

Sawbones 212: Coffee

Published December 16th, 2017

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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]

[audience cheers]

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

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee Smirl McElroy.

[audience cheers louder]

Justin: That's fine. It's fine. How many people wish that we were doing an episode about practical hangover cures? [laughs]

[audience cheers]

Justin: That was a trick! I'm a narc! You're all going to jail!

Sydnee: [laughs] Thank you all for coming at ten AM on Sunday. I appreciate it.

[audience cheers]

Justin: We fully rolled up so late that we were walking with people that were coming to the show, that were kind of looking at us like, "Well, wait a minute..." [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Hold on... [laughs]

Sydnee: We are not hung over, though. Full disclosure. I mean, I'm not.

Justin: If you average us out...

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: And round down...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughing] I count as one and a half now, though, so...

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: One and three quarters.

Justin: Sydnee's got one of those aliens from Alien inside of her. Basically.

Sydnee: [laughs] No!

Justin: Um, so, in a way, Syd, though, we are kind of talking about a hangover cure of a sort, if you think about it.

Sydnee: That's very true. Whenever we do live shows, we try to connect them to the place we are. Something that's relevant to the area. And it's ten

AM, and many of you may be hung over, so what better topic to talk about in Seattle than coffee—

Justin: Frasier.

[audience laughs and cheers]

Sydnee: [laughs] Frasier?

Justin: When I'm hung over, I like to wake up, [sings] "Hey baby, I hear the blues a'callin'," and I—

Sydnee: Go ahead and—

Justin: Melting away.

Sydnee: Can you—can you theorize on the medical applications of Frasier throughout history, please?

Justin: You learn a lot about... psychiatry.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: Because... he's a psychiatrist. He and Niles both. And... [pause]

[audience laughs]

Justin: John Mulaney... is not on that show. John Mulaney is the other guy. John Mahoney... uh, thank you, John. John, if you're here... so sorry.

Sydnee: [laughing]

Justin: Um... okay, coffee instead.

Sydnee: Yeah. We'll talk about coffee.

Justin: Okay. That's fine. That's fine. It's wild that we haven't done coffee before.

Sydnee: I know! I thought it was strange, too. I was trying to think, like, "What could I do Seattle? Coffee? I've done that before." We haven't! And coffee, you may not know, has a long medical history as well as... like, we like to drink it. Um, I feel really bad, though. I am—and I mean, it's very clear. I am drinking tea as I'm talking about coffee. [laughs] So, I... I don't know if I have to apologize? I'm sorry.

Justin: No. Tea's fine.

Sydnee: I can only—I can only have 200 milligrams of caffeine a day right now, guys. So... y'know.

Justin: You're fine. You're fine.

Sydnee: Okay.

[audience yelling various encouragements]

Sydnee: Thank you! [laughs] So, coffee probably started out in Ethiopia, as far back as 1000 CE. So, a long time ago. Maybe even predates that. And there's a legend as to how we kind of discovered coffee. And it's one of those that is repeated a lot, but it is a legend. Nobody's really sure that it's true, so...

Justin: I've heard this, actually, uh, before, Syd. And if I could step in.

Sydnee: [amused] Please, go ahead.

Justin: Someone checked in to a motel room, and they looked over, and plugged into the outlet was this small machine.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: And they were like, "Um, Becky? What is the story with this?" And there were little toilet paper wrapped around dirt, seemed to be, to them, is what they thought. And uh, there was little pink and white and yellow packets. And like, "I don't—honestly, Becky, I do not get any of this. What is happening over here?"

And then, eventually, a few years later, after plenty of trial and error with the machine, putting the dirt basically everywhere, eventually, they figured out how to make coffee. And that was the first..

Sydnee: So thank Becky for coffee.

Justin: Thank Becky for coffee.

Sydnee: [laughs] No, the legend is that, uh, there was a goat herder who noticed that his goats were eating these red berries off this plant, and then they were dancing. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And they seemed really happy. And he thought, "Mmm... well, I should check those out. 'Cause my goats seem to like it." And so, he also tried them, and he felt very energized, and felt great. And he took 'em back to the village and was like, "Everybody's gotta try these berries! They made me feel great!" And everybody enjoyed them. Especially, the monks found that they could finally stay awake during prayer.

Justin: That guy must've been... the ha—think about it. He was the only person on the planet on coffee. Which is already like, so next level. And he started his morning watching happy dancing goats! Like, that dude—do not step to him!

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: And I should say, as I mentioned, this is a legend. I cannot verify that it's true. And it is incredibly similar to the story of how we discovered horny goat weed. You can, y'know, exchange the details as needed. [laughs]

Justin: All—all history is legend with varying degrees of documentation.
[pause] Whoaaa.

[audience laughs and applauds]

Justin: Think about it. Question everything!

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: I thought you were—

Justin: Think about how far away the moon is! Do we have 15 minutes?
Hold on.

[audience laughter]

Justin: As you can see... in 1963...

Sydnee: [laughs] I thought you were just gonna make a joke about goats.
I didn't know where that was going.

Justin: Sorry.

Sydnee: So—

Justin: Goats went to the moon, I guess!

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Uh, no. The truth is totally discoverable, just not right now, in this case, maybe. So, the Ethiopian Galla tribe would grind up coffee beans and mix them with animal fat, once they started using them and they liked them. They would grind them up, mix them with animal fat, and then that would be like, an energy snack. Y'know, fat and coffee. [laughs] It's kind of like the butter coffee, right? Like the same...

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Same idea.

Justin: Sure. Bulletproof, they call it.

Sydnee: Uh... [laughs] Yeah. Exactly.

Justin: Bulletproof coffee.

Sydnee: Uh, Arab traders brought it back to Yemen along the red sea in 1100, and it began to grow there, and then just kind of spread throughout that area. And they started—that was when we start to see, like, taking the beans, and instead of just like, grinding them up and eating them or chewing on them, you start to see them boiling them and drinking the beverage. So, the beginnings of coffee. And it was called qahwah, which means 'energizing' or 'stimulating.' So... because, y'know, it was.

The idea of actually roasting them and then grinding them up before brewing it is still really old. It dates back to the 1200s. So we figured that out a really long time ago. And it was often given specifically... it was like this... [sighs] It was like this marital duty of a husband, kind of, that you should be able to prepare the beans, and then, make coffee and give it to your wife when she was on her period.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: So... [laughs] It was supposed to ease menstrual discomfort. So, anybody with a period could find—could find relief from it, but specifically, it was like this very, like... and then, I don't know, part of your vows. And I—I promise that, when you're on your period...

Justin: I will make the coffee.

Sydnee: I will make the coffee and give it to you. Um, and it was like—I mean, that would be grounds for, I guess, leaving your spouse. [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: Damn!

Sydnee: If they didn't provide you with adequate coffee!

Justin: Damn! That's a lot. You like, looove—that's like—[laughs] That's like lady from HR mouse pad level of loving coffee, right? Don't even talk to me until I've had...

Sydnee: It really makes you question the decision to make me tea this morning.

Justin: I did—I asked you what you wanted! Hater!

Sydnee: [laughing]

Justin: Sheesh! You've really changed.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: In addition—[laughs] If that wasn't—if that wasn't incentive enough to make coffee, it was also thought to be an aphrodisiac. So... so it was popular—[laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: Oooh! Coffee!

Sydnee: So, it was traded throughout Egypt and Turkey and North Africa. It was highly prized. It was used as currency in some situations. It was very valuable. I mean... everybody was discov—imagine that, as everyone tries coffee for the first time. I wish I could go back to that moment. What it's like to try coffee for the first time.

Um, and the first coffee shop actually opened all the way back in 1475, in Constantinople. It was called Kiva Han.

Justin: It—what was it called?

Sydnee: Kiva Han.

Justin: Oh, okay. I thought it was still gonna be Starbucks.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: You thought what?

Justin: I was just hoping it would be Starbucks. Not like, the same one, but it would be so funny.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Wouldn't that have been funny? Or even sounded—I would've settled for sounded like Starbucks. Ah, well. We'll get 'em next time.

Sydnee: Uh, it was—it was very tightly regulated as to where it was grown, and if you could take the plant, or cuttings from the plants out—outside of kind of this region of the world, because they were growing it and selling it and setting the price pretty high for it. It was very valuable. So the last thing you wanted was, y'know, somebody smuggling it out somewhere else, so that they could grow it, and then they wouldn't have to buy it from you.

But of course, that's exactly what happened in the 17th century. And that's when we see coffee spread to India. And this is one of the first times where you start to see this... it was already kind of, as I mentioned, being used somewhat medicinally. The stimulant thing is obvious. I mean, we've got caffeine. But, it was also being used for menstrual disorders and such.

But, at this point, you see that in traditional Indian medicine or Ayurvedic medicine, it expands to all kinds of different illnesses. Uh, so, asthma and a lot of respiratory diseases. Coffee was very popularly used for that.

Um, specific things like whooping cough, or uh, the DTs. [laughs] So, if you're withdrawing from alcohol. Maybe you just need some coffee. Um, some fake things, like hysterical affections. There's like hysteria. It's not a real thing. That's not a...

Um, palpitations, like when you can feel your heart beating really fast. That's probably not a good use...

Justin: Not a good moment for coffee.

Sydnee: ... of coffee. Um, cholera, and diarrhea in general.

Justin: Diarrhea, eh?

Sydnee: Uh-huh. [laughs]

Justin: Mm. Should be quite the afternoon!

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs] Which is—that's always one of those things where I read that, and this is—this is not just in traditional Indian medicine. I'll mention this as, using coffee for diarrhea was actually not uncommon. And I feel like the first time you tried it, you would go, "Well, no. That didn't work."

[audience laughter]

Justin: No, absolutely not.

Sydnee: Go figure. Um, it was used as a diuretic, which... it is. Somewhat. Y'know, it will make you pee. And specifically, in something called dropsy, which could've meant... throughout history, dropsy could mean different afflictions. But largely, we're probably talking about some sort of heart failure or heart disease.

So if we're talking specifically about heart failure, where you accumulate too much fluid, and it's a diuretic, that actually isn't... isn't too far off.

Justin: Alright, coffee! Good job!

Sydnee: And it was considered that, if there was an outbreak of malaria in your region that you could drink a cup of coffee, and it would protect you!

Justin: Huh. Well, that—good. That should—that’s malaria sorted.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Uh, and it was also prescribed for migraines.

Justin: You didn’t classify... I'm just spreading misinformation. Does that not protect you from malaria, Syd?

Sydnee: No, it doesn’t.

Justin: Okay, good. I just wanted to sort of—

Sydnee: Did I need to clarify? No, it doesn’t. [laughs] No. No. I mean, drink coffee. It’s fine. But no.

Justin: Quinine. Is what you need.

Sydnee: Okay! Look at you!

Justin: It’s from that Elizabeth Gilbert book.

[audience laughter]

Justin: The Signature of All Things.

Sydnee: Not from the episode that we did on malaria?

[audience laughter]

Justin: It—if I remember, that episode was based loosely on the book, Signature of All Things by Elizabeth Gilbert. It was sort of an adaptation. Hm!

Sydnee: No...

Justin: [high pitched] Well...

Sydnee: No...

[audience laughter]

Justin: No, yeah yeah yeah, was... yeah.

Sydnee: No, it was kind of based on like, historical fact, and medical fact...

Justin: And the novel, Signature of All...

Sydnee: Like, a lot of research that I did...

Justin: A historical...

Sydnee: I mean, I love that book too, but...

Justin: She did research too.

Sydnee: Well, no, I'm sure she did. I know she did. It's a great book.

Justin: You checked out Eat, Pray, Love, though?

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: So... [laughs] As the use of coffee continued to spread, it was also this stimulant property of it made it highly associated with kind of

intellectuals, and enhancing your intelligence in general, and making you quick-witted. And so, it became known as the milk of chess players and thinkers.

Justin: [laughs] It's weird to separate those into two groups.

Sydnee: [laughs] Um, coffee houses were sometimes called penny universities, because you could go to a coffee house and pay a penny for a cup of coffee, and then you would be a better thinker and more quick-witted, because you drank coffee. So, just like university.

Justin: I thought it's because, I've never been to a coffee shop where I haven't heard someone loudly expounding on something they learned in college recently. [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: You just kind of get that second hand education.

Sydnee: I think—I think that still holds true, because there are many times where we will go to like, the coffee shop in town. Starbucks. We'll go to Starbucks...

Justin: Have you heard of it? [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know why I'm like, hiding the—it's Starbucks.

Justin: Some say it's the first one ever.

Sydnee: Not in Huntington. [laughs] We got the last one, actually.

Justin: Yeah, the last Starbucks opened there. [laughs]

Sydnee: We got like, the first one in West Virginia. But...

Justin: That's true.

Sydnee: But it was the last one. But we—[laughing] If you go there, it's still filled with like... you can't find anywhere to sit 'cause of all the college students and the med students.

Justin: Just doing their thing.

Sydnee: I teach them, so I can be mad at them and say, "Could you leave? I just want to sit down." [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Um, so, from—with all these coffee houses, it was spreading. Everybody was—it was the place to like, gather and think and talk and debate and drink coffee. And it spread to India and Germany and France and the UK. And eventually, it gets to North America in the 1600s.

And as it spreads, I should note, everybody's kind of putting their own spin on it, as far as how they prepare the coffee. Which really doesn't matter from a medicinal standpoint, but that's why you get kind of different regional ways to prepare and brew coffee and that kind of thing.

In the US, part of the reason coffee like, really caught on, because everybody was drinking tea when coffee got here, uh, was a patriotic duty. We're not gonna drink tea anymore, 'cause we threw it in the harbor. And we're mad.

Justin: And we lost all of it and we don't have any anymore. Does anybody have any good ideas?

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: [laughs] So instead, we all started drinking coffee. And there you go.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Sydnee: It got to—another place, though, that it took big—like, had a big medicinal footprint was in China. In the late 1800s, it became... they started to grow it in China, and obviously, there was already a very heavy tea drinking, y'know, culture in China.

But uh, coffee began to be used in the traditional Chinese medicine system, because it is... it is an herb, so to speak. And it, uh—it is an herb. And it began to be used as various things, especially for like, your liver. That was the biggest use of coffee in the traditional Chinese medical system, was to kind of cleanse and purify your liver, and allow things to flow through it better.

That, and then, specifically, your gall bladder. It was thought that coffee could prevent gall stones. So that was a good reason to drink it. Uh, it was also thought to fight constipation...

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs] Which, again, now we're on the right side. Um, and again, they noticed that it was good for a diuretic. Now, the one thing that was noticed, that it was a—they thought it was a tonic for the spleen. But this was like a point of contention, because it was much better at purifying the liver than it was at being a tonic for the spleen. So it could like, cleanse and clean out your liver and allow all this stuff to flow from your liver, through your—to your spleen, was the way their... this was their understanding of how everything moved.

And then, it would get to the spleen, but it wasn't a strong tonic for your spleen, so your spleen couldn't handle it, and then your tummy would get upset. Which I think was a little—

Justin: So what do I do?

Sydnee: If you drink a lot of coffee, your tummy gets upset.

Justin: Oh, 'cause of the spleen.

Sydnee: Yes. But no, but that was the—that was kind of the theory on it. So you had to be very careful. You had to have a lot of... this was—this was—you had to go to a practitioner and actually, like, find out, how strong is your liver? How strong is your spleen? How much tonic do I need, and how much do I need this detoxifying agent? I mean, it was... it was more complicated than just, everybody drink coffee.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay. So you're ready.

Justin: Okay. I'm ready.

Sydnee: You understand it now?

Justin: I got it.

Sydnee: Um... the thing that was—one thing that's really interesting about coffee, though, is at this point, and prior to that in history is that, coffee, and to some extent, you could make this same argument for tea and for chocolate, were really instrumental in helping to disrupt the humoral system of medicine.

So, at this point, it was very common to believe that our bodies have four humors.

Justin: Black bile, yellow bile... phlegm...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: And... buh-luhhh...

Sydnee: And blood!

Justin: Blood!

Sydnee: Hey!

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: You listened to that episode. [laughs]

Justin: I listen to all the episodes, Syd. I don't remember all, but...

Sydnee: [laughs] So, at that point, it was very common to just think, if something was wrong, it was 'cause your humors were out of balance, and you needed to do something to rebalance them, whether that was uh, cut yourself and make—y'know, lose some blood. And then you could balance out by losing blood. Or uh, take something that would make you pee a lot, or take something that would make you throw up.

And um, the reason that coffee helped to disrupt this is that, uh, first of all, in the humoral system, foods were part of how you balanced out your different humors. So, instead of going and being prescribed bloodletting, or something that would make you throw up, they would prescribe you a certain food and say, "You need to take this, because it's a hot food, and you have too much of a cold humor." Or, "This is a dry food, and you have too much of wet humors." And so, it would balance it back out.

And the thing with coffee is that it kind of defied all these systems. You could make it taste different ways. The different ways you prepared it, different physicians would interpret it as a dry food or a wet food, or a hot food or a cold food. So, it kind of broke the system. And everybody who drank it had certain reactions to it. Everybody got like, more awake.

And that doesn't fit into the humoral system of medicine, because it should be very specialized to what your body needs in any given moment. Um, and so, it really started to disrupt the whole system of humors, because it was used as a cure-all.

Justin: It's sort of like when I started playing baseball and football professionally. They were like, "Do we have—is he a baseball player? Is he a football player? Maybe he's just an athlete. Y'know? Maybe we're all just athletes." And I really not, uh—knocked down a lot of walls. Don't feel like I get enough credit for it. I just wanted to bring it up.

Sydnee: Well, now you're being recognized for it today, honey. [laughs]

[audience cheers]

Justin: Please. Please, it was a lie I made up. Please. [laughs] I—I appreciate it, but you have to save your hands. You have a lot of clapping to do today.

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, so, it was really interesting, because this, obviously, the four humors system is wrong. And so, y'know, coffee kind of—even though the uses for it maybe weren't actually true, even all of the different things that they were using it to cure, it didn't really cure. That kind of application of it as a cure-all is part of why we got rid of the humors system of medicine. Which is interesting.

Now, as I mentioned, since it is—it can be considered an herb, it was very much loved by the developing herbalist community, kind of, at this point in history, especially in the early 1800s. And so, let's move back to the US to talk about that.

Uh, Samuel Thomson was an early herbalist who had a lot of followers in the early US, and created kind of his own system, the Thomsonian system of medicine, based on plant-based cures. [laughs] That so—some of these things worked.

Justin: Okay. Go on.

Sydnee: Some of these things worked. Because some of it was pulling from kind of folk knowledge, uh, people who lived in isolated communities in the US who didn't have access to physicians, and so, kind of had to figure things out. And some of the stuff worked, some of it obviously didn't. But he was

pulling from that base of knowledge to create like, a system of medicine for the people.

And again, there are pitfalls to that, because none of it was being studied. None of it was really rigorously, y'know, put to any scientific inquiry. But nothing was at this point, really.

Justin: Yeah! It was a fun time. Everybody was just having a lot of fun.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: And uh, and one group that grew from this were The Eclectics. And we've talked a little bit about eclectic medicine, I think, on the show before. But it grew out of this use of Samuel Thomson's, mainly, use of herbal medicines.

Except The Eclectics kind of—they drew from that, and then they drew a lot from early physical therapy principles, and created this branch of medicine called eclectic medicine. And there were over a dozen universities of eclectic medicine throughout the US in the 1800s, where you would be trained specifically in some of these like, botanical and herbal medicine, like, traditions. And then you would also learn these physical kind of maneuvers.

And this persisted until 1939. And it's a totally other system of medicine. It's not—it's not anything like what we teach today.

Justin: So there's like, osteopathic, allopathic, and eclectic? Would that be like—is it that different? Or...

Sydnee: Yes, yes. It was a completely other school of medicine. They were like—and there were some that would be like, the New York School of Medicine, and then in parentheses, like, [quietly] eclectic. Like, just in case, though. But sign up first! Come check us out before you figure it out.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Um, and they—they employed coffee in dozens of different ways. Some things that weren't revolutionary. Like I mentioned, like heart failure, the idea that it was a diuretic, so it could be used for heart failure. Um, they proposed that, y'know what? I know throughout history, we've had this argument, is it good for diarrhea? Is it good for constipation? We say it's good for both.

[audience laughter]

Justin: It... okay. Well...

Sydnee: Or not. [laughs] We'll just hedge our bets. Um, they would say specifically for headaches, but also for any unpleasant sense of fullness in your head.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: [laughs] Drink some coffee. Uh, if you have maybe some gangrene on your foot, you could just... prepare a dressing out of the grounds.

Justin: It's wild. Like, for that, and the diarrhea is like, it's when you have gangrene, and you want to be awake for every second of it.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: I don't want to miss a moment of this great gangrene.

Sydnee: Uh, again, some of the things like malaria, um, it was... typhoid, it was prescribed for. Gout. Rheumatoid arthritis. Again for alcohol withdrawal, and for hang overs. I haven't mentioned that, but coffee was often prescribed for hangovers, which I think was just kind of like, this will perk you up. I mean, whatever.

Justin: It works.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: It's also a, um... [quietly] vasoconstrictor.

Sydnee: Where you going with this, honey?

Justin: It's good for headaches?

Sydnee: It is used for headaches.

Justin: Yesss!

Sydnee: Caffeine. Yeah. And y'know, yeah. It's used for headaches. And it was back then, too. Um, depression, again, with the hysteria. Which I say is fake, and I'm accepting that everybody knows that. Hysteria was this kind of catch-all diagnosis that, traditionally, was applied to women throughout history, basically because we weren't behaving in ways that men wanted us to. For some reason.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Some of these... it probably uh, was used to cover up actual medical diagnoses that were left undiagnosed and untreated, and then sometimes, it was like, "My wife will not do the cooking. I think she's hysterical." So, that's hysteria. I felt the need to clari—

Justin: Apologies to anyone who thought I may have stalled or become frozen during that segment. I find that my best play is just to remain perfectly still.

[audience laughter]

Justin: There's very little I can add to discussions of hysteria. Um, so I just try to kind of... stay calm and... [laughing] And hang in there.

Sydnee: Uh, you see this persistence of its use, um, in relation to the menstrual cycle, or people with periods. So, it was used for both amenorrhea, which means not having a period when we would expect you to, and it was used for having too many periods, or too heavy periods.

So, any—anything having to do with periods, basically. [laughs]

Justin: Just coffee up.

Sydnee: Yeah. So, and also, it was prescribed sometimes for post-partum bleeding. So if someone has had a baby, and there's a lot of bleeding afterwards, give them a cup of coffee? Um... [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Again, for respiratory problems like asthma. Um, hiccups. Sure.

Justin: Aren't we reaching—

Sydnee: Why not? [laughs] They'll go away anyway.

Justin: Aren't we reaching a certain point in history, though, where if you were to like, "You should try coffee," the person would be like, "Yeah, no joke. Like every day, right? Don't we all drink coffee all the time every day?"

Sydnee: Um, kidney stones. Something called renal torpor?

Justin: We got more, huh Smirl?

Sydnee: I got more.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Renal torpor, which meant like, you're not peeing enough, so...

Justin: I mean, okay. In a very literal sense, yes. Drinking additional liquid will help with that. [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: And then... and then this one, which I'm not sure—

Justin: Also, Nestle Quik.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: I got one more. Anemic condition of the brain. I'm not sure what that was used to reference. [laughs] I know what anemia is. I know what a brain is.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: I don't know how to put that together into an anemic condition of the brain, specifically. [laughs] But yeah, you don't have enough blood in your brain, I guess? That seems really bad. [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Um... [laughs] That can—sometimes, we call that a stroke! So...

Justin: You doctors and your fancy terminology.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Now, when we think about the use of coffee as medicine, one thing that I immediately thought as I was putting this show together... I know I've gotta talk about, I know I've gotta look into, is why people give themselves coffee enemas.

Um, when did that start? If you're not aware, that's a thing. So that's step one. [laughs] Um, if you are aware, you probably, like me, have always kind

of known like, "Somebody does that. I don't know why." Who came up with that idea?

Justin: For first rule of coffee enema – and I think we all know – make sure everybody's done drinking coffee first. You don't want to take the last of the coffee, and somebody's gotta make a whole other pot, 'cause you wanted to put the coffee in your butt. It's so rude. [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: And as rule two, obviously, you gotta let it cool off. Okay?

[audience laughter and applause]

Justin: You just made a face that makes me very excited for the next 30 seconds of my life!

Sydnee: You joke... You joke about that... [laughs]

Justin: Indeed, and I shall continue to! Go on!

Sydnee: Coffee enemas date back to 1917. And it was introduced at this point, and it—

Justin: Everybody just made a reaction, like... what year would've been cool?

[audience laughter]

Justin: 1917?! Eeew!

Sydnee: I—I assumed it was something that came out in the '70s. I don't know why.

Justin: Yeah, that does feel right.

Sydnee: But that was actually when it started to lose popularity. Now, people still do this today. This is still something...

Justin: Some of you may be doing it right now.

Sydnee: Yes. [laughs] If you're really good at retaining it, you could be. I don't know.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: I'm just saying! [laughing] That would—that's a special skill, I imagine!

Justin: These people paid money.

[audience laughter]

Justin: To be here. They woke up at—they came here at ten in the morning, and you're doing this to them.

Sydnee: That's—they knew what they were in for. You all knew.

Justin: Yeah.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Fair.

Sydnee: So... [laughs] So, the reason it got really popular is that it actually became kind of linked with a certain regimen for cancer treatment. Which, of course, is not true. Let me preface with that. It does not do anything to cure cancer.

But this is why it took hold so strongly for a while, is it was developed by Max Gerson, who was a German physician who came to the US, and he had a lot of different ideas about the way that we could use nutrition in medicine

better. Which is totally fair. We could. We could do a lot more with advising people with how they eat, and not us—I don't mean using food as medicine, as much as a healthy diet that would promote better health.

And that was a lot of what he focused on. Except for then, of course, we kind of go on this... we go—we take this curve, and he starts to develop this dietary based treatment for cancer. Uh, so these are people who have already—this is not to prevent.

These are people who have already been diagnosed with cancer, and instead of going to another traditional practitioner, he says, "Come to me, and I will tell you about this diet. It's largely like a—basically like a vegan diet that you should go on. Low sodium, take these organic juice supplements I've developed and things, and you have to take like, tablespoons of them every couple hours. That kind of thing."

And then, up to six times a day... give yourself an enema with coffee, castor oil, or, if you're really feeling it, hydrogen peroxide.

[audience noises of horror]

Justin: To people with—

Sydnee: But definitely the coffee.

Justin: To people with... cancer.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Max, if you're here, it would be great if you came up on stage so I could ask your permission... to spin kick you in the face.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: And the—the basis of this is that he actually believed that most enemas just go through the large intestine, through the colon, and then they come back out. That's the idea. They come back out. Um, but he didn't think

that was true with coffee enemas. His belief was that a coffee enema had the ability to travel all the way through the large intestine, and then through your small intestine, and all the way up to the liver, and clean out the liver.

I don't... they don't do that. But that was what he thought they did. And so, once they got there, he thought it would stimulate the liver to help detoxify the body. Clear the liver of—clear the body of toxins. And—

Justin: There's another route to the liver, right?

Sydnee: —treat your cancer. Yes. [laughs]

Justin: You could go like, the express way. Why is he taking the back roads?

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: So, if you read a lot of kind of modern recommendations and like, regimens of coffee enemas, it's based on this guy's theories. Now, they have—it has changed over time, like a lot of people will tell you... six is a lot. That's a lot of enemas in a day. [laughs] Um, we recommend four.

Justin: Much more manageable.

Sydnee: That seems like a better—a better regimen of enemas.

Justin: Now I've got time to go to the grocery store! Thanks!

Sydnee: There are also—I read—I was reading all these like, "Here's how to do your own DIY coffee enemas!" And they were like... [laughs]

Justin: How about N-O-T?

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: [laughing] Make sure that you used a darker roast.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Which, nobody—nobody could give me a really good reason. Like, there were a lot of kind of like... uh...

Justin: Just the tannins.

Sydnee: [laughing] Traditional kind of medical, like, or... I don't know. Like, folklore kind of reasons why. But there was no real good medical reason why the darker roast. No. Just make sure you use a darker roast.

Uh, they don't recommend a specific brand of coffee, as far as I can tell. So I guess Folgers is fine. [laughing] Whatever you've got at home. Uh, you can—the original recipe, so to speak, for these enemas, was like, three to four tablespoons of coffee in the water. And now they say, "Mmm, now, listen... you're gonna want to start out with two. And you might make it up to four. And then, there are some people who can use up to six... but start with two and see how you do with that."

Um, and then like I said, only do about four a day. Uh, and if you're—I'm kind of taking for granted, everybody knows like, how much—

Justin: You put coffee in your butt! Right? With a tube?

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. You take a tube, and you put coffee.

Justin: You fill the tube up, somebody blows on the other end...

Sydnee: Nooo! No no no no no.

[audience laughter]

Justin: How does it get in there, then?

Sydnee: You just...

Justin: Hook it up to a vacuum?

Sydnee: Well I mean, you... like... once it gets past the sphincter... like, it's like a... gravity. Like, you just... like, you lay on your back, and you lift the bag...

Justin: Who lifts the bag?

Sydnee: I mean...

Justin: A close, dear friend.

Sydnee: A close friend. Or yourself.

Justin: Or a particularly well-trained dog.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: You can do these on your own. I mean, people do enemas at home. Usually not coffee, but...

Justin: ... but who lifts the bag?

Sydnee: Well, I mean, honey, you can. You have hands. They're not busy.

Justin: I'm on the ground! I'm on the floor, face down, with my eyes closed, and probably a white noise machine running or something! With like, candles! Like, anything! Reruns of Arrow on TV that I'm like, just trying to focus on, very loud! Whisk me away, Stephen Amell! I'm putting coffee in my butthole!

[audience laughter]

Justin: Act like it's obvious how I'm gonna do this coffee enema.

Sydnee: The—the all-fours position is popular among some. But most prefer laying on their back.

Justin: Wait a minute!! Okay, you may be a doctor, but I know where my butt is! That—that dog won't hunt! Oh, it—okay.

Sydnee: Do I need to draw you a diagram? [laughing]

Justin: It's gonna get—there's a high probability of kinking with the system you've described! The tube is gonna kink! Then what?! Then what's your grand plan? I don't even think you thought through how you were gonna give me this coffee enema, Sydnee!!

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: [laughing] I don't think we've been married long enough for that.

[audience laughter]

Justin: There may be some day, but I don't know.

Sydnee: Now—

Justin: So wait! I'm on my back...

[audience laughter]

Justin: Okay, hold on, actually. We're just—we're hi—okay. Hold on. We're...

[audience cheers]

Justin: Okay, so I'm on my back like this. So where is the tube... do you understand the pro—come over here.

Sydnee: You kind of need to lift—lift your legs.

Justin: Come over—just come over here. They can't two-shot us, so you gotta kind of—you should bring your microphone for the podcast.

[audience laughter]

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I did not predict this.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Lift your legs. Like...

Justin: [grunts] Okay.

Sydnee: Grab `em.

Justin: Like this.

Sydnee: Like, really—

Justin: Oh, there's no way—unless it takes like, ten seconds, there's no way I'm sustaining that for—like I'm not in enough discomfort?! I'm gonna raise my legs in—I'm gonna do yoga?! What are you talking about?!

Sydnee: Pull `em back!

Justin: Okay, so like this?

Sydnee: Yeah!

[audience laughter]

Justin: Okay. Wait, do I have—okay. Are you—now, who's holding my legs up? Am I having to do—I'm gonna get a cramp!

Sydnee: You're just in that position.

Justin: How long?!

Sydnee: —bag, and the bag is here...

Justin: Is the bag hanging off my feet?

Sydnee: I mean, if you wanted.

Justin: I bet I could do that. I bet I could put a pipe in between them. And hang the bag off of it.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Justin: Then it's a balance exercise, too. I do that in tae kwon do sometimes.

Sydnee: There you go!

Justin: Now, how long am I—

Sydnee: It doesn't take a long time. Like, it just goes in.

Justin: Here's the—it's already been too long. So unless it's about this long...

Sydnee: And once it's all in, like, you—

Justin: You lie here for, I'm assuming, a good amount of time.

Sydnee: No, no.

Justin: 'Cause the last thing we want is for all that to be naught.

Sydnee: Once it's all in, then you just—you can take the tube out, and you gotta hold it.

[audience laughter]

Justin: So how long?

Sydnee: 15 to 20 minutes.

Justin: Oh my god. So I—I clench up.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Now. Very carefully.

Sydnee: Very carefully. It's recommended that you put down some towels.
[laughing]

Justin: No kidding.

[audience laughter]

Justin: That sounds like an amateur move. I'm a professional coffee-putter-in-my-butt! I don't need towels! Lay down a napkin like you get on an airplane! I'm—that's plenty for me!

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: And then—and then you could either have... sometimes you could have like, a bed pan. Or you could go to the bathroom.

Justin: Or I could go to the bathroom for what? I don't want any of that good stuff out! Do you know how much work it was to get it in?!

Sydnee: No, well, I mean, you have to expel it. [laughs]

Justin: Nobody said anything to me about expelling it. This is the first I've heard.

Sydnee: Well, honey, things eventually come out there.

Justin: That's true, but I thought my body would absorb it, 'cause it needed it so bad.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Well—[laughs] It's absorbing all the good coffee stuff.

Justin: And then...

Sydnee: And then you... let it go.

Justin: [sings] Let it goooo...

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: Okay.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: [laughing]

Justin: Thank you for helping me understand. That's much easier to visualize now. And probably for you, too, and I'm sorry.

Sydnee: You got it now?

Justin: I got it.

Sydnee: Okay. [laughing] So, why do people do this?

Justin: Good question.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: So the idea now is, still based on this idea that we're detoxifying ourselves. Which... [sighs]

Justin: Nooo.

Sydnee: Your liver does that for you. Your kidneys help with that. You don't need to do this to detoxify yourself. Or any of the things that detoxify.

Justin: Or anything! Anything! You have organs for that!

Sydnee: Yeah. We have organs that are really good at detoxifying us. But it does that. That's the idea. That's what they think it does. Uh, it's supposed to help eliminate any parasites that might be creeping around in there that you don't know about. Um, by like, mechanical means, I think. Just flushes them back out.

Um, it's supposed to get rid of a lot of kind of generalized symptoms. Like, I keep seeing mentioned as "any type of pain." So any pain. So that's nice. And then, everything from like, arthritis it's used for, or like I said, there are still people who recommend it for cancer.

You can still find these Gerson institutes. Not in the US. I think they have been banned here. But you can still find them other places, recommending these treatments for cancer, specifically. Um, and then, at the same time, it's supposed to help with other things, more generally, if you're not using them. Even people who say, "This doesn't help with cancer. This will help with things like, um, tension, or depression... "

Justin: Absolutely not. That one, I can guarantee.

Sydnee: It's supposed to increase your like, your energy and your mental clarity and that kind of thing. So like, stuff that you would associate with coffee, if you just... drank it.

Justin: I know some people hate the flavor of coffee, but like, you gotta *really* hate the flavor of coffee to stoop to this.

Sydnee: Well, one thing that I saw specifically is, increases joy and happiness and reduces anger. [laughs]

Justin: Also untrue.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Now, why shouldn't you do this? [laughing] Well, there... I mean, there are lots of reasons. But there are side effects that are very serious, if this goes wrong. Uh, if you, um... let's say that, as you're introducing the—sometimes they have little plastic tips on the end of the enema tube that are not very soft.

[audience sounds of horror]

Sydnee: And if you puncture something... that's very bad. So, like, perforation has occurred. Infections. People have become septic from this. You can cause severe electrolyte imbalances from doing this, especially very frequently. You can get low sodium, or low potassium. Your electrolytes can get all out of whack, which will make you feel really bad, and sometimes make your heart beat wrong, and then you can die.

Justin: It... I... I'm not a very religious person. But... I'm assuming that, like... can you imagine a higher power of any sort stumbling upon you, in the middle of this procedure, and they're like, "You got it. I made the coffee, and I made you, and I made plastic tubes, and I didn't think you were gonna figure it out, but... that's exactly... that's exactly it. I thought you all were gonna be thrown off by the roasting."

"Yeah, you almost tricked me!"

"I thought we did, yeah. I thought we were gonna fool you with the roasting and the grinding and the brewing it. But this is exactly what I intended. Thank you for finding my grand design."

[audience applauds]

Justin: Probably not.

Sydnee: There—there have been cases of burns from people who did not cool the coffee prior to using it as an enema. And then... [laughs] There have been—

Justin: Good.

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: No! [laughs] Not good!

Justin: What? Not good.

Sydnee: Not good. There have—

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: Now you're gonna feel bad when I say this next thing! There have been three deaths that have been, in part, attributed to the use of too many coffee enemas. So...

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: This is my warning! Don't do this! [laughs] Good. You're being very serious now.

So, so that's my—that's my plea. Please do not give yourselves coffee enemas. Uh, I don't know that they do anything. There's no evidence that says they do.

Justin: I'm so glad we got to you in time, before you started putting coffee in your butt.

Sydnee: These are very popular. You would be surprised. In certain circles.

Justin: Oh, I'm not. It's 2017! You're not gonna surprise me!

Sydnee: I have not... [laughs] I have not looked. But I have done a lot of research.

Justin: Probably best not to watch.

Sydnee: I've done a lot of research on Goop in the past. Uh, Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle and medical website.

Justin: Oh, I just assumed that was a byproduct of the coffee enemas.

Sydnee: No. [laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: It's not that far off, honestly. If you read Goop.

Sydnee: I feel like this is something she's probably tried in the past. This is all a guess. I don't know that to be true. But I feel like if I looked, I'd find it.

Justin: Seems Goopy.

Sydnee: Um, I have—I have one more interesting note about coffee before we finish.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Um, I had never heard of civet coffee. Have you heard of civet coffee?

Justin: Uh, no.

Sydnee: So, Teylor, my sister, actually mentioned this. And I thought she was making it up and messing with me. [laughs] But she wasn't. And then my dad said, "No, I heard that's true," and then I thought, "Well, now they're definitely making it up."

But I read about it. So, civet coffee is a speci—it's not a type of coffee. It is a process of coffee, uh, where the civet – which is an animal, a small animal – eats coffee berries, and then, poops out these like... like, lumps of partially digested coffee beans. They're like in a big—it's like a collection of them. Um...

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: And it is used to—these partially dige—'cause they're partially fermented, is the reason they're thought to be good for you. 'Cause fermentation is associated with health in a lot of, um, kind of alternative medicine circles. So, they're partially fermented beans, and they're used to brew coffee. Which is the world's most expensive coffee.

[pause]

Justin: Hundred bucks a cup, I just heard. Hundred bucks a cup.

Sydnee: And it is—like I said, it's not any specific kind of bean or anything. It's just the process of... being digested, partially, through a civet, that makes it so... expensive. Um, this was kind of accidentally found by people in Sumatra and Java who were like, collecting these beans, because it was all they had access to, 'cause they were selling everything else, so that... y'know, we could drink it.

But that was part of why, y'know, like, the... it was like the Dutch India Tea Company saw them using them, and trading them, and said, "Oh, hey, we're gonna sell those and tell everybody that they're really great for you, and that they're very expensive."

And now, the unfortunate part is that there are like, farms of civets, where they try to force feed them these berries...

[audience sounds of horror]

Sydnee: ... yeah, to collect their poop, and make them into coffee.

Justin: Oh, y'all didn't see that coming?

Sydnee: Um, and then, to make it worse, they've done tests to see, is this coffee better? Do you know people who test coffee are called cuppers?

[laughs]

[audience laughter]

Justin: No.

Sydnee: [laughs] I didn't mean to be doing that! Um...

Justin: What were you holding there in your mind's eye?

Sydnee: Two cups of coffee, in my mind.

Justin: You were weighing between them. "One of these is more delicious."

Sydnee: Uh, and cuppers say that it's—not only is it not better, it's actually worse than most coffees. That is—according to coffee experts. I don't know. Um, because I guess it has less body and less flavor. 'Cause it's partially digested by an animal! So, there's—

Justin: But what's it like in my butt?

[audience laughter]

Sydnee: In case you're wondering, is coffee good for you? It feels like every couple years, we come out with a new study that says yes or no. And we all keep drinking it, 'cause we're addicted to it. So, I don't think it really... [laughs] It's not gonna change anything, right? Like, why do we keep doing this? We're all gonna keep drinking it. We're all addicted now.

But uh, there was—if this comforts you, there have been a couple large studies that have been, um, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2012, and then, one just this year, that said that there is... not only is there no increased risk of mortality with coffee drinking – there's actually a decreased risk of mortality associated with coffee drinking.

Justin: Yeahhh!

[audience cheers]

Justin: Drink enough of it, and you'll never die.

Sydnee: So currently, we think it's fine. We may change our minds in five years. I can't guarantee that. But currently, we think coffee is a-okay.

Justin: Alright!

Sydnee: Alright.

Justin: Radical!

Sydnee: In your mouth. [laughs]

Justin: Again, that's so important. And that goes for... just assume we're saying 'in your mouth' for pretty much any pill that we're talking about here, unless otherwise directed. [coughs] Excuse me.

Uh, that is gonna do it for us. Thank you so much to you for watching.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Thank you to, uh, PodCon for having us here. This has been so much fun. We've had such a great weekend.

Sydnee: Yeah, thank you! This has been wonderful. Thank you all for coming.

Justin: Thank you to the Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program.

[audience cheers]

Justin: We're part of a network called Maximum Fun. There's a lot of great shows that you can check out on that network. MaximumFun.org. And uh... anything else? No?

Sydnee: I don't think so. Thank you all!

Justin: Thanks for coming! Uh, but that is gonna do it for us for this week. So, until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[audience cheers]

[theme music plays]

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