

Sawbones 320: The Most Dangerous Parade

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

[theme music plays]

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

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: Sydnee, this dark time that we find ourselves in has given birth to a lot of really powerful Facebook meme culture.

Sydnee: That's definitely true.

Justin: The memes that move so fast, these days.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: You can barely keep up.

Sydnee: You can, uh... the one with the guy who's walking with the one girl, but he's turned around to check out the other girl? That one's getting a lot of use for a lot of different...

Justin: Yeah, a lot of different purposes.

Sydnee: ... reasons. I see that one. Lot of the, uh... 'this is fine' dog with the coffee cup on fire.

Justin: Yeah, the fit—the ‘this is fine’ dog has sort of... yeah, is ubiquitous at this point. And rightly so.

Sydnee: Yeah. Uh, one in particular that has surfaced that, uh, I actually saw required Snopes to check into, recently... is, I think, something worth discussing on our show. Because it is referencing—

Justin: Well, let me start recording. Hold on. Okay, go ahead.

Sydnee: Oh, I thought you were serious for a second.

Justin: No. [laughs]

Sydnee: I was gonna say, “What have we been doing?” [laughs]

Justin: This is how we always talk to each other. Seated at a table.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Six feet away.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. While I'm looking at my computer screen and timing us. Uh, so, this one is interesting, because it is based on medical history, and it has some fact. But also, not exactly right. Little inaccurate. I mean, not untrue, but I think Snopes rated it ‘mixed.’ So, y'know, there's some fact in there, but it's also not quite right. But it's being used to argue a point that is true and valid, and I agree with, but... I never think we should use something that's not accurate to support our cause. Y'know? Whatever side you're on, it should only be based on facts and truth, and not...

Justin: That's our side. That's the side we're on.

Sydnee: Right. So, I think it's worth delving into, so that we can talk about why it is important and relevant; just, maybe not exactly in the way your aunt shared it on Facebook.

Justin: Alright. I'm ready.

Sydnee: Not your aunt. Just...

Justin: Not my aunt.

Sydnee: Just the ubiquitous Facebook aunt. Uh, so, I want to talk about parades and disease.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: This is especially important in light of the fact that, in the last—this, I think when we recorded our last episode was the day of the president's press conference, when he introduced his plan to make America... back open. Open up again. But... whatever it is.

Justin: Make America back open up again. That's what it was.

Sydnee: [laughs] Something to that effect. Uh, that's such a—it's such a tricky thing. Obviously, there's been a huge impact on the economy. Obviously, people are struggling. The economy—when we talk about the economy in this vague sense, it's important to remember, like, these are made up of people. The economy is made up of humans who are working and don't have jobs right now, and need money and support, and an income. And uh, obviously, that's a problem.

There's a lot of pushback from the medical and scientific community, and I would put myself in there, that we have to be careful how we do this. Yes, of course, this is a problem. But perhaps we could look at other ways of supporting the citizens of our nation, as opposed to forcing them back to work into dangerous situations that might create another spike of cases, and lead to, uh, overwhelming our medical system. Which is what we've all been sacrificing to try to avoid.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: It would make all of this flattening the curve for nothing if we all rushed back into the world.

Justin: I can't—my heart can't take that.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: It has to be for something.

Sydnee: And it would just mean, not only, of course, more people would get sick. Some people would die, and our medical system would be completely overwhelmed, again, leading to the endangerment of all of our healthcare workers, as well as all of our other essential workers.

It would also mean we would have to be isolating longer.

Justin: Boo, hiss!

Sydnee: So let's do it right. We don't have enough tests. We don't have enough PPE to do any of the phases that were laid out at the press conference yet. Hopefully, we will. But we're not there yet.

Justin: Yeah. I'm looking at you, Georgia.

Sydnee: [laughs] Georgia. Even like, Trump said Georgia was wrong, right?

Justin: Hey, Georgia? If Trump's like, "That's reckless," you probably should pump the brakes. [laughing]

Sydnee: Come on, Georgia.

Justin: Yikes.

Sydnee: I used to live there, and you're really... you're really embarrassing me right now.

Justin: [laughs] Embarrassing yourself, too.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: And Tybee Island, and the varsity. You're embarrassing all the great Georgia landmarks.

Sydnee: [laughs] And Waycross, and the Okefenokee Swamp.

Justin: And your excellent aquarium. And the Braves. And Ted Turner. Montana Ted, as he insists I call him.

Sydnee: [laughs] And my friend Carolyn.

Justin: And Sydnee's friend Carolyn and her family. Everybody. We're all equally—and the Olympic Park.

Sydnee: Come on, Georgia!

Justin: That big Ferris wheel. We're all equally ashamed.

Sydnee: [laughs] We really do love Atlanta, though.

Justin: Yeah, love Atlanta.

Sydnee: Uh, so, if we... I like to look—when things are complicated, when we're trying to find a way out of a difficult situation, I think it's helpful to look to the past and see, like, where did we screw up before? Because we usually try to screw it up that way again. So maybe we could not, this time. Maybe there's a lesson we could learn.

And this meme about the Liberty Loan Parade, the fourth Liberty Loan Parade, I should say, uh, in Philadelphia on September 28th of 1918 has been shared a lot. Now, you had not seen it, right Justin?

Justin: No, but I um... mmm. I'm pretty choosy about my follows right at this time of year. This time of... time, I mean.

Sydnee: This was everywhere. And it—a lot of articles came from this. Recent articles. Now, I tried to read about all of this in pre-COVID articles, journal articles, and historical accounts of the time, because everything looks different in light of current events. So, I tried to look into the history of this parade. Was it as reckless as—the accusation of the Facebook meme is that the influenza pandemic of 1918, which is often called the Spanish Flu, even though that's not really fair, uh...

As we've discussed on the show previously, the Spanish Flu was only called that because, at the time, Spain was neutral during World War I. And so, they did not have a media blackout on reporting, like, illness. But all the other countries where the flu was occurring didn't want to say that out loud, because it would look... y'know, I mean, it would weaken them. Weaken their position. And so, Spain reported it. So they got tagged with it. But it was not, in any way, Spanish in origin.

Uh, but the accusation is that, because, uh... even though the epidemic—the pandemic had been kind of halted and was under control, then, Philadelphia loosened its, uh, social distancing restrictions in order to have this parade. And after this parade, there was a huge spike in cases.

And as I already said, there's truth in there. The parade happened. There was—there are actually three peaks to the Spanish Flu. I should say the influenza pandemic of 1918, to be fair to Spain.

Justin: I think Spain's over it.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: And that's such a mouthful.

Sydnee: Just saying, to be fair.

Justin: I think Spain's fine.

Sydnee: Uh, it is a misnomer. But to be fair. Uh, but there are actually three peaks. And there—y'know, so there was a second wave around this time, and it was the worst of the three. But it is not tied to, exactly, this parade. Or the later parades. Some of the memes tie it to the armistice day parades that occurred later on, and that's a whole other thing.

So, there's truth in here, but it's muddled. Because I want to talk about that. I want to talk about the—I want to talk a little bit about Boston, and I want to talk about San Francisco and masks, because everybody has a history that they're not thrilled about. [laughs] Not just poor Philadelphia, who gets, uh, as maligned as Georgia was at the beginning of this podcast.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: What's, uh... what's fascinating to read about is that, even if you look at articles written before this pandemic, you can find tons of connection between the influenza pandemic of 1918 and coronavirus today. There's lots of things that are said that are... I mean, eerie in how similar and how well they apply to the current situation. Which is frustrating.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Right, because... I mean, some of them are in reference to H1N1, which we think of as sort of like a... a bullet dodged, in that it was bad, but not nearly as bad as we feared it could be. And we still, yet, were somehow caught with our pants down.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: It was at a time... the Spanish Flu occurred at a time when transportation across the country was, uh, available—it had advanced in a way that it never had before. And across the oceans. You could move... people were more mobile than they had ever been before at this point in history. Um, obviously, that is true today, only even more so.

Pandemic was possible in a way that it had never really been, like, to spread as quickly, just because transportation was so much faster and easier.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And so many more people could do it. Communication between different parts of the world was available in a way it never had been before, so you could know about things that were happening overseas, about new illnesses that had sprung up, even before they hit your shores. And you could take advantage of that or not, depending on if you were paying attention or not.

But all of this was new. Again, similar to today. And the presence of the media to report on these things. This was really the first big boom of that in, uh, especially American history, where all of this is being covered constantly, because this is when kind of the realization that disease sells papers... hit. And so, all of this is being, y'know, broadcast to the public constantly, and that's really shaping their perception of the events and their reaction to the events.

There was a strong public health system in place, because of uh, the more recent influenza epidemic. One in the late 1800s. There was a public health system to address this stuff. There was a feeling that, because we understood germ theory pretty well now, it was much more widely accepted. Not completely, but still more so, and how diseases were transmitted.

We understood things about isolation and quarantine because of tuberculosis. We really felt like we were set for anything.

Justin: We had it.

Sydnee: Like, we had it.

Justin: Under control.

Sydnee: We were great. Not again. Just the first time.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: It's again now.

Justin: Now is... now is...

Sydnee: The again.

Justin: The again.

Sydnee: So, it's still disputed exactly where this—it's an avian flu. Y'know, the genetics of it seem to have come from a bird at some point. So, uh, all the pigs are always involved, right? When it comes to the flu, there's always some chickens and pigs involved in there somewhere. You can blame one or the other, but it's all...

Justin: It's all chicken and pigs.

Sydnee: [laughs] It's all the flu. So, somewhere, it jumped from an animal to a human. It's often been targeted to Kansas.

Justin: Hm.

Sydnee: As where it first appeared. Although, it's hard to say. We're not exactly sure. It may have come from US soil.

Justin: Where that first person said, "That pig looks sick, but I'm gonna kiss it anyway."

Sydnee: [laughs] Perhaps.

Justin: Perhaps.

Sydnee: Perhaps.

Justin: Perhaps.

Sydnee: Uh, there were cases, initially in the spring of 2018, largely associated with military installations. And this is not a conspiracy theory thing. Although, I think it's interesting. That was floated from time to time during the course of the year, especially as things got worse.

Justin: That it was a targeted biological attack during—

Sydnee: Did Germany do this?

Justin: Mmm.

Sydnee: I have—I—

Justin: Did they?

Sydnee: I know—[laughs] No. But it doesn't seem so outrageous when you hear some of the conspiracy theories out there... today.

Justin: Yeah, that's right.

Sydnee: Uh, which, by the way, I think it's always relevant to point out that, uh, the novel coronavirus, which causes the disease, COVID, did not originate in a lab anywhere on this planet. It originated in an animal, and then jumped to a human. And that is very unfortunate luck for humans, but... that's it. Bn There is no conspiracy.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I just feel like that should be reiterated.

Justin: I'm just gonna take your word for it, I guess.

Sydnee: Well, that's the truth. That's—

Justin: Well, I'll just take your word for it.

Sydnee: That's what the genetics say.

Justin: Okay. The science. Facts.

Sydnee: Anyway. Science says it. So, there was this thought, oh, was it something to do with Germany? No. It's really just—it appeared on these military installations because of crowding.

Justin: Mm, sure, yeah.

Sydnee: And lots of people living close together. Right? Uh, places—any place where people live close together and moved all over the place could spread it easily. And so, you have soldiers being moved throughout the country and carrying the virus with them. Uh, there—like I said, it started with this cluster of cases in Kansas that were reported in April. There was another one in May.

Um, but this wave, this first peak of the flu, really wasn't that bad, all things considered. It certainly wasn't as bad as it was gonna get. Throughout the spring, it was not obvious that this was a giant issue yet. Uh, and as we kind of move into the summer, you still have troops moving all over the country. So you've got people going from Boston to Philly to Kansas to New Orleans to the Puget Sound or the Great Lakes to Quebec. All over North America. But then, as summer hits, we start shipping our American GIs along with their flu virus overseas.

Justin: Exporting the culture.

Sydnee: Exporting it to Europe. And uh, somewhere... and even though on the US end, things seem to start calming as we moved into the summer... which has, again, been cited, I think, in this current—like, the idea that, well, in the summer, things will calm down. The heat will calm it down. So, things did seem to calm down over the summer of 1918 for the US, somewhat—even as we start to see cases climbing throughout Europe, and we start to see the pandemic burn throughout Europe.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Um... but, by the fall, we knew a lot more about it as a world. As a world community, we knew there was a flu out there that seems pretty bad. And it also seems to have gotten worse. Which probably did happen. The thought now is that there was some sort of mutation that occurred over that summer, as soldiers were being transported all over the world, and being stuck in, y'know, close quarters together. At some point, the virus got worse.

Justin: I thought, um—haven't you told me before that usually, when viruses mutate, they mutate to get weaker?

Sydnee: Well, this one didn't.

Justin: Dang!

Sydnee: No, I—

Justin: I guess that's why you say 'usually', huh?

Sydnee: Not necessarily. But yeah. I mean, the ones that—the ones that make the most people sort of sick, and are spread while keeping people well enough to continue out into the community are selected for, right? Whereas, the ones that send you straight to bed, and then you can't leave, and you can't interact with humans don't... y'know, they're out competed.

Justin: Mm-hmm. Makes sense.

Sydnee: Uh, but in this case, somewhere in there, the flu tended—seemed to get deadlier. And it was a lot more merciless in who it targeted. The first wave, like most influenza, uh, seasonal flu outbreaks tended to target the very young and the very old. Whereas, as we enter into late summer, early fall, we start seeing everybody getting sick. Y'know, healthy young adults, all of a sudden. Our soldiers, troops, are getting sick.

And I think we've said this before, but it bears mentioning... the influenza pandemic of 1918 and into 1919 killed more people, both soldiers and civilians, than the war did.

Justin: The war itself, yeah.

Sydnee: Than World War I. Yeah. Um, I mean, at this point, as we look into the summer, it was like, half of British troops were infected. I mean, it was all over the place. So, as we move into the fall, we know there's this risk. We know that it's what we called, at the time, a crowd disease. This is not something you got while you were isolated in your home. This is something that you got when you were out in the world. So we understood its infectious nature.

There was an outbreak at Fort Devens outside Boston in September, and that was kind of a red flag. That was a pretty big outbreak, and a lot of people were nervous about it, and... even though people were sick there, they were still shipping those soldiers out who had been exposed to the flu there at Fort Devens to other bases all over the country. Which, of course, helped spread the virus.

And in the interest of fairness, I think we should point out that Boston also had a parade around that time. [laughs]

Justin: Boston!

Sydnee: So it's not just Philadelphia that was parade happy. On September 3rd, Boston had a "Win the War with Freedom" parade, and it featured a lot of the, um... soldiers that were stationed there. That were at that base. So, a lot of people who were infected went out into the streets and partied, and then... we saw a lot more spread of flu among the community.

Justin: Parades aren't even that fun, guys. I don't know if you... if you all could hang in there for like 20 more years, TV is gonna be invented, and then you'll see. You don't need parades.

Sydnee: You don't need a parade.

Justin: You don't need parades.

Sydnee: No, especially like... did they even have any of the big balloons? The floats?

Justin: Did you guys even have big balloons?

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, there were already places where public health officials started trying to say things about social distancing. This is really where like—

Justin: Did they call it that? Is that an old term?

Sydnee: Yeah. Social distancing.

Justin: Hm.

Sydnee: Um, you really start to see these measures in place pretty quickly. Uh, but almost immediately, you also see the business community, and a lot of like, larger business. Like, wealthy. The owners of larger businesses pushing back against this and saying like, "Now wait a second, we're Americans. We have our freedoms. We got our rights." That was one big argument.

The other was, "You can't just crash the economy for the flu."

Justin: I'm glad we outgrew that. I'm glad we learned our lesson there.

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, theaters were closed before a lot of other things, and theater owners felt very singled out, because there was even a period of time in a lot of places where like, bars and restaurants were still open. But theaters were closed.

Justin: That's wild.

Sydnee: Right. Which seems... silly. Um, the nonessential businesses started complaining about essential ones and questioned what the definition was, and all the quibbling that we have seen, I think, now... it was the same thing. It was the same thing.

Justin: Yeah. 100%.

Sydnee: And there was no safety net. There were people living paycheck to paycheck, just as they are now. There were people who, uh, not having their kids in school meant, they didn't know who was gonna take care of them. And somebody had to take time off work. There was no universal child care, as there is none now. Also, there was no universal healthcare. So, all the same issues that made this incredibly difficult then are, of course, still in place now.

Justin: Yeah, didn't fix any of those, per se.

Sydnee: No. Um, and so—

Justin: We do have streaming, which they did not then. So we did fix that. 'Cause I'm sure they were also very bored. They probably played like, gin rummy or something.

Sydnee: In uh, in one of the articles I read... you're kind of skipping ahead, but that's okay. The author specifically mentions that, maybe the easy availability of entertainment, things like streaming services, would make it so that a future pandemic would not be so taxing on humanity.

Justin: You're saying—and when is this from?

Sydnee: That article was written during... that was 2009, during H1N1.

Justin: Oh! I thought it was, during 1918! They were like, "Listen..."

Sydnee: No. [laughs]

Justin: "If y'all can just invent Netflix, please. We're so bored."

Sydnee: [laughing] And then she said, "I'm the doctor."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: So, anyway. So, by the fall, we knew something was up. There were people speaking out, saying, "We gotta do something. We gotta stop this. This seems to be worse. Whatever was happening in the spring, it's way worse now. More people are getting sick. People are getting way sicker than they were."

And so, when Philadelphia started planning their fourth Liberty Loan Parade, you can see why... it's easy to look back and go, "What were you thinking? What were you thinking?"

Justin: "Huh?" Yeah.

Sydnee: Uh, at that—around that same time, St. Louis actually had a similar parade. Like, same kind of theme and stuff. They cancelled theirs. But Philadelphia decided to have theirs. And these were, by the way, parades that were held a lot of places throughout the US to help raise money for war bonds. To like, get you all excited.

Justin: Good cause, I guess.

Sydnee: Feelin' patriotic.

Justin: But... [laughs]

Sydnee: Right. Uh, but it was—but it was—and it was also, like, something to hold up. Like, look how much money *my* city raised for the war effort. So it was a big deal to not have one of these parades. There was a lot of political pressure to have it. There was a lot of, uh, economic pressure. And the people probably wanted it, assuming that it's safe.

And y'know, when you hold a big giant parade, it sends the message to citizens that it is safe to hold a big, giant parade.

Justin: That's true.

Sydnee: Whether it is or not. Uh, the outbreak in Philadelphia, at that point, was largely in the naval yard, among, again, members of the military. Some had come directly from Boston. Uh, and there was not... this is one of those things that's been debated much since then. The public health officer, William Krusen, who was in charge... kind of like the lead at the health department in Philadelphia.

Uh, it's much debated how much he knew or what he thought or what pressures he was bending to by allowing this parade to go forward. Or, I should say, could he have even stopped it? If he had spoken out against it, many would say like, well, he would've just been fired. And then he wouldn't have been able to help later when things, as you probably guessed, are gonna get bad.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: It's—I don't know, I think it's easy to look back and find a bad guy. I think we see now that there's a lot of... there's a lot of pressure on governors and mayors and health department officials from a lot of different places. And...

Justin: To open back up and get things moving again.

Sydnee: Yes. And so, I don't think it's so easy to find one person that is the—is the bad guy. And I don't know if there was a big outcry from the medical community. I didn't find evidence that there was, like, a huge group of doctors who were going, "You can't have this parade! You can't do it! It's gonna be terrible!" I think there was like, one guy who wrote an article about it like, a week later. But like, you don't see this giant, thundering cry to not have the parade.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: If it—maybe it was there. Maybe it existed, and maybe Krusen ignored it. It's hard to say.

Justin: Regardless, the parade happened.

Sydnee: Yes. On September 28th, 200,000 people packed the sidewalks of Broad Street in Philadelphia.

Justin: I'm assuming there were repercussions from this.

Sydnee: I'm gonna tell you what they were, Justin... after we go to the billing department.

Justin: Let's go!

[theme music plays]

[advertisements]

Justin: So, Sydnee, um... [sings] Before the parade passes by, I need to know what happened after the... [normally] ... parade passed by. It—it doesn't work, exactly.

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't think it works here.

Justin: No...

Sydnee: What do you think happened, Justin? If you had to wager... a guess...

Justin: People got sick? They didn't feel good? They got sick... from it. From the parade.

Sydnee: So, one big difference between influenza and the coronavirus is that, people knew they were sick a lot faster. You didn't have quite as long an incubation period.

Justin: That'd be nice, if that was the case for coronavirus. Just for testing and...

Sydnee: Sure, sure.

Justin: Understanding how we're managing the disease. It seems so hard to like... "So, who have you talked to in the past two weeks? Where have you been the last two weeks?"

Sydnee: That is advantage coronavirus, there. Uh...

Justin: What are some other things that you like about coronavirus, Dr. McElroy?

Sydnee: No! [laughs]

Justin: Sheesh. If you're gonna list all its great attributes? Shocker – medical history podcast host loves coronavirus. Is a big fan.

Sydnee: Don't say that. Somebody's gonna edit that into a clip, and... [laughing]

Justin: No. Please don't do that.

Sydnee: No. I do not—I do not love coronavirus. Uh, it is an advantage.

Justin: But you're just saying it has some—you're saying it has its advantages.

Sydnee: No, its advantage over flu. [laughs] If the two viruses were fighting – in my head, they are now. I'm seeing it. You can see it, too. Just look up some pic—anyway. However, the consequences were swift.

Justin: Taylor Swift. Casing all her concerts in 1918. 'Cause of the spread of the Spanish Flu.

Sydnee: 'Cause she knew—no. Within 72 hours of the parade, every bed in Philadelphia's 31 hospitals was filled.

Justin: That's that quick turnaround on the flu, there.

Sydnee: Yeah. Uhh... in—by the next week, 2,600 people in Philadelphia had died.

Justin: Dang.

Sydnee: From the flu. Or complications of the flu.

Justin: I hope that was a good parade.

Sydnee: About a week later. A little over a week. Maybe two weeks, actually.

Justin: I hope it was a very good parade. I hope they were tossing out full sized candy bars, or something.

Sydnee: Uh, a week after that, it was 4,500.

Justin: Hatchi matchi.

Sydnee: So... and because—I think this is particularly relevant. Even though like, as you can already tell, the timeline is a little off here. And there were other reasons. Social distancing was not completely in place. It's not like they lifted it for the parade. This is early into the fall. The worst month of the flu in this country would be October.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: So we weren't into the worst of it yet. And so, it's debatable to sit here and say like, "They knew, and they lifted all these restrictions for a parade, and look what happened!"

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Uh, they weren't quite doing it right. Because the worst was yet to come. But it was definitely made worse by events like this. Like this parade. And there's definitely a voice that says, you didn't know? Somebody didn't know? Somebody didn't say something?

Justin: Somebody wasn't... I mean, if St. Louis cancelled theirs, like, certainly, word had gotten around. Somebody knew something.

Sydnee: And it's easy to look back and see. There were a handful of cities who did things really well during this pandemic, and a handful of cities who really didn't. And... so, somebody knew something. Uh, most of the city's medical professionals were actually gone. Which, worsened... certainly, which added to the death toll.

Justin: In the war?

Sydnee: Yes, they were gone in the war effort. And so, the system was completely overwhelmed. I mean, comple—everything we've been talking about, we wanted to avoid by flattening the curve, I think what, uh, unfortunately, it seems like a lot of my colleagues in New York have been experiencing... they were overwhelmed. The system was not prepared to hold the number of patients it would see all at once.

And none of the systems. I mean, obviously, the hospitals themselves. The doctors, nurses... there weren't enough of any of—any kind of medical professional. But all the other services, too. I mean, even like... the funeral parlors. And y'know, the morgue was overwhelmed. It was a gruesome scene in Philadelphia, following this parade. Which, you can see why it has left this mark on history, because of all that.

Afterwards, Krusen and all the other doctors and city health officials responded by closing schools, churches, bars, stores... everything. I mean, locked the place down. Did all the stuff and more that we're doing now. But I think most of the damage had already been done.

And it is true that, as fall turned into winter, we actually saw a little bit of a downslope in cases. Probably secondary to a lot of cities doing what Philadelphia did. Kind of shutting the doors.

Justin: Shutting it down. Yeah.

Sydnee: And then, we did see a third wave. A third spike in cases as we go into the winter at the end of 2018, into 2019, which does follow, y'know, armistice day is in November. You have all the para—there were parades and parties and celebrations that happened throughout November, after that, and into December. And we did see another spike in cases. It was not as bad as that second wave.

That second wave, it... it's a W curve, if you could imagine.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: And the middle of the W was definitely the worst of this flu pandemic. There were different protocols, like I said, throughout the city, or throughout the country. And there were a lot of things that were similar to here, and there were a lot of things that were similar to now. Some places mandated that you wear masks. There was a huge effort at home, people who sewed, largely women at the time, were asked to make homemade masks to hand out to people, because nobody had any.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: There were some. I mean, there were medical masks, but... most people at home didn't have masks. They did things like banning public spitting at this time, which...

Justin: Hey... why did we wait so long to ban public spitting?

Sydnee: If we could've just banned that... I'm so glad I have lived in the time since spitting in public was sort of like, frowned upon. I know it's not banned, but like...

Justin: It's basically banned.

Sydnee: I mean, like, I don't—

Justin: It's cancelled. Which is worse.

Sydnee: I don't see a lot of people spitting in public. Oh, it's so gross.

Justin: Spitting in public is cancelled.

Sydnee: Spitting—spit is so gross, guys. Spit is gross. Don't spit.

Justin: Sydnee gets really yucked out about spit.

Sydnee: It's like the one thing. It's my one yuck. Uh, in Mobil, Alabama, the public health officers advised against kissing. They actually put out a... you couldn't like, get arrested for kissing, but they would tell you like, "Hey, stop that."

Justin: Please don't.

Sydnee: Don't kiss. It's dangerous. [laughs] Kissing is dangerous. Uh, in San Francisco, they did mandate that you had to wear masks in public places. That was one of the few places that actually enforced it. Y'know, a lot of places may have recommended it, kind of like we have now. Right? Like, nobody's gonna... at least, here in West Virginia, I'm not gonna get stopped on the street if I'm not wearing a mask. But it is recommended that I wear a mask. And I would. And you should, Justin. I'm looking at you.

Justin: I'm—it's just you and me in the room.

Sydnee: I know.

Justin: Why do I need a mask?

Sydnee: Well, not right now. I just mean, y'know, if you're out.

Justin: Y'know I wear one of them out.

Sydnee: I know you do. Just reinforcing.

Justin: Yeah. I'm not even that creeped out when I see people wearing them, like I used to be.

Sydnee: No, it's becoming—yeah, I think it's becoming more culturally...

Justin: It's weird. I remember flying, when we went on the cruise, like, getting to the airport, I remember seeing people in masks. And it kind of weirding me out. I'm wondering if—I bet that, even after this is sorted, like... you're still gonna see... I think that, culturally, we might move toward some of the Asian countries where that's like, a common courtesy if you're sick. You wear, y'know, a mask, usually.

Sydnee: I think you're definitely right that masks are gonna become a lot more like... accepted. I mean, 'cause it does—it did, prior to this, definitely stand out, I think, in this country, if you were walking around with a mask on.

Justin: Plus, if I know America, if there's something you can put brands on, we're gonna have a bajillion of them in different styles and colors and cuts.

Sydnee: Yes. They are surfaced to me already. Probably from the research I did on the mask episode. I get those surfaced to me a lot, those ads.

Uh, so, in San Francisco, this was mandated. And uh, initially, it was just for people who work in jobs like, um, customer facing kind of jobs, like a bank teller or a bartender had to wear a mask. But by the end of October, it was just a general mandate. If you're out in public, you gotta wear a mask. And you could face a fine. You could face jail time if you didn't comply. It was a big deal.

Even, uh—the mayor, actually, during a—even though he did believe in this, and supported this, during a boxing match, he was photographed with his mask, like, hanging off of his ear, not wearing it.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: And he was fined \$50 by the chief of police. [laughs]

Justin: I saw, maybe... today, I made my extremely rare shopping trip today. And I saw so many people who had it like... I saw a woman who was working at the store pull down her mask to yell for someone else, and then, pull her mask back up. Literally, half the masks below your nose.

Folks, remember. If it's below your nose, it's not doing anything.

Sydnee: That's right. Don't pull it—a chin strap will not help you in the fight against coronavirus, or anyone else, I should say. The masks are really more for other people than you. Which might—if you think about it, is an altruistic thing. I don't know if that helps people maybe be a little more conscious of it.

But yeah, it has to be covering your nose and your mouth the whole time. While you're talking. And if you need to eat and drink, you shouldn't be doing that out in public where other people are. That's the... I mean, unfortunately, that's the thing right now. So don't—you shouldn't pull it down. You shouldn't have it dangling off of your ear.

Justin: *Mister mayor.*

Sydnee: [laughs] So, in... because there was—this mandate only lasted about a month, initially. And then, in January, they brought it back, 'cause of that second—that third wave, I should say. That third spike of cases. In January, they went ahead and reissued the mandate that you have to wear a mask in public. And this time, people were organized against it. They were mad about it the first time. It only lasted about a month. They didn't have enough time to like, make signs, I guess. They needed some time.

And so, by January, they made some signs, and they formed the Anti-Mask League, is what they were called. And they protested to the state government, and said like, "San Francisco is being unfair! I don't wanna wear a mask! This is wrong!"

Justin: "Wahh! I burp in it and it gets stuck! It's terrible!"

Sydnee: [laughs] And of course—

Justin: That's might just be me.

Sydnee: Even like now, there were doctors who supported them and were like, "Yeah, we shouldn't have to wear masks! This is ridiculous!" And I see doctors saying that kind of stuff... there's... hey, there's bad apples in every profession.

And there were people from other health department officials, and other areas, and from the council who were like, "Yeah, I don't wanna wear a mask! Individual rights!" A lot of it was based in that. "This is our right as an American to expose everybody to viral particles flinging from my mouth when I talk!"

So, the fight lasted about a month. And it was a... like I said, it was a large Anti-Mask League. They were like, 4,000 people or something, as part of this league, who went and protested. Um, so that's a good number of people to get that mad about having to wear a mask.

Justin: Don't you love seeing people protesting the lock down now, wearing masks out and about? Like... okay, bud.

Sydnee: I'm still trying to parse the guy who was dressed at George Washington.

Justin: Yeah. Yeah. That was a look.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Anyway. So, there were protests. More people, though, agreed with the masks. And it did make an impact, because the majority of

people did wear masks. When they were polled, the vast majority... and I think that's true today. These protests look big, depending on the camera angle they're being filmed from, but uh... the vast majority of people... want to stay social distanced and stay safe and don't want to risk their lives, or their grandparents' lives, to fix the stock market.

If you're interested in more about the Anti-Mask League, by the way, I got this tip from a Twitter thread, from an NPR investigative reporter named Tim Mak.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And it was a really cool thread that really delves deep into this whole Anti-Mask League, and the history of that in San Francisco.

Justin: He's @TimKMak. M-A-K.

Sydnee: In case you're curious. That's where I found the tipoff from it there, and then, um... but he goes into way more detail.

So... in various parts of the country, various responses. Some places did really well with social distancing, and with wearing masks, and with hygiene. There was a huge hygiene movement that came out of this. It was actually specifically targeted at men, because men were seen as having like, really poor personal hygiene, because they didn't think it was manly. Like, it was manly to walk around spitting, and... coughing on your sleeve, and...

Justin: Being grody.

Sydnee: And being like, grody and booger-covered or whatever. I don't know. Is that manly?

Justin: Yeah, booger—boogers. Super manly. [laughs]

Sydnee: Boogers. Dirty. Yeah.

Justin: You are asking the wrong—

Sydnee: Dirty hands.

Justin: You're asking the wrong cat about what's manly. I'm sorry.

Sydnee: [laughing]

Justin: Barking up the wrong podcaster.

Sydnee: I should've known that by now. Uh, but there was actually a big movement, targeted mainly at men, to like, "Hey, no, it's cool. It's manly to wash your hands! It's manly not to spit! Be a real man and protect others by wearing a mask!" That was a—even the Boy Scouts got involved in this.

Justin: What if we put flames on it?

Sydnee: [laughs] But there was. There was this big movement of hygiene as a result of this, and that kind of thing. Um, but, all things told... the influenza pandemic of 1918, 1919 had a huge impact on human history. 500 million people – that's a third of the world's population – became infected. The estimated number of deaths was around 50 million worldwide. 675,000 in the United States. As I said, it was responsible for more deaths than World War I. And it changed... y'know, I think, certainly, the course of human history.

Justin: That's a—that's a ten percent—

Sydnee: It's been thought that perhaps, Wilson had the flu.

Justin: That's ten percent mortality. That's a very bad flu.

Sydnee: Yeah. It was a—well, it was a bad flu, and then, also, it was 100 years ago.

Justin: Sure, right.

Sydnee: So our ability to support somebody, y'know, and treat someone who has this influenza... but still, no, it was a terrible, terrible influenza pandemic. Um, and you would hope that, when you can look back on something like this in history... and there are—while it is often called like, the forgotten pandemic and stuff, it's been called that in enough books about it, that I feel like...

Justin: [laughs] We remember now.

Sydnee: [laughs] We remember now. It doesn't have to be forgotten. All this—all this information that I use to create this show is based on articles that were written, for the most part, before... what's happening now. I found, like, that Twitter thread that's current that led me to research.

But all of this was written before, and the lessons that we're supposed to have learned have been laid out for us over the past 100 years. And especially, if you look to 2009, with H1N1, when we didn't know how bad it was gonna be, you see a ton of academic work surrounding that that's saying, that compares it to the Spanish flu, and then looks forward and says, "What can we do to prepare for when something like that happens again?"

And it's very frustrating to read that. Because all of this stuff we're talking about, you see the corollary in our life today.

Justin: Yeah, but Syd, that's just... I'm—I know where you're coming from, but also, that's just humans. That's just... it's like, fool me once, shame on me. Fool me—shame on you. Fool me twice, that was 100 years ago. I don't know what happened to that other guy. Fool me again, I don't know. We'll see how it goes.

Sydnee: I think that excuse—

Justin: We are incapable of actually preparing—if we were to prepare for all the different worst case scenarios in the way that we really should, that would be all that we do. I'm saying—I know—and maybe I'm—and I'm not being anti-science there, I'm just saying like... I don't think humans can—I just don't think we're good at that kind of thing.

Sydnee: But in all these articles that I read, the academic, scientists, epidemiologists, medical doctors, public health officials... people who know these things, who are—who went to school, who paid to learn these things, and are now paid to know these things, and use these things in everyday life... they have been telling us that this was coming. Not this, exactly, or at this time.

Justin: Yeah, but they weren't saying it was here. [laughing] Do you understand?

Sydnee: The nature of pandemic is that it's everywhere.

Justin: Yeah. But they weren't—it wasn't happening yet. So it seemed like we still had some time. Y'know when you mean to buy salt for your driveway, 'cause it seems like it might snow soon? But you're like, "It hasn't snowed yet." And then, when you go to buy it, all the salt is gone, 'cause it did snow, and everybody needs salt at the same time. I'm saying that's the situation we find ourselves in.

Sydnee: What I would say—

Justin: This is not to excuse the government for not preparing for this pandemic when they saw it coming three months ago. This is not what I'm saying. And we should've had preparedness plans in place. I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that...

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: If you look around the globe... a lot of people weren't great at preparing for this pandemic. 'Cause I just don't think human beings work that way. I just don't think we think that way.

Sydnee: Well, maybe we need to start, if we didn't with the last, y'know, pandemics.

Justin: That was 100 years ago! They didn't even have TV!

Sydnee: But H1N1 was a giant warning. I mean, and a devastating warning. I mean, plenty of people died from H1N1. Like, it was a...

Justin: Yeah, but we dodged it, and then we got high off of that! We felt immortal! We felt so good! [laughing] We got so—we got—

Sydnee: No we didn't.

Justin: We got hit with a bunch of uh, serotonin and adrenaline from dodging that bullet. Woo! Never felt so alive! Probably forgot about it. 'Cause that's how humans are. That's just how we are.

Sydnee: Our—the thought process by a lot of academics during H1N1 is that, like I said, we would be so much better prepared now, because people would be more scientifically literate. And they would understand the importance of social distancing so much better, and you wouldn't have things like public officials who stand at a boxing match during a pandemic with their mask dangling off their ear. You wouldn't have those kinds of slip ups. You wouldn't have... Ben Carson standing at the podium, touching his face as he tells people not to touch their face.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, you wouldn't have those kinds of things, was the prediction. And that it would be so easy for everybody to social distance, because certainly, by the year 2020, we should have... y'know, some sort of social safety net for the economy, for people who are living paycheck to paycheck, so that it doesn't have to be that way. Childcare, and um, health insurance.

Justin: Now that – I want to get out in front of that. Absolutely. You know I'm on board with that, for sure.

Sydnee: Right. I hope so.

Justin: No argument there.

Sydnee: Better be.

Justin: Love healthcare. Think everybody should get it.

Sydnee: But what I would say about this Facebook meme is that, even though they've muddled the timeline a little bit, and it wasn't quite that extreme, there is a lot we can draw from this pandemic. And say, look, we knew 100 years ago that these methods could be useful, and indeed, could keep us from having more cases than are necessary, and from overwhelming our medical system, which saves lives, because if everybody who needs one can get a ventilator, more people live.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Y'know. If everybody who needs one can be in a hospital, more people live. So, there are lessons we could draw from and practice today. And uh, I think that bending to political pressures, and y'know, business interests, which is what a lot of this is coming from, right?

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: From like, mega wealthy business owners. I think we see the consequences of that. We can see that played out in different places around the country at the time.

One of the articles I was reading is from Kenneth C. Davis, who wrote 'More Deadly Than War: The Hidden History of the Spanish Flu in the First World War,' and I was reading an article. Then again, this predates our current pandemic. But I found it very prescient. He talks about... this was actually written—this article was written in 2018, on the eve of November 11th, the 100 years since the end of World War I.

And he says, "There will be parades and public ceremonies highlighting the enormous losses and long-lasting impact of that global conflict, but it will also be a good moment to remember the damaging costs of short sighted

medical decisions, shaped by politics during a pandemic that was more deadly than war.”

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: And I just think—I think it’s really important to remember that, that this is a long game. Keeping people alive and keeping them safe is a long game, and we can't—we can't just look to tomorrow. We have to look to what we’re going to be doing for the next year, until a, hopefully, an effective vaccine is available for everyone.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And one thing we don’t need to be doing is ingesting or injecting disinfectants.

Justin: Wow, that took away—

Sydnee: Of any kind.

Justin: That took a weird turn at the end, Syd.

Sydnee: That just happened, and I feel like it should be mentioned.

Justin: Shouldn’t need it.

Sydnee: We did a whole episode on not drinking bleach.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I don't know if I specifically said ‘don’t inject bleach.’

Justin: Shouldn’t inject bleach or any disinfectant.

Sydnee: No. And if you see people talking about the hydrogen peroxide IV as evidence for that, that’s also fake.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: I think we covered it on the hydrogen peroxide episode.

Justin: Fake.

Sydnee: No, that is also a huge—

Justin: Also, sunlight, we've discussed.

Sydnee: Yes. And the hydrogen peroxide IV therapy, specifically, is hugely dangerous. Please do not pursue that. Sunlight... probably less dangerous, unless you're talking about standing out in direct sunlight for long periods of time without sunscreen, in which case, it is dangerous. So, you should wear sunscreen.

Is that all the nonsense we need to refute this week?

Justin: I think so. For this week.

Sydnee: For this week.

Justin: Yeah, we should actually stop recording so no new nonsense comes onto the desk.

Sydnee: I feel like it's happening. Please keep social distancing. Please keep staying home to protect those that you love, and even those you don't love. Let's just protect—why not. Heck, let's protect everybody right now. Please stick to that, and...

Justin: I want to make a point, because I feel like I need to circle back on something real quick that I was talking about. I... I am not, in any way, trying to dismiss the uh, the lack of preparation from this administration, with regards to coronavirus. I am not in any way saying that. I'm saying that humanity is just bad at planning for worst case scenarios.

But I think what the other part of that is... I feel like humanity, when we're at our best, can be really good at reacting to them when they happen. And that is—I think that's what's hard for me to see now, is seeing people who aren't... answering that call, and sort of like... okay, this is the tradeoff for not being good at preparing for this stuff, is we gotta be good at like, handling it.

And I think that that's the least that any of us can do right now, is like, try to rise to that. And that's what is frustrating to me.

Sydnee: I think—I think that's very true. And I think, in a vacuum of leadership, unfortunately, that kind of... I mean, you don't know who to trust, and you don't know who to believe. Fauci. Anthony Fauci is the answer.

Justin: Except for Fauci.

Sydnee: If you are looking for who to trust and who to believe.

Justin: Yeah. Just Fauci.

Sydnee: Look to Anthony Fauci.

Justin: Everyone, please keep Anthony Fauci safe. [laughs] Uh, that's gonna do it for us.

Sydnee: [laughs] You can put him somewhere with RBG.

Justin: Yeah. That's gonna do it for us—but about six feet away. That's gonna do it for us for this—'cause you know they'll fall in love. That's just how... [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughing]

Justin: That's gonna do it for this—for this—

Sydnee: I think he's—they're both happily married! [laughing]

Justin: You took—put two beautiful, sexual people in a room, Syd...

Sydnee: I can't with this! No!

Justin: Who are—

Sydnee: Social distancing!

Justin: Um, thank you so much for listening to our podcast. We hope you've enjoyed yourself. Hope you're staying safe. Staying sane. And as much as possible. Thanks to the Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program. And thank you to you so much for listening.

Um, especially in these times, when there's so much gobbledygook and nonsense going on out there, why don't you share this show with people? We would sure appreciate it. Um, that... SawbonesShow.com is a good URL that you can use. That takes us to the podcast, or share a link to iTunes. Whatever podcasting thing you use, and... leave a rating, review. Whatever. We sure appreciate it.

But that is gonna 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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