

Sawbones 264: Auriculotherapy

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Intro (Clint McElroy): Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

[audience cheers]

Justin: Hello everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy!

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

[audience cheers louder]

Sydnee: Thanks. [laughs]

[cheering continues]

Justin: Hey, I was under the table—

Sydnee: Are you okay?

Justin: —I missed your applause. Was it about how—about equal with how mine was?

Sydnee: Exactly the same! Exactly, yep.

Justin: It was exactly the same? Excellent. Well, welcome.

Audience member: [screams excitedly]

Justin: Yeah, me too.

Sydnee: Thank you. [laughs]

Justin: Um, welcome to Seattle. That's weird.

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, so yeah. We love to come back to Seattle. Our family comes back to Seattle a lot, I feel.

Justin: Yeah, we're here a lot, it seems like. It's like a second—it's our vacation home in the cloudy-ville. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Um—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] We love Seattle so much that this morning... [laughs] Uh, after we got up, our daughter Charlie climbed up into the windowsill, and stood there, and looked out over the city and said, "[loudly] Hello, Portland!"

[audience laughs and cheers]

Justin: It was very good.

Sydnee: Just apropos of nothing. Just... "Where—where did you say we were?"

Justin: So we usually like to theme our episodes to the area that we're in. Uh, Seattle. But, uh—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: —[laughing] we've been to Seattle so many times that we're kind of out of things, if I'm being honest. Uh—

Sydnee: I'm sure there are more, but then, Justin had a whole other—he said, "Well, we're going to Seattle, but we're also going to PodCon. Maybe there's a connection there!" And I'm gonna let you explain... [laughs]

Justin: It's not—

Sydnee: ... that.

Justin: Sydnee said she was gonna let me explain. It's not a long chain. I just thought, "PodCon, podcast go in your—okay, PodCon is about podcasts, and podcasts go in your ear, so maybe an ear thing."

[audience laughs]

Justin: It's not a long trip. Just ear stuff.

Sydnee: So he said, "An ear thing." And I said, "Eh, you know, uh, we just got a—there was a tweet, I think, the other day about how we should look in to auriculotherapy. I wonder if that would be a good topic?" And I'm guessing you all don't know much about it, 'cause nobody got excited. [laughs]

Justin: That's very good. No, that's ideal.

Sydnee: Justin, what do you know about auriculotherapy?

Justin: Well, Sydnee. I mean, do you want me to be honest? 'Cause you kind of told me a little bit. Or should I lie?

Sydnee: What—pretend—

Justin: Well, we always edit this part out. No, just kidding. Normally she doesn't tell me about stuff. Okay.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: I know a little bit about it.

Sydnee: Okay. It has to do with the ear.

Justin: Ear stuff is involved.

Sydnee: Therapy. Ear therapy. [laughs quietly]

Justin: Ear therapy. I mean, that's what—that's in the word, right? Auriculo—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: —meaning "of or pertaining to the ear... area," in the Latin, in the original Latin.

Sydnee: Area, ear area. So, auriculotherapy is considered an alternative medicine, which... it's similar in some respects, I would say, to acupuncture. And then I would also say it's similar to reflexology, except it's the ear!

So it's basically a therapeutic procedure whereby you poke, or burn, or squeeze, or apply some sort of electrical current to various parts of the ear that correspond with all the other parts of your body.

So if you have a problem in your knee, you just like, squeeze this part of your ear and...

Justin: It's the... same. I mean, it's the same.

Sydnee: It's the same! Uh, so I had never heard of this. I've heard—'cause reflexology is sort of like the same idea, but with the feet. Like, you do it with feet.

Justin: It's like, fo—reflexology is foot massage with rules, and charts, basically.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And this is like ear massage, except it sounds less pleasant because you do a lot of other, I would think more painful, things to the ear as part of it. The original attempts at it, like it's origin, was probably with acupuncture, with ear acupuncture, which is done. But then it kind of goes astray. It goes off on its own little tangent, which is where Sawbones lives, on these tangents.

Uh, so, like I said, its origins are quite ancient, and it was originally based on the same ideas that acupuncture is based on, so the body has meridians, like these pathways through which energy can flow, and these are ideas that don't always sync up as well with like, Western medicine and our idea of like, what causes disease and what treatments are and that kind of thing.

Justin: [quietly] The nice—the nice way of putting it.

Sydnee: Well, I'm just saying, like, most of us don't treat based on, like—

Justin: Energy.

Sydnee: Energy.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: The flow of energy.

Justin: Flow of energy.

Sydnee: Right, like acupuncture is. Auriculotherapy was like—there were scattered attempts throughout history to kind of make it into its own thing. Like, for instance, one of the reasons—one of the like, kind of folklore behind why a sailor might get a bunch of earrings is that it supposedly improved your vision to pierce your ears?

Justin: I didn't even know that! Wow. This is—I'm already learning like, so much from this episode.

Sydnee: Uh, in Ancient Egypt, sometimes you could like, burn or pierce a certain part of your ear if you wanted to like, prevent pregnancy.

Justin: Wow! This is like, very potent stuff we're playing around here with, Syd!

Sydnee: Well, no, it—I mean, it didn't work. I'm just saying it did—

Justin: You said—you just clearly said "In Ancient Egypt—"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "—that would work," so I don't—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: No, you might try this.

Justin: You might try that in Ancient Egypt, and maybe it would be more effective because of... I don't know. The time period? Is it a faith thing?

Sydnee: No. I mean, again, like... is it what—are you asking me what it really is?
[laughs]

Justin: No, no, no. keep going.

Sydnee: What it really is is it doesn't work, but—

Justin: [laughs loudly]

Sydnee: What it—the theories behind it are that there are parts of your ear that, for some reason, are connected. Either believe—you could believe through energy, or as I'm gonna get into, there were some more like, sophisticated, embryologic origin theories.

Justin: Whoa. Okay.

Sydnee: Uh, but we'll get there. There was also—Hippocrates said, if you want to, [laughs] you can bleed someone behind their ear. So like, make a cut behind their ear, and bleed them there specifically to improve their erections.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Wait. If you want to?!

Sydnee: And their—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: —and their ejaculations will be stronger if you bleed them behind the ear!

Justin: Uh—why?!

[audience laughs]

[pauses]

Sydnee: I mean, Hippocrates, man. I don't know.

Justin: No, you can't just throw Hippocrates under the bus like that!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, one of my favorite—'cause these are all just like, these little snippets throughout history where somebody was like, "Let's try that ear thing again. No? Okay. Something else."

Justin: "No. Still nothin'. Alright."

Sydnee: In one of the little like... I guess you could call it a case report, although I don't think these qualify as like, medical literature case reports... one of the anecdotes, if you will, is in 1810, there was this professor in Italy who reported that he observed that a man who was stung by a bee on the ear was immediately relieved of all leg pain, and so the thought was if people could just get like, needles poked in their ear, then leg pain vanishes.

And so, this actually for quite a while—auriculotherapy was applied mainly for leg pain, sciatica. I found this again and again. People would come in and be like, "Agh, I have back pain or leg pain, I have sciatica," and they'd be like, "No problem. [quietly] Poke."

Justin: [hisses] "Now what hurts most?"

Sydnee: [laughing] Poooke.

[audience laughs]

Justin: "Now what's the most painful thing on you?"

"Um... my ear?"

"Hey, we did it!"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So, in the 1800s it became sort of popular to use this for—specifically for sciatica, and then also for toothaches, for whatever reason. Toothaches were a very popular use. But again, these were real scattered.

It was really—it took about a hundred years of this kind of scattered use before the doctor who I think you could consider like, the father of modern auriculotherapy, Dr. Paul Nogier saw these healers in Southeast France using a type of auriculotherapy. He observed that a lot of people in the community had a very specific burn on the back of their ear, and he started asking like, "I've seen a lot of people with this burn. What's the deal?"

And it turned out that there were healers in the community who were burning a very specific part of the ear for back pain. And he was so intrigued by this that he took this information back and he studied it for like, six years, and he came out with the idea that the whole ear corresponds to the human body, and it's really easy. You can visualize this. If you wanna know what part of the ear to poke to fix different parts of your body, all you have to do... and he published this drawing, by the way. I wish I had this original journal with his published drawing. Of a human fetus, superimposed on an ear. So just think about the ear—

Justin: Think about the ear..

Sydnee: Picture a fetus.

Justin: Picture... a fetus.

Sydnee: You know, like upside down, like, head down, ready to go. Like, full term. You know, like, all curled up.

Justin: Like a fetus, folks! Come on!

Sydnee: You know!

[audience laughs]

Justin: Work with us.

Sydnee: All curled up, and then just kind of superimpose it on an ear and... you can kind of see it, right? Like it kind of..

Justin: Okay. I'm gonna look dead ahead. You can kind of indicate sort of where on my ear we're talking about.

Sydnee: This is gonna... oh, maybe this'll work. And turn it... There! Okay.

So like, the head would be here—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: —[laughs] and then you'd get like, the spine curling around here, and you got like, the butt—

Justin: Oh my God, my ASMR is like, going crazy right now.

[audience laughs]

Justin: This is gonna be the next 20 minutes of the show. I feel so pampered and cared for.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: You got the knees, like, folded up—

Justin: Personal attention ahoy!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: —the hand—the hands, for some reason, kinda go like this.

Justin: There's gotta be more, Sydnee! This is so chill!

Sydnee: But with this in mind, it would be as simple as like... let's see. There's the spine, so like, does your back hurt?

Justin: [pauses] Yes. You better keep going.

[audience laughs]

[pauses]

[audience laughs and claps]

Sydnee: How—[laughs] how does it feel now?

Justin: Be—worse.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: It was—so, I was about to say "better," and you let go. So now it's worse.

Sydnee: I'm sorry.

Justin: So, you know, that's kind of a bad thing to make up, 'cause normally you would need to go to school. Like, for reflexology it's all higgledy piggedly along the foot in different areas, but this is just very easy. Bottom of the ear? Baby head. Up here? The butt. At the top of your ear? The butt. It's eas—or feet. Butt or feet. It's easy. It's one chart. You don't need to go to school for that.

Sydnee: It was really—I looked up this picture. I had to see this for myself, 'cause I read the description of like, just this superimposed fetus on an ear, and I thought, "Well, it can't be that simple."

Because when he published this, people got really excited! Like, the medical community went, "Oh! Yes! Oh, this is excellent! I love this! This is so simple, it must be true!"

And if you look, it really is that simple! It's a picture of a fetus on an ear, and everybody went... "[serious tone] Bravo."

[audience laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Paul. Paul, you knocked it out of the park!" So, everybody found out about this, about auriculotherapy, and got really excited and thought, "You know, we need to figure out how this works." Because he didn't really—he didn't propose, necessarily, all of the mechanisms by which this was possible.

It was kind of like... "We've established this works. Now let's go back and come up with a reason why." Which isn't typically how we do things, but... so, everybody started trying to figure out, like, "Well..." a lot of the doctors who were studying it in Europe and the United States were saying, "We don't—we don't really have

that concept of the flow of energy, so that doesn't really fit into our medical paradigm, so we need to come up with some other reason."

So they started doing all these studies where they like—they biopsied parts of the ear to see like, are there secret structures that maybe we have in our ear that we don't know about?

Justin: Is it—were there?

Sydnee: No. Um—[laughs] they tried that. They tried measuring like, the electrical resistance of different parts of the ear. And this is—stuff like this has been done with acupuncture, in case you're interested. They're very similar kind of studies.

So they tried to measure the electrical resistance. Is there something different about certain parts of the ear that we don't understand? They tried to apply functional MRI. So they were like, "Okay. We're gonna put you in an MRI machine, and then we're gonna poke your ear. [laughs quietly] And we're gonna look for other parts of your body to light up." And then—

Justin: Just when you think MRIs couldn't be less fun.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Here comes ear poking.

Sydnee: And then they were like, "We'll try it the other way. We'll poke your foot [laughing] and see if your ear lights up."

Justin: "You know, like that Operation guy?"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, meanwhile, Dr. Nogier had his own kind of method that he was arguing. "I know it works. I still can't tell you why, but I have new evidence— [laughs quietly] as to how—as to the fact that it does work. I have new evidence to present."

So, he invented a method of testing auriculotherapy, which he also kind of – he didn't invent, but he rejuvenated – his method was called the Vascular Autonomic

Signal, or the VAS. And what this is is he would... poke your ear with one hand, and then take your pulse with the other, and he could sense very slight, subtle changes in your pulse [laughing] that no other doctors could detect.

Justin: Whoa. That's a pretty valuable skill.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And this was part of the problem, is he started doing this to people where he'd be like, "Watch. I'll show you that it works." And he'd grab their ear... give me your hand.

Justin: Oh my gosh.

Sydnee: And he'd feel their pulse, here. And he'd go, "Ah. The problem's in your butt!"

[pauses]

Sydnee: And—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Would you say that's accurate?

Justin: I mean—that's where—you're right, it is. Yes. Like all McElroy men, um—

[audience laughs]

Justin: —the problem does happen to be in my butt, Syd.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: Lotta planes lately.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: Lotta time zones.

Sydnee: Now—

Justin: Lotta booze!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Now, the thing that—

Justin: Not a lot of vegetables.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: That's your—that's your own problem, man. You have gotten like, no cookie points on this trip. None.

Justin: It's true.

Sydnee: None. So the problem—

Justin: I ate small—very small potatoes yesterday. Like, the red ones.

[pauses]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Is that anything? The very small—they were very small and they looked very rustic.

Sydnee: This is nothing. [laughs]

Justin: It seems like, at that level of rusticity, [laughing] there should be some vitamins involved.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Was my instinct upon—I got three of 'em and I thought, "There's certainly some vitamins in here."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: You—you say this, and I'm a doctor, and then people hold me accountable, because these are your ideas about nutrition! [laughs] It's not fair!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I give him green things! I show him where they are!

Justin: The cheese ravioli was bad.

[pauses]

[audience laughs]

Justin: I knew that. I'm just saying, I knew that.

Sydnee: [inhales] Okay. Back t—[laughs quietly] back to this—back to this pulse—

Justin: There was a sauce, a cheese sauce for it, and you know what I said? It was so good, you know what I said? To the other people there?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm?

Justin: I was like... uh, I was like, "Hey, Roman Mars, this sauce is so good, it's besamelting my heart!"

[audience laughs]

Justin: It's what I said to him. And he was like—

Sydnee: What did—what did he say to you?

Justin: "—as somebody who is an expert in the built world, I want you to know that was the finest joke ever built. [quietly] I... want you tell you you're the..."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "... [softly] new king of podcasts."

[audience laughs]

Justin: "[softly] And... you're such an inspiration to me, because of the great joke about cheese sauce. It reminds me of how elevators. You know?"

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: "How they do their thing? Did you ever stop to think about that? Because I know the names of everybody that made up elevators."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "Let me tell you them." R—uh, Roman is a partner. We work on a podcast called Smart Stuff.

[audience cheers]

Justin: So, he doesn't—we go back and forth like this. He knows—he's a catbird with a wire tail, folks. He doesn't mind this at all.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: He loves a good-natured ribbing, about the built world.

Sydnee: Do you wanna hear about this auriculotherapy some more?

Justin: Yeah yeah yeah, I'd love to.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: I just got... yeah, a little bit of a tangent, huh? Sorry about that.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] You went on another podcast, I think.

[audience laughs]

Justin: It's—I mean, it's PodCon. It's gonna happen, I think. If it's gonna happen somewhere—

Sydnee: Podcasts—

Justin: Podcasts—

Sydnee: —in podcasts.

Justin: The layers between the realities are very thin.

[theme music plays]

Justin: Hey, everybody. I hope you're enjoying this very special episode of Sawbones as much as we enjoyed recording it, but I'm here to interrupt myself and my wife for a moment to tell you about a couple sponsors.

First up this week is Blue Apron. If you wanna switch up your cooking routine, check out Blue Apron. It offers a variety of meals, like kid-approved, family plans, vegetarian plans, and a new—brand new, pardon me—WW freestyle plan. That's Weight Watchers re-imagined.

If you have wanted to cook a little bit more, it can be kind of daunting because you have to go to the store, and you have to get all the right ingredients, and you always have stuff leftover and so there's waste. Blue Apron gets rid of all that. It's gonna deliver delicious meals right to your door.

You get to choose the ones that you want and don't want, and they've got delicious stuff. Um, had some great ones this month, like pork chorizo burgers and roasted potatoes, spicy soy-glazed chicken thighs... they started putting pictures into the copy, and I'm so hungry. They look, like, very, very good. I'm having a Blue Apron tonight, though, so I have that to look forward to.

You can check out this week's menu and get \$60 off! \$60, folks. That's at Blueapron.com/sawbones. Blueapron.com/sawbones. Blue Apron: it's a better way to cook.

We also want to tell you about Squarespace. You have a great idea. What are you gonna do with it now? Are you gonna print fliers? I don't think so. Fliers are like an internet that only people in the immediate vicinity can benefit from. Uh, you're gonna put it on the World Wide Web... even though no one calls it that anymore, and who's gonna help you do it? Why, it's Squarespace! They're gonna help you

turn that cool idea into a new website, help you publish content, even sell stuff based on your great idea!

They got amazing templates that are created by world-class designers, and everything is optimized for mobile, which is, I don't have to tell you, a lot of people on the internet on their phones. You ever go to a website that doesn't work very good on your phone? Squarespace is gonna handle that for you. It's optimized for mobile right out of the box. Plus, they got free and secure hosting. So, head on over to [Squarespace.com/sawbones](https://www.squarespace.com/sawbones) for a free trial, and when you're ready to launch, use the offer code "sawbones" to save 10% off your first purchase of a website or a domain.

Folks, that's gonna do it for us. Thanks so much for listening, and we'll be back with you again next week! But for now, back to the show.

Sydnee: So he—so he started proposing this way of testing whether or not this works, indicated by the radial pulse. And the problem with it is that it was—as he told people, "This is an incredibly difficult technique to master. You have to practice for years and years and years and... some people can never master it," so it was incredibly difficult to learn, and it was also really difficult to teach, because you're like, "Here. Feel. Do you feel it? No? [clicks tongue] Feel again. Do you feel it? No? Feel again." [laughs] "I don't know. It's there." [laughs]

Justin: "I don't know what to tell ya."

Sydnee: And so, this was his argument: all these other researchers who did all those other experiments that I mentioned just kinda said, "We don't really find anything. Like, we don't—we didn't see anything new, any new structures that like, carry secret pathways of energy or anything that—we couldn't find anything physical. We, you know, did the functional MRI thing and it just like—stuff just lit up all over the place. Nothing connected to anything, nothing was consistent, nothing could be reproduced. We did—" They did do the thing where they measure the electrical resistance on different parts of the skin to see like, is there a difference between one of the pressure points, one of the points that correspond to a body part, and then just like, a random place?

And there was a difference, but like, it wasn't consistent. It was like, "Well, that is stronger, but so is that one, and that's not a point, and that one has nothing. But that one has nothing too, and it's nothing—" it was just—nothing was consistent.

But they did note that like, you know, some parts do have more electrical resistance than others. What could this mean? And Nogier came back with the argument that like, "We haven't discovered all of the points yet." [snorts]

Justin: Ah, there's more points.

Sydnee: "There are secret points, there are satellite points, there are emerging points, that are as-of-yet not fully matured as points. So, there might be 2000. We don't know. You can't test this."

[audience laughs]

Justin: That's a weird... if you believe in either God and Jesus or evolution, both make that a buck wild thing to be there.

[audience laughs]

Justin: That is like, such—I don't care where you fall on the spectrum. Whatever you think made the things, I very much doubt it's like, "And finally, there's 2000 buttons in the ear that do a wide variety of wild things, and I'm curious if they'll find it, because it is really good, but there are a lot [wheezes] of them folks! It's like the Wonkavator up there."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] The only study that supported it at all, is they—somehow, they tried it on rabbits to see if like, they could measure if they could help the rabbits—

Justin: Those ears are huge! That's 4000 points!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: If they could poke its ear and make it like—make it feel good... somehow... and I was reading this, and I kept reading this study and like, looking at what they did and going [getting steadily more incredulous] What? How? What? Where?" Like, I couldn't even figure—but at the end of it they were like, "I don't know. The rabbits seemed to like it when we poked their ears! Maybe he's on to something!"

So that was the only study that was kind of like, supportive. Like, "Well... we did that to those bunnies."

Justin: Rabbits are just stoked to have your attention. In a way that doesn't involve pulling them out of hats.

Sydnee: [laughs] They're just trying to make the rabbits feel really good!
[laughs]

Justin: "Just chill out, rabbit."

Sydnee: So! After all of the—after this publication and all of these studies, and then this one rabbit study that was sort of like, "I don't know. Maybe. We don't know." People got really interested, and started using these ideas and kind of expanding on them. And I always love when I see these kind of pseudoscience-y concepts then get taken to the next level, and the next level, because they don't really have a—they're on shaky ground to begin with, and then the house of cards that gets built upon them...

So, anyway, part of Nogier's work was the idea that the body is responsive to seven frequencies. And these frequencies can change the function of your body, because they're like vibrations, and we're mostly water, so water... vibrates.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So it's that simple. You just have to know the right frequency to fix a different part of your body, and the easiest way to do this, as we'll get to, is to apply that frequency to the ear. So you just like, vibrate the ear at a certain frequency... [laughs quietly] at the place where the problem is. And like—an example is, Frequency A helps with wound healing. So, if you vibrate the ear at the... I don't know, at the shoulder, at Frequency A, then you could fix a cut on your shoulder.

[pauses]

Justin: No.

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Wait, wait, wait. "[high pitched] Be-be-beep!" False. False.

Sydnee: It's important to remember Frequency A, 'cause it also helps with tumors.

Justin: Uh-huh!

Sydnee: So either.

Justin: I bet it doesn't, though!

[audience laughs]

Justin: Now, this is all very legitimate, right? We're all vibrations. We're all energy. The secret tells us that—it's—folks, it's just—sit down. It's the law of attraction, okay? Hold on. [leans away from mic] I have a whiteboard here.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: [clears throat] [loudly] What you want—the Secret is—what is the Sec—lemme go back.

[audience laughs]

Justin: That's the secret, folks. Law of attraction, vibrated into the world, cure the tumor in your shoulder. Ask the universe to heal you. That's what I'm saying.

[scattered whoops and applause]

Justin: Vibration.

Sydnee: [laughing disbelievingly] Is that what The Secret is about?

Justin: That, in short, is The Secret. Um, law of attraction, like attracts like. Vibration. It's energy.

Sydnee: So—

Justin: [loudly] It's not McDonald's, folks! You can't just go up to the universe and say, "Hi, I wanna cheeseburger!" You have to tell the universe you're hungry, and the universe will feed you cheeseburgers.

[pauses]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: You're gonna attract what you're a vibrational match for, Syd.

Sydnee: Okay. Universe: please do not feed my husband any more cheeseburgers.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Please feed him some vegetables!

Justin: Doesn't work like that.

Sydnee: He needs the roughage!

[audience laughs]

Justin: The—the univer—the universe is not a gift registry, Sydnee! You can't order up vibrations for me! It's very personal.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So... so, like I said, there was Frequency A. Some more examples, Frequency D is really good for stress, so if you're stressed... which I guess that wouldn't be like, a body—like, maybe the whole ear. Just vibrate your entire ear at Frequency D, and then you'll feel less stressed.

G is the universal frequency, which I found very convenient, that you could use it for anything. It also made me wonder why the other frequencies exist—

Justin: Yeah, why waste the time?

Sydnee: —'cause you'd just use this one. And then specifically F is really good for dogs.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know what—I was like "For what for dogs?"

"Anything. Anything for dogs."

Just... vibrate a dog's ear at the frequency of F.

Justin: Vibrate your dog.

Sydnee: I'm assuming not like this. And they're fine!

[pauses]

Justin: Fixed my dog.

Sydnee: So. [laughs] And by the way, you may be wondering, "Are there products that I could purchase to help me in these efforts?"

Justin: Certainly not!

Sydnee: Of course there are! There are like, pressure feelers, and collar filters—

Justin: [laughs] Wait, what?! What's it called?

Sydnee: —and auriculotherapy point detectors—

Justin: Nice.

Sydnee: —all these different ways of like, looking at the ear and like, finding like, "There's—I see—the point is here, and there's the problem," and then there's ways for treatment, too! And they're mainly like, electrical devices that you're like, "Okay, here. Vibrate." [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "Or electrocute! Here." [laughs]

Justin: "Agh!"

Sydnee: "Shock."

Justin: Don't do that, physicians!

Sydnee: No.

Justin: American physicians, come on!

Sydnee: Some of these are hundreds of dollars.

Justin: [laughing] Of course. What? They're gonna cut you a deal? On curing your tumors?!

Sydnee: What the most—my favorite application of these frequencies, though, because this is one thing—so I'm gonna vibrate your ear. Okay. The best, for me, was a Dr. Emoto who took these frequencies that Nogier had discovered, and he started using them to vibrate water. And then he observed the water to see what kind of crystals were forming as he vibrated the water at different frequencies, and then in response to different things, like music and phrases and—

Justin: I thought you were gonna say Frasier.

Sydnee: No—[laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Maybe Frasier, I don't know. But he started sending these vibrations into samples of water, and like, arguing that if you send a sample of water some sort of like, loving message, if you like, look at the water and say, "Love and gratitude." And then freeze it, then you'll form all these beautiful, snowflake-like, lovely patterns of water, of ice. And that if you—he found the same thing when he played [laughing] Amazing Grace to the cup of water.

Justin: So if you hold up a cup of water and you're like, "[singing softly] Hey, baby, I hear the blues calling—"

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: "[singing softly]—tossed salad and scrambled eggs," you're gonna get like, a very—

Sydnee: And then freeze it, and you're gonna see beautiful crystal structures.

Justin: [crosstalk] Distinguished, urbane, witty structures and crystals.

Sydnee: Uh, he argued that, on the other hand, if you—[laughs] if you say mean things to the water, if you look at the water and you're like, "[angrily] I hate you, water."

[audience laughs]

Justin: "[angrily, through gritted teeth] Hey, baby, I hear the blues a'callin'! Tossed salad and scrambled eggs!"

Sydnee: [laughs] He specifically said heavy metal music is really bad for water.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And that it would create these—as they were described, like, demonic images. [laughs] When you play heavy metal music at water and then freeze it, it's very scary looking. It was the same as if you look at water and yell, "You fool!"

[audience laughs loudly]

Sydnee: "You fool!"

[audience laughs and applauds]

Justin: [laughs] Do it again!

Sydnee: But I just love—I like—[laughing] You have to picture, like, these scientists in like, lab coats—[laughs] and they're in a lab—like, you walk in, you're like, touring a research facility, and there's just one doctor who's standing there with a cup of water—"You fool! You fool! Freeze it, freeze it!"

[audience laughs]

Justin: "Freeze it. That's good. I put a lotta stink in that one."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So—[laughs]

Justin: That sounds like nothing. I've heard—we've heard a lot of things that sound like nothing. Staring at crystals that have been... scolded—

Sydnee: [snorts]

[audience laughs]

Justin: —and trying to find devil faces, that sounds like more nothing than usual.

Sydnee: Now, from this—'cause that was like... okay, so we have decided that water responds to vibrations by forming pictures, I guess by communicating with us, like, "[softly] Don't yell at me! [laughs] Here's a demon face!"

What—what do we do with this, in terms of medicine? I have to imagine at some point somebody went, "... And?"

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, the idea is that if you then apply any of these pleasant frequencies, either the Nogier frequencies or this positive music or whatever to the water, that the water will hold the memory... of the vibration... and then you can drink the water... and it will heal you.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And what's—what's wild—

[audience laughs loudly]

Sydnee: —what's wild is that I read this—

Justin: Don't say it works. I will quit the show.

Sydnee: No, no.

Justin: Don't say it works, I'll quit.

Sydnee: No, it doesn't work. No. But I read this and I thought, "I've heard this before." And then I remembered, I was on my way back from a medical conference when I was a student, and I was riding in like, the hotel shuttle back to the airport, and my friend and I, also a medical student—this guy said, "[deep voice] So, what've you ladies been doin' in the city?"

And we were like, "We were at a medical conference."

And he was like, "[loudly and deliberately] Oh. Let me tell you about vibrational water."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And the entire way to the airport, this guy told me about how he cured himself, of something, by placing vibrational water under his tongue!

Justin: And you were trapped in the car when he was—

Sydnee: The entire way. And like—

Justin: This is—this is your origin story, I feel like.

[audience laughs]

Justin: This is like, at the end of it you had just, like—your almost lifeless body fell out of the back, and you had to be rescued by monks [laughing] that took you to medical school and brought you back to health.

Sydnee: It was—I still remember it, because I remember I was just thinking like, "Just be nice. Just be nice. Be pleasant. Oh, hm! Okay. Hm! That's interesting, yeah!" It was all the like, "You'll never learn this in school. [laugh quietly] Listen to me, those crooks won't teach you this stuff!"

And I remember at one point saying, "So do you make it, or do you have to... buy it?"

And he said, "Oh, you can't make this. You can't—I don't have that kind of technology."

Which like, wouldn't just take like, a tuning fork, and like a cup? I mean—anyway. "I don't have that technology. I have to purchase it. It's worth every penny."

And all I thought was, "Ugh... Ugh... you poor guy! How much water—how much money—" and he was showing me—it was a bottle, like a little teeny—with a dropper. So this is still a—this is still a thing. I just thought this was interesting. This is still a thing.

Justin: Did it—if that happened to you now, would you like, say something?

Sydnee: Uh, yeah. Yeah. [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean, I was still in medical school. I was terrified, and I was just thinking like, "Please get me to the airport. [laughs] Please just let me get to the airport."

The only other concept that I thought worth mentioning that was born of auriculotherapy and Dr. Nogier's teachings was the idea... and this was based on that pulse thing that I mentioned... that you could also detect food allergies this way, and that there were a lot of people who have secret food allergies that don't know about it, which, to be fair, you could have food insensitivities you don't know about. That's not like, a wild belief. A lot of people do.

But his theory was that most disease is probably related to a secret food allergy that you don't know about—

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: —because you eat the food, and you don't get the symptoms for several months, so there's no way you could ever connect the two, which would be very difficult, [laughing] were that the case.

Justin: [laughs] That logical leap is sound, yes. That would be challenging.

Sydnee: That would be incredibly challenging. So, his theory was that what you could do is take a little ring, to which you have applied some like, mused... I don't know, cantaloupe or whatever? [laughs] Whatever you think they're—whatever you think they're allergic to, and you just put it on 'em somewhere, put it on their skin, and then feel their pulse!

Justin: Easy!

Sydnee: And again, he's the only one that could do this Radial Artery Food Testing, or RAFT. He's the only one who could do it, so good luck. But, I think this is still practiced today by some, who will just put a bunch of little rings on you and then feel your pulse and be like "[bored tone] No. No. [clicks tongue] Cheeseburgers. There's the problem."

Justin: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "[laughing] Cheeseburgers are your problem!" What is this used for today—auriculotherapy is still practiced. A lot of times it overlaps with ear acupuncture, but it's also just practiced on its own. Like, burning the ear, cauterizing the ear, putting pressure on the ear, anything like—applying—I found some that apply like, colored lights to the ear.

[pauses]

Justin: Good, good.

Sydnee: It's like, they—we don't work that way. [laughs] We can't—I can't shine some colorful lights on you fix thi—I mean, come on. But there's a lot of different ways that people are practicing it. As to what they say that it treats: everything. I mean, a—any—your entire body is mapped on the ear, so anything in the body can be treated by the ear!

Specifically they'll talk about pain. It's very commonly advertised for pain. It's a very commonly advertised alternative way to quit smoking. A lot of times they'll tell you they can help you quit smoking by doing this to you.

Justin: Presumably your ears are in such discomfort that you just don't feel like it.

Sydnee: [laughs] Afterwards you're like, "Fine! Okay!"

Justin: "Ow!"

Sydnee: "Please quit burning my ear!"

Justin: They take the cigarette from you and just stick it in your ear.

[audience laughs]

Justin: "There, you're cured!"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They do—

Justin: Every time you light u—[wheezes]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They, uh—

Justin: It would work. I mean, it would work. It would work. Not for why you're saying, but it would work.

Sydnee: You'll also find it advertised for things like—any kind of like, stomach stuff, like diarrhea and constipation, it's a really commonly advertised thing for. And any kind—any sort of psychiatric problem, like depression, anxiety, anything like that. They'll be like, "We gotcha. Lemme just—"

Justin: "No problem. Just poke your ear."

Sydnee: The... I don't remember! I guess it would be the brain part.

[pauses]

Sydnee: Did I fix your anxiety?

Justin: I mean, for the moment.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I'll just do the rest of the show like this. [laughs quietly]

Justin: Perfect!

Sydnee: Uh, it is very... aw.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I'll—I'll squeeze your ear later when we're alone.

[audience cheers and applauds]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Ugh. Great. Yikes! Hugely displeas—displeasing. Hugely unpleasant.

Sydnee: The—the one question that I really had is that I have seen a lot of people get the piercings in their ear, 'cause this is where this comes from. If you've seen people get piercings specific places in their ear for migraines, this—this acupuncture of the ear and auriculotherapy and all this, this is all derived from that same kind of body of knowledge.

And so I was reading about that, 'cause I've seen people specifically get... this is the tragus, right here. [leans away from mic] The little part of your ear that kind of covers—you can use it to kind of like, cover your ear. Or like, the Daith, which is like, right up above it.

You can get those pierced, and people say that it—it relieves migraine. Um, I've looked into it, and it's like most of the things. I can find a lot of anecdotes for you. I can find some like, case reports that have actually been published, like in the medical literature, "Here's a patient I had," they did this, their migraines decreased in frequency by this much.

But for the most part, even the doctors who will tell you it's worth trying—'cause there are doctors out there who say, "Look, I have no evidence for it. I'm not

saying it works, but maybe so you can try it," 'cause migraine's a terrible thing to have. If you have migraines, they're terrible.

And even those doctors who say that actually recommend ear acupuncture over the piercing, because what they say is, "Listen. If you're gonna do this, the acupuncture works by the same principle, and you don't leave something there forever that could get infected, so..." so even the piercings really—even the doctors who say like, "Do 'em, you should probably use the acupuncture."

But that was it. As far as like, practical applications... I mean, I like... I guess maybe an ear massage would be good? Could be nice?

Justin: You know, Sydnee, I actually think—I know of one thing that you can poke in the ear that'll always make the patient feel better.

[pauses]

It's podcasting.

[audience laughs and cheers]

Justin: Thank you, Podcast Convention, for having us here to discuss this topic. Thank you for all your support over the years of Sawbones. We have a book. It's called The Sawbones book, and you can find it wherever fine books are sold—

Sydnee: It took us a long time to come up with that title. [laughs]

Justin: Yeah. Uh, yeah. And thank you to Podcast Convention for having us here—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: —as part of their podcast convention. Thank you for listening, make sure you stick around. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of our song Medicines as the intro and outro of our program. And most of all, of course, as always, thanks to you for listening. We will be with you again next week.

So until then, my name is Justin McElroy!

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy!

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head!

[audience cheers and applauds]

[theme music plays]

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