

Sawbones 305: Bidets

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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, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: Um, December the 24th... was the date. Uh, I came home from last minute shopping. Uh... and I found—I'm gonna try not to cry.

Sydnee: Well, first you found my dad standing in our living room holding a tool bag.

Justin: Not that weird. Didn't register with me.

Sydnee: That's true.

Justin: Uh, came home and I found that my wife [getting choked up] had got me the one special gift that I asked for this Christmas season. She had gotten me a bidet.

Sydnee: Technically it's a washlet.

Justin: Well it warm—it warms my butt.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And... does other bidet stuff, which I'm not gonna be precious about talking about. Uh—

Sydnee: It attaches to our existing toilet.

Justin: Right. It's not like... you're probably gonna talk about a lot of these sorts of things, so I don't wanna get too deep.

Sydnee: No, I will—I will—

Justin: Into this topic.

Sydnee: —I will—at the end, I'll—I mean, that's not really medical history, to cover all of the, uh, various... perks that come with different kinds of bidets and washlets, but I'll mention it.

Justin: It was—it was—it was the only thing I had asked for for Christmas, and Sydnee... delivered.

Sydnee: It was a bit of a to-do, because you have to have an outlet next to your toilet.

Justin: Yeah. It's a whole pro—it was a whole production, but I really appreciate all that—

Sydnee: We didn't. But now we do.

Justin: That's right.

Sydnee: Handy... woman, Sydnee.

Justin: Handywoman Sydnee figured out how to put an outlet next to our toilet.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: With her own two hands, and no help from her dad.

Sydnee: I had never thought about the bidet as, uh—as a topic for our show, even though—

Justin: It's a topic for everyday conversation in my life now. It's all I'll sort of talk about.

Sydnee: Let's be honest, it's been a topic in our everyday conversation for a while, ever since Travis got one. So—

Justin: Yes. Well, I gave one to Travis because I thought it was hilarious, and then he became obsessed with it, and extolled the virtues of it to anyone who would listen.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: And then I thought, "I can't let Travis have a better life than me. I can't—"

Sydnee: [snorts] "A better butt than me."

Justin: "A better butt, a better life than me."

Sydnee: Uh, it was really—Dr. Smith emailed us and suggested this topic, and thank you, Dr. Smith, 'cause I had never—I hadn't really considered it, like, a medical thing. It just seemed like kind of a—I don't know, a fun thing? [laughs quietly]

Justin: Yeah! Well, a medical, mental health—mental health matters, Sydnee.

Sydnee: Well—

Justin: I don't know why you're—you're, uh, uh...

Sydnee: This is not about mental health. I—

Justin: It's about *my* mental health.

Sydnee: —there are claims—I did not realize this. There are—

Justin: It's an oasis.

Sydnee: —there are claims—

Justin: Meditation.

Sydnee: —that some companies make as to the medical benefits of bidets and washlets, which are—which I'm really just talking about a bidet seat that attaches to your existing toilet, as opposed to a separate thing, right? Like, that's the bidet. Uh, but I didn't realize that there were companies that were making all these

claims as to what they could do for you medically. And I thought that it was a good point. This should be addressed, because I am by no means anti-bidet, but we should—

Justin: I know you're not!

Sydnee: —we should know what we're buying, and what it will and won't do.

Justin: I noticed the settings changing when I go in there. Somebody's puttin' their *own* kind of spin on it.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] You can actually—well, I'm not gonna get into—anyway, I—it's worth mentioning that if—there could be a whole other episode about the way that humans have cleaned themselves. After... you know, bathrooming... throughout the ages. That could be a whole episode unto itself, and I don't want to get into all that, 'cause I really wanna talk about specifically the history of the bidet.

Justin: I could probably cover it. Leaves? Huge. Um... sponges?

Sydnee: Actually, the Romans—a sponge on a stick, and it would be, like, a community sponge on a stick.

Justin: Dead badgers, probably. In the Middle Ages.

Sydnee: Uh, the Greeks used—maybe. The Greeks used clay or stone, which seems, uh, uncomfortable?

Justin: Exfoliating? Yes?

Sydnee: Uh, it was the—the ancient Chinese that came up with the use of paper, which was, like, a huge step forward.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Right? That was a much better idea. But even as you move into, like, early American history, the early days of the United States, a lot of settlers used, like, corn cobs, so I guess they hadn't heard about this great paper innovation, and were using corn cobs. Which, again... ouch.

Justin: Oof.

Sydnee: A whole history of people using things that sound... unpleasant. Like, they don't sound like they'd be on the table.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: It sounds like, "Well, obviously we won't use a corn cob."

Justin: That shouldn't have made it past the blue sky sort of, like, "Well, there's corn cobs, we have a lot of those lyin' around, nothin' to do with 'em."

Sydnee: Uh, toilet paper has become, I think, the mainstay for most—

Justin: Wild about it.

Sydnee: —people. Uh, but does it make the most sense?

Justin: Does it? Are you asking me?

Sydnee: Does it? Is it? Is it the best way to clean your bottom after, you know, you—do you want me to use medical terms here? It's a—I think the word "defecate" is very gross.

Justin: It's bad.

Sydnee: I know it's technically accurate.

Justin: I don't like you to say—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —like, I'm fine with you saying—I'm—I don't care about the word "poop," but you are so—I know how it pains you to talk about stuff like this.

Sydnee: In the—it's weird. When I am seeing a patient and I have to talk about things like this, it doesn't even phase me. Like, none of this—it doesn't even register to me that I should have any, like, weirdness about it, but talking outside of an exam room about poop is weird for me. I don't know what that is! I can't—my doctor brain has to click on. I don't know.

Justin: Sydnee, it's not a—it's not a wild dichotomy. I imagine in your day-to-day life you don't put your finger in people's buttoles.

Sydnee: That's true.

Justin: Like, I think that there are different standards and practices for when you got your—your—your, uh, weird mirror wrapped around your forehead—

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] Uh-huh.

Justin: —and your white coat on.

Sydnee: Uh, but is there a better way than toilet paper?

Justin: I mean, I like to think so.

Sydnee: The bidet would argue—

Justin: Even though toilet paper still has a guest starring role—

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: —in the process.

Sydnee: Well, that's—that's debatable, but we'll get there.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, the word "bidet"—do you know where it comes from?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: What the—what word "bidet"—

Justin: I mean—

Sydnee: —I mean, you could probably guess the language of origin.

Justin: French.

Sydnee: Yes, it's a French word, bidet. Uh, it comes from a word for "pony."

Justin: Why?

Sydnee: How do you sit on a bidet?

Justin: I don't know. Bareback?

Sydnee: Oh, gosh, Justin...

Justin: What?

Sydnee: No, you just straddle it! You straddle it like you would a pony. Like you would a horse.

Justin: Oh, got it, yeah. I thought mine was good.

Sydnee: Did—I—which, by the way, I read that and thought, "Oh, that's how one uses a bidet." [laughs]

Justin: Sure, you straddle—

Sydnee: 'Cause I didn't know, 'cause we don't have those!

Justin: No. The are not—I don't think—have you ever seen one in your real life?

Sydnee: I don't think?

Justin: I don't think I have.

Sydnee: Surely I must've. I mean, I—I was all over Europe. But the—you know, they don't have a lot of bidets in hostels, though, so—

Justin: Yeah, fair.

Sydnee: —uh, or at least not the ones that I stayed in. perhaps there were hostels with bidets. So, you're—I guess you're supposed to straddle a bidet, and that's where—and it—and it—it's a certain kind of... horse. Like a really, like, short, stocky, like, short-legged little pony. And so it makes sense, because original bidets kind of looked that way.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like these little squat porcelain bowls with wooden legs that just kind of [holding back laughter] hunched over in the corner of your bedroom.

Justin: Is this something that would—I mean—okay. I'm gonna reveal my, uh, ignorance here. But, like, did—how—would it work without plumbing? I don't know how you would, like—

Sydnee: So, the original bidets—and these date back—just to kind of put you in a setting, probably the late 1600's is when bidets started appearing in France. Uh, and there is a thought as to who invented it, although we're not 100% sure. The guy who gets credit the most is named Christophe Des Rosiers. And he was a furniture maker. And that's what this is often, like—it leads back to French furniture makers. Which one made the first one? Which one had the first one in their bedroom? I don't know.

But he—this guy made furniture for French royalty, and there's at least this story where in 1710, uh, there was a—a pot put in the bedroom of Madame De Pris, who was the wife of a French Prime Minister, specifically for washing the genitals. So at this point it would've been literally, like, a wooden—like, four wooden legs with a little porcelain pot in the middle. Maybe, like, decorated. I could've been quite ornate, you know, 'cause it's made for royalty so it would've been a very beautiful piece of furniture. And you would just put water in it, and then straddle it and kind of... wash everything.

Justin: Got it.

Sydnee: Splash up there and wash everything.

Justin: Splash up there and wash everything.

Sydnee: Yes. So, like, no plumbing involved at this point.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Um, and they were—because of this, more were installed throughout the palace of Versailles, and it spread from there. That is—and this may be, like, an amalgam of various stories. Like, various members of French royalty and various furniture makers who had this idea, because at this point in history, to

bathe was an ordeal, right? Like, if you didn't have plumbing, bathing meant we have to haul water into this big tub, warmed water, until we fill it up—

Justin: So the idea is just, like, "How 'bout a little something for the genitals?"

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: "As long as we're in here..."

Sydnee: Yes, because the thought was, this would be good for after you go to the bathroom, right? Clean everything up after that. It would be used for—this is part of where the word "bidet" actually comes from—after a long horse ride was a common use for it, um, that you would come back and... you know, clean everything up, 'cause you'd been on horseback and maybe you'd get a little funky.

Justin: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] So—so it was used for that. Um, it was also a... it was also seen as a proper way to prepare oneself for other bedroom activities.

Justin: Sleep.

Sydnee: No.

Justin: Recuperating from the flu.

Sydnee: No, I'm talking about sexual activity.

Justin: Oh, my!

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Well, well, well!

Sydnee: That you may—you may wanna—

Justin: But Sydnee, it's Friday afternoon!

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] You may wanna freshen up a little bit, uh, before that. And so it was—it was used for all these things. And like I said, everybody—it was

originally associated with royalty, and so you would see these—and you can look up pictures of old bidets, and they're all, like, beautifully painted and they could be gold or silver—

Justin: [simultaneously] You'd probably get on a list, though. Probably get on a list.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: You'd probably get on some sort of list. "Old bidet, high-res, glossy JPEG."

Sydnee: The, uh—the last search in *my* search history is "Napoleon's bidet." So—

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: —there we go. Uh, I don't know what lists I'm on... but I bet they're interesting.

Justin: Yeah, you're probably already on 'em, though.

Sydnee: Oh, yeah.

Justin: This is, like, our 300-bajillionth episode. Like, you're on the lists.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Wherever the lists are, you're on 'em.

Sydnee: My popup ads, ever since we did the home lab tests and I ser—and I searched for home STI testing, my popup ads are... wild.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So anyway, uh, like I said, the original bidets were just these little porcelain pots with legs. Um, eventually they had, like, hand pump operated sprayers that were kind of added on so you could, like, pump the thing and spray.

Justin: Like a super soaker.

Sydnee: So—[laughs]

Justin: [holding back laughter] Basically.

Sydnee: Yes, like a super soaker for your down there.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: You know, basically.

Justin: That's what it said on the bowl! [snorts] Just engraved on there. This—here there be... like, one super soaker for thine... down there.

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh—

Justin: Yea, verily.

Sydnee: —the—the one that Napoleon had, I—I googled this 'cause I kept reading about Napoleon's bidet, and this is true. He had a silver gilt bidet that I guess he would even, like, take with him on his travels when he would go places. Like, "Pack the bidet, we must have the bidet." 'Cause they weren't hooked up to anything, so they were quite—well, I mean, probably heavy, but still portable. Uh, but he—

Justin: Always good to highlight, by the way, Napoleon's Bidet, excellent band name, free to use.

Sydnee: But he left his in his will to his son, and I found Napoleon's will and found that that is true.

Justin: Oh, wow! [leans away from the mic] Grody!

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: That's extremely grody.

Sydnee: Well, if—if nothing else—

Justin: That's the grodiest thing I've—that's *very grody*.

Sydnee: You know how—you know how in *Far and Away* Nicole Kidman brings that big suitcase full of spoons to sell in the new world so that she can, like, make her way? Like, she has a giant suitcase full of spoons.

Justin: No, Sydnee—

Sydnee: And then she loses 'em right away—

Justin: [holding back laughter] 'Cause no one's watch—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —No one's ever seen *Far and Away*! Do you know at the end of *Far and Away* it says "Thanks for watching, Sydnee"? [through laughter] It's in the credits. You're the only one that has seen and remembered *Far and Away*.

Sydnee: [through laughter] I have seen it maybe more than once, but she—she brings the spoons not to use the spoons, but to sell the spoons 'cause they're, like, silver. You know, they're expensive. Anyway, maybe that was Napoleon's thought, was like, "If all else fails, son, you can sell the bidet."

Justin: "You can sell this bidet to—"

Sydnee: "The silver bidet."

Justin: "—to the con-heads."

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Uh, Marie Antoinette even had a bidet in her prison cell, it is reported. They—they were so important for royalty that even before you execute someone—

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: —you could not deprive them of their right to freshen up their genitals.

Justin: [simultaneously] To basic—basic human rights.

Sydnee: Yes, to keep their perineum fresh. Uh, it seems like it—it briefly caught on in France, kind of spread throughout—mainly, like, rich people and royalty had access to these things, 'cause you had to have a maid, and they were kind of associated with that. Um, but it—it seemed to have died down somewhat. Uh, I

don't know if that was—some people tie it to the Revolution, the French Revolution, and so—that at that point, like, because it was really just a royalty thing, it wasn't—it didn't spread much beyond them at that point.

Um, except for in, uh—it went to other parts of Europe. So, like, at this point it's weird 'cause you kind of can follow the history of the bidet a lot more closely in Italy. Like, Italy and Portugal, and there were other places throughout Europe where it actually became way more widespread and was seen in everybody's home and, like, was much more—whereas, like, in France it kind of went away for a while and then came back.

Now, during the time that it wasn't as popular in France, there was still one place where you could always find it, and that was, uh, in brothels. And so that would lead to a really—

Justin: Ahh.

Sydnee: —as we get—as we move into American history with the bidet, this is really—

Justin: The tie to—

Sydnee: —this is why. If you're wondering, as an American, "Why do we not have bidets?" This is gonna get to that answer. Um, it wasn't until the 1800's that you saw them migrate from the bedroom to the bathroom, 'cause a bidet initially would've been in the bedroom, 'cause why—why keep it in the bathroom? It's not hooked to anything.

Justin: Mm-hmm, yeah, except—I mean, a little privacy might be nice. [snorts]

Sydnee: Well, I mean, just shut your bedroom door.

Justin: Yeah, but if you're preparing for... [strained, quiet voice] the making of love...

Sydnee: You're also thinking—I mean, like, remember. If we're getting into, like, the history of French royals, like, some of them held court while sitting on the toilet.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Like... we could revisit the royal fistula.

Justin: I'd rather not.

Sydnee: But anyway—so, they—the moved into the bathroom as we began to see indoor plumbing.

Justin: Ah! Okay.

Sydnee: 'Cause then you could have something with, like, taps on it, you know?

Justin: Sure, yeah, that's a lot more manageable.

Sydnee: You could actually have something that, like, had water. Um, it was still used for generally the same idea.

Justin: Genitally the same idea, did you say?

Sydnee: Genitally or generally. Um, and from there they spread throughout Europe, Asia, Latin America—a lot of different parts of the world started to take up the practice putting—installing a bidet next to the toilet in the bathroom. That became very commonplace many places.

It's funny, even as—kind of jumping ahead—there were, like—it became part of a standard, like, code as you would, like—if you're going to put in a new bathroom somewhere, but the 70's—

Justin: Gotta have a bidet.

Sydnee: —there were certain countries where, like, it was standard. You had to put a bidet in. it was just part of the thing.

Justin: "[holding back laughter] This isn't up to code."

Sydnee: "No, you—you don't have a bidet, you gotta have a bidet."

Justin: "Unhygienic."

Sydnee: Now, somehow Americans were clueless about all this until World War II.

Justin: Uh-huh?

Sydnee: And that was the first opportunity that Americans really had to see a lot of bidets, and to see them in action and see what they could do. And as I have already alluded to, where did they see these bidets? They saw them in brothels.

So... this—this begins the, uh, puritanical American response to the bidet.

Justin: [simultaneously] To bidets. Well, I'm eager to hear about it.

Sydnee: And Justin, I'm gonna tell you about it—

Justin: [gasps]

Sydnee: —right after we go to the billing department.

Justin: Let's go!

[theme music plays]

Justin: Quip, the makers of the Quip electric toothbrush—they want you to know that no matter what brand you use, if you have good habits, you are good. I think that that's nice! They're looking out for your health.

Sydnee: Oh, that is nice!

Justin: That's more important to them than whatever toothbrush you buy. But you know what? Quip does make it easier if you—if you want to try to improve your brushing habits, sometimes people brush for—let's say 30 to 40 seconds and then they get bored. "I don't wanna do this anymore. I can't eat while I'm doing this. This sucks. I'm gonna quit. I'm gonna go do something else."

Sydnee: You sound like you have personal experience with this.

Justin: I heard—my friend... Dustin...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: Told me about this. And, uh, you really should be brushing for two minutes. You know, and equally around the mouth. What Quip does is that it does these little pulses where every 30 seconds it pulses and lets you know to, like, switch to a different quadrant of your mouth. Like your upper left part of your mouth or whatever. And then after two minutes it, like, [buzzes] so you know that "Hey, I'm done brushin'!" It's great.

Uh, and they—what they do—so that's one way they help you improve your habits. They also help you by switching out your brush heads more regularly. On the—on the dentist-recommended schedule. So they just ship them straight to you when you sign up with Quip. They send you one when it's time to switch 'em out.

They got floss and toothpaste refills, too. Uh, every three months, and the shipping's free, which is cool.

Sydnee: You really have to tell your friend... Dustin... GacElroy... about this.

Justin: If you, like Dustin GacElroy, uh, want to improve your habits, head to getquip.com/sawbones and get your first refill free. That's getquip.com/sawbones. Quip: it's the good habits company.

Yeah, that's nice. Uh, so you—you learn how to brush your teeth. You're brushing, um, every day, two minutes, loving it. Wanna tell people kind of like a brag about, like, how—how good you are at brushing.

Sydnee: What's the best way to share your dental hygiene habits with the world?

Justin: Well, my friends, it's to start your own dental hygiene website where you talk about how great you are at brushing your teeth. Kind of a brag. How do you start to put together a website? Nobody knows, except one company is brave enough to reveal the secrets to us, the layman.

It's Squarespace. They have the—the guts to share the secrets, the keys to the castle, and to help you and me, the common folk, make our own dental hygiene websites.

Uh, everybody's using this thing. Gamers, coaches... coaches of gamers, uh—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: —healthcare professionals, students—

Sydnee: Gamers of coaches! [laughs quietly]

Justin: —[holding back laughter] gamers of coaches, people who trick coaches into playing Parcheesi with them. Uh—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —uh, sports teams. Uh, everybody is using Squarespace, and it can help you blog or publish content with, uh—with your new highfalutin website you can promote your business, announce projects, whatever you wanna do with a website! You can do it with Squarespace.

Plus they got built-in e-commerce functionalities so you can sell stuff, and, uh, 24/7 award winning customer support, which is wonderful.

So, right now, check out 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.

Justin: Now, Sydnee, you were, uh, about to tell me the coming to America portion of bidets—or rather, perhaps, the—the *not* coming to America portion of the story.

Sydnee: If you—if you read about bidets, if you learn about bidets, you get to this weird moment where you ask yourself, while the rest of the world was adopting the use of the bidet, and especially as plumbing made that so easy to do, why did Americans not follow suit.

Justin: It is wild, if you think about it. We're very big into pampering ourselves.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Very big into comfort.

Sydnee: Luxury.

Justin: Luxury. Big into hygiene, for a lot of people.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: It's, like, a big thing over here.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: Uh, it's kind of weird that we're—we're not down with bidets.

Sydnee: So, this—this probably—I mean, who knows everyone's individual reason in their head, back in the 1800's and 1900's, but it probably relates to the fact that we do not, in this country, shockingly enough, have a great track record about being open when we're discussing issues of sex or nakedness or anything like that. Uh, we tend to have quite prudish roots. And so—

Justin: Huh?

Sydnee: —yes. So you can imagine, as these soldiers are coming home from Europe after World War II, the only place that they've seen these things—whether or not they thought they were great. Let's go ahead and suppose that there was a soldier who thought they were just *amazing*.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "Oh, this was great, I felt so fresh. I want one of these every time I go to the bathroom."

"But where did you use it?"

"Well, honey..." [laughs quietly]

Justin: So what you're suggesting is that all of our GIs came home to a person, all our GIs come home and they're just wandering around thinking, "Man. I wish I could admit I knew what bidets was."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "I'd love to have one, and I just can't admit that I know what they were. If one other person—"

Sydnee: No—

Justin: "—would admit that they knew what bidets were, then I could—[holding back laughter] we could all finally admit that we love bidets and we saw them in brothels!"

Sydnee: The—the mi—the way the human mind works is so much murkier and convoluted than that. It's not that straightforward. People came home with these ideas that they used these things that were sort of taboo. Like, it was part of the whole thing. The sex was taboo. The bidet was taboo.

"I can't talk about any of it, or if I do I'll say, 'You won't believe what those wild French people have over there.'"

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which is what it—

Justin: Brothels!

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, it's what it became! It became this idea that, like, "Well, certainly as *Americans* we would never use this, but you know how French people are when it comes to the sex stuff."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that's how—that was the thought of it! It became associated with sex and with sinful behavior, and with things that—that, you know... good, clean, American fun wouldn't allow.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: And this was further perpetuated by the fact that at this time in history, a popular but completely ineffective form of contraception was douching.

Justin: Hmm.

Sydnee: In both and American and British history at this point in time. Uh, douching with various substances after sexual intercourse was thought to prevent pregnancy. Uh, of course this is absolutely not true. This does not work. Please do not try this. This is—we did a whole—I think we've talked about this before in our contraception episode. This doesn't work in any way.

Um, but a bidet was... one way that one could theoretically douche, following sexual intercourse, and prevent pregnancy. So not only have we now associated bidets with—they're something that Europeans do, [laughs quietly] they might be associated with sex, and maybe sex with someone other than your married partner, but also, maybe you use it to try to prevent pregnancy after you've had this unprotected sex with someone other than your married partner.

Justin: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Sydnee: So at this point they just became this very shameful thing in the minds of Americans. Weird, we don't understand it, we don't know 'em, we don't have 'em, let's just stay away from 'em.

And people tried to, like, move beyond this. All throughout—if you look throughout American history, there have been attempts by various, uh, people seeking money, [laughs quietly] to—

Justin: Just trying to—to make a run at bidets?

Sydnee: Yes! You know who even tried was John Harvey Kellogg.

Justin: That does not surprise me.

Sydnee: Yes. He was all about a lot of bad... shameful, sexual—

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: —ideas.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Yes. He—he—

Justin: The original kinkshamer.

Sydnee: In the sense that—yes. In the sense that he was—he was putting shame on people for their various sexual, uh, normal desires. And he tried to introduce something that he called the anal douche.

Justin: Mmm! That sounds great!

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs quietly]

Justin: Great, yeah! Please!

Sydnee: It was—it was very similar to a bidet. It was actually, like, a separate shower head attachment, and that's—it's very much like what you'll find throughout the Middle East, is that version of the bidet. Is, like, a separate little attachment that you can spray everything down with.

So it was the same, but people just didn't like it. Nobody in the US—

Justin: "I don't like this!"

Sydnee: —wanted that.

Justin: "Hey, Harvey? I don't *like* this. The douche—the anal douche you said was good and I would like? Turns out, egg on your face, [holding back laughter] I don't like this anal douche!"

Sydnee: Or even if people did like the anal douche, also, all that stuff you said about masturbation is really wrong, and you do some really wack stuff, and you're a bad guy? And—

Justin: And I've eaten so much yogurt this week, John Harvey Kellogg?

Sydnee: Your—your cornflakes are okay, but that's, like, the only thing you did—

Justin: The cornflakes are, like, good.

Sydnee: Well, they're not good. They're just fine.

Justin: They're fine, and—

Sydnee: Your cornflakes are fine, but everything else you did was pretty bad.

Justin: Your elf on a shelf cereal, uh, is—well, you won't make it for, like, 150 years, but when you do it will be sub par, as well. Sorry.

Sydnee: Uh, he's a bad guy. I wrote a whole essay once about how he's a bad guy.

Justin: It's in our book.

Sydnee: It's in our book. Anyway. [laughs quietly] In the—

Justin: "An essay" is a weird way of framing it.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Just part of our book you wrote, Syd. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I didn't wanna... sound like I was shamelessly—

Justin: [simultaneously] I once wrote a monologue—

Sydnee: —plugging—

Justin: I once wrote a one act monologue for the theater [through laughter] called *The Sawbones Book!*

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs] [through laughter] It—it's part of a book!

Sydnee: In the 60's, the American Bidet Company made a run at it, as you can tell.

Justin: [wheezes] [through laughter] I mean, with a name like that, what choice did they have?!

Sydnee: [simultaneously] By the name. The American Bidet Company. [laughs] Uh, led by Arnold Cohen. He tried to convince everybody, "Hey! Bidet's are great and I don't know why would don't have 'em yet, but, like, it's time. It is—"

Justin: "I've staked my business on—[laughs]"

Sydnee: "—it's time. It is—"

Justin: "—on the fact that y'all are gonna love these."

Sydnee: It was basically just a little sprayer on a toilet seat that you could attach to your existing toilet, which was a better—it's a better pitch for the American public, because then you don't have to, like, add a whole other thing to your bathroom that has to be plumbed and everything. This was just something that could be attached.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Uh, which is very similar, as a lot of people may note, to what is sold in a lot of places today, um, including in the US. Americans still didn't like it, but... Japan *loved* it.

Uh, and this idea that—that the American Bidet Company with Arnold Cohen had led to what we now know today as the washlet, which includes the, like, super toilet seat, like, the amazing robot toilet with—

Justin: Oh, with the doodads on it?

Sydnee: Yeah, with—I mean, you know, it can spray you off, of course. It can dry your bottom. It can deodorize things. The seat will stay warm. I mean, it's a whole—this was the prototype that eventually caught on like wildfire in Japan and gave birth to all these, you know—

Justin: Sadly the American—

Sydnee: —super toilets.

Justin: —American Bidet Company couldn't quite cut it here, but, uh, they renamed to ABC, just shortened it—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —and now they're making great programming.

[pauses]

Sydnee: That's not true.

Justin: [simultaneously] Like *Shark Tank*.

Sydnee: That would be interesting.

Justin: That would be an interesting fact if that was the next thing you said.

Sydnee: Yes. That is not true, though. There *was* a bidet, uh, or a washlet advertised on *Shark Tank*, if you want that tie in.

Justin: There. Thank you, yes.

Sydnee: Uh, they—

Justin: It's self-promotional, though. Shilling for ABC.

Sydnee: At this point, though, it—it was still a pretty expensive thing, and a lot of the ones that you'll find, the, like, super high end, fancy bidet/washlet, whatever you wanna call it—something that attaches to your preexisting toilet—it—you'll find very expensive ones. I mean, they're 3, 400 bucks. More, even, some of 'em.

Justin: Yikes!

Sydnee: Yes. They're quite pricey. Uh, and this was another—you know, this was a problem if you're trying to, like, break in widespread to the American market. A lot of people are like, "No, you know what? My toilet seat is fine. I don't think I need that."

Justin: Also, I just don't think you can get past the fact that your neighbors don't have one, and it makes it seem like you—at this point in history, I mean, like, perception and—and keeping up with the Joneses is everything. Like, the idea that you would have this and other people didn't need it, it seemed like you need more help there—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —you know what I mean? Like, listen, you don't understand what I'm doing in there. I can't—a simple paper can't—can't—[snorts] I gotta get a hazmat team in there, okay?

Sydnee: We're still so bad about talking about any of these things, right? Like, we still have so much stigma when it comes to just, like, normal bodily functions and what everybody does that—I mean, you can see where, yeah, "Why do you have a weird toilet? What's up with you?"

Justin: "What's wrong with *your* bu—[wheeze-laugh]"

Sydnee: "What—what is your butt doing that my butt isn't?"

Uh, there are new additions to the market now, obviously. Um, where they are more affordable they're way easier to install now, um, and it's definitely a growing market. Uh, you—you will find in the last, like, five or six years, every year more bidets and washlets are being sold in the US. Uh, on two—it's kind of two different ways that they're pitching it. It's interesting, because I found some that are marketed more towards, like—like, the boomers, like the older Americans, as, like, "This is the new luxury that you are not treating yourself to. The rest of the world knows of this great luxury, and you have not yet experienced it, and your—your bottom is in need. You must try this."

And then I've also seen it pitched more as, uh—like, to millennials as, like, a self care thing. "This is something that you could be doing for your body to, like, take better care of yourself and feel better every day, and—and the newer ones are making it more affordable to do so so, like, treat yourself."

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "Get a bidet."

Justin: "Get a bidet."

Sydnee: Yes. Um, but both are seeming to make some inroads, because you're—you're seeing these—especially these that attach to your toilet already. That's a lot easier to pitch than, like, "Have a bidet installed in your bathroom."

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Um, you're seeing them more and more spread. The other thing that is—that is intriguing, to younger people especially, is this better for the environment?

Justin: Uh... I mean, I could see, if it's using electricity, maybe not. But, uh, it probably saves on paper for sure.

Sydnee: So, the—these are the answers, and I am not an expert in this arena. I read all about bidets and tried to figure out what the truth there is, because depending on who you ask you'll get different answers. But in some ways—

Justin: Probably septic systems, if you have septic issues or, like, a less—less... uh, if you run into septic problems.

Sydnee: So I definitely wanna—I wanna address that. Hold that thought for a second.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: First of all, the paper. Obviously it cuts down on paper usage, clearly. I mean, even if you use a bidet and then kind of wipe as a follow up, um, because if the seat doesn't have a drying function you're gonna need to at least wipe the water off, even if it's cleaned you completely. There's—your butt's wet. That's unpleasant.

Justin: Yeah, nobody wants that.

Sydnee: No. You—not—you don't wanna put your panties and your pants on and then go out into the world with a wet butt. So—

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: —[laughs quietly] You still might use *some* toilet paper, although the new ones with drying function seek to completely eliminate toilet paper.

Justin: Hm.

Sydnee: Um, most people still use some toilet paper, it seems so it does save trees, for sure, in that respect. With typical usage, you consume less water in a bidet cycle than you do in making that same amount of, like, theoretical toilet paper you would use. So, like, you actually save water with, like, typical use of a bidet.

Justin: Huh!

Sydnee: I know that sounds strange.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But it—apparently there's so much water used in the toilet paper-making process.

Justin: Huh.

Sydnee: So if we're talking—I mean, if toilet paper didn't exist, that wouldn't be true, but if we're talking about an alternative—people are gonna clean their butts, right? With something. So if it's an alternative to toilet paper, it actually uses less water, which I didn't expect. So, good for trees, good for water.

Um, but if you start throwing in all the, like, perks, the seat-warming and the deodorizing, and—some of 'em have lights in the bowl and all kinds of things—

Justin: [snorts] [holding back laughter] It's unnecessary...

Sydnee: Is that—I mean, the—

Justin: [holding back laughter] A light in—

Justin: —the electricity and everything you're using at that point. And then you might—it may either end up neutral or maybe even to the negative, I don't know. I mean—

Justin: What do you need to see in there? Is it the toilet light comes on and you go, "There's my peepee. It's good to see."

Sydnee: It's for aim.

Justin: For *aim*?

Sydnee: For people who pee standing up?

Justin: Uh-huh?

Sydnee: If they go pee in the middle of the night and don't wanna turn the light on.

Justin: Oh, I—I guess...

Sydnee: So just the water lights up, and then you know right where your—

Justin: I guess...

Sydnee: —aiming. I mean, I guess if you sit down, too, but... it's a little—

Justin: I guess, yeah.

Sydnee: But yeah, that—either way. It's for—it's for night usage and not having to turn on the bathroom light.

Justin: [simultaneously] I just foll—I just foll—I just follow my heart. I just believe in myself and follow my heart.

Sydnee: Hmm, you miss you a lot. Your heart is not always guiding you in the right direction. The other thing is the alternative is those flushable wipes.

Justin: Oh yeah, those aren't flushable.

Sydnee: No, and we probably—

Justin: There's lots of things that can flush. That don't make it—mean you should.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] It's like when I talk to, uh, Charlie about the difference between, like, "Yes, Play Doh is non toxic, but that is not the same as being edible."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] Um, so if the alternative is wipes, that's not a great alternative. Uh, because even flushable wipes have caused problems for septic systems. They create something called... [pauses] fatbergs.

Justin: Why?

Sydnee: Like icebergs. But they're made of the fat that comes out of human waste... combined with the little fibers—

Justin: Oh, I don't wanna hear this.

Sydnee: —as the flushable wipes break down.

Justin: I actually don't wanna know this.

Sydnee: Create these giant fatbergs—

Justin: It's not too late. It's not too late.

Sydnee: —that have been, like—there was one in London that was, like, ten tons?

Justin: [quietly] It's too late.

Sydnee: That clogged the septic system, and it cost them *tons* of money to fix, and there's estimated that there's another one still underneath the city that is even—like, that is, like, a hundred tons or something. Like, this giant fatberg. Anyway—

Justin: Take—take that back.

Sydnee: —flushable wipes are probably not a great... idea.

Justin: Tell me—admit that you made that up.

Sydnee: No, I didn't.

Justin: Tha was just your like, dark, twisted, Clive Barker style—

Sydnee: I would say whatever your—

Justin: —gothic horror.

Sydnee: —whatever your plan is for taking care of your butt after you go to the bathroom, flushable wipes are probably not our best bet.

Justin: Alright, fine.

Sydnee: Um—

Justin: I'll just flush all these wipes down the toilet then. 'Cause they're so terrible.

Sydnee: The—the big thing is the health. I mean, that's what we got to get to, right? The medical.

Justin: Yes!

Sydnee: What—what do people say? So, there are a lot of companies that advertise them as also good for you medically. Not only are they a nice thing and they get you clean and you feel good and they—treat yourself, all those things that are fine to say—they also say that they have medical benefits. Um, some of the things they say are they can prevent urinary tract infections. They can help treat hemorrhoids. They can help treat anal fissures. They can help treat rectal prolapse, anal fistulas, anal itching, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, Chron's disease, um, ostomies, and that they also reduce bacteria on your butt and in your vagina, and that this is a positive thing, to reduce the bacterial load in those areas of your body.

Justin: Hmm... this doesn't ring true for me.

Sydnee: So let's—let's break this down. First of all, as you can imagine, when it comes to, like, actual studies...

Justin: Nothing, right.

Sydnee: Right. Well—and one doctor, as I was reading about this, pointed out—imagine the control group. If you're gonna do a blinded study, you have to have people who used a bidet, and people who thought they used a bidet, but didn't.

Justin: [laughs] "Hey, that was my sink!"

Sydnee: But how do you—

Justin: "Get back in here!"

Sydnee: —how do you spray water on someone's butt—

Justin: It's just a—it's just a cardboard hole in the floor and a guy with a super soaker below it. Like—and even that wouldn't work, 'cause that's simulating a bidet!

Sydnee: I know. Well, that's what—you have to make people think that water was just sprayed on their butt, but water wasn't actually sprayed on their butt.

Justin: Couldn't you do, like, a—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: —I don't know the exact word, but, like, a cultural study, because the two cultures are so—like, if you saw, like, a lo—a lower rate of some of these things in countries that use bidets a lot...

Sydnee: Yes, but you can't control all the variables then. If you have—

Justin: Sure, right.

Sydnee: —if you have, like, the—how many other confounders might be thrown in there that would actually change the rate of those things? It'd be a really hard study. I mean, you could make those comparisons, but it would be hard to draw any kind of conclusive... you know. Anything more than correlation. Causation would be very difficult.

But, um—but, as I said, there's no real evidence for any of it. Aside from the fact that these studies would be hard to design, not a lot of them have even been done. There are very few. They're very small.

Um, if you have an itchy butt...

Justin: Go on?

Sydnee: Pruritis ani, if your butt itches, uh, and you have been told that we can't find anything wrong, you've been to your doctor, they can't find any kind of infection or parasite or anything else causing it, and they tell you, like, maybe it's an irritant? And maybe all things should—just keep things away from your butt until it feels better, I guess? Maybe it would help with that?

This is more convenient than, like, having to take a shower every time you poop.

Justin: True.

Sydnee: Um, but most anything else we're gonna talk about, there's really no—and you could make an argument that, like, it's healthier in the sense that if I'm not wiping, I'm—my hands are staying cleaner, right?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: If I'm not touching the area where the poop was, then there's less likelihood that I'm going to get any of that fecal bacteria on my hands and touch anyone with it.

Um, but you could also just wash your hands, and again, most people do still wipe at least some after they use a bidet.

There was a study where they, um, tried to see if they could help with things like hemorrhoids, because hemorrhoids have a lot to do with excess pressure down there.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Uh, and so they did a study where they measured pressure. They, like, inserted a pressure probe in the rectum of patients—of participants to see, like, what they have—

Justin: Hopefully paid participants.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, informed. [laughs quietly] I don't know. They were informed. Uh, to see if they had more or less pressure without the use of the bidet, and they found that there was less pressure in the rectal area when you used a bidet, which you would think would mean fewer hemorrhoids. But, like, there is no way that from that tiny study you could say, "So, bidets prevent hemorrhoids!"

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Uh, do they subjectively make you itch less or hurt less? Maybe. I mean, anecdotally I've heard that reported. That, like, "Well, my hemorrhoids feel better if I use the bidet to clean up than if I use toilet paper, perhaps."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But I mean, again, that's—it's very subjective. I think that fine but, like, to say they're gonna prevent hemorrhoids, we don't have enough data right now.

Uh, there was another small study that suggested that perhaps this would be really great for use in the care of, like, elder adults who have difficulty getting themselves clean after the bathroom.

Justin: Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, and there was—it showed some positive results, but they still—they still needed someone there to assist them afterwards, um, in wiping. So it didn't completely—you know it's not like—it does not give independence.

Justin: Right, right, right.

Sydnee: It was—it was a good thing, but it didn't completely return them bathroom independence.

Justin: Makes sense.

Sydnee: Um, the other thing I would say is that—and all these other things—there's just no studies. I mean, there is no way. Like, to say that it prevents UTIs, to say that it does anything for irritable bowel syndrome, um—I just don't—they're not basing that on anything, certainly. Um, and it obviously, as I've already said is not contraception. It will not prevent pregnancy [crosstalk]—

Justin: You all at home should've figured that out. I bet even people at the time were like, "I don't know. I'll try it. I'm already squatting."

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: "But probably not. I think I'm probably hosed."

Sydnee: Uh, the—there is potential for harm, I will say, and some of these are pretty obvious and easy to avoid. One is, uh, there was a case where somebody burned themselves where they turned the water too hot.

Justin: That's an awkward... doctor's visit.

Sydnee: Yeah. So obviously if the water is too—please don't put any part of your body in hot—in hot water.

Justin: Yeah. Don't—don't overclock your—your bidet to be scalding temps.

Sydnee: It also—you can adjust the pressure on some of them, and too-high pressure—

Justin: Blow a hole through your butt. Second hole.

Sydnee: Well, you can damage the sphincter... activity. Like, the sphincter itself. So, like, too-high pressure could be dangerous.

But, I mean, these things—typically you can control for. I mean, these are kind of rare things, but you do need to be aware of them if you're gonna use a bidet. There is a possibility some people have brought up—we've talked about before, like, the bacterial cloud that happens when you flush the toilet. Remember we talked about that, when you flush the toilet it shoots the—

Justin: Oh, yeah. 'Cause it shoots the particulate in the air, yeah.

Sydnee: —bacteria, yeah. And that the dryer could do that as well. Like, if your bidet has a drying function—

Justin: It could blow—

Sydnee: —just blows the bacterial cloud up into the air.

Justin: [simultaneously] —poo gas into the air.

Sydnee: But there's—again, as I said in that episode, there's no evidence that this is doing anything to anybody. It sounds gross, it feels gross, but, like, as far as people actually getting sick from it—

Justin: It happens when you flush anyway, right?

Sydnee: Yeah, and there's no evidence of that. Um, there—there is, I would say—I would push back really hard against—you'll see places say this will help remove that extra bacteria from your butt, your perineum, your vagina, around your urethra, that whole area.

Um, there's no—first of all, no. You don't need to do that. There's no need—there's no *extra* bacteria. Once you have removed the feces, you're good.

Justin: Good, yeah.

Sydnee: The bacteria that are there *need* to be there. The bacteria that are in a vagina need to be in a vagina. That bacteria—I mean, this is all normal flora. If there is a problem and you're having pain or discharge or whatever, please go see a doctor, but as far as the idea that, like, if you're healthy and feel fine and you're not having any symptoms, you still might have too much bacteria—

Justin: Stinky butt bacteria, yeah.

Sydnee: —in your butt or in your vagina—that's not—there's no basis for that. So, like, the idea that you would need to do anything, including a bidet, to remove that bacteria, is... totally false. Um, and if you look at, like—some bidets have a rear... or it's also called sometimes the family setting?

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: The rear setting, or the family setting.

Justin: Get everybody on the bidet!

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Um, and then they also might have a front setting.

Justin: Uh-oh. That one's just for your parents.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: Not a family anymore.

Sydnee: The front—

Justin: This is a private setting.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] The front setting is to, uh, again, wash any of the front genitals that you—whatever your front genitals are, to wash those. Um, and it—it has also sometimes been, uh, pushed as a, "Hey, this is really good if you have a vagina because it can clean out your... vagina."

Justin: Hmm...

Sydnee: Um, sort of like a—like a douche would. Um, and as we have covered on this show before, uh—

Justin: Nobody needs to douche.

Sydnee: Well, there is no need for a cisgender woman to douche.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Uh, cisgender women do not need to douche their vaginas. Your vagina has the bacteria it has for a good reason. That flora is important. Douching has been shown to be bad. It is unnecessary, and it furthers this myth that the vagina needs to be...

Justin: Corralled.

Sydnee: [laughs] Needs to be, like, kept proper for anyone else. I mean, it, like—that there's something inherently wrong with it, that it's gross or it smells bad or that there's—that you need to keep it maintained.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: No. I mean, like, just be clean, like the rest of you, and that's it. You do not need to douche, if you're a cisgender woman and you have a vagina, you don't need to douche.

I make that distinction because it is important to know that, um, for trans women who have vaginoplasty, they—there is a necessity to douche, and there's a protocol for that, but that's an important distinction to make, is that for a cisgender woman, there's no need to douche your vagina. For a transgender woman with a vagina, you may well and probably do need to douche. Um, so listen to your doctor, if your doctor is saying that. I'm not contradicting them. Listen to your doctor.

Uh, if you have a mobility issue, could a bidet make it easier to keep clean?

Justin: Probably.

Sydnee: Probably, but again, I'm—this is me guessing.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Probably, maybe.

Justin: Case by case, I would guess.

Sydnee: Yes. I think it's very individual. And so I'd say, like, as far as on the medical end, they're pretty neutral. I think that the potential for harm from a bidet is fairly low, if used appropriately. Um, considering all the setting and everything we talked about. But I think that the idea that it's going to cure or treat or prevent anything... I really don't—I don't have any data that would make me say that. I would say it's fine.

I mean, I have now used one. It's nice! It's nice. You feel clean... I guess.

Justin: So you come down at neutral?

Sydnee: I come down on it—well, medically I just—I think there's no harm—no—no, uh—no help, really. It's like—it's not a medical device, how about that? Let's take it out of the medical realm. Not everything has to be medical. Not everything has to be for your health. Some things can just be, "This feels nice. I enjoy it. I would like to have it on my toilet, and I'm using it appropriately, and I'm not expecting it to do anything for me medically. It just is a nice thing."

Justin: Alright. Well, we've heard from Sydnee, and now we're ready to begin my three hour lecture on the benefits of the bidet. If you'll look at the first slide... [clicks tongue] bidets saved my life. That's right, folks. Strap in.

Sydnee: *Did* bidets save your life?

Justin: No, but it is nice. Um, that's gonna—

Sydnee: You enjoy the bidet.

Justin: —I enjoy the bidet. That's gonna do it for us here on, um... uh... *Sawbones*, the podcast that we're recording, currently. I don't know why I had to summon up the title of it, but I know it. Don't act like I don't know what it's called!

Sydnee: If you want a bidet or washlet, there are a lot of affordable models out there now, and there's—there should be no stigma, but they're also not gonna, like... cure you of anything.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So.

Justin: Um, uh, thank you so much to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. Uh, thanks to the Maximum Fun Network for having us as a part of their, uh, podcasting family. Uh, let's see. Uh, we have a book that we wrote. We referenced it during this show. It's called *The Sawbones Book*. You can find it wherever books are sold, and, uh, lots of people like it, and maybe you will too.

Uh, we're—we're real proud of it. Um, is that gonna do it for us, Syd?

Sydnee: I think that's it.

Justin: That is going to do it for us—oh! You know what? Something we have not mentioned yet—and I wanna get these dates exactly right because, uh, I don't wanna mislead anyone. On February 19th, we are going to be at the, uh, Taft Theater in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: February 19th, with *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*. Uh, if you go to bit.ly/becomethemonster, you can get tickets to see that show. Um, tickets are, like, 40 bucks, and you can come see it! We're doing *The Adventure Zone* the night after if you wanna, uh, come see that too.

Um, but *that* is going to actually do it for us for this week. 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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