

Sawbones 306: Viking's Disease

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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!

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

[audience cheers noticeably louder]

Sydnee: [bashfully] Thank you.

[cheering continues]

Justin: It's fine.

[cheering continues]

Justin: It's fine.

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] Thank you.

Justin: It's your time. It's your time now. You're just cheering out your time.

[audience laughs]

Justin: That's fewer jokes I have to make up, 'cause you're just cheering... for my wife. Because she's—

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: —great? I don't know. I don't get it.

Sydnee: It's fine, it's fine. Thank you, thank you.

Justin: It seemed about equal. That time seemed equal.

Sydnee: Uh—

Justin: I'm just gonna drink my white wine.

Sydnee: It's—okay. Could you please explain what you're drinking? 'Cause that's a weird—that's clearly not—

Justin: It's a white wine. It's... White Claw mixed with... red wine. It's a white wine.

[audience laughs and cheers]

Justin: Can I say this, folks?

Sydnee: That is what he's drinking. [through laughter] That's not a lie.

Justin: I said this once backstage and it made people *so angry*.

[audience laughs]

Justin: "It's not a white wine."

"Yeah it is, it's White Claw and... red wine, mixed together. It's a white wine."

It made people so angry [through gritted teeth] that I just doubled down.

I didn't even *want* to drink this tonight. I just wanted the opportunity to talk about white wine. And really irritate a lot of people.

Sydnee: No, it's just the infiltration of White Claw into our lives... in general—I thought it was a joke. I was like, "Ha ha, we like White Claw now." No, and now it's a—it's—like, it's backstage—

Justin: Good.

Sydnee: —it's everywhere, it's in our home... it's in *my* beer fridge, what is happening?

Justin: It's just good. It's refreshing.

[audience laughs]

Justin: When you're poolside, [conspiratorially] or when you wish you were...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Ew...

Justin: ... reach... for a White Claw.

Sydnee: Ew. You should—

Justin: Or, if you want to class it up, try mixing it with red wine...

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: ... for a white wine!

Sydnee: So, before we came, I asked on the show for suggestions for topics, because we always like to do something that's, like, regionally, you know, connected, something that would be interesting to everybody who lives in whatever city we're touring in.

And I got an email that said, uh, "Would you please talk about Viking disease?"

[audience laughs]

[scattered cheers]

Sydnee: And I said—and I thought, "Okay, that's perfect. First of all that's—okay, that would be great. We can talk about Vikings. Uh, and also, I don't know what that is!"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, because I'd never heard that term to refer to this particular condition. And so I thought we would talk about Viking disease, right? 'Cause you guys like—like, that's a—

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: —you guys like Vikings, right?

Justin: I do like Vikings. I like Vikings, like, the regular amount.

Sydnee: My—my—[laughs quietly]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: My understanding is that that comes from—like, there's a lot of Scandinavian descent in this part of the country that—

[audience cheers loudly]

Sydnee: —okay, so you—like, that—that whole, like Nordic vibe, you're into. And so... [holding back laughter] Vikings. And—and then maybe in this—in this particular instance, you also have, uh, some extra fibrous tissue... [laughs quietly] in your hand, creating a contracture. It's called Viking disease. Anyway, so that's what we're gonna talk about. Not—that's—that's not as, like... fun and sexy. But! Interesting.

Thank you to Mara, if you're here, for this—for this topic, and for teaching this name for this condition, which I never learned is Viking disease. I know about it, but I'd never heard of it as called this. Um—

Justin: It's the, like, last possible thing you would imagine Viking's disease being, right?

[audience laughs]

Justin: The last possible thing.

Sydnee: I—it really—it sounds very, like, scary and intense. [through gritted teeth] Viking disease.

Justin: Like, it seems like—

Sydnee: But—

Justin: —he loves axes so much that we came up with a medical condition about it. 'Cause he loves axes so much.

Sydnee: What it really comes down to is that it's—the development of this extra, kind of thick, fibrous tissue and nodules in the palm of your hand. And over time, it will start to cause your fingers to contract down to where you can't bend them completely, so your hand'll end up looking like this. This is—[crosstalk]—

Justin: I just saw literally 20 people!

[audience laughs]

Justin: "[hoarse voice] Just a quick check to make sure—okay!"

[audience laughs]

Justin: "[hoarse voice] Hand is okay! Hand is fine!" [clears throat] Like, literally 20 of you—and I can't see most of you. I saw 20 of you in light just, like, surreptitiously, like, "Can I... yes."

[audience laughs]

Justin: "Okay. Continue with the entertainment!" There's probably one of you who's like, "Aw, man."

Sydnee: "Aw, man!"

[audience laughs]

Justin: "Aw, beans!"

Sydnee: I—it's most—it's most common with the ring finger, and I can tell you—like, it really is—the reason it has this connection, Viking disease, is because it has a genetic predisposition, and specifically in Scandinavian countries it's much more common.

And so if genetically that's where, you know, you come from, you are more likely to develop it, and I have it in my family. And so as I was doing this research, I was sitting there looking at my hand the whole time goin' "Do I see..." 'Cause it said at first it'll start with some puckering, and I was like, "Do I see any puckering? I don't—I don't, but not yet, but maybe."

Um, but in—in Scandinavian countries it affects, like, 10% of men and about 2% of women, so it is—it is a pretty common thing, and so... I don't know. You might wanna check your hands.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Um, there are specific things—

Justin: How's your—how's your entertainment this evening? Pretty good, huh?

[audience laughs and cheers]

Sydnee: There are some specific things that can predispose you to it. Uh, Diabetes, especially type 1, has been linked to this. They've also linked, um—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: —sure! Uh—

Justin: Okay! Okay. Don't wanna wade *too* deep into the cheers for the type 1 diabetes.

[audience laughs]

Justin: I'm assuming it's not in enthusiastic support, but maybe, uh, more of an "Atta boy" sort of...

[audience laughs]

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: [laughs] Also—

Justin: Type 1 diabetes was invented in Minnesota, so.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Why do the scientists keep making it?!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Also, uh, smoking has been linked to it. Alcohol has been linked to it. Um, but we're still—

[scattered cheers]

Sydnee: —[laughs quietly] we're still not entirely sure why it happens. Like I said, we know there are some genetic factors, but we don't know exactly what starts to cause it. There are some similar conditions that can occur in other parts of the body. There's something called Ledderhose disease, and it's the same thing in your feet, basically. Same idea of, like, these nodules and fibrous bands and, like, contraction of your feet.

And then there is a similar disease that can occur in the penis—

[scattered laughter]

Sydnee: —called Peyronie's disease.

[scattered cheers]

Justin: You all...

[scattered cheers]

Justin: ... just laughed...

[audience laughs]

Justin: ... this is a medical program.

[audience laughs]

Justin: You laughed at the mention of the word "penis."

[audience laughs]

Justin: I am so... disappointed.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: If *I* have to restrain myself... you all do too.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I just like the idea—

Justin: [sighs] Continue, Sydnee. I'm sorry.

Sydnee: —[laughs quietly] as—

[audience laughs]

Justin: About them.

Sydnee: As we get to this, this has a different name that it's most commonly known by, and they're all kind of named for doctors.

Justin: The penis?! Oh boy! I got names for days for that!

Sydnee: [simultaneously] No, it—Viking disease!

Justin: Hold on. Get comfy. Alright.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Nope. Nope.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: This is a medical show.

Justin: Third grade!

Sydnee: No.

Justin: These are the ones I learned in third grade. Here we go.

Sydnee: Nope, we're calling it the penis.

Justin: Worm!

[audience laughs loudly]

Justin: That's the first one I knew about.

Sydnee: [sighs]

Justin: Worm.

Sydnee: I just wanna know if—'cause, like, the doctor—all these different—whether it was your hand or your foot or your penis, the—a different name—

Justin: Worm.

Sydnee: —of a different doctor is connected [holding back laughter] with each one. And I wonder if it was, like, a fight. Like, "Uh, who's gonna get the hand, the foot, and who's gonna get the penis?"

And everybody's like, "Not it!" [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And the one guy's like, "Ah... alright. Peyronie." [laughs] "I'll get the penis."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Anyway, we—you can—there has been attempts to, like, trace the origins of this condition to, like, the trail of the Vikings, essentially, because of this, like, genetic connection.

And so you see that it originates in Scandinavian countries, but then you see it spread, especially to, like, the United Kingdom, because if you go back to 865, what was called—I love reading about these histories of the Vikings, 'cause you'll find, like, some historians who are like, "[gravely] A great heathen army... [laughs quietly] [dramatic tone] descended upon England."

And then there are other people who are like, "Listen, they weren't that bad."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "Everybody likes to blame 'em with the raids and the stuff, but they were trading! There were poets. Calm down."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, they were led by—I love this—the pair of warrior brothers who led the—the Viking army, traders, whatever you wanna call 'em—uh, Halfdan... [through laughter] and Ivar the Boneless.

[audience laughs loudly and cheers]

Justin: [exhales] Sorry, did you say *Halfdan*?

Sydnee: Halfdan!

[audience laughs]

Justin: *Woof*. And Ivar the Boneless. And my boy Halfdan.

[audience laughs]

Justin: "Hey, what's up? I'm Ivar the Boneless. This is my boy Halfdan, and we're just gonna pillage your stuff."

[audience laughs]

Justin: "What's up? Make sure to smash that like and subscribe button."

[audience laughs loudly]

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh... [laughs] And then they started, like, some local rock music festivals. [laughs]

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: In the town.

Justin: The Fire Festival, which they spelled F-I-R-E—

[audience laughs]

Justin: —and they thought was *good*, and everyone else thought was very *bad* and *challenging*. 'Cause it was at their houses.

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So, as—as the Vikings spread over, you know, the United Kingdom, you start to see, like, more and more incidences of, uh, Viking disease among people there as, like, you know, they started living there and, like, spreading their genetic material. You know.

Justin: Hm. That's a charming way of putting it. Go on.

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] All over the place. Um, and so this is where—this is where this connection comes from. It's interesting, though, because this is probably not the whole story, because as we learned more throughout the years about this particular condition, we have found that, like, for instance there's a particularly incidence within Japan, and there is no, like, Viking spread to Japan. So obviously there are other things that can predispose to this, but this connection to, like, the Scandinavian origins has stuck anyway.

Um, there's also mention in some ancient—'cause there's been this thought, like this is more of a... this—this is really the origin of this disease, but then if you go back, there's some mention in some ancient Greek texts of a—and this is the way

that they've connected it: "Some sort of hand condition... that seemed to get better if you had an emperor or a doctor stand on your hand."

[audience laughs]

Justin: *What?*

Sydnee: And there aren't a lot of things—[laughs quietly] generally speaking... contractures of hand, foot... anything, really—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: —that we treat by standing on it... [laughs]

Justin: Or getting a *fancy* person to stand on it.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Justin: These days it would be an influencer.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] And this has been connected to one of the old, like, Scandinavian treatments for Viking disease was very similar, and it was said that there was—like, a rich guy was getting a foot massage? And he—and, like, the foot massage wasn't going so well?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So he—so he "accidentally"—this is the way it's recorded. "Accidentally" kicked the hand of the person giving him a foot massage, and it caused them a great deal of pain, but then later they were like, "Thank you so much. My hand is fixed."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And this was the origin of, like, this ancient Scandinavian fix for it is, like, "No problem. Hold still. [laughs quietly] Let me—"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "Let me kick that hand... and you're good." And so that's been the thought. Like, "Well, maybe it's a lot more common throughout history than we know."

Justin: My uncle's the mayor. Let me see if that's enough. I don't know.

[audience laughs]

Justin: I'm gonna try.

Sydnee: I don't know how important the city official had to be.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Like, the county commissioner?

Justin: County commissioner kicks it.

Sydnee: Dog catcher?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know. Uh, as it spread, especially throughout Great Britain, it was known by different names. And, like, for a while—you'll hear certain parts of the world where they kind of refer to it as, like, Celtic hand, and it has this really strong connection with that part of the world, even though it very clearly has these roots in Scandinavia.

Um, and then another—my favorite name for it is "The curse of the MacCrimmons."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] So... this traces back to 15th century Scotland. And the origin of this—because have their whole own kind of mythology as to where this condition came from, and it says that a long time ago in Scotland, the chieftains of the Island of Skye where Clan MacLeod. But—

Justin: [loudly] Yes! "[singing Queen's "Princes of the Universe"] Here we are!
[imitates drums] Born to be kings!"

That's why they're so good at holding swords! It all makes sense!

Justin: Hi, everybody! I hope you're enjoying this live episode of *Sawbones*. Uh, I just wanted to take a brief moment to tell you about our sponsors for this week. Uh, first up we have Stitch Fix. Uh, I feel like we've talked about Stitch Fix so many times, you must be well acquainted, but if you have not given it a whirl, think about your own personal style. Maybe, if you're anything like me when I started using Stitch Fix, you don't really have a sense of it.

Uh, and that's okay. Stitch Fix is here to walk you through the entire thing to find out your vibe, what looks good on you, what you love wearing. They deliver your favorite clothing brands right to your door. You tell 'em your measurements, uh, your preferences, how much you wanna pay for certain items—like, "I'd never pay \$100 for a shirt. No way, Stitch Fix!" And they'll—they understand. They get it. \$100 shirts aren't for everybody.

And, uh, they'll put together a box of clothes that they hope will fit you perfectly. The stuff the you love you keep, the stuff you don't love you ship back with no charge for shipping, or exchanges, or returns, or any of that stuff.

Uh, and over time your stylist is gonna get to know you. They're get to know your style even better. Uh, and the experience is just gonna get better and better, so give it a whirl right now. I think you'll really enjoy it.

You can go to [stitchfix.com/sawbones](https://www.stitchfix.com/sawbones), and you'll get an extra 25% off when you keep everything in your box. That's [stitchfix.com/sawbones](https://www.stitchfix.com/sawbones).
[Stitchfix.com/sawbones](https://www.stitchfix.com/sawbones).

We also wanna tell you about DoorDash. Um, this is a personal favorite of ours; one that has been a lifesaver so many times. When you don't have a plan for dinner and you don't have time—anything to cook, you don't have time to cook, uh, whatever it is—or you just got a craving and you, like, don't wanna leave the house. It's so cold.

Uh, DoorDash to the rescue. They connect you with your favorite restaurants in your city. You just open the app, you pick the food you wanna eat, and they deliver it right to you.

Uh, they deliver in all 50 states and Canada, from, uh, local go-to's or choose from national restaurants like Chipotle and Wendy's and, uh, Cheesecake Factory.

So don't worry about dinner. Let dinner come to you... with DoorDash. Right now, our listeners can get \$5 off their first order of \$15 or more when you download the DoorDash app and enter the promo code "sawbones."

\$5 off your first order when you download the DoorDash app and use the promo code "sawbones."

And, uh, with that complete, let's get back to the show!

Sydnee: But second to the chieftains... were their pipers. And that was the MacCrimmons.

Justin: Oh. That's less cool than the Highlanders, but go on.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] So my—my understanding is that if you were a MacCrimmon, then it was expected you would play the bagpipes. I don't think you got, like, a choice. This was just—you have been born into the MacCrimmons, you will play the pipes now.

And this worked out great—

Justin: It's like that for us and podcasting, actually.

[audience laughs]

Justin: It's very sad. I didn't choose this life.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So this worked out great for the MacCrimmons for a long time, and then a curse arose to stop them from being the official pipers of the Island of Skye forever.

Um, and there are a lot of different stories, as you would expect, 'cause it's kind of—it's kind of folklore, as to exactly what this curse was about.

Um, it's either that there was a widow whose only son was taken by the press gangs, which were, like, people who were forcing—they were, like, drafting you into the military, but, like, not dra—it was, like, forced. They're like, "No, you're drafted. We just took you. We stole you. You're drafted."

So—that maybe she put a curse on the family of the MacCrimmons? Um, there's a whole other story about a woman who taught her piping—[through laughter] the family piping secrets...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: ... to someone else, the MacPhersons, and she was punished by removing some of her fingers, and so then she put a curse on the MacCrimmon family forever for punishing her for teaching the piping secrets.

One way or another... there was a curse—

Justin: It's made up.

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: There was a curse put on the MacCrimmons that they would no longer be the official pipers of the Island of Skye, and the result was that all the pipers in the MacCrimmons family slowly had their hands... curled in into claws... and they never piped again.

And so in certain parts of Scotland, this is called the curse of the MacCrimmons, if you have Viking disease. Um, that is probably not the medical origin of this condition.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Agree to disagree.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: It's—when I do these shows, because I—like I said, I had already heard of this condition by a different name. And so as I'm setting this up in my head I'm thinking, "Well, I'll wait and reveal it later in the show, 'cause it's, like, a surprise," except it occurred to me that, like, it's really only interesting for me. And there are gonna be a handful of people in the audience who are gonna go, "I knew that's what it was!" But not very many.

But I'll still enjoy it, so... thank you.

Justin: This is Syd's version of "90's kids will love this one."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: The name that I learned for this condition—

Justin: Here we go.

Sydnee: —was not Viking disease.

Justin: Oh my gosh, here comes the twist!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: It was Dupuytren's contracture.

[scattered loud cheers]

Sydnee: I knew there would be a handful.

Justin: Some of you are faking it, and that's cool.

[audience laughs]

Justin: I get it. Welcome to my squad.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: For—for Doctor Dupuytren. Also Baron Dupuytren. He was a Baron as well as a Doctor. I don't know which you—

Justin: Baron Dupuytren definitely sounds like a JRPG villain, one hundred...

[audience laughs]

Justin: ... thousand percent.

Sydnee: I don't know which one you go with, if you're a doctor *and* a Baron.

Justin: Dr. Baron Dupuytren.

Sydnee: Dr. Baron Dupuytren.

[audience laughs]

Justin: 100%.

Sydnee: Excuse me, that's Dr. *Baron* Dupuytren. Uh, and as many scholars have pointed out, even though it is most associated with him—and that was certainly the name that I was taught in school is Dupuytren's—uh, he was not the first doctor to describe this condition.

Um, you can go back and find mentions of this, initially from a Dr. Felix Platter who—but we don't call it Platter's disease. Uh, from Switzzler—Switzerland in 1614, and he was the first one to actually describe it, and talk about some different ways to fix it.

And he described it, which I really like, as, uh, that your hand will have tendon-like crispiness. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Ew!

Sydnee: So you get crispy hands. So he was probably the first—he was the first one to describe it. And then in the late 1700's, we had a British doctor, Dr. Henry

Kline, who described it again, and wrote about it, and went into some possible treatments for it, and tried to say, like, "This could be called Kline's contracture."

And everybody was like, "Eh... I don't... "

[audience laughs]

Justin: "I dunno."

Sydnee: "I don't know."

Justin: "Sounds good to me!"

Sydnee: "I don't like that." And then one of his students who, like, studied under him and went on to continue his works and wrote extensively about the contracture itself, and also, uh, some surgical procedures that he tried to fix it, to, like, cut through the fibrous tissue and release it so that you could, you know, open up your hand again.

Uh, Dr. Astley Cooper. He wrote about it, and then *he* said, "You know what we could call it? Cooper's contracture... will be a pretty cool name for this. I'm writing a huge treatise on it. I'm publishing books about it. I'm doing this procedure. I'll even give my mentor some credit, and we could call it the Kline-Cooper.. contracture."

Justin: That's hard to say. I don't like that one.

Sydnee: Which is a lot of names. Um, but again, it didn't really seem to catch on. None of these names, until 1831. There was a Frenchman, Dr. Baron Dupuytren, who was a pretty famous surgeon already in his own right. He was a surgeon to Napoleon. He actually took care of his hemorrhoids.

[scattered laughter]

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: So you know, I mean... he trusted him with his hemorrhoids.

Justin: It's amazing.

Sydnee: Uh, and he was the—

Justin: Which were especially bad after he ate the Ziggy Piggy, as everybody...

[audience laughs]

Justin: ... knows.

Sydnee: He—[laughs quietly] Thank you. I—I enjoyed that.

Justin: Just for you, Syd.

Sydnee: Aw, thank you. And he was—he was kind of a controversial figure in surgical history. I lo—I started reading about—all I knew about this guy is that there's a contracture named after him. I figured he was a doctor. And so, as I started reading about Dr. Dupuytren, uh, he was—he was very much lauded for his skill. He was a very talented surgeon. But his personality apparently left something to be desired, and I think this probably plays in to how this guy ended up with all the credit.

Um, he was described as a square, solid man with a high-domed head.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: He was critical of all those around him. He had few friends. [laughs quietly]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, he was called the greatest of surgeons, the meanest of men.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And the, uh—after—after he died, the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal published sort of, like, a eulogy about him? And it's the most interesting... I would say honest, [holding back laughter] account... *attempting* to celebrate the life of someone?

Because they talk about how... the contempla—comtemplation of his features left a *je ne sais quoi* impression.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: On the feelings even of the most physiognomists, half pleasurable and half dissatisfied.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: A sensation at once of admiration... and dislike.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: For which it was found impossible to account. Uh, it was said that he had—that he had, uh, very few friends, and no one really knew him, *but...* he was a great surgeon. *And*, he was really good at getting things named after him.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So he—drawing upon these works, uh, of physicians before him, Kline and Cooper, he gave a lecture about this condition, about the contracture, and he said, "I am the first one... to attempt to fix it. And I can."

And back at this time we didn't have anesthesia, so the fix for it was pretty brutal, but if you could withstand it, he could... cut open... the patient's hand, and release that band of tissue. Basically that's all he was doin'. He was just cutting through it or cutting it out. And that would fix it, if you could survive the surgery... and ensuing infection, which was certain to follow.

If you could, he could probably return function of your hand. And so—and even said—in his work, he went on to say, "Those Kline and Cooper guys... they said it couldn't be cured."

Justin: They probably didn't say—[wheezes]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: It was a complete lie!

Justin: "Never. It'll never be cured!"

Sydnee: It was a complete lie! They had written about how to fix it. [laughs quietly] Uh, but everybody went, "Yes. This seems right. We shall call it Dupuytren's contracture."

And, I mean, he did pretty well for himself. He would go on to have 12 different, like, diseases, and fractures, and operations, and instruments and things named after him over time. Uh, so Dupuytren is the name that we remember and associate with this disorder, because of that.

He, uh—his most famous work, though, is called *A Treatise on Artificial Anus*.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: You know it better as *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

[audience laughs loudly]

Sydnee: But the thing I know him for is the contracture, so. Uh, some other interesting points about Dupuytren's, 'cause as I read about it, it has—maybe because we still don't quite understand the whole, like, path of physiology. Why does it happen, and exactly how can we predict who's going to get it and who's not?

Um, there is all this kind of interesting, like, mythology and folklore around it. Uh, one thing is that it's thought that James Barrie had this. There's some documented evidence that he may have, and it was the inspiration for Captain Hook. He wrote *Peter Pan*, so it was the inspiration for Captain Hook, was that his hand was kind of curled into a hook.

Um, there's also been some suggestion that what is called the hand of benediction, which is, like, this number.. [laughs quietly]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I know! May be the result of a pope long ago who had Dupuytren's and just—

Justin: If you're listening to the audio version of this, Sydnee has curled her pinky and ring finger, and has extended her middle and index finger in a sort of... I am Baptist.

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Benediction. [laughs]

Justin: I don't know, like, a... Catholic peace sign? I don't know what that is, but I'm assuming—

Sydnee: [laughs] There has been—there has been suggestion, like, "Do you think maybe there was a pope who had Dupuytren's, and this is just what he could kind of manage?"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And now we're like... blessing hand, benediction hand. And this went further! This theory, which was kind of explored, like, I don't know—and, I mean, it's really—it's only just kind of tossed out there in any history of Dupuytren's. Is, like, "I dunno, maybe. Wouldn't that be cool? I don't know. I didn't really—I don't really know. I don't really know what pope it might've been, or when, or if that happened, but it would be a cool thing."

There are some scholars who have taken this even further and said, "Well, now... if we're gonna go down that road, it probably doesn't originate with a pope or with Christianity at all. It probably originates with the hand of Sebazios, which was an ancient pagan god of, like, the Phrygians and the Thracians who was sort of similar to what you'd think of, like, the Greek god Dionysus. Like, the god of, like, fertility and, like, fun times?"

[scattered cheers]

Sydnee: And you can find these old statues that are just hands, and they're all like this. They're all that same—that hand of benediction or whatever, of Sebazios. And the thought is, like, why was it like this? And there's this whole theory people have developed as, like, "Well, we used to take... uh, like, things about humans that we admired and attribute them to gods, and if you had Dupuytren's way back in the day, you had lived longer—because it is a disease that tends to have older onset—you'd lived longer than everybody else, so already everybody's like, "You must be holy! You've lived so much longer than the rest of us!" [laughs] "Because we didn't have vaccines, and you still lived, and..."

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: "You must—there must be something holy about you!" And so this—that there was some old guy with Dupuytren's, and he would go like this, and they were like, "That must be a god thing."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And so they made statues of Sebazios's hand like this, and then somebody was like, "Hm. That seems like a good thing for Christianity to... also adopt. So we'll just do this thing."

And then a pope was like, "I like that. That's pretty cool. I like that move."

[audience laughs]

Justin: I can't believe it, folks. We've finally found it. Something that Christianity appropriated from paganism.

[audience laughs and cheers loudly]

Sydnee: And there's this whole theory that it all originated with just some guy who just managed to live a long time, back when it was hard to do that.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Who had Dupuytren's. I don't know. I—I always just thought it meant the holy trinity. But... [laughs quietly] either way, it's an interesting story.

Um, the treatment now that we have—'cause over time we've tried a lot of different things. Like I mentioned, the idea that you could just kind of go in and maybe cut that tissue is very old. Um, pretty early on we thought, "Well, that seems like the simplest solution."

And we were kind of right, except anesthesia has helped with that a lot. Uh, we have tried injecting all sorts of different things. We don't really recommend, uh, standing on... your hand. Uh, not a doctor or anyone else, or any sort of, like, violent action towards... the hand in general.

Um, like I said, Dupuytren's patients—they would knock out with a couple bottles of wine. Uh, we don't use that for anesthesia anymore. Uh, and we have tried some things like some enzymes and things to inject in there to try to kind of break up the tissue or dissolve the tissue, with not really great results. There's still some research ongoing.

We've tried things like steroid shots that can help a little bit, but again—and you'll find some wild things out there now. Like, there is a homeopathic... remedy...

Justin: [sighs]

Sydnee: ... called "Scar-X." Uh... that will not work, because homeopathy is fake, so.

[audience laughs and cheers]

Sydnee: So don't do that. Um... [laughs quietly] uh, but, the mainstay now is a surgical—is a surgical treatment, and there are different ways they can do that where they can either, like, cut the tissue or remove some of the tissue. They're trying some things with just a needle, so they can be less invasive. And the test to see if you—you know if you start to see, like—usually the first indication is, like, a little nodular kind of area at the base of your ring finger.

If you're worried about this, the test to see, like, "Do I need surgery? Is this really a problem?" Is—it's—[laughs quietly] it's the tabletop test, where we have you put your hand on the tabletop, 'cause doctors aren't always creative, and you just put your hand on the tabletop, and if you can—

Justin: I'm gonna call it Dupuytren's test!

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: If you can flatten it out, you're good. If you still can't flatten out those fingers, you might be a candidate for surgery.

Uh, and I worry about this, 'cause my grandpa has it! So maybe I'm next! My Grandpa Dan.

Justin: Yeah. Well... [pauses] uh, here's hopin'. I don't know what to s—

[audience laughs]

Justin: Like, I have a general anxiety disorder. I'll just add that to the pile, I guess, Syd!

[audience laughs]

Justin: Thanks.

Sydnee: It's okay. It's okay. It tends to be—please don't worry. I know that maybe many of you are of Scandinavian origin. [laughs quietly]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know how many. There's no way of knowing how far the Vikings spread. But, uh, do not worry. It is a condition that is considered—I mean, it is fairly benign. It's not particularly—it can be uncomfortable. It's not horribly painful, and it is treatable. So... please don't stress.

[scattered cheers]

Sydnee: But now you know, and it is Viking disease.

Justin: Um, thank you so much for having here at Minneapolis. We appreciate you so much.

[audience cheers loudly]

Justin: Um... did everyone take a moment to enjoy my wife's shirt? It is a shirt about vaccines.

Sydnee: Vaccine shirt.

[audience cheers loudly]

Justin: You can find that at mcelroymerch.com. Proceeds from that go to the Immunization Action Coalition. Now, I have a very exciting bit of, uh, news for

you. The head of that organization, Deborah Wexler, is here with us tonight, in this audience.

[audience cheers loudly]

Justin: Where are you? Deborah, if you could just raise your hand so I can see where you're at?

[cheering continues]

Justin: Okay. There she is! Deborah Wexler, ladies and gentlemen!

Sydnee: Hi!

Justin: A true hero of science!

[cheering gets louder]

Sydnee: Dr. Wexler has a wonderful organization where they help spread information about vaccines to both practitioners and patients, so that we can get, like, the good news that vaccines are safe and effective and save lives... out there.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: So, support that wonderful organization.

Justin: We also have a pro-vax pin, which also goes to the IAC. You can get that at mcelroymerch.com. Thank you to The Orpheum for having us here in this beautiful, historic theater. It is awesome.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Um, thanks to Paul Sabourin over there. On the ones and twos.

[loud whoop]

Justin: And, uh... oh, um, *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* is gonna be up after intermission. If you have a question that you'd like to ask us for that show, email it to live@mbmbam.com. Include your name and seat number in the subject line,

and then a *one sentence...* question that you'd like to ask, and we'll bring some of you up during that show.

Uh, thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Thanks to Maximum Fun for having us as part of their extended podcasting family, and thanks to you!

Sydnee: Thank you.

Justin: For being here, and for listening.

[audience cheers]

Justin: We'll be back with you again next week. Until then, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[audience cheers loudly]

[theme music plays]

["Dr. Worm" by They Might Be Giants plays]

Lyrics: [cheerful singing] They call me Dr. Worm! Good morning, how are you? I'm Dr. Worm—[cuts off abruptly]