

## Shmanners 484: Grey Hair

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["Shmanners Theme" by brentalfloss 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... the heck... are you, the heck?

**Teresa:** Ooh, the heck?

**Travis:** Yeah, man, heck! Yeah, I'm a grown-up. I saw words like "heck" and "dang it" and "shoot."

**Teresa:** [chuckles] I'm okay, you know... Just the other day was—no, was it last night? When we were like, "We're gonna finish decorating the tree." And then after the children went to bed, we were like, "Hm, no."

**Travis:** "Nah."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I said like, "Yeah, man, I think we're gonna decorate the tree. Like it feels bad, we keep starting these things and then not doing 'em. And then the kids went to bed and you were like, "But the problem is I don't feel like doing it." And I was like, "Oh, no, I don't feel like doing it either!"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** So we watched Bob's Burgers instead.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** And you know, sometimes that's self-care.

**Teresa:** That's kind of how I feel about my life at the moment, where—

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** I really want to do things, and then the time comes and I'm like, "No."

**Travis:** "No, actually. Now that you mentioned it, you know what? Actually, no."

**Teresa:** Yeah. And that's a great segue, because—

**Travis:** Is it?!

**Teresa:** Yeah, that's kind of how I feel about—

**Travis:** Because we're not doing the opposite this week. Bye, everyone! Thank you for listening.

**Teresa:** No... that's kind of how I feel about my graying hair. Where I think about, "Oh, maybe I should do something about this." And then I get to it and I'm like, "No, it's just gonna do what it's gonna do."

**Travis:** Okay, listen, here's what I'm gonna say, though. I got no judgment for people who do dye their hair. First of all, my mom dyed her hair like it was her job.

**Teresa:** My mom did too.

**Travis:** I have so many memories of my mom with like the dye in and her like hair bag, and going in and like the bathroom just smelling so strongly of hair dye. And she's in those like weird thin, clear plastic gloves that they give you with hair dye, and like a towel like clipped around her neck. And I'll be like, "Oh, hey, what's up?"

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** [chuckles] "Okay, weird." But the way I look at it is, as with so many aspects, I'm a man with purple hair and purple glasses. If there are things where you're like, "I've decided to do this for looks," yes. I'm not gonna judge you one bit.

**Teresa:** For fashion.

**Travis:** For fashion. If you're like, "Oh, no, it's 'cause I'm getting old," cut that out.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Cut that out. Every day is a gift.

**Teresa:** Wait, stop. Unless you want to. And you get to do what you want, because it's your body, your choice.

**Travis:** Well, yeah, just don't judge yourself for getting older.

**Teresa:** Or don't feel like you have to.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** That's the thing, right?

**Travis:** I recently dyed my mustache.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Darkened it just a little bit. Not out of vanity, so much as like I had like trimmed up the rest of my facial hair, but I have really pale facial hair. And I was like, "Ooh..." I know I got the mustache hair, it just doesn't look—it doesn't show up on camera that well. Right? So I'm not here to judge. And once again, gray hair? My beard is where 90% of the gray hair on my head lives.

**Teresa:** I mean, your temples are a little gray too.

**Travis:** Thank you. I'd love to have more of the Reed Richards, you know, silver temple thing. But I can't wait to be all gray.

**Teresa:** For me, if I catch a gray hair that is like short and like sticking up out of like my ponytail or something, I yank that. I yank it out.

**Travis:** If I catch a gray hair crawling across the floor?

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** I throw it out of the house and I say, "Get out of here."

**Teresa:** But if it's long and like silvery, right? Not like white and wiry. I leave it.

**Travis:** Well, yeah, here's the thing, the other side of the Reed Richards on, I would say, the—in the universe of gender expression, is the Rogue, right? Where you have that big streak of white in the front.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm, yeah. I don't have that.

**Travis:** I'd love that! Oh my god!

**Teresa:** That would be great.

**Travis:** I would take that big streak of white in the front, I would take maybe both, right? And now I've got the streak of white and I got the white on the temples. I'm Rogue Richards.

**Teresa:** [laughs] My mom also used to dye her hair. She used to dye it quite dark, like almost like black dark. And she did—she has—

**Travis:** She was a goth.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** She was a—she was a hardcore goth, black lipstick.

**Teresa:** Mm-mm.

**Travis:** Lots of studded—

**Teresa:** That's not true.

**Travis:** Bracelets.

**Teresa:** And over the years, she has bought lighter and lighter, and gotten it done lighter and lighter. So, I wouldn't—I mean, it is still brunette, but it is quite light brunette at this point.

**Travis:** My dad, Clinton McElroy—

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Radio personality and Adventure Zone co-host, was in Annie Get Your Gun.

**Teresa:** [gasps] Hah, we have a picture of him.

**Travis:** We do. And let's see, I was 19 at the time.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** I was 21 when dad turned 50, so he would have been like 48, right? Not that much older than I am now, six years older than I am now. Oh my god. And his hair was graying and lighter.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** And they were like, oh, for—he was playing Frank, the male lead in Annie Get Your Gun, so they decided like to... I say "they," I have no idea who it was—to darken his hair. And they went like black, right? Black hair and black mustache. And he looked like they were styling him for like a black and white TV show. You know, the white—

**Teresa:** It is *striking*. [titters]

**Travis:** It is way too dark!

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** There was no nuance or shade to it whatsoever. It looked like somebody had just gone in with like black children's paint, right? And just painted him. It was great and... bad-looking.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Yeah, that's theater, right?

**Travis:** Yup!

**Teresa:** So, here's my question, why? Why gray hair? That's the—

**Travis:** Why do human beings have gray hair?

**Teresa:** That's the real question.

**Travis:** Because the hair gets tired.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** If you would like to hear about a deep dive on this, I recommend Sawbones, because they have done a gray hair episode. I believe it was last year.

**Travis:** I don't like to promote other peoples' podcasts on our podcast, because there's only so much time in the day, and we're kind of competing. So—[blows a raspberry]

**Teresa:** We're not kind of competing.

**Travis:** Oh, we're not?

**Teresa:** It's a—

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** Like an appendix to ours.

**Travis:** But you've got to have your appendix removed?!

**Teresa:** No... Okay, so, here's the thing, right? Our hair is made up of keratin, right? Which is naturally colorless. But pigment called melanin is produced in our bodies, and colors our hair follicles. So, the shade of someone's hair depends on the amount of melanin that each individual strand is able to produce, which is usually up to genetics, right? And that is—

**Travis:** This sounds like a lot of made-up stuff.

**Teresa:** No...

**Travis:** So we won't admit that there's little tiny workers that live on our scalp, that paint our hair as it comes out. And it goes gray because they run out of paint. Just admit it, science!

**Teresa:** There is also science that relates the amount of gray hair to zinc production as well. But like I said, we will leave that kind of science biz to the Sawbones.

**Travis:** Who needs science?

**Teresa:** And so, over time, our bodies produce less melanin, causing hair to lose color and appear silvery gray, or eventually completely white. Like—

**Travis:** But not clear like a polar bear's.

**Teresa:** Well, but here's the thing, when you layer the polar bear's hair up, they don't look clear, they look white.

**Travis:** Yeah, wouldn't that be wild? If a polar bear looked—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** If you're like, "That's a naked polar bear," and then you touch it and you're like—

**Teresa:** "No, it's—"

**Travis:** "But there—wait, hold on."

**Teresa:** "It's got fur?"

**Travis:** "There's fur here, but I can't see it?" That would blow my mind, man, are you kidding me?

**Teresa:** So, that kind of—

**Travis:** Like a Predator.

**Teresa:** That kind of thing happens to our hair. Not—

**Travis:** Polar bears touch it?

**Teresa:** No, it doesn't go completely translucent, but it does appear white.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So—

**Travis:** Also, if you have—if your hair is graying or getting lighter or whiter or whatever, but it has kind of a yellow tint that you don't like, use a purple-tinted shampoo.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** That'll whiten it up, get rid of the yellow tint to it.

**Teresa:** And so—

**Travis:** Just a fun little tip from me, a guy with purple hair.

**Teresa:** Because a lot of it is genetic, people tend to gray at different times in their lives, and different... let's say...

**Travis:** Levels of coarseness?

**Teresa:** Density.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Density in different places, right? Which is why we often see people who gray at the temples, right? Or they get like a salt and pepper look, or that streak that you're talking about, right? So, that can—

**Travis:** Like, say, let's see, somebody who might—their hair might gray younger, and they have like kind of coarser, denser hair. Like Griffin McElroy!

**Teresa:** Ah!

**Travis:** Yes. Griffin has always had very... "wiry" sounds bad. That's a bit—like his hair... was always very unruly.

**Teresa:** Okay?

**Travis:** And he started going gray way faster than Justin and I. And it's fun to say it's because he's very anxious and stressed, but I know it's because

his hair is coarser, you know, thicker, whatever, that the consistency of his hair is such.

**Teresa:** Well, but also, didn't he start out quite blonde?

**Travis:** Correct.

**Teresa:** And so, he had less melanin in the hair follicles to begin with. So, it does make sense that he might have grayed before the two of you, who had darker hair.

**Travis:** That's true, yeah.

**Teresa:** Okay, so now that we know, the—I want to say, as far as like graying, right? There are really two things that happen to your hair. Either your hair goes gray eventually, or you go bald, and both of those have genetics to think.

**Travis:** Mm-hm.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Do you think I'll go bald?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** No. I had a—I'm sure I've told this story before, but in makeup class, in theater school, where I got my fame degree—

**Teresa:** *Mm-hm.*

**Travis:** At the University of Oklahoma, part of the theater class was the student, Michael Buchwald, who I'll talk smack against, because he's definitely dead now.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Would come in and point out the stuff you had to fix on your face with makeup, for the—

**Teresa:** Oh, yeah, corrective makeup. It's a course requirement.

**Travis:** It's awesome. Oh, you're talking to some 19, 20-year-olds who definitely have a strong self-worth. Nice. Anyways, he came in and he pointed at the like peaks on the, you know, sides of my forehead, like at my hairline, and he was like, "Oh, and you're going bald." So, you know, I was like, "Michael, I am not going bald." And he was like, "Those peaks, your hair line's receding." And I was like, "Michael, I have a gigantic head. It's just there's only so much hair that can cover up there. I have always had these."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** And he was like, "Okay, sure, whatever." That was 24 years ago, and the density of my hair has not changed since then. So, anywho, you were saying?

**Teresa:** Anyway, okay. So, now we're gonna talk about culturally speaking, the graying, okay? How that has swung back and forth.

**Travis:** Wait, you're saying culturally people have opinions on hair graying?

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** No way! This is the first I'm hearing about this.

**Teresa:** Let us start in the ancient world, where gray hair was revered.

**Travis:** 1950s.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] No.

**Travis:** Oh.

**Teresa:** The ancient Egyptians, specifically. So, here's the thing, right? People, if—let's follow the logic. People, as they get older, get grayer.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** So, if you are around longer, you will have more gray hair than someone who is not around as long.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Right? And so, it symbolizes wisdom and authority and experience from a life well-lived, right?

**Travis:** I think that that... I mean, I'm sure it has changed, and we're going to talk about that, but if you're talking about like media, if we're talking about movies, TV shows, books, whatever, gray hair as a shortcut like telling the audience this person is wise, is still to this day a thing that you use, right?

**Teresa:** Absolutely, and that shows up over and over again in culture. And so, because in ancient Egypt, there was an enormous amount of importance placed on a person's hair, we've talked about this, dying hair, wigs, braiding, all kinds of different things. Graying was a symbol of strength and survival, right? Because if you were old enough to live to get gray, you probably had seen some stuff. The Greeks and the Romans had similar feelings, but they took it a step further, right? Because you'll notice in Greco-Roman art from the Classical Period, philosophers, gods and legendary heroes are often artistically depicted with long, flowing gray hair.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Think like King Triton and The Little Mermaid, right?

**Travis:** Yeah. I mean, it's how I think of Zeus.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** You know, in the Hercules, in Disney's Hercules even, he had that like kind of waves of gray hair. But it's just—

**Teresa:** Yeah, totally.

**Travis:** How I picture Zeus, you know?

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Big dude with big—or in a lot of ways, God—

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Is often in the Judeo-Christian thing of like dude with big, white, you know, mane of gray hair kind of thing.

**Teresa:** And this was meant to broadcast superior knowledge and power.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Confucius even weighed in on the importance of gray hair in ancient Chinese society. One of his teachings emphasized the importance of piety and reverence to those with gray hair, not only due to their greater life experience, but also because they were the living embodiment of family heritage, right? In a society where your ancestors have a lot of like consideration and power over your everyday life, having someone there who has gray hair is kind of like having like that living kind of connection to the ancestors, right?

**Travis:** Okay. But also, I'm—okay.

**Teresa:** Okay, what?

**Travis:** But can I also say?

**Teresa:** What?

**Travis:** It reeks a lot, though—[chuckles] of once you are someone who, let's say, is old enough to start graying—

**Teresa:** Uh-huh?

**Travis:** You probably are more influential in society, you—like, the younger generation below you hasn't quite reached the point of self-sustainability yet, right? And you're like, "Oh, gray hair? Yeah, it's inherently—should be respected and listened to, because of the wisdom that I—I mean people with gray hair have."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** "And so, yeah." Right? It's the same thing of like—

**Teresa:** Ah, *maybe*. It makes sense.

**Travis:** Of like, respect your elders. I'm like, because they're old? Is that the only reason? I think respect is earned and not given. Boom! Mic drop. I say that as a 42-year-old person. I don't know what I'm talking about! If you're 21 and I'm like, "I'm 42, so I'm twice as respectable as you," I don't know what I'm talking about, Teresa! [chuckles]

**Teresa:** Okay, anyway.

**Travis:** I don't know *anything*!

**Teresa:** Anyway.

**Travis:** Yeah?

**Teresa:** Like things do, culture starts to shift, okay? And one of the places that we see the shift happen is in the Renaissance. So, in the Middle Ages, in the Europe-centric kind of point of view, right? Everyone could agree that gray hair symbolized wisdom and authority, but they were starting to become a lot more preoccupied with their own mortality.

**Travis:** Well, there was a lot of death happening, because of the plagues and stuff!

**Teresa:** Surely was, surely was.

**Travis:** And people probably worried more about like seeming healthy and vital—having a lot of vitality, you know?

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. And if you had gray hair, you were seen as that much closer to death.

**Travis:** Well, yeah, I mean, I guess, in that it shows a passage of time.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** And with every second that goes by, yeah, I guess.

**Teresa:** So, it's not—it's less about beauty standards and more about existential crisis, right? People not wanting to think about dying—

**Travis:** Well, but—

**Teresa:** Because there's so much death everywhere.

**Travis:** That was also during a time when like land ownership and leadership and stuff was kind of based on might.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Your ability to lead as a mighty leader and be—you know, lead armies into battle or whatever. And then as someone aged, right? And that becoming a sign of like, ah, they're not as good at fighting or leadership or whatever as they used to be, and it implying weakness as a leader. Instead of looking to leaders who were wise—

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Right? You wanted someone who was strong and violent, you know what I mean?

**Teresa:** And vital.

**Travis:** And vital, right? Of like, oh, they could lead into battle and kick so much butt. And it being like, "I don't want to appear weak as I get older, I want to still be seen as young and vital."

**Teresa:** It did move into beauty standard, right? So, it may have started as kind of like a reminder of the impermanence of life. It did move into beauty standard through the Renaissance.

**Travis:** Just like we're gonna move to a word from our sponsor. Here's a thank you note from our sponsor! I don't know, I just looked at the time and realized how long we've been going.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Here's a word from our sponsor this week!

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Speaking of the passage of time, things change! Years go by, memories fade. But you know what never fades?

**Teresa:** What?

**Travis:** Storyworth.

**Teresa:** Oh, okay, yeah!

**Travis:** Yeah!

**Teresa:** Mm-hm, yeah.

**Travis:** Yes. Because each week, Storyworth will email a loved one a question prompt, and then they can write a story over email or record it

over the phone for Storyworth to transcribe. And after a year, Storyworth compiles your loved ones' stories and photos into a beautiful keepsake hardcover book. This year, they added a bunch of new features to make storytelling even easier, with personalized questions and magic editor, and their magic layout and new book designs and vibrant color printing make finished books look even more beautiful. They've printed over a million books! That's so many books!

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** That's more books than I could eat in a lifetime.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** And they've preserved 35 million family stories since their founding 13 years ago.

**Teresa:** I wish that that's something that we would have done for my grandma, before she was gone, because I have a lot of questions that only seem to be answered like in passing.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** And I would love to like hear it from her point of view.

**Travis:** We could do it for my dad, it's not too late. And the questions could be like, how did you hurt yourself so much while I was growing up?

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Why are you so accident-prone? They have over 48,000 five-star reviews on Trustpilot. I love this idea, especially as we get older, we have kids and there are stories that I know get lost to time, like we talked about. And this is a wonderful gift to give, both to your loved ones and to yourself. So, give your loved ones a unique keepsake you'll cherish for years, Storyworth Memoirs. Right now, save \$10 or more during their holiday sale when you go to [storyworth.com/shmanners](http://storyworth.com/shmanners). That's [storyworth.com/shmanners](http://storyworth.com/shmanners) to save \$10 or more on your order.

[break]

**Jordan:** I'm Jordan Crucchiola, host of Feeling Seen, where every week, I have a different actor, director or writer as my co-host. And whoever that co-host may be, it is a sure bet that we are digging deep and having a great time doing it.

**Guest 1:** I love that you just said that.

**Guest 2:** Yeah, I mean, if I were going to join a cult, I think this might be it.

**Jordan:** A fresh look at your favorite film and a peek behind the curtain at how movies get made.

**Guest 3:** Oh, okay, I'm going tell you this whole story. Okay, I almost got fired from that movie.

**Jordan:** You should be listening to Feeling Seen!

**Guest 4:** I had so much fun and I love what you're doing.

**Guest 5:** I hope I did okay.

**Jordan:** New episodes every week, on Maximum Fun.

[break]

**John:** On Judge John Hodgman, the courtroom is fake, but the disputes are real.

[judge's gavel strike]

**Guest 1:** Brian would say "I'm the Gumby" of his family.

**John:** [laughs]

**Guest 1:** He's just not!

**John:** Claiming to be Gumby is an un-Gumby-like claim.

**Brian:** No, it's just Gumby and I being our authentic selves.

[judge's gavel strike]

**John:** So, what's your complaint? Too many sauces?

**Guest 2:** There are no foods on which to put the sauces.

**John:** Have we named all the sauces on the top shelf yet? Not even close.  
[chuckles]

[judge's gavel strike]

**John:** You economize when it comes to pants.

**Guest 3:** Truly, it's not about the cleanliness of the pants—

**John:** Well, why isn't it?! This is what I want to know!

[judge's gavel strike]

**John:** Judge John Hodgman, fake court, weird cases, real justice. On maximumfun.org, YouTube and everywhere you get podcasts.

[break]

**Travis:** We're back.

**Teresa:** We're back!

**Travis:** Okay. So, it became beauty standards.

**Teresa:** It did. And so, women of higher classes began to dye their hair blonde, which I think is kind of—it's easier to go blonder, because you have those kind of like caustic substances that can strip your hair. Whereas if

you're trying to dye it with like ink or whatever, it probably—it might not end up the way that you want it to. I'm thinking of Anne, from Anne of Green Gables, who has the red hair and she wants it black, so she puts ink on it and it turns green.

**Travis:** Well, the other thing is too, if you like bleach your hair—

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Then that's the color it is 'til it grows out.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Or you put dye on it. If you dye your hair and you wash it over time, right? Especially during a time when they didn't have like hair dye technology, I guess, for lack of a better word.

**Teresa:** Or that they had lost it. You know, we talked earlier about the Egyptians, but in a lot of places, these sort of things were lost and only "rediscovered" in the Renaissance.

**Travis:** Well, I mean like the idea of like the chemical knowledge to make really adherent dyes—

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** It will wash out and fade over time, and you have to kind of keep doing it. Though, that also makes sense to me why blonde was maybe a little bit more approachable.

**Teresa:** I mean, also, wigs, right? We will wear wigs.

**Travis:** Have you worn wigs?

**Teresa:** Will you wear wigs?

**Travis:** Will you wear wigs?

**Teresa:** [chuckles] Oh, I hope that that meme is still around.

**Travis:** At least for the—I would say 10% of the people who listen to the show just laughed really hard.

**Teresa:** Let's go jump ahead of it to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Okay? Historians generally believe that Henry IV of France began to use brown powder in his hair in order to cover up his gray at some point during his reign, which was like 1589 through like 1610.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** As it turned out, not only did this powder give the king his desired effect of sneakily hiding his grays, it also turned out that powder had additional benefits. For example, it would make your hair look less greasy.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** It also could be perfumed in order to cover up any smells from lack of bathing, because at this point, people did not bathe very regularly.

**Travis:** I just assumed you were gonna say it turned out it had like lead in it, or it was very poison—I mean, just following the trend of stuff I know about a lot of cosmetics in—

**Teresa:** I mean, maybe?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** But also, we have the next monarch, Louis XIII. Louis had a different problem, he began balding as a very young man. And so, when it happened in his early twenties, some say late teens, the boy did not want to be a bald king. So, to distract from his lack of hair, he started wearing a wig in public. And so, you know, when the king does something, everybody does that, right?

**Travis:** Oh, yeah, there were a lot—yeah, the—I put that time in France with wigs. It's interesting though, because you would have thought he could have been like, "Oh, yeah, I actually shaved my head, because this is the new cool thing."

**Teresa:** Oh?

**Travis:** "Everybody's bald. Anybody cool is bald. Don't you know?"

**Teresa:** Well, instead, the wigs really took off. And near—you'll notice that nearly every painting from the 1700s, everyone from judges to young ladies to full families, kids included, seemed to have white and gray hair!

**Travis:** Those were the days.

**Teresa:** The rarest and most expensive wigs were the white. So, in order to appear high-class as possible, people would powder their own wigs, or their own hair, with powder made from starch or cypress powder. Although, you could probably use flour as a backup if you were in a bind. Hair powder applied to fair hair intensified the bloneness to the point where the hair would appear white, but darker hair looked gray, and everybody thought that was still looking pretty distinguished, right? So, it was part of upper-class European life, and it appeared in writings from the time even. Here is, in the first of the Merry Romances, "A Perfect Match," that's the name of the—of the literary work, Mr. Merry reluctantly allows his manservant to powder his hair for a ball. Ahem. "John handed Mr. Merry his hat and his cane, and grinned, for once he had managed to persuade his young master to stand still for long enough to powder his hair thoroughly, heightening the bloneness of his color, John secretly thought that there were few gentlemen who could wear powder to such good effect."

**Travis:** It is a shame that at the time when the Brits were calling Americans "Yankee Doodle" in a judgmental, insulting way, powdered donuts weren't a thing.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Because that would have been such a good retort! Like, "Stuck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni," right? "Ah, yeah, you guys are a bunch of powdered donuts." Right? Like, it's—it would have done—ah! It would have been so good! If I travel back in time, that's the first thing I'm doing.

**Teresa:** That's what you're doing?

**Travis:** Is being like, "Hey, guys, I brought this powdered donut with me. I know, you won't be able to get one anywhere else, but we're gonna start calling them powdered donuts. It's gonna be great."

**Teresa:** Bold choice.

**Travis:** They won't get it. They won't get it. "Ah, you know what? I'll be back with, like a dozen of these things."

**Teresa:** [laughs] Here's another one. It was so widespread throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century to powder one's hair, that in the not the novel written by the Duchess of Devonshire in 1778 goes, "Monsieur bowed and shrugged, just like an overgrown monkey. In a moment, I was overwhelmed with a cloud of powder. "What are you doing? I do not mean to be powdered," I said. "Not powdered?" Repeated Sir William. "Why, you would not be so barbarous as to appear without. It is positively not decent. ""

**Travis:** Oh, my.

**Teresa:** Indeed! Right? So—

**Travis:** That's interesting, because I think that those are two different examples of one of like, "Look how cool and classy this is."

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** And the second one being like, "Whoa, dude. That's too much powder, man." [chuckles]

**Teresa:** Well, I mean, but I think it's shown better by the second line, saying that it is barbarous, it is uncivilized not to be powdered.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Everyone is powdered, right? And it was such a cultural mainstay that it became a coming-of-age ritual. So, many young men and women began powdering their hair young, as pre-teens, to show how grown up they were, right?

**Travis:** Oh, interesting. Much like, I think we talked about this in our facial hair episode.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Of like how military officers were like facial haired people or clean shaven, depending on what era or war or whatever you're talking about. And so, young people wanting that—to emulate that, and it being seen very much as like, "I'm old enough to shave!" And it's like, "Oh, young man! You're becoming a man now! Ha-ha-ha!"

**Teresa:** [chuckles] And it also became the hip, cool thing to mix metal powders into the hair, to give it different colors!

**Travis:** Now, this had to have had negative effects, right?

**Teresa:** Maybe, but that's not for us, that's for Sawbones.

**Travis:** Okay. I just can't imagine if somebody right now is like, "Put these iron shavings in your hair," and being like, "Yes, this feels great." Even glitter would feel terrible! Are you kidding me?

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Oh, these things were massively itchy.

**Teresa:** Probably.

**Travis:** Right? You're talking about not bathing that often, let alone washing wigs or whatever.

**Teresa:** I mean, at this point, the 1700s people were bathing more often. When I mentioned not bathing, that was in the 1500s.

**Travis:** Yeah, but even then, like we've talked about these really elaborate wigs and really elaborate hairstyles.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Where it's like you would set them and then have to like sleep in a box, or whatever, sleep sitting up so you didn't mess 'em up or whatever. You had an itchy head.

**Teresa:** You weren't getting those wet, that's for sure.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Okay, so, we have our next pendulum swing in around 1795, when parliament introduced a tax on hair powder.

**Travis:** Ooh, my!

**Teresa:** They were like, "Hey, everybody uses this stuff. If we make a tax, maybe we can get a lot of money." And then people were like, "Eh, no." [chuckles]

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** And so they just stopped buying it. The Prince of Wales, at this point, opted to have a more natural style, and then the Victorian era was not too far away, right? So, in the Regency period, the Prince Regent didn't powder his hair or wear wigs, so it was completely gone. Although, people did color their hair still, it wasn't to make it gray, it was to make it not gray.

**Travis:** Yeah—ooh? Okay.

**Teresa:** So, let's move on to today.

**Travis:** Okay. No one has gray hair, or everyone has gray hair? Wait, what is it? Today, people don't powder their wigs.

**Teresa:** They don't powder their wigs.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** But because of an invention by a French chemist in 1907, we have synthetic hair dye now.

**Travis:** Yes, this is what I was talking about.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** I know it's not hair dye technology, because you're not doing it with nanobots or whatever.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] But it's chemistry, right? So, the synthetic hair dye made it so that everybody could color their hair. And this coincided very neatly with the rise of Hollywood, right? And so, that solidified the idea that beauty was linked with youth.

**Travis:** Well, and then once again, I have to imagine that a lot of this has been... a lot of the negative connotation of gray hair has to have been kind of propped up by the idea of like actors and actresses or whatever getting older, and continuing to want to play lead roles which are often the younger, right? Like your ingénues and your leading men or whatever. And it's like, "Well, you're 45 years old, you're too old to play, you know, Tony in West Side Story." And you're like, "I'm not! I dye my hair. See how young I look?"

**Teresa:** Not only that, but because of Hollywood and the like, the movies across the screen that you could go back to and see over and over again if you wanted to, it kind of like solidified the image of the star in your mind. So, as that star aged in real life, you go back to the films, and you can see them not be that age anymore. They're forever young and beautiful in the eye of the camera, right?

**Travis:** I'm so glad that doesn't happen anymore today, where someone will put up like paparazzi pictures of somebody now versus like, you know, red carpet glamor shots of them like 10 years ago. And with the caption like, "What happened to them?" I'm so glad nobody does that anymore. It's so—it was so gross back when they did it, as though time doesn't exist. And instead, you're acting like something terrible has happened to someone because they're 10 years older.

**Teresa:** But they do continue to do that.

**Travis:** What?!

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** This is news to me! Not on the internet though, right?

**Teresa:** Yes, on the internet.

**Travis:** [gasps] Hah! Even on the internet, people are mean about peoples' appearance?

**Teresa:** Anyway.

**Travis:** No! That was supposed to be the one safe place. The internet is where everybody is nice?

**Teresa:** [titters] Post World War II, the beauty standards got even more strict. So, the 50s and 60s beauty standards of youthful femininity made gray hair seem like the worst thing a woman could have. And yet, men didn't seem to suffer from the stigma, because we've talked about before that graying can make you look "distinguished."

**Travis:** That was the—right? The 1950s was like young—you want to be a young woman and a respectable man.

**Teresa:** That's right.

**Travis:** Right? Those were the two. And when we talk about—we can't mention Hollywood and beauty standards without also mentioning like advertising.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** And like this thing of like, as soon as like it was realized like, "Oh, if we make someone feel that getting older is bad, then we can sell them products with the promise of being younger—"

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** "From the product, and just like cash in. So, we'll build up the insecurity and cash in on the insecurity at the same time."

**Teresa:** And nowadays, it seems like the pendulum swings faster than ever, right? Trends go in and out so quickly. And you know, there's even like the self-acceptance, kind of natural beauty movement that happens. And then we go to the other way, and it's all like full glam makeup and like quaffed hair.

**Travis:** Natural-look makeup over here, yeah.

**Teresa:** Yeah, it goes so fast, back and forth. But there are still some shining lights that you can see have their gray hair out and proud. People like Helen Mirren, Jamie Lee Curtis, Allison Janney and Jane Fonda almost always appear with their natural hair, that is gray.

**Travis:** Recently, I can't remember if it was Bebe or Dot, but they were both in the car. One of 'em said, "Why do some people not wear socks with their Crocs?"

**Teresa:** Mm-hm. I remember this.

**Travis:** And we were like, "Well, I mean, it's just what people do now. But—" And I said like, "10 years ago, if you wore socks with sandals, you would have gotten made fun of."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And they were like, "What?! Why?" And in that moment—sometimes, when your child asks you a question about a topic, a subject, right? You have to quickly gage how much—how deep am I about to go—

**Teresa:** Oh, boy.

**Travis:** In it, right? Where it's just like, I know that if I start down this pathway, there's going to be so many offshoot footnote questions that happen. So it's just like, "Yeah, man, trends are weird." But the truth is like, these days, as Teresa mentioned, that pendulum swings so much faster. Because what happens is you get this like build up where it's like, yeah, showing gray hair is bad, right? And it's like this momentum towards that, and everyone agrees. But then somebody who is—has some kind of influence on society is like, "Actually, it doesn't matter." And then people are like, "Oh? Yeah, what they said." And then you build momentum that way, right?

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** And then everybody's like, "Yeah, it doesn't matter." And then everyone's like, "Well, it actually feels pretty nice to like have hair the color you want." And they're like, "Yeah, oh, what they said!" Right? And that's the swing. And that influence just moves so much faster now.

**Teresa:** So in like—

**Travis:** But it's all reactionary to what everyone else is doing.

**Teresa:** I would say, in general, at this time, in 2025, gray is no longer considered "letting yourself go" the same way it was in the '50s and '60s for especially women.

**Travis:** Same with beards.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Which, there was—I remember even 10 years ago, a decade ago, talking about like why is it in a TV show, when you want to show like a man is really—oh, he's lost... it's like he's got stubble and stuff. It's like, that's what your face does. [chuckles]

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Some people's faces just do that, and it's not necessarily—if you mean like they made the decision not to necessarily shave every day, sure! But that being a reflection of a bad mental state is like, I don't know, man! Sometimes people just go a week or two without shaving. Leave this guy alone! Maybe his razor broke and he hasn't been able to make it to this to make it to the store. Back off! Sorry, go on.

**Teresa:** Let's do a little bit of gray hair etiquette. So, first, whether you're a haver of gray hair or a fan of gray hair, or whether your like family's hair never grays, we don't comment on people's gray hair in that way, right? You can almost always say, "Ooh, I love your hair." Or, "Did you do something new to your hair?" If you want to talk about it that way. But we don't want to make people feel self-conscious about their choices, right? So, we don't—we don't comment on it that way.

**Travis:** And that's the thing too, think about you never know how the thing you said is heard.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Right? Because even if you don't say it this way, it's so easy to hear a comment like that and be like, "Hey, no matter what anyone else says, even though everyone else thinks it doesn't look good, I do."

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Right? You don't know like how it's going to be received, so why do it?

**Teresa:** Like I said, if you like it, I think that you can comment and say, "Did you do something new to your hair?" Or, "Something's different about you. Did you get a new haircut?" Or whatever, that kind of stuff, right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** But to pass judgment on it in any—like everybody else might say. Or, "You know, I've never seen it like that before, but..."

**Travis:** My advice on compliments is always, if you're going to compliment something, compliment a thing that's a choice.

**Teresa:** Mm-hm.

**Travis:** Right? Like someone's necklace that they put on that morning was a choice that they made of like, "This is how I feel today," right?

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Someone's hair color? Like natural hair color. Or their, I don't know, shoulders or whatever, their hand.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Whatever you want to say, right? That isn't a choice that they made. So, you don't know if they endorse that thing or not.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Right? Like, I have purple hair. That's a choice that I made, to dye my hair purple. So you could say, "I love your purple hair." You see someone who's a natural red head, you have no idea what their relationship with their hair color is, right? Because that wasn't a choice they made to represent who they are, that's just a natural thing that's happened.

**Teresa:** Or maybe it is a choice, but we don't have to comment on it.

**Travis:** But that's what that's saying, you don't know if it is or not.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Right? Versus a thing of like a pair of shoes. That person made a choice that day that that was the thing they were going to wear, or a thing that they like when they bought them, or whatever.

**Teresa:** If someone does comment on your graying hair, I think that an appropriate thing is to say like, "Well, I really like it." Or—

**Travis:** "Thanks, I grew it myself."

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** That's one of my go-tos.

**Teresa:** Miss Manners has a couple of suggestions. She says you could say, "How kind of you to take an interest in my personal business."

**Travis:** Oh!

**Teresa:** *Hmm?*

**Travis:** Dang!

**Teresa:** That deserves a snap.

**Travis:** That's really good.

**Teresa:** And here's another one. Look at them quizzically and say, "Excuse me, do I know you?"

**Travis:** "Yeah, I'm your husband."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** "Baby, what's happened?"

**Teresa:** Like you mentioned, purple shampoo is a really great asset to graying hair. It keeps it from being kind of yellowish, right? And it can also make it very shiny and silvery and lovely. So, do invest in some purple shampoo if that is the direction that you want to take your hair.

**Travis:** And you don't want like purple—like, so I have—you want a purple tinted.

**Teresa:** Yes, it's a—it's a toner.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Right? It's a purple toner, not dye—

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Purple.

**Travis:** Or if you have like—

**Teresa:** You're right—

**Travis:** Grey or white hair, you're gonna end up with purple hair.

**Teresa:** That's a very important distinction. You are correct. And you know, do you! Do what you want to do. Or even just let yourself be natural, even if that's not a choice that you thought to make. You can be natural if you want to.

**Travis:** And you know what? You can also... and you—hey, thank you for listening.

**Teresa:** [chuckles] There's no need for a segue.

**Travis:** No, you're right.

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to our... our author? The person who wrote mine and Teresa's lives.

**Teresa:** Researcher.

**Travis:** Thank you to our writer and researcher, Alex, without whom we couldn't do the show. And thank you to you for listening, you guys are individual strands of our wig. Thank you—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** So much for being here. The video on demand for candle—

**Teresa:** What are weird mood you're in. [chuckles]

**Travis:** I don't know, man. Listen, I—if I didn't have a clock in front of me, I couldn't tell you what time it is, kind of deal, you know?

**Teresa:** [chuckles]

**Travis:** Hey, everybody, thank you so much—no, I already did this! Hey, Candlelights video on demand, tickets are still available. That's going to premiere December 19<sup>th</sup>, at 9PM Eastern time. We're going to be in the chat, talking through it. And—

**Teresa:** And it's a lot of bang for your buck, so get those tickets.

**Travis:** Ah, so much. And there was a bit swap in there where me and Teresa and Sydnee and Rachel and Griffin and Justin all traded around bits. There's a smell-based game show you'll get to enjoy. There's...

**Teresa:** And performances.

**Travis:** Yeah. There's a new Medicine Called Christmas in there, there's all kinds of stuff. Go check it out. [Bit.ly/candlenights2025](https://bit.ly/candlenights2025). And that video on demand is available through January 4<sup>th</sup>. What else?

**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. Also, we are always taking your topic submissions, your questions, your idioms, all of those things should be sent to [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com). And say hi to Alex, because she reads every single one.

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

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

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

**Teresa:** Manners-shmanners, get it?

["Shmanners Theme" by brentalfloss plays]

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