

## Sawbones 204: Inside a Doctor's Bag

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**Clint:** *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 you mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

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

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

**Justin:** Well, we had a fun weekend, Syd.

**Sydnee:** We did, Justin!

**Justin:** I went and spoke at the Columbus Game Developer's Expo. Hello to everyone who, uh, was so cool to us there.

**Sydnee:** You gave everybody great advice.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm. Grace showed us a colon, a knitted colon.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm, that was impressive. And Charlie got to eat lots of mini cheese balls that were available backstage.

**Justin:** So appreciated.

**Sydnee:** So... and we also got to go one of our favorite places on Earth.

**Justin:** COSI! The Center of Science and Industry.

**Sydnee:** That's right. Now, when you say it that way, the Center of Science and Industry—well, I was gonna say that doesn't sound as exciting, but actually to you, our listeners, maybe it does. [laughs]

**Justin:** Maybe it does. Maybe that's right up your alley.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Maybe you're on our—on the same page as us. COSI is one of my favorite places, 'cause it's basically a big amazing science museum in Columbus, Ohio.

**Justin:** Yep.

**Sydnee:** And if you have never been there and you live in that area, anywhere around there—

**Justin:** It's great. Top flight.

**Sydnee:** —make the trip. Favorite place to go as a kid.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** And as an adult.

**Justin:** Even after it switched buildings, it's still a delight.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. I didn't even realize it did.

**Justin:** Yeah, it used to be downtown, next to the first Wendy's.

**Sydnee:** Well. Uh, COSI is amazing, and it also gave me an idea for this week's show!

**Justin:** I'm ready, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:** So, in COSI they have—it's called Progress, I think, and it's like a—

**Justin:** It's called Progress is the name of the section.

**Sydnee:** —a time-traveling tunnel through—

**Justin:** I think, if memory serves, and this could—

**Sydnee:** —two old-timey towns. [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** —could be an embellishment of childhood, uh, that you used to walk through a little literal tunnel to get to this section, and I think there used to be cavemen. I don't really remember.

**Sydnee:** I don't know.

**Justin:** But you go through two old-timey towns from, like, the 1800's and the 1950's and 60's. It's, like, my favorite thing. It's, like, one of my favorite places.

**Sydnee:** And it's supposed to be about, like, the progress of technology and stuff.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Between the two. But they also have a little display that I was looking at in the old 1800's store, one of the store windows, of, like, medicine, and old, you know, patent medicines, and a doctor's medicine bag from that era.

And I found myself, like, glued to the window, trying to read every label on every bottle, and I thought, "You know what might be a neat idea to talk about? What would be in a doctor's bag in whatever era of history?"

**Justin:** Alright. Well, Sydnee, I've got a old-timey doctor's bag right here. Let me just set it on the—the table.

[clunk]

And open—

**Sydnee:** [holding back laughter] That's the sound it made!

**Justin:** —open it up. Creaaaak! And—

**Sydnee:** That's—mm-hmm!

**Justin:** —oh, let me try my capo, let's see what kinda noise—

[squeaking]

That's not bad.

**Sydnee:** That's pretty good.

[high pitched squeaking]

**Sydnee:** I like this. This is like an old-timey radio show now.

**Justin:** And, uh, what do we find inside?

**Sydnee:** Uh, so, I'm gonna talk about a doctor's bag of the 1800's. Uh, this is probably geared towards the later 1800's? Because of some of the specific inventions that I'll name, because obviously these things evolved quickly through these years. Um, and thank you, COSI, for the inspiration.

So, generally speaking, a doctor in this time period would want to carry very practical items with them that they were sure to use on most or all of their patients, because they were hauling it around, usually making house calls. So you don't want to carry a bunch of unnecessary stuff in there. Uh, these also, if you think about it, like, what kind of bag they would be carrying, if you think of, like, the classic big, leather, black bag—

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** —there's that. Uh, but for some it would even be more of, like, a saddlebag, because they would be riding horseback on the frontier.

**Justin:** So cool.

**Sydnee:** To go see—exactly.

**Justin:** So *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*.

**Sydnee:** It very much is. It's very cool. So it could be, like, a saddlebag. It could be, like, the traditional black bag. There were, like, medical boxes and cases as well that were better for—

**Justin:** I bet that guy probably got a lot of crap from the doctors that had bags. Think about that big lunkhead just carryin' around a big dumb box full of medical stuff.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** What a jerk! Just get a bag!

**Sydnee:** It was like—no, maybe it's like daring to be different, like the kid at school who would carry the roly bag, who had the roly backpack.

**Justin:** Nah. It's, like, cardboard, and the tape at the bottom is old so it just, like, opens at inopportune moments and dumps all the stuff on his shoes.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I don't mean, like, a cardboard box. So, uh, like I said, they were traveling a lot so it had to be something that they could carry around. Um, a lot of what would be inside a bag would be tools, as opposed to a lot of medicines. Although, as we'll talk about, some doctors may be more prone to carry more medications than others.

Um, and inside the bag, if you open it up there were usually lots of little compartments. No matter what your bag looked like, you wanted lots of little compartments so that you could keep all your tools somewhere, and it might be numbered or labeled. Usually, like, little numbers.

I have an old, um, medic, military medical bag that I got when I was in Prague.

**Justin:** Cool. I've seen that.

**Sydnee:** And it's neat, 'cause when you flip it open it has little numbers at each compartment, which I'm assuming, like, you would routinely put this medicine in this number—you know, you would know just by the number. But anyway, this was pretty—this was pretty standard to have it all kind of labeled and keep everything in order.

So, let's talk about the tools, first. Because most doctors, especially general practitioners, but also surgeons, would be carrying tools over medicines in their bags.

So, one essential tool now, as was then, would be something like a stethoscope. Anytime after 1816, it would be an actual, real deal stethoscope, 'cause that's when they were invented. But prior to that it would be, like, an ear trumpet.

**Justin:** I bet that's tough. That can't be much better than just, like, putting your ear on their chest and hoping for the best.

**Sydnee:** [sighs] It's a little bit better? And it's one of those skills that you would have to acquire. I mean, a stethoscope is a skill too, you know. I don't wanna pretend like the first time you pick it up you're instantly great at hearing heart sounds. Um, but it's not probably as difficult a skill [laughs quietly] as the ear trumpet would've been to acquire.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** So you had to have that. Uh, you would've had some things like a folding magnifying glass.

**Justin:** To look at warts closer.

**Sydnee:** Yes, to look at various lesions and whatnot more closely. And because, like, they just look so sciencey, right?

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Uh, you wanna have lancets. Now, why would you have lancets?

**Justin:** To lance boils.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Sure!

**Justin:** Woo!

**Sydnee:** To lance boils. That would be a great—a great reason to have a lance.

**Justin:** I could've been an 1800's doctor, is what I'm startin' to think.

**Sydnee:** You would also wanna have lancets, or a small kit of scalpels, or maybe a fleam. Do you remember the fleam.? We talked about the fleam.

**Justin:** [thoughtfully] Oh, what's the fleam? I know we talked about it.

**Sydnee:** It looks like a little, uh, pocketknife, like, Swiss Army knife kinda thing. It's all folded up, and then you unfold it and it's got a bunch of triangular-shaped

blades that are great for... opening a blood vessel in the event one needs to be bled.

**Justin:** Great.

**Sydnee:** So, a lot of these tools were mainly for bleeding... your patient.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Which, of course... we don't use as often today.

**Justin:** Not so much.

**Sydnee:** At least not for that purpose. And as you go into the later 1800's, some of these would be less likely. You know, you wouldn't necessarily find a fleam, because bleeding had begun to lose... um, interest? [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** Yeah. Yeah, it's not as hot of a commodity anymore.

**Sydnee:** I was gonna say, like, efficacy, but, like, it was never—

**Justin:** It was never—yeah. Never had that.

**Sydnee:** —it was never effective, it was just—people stopped doing it so much. You might have an eyedropper for... you know.

**Justin:** Drops in eyes!

**Sydnee:** For putting drops in eyes. Uh, and after 1867, you may have a thermometer, because thermometers actually—the original thermometer was invented prior to that, but the original thermometer was huge. It was very long, and it was very fragile—

**Justin:** And it was for butts only.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Well, I mean, that is—that is the most accurate temperature, Justin.

**Justin:** You—you can't put it in the mouth if it was that big. It's gotta be for butts.

**Sydnee:** Wh—

**Justin:** Think about it!

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I am, and I'm still not clear.

**Justin:** It's like, think about how silly that would look to have a giant thermometer in your mouth.

**Sydnee:** I mean, it's very long.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** What, do you think it looks less silly to have a giant thermometer sticking out of your butt?

**Justin:** No, but that you would have to do in privacy, [holding back laughter] so nobody would see you.

**Sydnee:** A rectal temperature is the most accurate temperature.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** To be fair. Anyway, they were very long, and they were fragile and, like, they had mercury in them, so they weren't the best thing to just carry around in a doctor's bag. So after 1867, you see the invention of small, portable thermometers that are easier for you to actually take from place to place and check for fevers.

**Justin:** That must've been exciting.

**Sydnee:** Um, prior to those, doctors had to be pretty good at... feeling foreheads.

**Justin:** That seems so scattershot to me.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]



**Justin:** That's, like, unnerving. But I guess, like, what—[wheeze-laughs] I guess on the other hand, "Yeah, he's got a fever."

"What do you wanna do?"

"Eh, I don't know! I don't know. Nothi—not different, I guess, from what I thought."

**Sydnee:** No, that—I mean, the treatment's gonna be the same, right? Bleed 'em!

**Justin:** Bleed 'em!

**Sydnee:** Bleed 'em. No, you know, actually they've done studies to, like, test how good, um, parents are at feeling foreheads on kids and predicting fevers, and they're actually pretty decent.

**Justin:** Yeah, I feel like I have a pretty good sense of it with Charlie, for sure.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, yeah. I think—I mean... we're wrong sometimes, but we do an okay job.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** We can get thermometers now, though, so, like, get a thermometer.

**Justin:** We—yeah, do have a thermometer, folks.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Get a thermometer. [laughs] Now, um, along the lines—

**Justin:** Save your emails.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Along the lines of bleeding, you could also get a scarificator?

**Justin:** Uhhh...

**Sydnee:** Do you remember those things? They're these little, like, spring-loaded, round, cylindrical devices that you would hold on your skin and then push a button and, like, multiple blades would spring out and cut you at once.

**Justin:** Ah!

**Sydnee:** So that you could bleed somebody more effectively and efficiently.

**Justin:** [groans uncomfortably]

**Sydnee:** Um, or, they were later used for vaccination against smallpox. That was part of how that was performed, was using this device.

**Justin:** Ugh.

**Sydnee:** So you may have had one of those in your kit. That would look particularly intimidating, I think. Uh, you would have a small selection of things like forceps, tweezers, scissors, just really, you know, kind of practical things you might need for removing various debris, or a small sewing kit for suturing.

**Justin:** Stitching people back up, yeah.

**Sydnee:** For stitchin' people up, that kind of thing. Um, you might have something like some scales.

[pauses]

**Justin:** [hesitantly] To measure out dosage?

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. If you are gonna mess with medicines, you might need some scales, because—

**Justin:** [through laughter] If you're gonna mess with medicines!

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** What a cool time.

**Sydnee:** Because you're probably going—you're probably not bringing pre-mixed, pre-prepared medications most of the time. A lot of it, doctors are kind of measuring out for themselves. Either they're creating for themselves, or they're buying concentrated kind of mixes that have to be diluted and stuff.

So anyway, you might have some scales and, like, a mortar and pestle would be a very common thing you might find, if you were gonna carry a lot of medications.

Um, and along those same lines, syringes and needles would be pretty essential if you were gonna administer medications. Um, especially—one of the earliest things that a doctor might carry with them standardly would be some kind of opiate.

**Justin:** Oh, sure.

**Sydnee:** So morphine or something.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** Or heroin.

**Justin:** That'll fix 'em up.

**Sydnee:** Right. And so you might have something like that. Uh, and you would need a syringe. You'd also want a syringe for flushing things out. So, like, just—no needle on it, just the syringe part that you could fill with water and flush things out.

**Justin:** Perfect.

**Sydnee:** Just to clean out wounds and stuff.

**Justin:** We used to do that in school. We had—we would get, like, syringes without a needle in 'em and use 'em to spray each other.

**Sydnee:** Yeah! They're great for squirt guns.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Not the needle, though.

**Justin:** Not the needle, folks!

**Sydnee:** Leave—leave the needle out if you're gonna let your kid play with it.

**Justin:** [snorts]

**Sydnee:** [holding back laughter] There's my advice to you.

**Justin:** Man. And they say this show isn't educational.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Uh, several different sizes of speculums for various orifices of the body.

**Justin:** Remind me, what's a speculum?

**Sydnee:** [sighs] Uh, a speculum—it depends on exactly what we're talking about. You can use, like, a gynecologic speculum, which is like a duck bill looking device—

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** —that opens, and you can use to insert inside the vagina and take a look in there. Um, you can use various speculums to get a better look at the rectum, or there are ear speculums, and there are nose speculums—

**Justin:** Sounds like—sounds like—

**Sydnee:** —they're all just, like, devices that help you get a closer look inside an orifice.

**Justin:** It sounds like spatula. 'Cause, like—

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** —people will call anything a spatula.

**Sydnee:** It's not a spatula.

**Justin:** No, I know it's not a spatula. I'm just saying the term speculum sounds like it's used for as many things as spatula is. There's no good consensus on what a spatula is. It irritates me.

**Sydnee:** That's a good point. Well, a spa—it's just to kind of look—

**Justin:** [crosstalk] people call the flat metal thing with the lines. That's what I think of, like Spatula City, spatulas.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** But, like, also people call the little flat spoons spatulas.

**Sydnee:** But that's a spoonula.

**Justin:** Infer—it's a spoonula. "[Dracula voice] Count Spoonula!"

**Sydnee:** Sp—speaking of spoons, you might have an ear spoon in your kit.

**Justin:** That was the greatest segue we've ever done on the show. It was the cleanest thing.

**Sydnee:** Thank you.

**Justin:** I'm sorry I called attention to it.

**Sydnee:** You might have an ear spoon, which would be, as you can imagine, a little spoon used for cleaning out your ear. Sometimes they would get really fancy and have a toothpick on end and a spoon on the other. [laughs quietly] Again—

**Justin:** Clean your teeth, clean your ears?

**Sydnee:** Exactly. And it would—there were very fancy ones. There are, like, gold—you can look at pictures if you're even curious, if this is the kind of thing you're into, which apparently I am—[laughs quietly] look at pictures of old ear spoons on the internet, and you can find really fancy, like, gold plated and, like, you know, jewel-inlaid ear spoons. So there you go.

Uh, you might have a small kit of probes. Various long sticks... that you—

**Justin:** For—you can guess.

**Sydnee:** —probe things with. Uh, you may have cupping devices. Uh, we've talked about cupping on the show before. That for—for a good bit of history, and actually currently, some people believed that cupping would in one way shift humors? That was the origin of it, was to pull humors away from or towards different parts of the body. Um, and so you would have the little glass cups. They were usually glass at the time. And then some lint that you would have with them

so that you could set fire to the lint to use it to create a vacuum inside the cup, and then put that on the skin, and create a big, nasty, ugly-looking... bruise.

**Justin:** [holding back laughter] For medicine.

**Sydnee:** For medicine. And then maybe catch your patient on fire!

**Justin:** Who knows?

**Sydnee:** Try not to.

**Justin:** Seems lively.

**Sydnee:** A trephine. For trepanation.

**Justin:** Ahh, good. There's my guy.

**Sydnee:** Yeahh. So, you might wanna have a handheld little head drill.

**Justin:** Just in case, on the go.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And, I mean, largely at this point in history they were being used for, like, traumatic skull injuries. So, somebody gets stepped on by a horse, and we know that—we didn't quite understand why, but the brain was gonna swell. We know that those pieces of skull are gonna be a problem, and so drilling a hole in the head would've been not an inappropriate treatment at the time.

**Justin:** The good kind of trepanation that does—does exist.

**Sydnee:** Now, this was still done under absolutely, like, no sterile conditions—

**Justin:** Aw, yeah yeah yeah!

**Sydnee:** —no, you know—you're not washing your hands or the trephine or anything, so I wouldn't say it's, like, the best kind of trepanation. But—

**Justin:** No, yeah. But it's like...

**Sydnee:** Yeah. But not done for fun.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You may have dental tools. A lot of doctors at the time would pull teeth, too.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** Because... why not? They were there.

**Justin:** [crosstalk] there already.

**Sydnee:** And it was a great show! You could do that in front of people and earn a few extra bucks.

**Justin:** Perfect.

**Sydnee:** And some—and some fame. You would probably have one of those little alcohol lamps? That was just for light. You know those little teeny lamps?

**Justin:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Sydnee:** That run on alcohol. Those were very common to find in doctor's kits. Uh, and you might have some things like little glass bottles or slides or something, if you wanted to collect samples to take back to wherever your doctor lab is to analyze. Um—

**Justin:** And wait for someone to invent the microscope.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Well, I think we have the—

**Justin:** Probably existed. Probably existed by now.

**Sydnee:** Uh, and we have—and you might have some leather straps or, like, tourniquet kind of things to use, or maybe because you needed restraints, if you were going to do something incredibly painful.

Um, and then, like I said, without getting into the medicines too much yet, it would be very common to have some little ampules full of opiates of some sort. That was very common, just for pain relief. Um, and then after the 1860's cocaine was a very common thing to find in a lot of doctor's kits, so.

**Justin:** What about snacks? You haven't mentioned a snack—

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** —but I'm assuming a doctor on the go [laughs quietly] probably has a Clif Bar or something, right?

**Sydnee:** At least, at least, in there. One of those little things that I love—

**Justin:** [simultaneously] Some mints? Stickers for the kids?

**Sydnee:** —one of those little ki—one of those little containers that have, like, cheese and nuts and—

**Justin:** Oh my God. Sydnee goes—

**Sydnee:** —raisins.

**Justin:** —buckwild for those things.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Like, the little trays. I'll say, like, "Did you eat lunch?"

**Sydnee:** Called, like, A Sweet Escape or something.

**Justin:** And she'll say, "Yeah, I had one of my trays." And it's like—one of her trays is, like, 30 white chocolate morsels, and some raisins, and some cubes of meat. And she's like—

**Sydnee:** No, just cheese.

**Justin:** —"Yeah, I have." Just cheese.

**Sydnee:** I can't have cubes of meat right now. Just cheese.

**Justin:** Oh, that's right, right, right.



**Sydnee:** Uh, they're delicious. But no, unfortunately these old-timey doctors would not have had them. Uh, you wouldn't find bandages. I thought this was worth mentioning. You would not—if you noticed, I didn't mention anything about any kind of bandaging material. It would have been really bulky for doctors to carry around, 'cause we're talking about, like, cloth bandages, at the time.

**Justin:** Right, right, right. Like, come up with something.

**Sydnee:** It would've been a big waste of space in your bag, and you really would've expected the patient's family to supply those to you. So basically you show up, and if you need bandages, the patient's family is gonna tear up some sheets or whatever to give you those.

**Justin:** Well, if I had—if I had to guess, I'm—and this is, like, complete conjecture on my part, but if I had to guess, I would bet you probably had to be ready to deal with, like, first aid type stuff on your own.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Like, by the time you found a way get the doctor there—

**Sydnee:** There was no EMT there, yeah.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** No, you're exactly right. And so, like—well, yeah, yeah. So the bandages probably would've been coming from the family, and that kind of thing was actually expected. We mentioned this a long time ago in one of our childbirth episodes that, like, when you went to the hospital to have a baby, you would bring your own, like, bandages—not bandages, but, like, sheets and blankets and towels, and all that stuff. Like, a basin to put water in. Like, you provided all that stuff. That just—they didn't have it for you back then.

Uh, there wasn't any need for antiseptic—you might've noticed I didn't mention that, 'cause we didn't know that that was a thing.

**Justin:** That was a *need* for antiseptic. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Well, there was a need, but we didn't understand it. We didn't believe it. We were still really mad that Semmelweis brought up hand washing and decided not to do it. Well, at some point in this time period, depending on where you are.

But anyway—so, we weren't washing our hands, and we didn't worry about antiseptic. And, uh—and again, about delivering babies, most docs weren't doing it, so you wouldn't need any kind of obstetrical equipment. Back then, it was largely midwives. And especially if we're talking about doctors who are going from house to house.

Um, if people are having home deliveries, midwives are doing that. So you really wouldn't see a lot of docs carrying a ton of obstetrical equipment around unless that was something that they had a specialized interest in, or they knew that's what they were coming for.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Um, no blood pressure cuffs, no sphygmomanometer.

**Justin:** Oh, that just seems like such a natural part of the—

**Sydnee:** Not around yet.

**Justin:** —doctor's bag.

**Sydnee:** Not around.

**Justin:** Not around. What about—okay. So, what about medicine?

**Sydnee:** Well, Justin, I'm gonna tell you about medicine. But first, why don't we head to the billing department?

**Justin:** Let's go!

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Justin:** So, you promised me, Sydnee, medicine, and I want medicine.

**Sydnee:** That's right, Justin. So, uh, like I said, any doctor might carry medicines with them, and especially if they had medicines they were making, 'cause that was not uncommon to find a doctor who also kind of made their own little concoctions. Uh, but specifically if you were a homeopath, you probably carried a collection of...

**Justin:** Lies.

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] I don't know—I was gonna say medications, but... it's a loose use of the word, there.

**Justin:** Loosey goosey for made-up gar—[crosstalk]—

**Sydnee:** Some bottles of—some bottles of water. Uh, or perhaps an herbalist. You probably would carry a separate box full—just dedicated to your medicines. I mean, 'cause you—you may be able to fit that all in the one doctor bag, but you'll see a lot of old medical kits that are just the medicines, kind of separate from everything else.

Um, and you would carry some of the basics, such as, like, some anti—some of the early, like, antibacterials. We didn't know that's what they were, but we knew that these were good for putting on wounds. They did something, we didn't know why. Um, things to make, like, poultices.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** Like, to help things heal, or what we thought were drawing out poison, toxin—we didn't know, again—infection.

**Justin:** Just kinda played it by ear.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, that kind of thing. Um, you might have some willow bark.

**Justin:** Which was used...

**Sydnee:** For pain, because of—

**Justin:** Because it was—made aspirin.

**Sydnee:** Exactly. Exact—very good.

**Justin:** Or acetycolic... acid.

**Sydnee:** Acetylcyli—aceta—[laughs quietly] now you're messin' me up.  
Acetalal—

**Justin:** [simultaneously] Acetakillic—ceta—cetadillickillic—

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Acetabilikilichilic acid.

**Sydnee:** Acetylsalicylic acid!

**Justin:** [crosstalk] Chilic, salac.

**Sydnee:** Stop! [laughs]

**Justin:** Alec Baldwin acid.

**Sydnee:** Uh, the—you might have some medicinal brandy in there.

**Justin:** Wink!

**Sydnee:** So just some alcohol with something in it, 'cause why not? Um, laudanum was a staple.

**Justin:** I'm gonna l—I'm gonna make a line of brandy called It's Medicine, and that will be the brand.

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh.

**Justin:** And you just say—"Oh no, this? It's Medicine."

**Sydnee:** "It's Medicine." Uh, and so—and you definitely, like I said, would wanna have some laudanum, because it was good for everything, 'cause it made you feel so good, and especially back in the 1800's, you would give it to a woman who complained about anything, because... that's what we did!

**Justin:** [quietly, sing-song] Sorry!

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** [quietly, sing-song] Sorry, everybody!

**Sydnee:** So you had to have the laudanum. Laudanum for the ladies.

**Justin:** Laudanum for the ladies. Ladies' Laudanum.

**Sydnee:** Uh, a lot of these that I'm gonna talk about may be in the form of powder, so you would actually—they would, like, wrap them in little squares of paper, like newspaper or something like that, so you would have a bunch of teeny little packets.

**Justin:** I see that in old-timey movies a lot.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Like a little packet of some—take a powder. That was, like, a common—"Just take a powder." It was a common turn of phrase. Um, there might be some liquids or tonics or tinctures in there, a lot of things that might need to be reconstituted. So, like, this is—you know, you can take a couple drops of this—there's your eyedropper. Take some drops of this and put it in some brandy, [through laughter] and there you go. Some kind of alcohol to reconstitute it. That was very common.

Um, and then some doctors would take the time to actually make their own tablets out of some of these different things. Um, it just depended on, again, kind of how into it they were. [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** Yeah. How much they wanted to work.

**Sydnee:** This is very—this is a very loose science, at this point. [laughs] This is more of a hobby. Uh, so—

**Justin:** I wonder if the—you probably need a machine to make pills, right? At least some sort of tool, I would think.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, something to press it into a pill shape.

**Justin:** I wonder if that's something you would carry around, or just do at home.

**Sydnee:** I didn't find any mention of that. Um, just because I think it would be bulky.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** So I think you would probably want to make them at home and carry them with you. Um, or just carry the powder. It'd be easier and lighter.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You know? And you could—think about how many you could stack of just little packets of powder in your bag. Um, in addition, some things you might carry around—and a lot of these I actually—I was able to just find a bunch of old medical kits and, like, look at all the different bottles in them and try to figure out what were common—common themes. Um, cream of tartar to use as a laxative was not uncommon.

**Justin:** Whoa!

**Sydnee:** Yeah, I didn't know that it would do that.

**Justin:** Me neither.

**Sydnee:** I mean, don't try that at home. Um, there's something—

**Justin:** Reconsider how I make my meringues, now.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] There's something called manna. Not that manna.

**Justin:** Not from heaven.

**Sydnee:** No, it's from plants. It's just plant material that, again, will work as a laxative. So it was not uncommon to find a bottle labeled "manna," it would be from various plants.

Um, again, anything that worked as a laxative was very popular. Uh, there was something called turkey rhubarb, which I only enjoyed because the bottle actually said "Tincture of fine turkey rhubarb."

**Justin:** Sounds delicious.

**Sydnee:** Which—it does! It sounds pretty good, turkey rhubarb. Um, I don't know what that was supposed to do for you, I just liked turkey rhubarb. Some castor oil. Uh, some peppermint water.

**Justin:** An emetic, I guess I should say.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Don't wanna get [unintelligible] fancy.

**Sydnee:** Some peppermint water, which would, um, help with vomiting, diarrhea... [pauses] gas.

**Justin:** You mean faaarts?

**Sydnee:** Yes, honey. Yes. Lavender was a common herb you would find, like some sort of preparation of lavender, uh, for digestion and depression, so that's a nice little...

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... combo for you.

**Justin:** And—listen. If you're sad about... [snorts] how much your tummy hurts, it's the perfect remedy.

**Sydnee:** There you go. Then take some lavender. Uh, we've talked before about Epsom salts. Those were very popular for soaking things in, and at times, they would advise ingesting them. I would not advise that.

**Justin:** Don't!

**Sydnee:** But you would carry some Epsom salts with you. Um, and then you may have some patent medicines in there.

**Justin:** Aw, yeah!

**Sydnee:** Now, not all doctors were fans of the patent medicines. Many of them found them to be kind of hoaxes, as they were, because they contained things like alcohol, and opium, and—

**Justin:** Well, and I would imagine if you were a doctor, you'd probably have a healthy amount of—if you're a working physician who's actually trying to do science-based stuff, you probably have a pretty healthy skepticism of non-doctors trying to sell medicine they—

**Sydnee:** Exactly.

**Justin:** —[holding back laughter] they made up in their basement.

**Sydnee:** Exactly. And so there was definitely friction there. So, not all doctors would have carried any patent medicines, and the ones they would have chosen to carry probably—they would've been pretty particular about.

Um, but then you find some patent medicines that were using ingredients that even doctors were recommending. So, these might've been, like, easy preparations for them to carry along with them.

So, like, one example would be something like Dr. Steer's Chemical Apolt—Opodeldoc. Opodeldoc—elpodeldoc. This was a word I was unfamiliar with.

**Justin:** That's not—it's a fairly clumsy portmanteau, it seems.

**Sydnee:** Yes. So, opodel—opodeldoc is a kind of cure-all, and I had to read about what this is, 'cause it—Dr. Steers is not the only one who made one of these. Uh, his in particular was used for aches, pains, bruises, it was made of soap, spirit of wine, camphor, rosemary oil, and sometimes spirit of ammonia.

But the original opodeldoc dates back to Paracelsus, who we've talked about before. Bombastic Paracelsus, who, uh, made a liniment from it that was maybe named for the different herbs that were in it. This is one theory. Opoponax, bdelium, and aristolochia? and maybe from that he put it together into opodeldoc. [pauses] I don't know.

**Justin:** Sure?



**Sydnee:** This theory's as good as any, I guess? [laughs quietly] Where else did he come up with it?

**Justin:** I thought that smelled like a portmanteau.

**Sydnee:** And, uh—yeah. I mean, it sounds like something that probably was just kinda stuck together, does not roll off the tongue. Uh, and these were things that were already being used for various medicinal purposes.

Uh, his also had soap, alcohol, camphor, and then could have some other herbal elements in addition to those. And this—this theme of an opodeldoc became so popular, kind of in culture and, like, what everybody recognized as a kind of cure—all that someone might have, made of various substances, that the name Old Opodeldoc was, like, a stock character?

**Justin:** Hmm.

**Sydnee:** For a lot of different, like, plays and writings from the time, so you would have a physician that was named that in the play. And they would be like—they would kind of be like comic relief. Um, Poe used the name as a pseudonym for a character in *The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.* And, uh—and this opodeldoc would've been very widely used during Poe's life, so.

**Justin:** Huh. There you go.

**Sydnee:** I had never heard of this before.

**Justin:** Opodeldoc. It's kind of a mouthful.

**Sydnee:** It is, it is. But you may have found some variety of opodeldoc in there. Um, usually a sarsaparilla-based medicine. Those were very popular at the time. Um, so Ayer's sarsaparilla medicine was a very common one. [laughs quietly] There were lots of other ones, but anything with sarsaparilla.

**Justin:** That's a fun word that I wish we got an opportunity to say more often.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Sarsaparilla.

**Justin:** [simultaneously] Sarsaparilla.

**Sydnee:** Uh, celery-based medicines were incredibly popular. We've talked about Lydia Pinkham's before.

**Justin:** Oh, she's great.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Still find it, by the way.

**Sydnee:** You can still find it.

**Justin:** Lydia Pinkham's out there.

**Sydnee:** Yep. So, us—the kind of vegetable-based medicines or celery-based medicines were very popular. Blister plasters, like a mustard plaster—these were to use—we've talk about these before—to use as, like, a counter-irritant.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** So you have inflammation or infection or something going on somewhere in the body, and you put this plaster on healthy skin somewhere else. It will irritate the skin and cause inflammation there, drawing blood away from the site of injury or illness, and making you better?

**Justin:** [raising in pitch] Making you more annoyed?

**Sydnee:** So you might find these in a doctor's kit. Um, maybe some strychnine.

**Justin:** In case you just got too much—

**Sydnee:** Just—well, no. We've talked about that. Strychnine was used in medication for a while. Um, so maybe some strychnine., maybe some mercury. It was a very popular cure for syphilis.

**Justin:** Oh!

**Sydnee:** Also in the form of calomel for any kind of stomach complaint.

**Justin:** Perfect! Man.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. So—

**Justin:** Thank you, patent medicines!

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** You sure did have a wide range of uses.

**Sydnee:** So, mercury would've—mercury would—it would not be uncommon to find mercury in a doctor's bag. Um, and then—

**Justin:** Hopefully it didn't open, 'cause that's, like, your whole day.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's it. Well, that's what those old thermometers were probably good for.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** They just broke open, and then you let your patient... eat what was inside?

**Justin:** I guess?

**Sydnee:** And they cure their syphilis. Anything that generally caused sweating, or peeing, or vomiting, or pooping was considered a good thing.

**Justin:** I mean, you drive all the way out to the person's house, on a horse. And they want something to happen.

**Sydnee:** Well, actually, you hit on a point I wanted to make, which is that a lot of times, patients did not feel that they had been cared for unless they were given some kind of medication. And so medicines like these that would produce some sort of [holding back laughter] visible result were very popular, because then you knew the doctor gave you something that worked, which could've been a very powerful placebo effect. And, in fact, some doctors actually carried literal placebos with them—

**Justin:** Just to, like—

**Sydnee:** They would carry sugar pills.

**Justin:** That's so good.

**Sydnee:** Just to give—if they knew it was something there was nothing to do for, or they thought was gonna go away on its own or whatever, but they also knew that the patient would be very dissatisfied with that answer, they would give 'em sugar pills.

**Justin:** Oh, that's so good.

**Sydnee:** So that was actually—now, this is totally unethical. We do not do that anymore. That is not a thing that we do. But back then, I mean—

**Justin:** Wink!

**Sydnee:** No, we don't! We really don't.

**Justin:** Why are you winking?

**Sydnee:** N—I'm not! Stop telling people—

**Justin:** Sydnee's not—Sydnee's not winking!

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Uh, and a portable drug kit could hold anywhere from 12 to 36 vials of some sort of powdered medicine, just depending on—and you can—again, these are really cool to look up, all of just the different varieties. Um—

**Justin:** Are they cool, Sydnee? Are they cool to look up?

**Sydnee:** Yes, they're very cool. Shut up. Uh, in—just one note. If you were a military surgeon, a lot of this you would probably find useless. A battlefield—

**Justin:** Right. 'Cause triage, right?

**Sydnee:** Yes, a battlefield surgeon would want to carry a lot of some sort of opiate, for pain control, which makes sense. Lancets and scalpels and sutures, obviously makes sense. And then you would have a whole other box... just full of really big knives and saws.

**Justin:** The no-no box. [muffled laughter]

**Sydnee:** Uh, and you can probably imagine what those were used for.

**Justin:** Yes. Cooking up... a mean get-well lunch for all your friends, and you use that to carve the meat, or to, um... cut the vegetables and...

**Sydnee:** No. No, no. Amputations.

[pauses]

**Justin:** Well, that's gonna do it for us this week, folks!

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** Thank you so much for joining us. Let me—hold on, wait. Shut the bag.

[creaking noise]

Uh, the bag's all shut, and [through laughter] that's gonna do it for us!

**Sydnee:** We'll have to look into some more medical bags from... I don't know. Maybe we can—maybe we can find some ancient medical bags and see what's inside.

**Justin:** We'll also have to look into more devices foley work if we're gonna go down that road.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** But, uh, thank you so much. Hey, if you wanna tweet about the show, @sawbones is our Twitter account, so you can tweet at us, or just tweet about the show, tell people to go listen to it, because that's how we get other people to listen to it. Um, so please do it! Okay? Thanks!

**Sydnee:** Thanks! I mean, thanks in advance. We appreciate that.

**Justin:** Thank you to the Maximum Fun Network for letting us be a part of their podcasting family. Uh, we sure appreciate 'em. Oh, here's a bit of good news that isn't necessarily podcast-related, but, uh, Bullseye, one of the Max Fun shows that is also on public radio stations, is coming to Huntington!

**Sydnee:** Oh, cool!

**Justin:** It's comin' to West Virginia public radio. So, uh, check their website for listings. Bullseye is a pop culture show, um, hosted by Jesse Thorn, who runs Max Fun, and it is great! Thank you—did I thank The Taxpayers? I'm gonna thank 'em twice.

**Sydnee:** You can thank 'em again. Just thank—juts—they're great, so just thank 'em again.

**Justin:** Thank you so much for letting us your song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. Thank you to you for listening! But that is gonna do it for us. So, until next week, 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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**Oliver:** How's it goin', everyone? I'm Oliver Wang.

**Morgan:** And I'm Morgan Rhodes. We have a brand new show on the Maximum Fun Network that we'd love to share with you. It's called Heat Rocks.

**Oliver:** Morgan, would should probably explain what a heat rock is.

**Morgan:** It is a banger, a fire track, true fire.

**Oliver:** Right. Dope album. Each episode, we will bring on a special guest to join us to talk about one of their heat rocks. It might be a musician.

**Morgan:** A writer.

**Oliver:** Maybe a scholar.

**Morgan:** I mean, I would've been happy to just talk to you about your heat rocks, but this is a different show, so.

**Oliver:** Yeah. I think people might enjoy hearing maybe the guests, instead.

**Morgan:** To do that, you'll have to go to [Maximumfun.org](http://Maximumfun.org). So if you want to talk about hot music, you should check us out.

**Oliver:** Heat Rocks.