh!*

**Teresa:** The Benz Patent Motorwagen.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And so Bertha was officially driving his third iteration of the car. Quote, "visiting her mother," right? *But* they really were kind of showing off the car.

**Travis:** Yeah. It was like a proof of concept.

**Teresa:** Exactly! Exactly. This car had only been driven as a proof of concept short distances. But after her cross-country trip, it was recognized across Europe, right, as the Mercedes-Benz!



**Travis:** There is a lot of places in Cincinnati, or throughout the country, where the speed limit is 20.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And it feels like I'm moving through molasses when I'm actually going the speed limit at 20. The idea of going six miles an hour... And if it was me now, teleported back then, going six miles an hour, I'd be like, "Oh, my god." But the idea that they would be going six miles an hour, and going, "*Whoa!*" [laughs]

**Teresa:** "So cool!"

**Travis:** "Whoa! Slow down, Mom! Slow down the— Whoa, you're going seven! Speed limit here's six, Mom! Slow down, you speed demon!"

**Teresa:** Well, if *you* would like to go in Bertha's... tire marks?

**Travis:** Yes. [crosstalk].

**Teresa:** There is the Bertha Benz Memorial Route in Germany, so you can go along this scenic route and take the trip that they took.

**Travis:** What's great about that— And I know the car was named after them. But that also feels like a name that you would see in a *Cars* franchise movie.

**Teresa:** Mm, Bertha Benz.

**Travis:** Where they're like, "This is Bertha Benz!" Right?

**Teresa:** Yeah, totally.

**Travis:** It feels like— Ah, that's fun.

**Teresa:** Totally.

**Travis:** It's fun sometimes, talking about history.

**Teresa:** Now, the first trans-*American* road trip was actually a bet. [laughs]

**Travis:** Wait. I feel like I know this story, but I can't remember any of the details. It's— Okay. I can't remember any of the details, but I definitely have heard this one before.

**Teresa:** Alright. So while visiting the University Club in San Francisco, a former army medical officer named Dr. Horatio Jackson overheard a conversation—

**Travis:** Another— Can I say?

**Teresa:** Another great name?

**Travis:** Another great— That feels like a name that somebody came up with. Like, "Phineas Fogg" kind of feel of, "This is a guy who's gonna make it across a great— His name is Horatio Jackson."

**Teresa:** Yup.

**Travis:** "And he's a *doctor*."

**Teresa:** [giggles] He overheard the conversation—

**Travis:** "A doctor of adventure. He had a PhD in adventure."

**Teresa:** [through laughter] Okay.  
Of people talking smack about cars, right?

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Saying they were "just a passing fad." And being an automobile enthusiast, Jackson was like, "Nuh-uh! I could drive a car across the US, if I wanted to." Not a direct quote, but...

**Travis:** Yeah. I don't think he said, [with immature tone] "Nuh-uh!"

**Teresa:** "Nuh-uh!"

**Travis:** But that is what I would have guessed.

**Teresa:** [laughs heartily]

**Travis:** I actually had it in my head, "I wonder if he said nuh-uh."

And then *you* said, "Nuh-uh."

And I was like, "Nice. Feels good."

**Teresa:** Yes!

Okay, so he bet the men that he, for \$50 dollars – which is about \$2,000 in today's money – \$50 dollars that he could drive all across America. So there were several problems with his boasting. First of all, he didn't *have* a car...

**Travis:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** And a low-end car at that point would have cost \$650 dollars, which is more than most people made in a year.

**Travis:** Can I tell you, it tells me a lot about Dr. Horatio Jackson's personality. Because I'm not saying now that \$2,000's nothing. God knows, it's pretty good. But if someone said to me, "Hey, I'll pay you \$2,000 dollars to drive across the country," I...

Even now, my car can go much faster than I assume cars would at this point. And there's a lot more to do, and see, and stop, and whatever. I think I'd be like, "I don't know, man. \$2,000 dollars? [sighs] That's a *long* way!"

**Teresa:** Talk about purchasing power as well, right? I mean, it's just not the same.

**Travis:** I mean, sure. But considering a car itself cost \$650 dollars, and you would only win \$50 dollars... Seriously, it seems like a bet that they said, "I don't really wanna engage with this guy on this thing."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "We were just kind of talking amongst ourselves, and he overheard. He

was eavesdropping. I'm gonna say \$50 dollars, there's no way that would be worth it. He'll drop it, we'll never hear about this again."

And then Dr. Horatio Jackson was like, "Ah! Yes! \$50 dollars, you say? Sounds good to me."

And they were like, "No— Oh. Um, no!" And he's like, "Give me all your contact information! It's whatever year it is, and there's no way I'll be able to get a hold of you after this. But I trust that you'll send me \$50 dollars! Unless I have to then drive back here, to get it later. Bye! Ta-ta!"

**Teresa:** "Bye!" This wasn't the only obstacle. He also didn't know how to drive. [laughs]

**Travis:** Oh, my God! Dr. Horatio Jackson, what are you doing?

**Teresa:** He would figure it out on the road.

**Travis:** I... I don't think he, maybe, was thinking this all the way through.

**Teresa:** He had a friend, Sewall Crocker, who was a chauffeur and mechanic. So he relied on his friends to get him through. He knew that this guy could not only drive a car, but could teach him. They took turns; he did teach him.

**Travis:** So you're saying, Dr. Horatio Jackson not only accepted this bet, but was able to talk to another living, breathing, thinking human being into, like, "Hey, let's do this"?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** "We'll each get \$1,000 dollars, I guess, to drive across the country. In what I assume, at this point, is gonna take us six years, from what I've [crosstalk]."

**Teresa:** You're really disparaging the amount of money, but you have to think about the purchasing power as well.

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** It was a lot—

**Travis:** This dude wanted to be the Amelia Earhart of the ground. He wanted to be Amelia Groundhart. And that was his goal, of like, "It's not about the money! People will always remember the name of Dr. Horatio Jackson!"

**Teresa:** So together, they went in on a car. And Crocker was like, "Totes, I'll be your mechanic, and second driver, and travel companion. Let's go."

**Travis:** So they bought a car.

**Teresa:** Yeah, they bought a car.

**Travis:** So they paid.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** So at this point, they're at negative \$600 dollars for this bet.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Okay. I just want to make sure we're all on the same page.

**Teresa:** This tally will continue to rise.

**Travis:** My goodness gracious. It wasn't like he was trying to— He wasn't trying to explore the Arctic for science. He was like, "I'm gonna drive a car real far away." It sounds like something our eight-year-old would do. It'd be like, "I'll figure it out! I'll go!"

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** "How much? \$50 bucks? Dad, buy me a car." Right? Like, this feels like her kind of plan.

Go on.

**Teresa:** This is kind of like the way America was built. Anyway—

**Travis:** Tell me about it. And run.

**Teresa:** 1903. Winton touring car is what they took from the Winton Motor Carriage Company. And they stockpiled rubber coats, rubber protective suits, sleeping bags, blankets, canteens, water, and ax, a shovel, a telescope, tools, spare parts, walk and tackle, gasoline, oil cans, a camera, a rifle, a shotgun, and pistols.

**Travis:** And they were getting half a mile to the gallon, with that much stuff with them.

**Teresa:** Well, they *needed* it, because the car didn't have a roof or a windshield.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** So they had to protect themselves from the elements.

**Travis:** Yeah. And it wasn't like they could stop at hotels, motels, and/or holiday inns on their way there.

**Teresa:** Not even gas stations, really. Right?

**Travis:** Where'd they get gas from!?

**Teresa:** I mean, they had people at—

**Travis:** They had to pump it up from the ground themselves, and refine it?

**Teresa:** You could buy gas cans from general stores and stuff.

**Travis:** But then just take it with you.

**Teresa:** Yeah. You had to take it with you. There was no telling when you would run into another one.

**Travis:** So however much they paid for all those supplies, too.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay? This had never been done before, though.

**Travis:** I can't imagine why!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Huh! Huh! It's like if Amelia Earhart was like, "I'm gonna fly across the ocean."

And they were like, "Okay, cool. Where's your plane?"

She said, "I don't have a plane."

And they said, "Okay, cool. Well, you know how to fly, right?"

And, "Nah. Never flown before in my life, but I'll figure it out."

And they were like, "Okay, but planes... can't fly that far!"

And she was like, "Haha! That won't stop me!" And just go on.

**Teresa:** More things that did not stop them was the fact that several different car dealers had already attempted this and failed. Also, there was a lack of paved roads, right?

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** There were consistent mechanical failures, 'cause it's a new thing, right?

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** This car. And dangerous conditions.  
Um, so...

**Travis:** They died.

**Teresa:** No, they didn't die.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** One thing that they did well is that they decided to go north from San Francisco, instead of directly east, so they wouldn't run into the Rocky Mountains.

**Travis:** Good call!

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** 'Cause I doubt there were many roads over that, or through it, at that point.

**Teresa:** Right. But it did take a long time, and they broke down quite often.

**Travis:** Emotionally.

**Teresa:** And their top speed was about 30 miles an hour.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** They had to stop consistently for repairs, and to re-up on supplies. Especially since their gear had a habit of falling off the back of the vehicle.  
[giggles]

**Travis:** Sure! Sure, sure, sure. No roof racks.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Yeah. But they became kind of celebrities throughout the towns that they visited. Most people at this point had maybe heard of cars, but never seen one.

**Travis:** They would notice the two idiots. And everyone who—

**Teresa:** [laughs] No, they were celebrated. Everyone was like, "You guys are doing a great job." Um... [laughs]

**Travis:** America? You never cease to surprise me.



**Teresa:** People would line the streets. Children would leave schools. They would run stories in the newspaper. And people considered it such a rare luxury—

**Travis:** They all must have been so bored back then.

**Teresa:** It was considered a life event!

**Travis:** [laughs loudly] [with old-timey accent] "Did you hear!? Did you hear, Papa? Dr. Horatio Jackson is coming through town today!"  
"What!? He's still alive?"

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Oh, my God.

**Teresa:** Rumors began to circulate about the car that made it seem like a mythical beast. In fact, one such rumor was, when it drove through your town, make sure you don't blink, because it'll shoot down Main Street at 90 [through laughter] miles an hour.

**Travis:** My goodness.

**Teresa:** So you might miss it, if you blink. [snorts]

**Travis:** This is dumb, and I love it.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Okay. The final tally from San Francisco to New York: 63 days, 12 hours and 30 minutes.

**Travis:** My goodness!

**Teresa:** Yeah. That's a lot. And their entire journey ended up costing, with the cost of the car, \$8,000 dollars.

**Travis:** [with old-timey accent] "*Huh!*? Oh, my!"

**Teresa:** So probably not a very good return on investment, *but* we're talking about him! So notoriety counts for something.

**Travis:** I guess. Feels like getting paid in exposure, but okay. Did they at least get sponsored by the car dealership, or whatever? The people who made it?

**Teresa:** Um...

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Not really. But he got a lot of newspaper articles and stuff!

**Travis:** Cool, man! Great.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** And just remind me: stores and banks and stuff accept newspaper clippings about yourself as money?

**Teresa:** No...

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay.  
Speaking of money.

**Teresa:** Oh!

**Travis:** I...

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** ... am [to McDonald's theme] ba-da-ba-ba-ba, loving it.

**Teresa:** Okay. [laughs]

**Travis:** But how about a quick break for a word from another Max Fun show?

[Shmanners theme song plays]

[ad break, calm music plays in background]

**John:** Hey, it's John Moe from *Depresh Mode*. Every week on our show, we have honest, humane conversations with artists, entertainers, and experts about what it's like to live with an interesting mind.

I just interviewed Gavin Rossdale from the band Bush. You might be wondering, "What would a successful, handsome, popular musician know about mental health?" Turns out, lots!

**Gavin:** All the time, we're forced into happy situations, sad situations, challenging situations. Happy, sad, challenging. And it just never ends! And why should it? [chuckles] You know, we're just the sum of all these journeys.

**John:** Check out *Depresh Mode* with John Moe every Monday at MaximumFun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

[ad changes]

**Brenda:** Have you been looking for a new podcast all about nerdy pop culture? Well, I have just the thing for you! [echoing] *Secret Histories of Nerd Mysteries!*

[sci-fi music plays in background]

**Austin:** *Secret Histories of Nerd Mysteries* is a weekly pop culture history podcast hosted by me, host Austin...

**Brenda:** And me, host Brenda! We've already tackled mysteries such as, "What happened to the puppets from *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*?" "Is Snoopy Mexican?" And "Why do people hate Barney so much?"

**Austin:** From theme parks, to cartoons, to '80s, '90s, and 2000s nostalgia, we tackle it all!

**Brenda:** Check us out every Tuesday on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org), and wherever you get podcasts.

[ad break ends]

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** After a quick rest stop, we're back.

**Teresa:** So now that it had been done, everyone was interested in doing it. There were several ocean-to-ocean automobile endurance contests at this point. Six years later, the winning car only took 23 days to go from New York City to Seattle. That's better.

**Travis:** That's pretty good! In six years, they get three times faster? Pretty good.

**Teresa:** 1909 saw the first woman to cross the American landscape by car.

**Travis:** Ooh, la la!

**Teresa:** Actually, the first four women. Because Alice Huyler Ramsey left from Manhattan with her two older sisters, and one of their friends. None of whom knew how to drive. [laughs]

**Travis:** This is— I have— Okay. At that point, I know cars were much simpler.

**Teresa:** And there was no such thing as a driver's license or permit. If you could get in it, you could try and drive it.

**Travis:** But I also think, now, about how much of learning to drive is driver's safety, 'cause other drivers are on the road. Pedestrian safety, 'cause you're driving in town, and people are walking around. Driving on the highway.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And staying on the road, learning about all the road signs. None of that was a factor.

**Teresa:** None of that exists. There's not road signs, there aren't other cars, and people generally were not considered obstacles.

**Travis:** So it seems like what you were learning was what the gas pedals did, how to turn the wheel, how to start the car.

**Teresa:** It's like the first time that you let your child get in the bumper cars.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Right? You just buckle them in, and hope for the best.

**Travis:** There's a learning curve, for *sure*.

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** But once you're like, "Oh, this pedal— Okay, this one does this. Okay, cool!" You pretty much got it.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** At that point, you're just learning to be comfortable doing it.

**Teresa:** But lo and behold, 59 days later, Alice cruised into San Francisco, having changed 11 tires, cleaned spark—

**Travis:** How many tires did this car have!?

**Teresa:** [through laughter] No! You know what I mean, you goober. Cleaned spark plugs, repaired a broken brake pedal. They also caught bed bugs in Wyoming. They crossed through a man hunt in Nebraska. And they had been surrounded by a hunting party in Nevada. So they were held at—

**Travis:** Where's this movie? I wanna see this movie.

**Teresa:** I mean...

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Do it.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** And the crowds awaited them.

**Travis:** Called *A Car of Their Own*. It's like *A League of Their Own*, but a car.

**Teresa:** But a car.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** The crowds awaited them at St. James Hotel in San Francisco. And everybody was *astonished* when they pulled up, because they thought that they had done it.

**Travis:** Yeah, I guess that's the other thing, too. It wasn't like you were stopping at payphones or texting your friends, being like, "Mm. About four days away!" It's like, once they left the thing, you're like, "Well! Hope they don't die."

**Teresa:** Yep!

**Travis:** "We'll find out in two months, I guess."

**Teresa:** "I guess so." It became a kind of a thing. And then summer road trips were taken by Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone— Yes, of Firestone Tires.

**Travis:** Not Harvey Fierstein.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Different person.

**Teresa:** Different.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And in 1919, the Motor Transport Corps convoy was taking a trip from Washington D.C. to San Francisco. And it was an 81-vehicle and approximately 300-army-personnel parade across America.

**Travis:** I do love the idea of— Let's say Justin, my brother, whom I love and respect, was like, "My brother, Travis! I shall take my automocar from New York City to San Francisco." And I was like, "Sounds good, buddy! I will wave you off in New York. Then, I'm gonna get on a train, and I'll be in New York in about a week."

**Teresa:** You mean San Francisco in about a week.

**Travis:** "San Francisco in about a week. And I'll be there, I guess, too. But I might get bored, so maybe I'll go back to New York for a while."

**Teresa:** And then back again.

**Travis:** "And *then* go back, and then I'll be there. Let me know if you need anything, I guess, and I'll throw it out the window of the train as I go back and forth. Bye!"

**Teresa:** Guess who was on that trip?

**Travis:** Who?

**Teresa:** Dwight Eisenhower.

**Travis:** Oh! I've heard of him.

**Teresa:** His report said that his 62-day trip would spread the word about the importance of highway infrastructure in the United States.

**Travis:** Sure! I could see that.

**Teresa:** I think that it was kind of, if you'll excuse it, putting the cart before the horse, to take a car across the United States without a road across the United States.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** But let's not—

**Travis:** If your point was to get there, and be like, "Yeah, man. You know what would've made that way easier?" [laughs]

**Teresa:** A road! [wheeze-laughs]

**Travis:** "A road! Oh, God, that would've been so cool, you guys."

**Teresa:** Alright. 1926, Route 66 was commissioned and then completely paved by the end of the 1930s. So more American citizens began to get into cars. And these newly-paved roads for vacations helped people migrate out West. They also made everything more accessible.

But the 1950s is when things *really* start to take off.

**Travis:** Well, this is when you get, I think, what most people think of. And you get into a lot of white flight. If you don't know about that, look that up.

**Teresa:** Yes.



**Travis:** Because it's horrendous. But you get that suburban ideal, right?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And you get that very car culture of, if you want to get *anywhere*, you need a car. To get to the store, to get to shopping. To "drive into town," quote unquote, right? Take your kids to school. Everything started to spread *out* to a point of, "You can't just walk."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Right? Everything is car-driven. Haha.

**Teresa:** Haha!

So then what you have for after the post-war economic boom, right, you have people who not only have leisure time, but also automobiles. Thus, the summer road trip became a part of the culture. Not just something that— like, a great undertaking. It was kind of, like I said, a rite of passage, almost.

**Travis:** And you also started— This is one of my favorite weird periods in time, as far as vacations go, for a lot of reasons. But once you get into Disneyland, right?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Disneyland being in California. And at this point, any air travel was *extremely* cost-prohibitive, right? And people were like, "Hmm! This Disneyland thing, I'd love to go there, but I can't make it." So you started getting all of these small amusement parks that opened up all over the country.

**Teresa:** Exactly!

**Travis:** That people could drive to.

**Teresa:** And a lot of these were centralized around Route 66.

**Travis:** Yes! But my favorite— The reason I like it is they were not super well-regulated.

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** And a lot of these were just people with some money who were like, "I think it'd be fun to open my own amusement park!"

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And they would just throw together an amusement park with, I don't know, maybe a costumed character and some weird, big statues of Paul Bunyan, or whatever. And those parks would last about two years before it was like, "Mm. This was a terrible idea, and I should not have done this."

And there's a lot of, for a five-year period, very condensed, poorly-planned, poorly-thought-out and, mm, dangerous history of amusement parks. Where everyone went, "This is gonna be great! Oh, no, what were we [laughs] thinking?" so quickly.

**Teresa:** Along with amusement parks, you did have motels, diners, other small roadside attractions. Souvenir shops, things like that, right? And so this is why, in the '50s and '60s, we think of kitschy motel signs.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** And diners with swivel stools, and things like that.

**Travis:** And the world's largest ball of twine! Those kinds of things. 'Cause you'd be driving for a long while, and you'd be like, "Ah. I can take the kids to go see a big crayon."

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** "And they'll be very excited about that. And maybe I will get 20 minutes of peace as I drive down the road."

**Teresa:** So the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. And it authorized \$25 billion dollars to be allotted for the construction of more than 41,000 miles of roads over a ten-year period. At the

time, this was the largest public works project in American history. One that we all still benefit from today.

**Travis:** Yeah! I mean, I drive on highways all the time.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** I've seen 'em. I—

**Teresa:** You've been there.

**Travis:** Yeah! And some of them, I like. Some of them, I have issues with. You know.

**Teresa:** [giggles]

**Travis:** Ask me on any given day how I feel about highways.

**Teresa:** So today, in 2025, according to data from AAA, a record 39.5 million people were planning to take road trips over Memorial Day weekend this year. That's an additional million compared to 2024. And AAA expected to report even more over 4th of July weekend this year, up to a million more people.

**Travis:** Thinking about this, I remember after Champions Grove, and we were driving back, and I had my British friend Paul Foxcroft in the car with me.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And we hit a point where it was like, you pull off the highway, and there was a Home Depot, some fast food restaurants, a hotel. And it's not a town, or a city. It's just an oasis of, "Stop and eat at this Applebee's and get some gas," kind of thing.

And he was like, "I have a question, as far as America goes. What do you call this kind of area?" And it had never even occurred to me. I was like, "What do you mean?" And he was like, "We don't have this. What is this?" And I was like, "I don't know. I guess it's just the strip, or whatever. We don't really think about it." But that idea of, as our country is big...

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And as we expanded—

**Teresa:** Is it maybe 12 hours, from one end of England to the other end?

**Travis:** Yeah, something like— Maybe up and down, you know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Side to side is 20 minutes.

**Teresa:** [through laughter] That's not true!

**Travis:** No. But this idea of, "We don't have a town here, but it's a long distance." And someone figured out, "They'll need to stop for gas somewhere in here. So I'll build a gas station." And then that gas station did well, and they said, "Well, maybe we'll put a little motel here." And then they were like, "Well, people are stopping here. Might as well have restaurants and shops." Right?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** And it just became, like I said, just a little oasis of, "They're still there." Right? "I'll just pull off of this exit, and then get back on." Right?

**Teresa:** I mean, that's probably what I would call it. "Exit Number" whatever it is.

**Travis:** Yeah, right? But it's just like, "I don't know, man. Do you need to stop? 'Cause we could sell you stuff, and make money here."

**Teresa:** Yep, totally. Okay, so let's go over some quick rules of the road. And if you are interested in more of these, we actually have another car etiquette episode way, way, way, way back at the beginning of this stuff. So go all the way to the beginning of our feed, and listen to that one, as well.

**Travis:** What are you waiting for? Don't do it— Oh, actually, wait until the end of *this* episode.

**Teresa:** Yeah, don't stop here.

**Travis:** Then do that. Okay, yeah.

**Teresa:** Do it afterwards. For more tips, and tricks, and etiquette.

Okay, so first of all, when you have the opportunity to use the bathroom, use the bathroom. Or at least offer to everyone in the car.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Every time we see an exit on the way to Huntington— A rest stop exit, which is another thing I don't think that they would have in England, right? Because you could probably just stop at a town to go to the bathroom, if you needed to.

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

**Teresa:** But anyway—

**Travis:** I want more train travel, though.

**Teresa:** That's true, yeah. Anyway, we always say, "Anybody need to go to the bathroom, even a little bit? Can you feel, maybe, that you might need to go to the bathroom?"

**Travis:** "Are you sure?"

**Teresa:** "In the next ten minutes?" [laughs]

**Travis:** "Are you sure? Are you sure, 'cause I don't wanna— Okay."

**Teresa:** And we have encountered several times when we needed to do an emergency potty. [chuckles]

**Travis:** A bush wee, as one might say.

**Teresa:** [laughs] As Bluey would say. And so then, make sure that you use the bathroom, because you never know when you might come across another one. Also—

**Travis:** If you have to go to potty, stop and go right away.

**Teresa:** Daniel Tiger said that!

**Travis:** Daniel Tiger. Most of our bathroom etiquette comes from children's cartoons.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

If you are licensed to drive, you should offer to drive, to take a turn. Because even though it is stationary, right – you are sitting – it still requires a lot of mental focus. And it's so strange to drive a car, and get out of the car, and feel tired.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? But you are working, your muscles are working. There are things that get tense. You are looking all around, all the time. You're doing several things at once, pretty much constantly, right? Little adjustments to the wheel, and the gas, and the brake, and the rearview mirror, and the— Maybe it's raining, and that can even introduce *more* tension into things like that.

**Travis:** There's a big, scary bull chasing your car. All kinds of things.

**Teresa:** Mm, that doesn't happen very often.

**Travis:** No, but when it does, hoo boy.

**Teresa:** Hoo.

**Travis:** I would recommend – this is just a little psychology thing, or whatever – figure out before the trip starts.

**Teresa:** Mm.

**Travis:** Agree, like— If it's a three-hour-drive, say, "I'll drive for an hour and a half, and then we can switch." Right? Because sometimes, when you're going, you get into a rut, or it feels like, "Oh, I could keep going. I could keep—"

Or you feel bad asking the other person to switch, or you get into that Midwestern of, "Do you need me to?"

"No, I'm good!" Right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Schedule it out ahead of time, so that way, you just know when it's gonna happen. Everyone's ready for it, and it's not a conversation.

**Teresa:** And do know that, quote, "By law, professional truck drivers can only drive 11 out of every 14 hours, and must rest at least a half an hour somewhere in there." You are not a professional truck driver, so pull over and switch drivers at the first sign of drowsiness.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** On that note, it's okay if you're unable to drive. Maybe you are unlicensed, or perhaps you have a physical limitation for driving. Make sure that everybody understands this, right? And offer your services in other ways. Maybe you chip in for gas a little more than everybody else, or you offer to go inside and get the snacks. Or whatever, in this.

**Travis:** Or you're throwing the barrels off the top of the car.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** To try to knock down the big, angry bull that's chasing you. Right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** You're on barrel duty.

**Teresa:** [laughs] I've got a visual about that.

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** It's pretty funny.

Make sure that you share the aux cord diplomatically, right? We often, in our car, whoever is driving gets to pick. You usually pick books or podcasts, and I usually go for music. Which is great, because when we switch, we get to do something else, if we want to. Although I do enjoy our murder mystery books.

**Travis:** Indeed.

**Teresa:** If you are in the passenger seat, you are the copilot. That is how this works. That means it's your job to adjust the radio, if needed. To hand the driver their meals, one chicken nugget at a time, if you have to. Dump any trash. Help with navigation. I mean, nowadays, we definitely pretty much use our phones or in-car navigation, but pressing those buttons is your job now. So do make sure that you are awake, alert, alive, enthusiastic about it.

**Travis:** If you need to sleep, I would say, like...

**Teresa:** Yes!

**Travis:** Either let the person know, or admit it, listen. You're gonna fall— Sometimes, you fall asleep. That's okay. Just, you know, be judicious about it, I guess.

**Teresa:** Sure. Or don't get upset when the driver wakes you up because they need something.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Passengers, generally in the back, are allowed to sleep, text, or zone out, or read their books, or whatever. Our children, they love their in-car games and such.



**Travis:** Sure. You know how kids are.

**Teresa:** So then... Let's talk a little bit about snacks. I do think that snacks are necessary for road trips. I would say that it's important—

**Travis:** The messier the better!

**Teresa:** No!

**Travis:** Loud, and crunchy!

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Sloshy snacks! Big bowl of cereal, filled to the top with milk!

**Teresa:** [laughs] Let's keep them non-messy.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** Although Cheetos are pretty messy. But you can lick your fingers afterwards, right?

**Travis:** Yeah, what are you gonna do, *not* have Cheetos? Come on!

**Teresa:** Make sure that they're easily shareable. And probably not smelly, right? Let's leave the deviled eggs...

**Travis:** Oh, really? *Really*, not smelly? So would you say sour cream and cheddar chips? That you love, and I think smell...

**Teresa:** [wheeze-laughs]

**Travis:** ... absolutely terrible? That's bad etiquette, you say? Huh, weird! *Weird!* 'Cause you got our daughter hooked on it, too.

**Teresa:** [laughter rises]

**Travis:** So now you and Bebe both like what I call "stinky chips."

**Teresa:** [gasping laughter]

**Travis:** You love those stinky chips in the car. Would you say? Huh!

**Teresa:** Mea culpa. [wheeze-laughs]

**Travis:** What?

**Teresa:** Mea culpa.

**Travis:** Okay. Hm! Interesting. *Interesting.*

**Teresa:** Well, see, if it was just me and Bebe, we would love it! We don't care about the smell.

**Travis:** Sure! Meanwhile, me and Dot are dying. Okay, cool! Great, great, great. Go *on*.

**Teresa:** Alright. Chips, cookies, grapes, nuts, gummy bears, Goldfish, granola bars, and candy in general is usually fine. I would try and steer clear of chocolate, because it can get a little sunny in the car sometimes and melt the chocolate.

Keep every fast food napkin you come across in your glove box. Maybe even bring baby wipes. Because if you're sitting for a long time, you're snacking, there's gonna be a mess. Right? So just make sure that you're prepared for that.

And also, make sure your car's in good shape. Maybe it needs a little tune up, maybe it just needs to be cleaned out. So we go all the way from regular maintenance, oil change, tire pressure, things like that to just making sure that there's napkins in the car. Right?

**Travis:** I highly recommend keeping a box of tissues in the car.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Good for cleaning out messes. Good for blowing noses. Good for wiping tears, when you realize you haven't eaten and it's three o'clock. But also good in an emergency bathroom situation, is tissues.

**Teresa:** That's true!

**Travis:** A very flexible—[crosstalk]

**Teresa:** And then when the box is empty, you can put trash in the box.

**Travis:** There you go.

**Teresa:** Make sure that you build in time for stops. Because stops on a road trip are part of the fun. Maybe you can plan out your lunch at a diner, or go and see that giant crayon you were talking about.

**Travis:** Also, a lot of rest stops have geocaches.

**Teresa:** Ooh!

**Travis:** If that's something you're into, that's a good chance to stretch your legs and move around.

And that's gonna do it for us! Thank you all so much for being here. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not do the show. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx, without whom we could not do the show. Thank you to you for listening. You are precious cargo, and we will drive safely on this road trip of podcasts.

**Teresa:** Aw!

**Travis:** Go check out McElroyMerch.com for all the new merch, now that it's August.

And let's see, go to [bit.ly/mcelroytours](https://bit.ly/mcelroytours) for all of the upcoming *My Brother, My Brother and Me* and *Adventure Zone* shows. Also, me and my brother and my dad

are gonna be at Dragon Con. And you can see the whole schedule, get tickets, all the information at [bit.ly/mcelroytours](http://bit.ly/mcelroytours).

What else, Teresa?

**Teresa:** We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ring tone 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 topic submissions, questions, queries... you know, high fives. Send 'em to [laughs] [shmannerstcast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerstcast@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*. Vroom, vroom!

[Shmanners theme music plays]

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