Shmanners 503: Idioms Part 20

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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: Oh, you know, this is a—

Travis: Yeah, tell me!

Teresa: Well, so—

Travis: Open up for once!

Teresa: [chuckles] Or just that—

Travis: You're like a tight—you're a tightly closed flower bud. Open up—bloom for me!

Teresa: It's hard when you won't let me talk.

Travis: Just say it! Just whatever words come to mind.

Teresa: I feel—

Travis: Just say it already!

Teresa: [chuckles] Stop it! This time of year, between New Year's and Valentine's Day, even with Valentine's Day—

Travis: Yeah…

Teresa: Feels just kind of like meh, going through the motions, not much to like… look forward to do, you know.

Travis: It's waiting for something to happen.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You know? Because it's that like, one, I think it's the doldrums, post like the holiday season, you know? You get all the build up to the end of the year.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like the last two weeks of December just feel like, here it come—or whatever, you know/? It's in the air. And then the new year starts and you're like, "Well, it's pretty much the same as it was, I guess."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: If not worse.

Teresa: Ah…

Travis: And then you're also waiting for spring. Anywho!

Teresa: And our kids have been out of school a lot.

Travis: *So much*.

Teresa: Thanks, snow. Actually, I really like snow, but like really, stay in school, kids.

Travis: I detest it. I like it visually.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I wish that like it was holographic snow, can you imagine?

Teresa: Ooh.

Travis: Oh my gosh.

Teresa: I think that our dogs would really like holographic snow better too.

Travis: Yeah! I'm living in the 22nd century.

Teresa: Yes. That'll be the next one.

Travis: Because of climate crisis.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Anyways!

Teresa: No, no, don't talk about that!

Travis: Hey, heh, forget I said anything!

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: So, it's another idioms episode.

Teresa: It is! Can you believe, this is our 20th idiom episode?

Travis: I would have guessed 19th.

Teresa: Shut up. [chuckles]

Travis: I would have guessed like 12 or 13. But we do love idioms episodes!

Teresa: We do idioms like four times a year, because our lovely listeners keep sending them in, and they should keep sending them in, shmannerscast@gmail.com. And say hi to Alexx, that's A-L-E-X-X, she will lovingly read, categorize and save your idioms for our idiom episode.

Travis: I also—we've done like 400 episodes or some such nonsense.

Teresa: Something like that.

Travis: So…

Teresa: Didn't we just say 500?

Travis: *What*?

Teresa: I think that we just hit 500.

Travis: So 20 is not even that many, when you think about it.

Teresa: When you think about it. And the reason, if you're just joining us—

Travis: 4%. I just did the math in my head. Anyways, go on.

Teresa: If you're just joining us, the reason that we talk about idioms is because we talk about social etiquette a lot. And language is really shaped by social etiquette. The things that we talk about and the things that we do, they really like ingrain themselves into our language. So much so that, culturally speaking, if you were to go to another part of the world and say your own idioms, people would be like, "I have no—there's—I have no idea." But then there are also some nearly universal idioms that we've discussed. These are not one of them. [chuckles]

Travis: It also, not to make our entire lives about being parents, but it's hard to get away from it. [titters] But also like as you're teaching smaller human beings, younger human beings language, especially English, which is

wildly confusing—we've reached the point now with Bebe and Dot, nine years and six years old, like connotation.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? And context. Where they will say like, "We're out of yogurt tubes. This is a tragedy!"

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And we're like—

Teresa: No.

Travis: "That's great that you said it that way, but that's not the full usage of it."

Teresa: Sidebar, did you know that the rule when two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking, that's an English like spelling rule, is only applicable 40% of the time. That doesn't seem right.

Travis: That's true of most spelling rules.

Teresa: I don't like it.

Travis: Listen, man, the number of times that like we've helped our children spell something and they're like, "Why is there like an I in there?" And it's like, "I don't know, man. I also don't know."

Teresa: I usually explain it with, "Oh, well, this doesn't quite follow the rule because it's from a different language, and we just turned it into a word for us." I mean, that also—that works a lot of time.

Travis: Well, that's the thing, man, the English language is such a mishmash of like colonized words and, you know, anglicized words. And like we took some French from here, a little German from there, we took—it's all chaos.

Teresa: Okay, ready for an idiom?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: This is from Wayne B.

Travis: Thanks, Wayne!

Teresa: The phrase is, pedal to the metal!

Travis: So this is like… you're going really fast. Because you're pushing your car pedal all the way down 'til it's touching, I guess, the metal of the floor.

Teresa: Yes. Going really fast or exerting maximum effort.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I mean, I think that's important. Because if I am putting the pedal to the metal for school, on school this year, so that I can be valedictorian, that doesn't mean that I'm going extra fast—

Travis: It's the same—it means—

Teresa: It means that it's maximum effort.

Travis: The same as if you said full steam ahead.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? We're moving full steam ahead, right? It's like, yeah, man, "We're giving it all she's got, captain."

Teresa: The origin of this phrase is literal, okay? And there's a bit of debate —isn't there always?

Travis: *Ah*.

Teresa: A bit of debate as to whether this phrase first showed up in the 20th century, 1950s, 1970s.

Travis: 1800s.

Teresa: The phrase.

Travis: That would be wild! Wouldn't it?

Teresa: Because that wouldn't be the 20th century. But also, it probably goes all the way back to prohibition.

Travis: Because like bootleggers and rum runners and stuff?

Teresa: Yes. Indeed. NASCAR itself originated from stock car races that bootleggers would have. So, if you are not familiar, people who are running gin or—

Travis: Anyone who's watched, what is that, what's the Ricky Bobby movie?

Teresa: Oh, yeah.

Travis: What is that called? Oh, no!

Teresa: Talladega Nights.

Travis: Thank you. Anyone who's watched Talladega Nights knows that.

Teresa: They know that. In the '20s, people running gin or other illegal alcohol prided themselves on having extremely fast cars to the point where they used to race them for fun. So, the floorboards of older model cars were made of metal instead of plastic or what have you. And so, to make the car go as fast as it could, they would quite literally attempt to push the accelerator pedal all the way down to the floor.

Travis: Until eventually their feet were hanging out the bottom and they're Fred Flinstoning it.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Man, that was one—our kids asked us—

Teresa: What are cars made out of? Is it polycarbonate?

Travis: Fiberglass?

Teresa: Fiberglass? Hm, okay.

Travis: Oh, we got some Cocoa Pebbles. And our kids—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Bebe was like, "Who are these people?"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I think she said, "Who are they supposed to be?" Which is like such a great like "who do they think they are" kind of thing. And I was like, "It's the Flintstones." And she had no context whatsoever. And I was trying to explain, it's supposed to be like they're cavemen, but not really, because there's like dinosaurs. And it was really hard not to go into [sings] they're from the town of Bedrock.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: [sings] They're a modern Stone Age family.

Teresa: Here's the thing, I don't really blame her. There are so many cartoons these days. Like, take your pick of any type of cartoon you want to watch, any type of like animal or vegetable even, like—

Travis: Or mineral.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Plasma.

Teresa: But back when there was the Flintstones, there were only like the Flintstones and the Jetsons and—

Travis: So yeah, I just explained to her they're like the Jetsons, but Stone Age—

Teresa: But she didn't know who that is either—

Travis: And she was like, "Oh, I get it. Of course, Dad, thank you."

Teresa: Okay, here's another one, from Jessica T.

Travis: Thank you, Jessica.

Teresa: To save face.

Travis: Oh?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: So this is like when you do something, like if somebody does something to kind of lessen the negative impact of something embarrassing, or something like that. You know, it's like, oh, they showed up at a party really drunk and embarrassed themselves. So the next day, like to save face, they went around and explained like, "Ah, I got fired from work yesterday and I was in a bad place," or whatever.

Teresa: Yeah. I think that the key is about avoiding humiliation.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. I think that's really important to this.

Travis: Usually when I hear it, I think of it as a very posh thing. You know, if it was like, oh, they did it to save face, it feels like one of those like, this is—that's something that people who are super worried about like their reputation and standing talk about saving face.

Teresa: Mm-hm. And when you think about it, I think that this makes a lot of sense, because the general consensus seems to be that this is a Chinese idiom—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: From at least the 19th century, if not before, when it was later co-opted by the Western world. Obviously, we can't prove that 100%. But the most—

Travis: You can't prove anything 100%. Mathematicians are still arguing about if you can prove that one plus one equals one. Or equals two. Whatever.

Teresa: Oh, no. Can you prove it?

Travis: That's what I'm saying! It's hard!

Teresa: The most common story for how this phrase got its start is that saving face is literally referring to protecting makeup. The idea is you had to save your face by putting a screen in front of the fireplace to prevent heat from melting off makeup. And over time, this phrase evolved, because the word face in China is not only used to describe your literal face, but also your dignity.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: So, "losing face" was the original Chinese phrase, which meant to disgrace yourself. So then colonizers created the term of "saving one's face," and therefore one's dignity.

Travis: You know, I think I've always associated in my head like the same as like, I can't show my face around there anymore, I'm so embarrassed.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Travis: Right? That it's like, well, I want to be able to show my face, so I need to save my face. Now we've—

Teresa: From melting off. [laughs]

Travis: I guess, yeah, from embarrassment. I think we've all felt that.

Teresa: Here's one from Amanda.

Travis: Thank you, Amanda.

Teresa: Whirling dervish.

Travis: Okay. This is like you came in—oh, this is another idiom, but like a bull in a China shop, right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Where it's like you were moving so chaotically, you came in like a whirlwind. You know, you're there like a tornado, just moving around. Doesn't have to be literally.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? But like, they came in and like kind of chaos followed them.

Teresa: Yes. Not only that, but they often move from one activity to the next.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Causing chaos. So—

Travis: Is this a real thing? Because I'm picturing like spinning dancers.

Teresa: Yes, exactly! Dervishes are actually real people. And they do, in fact, whirl. So, dervishes are a member of a specific form of Islam, and as

part of their worship, there's a trance dancing ritual in which the men who wear billowing white skirts whirl in circles meant to replicate the planets revolving around the sun.

Travis: That's cool.

Teresa: This religious practice is over 800 years old and has become a massive cultural attraction in Turkey, where it originated. So, if you find yourself in Istanbul, you can see this performed. And the men who twirl can get very fast. And the ritual can also take a while, so you need a great amount of energy in order to be whirling dervish, which is one of the things that we talked about as a phrase, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Someone who has a lot of energy.

Travis: That's cool!

Teresa: I remember this from The Sound of Music.

Travis: You do?

Teresa: That song, "How do you solve a problem like Maria," has that line, "She can throw a whirling dervish out of whirl."

Travis: Oh?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That's not one of the songs I know super well.

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: As opposed to, you know, what a deer is.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And what a name I call myself might be.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And perhaps how long one might run.

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: I can't remember the words they used in there, but I remember those parts, you know? There's a drink with something about that, and then we come back to the deer.

Teresa: Well, you missed a couple, but I'll allow it.

Travis: No, that's all of them.

Teresa: No, there's this—the one about the needle.

Travis: Oh, yeah, a needle that's pulling thread.

Teresa: Mm-hm. And then the singing.

Travis: Can we talk about, in that song, there's a moment where they just say "La, a note to follow."

Teresa: [chuckles] Yup. Uh-huh.

Travis: Come on.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's the equivalent if they were like, "Here's Justin and Griffin, and their brother." Right? It's like, what?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm just the one that follows so?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Rogers and Hammerstein, what you gonna do?

Travis: I'm gonna find 'em!

Teresa: Oh? Okay.

Travis: Are they dead?

Teresa: No. Wait, yes, they are actually, yes.

Travis: I was gonna say.

Teresa: Yes, their estate lives on though, so be careful.

Travis: I'll find their estate!

Teresa: Be careful.

Travis: Hey, change the words.

Teresa: [chuckles] Okay. Here's one from Michelle from Michigan.

Travis: Thank you, Michelle.

Teresa: Licking your chops.

Travis: Okay, so this is like, I'm so—not even hungry, so much as like, I'm like in expectation of the meal I'm about to have.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? So, not just like, "Oh, I'm really hungry," but more like, "I know that that food is coming," right? But it, once again, doesn't have to be literal, right? I picture this of like, if you see like a really experienced lawyer

who's going up against an absolute like newbie lawyer, and it's like, "Oh, yeah, that experienced lawyer was looking at that new guy just licking his chops. He knew he was going to eat him up."

Teresa: Yes, so in that—in that way, you are talking still about eating.

Travis: Sure, but it was like—

Teresa: Right? But in a different—in a different sense.

Travis: Yeah, they're gonna devour 'em, right? Yeah.

Teresa: Yes. You're using one idiom to describe another idiom.

Travis: Well like if you said, yeah, they're going to crush him. It's like—

Teresa: Sure, yeah.

Travis: They're not going to put 'em in a big machine and squish 'em, you know what I mean.

Teresa: Yes. It's about the anticipation, really. And I think that that is, that's the biggest part about it, even though it is in anticipation of something amazing or delicious.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Well, there is a certain threatening nature to it, right?

Teresa: Sure, yeah!

Travis: Where it's—I don't picture that as just like, "Oh, yeah, the six-year-old was looking at their birthday cake and really licking their chops." It's more of like I picture like, "I am a carnivore about the tear into the steak," you know, kind of feeling to it.

Teresa: I mean, I don't know if it started that way, but I definitely get that feel for the way that we use it.

Travis: I think that's the connotation of it, right? Like almost like a predator-prey kind of thing, yeah.

Teresa: At the moment, yeah, sure.

Travis: Because I picture a lion.

Teresa: Oh, okay?

Travis: Right? Because a lion, you'll see them like lick their lips almo—you know, like you'll see it. They use it in movies a lot. I don't want to say—

Teresa: They do?

Travis: You see it like I'm seeing lions on—

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: When I'm walking the dogs, I see the lions.

Teresa: In movies and TV, they see it.

Travis: You see the—like these animals, like their tongues lick out like they're drooling.

Teresa: So, chops being—

Travis: Am I specifically thinking of like Tex Avery cartoons?

Teresa: I think you are.

Travis: Where like the wolf's tongue rolls out? Yeah, that might be it, actually.

Teresa: Yeah. The word "chops" being used as a stand in for "mouth" or "lips" dates all the way back to 1577, but the phrase really took off in the Jazz Age of the 1930s. So, licking your chops became slang for warming up with your band, because woodwind players literally had to lick their lips and their reeds of their instruments, right?

Travis: Yes, okay.

Teresa: And so, due to the popularity of jazz music, someone "licking their chops" became synonymous with someone feeling great anticipation for an amazing musical set to be played, right?

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: And this is also where the phrase "chops" comes for referring to someone's skill level, right?

Travis: Oh! Okay.

Teresa: For example, "They don't have the chops to play that saxophone," right? So—

Travis: But then I've also heard it used just—

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Even beyond that, you know?

Teresa: Yeah, but that—

Travis: That's like in sports, or whatever, you know.

Teresa: But that would literally mean that you didn't have the mouth or the lips to play the instrument, right? And it—

Travis: Not like me.

Teresa: And it—not like you.

Travis: I got the lips—if I had really committed myself to trombone in middle school instead of only learning one quarter of the music, while the other three trombone players in the band learned one quarter each, oh, I could have been something! With these powerful pillows? Are you kidding me?

Teresa: You could—you could play the trombone on podcasts.

Travis: Honestly? That might be the worst audio experience anyone could ever experience.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Especially if they—if I was as close to the microphone with the trombone as I am now?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And you just had to hear [sings] *pwaa-pwaa-pwaa*! I doubt anyone's like, "That's exactly how I want to hear a trombone."

Teresa: I think you're right. So here's another one, contributed by Mars Bar.

Travis: Thanks, Mars Bar.

Teresa: A new lease on life.

Travis: This is an idiom?

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Of course it is—of course it is.

Teresa: Of course it is.

Travis: Of course it is. But I never in a million years would have thought of it if you were like, "Name a million idioms."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: This is like—this is like, because it would take me one year—

Teresa: Right, yes, yes.

Travis: Okay. Not the first ones, but on average—once I got through the first 100,000, it would start to slow down. So, a new lease on life is like, they have a renewed sense of joy in living, right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Of like, yeah, they were kind of just like, "What else is there? I don't know what I'm even doing this for." And then something happened, and they got a new lease on life.

Teresa: Yeah, a fresh start.

Travis: Right? They were excited—yeah, but I see it as not just a—because you might talk about a fresh start like a new job, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Where like, I'm, you know, on— "I'm recovering from some accident, I got a fresh start." But a new lease, I see it as more like an attitude thing of like, suddenly—

Teresa: Which you could get if you got a new job that you really love.

Travis: Yes. But this is like suddenly colors are bright again, "I love the sound of the birds singing in the morning, I'm springing out of bed, I have a new lease on life."

Teresa: So, this dates all the way back to the great Scottish poet, writer and historian, Sir Walter Scott, who used it in a letter he wrote in 1809. He

is known mostly for his contribution to European literature, but he was actually a lawyer before he was a writer. And he happened to dabble in a state law, which is illustrated by the fact that one of his very first jobs at court was to oversee an eviction in the Scottish Highlands.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: So, a writer brain plus a lawyer job makes it so that there were some wonderful phrases to be discovered about this. This letter that he wrote to a friend had been sick for a long time, but appeared to be improving, so he described the health improvements of his buddy by writing, "My friend has since taken out a new lease of life, and may live as long as I shall." So, this originally meant about an improvement after an illness.

Travis: Right, like borrowed time one might say almost.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Where it's like, "Yeah, you have this really bad illness, but you signed a new lease on life and got more life."

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Right. Can I just say, can you imagine like writing an email to a friend, and then like 200 years from now, some phrase that you used in an email you sent to your friend was so universally used that it no longer even struck people as an idiom?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: That it was just like me writing, you know, to my friend Bobby like, "Yeah, man, I don't know, you just gotta—the horse and do the thing." And then like 200 years from now people are like, "Gotta do the horse and do the thing!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That's wild. You know what else is wild?

Teresa: What?

Travis: We're gonna take a break for another Max Fun show. That's actually not that wild, we do it every time, but…

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Here it is. [chuckles]

Teresa: [laughs]

[theme music plays]

Austin: Howdy there! So sorry to interrupt whatever amazing show you were listening to, but it's time for an ad! I'll be so quick and you can get back to your show, don't worry. I'm host Austin, one half of a podcast called Secret Histories of Nerd Mysteries, that I make with my good friend, Brenda. We talk about the pop culture stuff you like, like Thunder Cats and Yu-Gi-Oh! Did you know that the Thunder Cats are cousins with Farrah Fawcett? Or that Yu-Gi-Oh once caused a riot? You probably want to know more. You can find us at Maximum Fun, or wherever you get podcasts, every single Tuesday!

[break]

Griffin [in a wizardly voice]: The wizards answer eight by eight. The Conclaves call to demonstrate their arcane gift, their single spell. They number 64, until… a conflagration! 63… a 62 they soon shall be. As one by one, the wizards die… 'til one remains to reign on high.

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[break]

Teresa: This is from Avi W.

Travis: Thank you, Avi.

Teresa: More power to you.

Travis: Once again, man, yeah, I get it. I just assume this is just like—it all makes sense to me! I'm here, oh, I'm saying a thing and someone's like, "Okay, have some of my power. You can have some of my power."

Teresa: *Hm*?

Travis: This is like, how I hear it is like, when someone is making a really good point or standing up for something, or whatever. The sincere way is like, "Yeah, more power to you."

Teresa: Mm-hm!

Travis: But I think it has come to be like, "All right, more power to you, man. Now move it along."

Teresa: So like "good luck" or "good for you."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: But it could be taken both ways, right? So, "Good luck," right? Wishing you actual good luck.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Or, "Good luck…" Like, "That's never gonna happen, I'm sending good luck for you," right?

Travis: Yeah, because I can—I hear it both in my head of like someone saying, "Yeah! More power to you! Yeah, stick with it, man!" But also like, "Okay… more power to you."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "I get it. Yeah, you get it."

Teresa: Yeah, can be used sarcastically.

Travis: There was a phrase for that recently, because I saw a video, we've talked about this on the idioms episodes before, how like "it's all downhill from here—"

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Could be like, "It's only going to get worse, because it's all downhill from here, it's going down." Or, "It's all gonna get easier, because you're just coasting downhill."

Teresa: I know.

Travis: And it started meaning one thing and has become to be used in the other. And it's like, yeah, both of them are right and it's very confusing.

Teresa: It is very confusing. This dates back to the mid-19th century, and had nothing to do with wishing anyone luck. It was about getting people to drink more.

Travis: Really?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I would have guessed something to do with like engines and like power to the engines or something?

Teresa: The original phrase was "more power to your elbow," so that you could lift the drink to your mouth, right?

Travis: What?

Teresa: If they—if they wanted you to drink more, it's referring to the fact that your elbow has to be strong enough to bring the beer to your lips. So hypothetically, the stronger your elbow is, the more you'll be able to drink.

Travis: That's wonderful. And weird.

Teresa: So it's like—it's like the chug chant, is basically what this is. [chuckles] Again—

Travis: I could also see that being used both ways where you're like cheering for someone, but also someone won't stop talking while you're just trying to have like a quiet drink with them. And you're like, "Less power to your mouth, more power to your elbow." Huh?

Teresa: [chuckles] Maybe! So, this was actually started in print by George Bernard Shaw in his book John Bull's Other Island, where he used the phrase. So, I'm not saying that this wasn't something that people said already, but in print—

Travis: It was popularized by him.

Teresa: In print, we can point to this first usage. As the decades went on, " "more power to your elbow" became "more power to you," right? And we don't use this drinking phrase anymore, so like it just has moved on to a totally different meaning.

Travis: "More power to you, and to you, and to you!"

Teresa: [chuckles] It's like a Catholic mass.

Travis: "Yes! And also with you." That is how you would respond.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "More power to you."
"And also to your elbow."

Teresa: "And also to you." [chuckles] Here's an international idiom, from Jessica T.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Strong enough to trot a mouse across.

Travis: Okay, I'm gonna guess that this is like a really flimsy excuse or something where it's like, okay, yeah, that's strong enough—like that you're saying it's not very strong?

Teresa: Actually, it's supposed to be I think the other way. Because the idea is that it is dense enough—like tea specifically is where this is used.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: That it is dense enough for a mouse to walk across and not fall in.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: I think it might be an English as in England idiom.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: They do a lot of tea over there.

Travis: So this isn't like, yeah, maybe a mouse could cross that. And more like, that's strong enough—like, yeah, ooh, it's like liquid, it's thick.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah. Here's another one, true dinks. I've heard about this.

Travis: Is this Australian?

Teresa: It is!

Travis: Yeah, this is like—

Teresa: I've heard fair dinkum, that—

Travis: Fair dinkum—

Teresa: That's what I've heard.

Travis: Like, okay, good point, yeah.

Teresa: Indeed, yeah.

Travis: Yeah, you got this one.

Teresa: Meaning absolutely not a lie at all, and complete truth.

Travis: But I usually hear it almost immediately, right? Where someone has just made a point that like almost completely undermines the thing you said. Or pointed out something ridiculous and you're just like, "All right."

Teresa: Fair dinkum.

Travis: "Okay. Fair—" Like what—someone might say, "Fair enough, okay."

Teresa: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: "Fair enough." I've also heard fair deuce, which I think is… British.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Right? And it's like, "Oh, fair deuce." I might only know that from Mighty Boosh though, so I have no idea if that's universally how it's used.

Teresa: [chuckles] Or just by Noel Fielding.

Travis: I think it was Julian Barry—

Teresa: Oh, yeah?

Travis: Who'd be like, "Fair deuce."

Teresa: Okay. So, here's another one, strangely enough, that ties back to The Sound of Music, the phrase "God bless Kurt," when someone suddenly remembers something.

Travis: Did Kurt sneeze in the movie and everyone forgot?

Teresa: No, no, no, do you remember—so, what happens is, when Maria first arrives at the household, right? She's going to bed, she's saying her prayers. She cannot remember the name of the other boy, and she says, "Oh, and I forgot the other boy. What's his name? Well, God bless what's his name." Right? And so, when the kids come in, and she finally sees Kurt, "That's who I forgot. God bless Kurt." Right? She just like, in the middle of saying other things, she goes back to her prayer and says, "God bless Kurt," because she remembered, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, when you say "God bless Kurt," maybe it's like, "God bless Kurt, I remember where I put my keys."

Travis: Oh, like someone might say, [yells out] "Kevin!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You know?

Teresa: Maybe? Maybe. So, it's people joking about remembering the thing that they had forgotten.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: Here is one that I think that we have talked about before—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But I want to expand upon, because it is within you and your brothers, one of your very specific things that I hadn't heard until you guys.

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Kidding on the square.

Travis: Did we make this up? Did it originate with us?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It did not. But you guys use it a lot, so tell us—tell everybody what it means.

Travis: So, kidding on the square is when you kind of make a joke out of a thing, but you really mean it, right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: So like, let's say, you know, you're waiting on dinner, right? Everybody said, "Hey, come over for dinner, we're gonna eat at six o'clock." Right? And at 6:45, right, and you say something like, "Oh, I thought we were gonna eat—see, it must be daylight savings time. That must be it. Ha-ha-ha." And it's like, okay, you're making a joke out of this, but it seems like you're actually pretty upset.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That we weren't ready for dinner at the right time. Are you kidding on the square? Is this—are you being serious? And it also is usually, at least in the context we use it, of like you are like kind of circumventing actually being confrontational and saying what you're upset about, and making a joke out of it. So, stop kidding on the square and just tell me what it is that's bothering you, that kind of thing.

Teresa: So, it originated in 1907, from a letter where someone wrote the phrase "kidding." Because "kidding" was already slang, right? But if you were on the square, it meant that you were trustworthy, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, putting those two together, kidding, meaning that you were joking, but on the square being trustworthy, makes it so that you've got like the two diametrically opposed meanings, mean together something new, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: A joke that is actually serious underneath.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so—

Travis: Which I also think, it's important to note, doesn't just mean like when you hear a stand-up comic make a joke that you relate to because there's truth to it, but I think it has to be, as you said, underneath, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: There's an underlying truth that the person is kind of letting leak out through the joke.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And a lot of people actually point at something a lot earlier—sorry, a lot later than that. 2003, it was mentioned in Al Franken's book, Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them, about early 2000s politics. He wrote, "I think he was kidding on the square, a phrase I hope will catch on. It means kidding, but also really meaning it. People do it all the time, kidding on the square. If this book does two things, I want it to get kidding on the square into the lexicon, and I want to get Bush out of the White House."

Travis: You know what's wild? Let's see, 2003, I remember us owning that book.

Teresa: Mm-hm!

Travis: I'm pretty sure I read it, maybe Justin and Griffin did too. That might have been where we learned it from.

Teresa: Maybe! But it's older than that.

Travis: It's older than that! But that might have been where we learned it from.

Teresa: So the book accomplished it's—one of its two jobs? [chuckles]

Travis: Possible! Maybe. Hey, everybody, thank you so much for joining us. As Terese already said, if you have idioms, we love to get them, so please send more to us, shmannerscastcast@gmail.com. Make sure you say hi to Alexx, because she reads every one.

Speaking of, thank you, Alexx, our researcher, without whom we could not do this or any episode. Thank you to Rachel and Gino, our editors, without whom we could not do this episode. And thank you to you, we couldn't do this episode without you because you submitted—

Teresa: You sure did it! You sent 'em in!

Travis: The idioms, so thank you. Thank you so much. Make sure you check out mcelroymerch.com for all your McElroy merch needs! What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We like to 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'd love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

And like Travis said, we're always taking these kind of idioms, just send them in. We also love to hear your topic suggestions, your biography suggestions, your other etiquette questions, we would love those,

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 Theme" by brentalfloss plays]