

Sawbones 241: Perkins' Tractors

Published August 28th, 2018

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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]

Justin: Hello everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*: a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, [Oprah impression, allegedly] Justin McElroyyy!

Sydnee: And I'm... Sydnee... McElroy.

Justin: Thank you to Oprah for coming by to introduce me, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: Do you really think if Oprah actually came by to introduce one of us it would be you?

Justin: Uhh, that's fair. Yeah... of our life choices, I think Oprah would support yours more. If we're being honest.

Sydnee: Well, I'm not saying she would be against either of our life choices. I'm just saying, if she could only introduce one of us...

Justin: Oprah, choose your favorite! Tweet now, Oprah.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: And vote.

Sydnee: Oprah, who is definitely listening... to our podcast. Every week.

Justin: Only one vote in this poll will be accepted, and it's Oprah's. [through laughter] If you're not Oprah, don't waste your time.

So, uh... we are going to continue our combo.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Uh, our.. three? Is this three in a row?

Sydnee: Is it?

Justin: Yes, it is!

Sydnee: Yes, yes it is. It is.

Justin: 'Cause we went from, uh...

Sydnee: I think I'm killing it next week, but that's okay. We'll celebrate this.

Justin: C—CBD oil, to placebo effect, to Perkins' Tractors.

Sydnee: That's right. I kind of referenced this in our last episode on placebo effect that there was a—one of the more influential, um, experiments that was done to kind of illustrate the placebo effect was in reference to these things called Perkins' Tractors, which I didn't know much about.

Justin: Now, I know—I know about this one.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: I remember these ads from when I was a kid.

Sydnee: Oh boy.

Justin: "[either a twangy southern accent or a Kermit the Frog impression] Hi everybody, this is Dan Perkins' of Perkins' Tractors. I wanna encourage you to come on in this weekend. We got a big Labor Day Sale kickin' off, just wanna remind you, the price is gonna go up and the kids are gonna grow up, so make sure you get on down to Perkins' Tractors and get yourself one of these fiiiine machines! We got 0% financing—*no* such thing as bad credit here at Perkins' Tractors. Come on down, get one of these bad boys and start tractin'... today!"

Sydnee: Is that what you do with tractors?

Justin: "[country Kermit] Today!"

Sydnee: Tractin'?

Justin: [snorts] "[country Kermit] Today!" He was arrested shortly after. He—
[through laughter] he did not—

Sydnee: I love you for your farming skills, man.

Justin: Yeah. That's—yeah.

Sydnee: Tracting? That's not the kind of tractor I'm talking about.

Justin: Alright.

Sydnee: Uh, nor is Dan Perkin—Dan Perkins? Is that who it was?

Justin: It was Dan. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Dan? No—

Justin: I—you didn't see those ads?!

Sydnee: Mm-mm, no.

Justin: He used to be on after Ballard's? Remember Ballard's, though?

Both: [singing softly] B-A-double L-A-R-D-S, it's true!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: [singing softly] We're the best in the test, our prices are the rest!
Ballard's brings the best!

Both: [singing softly] Do you—

Sydnee: Yeah. Nobody outside this area will know that, right?

Justin: It—Google, uh—

Sydnee: I think it was a locally owned—

Justin: Google that on YouTube. [holding back laughter] Ballard's animated intro.

Sydnee: Or don't. Or just listen to our podcast. Which is definitely gonna continue at some point.

Justin: [simultaneously] Yeah, no, check it out. It is a cute—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —just cute dancing pigs. Sorry. I'm not gonna de-tract... from what you're doing anymore.

Sydnee: Now—

Justin: [inhales loudly] [distantly] Kaboom!

Sydnee: [through laughter] Now we're into puns. This is really—

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: —should we just start over now, or..

Justin: No, we're not starting over!

Sydnee: Okay, good.

Justin: We're gonna keep on tracting'.

Sydnee: Good. [holding back laughter] Okay.

Justin: [wheezes] I don't mean to be—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Okay, well this is—

Justin: —listen, I don't wanna be intractable, but I refuse—[wheezes] [through laughter] to stop.

Sydnee: I just can't get any traction with this topic.

Justin: There we go!

Sydnee: So we're not talking about Dan... Perkins. We're talking about Elisha Perkins.

Justin: I'll retract what I said earlier about Dan Perkins.

Sydnee: Born in 1741 in Connecticut—

Justin: That's a beautiful tract of land right there. Connecticut?

Sydnee: Okay. Uh-huh. Okay. He was trained in medicine by his father, also Dr. Perkins.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Uh, respected physician of the time, of the era of the region. And, um, he initially started practicing—I mean, the typical medicine of the day. I'm not gonna say... legitimate, high-quality medicine, because that was hard to come by.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: In the early 1800s.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: However, it was the accepted medical practice of the day, right? It was legitimate as it got back then.

Justin: Fair enough!

Sydnee: He had an interest in teaching, and he had a huge practice and he started contributing to the local academy, and he was making a name for himself, doing—doing daddy Dr. Perkins proud.

Justin: Alright.

Sydnee: Okay? That was how he started out. Uh, his patients were very high profile. He took care of several members of Congress.

Justin: Hmm!

Sydnee: But Dr. Perkins the younger was not satisfied with mere... goodness. He sought greatness. And in this time, in order to be considered a really great physician, you had to do something more than just, like, take really good care of the people where you practice. You had to... make something. You know? Find a cure. Create a new treatment.

Justin: Pro—progress.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Was the metric of success.

Sydnee: Exactly. Make a device. Do something. Something that you could name after yourself and that would leave—leave its mark on the rest of medical history, so that someday... [holding back laughter] Dr. Sydnee McElroy could make a podcast about it.

Justin: [laughs] Beautiful.

Sydnee: Uh, he based his—his invention on some observations that he made during a surgical procedure. He noticed that when he touched muscle fibers with metal instruments that they seemed to contract. Like, the muscle twitched when he touched it with the metal instruments.

And he started to repeat this with wooden substances and other materials and things—cloth, whatever—and it didn't seem to react the same way. So he began to theorize that there was something in the metal that had an effect on the human body that wasn't present in other substance. That metal had this, like, unique influence on our body.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Right? Because he observed that. He paired this with an observation he made during a tooth extraction that—and I find this observation unlikely. However, this is his recorded finding that he based his future experiments upon. That when he separated the gum... from the tooth—

Justin: [squeamish noises]

Sydnee: —using a metal scalpel—

Justin: Ahh!

Sydnee: —the pain seemed to go away.

Justin: Bullcrap. [wheezes]

Sydnee: I have to assume that the patient passed out at this point.

Justin: Yeah, they went into shock. [wheezes] So they—

Sydnee: And so this is why...

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... they weren't reporting pain. Whatever the situation was, he thought that something in the metal blade, some—some property that is intrinsic to the metal completely eliminated the pain that the patients should've been feeling during the procedure.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, um—and finally, he had an observation that if he took a metal instrument and just placed it—he was about to remove a tumor, which at the time, "tumor" would've been used for any kind of growth, or anything underneath the skin that you couldn't tell what it was.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, who knows [crosstalk]—

Justin: Fatty deposit or skin tag.

Sydnee: Yeah, some sort of mass under the skin he was removing. And he just—and it was inflamed. This was an enlarged, inflamed mass. And he just laid the scalpel blade on top of it, and the patient claimed all the pain vanished from just laying the metal blade on top of it, even before he actually excised the tumor, and that somehow just even touching the metal to the skin made the pain go away.

So from all this, from these observations, true or not, he created an instrument.

He tried various kinds of metal. Um, he tried to, you know, make, like, different compounds and apply them to painful places on patients—

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: —the weird... Dr. Seuss thing that we're doing here.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Uh, and—and to see, like, what—what would relieve the pain better, which compound was the best, what kind of metal. And eventually he arrived at a specific alloy that he found most effective.

So he had these metal prongs, and he would lay them on people, and he claimed that they could relieve pain. And in 1795 he took all these findings and his new instrument and he presented it to the Connecticut Medical Society and said, "Look at what I have created! It's metal that makes your pain go away. It's metal that can heal you."

Everybody was kind of confused. A lot of them were quite skeptical, and a few of them were completely outraged and, you know, immediately decried this—this invention.

Uh, it sounded a lot like animal magnetism, which we've done a show about before.

Justin: Yeah. And that one was real, right?

Sydnee: No. It wasn't.

Justin: No. That one was not.

Sydnee: At all. And this—this seemed to echo that. And at this point, everybody kind of had decided that animal magnetism was fake, and so since this was sort of similar to that concept, a lot of doctors were very—kind of scandalized by its presentation. Like, "Uhh, now Dr. Perkins, we kinda thought you were a real... like, a *real* one. Like, an *actual* doctor, and now it seems like kind of you're into this fake stuff, and now we're all a little outraged."

But the overall opinion—and this is—I think this is very typical for doctors. When you hear about somebody doing—like, they say something and you think, "That seems completely outrageous and I think you're full of it."

Instead of saying that to their colleague they said, "We think we need some more evidence of this, Dr. Perkins. So why don't you go back to Connecticut—" well, he's in Connecticut. "Go be back to your home and work on it some more and bring us some more results, and let us know when you figured some more out."

Justin: You're joking, but that's probably the healthiest place for you to be, right? You don't wanna dismiss new stuff out of hand, but you also don't wanna immediately accept things without proper proof, right?

Sydnee: I think generally speaking that's probably the best place to be. I think if a guy comes to you with a piece of metal and says, "If I lay it on your tumor your pain goes away..." I'd be a little suspicious!

Justin: Well... people were probably very suspicious, uh, the first time someone told them that a tiny droplet of an herb in a thousand percent solution of water could cure their arthritis, and then look where we are now.

Sydnee: It doesn't.

Justin: It doesn't.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Uh, Dr. Perkins—I don't know what his mood was at this point in history. I don't have evidence to tell me how he felt about his presentation to the Connecticut Medical Society. But I do know what he did, and what he did was say, "Well, screw those guys. I need to make some cash."

Justin: "Yeah. I need to get paid."

Sydnee: So, on February 19th—

Justin: "Get it on Kickstarter."

Sydnee: —[laughs quietly] On February 19th, 1796, he patented what from henceforth will be known as Perkins' Tractors. They were two three-inch metal rods with a point at the end—like, rounded at one end and pointy at the other—

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: —uh, he claimed that they were made of some unusual metal alloys that were very specialized and secretive and he couldn't tell you everything, "But trust me, they're the best—they're the best metals that have unique healing properties."

Uh, they were probably actually just brass and steel.

Justin: Perfect. [laughs]

Sydnee: And once he—

Justin: But they'll never know. It's been lost to history, because they're so secretive.

Sydnee: —once he patented them so that nobody else could steal this... *really* A+ idea, he began using them to, as he put it, "Draw off the noxious electrical fluid that lay at the root of suffering."

Justin: Perfect!

Sydnee: So basically any pain that you had, he felt he could remove the essence of the pain from your body by simply placing these metal tractors on your skin and—and sometimes moving them in certain patterns. Sometimes you had to actually move them around, but please know, they're not doing anything to you. He's not cutting anything out, he's not stimulating your skin in any special way with them. He's just—

Justin: Just kinda—

Sydnee: —they're just—he's just putting them on you, and maybe moving them about a bit—

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: —and—[laughs quietly]

Justin: Calling it a day.

Sydnee: —with that, he could cure...

Justin: Can I ask you a question?

Sydnee: Hmm?

Justin: Uh, was this a—a home treatment that you could, like, buy one of these things and do it yourself? Or is you had to go get the treatment from, like, a licensed professional?

Sydnee: Initially you had to go get the treatment from a licensed professional, but then he started selling them for about \$25 a pair.

Justin: You know how they sell the—

Sydnee: Pretty pricey for 1796.

Justin: Yeah, no kidding. You know how they sell the Lasik machines because they were like, "Well, anybody can do this. This is actually fine. We'll just sell you the machine. I don't know why you're even coming in."

This is kind of like that.

Sydnee: Sure!

Justin: This is like, "We'll just sell you this highly sophisticated medical thing, because... it's real, and you should be able to handle it!"

Sydnee: "You can do it yourself!"

Justin: "You can do it yourself!"

Sydnee: "For... only \$25. A pair."

So—so he began selling these, and he said that they could treat any pain complaint, including—these are just some of the things that you could get treated with your Perkins' tractors—rheumatism, gout, eye inflammation, erysipelas, pleurisy, tetters, seizures, lockjaw, bruises, sprains, tumors, burns, headaches, toothaches, earaches, backaches, arm pain, leg pain, breast pain, side pain, and... skin conditions.

Justin: Can somebody please stitch together all of those that Sydnee has ever done and just make one huge, like—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "—This can—this can treat—" and then it goes on for four minutes?

Sydnee: And then we just need to make up a medication and start selling and we'll be billionaires.

Justin: Cures-are-all—

Sydnee: Quickly.

Justin: Here, I'll give you some audio for the beginning. [laughs quietly] "Cures-are-all—[laughs quietly] is a real medicine, and it can treat—" and then we'll just list all—

Sydnee: We'll just do those.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, by the way, I didn't know what tetterers were.

Justin: What is tetterers?

Sydnee: Tetterers—I looked this up.

Justin: Sounds like an old-timey name for a real thing that we don't use anymore like, uhh—like how people call it their nerves, you know? When you—

Sydnee: Yeah, although people definitely still use "nerves."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But yeah, I think it—I've never heard it used in common practice, but it's, like, a colloquial term for any—any skin condition that has vesicles. Like, little, uh, fluid filled blisters, and is itchy, and is red. So it could be, like, eczema or ringworm or psoriasis. So, anyway—just in case you're curious. I didn't know what tetterers was. I had to look it up.

So with his device safely patented, Perkins began touring the country to market it and sell it before, I guess, the Connecticut Medical Society or anybody else could stop him?

Justin: Yeah! Stay one step ahead of the law. That—like all great medicine!

Sydnee: So he started out in Philadelphia, where Congress happened to be meeting at the time, and it went over—uh, it was great in Philadelphia.

Justin: Oh, they're wild for it there.

Sydnee: Philly loved it, yes. Uh, he sold the patent to make it in Philadelphia. I'm guessing, like, you could sell the patent to different places to, like, make it there?

Justin: If you're doing something, uh, in this time period, it sounds like you can do whatever the heck you want.

Sydnee: Yeah, I think you can anything. It was the board of the alms house. He sold it to them so they could begin making the tractors and selling them there in Philadelphia, and he began to treat members of Congress with it. That's a great way to raise the profile of your fake medical device, right?

Uh, they were crazy about it. Even George Washington bought a pair of Perkins' metal tractors.

Justin: Wow!

Sydnee: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So did, uh, the Supreme Court Justice, Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth. Bought some and then wrote a letter of introduction for him to John Marshall, saying, "Listen. Perkins is an A-Okay dude, and his tractors are great, and you should tell all your friends and family about it, and..."

He doesn't say, like, "Don't give him any trouble." It's just, like, a, "This is fine. Trust me, this is fine," kind of letter.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Which I don't know—I mean, like, a letter of introduction—you don't do a lot of that anymore. It's like an outdated—you know what I mean?

Justin: I—yeah. Uh, also to explain why I was so excited, John Marshall obviously, if you don't know, is the namesake of Marshall University, the alma mater of both the hosts of this program.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: Uh, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Uh, a statue?

Sydnee: And a statue.

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: Definitely a statue.

Justin: [laughs] He's a statue—

Sydnee: Most notably, a statue.

Justin: [through laughter] Most notably—known for his work as: a statue.

Sydnee: [laughs] On campus. Where Raleigh is right now.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Aww.

Justin: That has nothing to do with anything.

Sydnee: That has nothing to do with anything. Anyway, he wasn't satisfied with the US, though, Perkins. That's not enough. Why—why just sell something here when you could sell it other places too?

So he sent his son, Benjamin Perkins, Ben Perkins, who had just graduated from Yale, to get set up shop in London. In actually the former home of, uh, another famous doctor, John Hunter, and sell his tractors there.

Justin: His real tractors.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. So he would see patients in the morning there. Uh, Ben Perkins, now, the son. In—in this place in London. He set up shop and he would have people come in. He would see them. Definitely whatever was wrong with them would be treated with the tractors, of course.

Justin: Oh, good. You're in luck.

Sydnee: "I have these tractors, they treat that. Whatever that is.

Justin: "This is tractor friendly."

Sydnee: Then he would sell them tractors. And then he would go do home visits all afternoon and evening to sell more tractors. They were five guineas a pair.

Justin: Wow. So...

Sydnee: In London.

Justin: ... so that is... compared to the price—

Sydnee: I'm assuming that's, like—that would've been equivalent to the 25 US at the time?

Justin: I mean, I—you have to...

Sydnee: I don't know.

Justin: ... imagine. I mean, some—how much was a guinea? It was a—they don't use this coin anymore, so who knows? It's about a pound a shini—and a shilling. So about—wow! So, like, six—

Sydnee: Five pounds, five shillings.

Justin: —so, like—going by today's exchange right it's just, like, what? Like, 7.50?

Sydnee: Yeah?

Justin: Man. Y'all gettin' a deal!

Sydnee: Well, but who knows what the—what the exchange rate was—the pound to the dollar in—

Justin: I mean, yeah, maybe.

Sydnee: —post-Revolutionary War...

Justin: Yeah, that's,—that's fair. Yeah, who knows?

Sydnee: I don't—who knows? Anyway, that's not the purpose of this podcast.

So Benjamin Perkins selling his tractors, making a name for his father all over London, and he published—this is the thing—

Justin: Don't tweet at us, by the way, about that. I *don't* care.

Sydnee: I do!

Justin: Okay, tweet at Sydnee. [laughs]

Sydnee: Tweet at me. I think it's interesting. Uh, he then published—and this is the thing you need to know about Ben Perkins if you don't remember anything else. Dude can name a book.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: He is—if we—if we write another book, this is who we should go to for the title. I mean, he's not with us anymore, but if we could.

Justin: If we can channel him.

Sydnee: Yes. He published... *The Influence of Metallic Tractors on the Human Body in Removing Various Painful Inflammatory Diseases, Such As Rheumatism, Pleurisy, Some Gouty Affections, Etc, Etc, Lately Discovered by Dr. Perkins of North America and Demonstrated in a Series of Experiments and Observations by Professor Meigs, Woodward, Rogers, Etc, Etc, by Which the Importance of the Discovery is Fully Ascertained and a New Field of Inquiry Opened in the Modern*

Science of Galvanism, or Animal Electricity, by Benjamin Douglas Perkins, AM, Son of the Discoverer.

Justin: And it says here, "Based on the novel *Push* by Sapphire."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: It says that at the end.

Sydnee: [laughs] These are the best named books—there's more! Just wait, there's more.

Justin: There's more?

Sydnee: But first—

Justin: Oh, no!

Sydnee: Let's head to the billing department.

Justin: Aw, this one hurts! Okay, let's go.

[theme music plays]

Justin: Our first sponsor this week is Blue Apron. Aww, I had a good Blue Apron last night. If you don't know, it's a box full of ingredients and recipe cards, and you make the recipes on the cards, and they're delicious and they come out great, and you learn a lot about cooking and what have you.

Sydnee: They're quick, they're easy to follow.

Justin: Yeah, and they are delicious. Last night Sydnee made, uh—what was it? Like, a steak with ramen—

Sydnee: It was, like, an orange beef—

Justin: Orange beef with, uh, ramen. Aw, mmmama. It was so good. And, uh, tonight we're gonna have another Blue Apron. We get to eat—

Sydnee: I think I was gonna make the meatball one. The chicken meatball—

Justin: Oooh!

Sydnee: There's capers on it.

Justin: They're great. They're well-balanced meals. They are delicious. You learn about cooking. They're just—they're great! I just can't say enough about Blue Apron. Uh, this month they have cool partnerships, like with *Master Chef* and *Bob's Burgers*.

Sydnee: Hey!

Justin: There's a *Bob's Burgers*-themed meal this month. How cool is that? So, go—uh, let me give you an example. Uh, how about, um, chicken with barbecue sauce and juicy cheeseburgers with a spicy slaw. And, uh, they're delicious and fun and easy to make and everything, so—

Sydnee: And they give you grilling options, too, for the summer.

Justin: That's very cool.

Sydnee: Some of the recipes have grilling options.

Justin: It was very cool.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: So, uh, check out this week's menu and get your first three meals for free at blueapron.com/sawbones. That's blueapron.com/sawbones to get your first three meals for free. Blue Apron: a better way to cook.

It can be tough finding the right people for the right gig when you're a businessperson like myself. Uh, but luckily there is a, uh, option for you that is gonna make the whole process a lot smoother, and it's called ZipRecruiter.

ZipRecruiter sends your job to over 100 of the web's leading job boards, but it doesn't stop there. They've got this powerful matching technology that scans thousands of resumes to find the right people with the right experience and invite them to apply to your job. So right now, our listeners can try ZipRecruiter for free... at this exclusive web address. ziprecruiter.com/sawbones. That's

ziprecruiter.com/S-A-W-B-O-N-E-S. [holding back laughter] it says right here that we should spell the name of our show, but there you go.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: It—it's *Sawbones*!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: [through laughter] ZipRecruiter is the smartest way to hire.

Justin: Now, Sydnee, you were, I would say, teasing me with some other great titles that Ben has worked up, and I hope you've got some of those in store for me.

Sydnee: So, let me just say at this point—Ben Perkins' sales pitch is working *really* well overseas. Uh, the use of Perkins' tractors has earned its own field of study, of science: Perkinism.

Justin: Mm!

Sydnee: There are many enthusiastic followers now of Perkinism—

Justin: [holding back laughter] It's sure to hold up well to that level of scrutiny.

Sydnee: Yeah. Once it has a name it's real, right?

Justin: Yeah, it's real!

Sydnee: It's Perkinisms. That's it. That's what homeopathy did. "It's got a name! It's real now, right?"

Justin: Bacchanism.

Sydnee: Uh, now obviously there were some doctors who began to, you know, fight against this. There were doctors speaking out. I don't wanna say that everybody was, like, just goin' with the flow. There were people who were saying, uh, "Listen. You—this can't be real. This doesn't make any sense, and also, how in

the world do you expect us to trust you when you're making the device, you're selling the device, and you're saying everything can be treated with the device, and you profit off of that?"

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "That seems... ethically..."

Justin: Weird.

Sydnee: "... questionable." *But*, he had a lot of people jumping to his defense! Every time somebody questioned him, there were doctors. Uh, there were the heads of various medical societies, as well as Jonathan Trumbull, the governor of Connecticut. Um, Josiah Meigs was a Yale professor who wrote very influentially about how they were used on his son. Um, and that they were—he also mentioned, by the way, that they were great for pain and picking up... walnuts. I don't know why that was mentioned, but—

Justin: [high pitched] They're great for picking up walnuts?!

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Medical tractors.

Justin: [high pitched] I know! But, like—[snorts] [laughs]

Sydnee: Pain and that.

Justin: [through laughter] And if it turns out this isn't real... the good news is—

Sydnee: You can pick up walnuts.

Justin: —that your walnut problems are solved!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: I wonder if we could use 'em on the chestnuts out in the yard with the spiky things on 'em.

Justin: Oh, maybe. Maybe.

Sydnee: Maybe they'd be good for that.

Justin: Chestnut—hey, folks? Chestnut tree, when you get it, if you buy a house with a chestnut tree in it it's gonna seem real charming and like a real nice "Chestnuts roasting on the open fire," what have you. Folks, there is nothing sharper on this Earth than the husk surrounding chestnuts.

Sydnee: Yeah, they're—they're like—they're these balls of hypodermic needles that fall from the trees over your children's swing set.

Justin: It's a miserable plague. Chestnut trees are a miserable plague, and I think, dare I say it, Earth would be better if we uprooted all of them and burned them in a big fire.

Sydnee: No. Well, don't say that. Because maybe you would love our house [holding back laughter] with this beautiful chestnut tree out back to buy someday.

Justin: Hey! Are you in the mood for a house? [laughs] Do you like chestnuts?

Sydnee: They'll go through your shoes.

Justin: Oh, and by the way—

Sydnee: *Through your shoes!*

Justin: —even cooking them is a giant pain in the butt! Ugh.

Sydnee: Anyway.

Justin: Anyway.

Sydnee: This is not about chestnuts. So, uh, Ben is still—he was really—Ben Perkins is really the reason these got so successful. I mean, Elisha made 'em—

Justin: He was on his grind!

Sydnee: —of course, he was the creator, the inventor. But, uh, Ben was not satisfied with one book. He—he published another one. Every time, like, they were called into practice, he'd just publish more books to, like, prove that they were working.

So this one was, *Experiments with the metallic tractors: in rheumatism and gouty affections, inflammations and various tropical diseases, as published by surgeons Herholt and Roft, translated into German by Professor Toad, thence into English by Mr. Charles Kampfmueller; also reports demonstrating the efficacy of the metallic practice, edited by Benjamin Douglas Perkins, son of the discoverer.*

Justin: That's a good—

Sydnee: Always gotta get that "Son of the discoverer" on there.

Uh, they got *really* hot in Denmark, when the wife of a US diplomat took them with her there and started telling everybody about them, and she was very popular so everybody liked whatever she was doing and wanted to do it too.

So, like, for a while Perkinism really took off in Denmark.

Justin: It's very hot.

Sydnee: Yeah. It was very hot in Denmark. Um, some people also began using them on animals, and it was—uh, in that book that I just mentioned, it was also noted they seemed to work better on horses than cows and sheep.

Justin: Okay?

Sydnee: How you could tell...

Justin: Sure!

Sydnee: ... I don't know. You—just ask the horses!

Justin: Just ask the horses!

Sydnee: Well, at this point the Connecticut Medical Society I guess realized he wasn't coming back.

Justin: [cackles] They'd just been—

Sydnee: "Anybody seen Elisha lately?"

Justin: They'd just been adjourned for that long.

Sydnee: "Where did old Dr. Perkins the elder go?"

"Well, I don't know, but you should see what his son's doin' in London!"

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Um, they were still waiting to hear back. He—he—they didn't hear back, so they met in May of that year and passed a resolution that basically says, "Uh, this is fake, and this is very dangerous, what he's doing. And we're very angry about it, and we basically say that this is, um, disgraceful to the faculty and delusive to the ignorant. Um, and that we're going to expel him from the Connecticut Medical Society."

And he called it—they called it "Delusive quackery."

Justin: [sneezes]

Sydnee: So. Quackery, they—they announced it.

Justin: Yeah, but that's just, like, their opinion, man.

Sydnee: Sure, sure. And I don't know that everybody all over the world was listening to the Connecticut Medical Society's opinion.

Justin: Maybe nobody—

Sydnee: They should've been.

Justin: —yeah, they—yeah, they were—they may've had something, but also, I'd like to hear some more about these cool walnut grabbing things that can fix my arthritis.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Um, so he was expelled. They even talked about how awful it was. People were selling their horse and carriages to pay for these tractors.

Justin: Which is ironic, because... once they had a tractor, they wouldn't need the horses anymore!

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: 'Cause...

Sydnee: No. Wrong.

Justin: ... if it was still for...

Sydnee: Wrong kind of—

Justin: ... there was a—

Sydnee: —it's a different tractor.

Justin: —you see, I—

Sydnee: I thought we'd already established.

Justin: But if... I mean...

Sydnee: These are definitely different tractors.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: *But.*

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: Anyway. So, uh... the tractors are really hot.

Justin: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Ben Perkins is just sellin' the heck out of 'em overseas. In the US, things are starting to get a little shaky.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And then—

Justin: John Law, John Science [laughs] startin' to catch up with 'em.

Sydnee: Uh, and then Dr. Perkins the elder, um, turns his attentions elsewhere, because in 1798, yellow fever is ravaging the United States. Did you know that?

Justin: Uh... yeah?

Sydnee: Back in the day?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I think we've said that before. Yellow fever used to be a problem in the US. Uh, as did malaria.

Um, and Dr. Perkins wanted to be part of the fight against yellow fever. And so he actually—he didn't use his tractors for this. He did not. He had his own mixture that he thought would be helpful with yellow fever, because he had used it in the past for dysentery and he thought that this was... uh, maybe going to be—although I don't think it was successful with dysentery. I don't know why he thought yellow fever was gonna be the ticket, but he tried anyway.

He made this mixture of vinegar and baking soda and hot water, and administered it to people, thinking it would cure them of their yellow fever. Uh, he went to Connecticut, but by then the epidemic was already kind of waning, so he went to Massachusetts and it was already starting to wane there.

So he finally caught up with, like, the height of epidemic in New York in the summer of 1799. He began using his new treatment... [pauses] I don't know that it actually did any good, and unfortunately while he was trying to administer... [sighs] help to the suffering, he succumbed to yellow fever in the fall of that year.

Which I only mention, before you give me a hard time, because the tractors didn't stop.

Justin: Tractors—no, that wasn't the end of it?

Sydnee: No! Because Ben Perkins is still overseas doing his... like—like, reclaiming his father's legacy by selling these—these tractors. He patented the tractors in London. He wrote more books. He started the Perkinian Institute?

Justin: [through laughter] The Perkinian Institute...

Sydnee: Yes, the Perkinian Institute, dedicated to the study and—and furthering of the science of—

Justin: The—the not-so-careful studying of—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Pieces of metal that will fix you. Um, Benjamin Franklin's son sat on the board of the Perkinian Institute.

Justin: Really?

Sydnee: It was the nicest medical building in London. It far out—outshone the hospitals of the time. And it was a—they had a lot of money! They were selling useless things to people and people were buying them, in droves!

And you can read—in some of these books you'll read, like, these, um... uh, claims by people who had been treated by them who will say, like, "I know they worked for me."

And there was even, like, an account of a woman who was like, "I had this horrible bruise and my friend brought the tractors over and put them over the bruise, and she swore the bruise was gone afterwards. I kinda thought it was still there, but she says it's gone!"

Justin: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Sydnee: That kind of claim.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which... you know.

Justin: Specious at best.

Sydnee: Anyway, this is where Dr. John Haygarth of Bath comes in, and this is where this intersects with placebo theory.

Justin: Bath is lovely.

Sydnee: Bath *is* lovely.

Justin: We spent a lovely week there once, before we had kids.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: It wasn't lovely just because our kids weren't—weren't there, but that didn't... hurt, I would say.

Sydnee: I—

Justin: It's a lovely area.

Sydnee: It is a lovely area.

Justin: I'm just paying tribute to Bath, which is lovely.

Sydnee: Well, Dr. John Haygarth, uh—he decided he was going to look into these tractors by creating some wooden tractors that looked as if they were identical to the metal tractors. They looked like they were made out of metal but they were actually made out of wood. And he began treating patients with the wooden tractors the same way that they were being treated with the metal tractors, and what he found is that they all responded the same.

Justin: Hm.

Sydnee: Either it worked or it didn't, no matter what they were using. And basically he said, you know, this—all you had to do—actually, he said this. "All you have to do is tell them how well it's working while you're using it, and it works."

Justin: Wow! That's it?

Sydnee: Yeah. Just hold the tractors over them, and no matter what they're made out of you just say, "Look how great this is working! These are so wonderful. Do you know how many people these cured? Have you read the books?" [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: And basically at the end the patients responded. Uh, or they didn't, but it was the same no matter what, and so that kind of undid the theory that the metal was the thing curing people, because obviously it didn't matter, and people began to talk about the placebo effect, and that was last week's episode.

Just so you know, Ben Perkins made one last effort to refute this with one last great, great book.

Justin: The last of his trilogy. [laughs]

Sydnee: The last—[laughs quietly] I think—there were more in there.

Justin: Probably, sure.

Sydnee: Uh, *New Cases of Practices with Perkins Patent Metallic tractors on the human body and on animals, but especially on infants and horses, chiefly from the clerical and medical professions with a confutation of every attack upon the metallic practice.*

Justin: I... don't... care. You can't... have a phrase like "But especially on infants and horses" in any context in the English language—like, I cannot think of a ph—of a ph—of a—a—a context in which "But especially on infants and horses" that, like—

Sydnee: I don't know. [laughs]

Justin: —unless it's, like, "Diapers look cute, especially on infants and horses."

Sydnee: Wait. *Do* they look cute on horses, though?

Justin: They can be cute—I mean—no, you're right!

Sydnee: No, they don't.

Justin: No, okay. I—I stand corrected.

Sydnee: I don't wanna see diapers on horses. I don't have any problems with horses, I just don't wanna see them in diapers.

Justin: *Especially* on infants and horses.

Sydnee: Uh, despite this last gasp effort from Perkins the younger, this was kind of the end of the tractors.

Justin: Well, they had a good run.

Sydnee: They—they really started to fall out of favor. The Perkinian Institute closed, and people in Denmark weren't using 'em anymore, and everybody in the UK was kind of up to the—up to what was goin' on. In the US, there were enough people yellin' about it that that was kind of the end. Uh, everybody had decided that they were probably fake and we should probably stop using them.

Um, Ben Perkins hightailed it back to New York with, like, \$50,000 in profit. Which, again, probably a lot for the time.

Justin: Good, yeah!

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Seems good!

Sydnee: And he went into publishing. [through laughter] 'Cause obviously that's where his talents—

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: —truly lied... all along. And that was the end of Perkins tractors.

Justin: Well, congratulations. Uh, to—to Perkins. You had a good run of it, I think. Made a lot of money. Helped a *lot* of people. And I think we can all agree that this was a great success.

Sydnee: I mean, he thought he did. They thought he did. Somebody thought he did.

Justin: And yet you, Dr. McElroy, seem to remain unconvinced of the power.. of Perkins tractors.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Well, I mean, they were fake. They didn't work.

Justin: "[country Kermit] Hey, don't worry, little lady! We got some *pink* ones for you too, here in the back! Perkins tractors take care of guys, girls—we don't care! We got tractors in every color of the rainbow."

Sydnee: Well—well I think we're done! I think we're all out of time.

Justin: "[country Kermit] Hey, no! Lemme—hang on—hold on. I gotta—have you heard the good news?"

Sydnee: [simultaneously] I think that's it, dear.

Justin: "[country Kermit] I got some tracts here for you."

Sydnee: Dear, thank you.

Justin: "[country Kermit] I'm kind of an outsider." [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Tell people about our website and whatnot. Do—do your thing there.

Justin: [laughs] Uhh—[laughs] Um... uh, he starts witnessing about the gospel of Jesus Christ if you let him keep going.

Sydnee: Oh.

Justin: That's the character, eventually.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: He's staunchly conservative, and a deeply faithful person.

Sydnee: I think—I think this can—this needs a little more work.

Justin: I'm gonna take it back to the woodshed.

Sydnee: Okay. Alright. [laughs]

Justin: Uh, thank you so much for listening to our program. If you, uh, want to listen to more episodes of the show, you can subscribe on a podcast platform of your choice, or on iTunes, which is also a great place to leave a review, if you don't mind. That actually really, really helps us out. So if you have not done that, please do so.

Also, we have a book coming out July... some—was, uh, last month.

Sydnee: That's not when it's coming out.

Justin: And next month is September, and then after that is October, and *that* is defo when the book *is* coming out.

You can go to bit.ly/thesawbonesbook to, uh, preorder it. And also, we're going to be doing a signing and talk at the Tribeca, uh... Barnes and Noble store? Uh, that is gonna be on October 17th. You can get details about that on our Facebook page, of *Sawbones*, so you can go enjoy that, and we hope that you can make it out for that.

All you gotta do is buy the book on that day. If you buy the book that day then you, uh... you, uh, can come to that signing and the talk, and it'll be oodles of fun, so.

Uh, thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program, and thanks to you for listening! We appreciate you very much and we hope you have enjoyed yourself.

But, until next week, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[theme music plays]

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