

## **Sawbones 299: The Man Behind the Knick**

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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 co-host, Justin McElroy.

**Audience:** [cheers]

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

**Audience:** [cheers louder]

**Justin:** For the first time, equal. They were equal. That's so wei—I got some sinus stuff going on, but it sounded equal to me. Um...

**Sydnee:** Thank you. [laughs]

**Justin:** So uh, what a thrill it is to be back in New York and back at the King's Theater. What a beautiful place.

**Sydnee:** So beautiful.

**Justin:** We have done, uh, several shows in New York. Uh, but—

**Sydnee:** We once did three in one day.

**Justin:** Yeahhh... that was when we kind of messed up and booked a hundred seat theater, and so, we ended up having to do three shows in one day, which meant I did six shows in one day, and... yeah. The quality suffered. [laughs] I mean, I don't know how to say it. The quality suffered.

**Sydnee:** I only did three that day, but I also was 30 weeks pregnant, so I feel like...

**Justin:** Okay, here we go... alright...

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Sydnee:** ... like that balances out. [laughs] Uh, but when we were trying to come up with a topic for this show, there's so many things when you dig into medical history related to New York. There are endless things you could talk about. But it gets harder when you've done as many shows as we have done here, and so, we were kind of going back and forth. What are some other things we could talk about? And Justin said, "Hey, why don't you talk about that show, The Knick?"

Which... is a cool—I mean, I watched the whole show. It was a really cool show. Of course, it was set in New York, so there's the connection. And it was about medical history, so that's all—that all makes sense, except it definitely did go off the air in 2015...

**Justin:** Okay. That's fine. Yes, that's accurate. That's why when we brought it up, the muted response is 'cause nobody remembers that it was on TV.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** John Hodgman was in it, though, and here's the news peg...

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Justin:** His new book, Medallion Status, is on shelves now. This week. Pick it up. So that's the... news hook, I guess?

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Well, what—yeah. But no, I started digging into, after Justin said that, I was like, well, y'know, maybe there's something there, 'cause I think it was based on more than just like, there really was the Knickerbocker hospital. There were—it was based on some like, actual people and stuff.

So, I started digging into it, and the main character on the TV show, Dr. John Thackery, was based on an actual human who was from New York, Dr. William Stewart Halsted, who was known as like, the father of American surgery and came from New York and has an interesting, complicated history. So... you did give...

**Justin:** Y'all are spoiled, man. If the father of American surgery came from any other city, they would be losing their mind.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "Yes! Yes! Yeah, we know, we named our college after him and the city, and all our hospitals! Yeah, he's a legend here!" And you're like, "Uh, did he? Huh, weird."

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** He's like the thousandth most interesting person from New York. How cool.

**Sydnee:** Uh, it—

**Justin:** You know about Seinfeld, right, Justin?

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Hellooo.

**Sydnee:** [laughing] Seinfeld got more woos.

**Justin:** Here's here. Jerryyy. My man, thank you so much for comin'. Don't crane your necks. Just trust me.

**Audience:** [laughing]

**Sydnee:** Uh, if you haven't ever seen the show, it's okay. You don't need to learn about this actual, historical figure. That's not necessary. Um, but the character that was based on his life, uh, on the TV show was this like, really brilliant surgeon who also had an addiction to cocaine, and then later, morphine, and...

**Audience:** [laughing]

**Justin:** Wha—do—what?!

**Sydnee:** Got some woots for that.

**Justin:** Don't—don't applaud that!

**Sydnee:** So, so he had some... we'll say erratic behaviors.

**Justin:** That's a nice way.

**Sydnee:** In the operating room. And then, of course, it's all about medical history right at the turn of the century. It was set like, around 1900, and everything was kind of just like, "let's throw it to the wall and see what sticks" kind of attitude towards medicine, so there's lots of that.

And the figure who inspired that, Dr. Halsted, fits that pretty well. He was a very complicated person, and he was, in many ways, a genius, and did amazing things. And then there are some other more interesting parts to his history that I think makes him a perfect fit for Sawbones.

He was born in New York, like I said, in 1852.

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Sydnee:** 1852!

**Justin:** 1852 got a bigger cheer than the name of your town.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Uh, he was uh, he came from a wealthy family. They had like—they had two homes. They had a home, like, right on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and then a big, like, mansion upstate.

**Audience:** [scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** Woo for the mansion upstate, too. [laughs] He was not... he was not a stellar student. One of his biggest frustrations is that, even—he wasn't a stellar student, but he did go to Yale, so... there says... I mentioned he came from a wealthy family. [laughs] I don't know if they pretended he was on crew, or...

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** But...

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Sydnee:** But he did get into Yale. Uh, but he never was inducted into the Skull and Bones, and that was one of his biggest, like, frustrations. [pause] I don't know.

**Justin:** I mean, you gotta have some limits, right?

**Sydnee:** I don't know. Uh, but in medical school, he really started to apply himself, and he did a lot better. He was making better grades. After the first two years, though, and back then, med school was like, three years, typically. And then, after that, it was just sort of like a hodgepodge of what you would do. You'd go to med school, you'd finish, you'd be a doctor, and then you were just expected to like, "Now, go learn more before you practice, 'cause you don't know what you're doing, but we're done." Uh... [laughs]

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** There was no intermediary step there.

**Sydnee:** No, it's just like, you're a doctor now. Figure it out. So, he went for two years, and he was like, "Woo, this is tough. I need a break." So he took a summer off and like, went hunting and fishing and doing, I don't know, whatever wealthy people do when they're taking a summer off from med school. [laughs]

And after he was done with that, he came back and took an entrance exam to become an intern at Bellevue Hospital. And the thing is, you weren't allowed to do that unless you had finished medical school, but he did it anyway.

**Justin:** Alright!

**Sydnee:** And he passed the exam. And he did so well on it that he got the internship. So he wasn't—he hadn't even finished medical school, and he was already functioning as an intern at Bellevue Hospital.

And this is where—this was a really important point in his history, because while he was there, this was the same point in time where Lister came to the US and started giving lectures on the concept of antisepsis. Of like, antiseptic technique, of like... yeah, of like, let's do things cleanly, and then we won't have so many infections. And that idea had not taken hold. There were lots of surgeons who were like, "Psh, no. I'm not gonna wash my hands. Whatever."

**Justin:** "Love being dirty."

**Sydnee:** And uh, and he was—in this atmosphere was kind of where he—that's where his learning took place, and he was like, "That sounds... like a great idea. I love it, and I'm gonna live by it." And it is one of the things that he was known for throughout his career. Everywhere he went, he was like,

"Listen, I don't care what the bosses say. The man's not gonna stop me from washing my hands..."

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** "Cleaning my surgical instruments..."

**Justin:** That's the kind of rebellion I can get on board with.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** "Trying not to sneeze in the patient... that kind of thing."

**Justin:** You don't always succeed, but it's nice to try.

**Sydnee:** Uh, and so, he did this year, and this was very important to his learning, and he did finish medical school after that in the sense that he took the exam and passed it. And then, he was among—it's noted—I read this. He was among the top ten in his class, but to decide who was at the top of the class, I guess 'cause everybody was so close in their scores or grades or whatever, they had a contest. [laughs]

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Which is not how medical school works now.

**Justin:** So they had like a Quidditch cup, basically.

**Sydnee:** [laughing] I got so excited, 'cause the one article I was reading just said that they had a contest that he won. And I was like, "A contest? In what? Like, what did you do?" It was just an essay contest.

**Justin:** Awww.

**Sydnee:** Which sounds like—I know! Like, of all the—

**Justin:** You gotta be like the lumberjack games. You're like, how many patients can you slice open in one minute?

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] So he won the—whatever his essay was, it was great, and he won the essay contest, so he got to be like, top of his class. And because of that status, he went on to get a position at New York hospital as a house officer, which was a big deal. And so, he got this prestigious position because, y'know, he wrote a great essay.

Um, and while he was training this year, he developed... this sounds so boring, but this was the first time anybody ever made a hospital chart.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Whoaaa.

**Sydnee:** He was like—y'know what a—y'know what the—

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Sydnee:** Patients should have like, a piece of paper that has like, I don't know, their heart rate and their temperature on it?

**Justin:** We were so rudimentary with the first one, it just says like, "He's sick."

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "Do not leave. Give pills."

**Sydnee:** But that—he—and this was still in his training. And through that year of his training, he invented the hospital chart. And then he was like, "My work here in the US is done." And he literally—at this point, he went, "Well, I've learned everything the United States of America has to teach me. I'm going to Europe." Which is what he did. And for two years, he just



wandered all over Europe, learning from every doctor or surgeon that he could.

And that sounds wild. This really, for the time, was kind of what you were expected to do. Now, obviously, he had the means to go train among some of the most world-renowned surgeons and doctors of the time, which not everybody did. But that was sort of the expectation was like, well, go out there and learn something. And he did. And he finally felt like—and this was really—you just decided, “Okay, I know enough. I'm done. I'm gonna go practice on my own.”

So, in 1880, he came back to New York and said, “I'm a surgeon!”

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Trust.

**Sydnee:** “I did it! Trust me! I know how to do this now! Let me work places.”

**Justin:** “I went to London, soooo... I'm a surgeon, I guess.”

**Sydnee:** He went everywhere! And uh, and so, he started working at like, every hospital he could find. He was working at Roosevelt Hospital, Bellevue still, he was working at the charity hospital and the immigrant hospital. He actually—he felt like he was so committed to these antiseptic techniques, and he felt like he couldn't do them at Bellevue. He was like, “They just don't—the hospital cannot do what I need in an operating room. I can't convert their operating rooms.” I guess it was so dirty that he felt like, “I can't even clean this room to a point...”

**Justin:** You guys have a milkshake machine in here. What is wrong with you? Why do you have a gum wall? What were you thinking?

**Sydnee:** So they—

**Justin:** Is that a children's play place? Like, why would you put that here?

**Sydnee:** In the OR? So, he had them build his own operating theater, which was basically in like a tent outside. But it was like, a giant tent with a theater in it.

**Justin:** Do you know how dirty your hospital has to be?!

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Before someone is like, "Um, I'm just gonna do it in a tent outside."

**Audience:** [laughing]

**Justin:** "That would be better for me."

**Sydnee:** So—and it was like a ten thousand dollar tent that he built. [laughs] I mean, it was an expensive outdoor operating theater. I mean, it was covered.

**Justin:** A really nice tent. Fine. Okay.

**Audience:** [laughing]

**Sydnee:** So the—but I mean, he was really gaining a lot of—a great reputation through all of this. He was widely respected, and his work was good, and students enjoyed learning from him. He was incredibly popular among the professors. At the time, if you were a professor, you would hold what was called a quiz, and I don't mean like a quiz like a test. I figured you would say like, "We all know what a quiz is."

**Justin:** We all—we do all know what a quiz is.

**Sydnee:** I just wanted to jump on that. I just want to jump on that before you give me a hard time. Back then, a quiz was like, if I had a quiz, it would be, "Follow me around, and you can watch me do things, and help me do things, and I'll have lectures sometimes, and classes," and it would be, y'know, Sydnee's quiz. Well, I'd probably go by doc—Dr. McElroy's quiz.

**Justin:** Dr. Sydnee's quiz.

**Sydnee:** And so, his quiz was the most popular. All the students wanted to learn from him. All the doctors in training. Um, he was—he was really hands on, and he was just—he was a very interesting lecturer, and so, he was—he built up this great reputation as like, a teacher and a surgeon.

And he had like, boundless energy to do these things. It was noted over and over again, like, "This guy like, never sleeps. I mean, his lectures are so engaging, and he just talks and talks and talks, and then he goes and does surgery for hours, and then he's up the next morning first thing!" And there was just... there was a lot of commentary on how—

**Justin:** Where does he get the energy?!

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Um, and uh, this probably is because, on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1884, he read... we know the date. I think that's interesting. We know the date he read an article in a medical journal. This is very well documented. He read an article about, uh, some recent discoveries in ophthalmology with a brand new anesthetic.

And he was reading this article about how much success they'd had using this anesthetic in different, um, procedures on the eye. And the author said, "It would be really interesting to see if this new anesthetic could be used elsewhere in the body, 'cause I think it could, but that's not really my thing.

So like, maybe somebody else... somebody else wants to try this anesthetic other places in the body. I think it could be good for like, paralyzing peripheral nerves, so like, you could inject it into your arm, and your arm would go numb if you hit the right nerves, or your leg... that kind of thing. And I think you should—I think somebody should try it."

So anyway, Halsted was like, "I love this. I'm that guy. I'm gonna do this."

**Justin:** What do I need my hands for? I'm just a surgeon. Let's go.

[theme music plays]

**Justin:** Boy, this has been—this is a fun one. Boy, this was fun. New York. The big apple. I remember it like it was yesterday.

**Sydnee:** Well... I mean, it wasn't that long ago. I hope you remember it.

**Justin:** Uh, I want to take a quick break, Sydster, to talk about our sponsors for this week's episode.

**Sydnee:** Do it!

**Justin:** Wow, alright! Thank you! That's just the shot in the arm I needed.

**Sydnee:** I'm excited!

**Justin:** I want to tell you about Blue Apron, first off. Have you heard about this?

**Sydnee:** I love `em!

**Justin:** If not, welcome to Sawbones. This must be your first episode.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Uh, Blue Apron is a meal delivery service that stands a cut above. And I say that because you'll cut things as part of the Blue Apron.

**Sydnee:** I love that part. I love chopping.

**Justin:** Experience. Sydnee's great at chopping. I love to see Sydnee in the kitchen. That came out wrong. Let me start over.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Sydnee puts her Air Pods in. Sometimes she has a nice cooking beer. And she'll just kind of zone out for a little while and relax and cook a nice meal for our family.

**Sydnee:** I love it. It's one of my favorite things to do for myself.

**Justin:** And—but here's the trick. It's also for me, because at the end, I get a delicious meal! Home cooked, just for me! It really takes the edge off of watching both the kids by myself for a half hour while Sydnee makes a delicious meal. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] But thanks to Blue Apron, it's only a half hour.

**Justin:** Uh, they got some great stuff in, uh—or, we've had some great stuff, I should say, in November. There was a sesame sweet chili wonton noodle. Chicken, black bean, and kale enchiladas. Beyond Meat Bolognese. Crispy potato and kale hash.

**Sydnee:** Nice. Very nice.

**Justin:** Thank you, Sydnee. Thank you. This, uh... y'know folks, Blue Apron believes cooking matters. Don't have it delivered, precooked, or picked up – cook it! Once a week, once a month, or at least, once more than you do now. Check out this week's menu and get \$60 off when you visit [BlueApron.com/Sawbones](https://BlueApron.com/Sawbones). That's [BlueApron.com/Sawbones](https://BlueApron.com/Sawbones). Blue Apron: Just cook. That's new. New tagline. What do you think?

**Sydnee:** I like it.

**Justin:** Just cook.

**Sydnee:** I like it. Yeah.

**Justin:** Just cook.

**Sydnee:** Just cook.

**Justin:** Uh, y'know, uh, open enrollment is uh, here again. It's the time for healthcare coverage. But it's also a good moment to reassess your life insurance needs. Your employer life insurance might not be providing you all the insurance you need, and Policy Genius can help.

Y'know, it can be overwhelming shopping for life insurance, and boring, I will say. But Policy Genius is the easy way to shop for a life insurance plan in minutes, compare quotes from top insurers to find your best price. And once you apply, the Policy Genius team is gonna handle all the paperwork and red tape. All the boring stuff, so you can just do the fun, sexy parts of buying life insurance.

And uh, the stuff you buy through Policy Genius stays with you even if you leave your job. So, when you're looking at workplace benefits this month, make sure to double check your life insurance options, then go to [PolicyGenius.com](https://www.policygenius.com) to get quotes and apply in minutes. The Policy Genius: The easy way to compare and buy life insurance.

That is going to do it for us for this week for our interruption. I hope you'll pardon it, and I also hope that you'll enjoy the rest of this episode.

**Sydnee:** Thank you!

**Justin:** Thank you!

**Sydnee:** So, he got this new anesthetic. He got a team of students, and he's like, "Let's inject this everywhere on ourselves," 'cause they did, on themselves. It was all self-experimentation to see if it works. And I mean, it was hugely successful.

They, y'know, were able to paralyze just, y'know, this—or they were able to numb just this finger, or just this part of your leg, or whatever. And this was revolutionary as an anesthetic for surgery. Like, this is great. We can use this and numb anything and do procedures and the patient won't feel any pain, and we're so excited.

And I want to read you the first sentence from the paper he published about his experiments, because I think this will kind of inform what this new anesthetic was. So this was—this was a published, scientific paper, and this is the first sentence.

“Neither indifference as to which of how many possibilities may best explain nor yet at a loss to comprehend why surgeons have, and that so many quite without discredit could’ve exhibited scarcely any interest in what as a local anesthetic had been supposed, if not declared by most so very sure to prove, especially to them, attractive, so I do not think that the circumstance or some sense of obligation to rescue a fragmentary reputations for surgeons, rather than the belief that the opportunity existed for assisting others to an appreciable extent induced me several months ago to write on the subject in hand the greater part of a somewhat comprehensible paper which poor health does incline me to complete.”

**Audience:** [laughs and cheers]

**Sydnee:** That’s the first sentence. [laughing]

**Justin:** So... so he was on coke.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** The new anesthetic was cocaine.

**Justin:** Okay. Cocaine.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And these doctors and students had injected themselves with cocaine for a while, and then they all became addicted to cocaine... and then they published this paper that was written on cocaine...

**Audience:** [laughing]

**Justin:** It's both written on cocaine and written on cocaine. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** On cocaine. And it's funny, 'cause if you read any commentary on it, they all say like, it's—you can't understa—it's incomprehensible. It's all like that. The whole paper is like that. And what you can get from it is, I think cocaine works?

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** But also, there may be some problems. I have some concerns. [laughing] I don't—if you're in any field where you have to publish in journals, you know that this was submitted and published, and you think, "What were papers like then?"

**Justin:** I like it. It's like, y'know, I don't get it, but somebody out there will. It's not my thing, but...

**Sydnee:** Uh, so, when you look into the rest of Halstead's career, things—some strange things happen from time to time. And this was probably the turning point. At one point, he actually performed a surgery. It was a groundbreaking surgery. It was one of the first gall stone removal surgeries, that he didn't remove the patient's gall bladder, he actually went in and cut a hole in it and took gall stones out to help the patient who had blockages because of those stones.

And he—the patient was his own mother, and he did the surgery at two AM on the kitchen table in her home.

**Justin:** Whoa!

**Sydnee:** She was fine. [laughs] It worked and she survived, and he said, "I did one of the first gall bladder operations in the US!" Which was great, except it was definitely on your own mom on your kitchen table, man.

**Justin:** [laughs] I did it, and I did it at my mom's house!



**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Cocaine is great!

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I could've never done this without the incredible power of cocaine! I would've definitely second guessed myself at some point!

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Now, he did—he did realize that this was becoming a problem, and his first instinct was to try to treat himself by taking a long sailing trip with only enough cocaine to get him through half of it.

**Audience:** [laughing]

**Justin:** There... okay, wait... he could've take—here's what I like. If he had gone completely without cocaine, he would've gotten two hours in and been like, "Actually, I don't want to do this. I changed my mind. I'm going to go back to shore where I can find more cocaine." [laughing] So he got enough cocaine to get himself out. I love that.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Uh, but then, it did not go well. He ended up—they have like—there was like an emergency medical, like, chest on the boat, and he ended up raiding it and finding both cocaine and morphine in it, enough to get him back to shore.

**Justin:** Okay. That was shortsighted, I will say, on his part.

**Sydnee:** And the bigger problem is that then, when he did seek, y'know, treatment to actually go to rehab for cocaine, at the time, the most popular treatment for cocaine addiction was, in fact, morphine. Lots of morphine. With the thought that, maybe we'll just get you on this instead? And so, what results, which was the, y'know, the typical result at the time, is that you were addicted to both at the end.

**Justin:** Alright!

**Sydnee:** Um, and this—at this point in the story, this may be why, like, he’s not... maybe everybody—he’s not remembered in like, the annals of like, New York hall of fame, like, history, like... uh, at this point, New York was kind of done with him. A lot of people were like, “Listen. Uhh... we don’t know what you’re up to. This paper is... I mean, it’s really worrying people, and you did surgery on your mom on a table, and...”

**Justin:** We love the clean hands thing. So big on that.

**Sydnee:** “Yes. We’re gonna keep that.”

**Justin:** Love that.

**Sydnee:** “But don’t you have some friends in Baltimore? I heard you had some connections there. Just scooch on over to Baltimore. And why don’t you hang out there? They’ve got this new, like, hospital school thing they’re trying to set up called Johns Hopkins. They could really use some help. Go help them, and we’ll just—we’ll call it a day.” Which is what he did. And the rest of his career, he actually spent in Baltimore helping to develop all kinds of new surgeries at Johns Hopkins.

And he did a lot of amazing things there. He developed brand new procedures for inguinal hernia repairs, and he did like, the first radical mastectomy where he like, had to remove, for breast cancer, had to remove a breast, and like, all the tissues around and underneath it. And it was, at the time, a revolutionary procedure.

So like, again, he’s developing these amazing techniques and surgeries and teaching everybody, but he’s still, at the time, is documented as using cocaine and using morphine really regularly. Up to, the thought is, and I mean, it was different units of measurement at the time, but he was maybe using up to 200 milligrams of morphine a day.

**Justin:** Whoa!

**Sydnee:** At this point.

**Justin:** Someone's applauding. I'm assuming you're a morphine salesman.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] We got somebody from Perdue in the crowd.

**Justin:** [laughs] Dang!

**Sydnee:** Perdue? Come on. Um, uh... [laughing] So anyway, and to get a sense of his personality, because if you look at this point in his history, he really—he kind of changed a lot. Um, from this like, when you hear about his life in New York, he was—he would go out and like, hang out with people, and he was well known, and like, this kind of gregarious character.

And then, uh, he became a lot more like, uh, distant, and cold, and orderly in his life in Baltimore. He was a very meticulous dresser. I love this point. He would wear these shirts that were made in Paris, and he would only send them back to Paris to have them laundered.

**Justin:** Wow. So you're saying a lot of stinky shirts for this guy.

**Sydnee:** He didn't believe there was anywhere in Baltimore where they could properly launder shirts, and only Paris could do it. Um, he would have—they rarely entertained at his home, because he was so meticulous about his dinner parties, and about the menu, and about like, all of the place settings and all this stuff, that it became just overwhelming for his wife and the staff and everybody.

And he would spend, like, hours out in his garden with his dahlias, and he was very meticulous about all these things. And if you read some of the comments, we have comments that he wrote on billing that he did, like, for patients. Like, he'd go and do a surgery, and then he would bill them, and he would like, write little notes. Like, his own personal feelings about the patient or the procedure or whatever.

And there are things like, "Very wealthy. Outrageously small bill." [laughs] He examined a child who had enlarged lymph nodes, and at the bottom of the bill, he wrote, "A terrible kid. Consult \$50, at least one hour's torture by child."

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And then things like, on other ones, he wrote, "Terrific operation. Also highly dramatic. Electric lights gave out. Lamp nearly exploded and set house on fire. Patient stopped breathing. Artificial respiration. Inexperienced assistance. Ether gave out, because etherizer had so asphyxiated patient, he got neither air nor anesthesia. Life of patient saved. \$500. Should be \$5,000."

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And in his life in Baltimore, he also found love. And this is a very Sawbones love story, I feel like. So, I've mentioned that he—that antiseptic technique was a big part of his... y'know, that was his thing, and that was one of the things he went around pushing and like, getting other doctors to accept and his colleagues and students. Um, and that plays into this love story. I know that sounds weird.

But Caroline Hampton moved to New York to enter nursing school against her family's wishes. She started working at New York Hospital in 1888, and then she also moved to Baltimore. So, followed kind of the same path as Halsted. And she moved to Baltimore, and when she was there, her personality kept bristling up against a lot of the other nurses, and she actually was in danger of losing her position, except Halsted kind of... I think he'd taken a shine to her. So he kind of swooped in and said, "No, she's gonna be the chief nurse now. So she's gonna just tell you all what to do. So you can't fire her."

And after he did that, he actually—they started working together a lot. She would like, assist him in the OR. And because of his antiseptic procedures at the time, it required that, before you would like, touch the patient or touch instruments, you had to put your hands in mercuric chloride every time.

**Justin:** Eugh.

**Sydnee:** And this, specifically, to Ms. Hampton, was damaging her hands. She was developing a terrible dermatitis, because she kept having to put her hands in this stuff to follow his procedure. And he didn't want to lose her in the OR, so he went to the Goodyear rubber company and asked them to make these, uh, very tight, fine, thin, fitted rubber gloves for her to wear in the OR. And this was the first time anybody ever wore rubber gloves during a surgery.

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Sydnee:** And I guess it was—so, one, he introduced the idea of wearing gloves in surgery this way. And two, he wooed her...

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** ... with these great rubber gloves. And she was so flattered, they later married. [laughs]

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** So...

**Justin:** That's love.

**Sydnee:** I mean, you never give me rubber gloves.

**Justin:** That's... I mean, that's... not—yeah. I mean, well...

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** That's... inarguable I guess, Sydster. I mean, yeah. That's true. I mean, in our younger days, obviously.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** So... as Halsted got older, he became less interested in the teaching part of his, uh, kind of his job. And he was still, like I said, he was working at Johns Hopkins, and he was supposed to be not just doing surgeries, but training and teaching. And he more and more just wanted to spend time in his garden, and spend time at home.

He would take these like, extended summer breaks, which you don't really get from like, most jobs. From like, surgery jobs. [laughs] You don't get to like, take the summer off and be like, "Just take care of the patients. I'll be back at the farm. Don't worry, it's fine." But he would.

He would go down to South Carolina where they had a farm for the whole summer, and just not take care of his patients and let the students do it. And he... through this, he developed this idea that maybe it was a good idea to give your students and your young doctors in training a little more independence, y'know? Maybe we don't give them enough responsibility right now. They go from medical school, to like, an apprenticeship thing, and then they're doctors.

Um, but maybe there should be something in between, where they have like a graduated system of responsibility where they start out, and they—y'know, they're told what to do a lot. But then, eventually, they know enough where they can just run things on their own, and their attending, the doctor who's in charge of them, can just, y'know... hang at home. Take calls from there. Maybe go to the farm for the entire summer.

So, he wrote all this out and introduced this idea in a lecture at Johns Hopkins and said, "I think we should have something that I'm calling a residency." And basically, it was his way of not having to go to the hospital.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And this was the structure of residency. Residency programs are based on William Halsted...

**Justin:** Not wanting to go to work?

**Sydnee:** Not wanting to go to work.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I love that. Today, I'm here to announce the podcast residency program.

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And this really, like, in case you're not familiar with residencies today, this is very much how it works. And the whole idea was that the chief residents, the more senior residents, would teach the younger ones, and would supervise the younger ones, and y'know, we really—we want to keep us, as the doctors already know, we just want to stay out of their way. Let them learn. They need some independence. They need more responsibility.

And that... that spread all over the country, and now, that is how residency programs work today. Although, I will say as an attending in a residency program, I don't go take the whole summer off. I don't go to a farm in South Carolina. I do go to work. But, he developed residency programs.

**Justin:** Y'know what's interesting, Syd? We've covered a lot of this guy's accomplishments, and one sentence I have yet to hear you say was, "And so, he stopped doing so much cocaine."

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** It is... so, his closest... [laughs]

**Audience:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** If you read, there are lots of different biographies you can read if you're interested in knowing more about him. He's a character of much interest in history. That's why there was a, y'know, there was a whole character in a TV show based on him, because he had this kind of complicated story. And if you read some of those biographies, there were a lot of people who I think want to believe that he, at some point, stopped using cocaine or morphine or one or the other or both.

But his closest friends wrote, no. We... we know he never did. So, as far as we know, that... no. He didn't.

**Justin:** O... okay. That's kind of a weird note to end on, but um...

**Sydnee:** Well, no, 'cause then, later, he got to be played by Clive Owen on a show on Cinemax, so...

**Justin:** So you're saying there's really no downside to the drug use. Okay. There you have it, folks. Apparently that's it. [pause] Anything negative as a result of the rampant drug—anything you could give me? [pause] Folks, we've had so much fun here tonight. Thank you so much for having us.

**Audience:** [cheers]

**Justin:** Uh, we will be, uh... we're gonna take a quick break. Come back with My Brother, My Brother, and Me. Thank you to the Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program. Um, you may be able to find outside some copies of the Sawbones book, written by us, illustrated by Taylor Smirl. You can go buy 'em if you want. And uh, that's gonna do it for us for this week. Yeah, Syd?

**Sydnee:** That's it.

**Justin:** So until next time, 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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