

Shmanners 495: Ask Shmanners

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Travis: Well, hey there, fancy pants! You're listening to this episode during the 2026 MaxFunDrive, which runs until May 1st. Max Fun shows are artist-owned and audience-supported, and this is the time of year when we come to you and ask for your support. You can start as low as just \$5 a month to directly support the show and get access to hundreds of hours of bonus content, and there's so many more levels and so many more great rewards. You can find out all about it, or join, boost, or upgrade your membership at maximumfun.org/join. And if you're already a member, thank you so much.

["Shmanners Theme" by Brental Floss 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 okay. I'm doing good.

Travis: On this fine spring day.

Teresa: I mean, it is pretty spring.

Travis: Spring has sprung.

Teresa: [chuckles] We have to stop—I mean, we've been mowing the lawn now for several weeks.

Travis: It's the worst.

Teresa: It's the worst. [chuckles] That's okay, it could always be worse.

Travis: That's true, we could have two lawns! Four!

Teresa: Or no lawnmower.

Travis: Or no...

Teresa: We'll have to do it with our teeth, or a scythe.

Travis: Or the sun could be permanently blacked out, and we'd all be slowly dying.

Teresa: Like I said, it could always be worse.

Travis: It could always be worse! An asteroid. A grassteroid!

Teresa: Oh, no!

Travis: Hits and makes the grass grow really fast. Oh my gosh. Can you imagine?

Teresa: No.

Travis: I think it would go a little something like this. The year, 2026.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: One man, a hero, Travis McElroy. Everybody knows he's a hero. They all look to him for leadership.

Teresa: He's a hero already and he hasn't done anything?

Travis: Well, he becomes like an incredible hero. A superhero, if you will.

Teresa: Oh, he will be? So, people don't look at him as a hero yet.

Travis: Yeah, he's already a—this is what I like to call the hero to hero's journey.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: The hero to bigger hero journey. Starts off as a hero, and just up from there, you know?

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: There's no downturn. At no point does anyone doubt him. There's no conflict. People just every day are like, "I appreciate him a little bit more today."

Teresa: In this fiction, no one ever says things could always be worse.

Travis: I actually forgot why I started talking about this—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Just a movie about people slowly realizing more that I'm even better than they thought I was. And that's going to do it for us. Thank you so much.

Teresa: I want to talk about a cool dude.

Travis: Oh, okay?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Me?

Teresa: [sings] Segway.

Travis: Segway!

Teresa: So, last week, we talked about autographs, which, as a quick reminder, are not just signatures, but also the little letters or sign offs or quips or whatever that you write alongside your signature.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And in a little side quest, Alexx found some information on this really cool dude, or I mean, I can't speak to him personally, but he did a really cool thing.

Travis: An interesting fellow.

Teresa: An interesting fellow who did a really cool thing.

Travis: He ate a bunch of signatures.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay. I've seen someone do that before. One time someone asked for my signature on an apple, and I signed it with a sharpie, because that's how I sign everything. And then they took a—they ate a bite, and then looked at me and said, "Is sharpie safe to eat?" And I said, "You should have asked that before."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And I don't think so?

Teresa: I think it's about the dose that makes the poison.

Travis: That was the second weirdest thing I've ever signed. The other one was a piece of art of Lin-Manuel Miranda as Hamilton, at a convention someone asked me to sign. And I was like, "You know that's not me, right?"

Teresa: [laughs] Interesting.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I haven't heard that one before. But this guy, he walked over 200,000 miles collecting autographs.

Travis: That's a lot of miles. Not all at once, right?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Because I think that you'd hit an ocean.

Teresa: I mean, he crossed oceans.

Travis: He walked across the ocean?

Teresa: He didn't walk—no!

Travis: I guess if the boat was moving and you started really slowly and went into the boat, and you just took like little steps, you could say like, "I walked across the ocean."

Teresa: Not counting his boat trips.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Still, that's a lot.

Travis: Yeah—oh, yeah!

Teresa: That's a lot of miles. Anyway.

Travis: Yes, 200,000, I would say, is a lot of miles.

Teresa: Yes. A man from Croatia named Josef Mikulik.

Travis: That's a cool name.

Teresa: It is a cool name.

Travis: It's right there in there.

Teresa: He's been obscured to history a little bit. He doesn't even have a Wikipedia page.

Travis: What?

Teresa: But he does exist in—

Travis: WikiFeet.

Teresa: No—

Travis: Because he walked 200,000 miles.

Teresa: He does exist in newspaper clippings, he had several Time Magazine articles written about him. And there's just the sheer amount, the volume of signatures—

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Really speaks to his story. I mean, you can follow him around the world by reading the signatures.

Travis: [sings] And he would walk 500 miles—

Teresa: Even more.

Travis: [sings] And he would walk 500 more. Then repeat that... four... forty fo—wait—[sings] 4,000 times. And then he'd show up at your door.

Teresa: Yes!

Travis: [sings] For signatures, for signatures, for signatures—

Teresa: And letters—

Travis: I'm not done.

Teresa: And stuff.

Travis: [sings, spoofing the tune of "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" by The Proclaimers]

Teresa: Mm-hm, yeah.

Travis: Now I'm done.

Teresa: Yeah, okay. So, he was born in Croatia, January 15th, 1878, to a family of farmers.

Travis: I was wrong. So, if he walked 500 miles, and then 500 more, he would do it 2,000 more times. Repeat that process.

Teresa: Right, because—

Travis: Or to that—

Teresa: That's 1,000 miles—

Travis: It would—no, it actually—sorry. It would be 1,998 more times, because he's already walked 1,000 miles.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: Wait. 1,999 more times.

Teresa: This is boring. [chuckles]

Travis: Not for us math nerds. Well, I'm not a math nerd, or I probably would have gotten it right the first time.

Teresa: [chuckles] That's true.

Travis: Every so often, we have an episode where I have nothing of interest to contribute. And I am merely scraping at the cracks of the seat of the couch of conversation.

Teresa: Okay, so just listen.

Travis: You know I can't do that.

Teresa: [chuckles] All right. He was a farmer. His family, farmers, farming is what they did, okay? So, he would farm his own farm with his family. He would go to other farms and farm with them. And that is not what he wanted to do. He was born a farmer, but he didn't want to be. Because in his heart, he was a traveler.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: In his early 20s. His father refused his request, so he divided and conquered and got his mother to agree so that he could go. [chuckles]

Travis: That's the way to do it.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: It's always a stalemate when you ask one parent and they're like, "Well, ask your other parent." And then that other parent's like, "Well, what did they say?"

Teresa: Right.

Travis: "They said to ask you." And then you say, "Well, ask them again." And then you just play tennis with the child.

Teresa: But this one asked his dad and his dad said no, so he asked his mom. His mom said yes, and then he went to his dad and said, "Mom said yes."

Travis: Classic.

Teresa: Classic. First, he went to Italy, and then to Malta. And then he was like, "Mom, Dad, I know that I said that I would come home, but I'm not gonna."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: He kept going.

Travis: And this was when?

Teresa: This was in 1878.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Well, no, that's when he was born, so 20 years later. Do some more math for the people at home. [laughs]

Travis: It was 2000 and—no, 1898, something around there.

Teresa: He got on a boat to South Africa.

Travis: That's pretty far.

Teresa: Yeah, pretty far. It took 35 days to travel from England, where he started, not Italy, to Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Travis: Okay. He's bouncing around already, because we went Croatia to Italy, to Malta, to England, now to South Africa.

Teresa: To South Africa.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right. But it was the middle of the Boer War, which is the colonial struggle between the British and the Dutch settlers.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Both trying to colonize the same place.

Travis: Should have wiped each other out.

Teresa: Should have, but they didn't. Anyway, then from South Africa, he went to South America.

Travis: Okay, that's a—that's a transatlantic flight.

Teresa: Yes, it is.

Travis: Or a boat trip. I doubt he was flying. Unless, could he fly?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: He could not fly.

Travis: That would have been a huge twist, if you saved that 'til this point in the story.

Teresa: I know, I know—

Travis: And he had big angel wings!

Teresa: [chuckles] In South America, he went from Argentina to Buenos Aires, to Brazil. In Brazil, he was like, "This is really rough." He had to live in the rainforest in Brazil. I don't think he really thought this through.

Travis: No. But to be fair, if it was now, he could make a bunch of fun TikTok videos about like carving stuff out of mud and rocks, and everybody would be like, "Ah?" And he'd get like two million views.

Teresa: I mean, maybe. He reports that he nearly died in the rainforest in Brazil, but he didn't. Because there is so many more miles to go. All the while, what he was doing was amassing a great book of autographs, and at

one point, it got back to Croatia that he was doing this. And a publishing group was like,

"Hey, if you walk around the world in like five years, I guess, we'll give you \$10,000." Which would have been about \$350,000 today. Sorry, at the turn of the century, not today. But they also said that if we publish it—there was a thing about rights reverting, a weird thing. And so, we don't know if he ever actually took the deal, because nothing was ever published. But we knew about the deal.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: You know what I mean?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: I think that he probably was like, "Hm... I don't need you."

Travis: "That's not why I'm doing it."

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: "I'm doing it for the love of the game!"

Teresa: The love of the game. So then, he got himself back up to the Mediterranean.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: And—

Travis: Wow.

Teresa: This is where the autograph book really started, right? Because it was a big thing in Italy in the time.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: He had been kind of carrying it with him. But he was like, "Hey, I could really do this. This could be my thing. Everybody's got these autograph books. I've got little notes and stuff from the people that I've met. What if everybody I meet, I give them a chance to add to my autograph book?"

Travis: "To sign my yearbook."

Teresa: Exactly, exactly. So, this is the way that he would document his great adventure from now on. He was actively collecting things from people about where he had been. He definitely would have people like attest to his visit, right? And he often got requests for like, hey, get the autograph of this person and that person. But he refused to send off for autographs.

Travis: Yeah, he had to—

Teresa: Right?

Travis: He had to walk there.

Teresa: It was a—it was a personal journey, right? And when he started becoming famous for this, right? The enormous tome weighed nearly 60 pounds.

Travis: *What?*

Teresa: And had thousands of pages of autographs.

Travis: That's a big ol' book! Wait, hold on—

Teresa: That's one of the books.

Travis: So, that must mean that, unless I guess it was like a binder that he could add pages into, which is completely possible, otherwise, what it means is that he was like very aspirational when he bought this blank book.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: That he was like, "Yeah, this 60 pound book, it's worth it."

Teresa: Well, I think what I'm envisioning is he has a book, but as people give him like notes and letters and stuff, he's kind of like sticking it into the pages.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: So, probably pretty soon after he broke the binding, he was like, "I need to just kind of like squish everything together."

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. So, we have this incredible collection around the year 1911, okay? So, by the time that he'd been traveling for a decade, he finds himself in Oceania. He sailed to Australia and New Zealand, and he's got autographs and little messages from the mayors, even the governor general of Australia. From there, he went to the Philippines, then on to Japan, where he received a military escort because he's famous, right?

Travis: My goodness gracious!

Teresa: He stayed in Japan, he met the US ambassadors, he met the mayors of places like Nagasaki and Kobe, and all kinds of really cool places, right?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Hong Kong. Then he met the governor and president of China. Then he went to Shanghai, and he went to Singapore, and then he went to India. And now it's just 1912.

Travis: Okay. Okay. So, he did not—what is it? Someone is like—when you say like, he didn't let the grass grow under his feet and let moss—he didn't—he was a rolling stone.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And he got—he got the—

Teresa: I don't know which metaphor you're searching for! [chuckles]

Travis: He was covered in grass from rolling... in the grass. And no moss! Oh!

Teresa: No moss.

Travis: No moss was there.

Teresa: Was growing on—

Travis: Because the grass got in the way.

Teresa: 1913, we see that he's to the Middle East, Alexandria, Cairo, Jerusalem. Then Western Europe, to England, to France, Germany, Denmark, Bohemia, Spain, Italy, Portugal. And then—

Travis: I'm sure that a lot of this is more linear than it seems in my head. In my—like it's probably like if you drew it, it'd be like, you know, from an Indiana Jones movie where it's like, "Whoa." But in my head he's going, "Pew, pew! Ping, ping! Bing-ding, ding-bing!" I don't know, man! They just put him in a box and shipped him wherever! [chuckles]

Teresa: He was walking—

Travis: He was walking.

Teresa: Most of the time. Most of the time, he was walking. I guess except if he was on a boat, which we established already he wasn't walking. [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah. Okay. And then—

Teresa: And then! 1914, World War I. [titters]

Travis: Bummer.

Teresa: Yeah... Yeah, that kind of—that's like the biggest gap in all of this.

Travis: You know, I'm starting to think this World War I thing got in the way of a lot of fun stuff!

Teresa: Especially Joseph walking around—

Travis: Call me wild! But I'm starting to think these World Wars were no good!

Teresa: Not fun for—

Travis: HuH!

Teresa: Collecting autographs, at least.

Travis: No!

Teresa: No. No. 1918, he's back. This time, he went to the United States. Philadelphia, up and down the eastern coast, with this big book in tow. He was very hard to miss. The Washington Post described him as, clad in a costume which looked like a combination of alpine climber, football and bicycle garment, wearing on his back a stout knapsack, and in his sun-browned hand, a heavy cudgel.

Travis: Cudgel?

Teresa: That's the book.

Travis: Oh? No, a cudgel's like a club?

Teresa: Yeah, the book was described as like a large—a large, heavy object.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Now, I think it's...

Travis: I'm picturing, the way you've just described him, like an ogre, walking around, dragging a big club behind him. And in my mind, he's 10 feet tall.

Teresa: Oh—

Travis: Which would make the steps... fewer steps—

Teresa: Fewer steps.

Travis: To get farther. Makes it all make sense.

Teresa: Definitely. No, it was the book. The cudgel is the book.

Travis: Okay. You don't know that.

Teresa: I—

Travis: You're pretty confident, but you don't know for sure.

Teresa: I don't—there's not a—

Travis: He might've had a book and a big club.

Teresa: That doesn't bode very well for getting signatures from people.

Travis: Oh, doesn't it?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: If someone comes up to me and they got a big club and they're like, "Hey, you should probably sign this." I'm like, "I should! You're correct!" And then if somebody else is like, "Hey, you're that famous guy—"

Teresa: But if you're—

Travis: "With a bunch of signatures. Give me that book." And he's like, "Well, my big cudgel has something to say about that." And you're like, "I didn't realize you had a big ol' club. I'll leave you alone, sir."

Teresa: I think that brandishing a weapon like that precludes you from getting signatures from people like heads of state.

Travis: That's probably true—

Teresa: They probably don't let you in!

Travis: He would check his big ol' club at the door!

Teresa: The club is the book, I'm pretty certain.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Anyway.

Travis: All right.

Teresa: The Raab collection, the institution that would later come to own—

Travis: I thought you were saying his collection of signatures was rad.

Teresa: No, Raab.

Travis: It was a rad collection, man. Raab.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Wrote of it as, "As he became increasingly famous, world leaders, artists and luminaries from Egypt to New Zealand were thrilled to sign what was becoming a global who's who." Some wrote letters, which included stamps and seals and photos to give Mikulik.

And the idea was to get yourself on this record, because he went everywhere and had everybody sign it and do it. And I'm like—I've mentioned a lot of heads of state and like government officials and things like that, but he had *everybody* he met sign it. Clerks, barmaids, people from grocery stores, I'm telling you, I cannot make it clear enough—

Travis: No, every—

Teresa: Everybody.

Travis: Everybody.

Teresa: Everybody signed it.

Travis: What I love about this is like—I'm not a psychologist, I'm not a sociologist. But I think there would be a study to be done here of something, where like the momentum of it is like—you know, if you have one person who signed a book and you're trying to get the second person to sign it, right? Oh, okay. But by the time you have like, I don't know, 50,000 signatures or whatever, and people are talking about like, "Yeah, there's this guy." Now people are like, "I gotta find this guy!" Right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And it's like, the exercise itself has not changed, but merely the perception of it, of like, "I want to be included in this thing because other people are included in this thing. Not because it benefits me in any way. It does not grant me any more privileges than I had before."

Teresa: *Hm.*

Travis: "But a bunch of people have signed it."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "So now I want to sign it."

Teresa: Yeah, yeah. And he was famous enough at this point that in 1919, he told the Evening Post that he walked up to 10 Downing Street, London the other day, and—

Travis: And that's where Sherlock Holmes lives.

Teresa: No. [titters] The prime minister—

Travis: Oh, yeah, yeah—

Teresa: Welcomed him—

Travis: That makes more sense.

Teresa: Into his home to sign his book. And he didn't even have an appointment. He just charmed his way in. He was like, "Hey, I'm that guy. I collect signatures—"

Travis: "I'm him."

Teresa: "Don't you want... don't you want to be in my book? I'm him."

Travis: I want to be in his book. Is it too late?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's probably too late.

Teresa: It's too late. It's too late. Rebecca Rego Barry, author of Rare Books Uncovered and an editor of Fine Books and Collections magazine, wrote about McCulloch's journey for the Smithsonian magazine. Her description of him reads like an eccentric grandpa from a fairy tale. "He was a teetotaler, a vegetarian, and he played the bugle," which is what she told the podcast Constant Wonder. "So, you can imagine that he stuck out pretty immediately in these small towns. Not only that, but there was also the matter of his medals. People loved to give him little medals and pins and stuff—"

Travis: Wait, we're going to have to take a break! Because I want to get into this. But first, how about a thank you note for a sponsor?

Teresa: All right.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hey, folks. So, Mother's Day is coming up.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: I don't know if you guys know this, but I had a mother. A lot of people have mothers.

Teresa: Yes, and these mothers existed as people before they were mothers.

Travis: This is true! So, my mother passed when I was 21. Not to get too serious, but one of my favorite memories, and one of my biggest regrets, honestly, is my mom and I went to see Sideways together.

Teresa: Mm-hm

Travis: Just she and I, when I was, you know, whatever year that came out. So, I was like 19 or 20 or whatever. And just like hung out as grown-ups, you know? There was a moment, I remember when my mom and dad came and visited me in college, and I was 21, and we all went out to dinner, and I looked at my parents and I was like, "I'm going to order a beer with dinner." And my mom goes, "Okay, then I'm going to order a glass of wine." And I said, "Okay." And we said it exactly like that to each other—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Like, is this cool? And—

Teresa: It's like you were holding pistols at each other under the table.
[chuckles]

Travis: I know, right? Like, is one of us going to make a big deal out of this?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And those kinds of like seeing my mom, not only as like we are both adults and can kind of also be friends, but like as a person—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: As like a whole human being—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Outside of just being my mother, are some of my greatest memories. And the fact that I didn't get to have more of them, right? Is one of my biggest regrets. So, I'm very excited to talk this week about Storyworth, which is a service, a product—a great way to reach out to the person in your life, get a gift for the person in your life, be it your mother, be it any kind of loved one, right? And build out a story of like who they are as a whole person, not just who you know them as.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? And I've been lucky enough to get to do this with my dad a lot, right? You know, we've worked together a lot. And I've now been an adult I think in his mind for at least three years.

Teresa: At least.

Travis: And been able to like talk to him as a person and be like, "What was this like? When you grew up here, what happened at this point?" Right? And getting to share those stories is amazing. And each week, Storyworth will send your mother, or whoever, a question about their life. They can respond however they want, over email or the web, voice recording. Or they have new this year, a guided phone call. So, no apps, login, no hassle, makes it easy for them.

Teresa: Nice.

Travis: And you can even help pick the questions they're going to answer. You can choose from pre-written questions, you can write your own, or let Storyworth create personalized questions based on their life. And you will get each story as they tell it. And after a year, Storyworth compiles everything in their words, their photos, their life, into a beautiful hardcover book. I don't even think of it really as a present—it is a gift, obviously, but it's more of like a shared experience.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Something that's going to bring you closer together with this loved one. So, if you are looking this year for a gift for your mother, give mom a gift that helps her reflect on her life with fresh perspective. I can't stress enough, any loved one. This isn't just for mom, but it is a great Mother's Day present.

Teresa: Of course.

Travis: And gives your whole family the gift of her stories. Mother's Day is Sunday, May 10th. You can order right now and save up to \$20 at Storyworth.com/shmanners. S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S. Which, hopefully you know that.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: But save up to \$20 at storyworth.com/shmanners. That's storyworth.com/shmanners.

[break]

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[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 to tell you this whole story. Okay, I almost got fired from that movie.

Jordan: You should be listening to Feeling Seen!

Guest 3: I had so much fun and I love what you're doing.

Guest 2: I hope I did okay.

Jordan: New episodes every week, on Maximum Fun.

[break]

Travis: Okay, so he was getting medals.

Teresa: He was getting medals and pins and things like that as a thank you. After people would sign his book, they would go, "Hey, how about you take this with you? Right? Little memento of our time together." And he—

Travis: My brain just went like a human geocache, but like that's not true because I don't think they're good trade pins. This wasn't like a Disney World thing where you're like—

Teresa: No, he didn't want—he wanted to keep 'em. He wanted to keep 'em.

Travis: Yeah, he would keep 'em, yeah.

Teresa: And so, he would pin every single piece to his clothes.

Travis: So, now his book's heavy and his clothes are heavy!

Teresa: Yup!

Travis: He's got—he's gotta have calves for days! His calves and his thighs, big around as tree trunks!

Teresa: [laughs] I just—I just want to make a picture, a mental picture of, I'm just like hanging out in my town, sweeping my porch, right? Or whatever.

Travis: As you always do.

Teresa: As I always do. And this bedazzled—

Travis: Jingly, jangly man!

Teresa: [chuckles] With a giant book.

Travis: And a huge club.

Teresa: Starts walking—

Travis: Just dragging a big old club behind him.

Teresa: He doesn't have a club! [chuckles]

Travis: Scraping, like Paul Bunyan, just scraping a big old chasm behind him.

Teresa: He was clearly attracting attention, right?

Travis: Yeah! "Who's that big man with a big book? And a jingly, jangly jacket and pants, I guess, full of medals. And a big club."

Teresa: [chuckles] No club. He spent some time in 1918 going from like DC to Boston, and all those different places there on the East Coast. Then he would hop across to England for a little bit, and then he came back to America, but to the other coast, went to California. Where he started collecting movie star notes.

Travis: Ooh-la-la.

Teresa: He's got notes from film stars like—

Travis: My brain for a second went like, "Ah, for the Gold Rush." And then I was like, "That's like 70, 80 years prior to this happening. The Gold Rush was not in 1920, Travis."

Teresa: No. Douglas Fairbanks.

Travis: [gasps] *Hah*. I know him.

Teresa: Mary Pickford.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And William Fox, who founded 20th Century Fox.

Travis: Yeah! And was a human fox.

Teresa: No, was not a human fox. And so, he was able to meet not only executives, artists, movie stars, people who were building like the grand Hollywood that we think of, right?

Travis: The golden age.

Teresa: The golden age.

Travis: Yesteryear.

Teresa: And this is before they became household names, this was in the 1918 and '19. Okay, here are just a few of the more famous people that signed his book. We've got Theodore and Edith Roosevelt.

Travis: Know them, yes.

Teresa: William Howard Taft.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Woodrow and Edith Wilson.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Calvin Coolidge.

Travis: So, these are all presidents.

Teresa: Herbert Hoover.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Yes. Like I said, he loved to collect like heads of state and like ambassadors and people holding for office.

Travis: Also, and I shouldn't have to clarify this, but I just did in my brain, like those were all spread out over time, it wasn't like those were all presidents *at once*.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And he just went to the White House *once* and he was like, "Hey, eight of you—"

Teresa: No.

Travis: "Gather around and sign here."

Teresa: Kept going back, right? And so then we've also got, this is something that Alexx wanted me to make sure that I hit. He has the signatures of both Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla.

Travis: [gasps] *Hah*. But probably not on the same page.

Teresa: Now—

Travis: I doubt—I doubt Tesla would sign on the same page.

Teresa: Not on the same page, because they did have an ugly rivalry.

Travis: Well, Edison... sucks.

Teresa: Yes. And they had their war of the currents in the 1880s.

Travis: Sure. And Edison—

Teresa: I mean—

Travis: Sucks.

Teresa: Yeah. But like I said, so, he treated each signature as very important, whether it was like a bank clerk or the president of the United States. And so, the combined work of tens of thousands of people is in this book. So it's a great time capsule and it's a survey of the world, right? And then we hit 1924.

Travis: What happened?

Teresa: The Immigration Act.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That limited the number of people who were allowed entry into the United States.

Travis: But surely he got a pass, right?

Teresa: I mean, it doesn't say that he was kept out? But it does limit the breadth of people that he would be able to collect.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: So now he's going to them. "Give me your tired, your poor, your signatures."

Teresa: He made a point to visit a lot of immigrants, being a world traveler himself. So, in 1924—

Travis: He was like a—he was a worldwide immigrant.

Teresa: Yes. Yes. We start to see more, especially in the United States, you start to see like established immigrant groups popping up, instead of going to like—so like, you would see—he would go to a town of like maybe German immigrants, right?

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: So you'd see a lot of those types of signatures and stuff. Instead of like it looking more like Ellis Island, right? Where there was like a few from here and a few from there, and a few from here, right? Like—

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: You're picking this up what I'm putting down here?

Travis: I am. Yes, ma'am.

Teresa: By the end of his decades of travel, he had traveled more than, like I said, 200,000 miles, been to 33 countries—more than 33 countries, excuse me, worn out 44 pairs of shoes—

Travis: That was going to be my next question, yes.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Met tens of thousands of people, had been the subject of four New York Times pieces, and was the subject of a newsreel shown in virtually every single movie theater in the United States at the time.

Travis: Amazing.

Teresa: He's quoted as saying, "I have no address," and often didn't know where he was gonna be sleeping that night. He relied on the kindness of strangers to let him into their homes.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: But he would—

Travis: But at that point, he also had, "Do you want to see my references?"

Teresa: [laughs] That's true!

Travis: "How much time do you have?"

Teresa: He does carry with him a book of references—

Travis: Yes!

Teresa: "I have met—"

Travis: "This is where Herbert Hoover said I was a great houseguest, at the White House." Wait, was Hoover a president? Hoover was a president, right?

Teresa: Yes, yes.

Travis: And a vacuum.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And a damn! Go on.

Teresa: [laughs] I think you broke me for a second.

Travis: Yeah, if you had seen my wife's face and she tried to figure out if Herbert Hoover was in fact a vacuum... was he?

Teresa: Okay, I—

Travis: "What does my husband mean?!"

Teresa: At this point, his various books expanding multiple—you name it, had traveled on pack mules, by rickshaw, by pushcart, by boat, by automobile, and of course carried on his back.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: The book has its final signatures from 1923, and it was so heavy in that year that he pushed it in a custom-made like pram.

Travis: Like a baby.

Teresa: Like a baby. Isn't that fun? [chuckles]

Travis: And he's still alive today.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: I'm still—I'm still picturing, I'm adding to my mind picture. This old grandpa guy covered in like flair, right?

Travis: Like a TGI Friday's employee.

Teresa: Pushing a book in a baby stroller. [chuckles]

Travis: At that point, he probably had to have his giant club like strapped to his back—

Teresa: No!

Travis: Hands-free.

Teresa: *No club.*

Travis: It was book club.

Teresa: The signed notes in Joseph's compendium totaled more than 60,000, and we have identified at least 23 languages. There's some like in there that will be lost to time, right? In 1923, he met ASW Rosenbach, who was a famous collector. Talked about him. And he said that Mikulec's book was the most complete collection of contemporary autographs in existence.

Travis: I should hope so! I should hope—the man's put the work in!

Teresa: He surely has. In 1924, he sold it to a businessman. He sold one piece of his collection to a businessman named Samuel Robinson, who purchased it for \$2,500.

Travis: It was probably worth more than that.

Teresa: I'm certain it was. In 1920s money, that's like \$40,000.

Travis: Oh, it was definitely worth more than that.

Teresa: Yes. And so, after this book is sold, his story kind of goes cold. We know that he died of tuberculosis in Italy, in May of 1933. But like we don't really know much of what happened after that. And his collection was kind of like lost to time, other than this book, the one book. And even the one book

which was in the hands of like a private collector—this wasn't like published—

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: As like, you know, he's—this guy's got it, and come and see it. It was like kind of like a family heirloom passed down. Until 2019, when Nathan Raab got a call.

Travis: "You know that old book you've been looking for? Well, listen to this!"

Teresa: Well, kind of. He's a historian and nationally-recognized expert in historical documents, and he received a call from the great nephew of Samuel Robinson. He requested that Raab come look at the book, and he said—this is what—this is what the great nephew said. "I've got this book from this man who traveled a lot of places, and there are all these signatures. I can read some, but not others. Do you want to come take a look?"

Travis: "And hey, I found this old cup with the name Jesus scratched in it."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Do you think that's anything?"

Teresa: "You think that's anything?" And apparently Raab was like, "I don't really know if this is gonna be anything. People usually oversell things to me, but I'll go and take a look." Where he was able to look at some of the signatures, picking out things like Theodore Roosevelt.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: Right? And he said that no matter what he had been told, he couldn't have been prepared for what was there. He said he actually undersold it on the phone. He was like, "People usually think they have something great, and they don't." But this guy, he was like, "I don't know what this is." And he was like, "This is it. This is the one."

So, he was able to piece together, from all the collection that he got his hands on, about the village in Croatia where he came from, and about the timeline of his adventures using the old newspapers. And he found newsreels because he was able to like get the information slowly over time.

And he learned that this particular book probably wasn't even the only book that Joseph had made. And so like upon his death, Mikulec's death, an autograph book was actually listed in one of his few possessions. So, probably another one of these books from the very end of his life—

Travis: At least another one.

Teresa: At least another one from the end of his life when he had like largely kind of fallen off the map, is probably still somewhere in Italy. Some—

Travis: And we're gonna find it!

Teresa: Sitting on somebody's shelf.

Travis: On this season of Uncovered Treasures with Travis and Teresa, join us as we fly to Italy to find a book!

Teresa: I would love to go to Italy.

Travis: To find a book?

Teresa: Sure!

Travis: Yeah, it's just an excuse.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You don't really care about—

Teresa: And eat gelato!

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: You don't care about that book like I do! This has been a passion of mine for minutes!

Teresa: [laughs] The place that has the book now, this particular book, is the Croatian History Museum. In 2023 they acquired this priceless item. And the book is actually purchased, like physically owned, by Viktor Šimunić who is the mayor of... I'm gonna do the best I can, Oros... lavje? Orsoslavje, perhaps. Which is Mikulec's hometown.

Travis: Oh, that's great!

Teresa: So that hopefully one day it can be displayed in the place where he was from. Which is pretty cool, right?

Travis: This is a great story.

Teresa: In 2024, a statue was unveiled of him. He's got a big beard and a mustache, he's in traveling clothes, and he's got a massive autograph book on his shoulder.

Travis: Incredible. That's a great story. Hey, Alexx! Thank you for bringing us this story, and thank you to Alexx for being a researcher, without whom we could not make the show.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Thank you to Rachel and Gino for editing the show. We couldn't do it without you. And thank you to you for listening, you are the jingly-jangly flare on our old jacket.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I wanted to let everybody know, next Friday, April 24th at 7 PM, I have organized a fundraiser for the Know Theater of Cincinnati. It is a casino

night. With your ticket, one, you'll support a great theater, and you'll get some play money to, you know, play some roulette or blackjack with. And then you can trade that play money in for raffle tickets to win great prizes, or participate in the live auction.

One of the auction items is an attendance package to this year's Champions Grove, which is very exciting, that I donated, so you can come and bid on that. I'll be there dealing blackjack, and I'll be hosting the auction. You can go to knowtheater.com, that's K-N-O-W-T-H-E-A-T-R-E.com.

Teresa: Great job.

Travis: Thank you very much. And get your tickets. Come out and support a great theater here in Cincinnati. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent 'Brental Floss' 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. And as always, we are taking your topic submissions, your questions, your idioms. Please send those to shmannerstcast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one!

Travis: Also next week is going to be Max Fun Drive. So—

Teresa: Woo-woo!

Travis: We got a lot of exciting things. And you'll hear us talking about all the great awards and everything. But our episodes come out on Friday. So, I'm telling you right now, you can go to maximumfun.org/join, and support Shmanners and all the other great Max Fun shows. And if nothing else, go to maximumfun.org/join on Monday to see all the reward levels and everything. And make sure—

Teresa: We did an amazing bonus content this year.

Travis: That's true, we did. Where we talked about zombies, Disney zombies.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: In depth.

Teresa: Mm-hm!

Travis: Talked about the first movie, *in depth*.

Teresa: And we had such a great time. [chuckles]

Travis: We did. And follow @TheMcElroyFamily on Instagram, and you can see all of like the streams and bonus goals and all that stuff. But that's gonna do it for us this week. Join us again next week!

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners! Get it.

["Shmanners Theme" by Brental Floss plays]

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