

Shmanners 504: Route 66

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[theme music 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 well, you know.

Travis: Are we in the dark days of summer yet?

Teresa: No, not even close. We just started.

Travis: *What?*

Teresa: I know.

Travis: *What?*

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But it's been hot for like a week?!

Teresa: Well—

Travis: How much longer is this gonna go on?

Teresa: Much longer.

Travis: Ah, man!

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: [yells out] That's the worst! When I'm a little bit too hot all the time, ugh, it's almost as bad as being a little bit too cold all the time.

Teresa: Well, sweetheart, I would say that this week has been pretty, pretty perfect. Last week was full of rain, right?

Travis: I love that!

Teresa: This week, pretty great.

Travis: I like the rain! The rain makes it feel okay that I'm an indoor kid.

Teresa: *Ah.*

Travis: Because then I get to pretend like I would have gone outside.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: I'm certain I've talked about this before on this show.

Teresa: I think that you have. [chuckles]

Travis: But it's like, ah, I'd totally be outside playing, if only it weren't raining!

Teresa: If only...

Travis: Too muggy! That's what—that's another thing you can use for like a day or two after it rains.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Or like the ground's too muddy, the air's too muggy. And then it's like, "It's too hot!" You know? "Ah, it's too cold. Ah, I guess I'll have to sit here and play video games some more."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "I guess I'll have to finish my Lego build. Uah... Or work on one of my many unfinished crafting projects, *aw*."

Teresa: [chuckles] Well, you know—

Travis: I left my coffee across the room. What am I gonna do?

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: This is the worst day of my life.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I'm gonna get it—

Teresa: Are you gonna—you're gonna go get it. [chuckles]

Travis: Keep talking. Keep talking! This is content!

Teresa: I can't. I can't.

Travis: Teresa, this is content! Don't waste it!

Teresa: Hey. Hey.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: So remember how last week we went through a trip on Route 66—

Travis: A totally real—

Teresa: Totally real. [chuckles]

Travis: Not at all fictionalized.

Teresa: [chuckles] No.

Travis: American Girl doll trip.

Teresa: An American Girl doll trip that is fictionalized, but contained some actual facts.

Travis: I was thinking about it afterwards and how glad I am that it's not just like real pictures of like a doll pretending to travel.

Teresa: Oh! Yeah, no.

Travis: Creeps me out.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I don't even like when they pretend the dolls can move. Creeps me out. Not in a Chucky way, but in like a Toy Story way. The things those dolls have seen!

Teresa: Oh my gosh.

Travis: The things they've heard! Ah, no.

Teresa: I don't want to think about that.

Travis: They know too much!

Teresa: Okay, so, we took a fictionalized trip on Route 66. I said that I thought that it went all the way across the United States, it does not. It actually does start in Chicago, where we started with our American Girl doll, Molly.

Travis: I guess that makes sense, because isn't one of the nicknames of it like the Backbone of America or something like that? I feel like I've heard it called that before. And your backbone doesn't start at the top of your head.

Teresa: You're right. It doesn't.

Travis: That would be weird.

Teresa: It's more often known as the Mother Road.

Travis: Because you can use it to make other smaller roads.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And then make a loaf of road from it. I'm thinking of sourdough starter.

Teresa: Yeah, you are.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You're thinking of sourdough starter. But this year is the 100th anniversary of Route 66.

Travis: And how should I feel about that?

Teresa: You should feel good, because, well, for one, you may be confused, because our journey took place post-World War II, right? Which was not 100 years ago.

Travis: No, nobody knows when that was.

Teresa: It was the late '40s, early '50s.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Anyway, the road was actually commissioned in 1926. So, that's the 100th—

Travis: So that would be 100 years ago, if my math is correct.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yes. Indeed. That's what I just said. So—

Travis: Yeah, but if you catch me too quickly, I don't know what year it is, or how old I am.

Teresa: Okay. [chuckles]

Travis: I mean, it's not like I don't ever know, I'm just saying if someone asked me too quickly, I think I'd say 2024?

Teresa: Huh.

Travis: Maybe. Just, I think I like that number better.

Teresa: Interesting.

Travis: I think it sounds more, I don't know... eh. The other day—

Teresa: Okay. [chuckles]

Travis: Maybe this was yesterday, Bebe, because I was building a DeLorean, speaking of Lego kits, I was building the Back to the Future DeLorean. And Bebe asked me to describe the first movie. So I went into a 10-minute recap of the first movie, and man—

Teresa: She was riveted, though.

Travis: Yeah. I know everything that happens in that movie. And then she was like, "What happens in two and three?" And I was like, "Well, okay, in for a penny."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: And I just kept going. So like 30 minutes, it was like I felt the closest I've ever felt to before like writing, when our ancestors used to pass down important stories in an oral tradition.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Where I was like, "And now—and now I'm telling you, my dove." And the reason I bring this up is we reached a moment where I said, "And they traveled to the future in 2015." And Bebe looked at me with this, "Ah?!" Kind of like, "Oouh! I get it!" And I was like, "Yeah, at the time, that was the future."

Teresa: Yeah... Back to Route 66.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Route 66 is 2448 miles of highway. Like I said, that stretches from Chicago, Illinois to Santa Monica, California.

Travis: That is quite a bit—I mean, this is a rough estimate, but I'm—

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: My rough estimate of like, if we were to drive from Cincinnati to LA, I think it's something like 3200 miles.

Teresa: Well, that makes sense, because the reason that it is longer than the highway system is because it connects all the small towns between it, right?

Travis: It meanders.

Teresa: It meanders a little bit. It doesn't go through native like topography. Topography? There it is. It goes around things.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: It goes through these towns. So it's kind of like windy, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So it's a little longer. It goes through cities like St. Louis, Santa Fe, LA. And—

Travis: It went through LA? Well I guess to get to Santa Monica, yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, to get to Santa Monica. When it started, they were like, "It's 1926 and—"

Travis: "News around the world! It's 1926, and we're building a road for the first time ever!"

Teresa: [chuckles] "The West must be explored!"

Travis: "Yes! Get in your jalopy, son! Go out West! You're late to the party, but so what?"

Teresa: And so, one of the reasons why this was so important to the United States is because we now had automobiles.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: They've been around enough so that they weren't so, you know, so scarce. People were able to have automobiles. And it was—

Travis: I mean, there was an overlap, because we've talked about automobiles before, where it was like, yeah, that's fun to like, "Oh, I'm driving to a friend's house or drive into town."

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: But you—these things were not meant for road trips. They didn't—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like gas mileage was not a thing. Most of the time, early days, they didn't have like windshields or mirrors or anything. It was like—

Teresa: Which is another reason—

Travis: You're not going on the road, yeah.

Teresa: Why you needed to go from town to town, right? Because they didn't have good gas mileage, you had to make sure that there were lots of stops along the way.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: A highway doesn't make sense for that point in time for the machines that we had. And so, they started to make this cross country at, I believe, the 30... 35th parallel? Yeah, the 35th parallel—

Travis: One of my favorites.

Teresa: Of latitude. They started making it and the commissioner, the highway commissioner at the time, who is now referred to as the father of Route 66, his name is Cyrus Avery. He actually wanted to name the road Route 60, because he felt that the even number and a multiple of 10 would be good, which makes a lot of sense, because as you go across the United States, these kind of numbers go in a specific order.

Travis: That would have been wild, if only because—for me personally, because Route 60 is in Huntington, West Virginia.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And like, that's where the drive in was that I went to as a kid, where they eventually built a Walmart. It's where the Jolly Pirate is.

Teresa: Yeah, yeah.

Travis: If it had been connected to Route 60, that would have been wild, because it's not anywhere near Chicago.

Teresa: That's true.

Travis: So it would have just been a satellite part of Route 66, I guess.

Teresa: But they decided that 66 was catchier.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Kind of easier to say.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: They decided Route 66.

Travis: "Get your kicksy on Route 60" isn't as fun.

Teresa: [laughs] No, you're right, you're right. That makes a lot less sense.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And like I said, it was purposely meandered through the small towns. University of New Mexico professor emeritus David Dunaway told the History Channel that to "Understand Route 66, you have to go back to the native settlements, the animal trails that were followed by Native Americans, and then the people who followed the Native Americans on trains and stagecoaches and other means of transportation." So, they were just kind of like pouring asphalt over the road that everyone had already decided to take.

Travis: I think, listen, it's not like I'm 100 years old, but I think that it's really easy to forget what a huge jump in transportation airplanes were.

Teresa: Yeah, totally.

Travis: Right? Because if you look at it, and it was like horses to carriages to railroads to whatever, right? It was this natural evolution of, "Well, there's people here," right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: "That I could stop at and trade supplies for." And then that would become a settlement. And then that would become a town. And then that would become a city. This is near a river, so we can take a boat from here to here, right? So that would become a settlement that—right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And so, it would make sense that these like trading post stops to carriage, you know, stop towns, to railroad towns, to automobile, would all be in a chain. And then you get to airplanes and it's like we can go wherever.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: As long as there's enough money to build an airport here, it doesn't have to be connected by anything.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And like that changed travel in America, at least. Because for our listeners in other countries, specifically the UK, I hear this a lot from our UK—America is so stupid big, right?

Teresa: Yes, it really is.

Travis: And like the idea of having a train system—listen, I'd love it if our main transport was train. But the idea of being like, oh, I'll just hop in a train and take it to the other side of the country is like, okay, great! You're looking at like a three week train ride.

Teresa: Not so much anymore.

Travis: Well, but I mean, at that time.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That it evolved the same way like train—airplanes did.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? And it would be like, yeah, man, like you'd be looking at a real endeavor. And so airplanes just kind of wrecked it for everybody. Boo! But also, it's nice to be able to get somewhere in three hours.

Teresa: So Route 66 was often run parallel to the train tracks, because it was already graded into the high ground, right? To avoid flooding. And it tended to be on flat, stable terrain.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So just already, it made a lot of sense because you were putting the road where people were already going and where you'd already built stuff.

Travis: Yeah, trains didn't stop in the middle of nowhere.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? They would stop at towns and cities to unload and load and everything. So it's like, okay, cool, there's already towns there and this is already like the flat ground where we put the train.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Makes complete sense.

Teresa: Like I said, the 35th parallel is important to the road, because it was often called a "all weather road." Because it was far enough south that it didn't have snow on it half the year, but it was also far enough north that it wasn't super, super hot in the summertime. So they were like, let's make

this right about here so that, number one, people aren't super uncomfortable, and number two, so it doesn't destroy the road.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Because that happens a lot.

Travis: I also bet they beat a lot of like—you know, you get a lot of rain in like the Gulf of Mexico area.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? Because you get like the storm—the hurricanes that come through there. And I bet they were avoiding a lot of that by going through places like New Mexico and stuff like that. Where it's like, yeah, it's warm, but it's not raining, so it's not going to like tear apart the road, you're not going to be stuck in the mud.

Teresa: Yeah. One of the other things that made Route 66 so much a part of our American culture is the famously documented trip of the Joads in *Grapes of Wrath*.

Travis: Love that show. It's a book, I guess.

Teresa: Right, yes.

Travis: But we did the play at Shakespeare and I love the play too. I've never read the book. Sad.

Teresa: It takes place—

Travis: Sad stuff.

Teresa: During the Dust Bowl. Yes.

Travis: There's not—it's not a laugh riot, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Teresa: No.

Travis: No, Steinbeck didn't write a lot of funny stuff. You know what I mean? He wasn't—he wasn't yucking it up.

Teresa: They call it poignant.

Travis: Ugh. Boo! Give me a Baby-Sitters Club, you know what I mean?

Teresa: So, it takes place during the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, where people who—

Travis: I don't know why I said babies—I've never read a Baby-Sitter. I should have said Boxcar Children, Encyclopedia Brown. These are things I've read.

Teresa: Those are things that you're actually familiar with.

Travis: Yeah! I didn't read Baby-Sitters Club growing up, Justin did.

Teresa: [chuckles] So—

Travis: That's true! That's true, that's not a joke.

Teresa: So, when people's farms failed, right? And then the towns started to deteriorate due to the terrible, terrible weather, people started moving west looking for jobs, right? Like to pick fruit and things—

Travis: Sharecroppers.

Teresa: In California. And this is where the nickname the Mother Road comes from. It was Steinbeck's way of explaining the hope that Route 66 offered families. It was kind of like a yellow brick road to them.

Travis: Is it a play do you think on like "mother load," of like where people were going west during like the gold rush to try to hit the mother load and hit that like, I'm going to go out and have like this huge success based on that. And then it's like the mother road.

Teresa: No, I don't—

Travis: No, you don't think so?

Teresa: I don't think so.

Travis: You can't even entertain the idea—

Teresa: No.

Travis: That I might be—okay.

Teresa: No, I—

Travis: I thought it was really insightful!

Teresa: I think that it comes from the idea that this is where all life comes from.

Travis: But couldn't it also be—

Teresa: The road is—

Travis: But couldn't it—but Teresa, couldn't it also be? Don't you thi—don't you think? This is my new in-podcast TikTok series where I come up with conspiracy theories about this specific topic. Don't you also think it could be what I said? [chuckles]

Teresa: So, the Mother Road was this great pipeline for these disenfranchised people, right? But it was not in great shape. It was full of potholes and it was uneven and—

Travis: Wait, this was Route 66 already? Or this is before it became Route 66?

Teresa: No, this was—this was in the '30s, right? It had already been commissioned as Route 66. But it was, like we said, I mean, it was like the roads from town to town.

Travis: Wait, can I guess? Can I guess? I know very little about history, but can I guess?!

Teresa: What?

Travis: This was the post World War II FDR like New Deal—

Teresa: Pre World War II. Yes.

Travis: But to get out of the Great Depression.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? Where he's like, "I'm putting people to work and we're doing—government's paying for all of this infrastructure work. We're building dams, we're fixing roads."

Teresa: Exactly. Between 1933—

Travis: If I had said pre-World War II!

Teresa: That would have been perfect.

Travis: That would have been 100%. I'll take an 85% on that one.

Teresa: Okay, okay.

Travis: I'm fine with that.

Teresa: Very close. Between 1933 and 1938, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Project Administration went to work all over the country. Just like you said, we got dams, we got airports, we got bridges, public buildings, community art centers, all kinds of everything, right? They hired out artists to paint murals, write recreational guides, they performed theatrical productions for places like the national parks.

Travis: Hey, this *rules*.

Teresa: It was amazing. The social program really did put Americans to work, and they repaved and fixed up Route 66.

Travis: So it's almost like it was mutually beneficial for everyone.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And that it was like, it gave people jobs.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Helped the economy a lot at a time when it needed it.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And helped the infrastructure of the country a lot at a time when it needed it. So social programs working together with the government as opposed to being opposed to it was mutually beneficial for everyone. [sings] The more you know.

Teresa: The Civilian Conservation Corps disbanded before World War II, but alone, they built over 125,000 miles of roads and trails. They spent six million collective work days fighting forest fires, and planted over two billion, with a B, trees.

Travis: *Wow.*

Teresa: I know! Right? So cool.

Travis: You know what else is cool?

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: Hearing a word from another Max Fun show. We'll be right back after these messages.

[theme music plays]

Alex: Sunscreen companies calculate SPF by testing it on volunteers' butts.

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[break]

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[break]

Travis: And we're back.

Teresa: When we left off, between 1933 and 1938, under the loving hand of these laborers, they completely paved the highway of Route 66.

Travis: Much like Lightning McQueen in the hit film Cars.

Teresa: [chuckles] Sure.

Travis: When you think about it, it was a lot like that.

Teresa: And it was just in time, because Route 66—

Travis: They had to get to the Piston Cup.

Teresa: [chuckles] No. No, no, no, we're back to 1938.

Travis: Oh, right. Okay, sorry.

Teresa: It was just in time, because Route 66 played a big role in World War II.

Travis: Was it getting supplies?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Across the country?

Teresa: Because it went from Midwest to West Coast, it was a bustling truck route.

Travis: Oh, yeah.

Teresa: Full of heavy vehicles transporting materials and supplies and people between California ports and Midwestern factories. Industries in California were sending materials east, and Route 66 was bringing the workers west.

Travis: That makes a lot of sense. Especially World War II.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Your West Coast, a lot of stuff to do with Japan and—

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: And the Pacific.

Teresa: Yup.

Travis: And needing to get a lot of supplies over there at a time when there probably wasn't as much industry in California as there is now. Complete sense, it makes. I don't know why I spoke like Yoda.

Teresa: [chuckles] Well, it does. That's not like Yoda—

Travis: No.

Teresa: But it does.

Travis: That's Yoda's wife.

Teresa: After World War II, we've talked about the boom of the vacation and camping and things like that with all of these returning GIs and this move to the suburbs, and the idea that you would be paid enough to actually enjoy some of your time, because unions were really active. And—

Travis: And time off included in that as well.

Teresa: Time off was included in that, and people were paid a living wage, so they were able to actually take the time to take vacations across the United States, and Route 66 was a big part of that.

Travis: And I have to imagine a lot of that was the baby boom.

Teresa: Absolutely.

Travis: Right? Where it's like suddenly, there are so many kids, right? And you're like, "We have to do something with these children."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "We can't just keep them in the house. We've got to take them out somewhere."

Teresa: "They're destroying the house."

Travis: "They're destroying the house—"

Teresa: "Get them out of here."

Travis: "They're destroying my mind."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "We must do something with these children. I know what will help my peace of mind, getting them in the car—"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "For days on end. A much smaller space that we can all share."

Teresa: Yes, "But not where all our stuff is."

Travis: "And maybe they'll look out the window for brief moments of time, and then I can just have a quiet second."

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Yeah. "We'll let them run around on a rock or whatever."

Teresa: Whatever.

Travis: "And remember what it was like to not have them. Sad. Sad to not have them. Quieter! But sad."

Teresa: Okay, so—

Travis: I love my kids so much. I can't stress it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: They've only been home from school for like three days. Right now is the best time—

Teresa: A little longer than that, but—

Travis: To talk to me about like, oh, I love having them home, this is great. Talk to me again in two weeks? We'll see.

Teresa: Okay, so, people would take their vacations. And like we talked about last week with Molly and her family, the road was the vacation, it wasn't you were going on the road to get to something. Although obviously you had the end goal of wherever you wanted to end up, whether it was all the way at the end at Santa Monica or, you know, somewhere in between, part of the trip was going on the trip.

Travis: Yeah, there was no like, making good time wasn't a concern. Especially I think that as time goes on, we end up seeing much more like destinations in America.

Teresa: Yeah, totally.

Travis: Right? Where you get Disneyland, you get Disney World, you get the Catskills, you get... not the Adirondacks, that's a chair. But anyways, you get these places, you know, amusement parks and stuff like that—

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Where it would become like, we're going to go there and set up for a week, right? And do these things and go home. And because this was such a new thing, those things hadn't really sprung up in the same way. So it was more little destinations along the course of the road.

Teresa: Exactly. More than 250 stops along the Mother Road are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including downtown Chicago, right? And the Santa Monica Pier.

Travis: Those both make sense.

Teresa: Yes. There are souvenir shops, classic diners, neon-signed motels, and a host of national parks along the way. A few of the iconic stops include but are not limited to the Merrimack Caverns, which we talked about last week, Meteor Crater, Cadillac Ranch, the St. Louis Gateway Arch, the Painted Desert, again from last week—

Travis: Is Roswell near Route 66?

Teresa: You know, I don't know. It's not mentioned here, you're gonna look. A few more, we've got the 66 Drive-In Theater, the Rainbow Rock Shop, the Midpoint Café and Gift Shop, named for being the halfway point.

Travis: Yeah, that makes complete sense.

Teresa: Mm-hm. The Mojave National Preserve, the National Cowboy Western Heritage Museum.

Travis: I mean, the Grand Canyon.

Teresa: Yes, which I don't think is directly on Route 66, but very close, yes.

Travis: So it's not—okay. Roswell's not on Route 66. It would be like a two-hour detour off of it.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So, we probably wouldn't have seen any aliens at these places.

Teresa: Probably not.

Travis: Is what I'm getting at.

Teresa: Right, mm-hm. So, families flocked to these Route 66 attractions. There were, like I said, there were diners and there was a lot of open sky, right? That was really important at the time. People being like, you know, "This is the heritage of America." And you could look outside and see like it was just from horizon to horizon, America.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And that was part of like one of the ways that they marketed Route 66, being like, "Everywhere you look, America."

Travis: Well, I also have to imagine post-World War II was also the time when suburbs started to be a thing, right? And you were moving away from densely packed in a city to living in the suburbs, so I have to imagine the idea of like space as the end goal. It is funny how often we cycle through that, right? Because speaking about going West, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: How much of it was like, go out and, you know, claim the land...

Teresa: Quotes—

Travis: Quote/unquote.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah. And then it being like, because space, right? We gotta... get your own space, right? This space is yours. And then we kind of cycle through that over and over again of like, you don't want to be stuck in the city. And then people were like, actually, that's where stuff is. I kind of do like being in the city—

Teresa: I kind of like it here.

Travis: Of like, ooh!

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: We're going to have to start a whole new sales pitch on space and how much you need space to roam. And they're like, yeah, that's just more lawn to mow. I don't want to actually do that.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: I'd like to be where stores are. And they're like, *ooh...*

Teresa: So, with people traveling the road, right? They spent money at all of these different places. And so smaller communities were able to thrive off the tourism dollars, which would lead people to make more kind of like roadside attractions to attract more people. And so like, you were constantly in this battle of trying to get people to like stop at your town.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And spend their money at your place.

Travis: So, bigger and bolder claims. "No, we have the biggest ball of yarn in the world."

Teresa: Exactly. Exactly. The very first fast-food drive-thru popped up on Route 66, which is—

Travis: Makes sense.

Teresa: Very cool.

Travis: Yeah, that tracks.

Teresa: It was like the coolest main street, just as big as it could possibly get.

Travis: Yeah! It was Main Street, USA. It was like the main street of like 100 towns all in a row.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: Especially fun—now, granted, I hate to admit this, but my main go-to mental image of Route 66 is in fact Cars, unjokingly.

Teresa: Yes. [chuckles]

Travis: But especially when we get into like the '60s, where you get like the neon and chrome kind of look on everything, I still think that that is a cool aesthetic that we let go of way too soon.

Teresa: And a lot of the imagery that we think of from that time period is owed to a 1960s television show called Route 66, about two young men in a convertible driving along the road. It ran for four years and had 116 episodes.

Travis: And I bet they had some kind of weird like robot sidekick or like an alien or something.

Teresa: No, I don't—I don't think so.

Travis: Wait, when was this? The '60s or the '70s?

Teresa: '60s.

Travis: Okay, yeah. When we get into '70s and '80s, like they would have had big foot with them or something.

Teresa: Definitely. Definitely.

Travis: Speaking of the chrome and stuff, and neon, if you ever get a chance, anybody listening, and you're in the Cincinnati area, the American Sign Museum—

Teresa: Very cool.

Travis: Will give you an absolute like nostalgic blast, even if you weren't alive during that time, where you're like, I miss this aesthetic! Of like neon—you can hear the neon signs hum in a way that I find so soothing.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: In a way that I bet like if I had been alive at that time and be like, "I can't hear myself think, I just hear neon hum everywhere." And I get in there and I'm like, "Everybody, shut up."

Teresa: [chuckles] "I love it here."

Travis: I don't want to think about anything except the hum of the neon, and I'm just going to zone out.

Teresa: And they have a giant big boy.

Travis: They do have a giant big boy. Like Frisch's Big Boy. A heater for the big boy.

Teresa: *What?*

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's a different show. Musician Bobby Thorpe wrote Get Your Kicks on Route 66, which was then rerecorded by Nat King Cole in 1946. And covered now by everybody from Chuck Berry to the Rolling Stones to, I mean, there's a million different covers—

Travis: You've almost certainly heard it in a movie set in the '60s, or you've heard it in commercials.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Or something.

Teresa: So, we've gotten all the way up to the '60s. And this is when Route 66 starts to decline.

Travis: Well, this is, as like I hinted at earlier, this is when you start to get the destination stuff and airplane travel started to become more normalized, right? So, families wanted to take trips to Disneyland, they wanted to take trips to, I think then a decade later, Disney World. One of my favorite things is there was a time period—because I like abandoned amusement—I love Defunctland and channels like that. And there was a time period where Disneyland existed, and Disney World did not.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And airplane travel is still very extensive. And upstate New York in that area, they were like, "Ah, right, we're going to become—" There's amusement parks and theme parks all over the place here within like, you know, 100 square miles of each other. And then Disney World opened and airplanes became way cheaper to fly on. And you got all these abandoned amusement parks in like this one chunk of the country.

Teresa: So what we have is the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, signed by Eisenhower. That is when they started to make a very efficient highway system.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: That instead of going through the towns and around the geography, it bypassed the towns and went through the geography.

Travis: You know, as someone now who lives in Cincinnati, where it is perpetually in a state of doing something to 75, watching them carve away a part of like a hillside to make an exit ramp and thinking, okay, but this is like a three-year project, and two and a half years of it is carving away this side. Wouldn't it just be easier—

Teresa: Wouldn't it just be easier to go around? [chuckles]

Travis: To find a place like, I don't know, 200 feet down the road where this hillside wasn't there, and just making the exit there?

Teresa: I know, right? So, instead of finding yourself on main street of a small town you never would have found otherwise, drivers now had to take off ramps off the main thoroughfare and sometimes drive several miles to find these attractions that are listed in all the brochures and stuff. Where it was once, you would just, everyone would pass by it.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? And so, by 1960, Interstate 40 replaced much of Route 66. And by 1970, Interstate 55 provided a faster way to get from Chicago to St. Louis. While Interstate 44 would get you from St. Louis to Oklahoma City. And so much faster, right? Because the roads were bigger, they were more newly built, they were straighter, they didn't meander as much, like you could just go faster and get there faster.

Travis: Completely eliminating the journey, right?

Teresa: Exactly. Yeah.

Travis: Well, but also at that point, you know, mileage was increasing, gas, you know, you were able to get there with fewer stops, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like, and I bet a lot of just road travel was losing a lot of its magic from all of the—

Teresa: Maybe.

Travis: But I mean from all of these things coming together, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Because—

Teresa: The convergence of it.

Travis: As it would slowly go and you're like, eh, it's not as fun to stop places. But that's because the road doesn't take you by the places it was fun to stop at.

Teresa: Right. And for a while, you had to actually like exit and go find the things like gas stations and, you know, like hotels and all of that stuff. Like the diners hadn't actually moved to the highway exits yet. So, it was more of like, well, I mean, can we go 10 more miles? Can we go to the next town? Maybe it'll be easier to get to the gas station or something like that.

Travis: Well, and I also have to imagine, as you mentioned earlier, the rise of fast-food and drive-throughs—

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Really also stopped—

Teresa: The diners.

Travis: Because it was like, well, we can just grab food without ever getting out of the car and ever turning off the car, and get right back on the road.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: To pick up time.

Teresa: So, in 1985, Route 66 was officially decommissioned. But the decommissioning movement popped up to a reviving of the—

Travis: So it was recom—

Teresa: Iconic highway.

Travis: It was re-commissioned.

Teresa: Well—

Travis: It was—

Teresa: So, no,—

Travis: Un-decommissioned. De-decommissioned.

Teresa: It seemed like the second they said, "We don't need to do Route 66 anymore, we've got these other great highways," there was a bunch of people who went, "No! We're going to do Route 66 anyway!" So, the Road Ahead Partnership, which is a national organization dedicated to revitalizing Route 66, is headed by David Dunaway.

And he's happy to report that in the modern age, there are entirely new streams of people that are opening restaurants and gift shops and other businesses along Route 66. There is a lot faster way to get from one side of the country to the other, but up to 40,000 people a year still opt to do the entire journey from Chicago to Santa Monica, or obviously the other way.

Travis: I hear you. I hear exactly what you're saying. I know what we're doing this summer.

Teresa: No! [chuckles]

Travis: You don't want to... maybe when the ki—maybe when the kids are a older.

Teresa: A little older. A little older.

Travis: Like 40.

Teresa: [chuckles] I just don't—

Travis: And they can drive. Maybe when the kids can drive.

Teresa: Yeah! Once we can all take a turn.

Travis: And we'll sit in the back with our iPads.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: You know what I mean?

Teresa: Once they're able to appreciate it a little more.

Travis: But they won't, because that's the cycle of things, right? Is I think the reason—you're talking about 1985, right? It was decommissioned. And now people are doing it again, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Because these—like they lived in a time where airplane travel was the norm. And the idea of taking these like cross-country drives becomes romantic again, right? Becomes like, ah, what a leisurely—I'm in control, I get to decide where to stop, I'm doing these things again, right? And so then they'll take their kids on it and their kids are like, "Oh my god, I'm so bored."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right? And they're like, "You don't understand, it's the romance of the—we're driving—it's Route 66!" And the kids are like, "I, Dad, I couldn't care less."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "I'm 12." And then when the kids get older and then they have money and they're like, "No! I never want to do that again, are you kidding me?" And then their kids will grow up and be like, "Ah! I wish that we could just drive!" You know?

Teresa: And it starts again.

Travis: It will all cycle through! And that's beautiful! That's beautiful! It's a circle of boredom. You know?

Teresa: People all over the world have become enchanted with this vintage Americana highway, particularly international tourists, people from Germany, France, Brazil and Japan flock to experience what has become one of the most famous roads in the world. David Dunaway says that it began to function as a nostalgic road that people were excited to drive because it represented a rededication to an earlier era.

Travis: Well, it's the same reason, you know, when we travel and it's like—if we go to Scotland, right? We want to go see a castle.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And you know, like that kind of idea of like, where is the history of the US that people want to see? It's the West, right? It's like the American West is the thing that captured non-Americans people's interest as much as—I mean, we've talked about it before where like people would take Old West shows, you know, during like the early 1900s over to, you know, England and France and everything, because like that was what people associated—Americans! Cowboys! Right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And like, so of course it's—they don't care about anything.
[chuckles] They're not like, "We gotta see, you know, we've gotta go see Rhode Island." Right?

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Like I don't think—I had to really cycle through a couple of states in my mind of like, not Florida—

Teresa: Not there.

Travis: Because that's what Disney is.

Teresa: [chuckles] Some etiquette and some tips and tricks. Plan your trip, if you want to do Route 66, well in advance. You can make it take as little as two weeks, or you could take as much as a full month and still have stuff to see, right? Plan about five stops, right? As like your big things you have to do. And plan around those, so that you can enjoy those things that you want to see around main street America without like stressing too much. But don't plan too much—

Travis: There you go—

Teresa: Because there's—

Travis: Let the wind take you.

Teresa: Always something extra, something cool that you'll see a sign for that you'll want to see.

Travis: I think along those lines, be willing to risk something not being good.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Rather than being like, "Well, I don't know. I mean, I haven't done any research on that place, or should we look it up like on Google Maps or

Yelp to find out if it's legit or weird or whatever." You know, maybe it's fun. Maybe it's just a tourist trap. That's the point!

Teresa: They can't all be bangers.

Travis: That's the point!

Teresa: But you're going to find a banger if you keep looking for it.

Travis: Or you're going to find a ve—you go to something and you're like, this is the weirdest.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Like this thing said it was a Bigfoot museum, and it's all about the Bigfoot like monster truck. That would rule. Actually, I'm saying that—that was going to be an example—

Teresa: [chuckles] You would love that.

Travis: Of bad. But if it was dedicated in the same way you would go to like a Smithsonian, and it had that sort of reverence, but about the Bigfoot monster truck? Oh my god, I'm there in a heartbeat.

Teresa: Have patience, especially with the driving conditions, because like we said, chances are you'll probably be in traffic at some point. Not only with the roadside attractions that might be more popular, but with like the actual road, it's not like a highway, right? So, there's going to be stoplights, it's going to go through actual towns and you're going to have to like actually stop, right? Rules of the road always apply, of course. And this is like the road of all roads, so—

Travis: So the rules of all rules.

Teresa: [chuckles] Everyone is driving, right? We're all in this together. We're all doing the same thing, so be cool, right? Especially a lot of families. So, do your best to be kind to other cars and like realize that we're all on the same adventure together, right?

Travis: I think if you're going to go on Route 66, you have to let go of the making good time thing or "this is taking forever" thing.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? Like that's kind of the mindset you have to let go of. So it's like, "We're stuck in traffic," or like, "Oh my god, this person's not going 20 miles over the speed limit like I want them to." Like, yeah! That's kind of—that's kind of the point of it of it. You gotta do that. Because that will lead you to really appreciate like, it's like a vein, a rich vein of gold that runs through the country. And that's why it's called the Mother Road, when you think about it, right?

Teresa: [chuckles] Oh, yeah?

Travis: Because like, it's almost like if you have like the mother road, right? That you would go West for.

Teresa: Okay?

Travis: Right? So it's like—like I can see the connection.

Teresa: I'm still not getting it. Odds are though—

Travis: Do you want me to explain it a third time?

Teresa: [chuckles] Odds are that you will stop at a national park, so a brief reiteration of some of the best rules for that. Do not disturb the wildlife, abide by all posted warnings, listen to your park rangers and leave the space better than you found it by taking pictures, not souvenirs, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Rocks and flowers and things like that, leave them there—

Travis: If you feel like they have some trash while you're there and you see some debris and some litter, even better.

Teresa: Be kind to locals, right? Because along this road, people live, people live here. They're not like—this isn't like the whole thing is like a tourist attraction. Because it is—it is touristy, but people live here, so be nice.

Travis: It's not like—they're not like, you know, if you go to Disneyland and there's people working in the shops pretending to be a soda jerk or whatever—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? No, these people actually live—they're not actors in your Route 66 experience.

Teresa: Mm-hm. Do remember in your car to bring snacks and water, right? This is the best way to stay happy on a road trip.

Travis: Oh god yes.

Teresa: And so, you're going to really need it, especially crossing some of those long stretches of desert. Also remember that Route 66 goes through a collection of indigenous tribal nations, and Native American people are in many ways the backbone of this experience on this road. They—

Travis: But they're not prompts or—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: They're not like, oh, how kitschy.

Teresa: Yeah, looking at you, Teepee Hotel. So, do your best to honor that as you make your way across these—the eight states, right? For one, if you're visiting a reservation or an indigenous stop, mind that directions will usually be posted somewhere so like you're not climbing on the ruins of an old pueblo or you're going into a space that's roped off. Don't trespass on tribal lands and definitely don't take anything—

Travis: I mean, buy stuff!

Teresa: Buy stuff, right? But like your little rock that you pick up from the petrified forest, if everybody did that, there'd be no forest left.

Travis: And don't like stop at a reservation to have a big like, "Oh, I'm going to have a metaphysical, magical experience or whatever." Gross. Don't do that. Just be a conscientious visitor, like you were visiting someone's home. You know what I mean? I'm here. I want to, you know, engage, but not like gawk or—

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Make an effort to go and visit the real stuff and leave the kind of like kitschy, bad stuff alone, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And while you're waiting hours in the car, not while you're driving, you can learn about which tribal nations steward each place you're going to, at americanindigenoustourism.org. They have a really great pamphlet you can download from their website called American Indians and Route 66, that's produced by the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association. There's a wealth of information about the indigenous history of Route 66 and is a great way to start your education on those things.

Travis: And that's going to do it for today. Thank you, everybody, for listening. Thank you to Alexx, our researcher, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to Rachel and Gino, our editors, without whom we could not make the show. And thank you to you for listening. You are the gas in our tanks that keeps us going.

Teresa: Aw.

Travis: What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent 'brentalfloss' Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, 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 topic submissions, questions, biography suggestions, idioms. Send those to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's going to 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.

[theme music plays]

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