

## Sawbones 184: The Salisbury Diet

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

[theme music plays]

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

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

**Justin:** You know I wasn't actually gonna do my middle name? I thought to myself, that sounds a little pompous when I was editing.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** And I just did it. So maybe that is me, now.

**Sydnee:** That's just you?

**Justin:** Maybe I'm just the kind of guy who does that.

**Sydnee:** See, I felt dragged into it, so I'm resisting now.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** I don't need to say all— you know, I don't really need a big flashy title. I just like to kind of let my work speak for itself, you know?

**Justin:** Says the person who corrects anybody who doesn't put "doctor" at the beginning of her name.

**Sydnee:** That is— that is not true, don't say that.

**Justin:** It's not true.

**Sydnee:** That— I'm not like that.

**Justin:** No, yeah. Unless they call you Mrs. Justin McElroy, then you do do the—

**Sydnee:** Okay, then I would lose it, yeah. No, I have a name. I have a— I am not just, you know, wife of Justin, thank you.

**Justin:** [whining] Sydnee, I'm tired of eating beans!

**Sydnee:** Justin, we're tired of hearing about your diet.

**Justin:** Sydnee, I'm *tired* of eating *beans*!

**Sydnee:** It's your own fault! It's your own fault. You've fallen into a classic fad diet trap.

**Justin:** It's not a fad diet.

**Sydnee:** You've fallen into a fad diet trap.

**Justin:** It isn't a fad diet, about the slow-carb lifestyle.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Fad diet trap.

**Justin:** Don't say things on the podcast you can't take back in real life, you don't wanna undermine me. I'm feeling great, I'm losing LBs, putting on muscle. God, I eat— high yellow belt in taekwondo. Feeling great. Just don't wanna eat beans anymore.

**Sydnee:** Now, let me ask you. Do you think that slow-carb is like a revolutionary new concept?

**Justin:** No, but you do, because you said it's a fad diet. I'm saying it's not a revolutionary new concept, I'm saying it's just a solid way of eating.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** With a lot of beans.

**Sydnee:** Do you think it's possible that it's popular right now and that maybe other versions of these kinds of fad diets were popular at different points in history, maybe by different doctors like Dr. Atkins, whereas— that's why we're here, with our slow carb, let's be honest. But maybe there were— maybe he had predecessors, maybe there was somebody even before him.

**Justin:** Well, Sydnee, I would have said no, but from your tone I can tell you're trying to segue into an episode of *Sawbones*, and so I'm going to go with it and say I bet that's probably right!

**Sydnee:** That's right, Justin.

**Justin:** [enthusiastically] Nice!

**Sydnee:** You guessed it, you guessed it. The idea of eating low carb is not really a new one and there have been various iterations of, uh, meat-based diets throughout history and I wanna tell you about one, and specifically its founder, Dr. James Salisbury.

**Justin:** Okay, well, I would love to hear about him.

**Sydnee:** Okay. So, first of all, thank you Sam, for recommending this topic. Doctor—

**Justin:** Sam Salisbury.

**Sydnee:** No, not. I don't think Sam—

**Justin:** Private detective.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's a good name. Hey, Sam, if you wanna be Sam Salisbury, private detective...

**Justin:** There's your business card.

**Sydnee:** There— yeah. Stick with that. Um, credit us though.

**Justin:** Yeah, for sure.

**Sydnee:** Definitely give us all the credit.

**Justin:** The *Sawbones* joint.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Sam Salisbury, private detective. A *Sawbones* joint.

**Sydnee:** Dr. Salisbury was born in Scott, New York in 1823 and initially medicine wasn't his passion. He pursued chemistry as a career and worked as the principal chemist for the New York Geological Survey until 1852, but sometime in there he, I don't know, got bored? Got really interested in anatomy.

**Justin:** Looked at enough rocks and was like, "I wish this was a butt."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's how doctors become doctors. We look at rocks and go, "I wish this was a butt," and then—

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And now I'm a physician.

**Justin:** And now I'm a physician, just like that.

**Sydnee:** That's the start. It's really at the core of every doctor, that's the story.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Somewhere along the line, they just wish something was a butt.

**Justin:** Mm. Inspirational.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm. Uh, however, he— so he got interested in medicine, I'm not sure how, and so while he was still working, he started pursuing his MD and he got his medical degree in 1850. Now, as he started practicing, he became very focused on the idea that all illness comes from basically eating the wrong foods. Like, it's all diet.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** We can trace everything that's wrong with humans back to things they're eating or not eating.

**Justin:** I've heard, uh, I think that's a kind of everything old is new again, I've heard a lot of that lately.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** Especially with guts. I've heard it's all about your gut bacteria.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Yes. So he, along these same lines, he wasn't talking about gut bacteria, but some very similar themes to what we've talked about more recently on the show. So, uh, any illness of the G.I. tract certainly could be traced back to what you ate. He definitely knew that.

If you came in with anything, you know, you're nauseous, you're puking, you're having diarrhea, your stomach cramps, anything like that, obviously, that's what you eat. And then pretty much anything else too, we just don't know. We've just still got to figure out all those connections.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Um, and he thought that if we could just figure out what these things were that were making us sick and which things wouldn't, then we could cure all diseases, essentially.

**Justin:** Just like that.

**Sydnee:** Just like that. So, he went about this in a fairly scientific way. If you wanna know what foods are good and what foods are bad, Justin, what would be a really easy test you could do?

**Justin:** Eat all of them. In order, alphabetically, and write down a number of how I felt after each one.

**Sydnee:** Okay. That's— Well, that's not bad.

**Justin:** Thanks.

**Sydnee:** So, yeah. So, he started these solo food trials.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Just eat one food for a period of time...

**Justin:** [thoughtfully] Hmm.

**Sydnee:** ... and see how you feel.

**Justin:** That's where I like, kind of— yeah, I didn't control enough for that.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. Just eat one food and, I mean—

**Justin:** Beans, for example. Just eat beans every day for every meal for weeks on end and see how you feel.

**Sydnee:** As a matter of fact, he started with baked beans.

**Justin:** Did he?

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Did he?

**Sydnee:** Yes. The first food he tried was baked beans.

**Justin:** It looked awesome, it looked carved, so good. They had the eight packs.

**Sydnee:** No, he reported that he did not feel very good while he was eating just baked beans. He felt like he wasn't as quick, like, thinking-wise. Like he was not able to process information as quickly because he was kind of slow in that regard and then he also felt dizzy and flatulent.

**Justin:** I don't know about that second part, but...

**Sydnee:** [laughs] But it's not enough to try it out on one person, right? If you're gonna do a study and you wanna know if eating baked beans all day makes you dizzy and flatulent, you probably need to try it out on other people.

**Justin:** You get a lot of bean heads in there to eat some baked beans.

**Sydnee:** So, he invited six other guys to actually come stay at his house.

**Justin:** And eat beans?

**Sydnee:** And eat nothing but baked beans.

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** And they all did this. Can you imagine having to be in this house?

**Justin:** No, no. I can't, actually. I would rather not think about that, thank you.

**Sydnee:** I actually— you know what? I'm gonna go ahead and say I don't know if Dr. Salisbury had any kind of spouse, significant other.

**Justin:** I mean, certainly not afterwards.

**Sydnee:** Not after this.

**Justin:** Maybe before.

**Sydnee:** Not after I invited six other guys who are all gonna sit around and eat baked beans all day and fart and then write down how we feel.

**Justin:** How we feel about it? Sad, I think?

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Bad. Guilty.

**Sydnee:** This is the weirdest fraternity I've ever been to.

**Justin:** That basically is a fraternity, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Is that all you do? So, they all stayed at the house, they all tried eating only baked beans for a while, and they all had the same effect. So they didn't feel good. So, he started going systematically through a lot of other foods, the next thing he tried, again, was oatmeal porridge.

And with all of these, like, with that one, he invited four other dudes, usually four men that he would find and pay. Like, "you're gonna come live with me and I'm gonna give you food, but it's just this one food and you're gonna have to tell me constantly how you feel while you're eating it."

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And he did that with bread and rice and corn and potatoes and asparagus and beef and mutton and chicken and turkey and lobster and fish.

And after doing all of these experiments, and remember, each of these foods was one at a time for anywhere from a week to two months of that single food. It all in all lasted about two years that he did these experiments.

**Justin:** Okay.



**Sydnee:** So at the end, he came up with a couple conclusions. First of all, contrary to what we would probably tell you now, Dr. Salisbury was certain that vegetables were bad for you.

**Justin:** Okay, I'm in. What else do you got?

**Sydnee:** This is something that my dad I think would have been on board with back in the day, like, "That's right! You just need the meat! What are all these vegetables for?"

So vegetables were bad. He thought that starch—

**Justin:** Tommy also doesn't like his food to look like the thing that it is. Like, he doesn't like tomatoes unless they're in a sauce or something that doesn't look like tomatoes.

**Sydnee:** Preferably ketchup.

**Justin:** Preferably ketchup. Ideally ketchup.

**Sydnee:** 'Cause that's as far from a tomato as a tomato gets, I guess?

**Justin:** All this and more available for you on *Court Appointed* every week, go check it out.

**Sydnee:** [laughing]

**Justin:** Hear about Tommy— It's not all about Tommy's weird food preferences.

**Sydnee:** No, they actually talk about funny legal things, but you know.

**Justin:** But also I'm assuming at some point tomatoes do come up.

**Sydnee:** So, he thought vegetables were bad for humans. He also thought that starch was bad. Uh, so bad that they would create poison in your G.I. tract when you ate them that would lead to things like heart disease, tuberculosis, mental illness, and cancer.

This was based on like, an old idea, we've talked about this before. The idea that like, you can get a sour stomach from like, food rotting and fermenting in your stomach and making you sick.

**Justin:** It just kind of hangs out there.

**Sydnee:** Exactly.

**Justin:** Like an old basement.

**Sydnee:** [laughing] But that's what— occasionally, food does that for reasons we cannot fathom and specifically, in Dr. Salisbury's case, if it was a vegetable or starch food.

**Justin:** You know, you at home are kind of cackling about that, but I bet within your lifetime you've been told that gum does that, so.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, that's true. That's true. Or that a watermelon seed will grow a watermelon in your stomach.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** That's not true either.

**Justin:** Not true, folks.

**Sydnee:** That's not true.

**Justin:** We can bust that myth right now.

**Sydnee:** [laughing] I didn't even have to test it.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** So, his proof for this, other than his studies, was in our teeth. The proof is in the teeth.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** So he looked at human teeth, and he said, "Look, I'm looking at these teeth, I look in this human mouth and see all these teeth, and clearly 20 of these are meat teeth."

**Justin:** [snorts]

**Sydnee:** "You can tell just by looking at them. You got 20 meat teeth. You've only got 12 vegetable teeth. Now that tells you something, right there."

**Justin:** [holding back laughter] Yeah, you're not— The good lord doesn't want you to eat as many vegetables as he does meat.

**Sydnee:** [laughing] Because he gave you all those meat teeth!

**Justin:** [as Dr. Salisbury] "Now back there, what you got is a taffy tooth. You got one taffy tooth. That means, by using my advanced system, you get one piece of taffy a day."

**Sydnee:** So, this is pretty much this. So, therefore, meat's our friend, plants are our enemies. He advised limiting veggies, fruits, starches, and fats to about a third of your diet and two thirds of your diet should be meat. Now, the more you shift that balance towards meat the better, but the very least, two thirds of what you eat every day should be meat. I'm not saying protein, I'm saying meat.

**Justin:** Meat.

**Sydnee:** Two thirds of what you eat should be meat.

**Justin:** Don't try to sneak lentils in there.

**Sydnee:** No. And a third should be all those other things and then the more you can shift that to no veggies, fruits, starch— Like, that's the thing. He is advocating that if you can eliminate everything but meat from your diet, that's fine.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** He's just realistic that most of us won't want to do that.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** And when it comes to meat, are there better kinds of meat?

**Justin:** I'm assuming yes.

**Sydnee:** Yes, Dr. Salisbury did these studies too, to figure out which meat is the best. So, he tried a bunch of different kinds and he found some, like, for instance, pork he named specifically, gave him what he called meat dyspepsia.

**Justin:** Mm.

**Sydnee:** Which is acid reflux.

**Justin:** And an unpleasant term.

**Sydnee:** Meat dyspepsia.

**Justin:** Meat dyspepsia.

**Sydnee:** So he got acid reflux, he got heartburn from eating pork all the time and uh, and he would do the same thing with a bunch of healthy young men. Again, he would pull them in and have them eat different kinds of meat and ask them, "Did that give you meat dyspepsia?" And he found that most meats...

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] ... would cause acid reflux, with the exception of two. He believed beef and lamb will not cause heartburn.

**Justin:** That is...

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** ... incorrect. That was a good try.

**Sydnee:** I don't know how he was preparing, like, turkey, that turkey gave him heartburn and beef didn't.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Right?

**Justin:** Yeah. Yeah, I don't know. That doesn't sound right to me.

**Sydnee:** Now, to be fair, he was choosing leaner cuts of beef, I will say that. It was not very fatty.

**Justin:** Yeah, but still it's like—

**Sydnee:** But still.

**Justin:** Beef!

**Sydnee:** But still. But still. So, the ideal diet that he came up with, like the ratio, generally, that I gave you is a good, like, kind of rule of thumb for everybody to follow to stay healthy, but the ideal diet, especially for people who are already ill—

So, then we're talking about, not just preventing tuberculosis with meat, we're talking about curing tuberculosis with meat now. So, the ideal diet would be coffee and lean, chopped beef steak, which he calls in all his writings, "muscle pulp of beef." You know...

**Justin:** Just so appetizing.

**Sydnee:** If you really wanted to—

**Justin:** Yeah. I know if I see that on the menu, I just, "Waiter, please. I didn't see you had muscle pulp of beef on here and also I'm Hannibal and could you bring lots, please. Super rare, thank you."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] He, uh, he tried this coffee and lean chopped beef steak diet out on himself, as well as about 1000 pigs.

**Justin:** Don't you mean bacon gristle sacks?

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Isn't it, Salisbury?

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] I'm sorry, excuse me. Uh, that was probably— The book, we're gonna get to it. He wrote a book about all this and it's incredibly dense and scientific as you may imagine. So, he treated the—

**Justin:** Would you say it's... meaty?

**Sydnee:** It's meaty— [snorts] Obviously, it's very meaty. So, he tried it out on about 1000 pigs, which he had tried it out on a lot of humans—

**Justin:** [wheezing with laughter] God damn it, he was giving pigs coffee?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Just getting them jacked?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, no, his theory was the G.I. tract of the pig is very similar to humans and the advantage is of that, and I'm sorry out there for everybody who does not like the idea of killing a pig, but, uh, you could dissect them afterwards. That was the other advantage.

**Justin:** And just jacking them full of java.

**Sydnee:** So like, you— Like he had a bunch of, uh, human subjects that he fed a bunch of meat to. He did not dissect them, though. Just the pigs.

**Justin:** But coffee. But like, lots of coffee...

**Sydnee:** Coffee and meat.

**Justin:** ... for the pigs.

**Sydnee:** Coffee and beef and then, yeah.

**Justin:** What does that—

**Sydnee:** And they all were great, they were all healthy. I don't know, I don't know if he asked them like, "How does your tum feel?"

**Justin:** "How's the coffee doing, Wilbur? What's that spider writing up there? It says, um, 'You've been talking about the screenplay you want to write for 30 minutes nonstop, please switch to decaf.' Man, that spider is tired of that by now."

**Sydnee:** [laughs] So, from whatever he saw in the G.I. tract of these pigs, he concluded that he was right. And let me say this, I don't think I've mentioned this. Uh, in a lot of these cases, he was examining patients beyond just, like, asking them how they feel.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Like, he was a big believer in, like, blood tests and checking body fluids like urine and getting—

**Justin:** This is kind of sciencey. It's like a little more sciencey than we're used to.

**Sydnee:** Exactly, exactly. Like, getting stool samples and stuff like. And he continued this during the Civil War, he served as a physician, and he was able to kind of try these theories out on six soldiers.

So chronic diarrhea was a very common problem, a lot of soldiers were suffering from it, and so he would put the soldiers on these strict beef and water— beef and coffee, and if you couldn't get coffee, hot water, regimens.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Beef and hot water regimens. And he felt like, from his observations, that it was helpful. And he would do the same thing, like he would give them the diet and then take bunches of samples of their poop and stuff.

**Justin:** Hey, can I—

**Sydnee:** There's lots of poop sampling I didn't get into. There's lots of, like, checking to see, like, what's still left in there? Did we break it all down completely? Because that was one of his big hallmarks, was like, a lot of the stuff we eat can't be broken down completely, so obviously we shouldn't be eating it.

**Justin:** Kind of a crummy way to take a break from doing war. Like, "Listen, I've got to go out and do more war in like, 30 minutes. Can you not take stool samples and blood samples from me, please?"

**Sydnee:** [as Dr. Salisbury] "Well, I mean, I won't take the stool and the blood until after you eat all of this beef and drink this cup of hot water for me, please, because we're out of coffee."

And so, from all of this information, from all of his studies on himself, on his sleepover buddies, on his pigs, on soldiers, he took all this information and he created one of the first fad diets.

**Justin:** Oh! What specifically?

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

**Justin:** Let's go!

[theme music plays]

[ad break]



**Justin:** Now, Syd, you were about tell me about a fad diet that Mr. Salisbury cooked up, if you'll pardon the...

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** ... rather flimsy pun.

**Sydnee:** That's right. So, uh, it is 1888 and Dr. Salisbury finally publishes his book. Uh, I would love to say the book shook the nation, but probably not because it was called...

**Justin:** *Steel Magnolias.*

**Sydnee:** *Relation—*

**Justin:** No.

**Sydnee:** No.

**Justin:** Sorry.

**Sydnee:** No.

**Justin:** Let me try again.

**Sydnee:** Try again.

**Justin:** *Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants.*

**Sydnee:** Mm. No.

**Justin:** [simultaneously] No.

**Sydnee:** Not that one either.

**Justin:** Got it. Which one? I could name other books, let me look around.

**Sydnee:** Alright. Justin keeps looking at books. So, *Relation of Alimentation and Disease*. As you can imagine, people were excited by that title.

**Justin:** That's gonna— see, that'll get you right to the top of the best-seller list.

**Sydnee:** No, it— The book itself, I mean, yes, people read it, but it was more one of those things that starts travelling word-of-mouth.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** The beef and hot water diet, is what it's called.

**Justin:** BuzzFeed, the newspaper, puts out the 7 most interesting things you need to know.

**Sydnee:** There you go, about the new beef and hot water diet. So here's a general idea of it. You take, you get four pints of warm water a day. I should say hot water. It's pretty warm water that he would recommend. Um, this replaced the coffee. He eventually found out that, like, the coffee was not necessary, it was just all the water you were consuming from the coffee.

**Justin:** Yeah, I wouldn't think the stimulant would hurt though.

**Sydnee:** No, but unless people were just, I don't know, having diarrhea or something.

**Justin:** I bet. I bet maybe that coffee rations were too hard to come by during the Civil War and he just tried hot water.

**Sydnee:** That's probably true, too. So, four pints of warm water a day and minced beef. You would a pint an hour before each meal. So, you're gonna have three meals a day.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** You're gonna drink a pint of hot water and then eat some minced beef an hour later, do that three times, and then after dinner, you're gonna wait three hours and drink your last pint of hot water right before bed.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** Uh, the hot water was to do a few different things. Um, because obviously this was not part of the nourishment itself.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** He was very clear on that. Like, the hot water does not replace your food. What it does is cleans you out. He thought very literally, it was cleaning all of— especially if you were someone who was just starting this, he thought that this was really vital to clean out all of the gross stuff that all of those horrible vegetables had left in your body. [laughs]

**Justin:** Yeah. It's just—

**Sydnee:** All that nasty vegetable and fruit material is gonna get cleaned out from all this hot water. It was also thought to stimulate your liver, prevent acid reflux, make you pee more, which was thought to be a sign of good health.

**Justin:** Fair, but that's a pretty one-to-one, but yes.

**Sydnee:** Uh, clean uric acid out of your joints. So he thought that— Gout was a big thing he sought to cure with this diet.

**Justin:** [wheezes]

**Sydnee:** And he thought that all of the hot water would help flush all the uric acid out of your joints that was causing gout.

**Justin:** Isn't heat bad for gout?

**Sydnee:** Any rich foods are bad for gout, I think high in purines.

**Justin:** Okay. Trying to remember. I know we talked about it before, but.

**Sydnee:** Um. It was thought to purify the blood and make it thinner, so your heart doesn't have to work as hard to pump it, because that could weaken your heart. He also thought the hot water would make you calm, cheerful, free from pain, and able to sleep well at night and have energy in the day.

**Justin:** Mm. No.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** No. Well, maybe calm. But more despondent? Like, calm in a despondent way.

**Sydnee:** I don't know, are you calm 'cause you're drinking hot water?

**Justin:** Well, I mean—

**Sydnee:** I guess calms so, you don't like—

**Justin:** I meant more like depressed. [laughs]

**Sydnee:** Calm so you don't spill it on yourself.

**Justin:** Yeah, that's true.

**Sydnee:** Uh, for about 20 years this became an extremely popular fad diet.

**Justin:** Too slow, y'all. I don't think that even qualifies as a fad diet. You all just didn't know how to eat good for a while. [laughs] For two decades. My wife is being very generous and calling it a fad. You buckled down for a generation on this, old timey people, don't try to hide.

**Sydnee:** [as an old timey person] "Pass the minced beef please." Uh, one such follower—

**Justin:** "Uh, excuse me, waiter? Uh, I hate to trouble you, and I don't wanna go off menu, but do you have—"  
"Let me guess, let me guess, let me guess. Uh, minced beef and hot water? People have only been asking for it for 20 years. Yeah, no problem."

**Sydnee:** [as a waiter] "Whatever. Fine."

**Justin:** [as a waiter] "Yeah, fine. Fine!"

**Sydnee:** Chefs are quitting left and right. "This is disgusting!"

**Justin:** "Fine. I'm just going to tell my boss, Chef Boyardee, that you don't want his pasta." And then that's how he was like, "Never mind, I'll just store it in cans!"

**Sydnee:** Do you think that's how that happened?

**Justin:** [Italian accent] "'Cause he doesn't— they don't want to eat, and I got so much leftover! I'm gonna put it in cans. To keep it."

**Sydnee:** I—

**Justin:** And then as he was leaving, they were like, "Hey, excuse me, bub. Is that a can of spaghetti?"

"Yes, but I made it wrong and they're all o-shaped."

"Well, that's okay, I'll take a load with me, bub." And then, from there on— And that guy's name was... Mr. Campbell.

**Sydnee:** Uh-huh. [laughs]

**Justin:** Anyway. There's a whole— it gets confusing.

**Sydnee:** What's great about this is that your accents can never be offensive, because they're so bad they're—

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like, nobody could ever tell what you were trying to do there.

**Justin:** Kind of all over the place.

**Sydnee:** Uh, so, a lot of what we know about, kind of the culture that surrounded this diet, doesn't come from Dr. Salisbury himself. Like I said, he wrote the very dense scientific text *Relation of Alimentation and Disease*, but one of his followers was an Englishwoman named Elma Stuart, and she claimed that before she came in contact with this diet, she had spent the previous nine years bedridden with some sort of horrible ailment that she had been to 43 different doctors for and none of them had been able to figure it out or cure her.

And then she saw an ad for this diet in a paper and she ordered the book and she read the book and she started the diet. And she claimed that it took a year to clear her out, but a year later she was good as new.

**Justin:** [suspicious] Hmm.

**Sydnee:** And she became pretty evangelical about the diet after that. So, a lot of what we hear about, like, people who tried it out, especially over in England, because she kind of became— she felt like it was her job...

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** ... to make sure, you know, "It originated in the United States, but it's my job to make sure everybody in England has, you know, contact with this treatment." The Salisbury treatment, as she would call it.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** So, she started telling everybody about it and she ended up actually writing a book. And this book is probably a little easier read, it was actually kind of, like, it was very popular and a lot of the book critics were like, "Well, it's written in the crude fashion of today."

**Justin:** Right. It's accessible. Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's kind of conversational. Yeah, it's very accessible. And it's called *What Must I Do to Get Well and How Can I Keep So?*

**Justin:** Boy, I do want to read this book, actually.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] It's actually pretty fascinating. It's her own personal story of her journey to wellness and then stories about other people who had been cured with the diet and then very specific, like, recommendations and descriptions of what to do and pitfalls and all that kind of stuff.

And she, like I said, she spread the Salisbury treatment all over across the Atlantic like this. She would actually consult with people, like personally consult with them.

**Justin:** "I'm gonna consult with you and give you a personalized recommendation for you."

"Let me guess, hold on. I don't wanna skip to the end, but is it... hmm... Give them mashed up beef and hot water?"

**Sydnee:** [laughs] It's funny because she writes about a lot of her experiences consulting with people. And I mean, she's not a medical professional. She just read the book.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** And is doing this.

**Justin:** And did her own book.

**Sydnee:** And then did her own book, and now she's consulting with people. And so, she would like, talk to people and say, "I think you might benefit from this diet," and advise them and then if they— And they would write back and correspond with her periodically to say, like, how it was going.

And so she tells all these stories about, so, Mr. So-and-so writes me and says, you know, it worked okay for a while and then it's not or, you know, it helped a little, but it hasn't had the effects I've wanted it to. And so of

course, she does the obvious and says, "Send me a sample of your poop and I will tell you what you are doing wrong."

**Justin:** Elma Stuart you nasty bird.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** You dirty bird! How dare you! You are a nasty bird!

**Sydnee:** If there weren't so many problems with this diet, this would be really inspirational because I mean, it's fascinating to me that this woman took it upon herself to like, learn microscopy and understand how to analyze stool samples under a microscope. And she did! She did!

And like, she would get these samples and then she, according to her, now this is all from her perspective. She would write these people back and say, "Well, I saw some nuts in there. That's not on the diet is it? I can tell you were eating dried fruit and that is your problem."

And in every case, she would say inevitably, they would write her back and say, "I can't believe it, you caught me! You're right, I haven't been sticking to the diet, how did you know? How could you figure it out?"

**Justin:** Can I just say, like, on behalf of everybody, thank God for television.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Because until television, this is how— "Well, Julie, I've got to kill an afternoon."

"Well, how are you gonna do it, Fred?"

"Well, Julie, I'm going to poop in a bag and mail it to England."

**Sydnee:** [laughs harder]

**Justin:** [as Fred] "Then, wait for the response as our game of cat and mouse and poop continues. This— the wait is agonizing for the letter to see if she's caught me in my latest crime."



**Sydnee:** There was one particularly hard case she wrote about, in which a man was—

**Justin:** She couldn't cut it and she was at it all day and she couldn't, because hard—

**Sydnee:** No, no, she figured it out— [grossed out] Oh, oh. No. Justin. In which the man was eating bananas on the sly, but kept just complaining like, "I don't know, it's not working. I don't know what the problem is."

And she kept analyzing his stool, but she had never seen bananas in poops, so she wasn't familiar. Like, this was how she figured this out. By eating things or having samples from other people who ate things and looking at poop that had that in it and seeing what it looked like. Like, this is really how she figured this out.

So, she said, "Well, I've never seen bananas in poop, so I kept seeing this thing that had a lot of starch in it, but I had no idea what it was." And she finally got the idea that it might be bananas, somehow. And she sent a friend to bike into town and buy her a dozen bananas. And she told her friend, "We'll just have a gorge on them." And they gorged themselves on bananas.

**Justin:** And then duked.

**Sydnee:** And checked it out. It looked exactly like the gentleman whose sample she was inspecting.

**Justin:** [crosstalk]

**Sydnee:** And she... gotcha.

**Justin:** Gotcha.

**Sydnee:** Gotcha.

**Justin:** Gotcha.

**Sydnee:** You're eating bananas.

**Justin:** Side note, that was definitely this dude's fetish. But, you know.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Sorry. Sorry, everyone! That's the facts.

**Sydnee:** Now, the uh, as you may have already guessed, at the same time that Dr. Salisbury introduced his diet and Miss Stuart was making it oh, so very popular, he also came out with the perfect food. So, he knew that beef, specifically minced beef, was a great thing to eat. But he said, "You know what? I found the perfect way to prepare it, where it will be most easily digestible and it tastes good and it's easy to replicate."

And here it is; it's ground beef, flavor it with some onions and some seasonings like salt, pepper, there's some lemon juice in there, some butter, real butter. Worcestershire sauce, mustard, and horseradish. And you can deep-fry it or boil it, either way. It was kind of a steak of sorts.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** You might say a Salisbury steak, perhaps.

**Justin:** And now you know... the rest of the story.

**Sydnee:** So, this is where Salisbury steak came from. He recommended that you eat his steak three times a day with lots of water and it would— in addition, it would help you lose weight, that was the other thing. In addition to protecting you against all these diseases, eating the Salisbury steak three times a day will help you lose weight and prevent gout, rheumatoid arthritis, colitis, anemia, asthma, heart disease, TB, everything else I mentioned.

**Justin:** I don't buy all that stuff.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] No, you shouldn't! It's not true, Salisbury steak won't do that.

**Justin:** You could do worse than this, though.

**Sydnee:** Than a Salisbury steak?

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You know, it's funny. I read that Salisbury steak probably would not have continued to remain so popular. I mean, because it— we still eat— well, I don't, but, people still eat Salisbury steak today. Now, why did this persist? This particular preparation of minced beef.

And one reason that people theorize is that after World War I, the hamburger dropped in popularity because it was named "the hamburger" and there was a rejection of things with German names. And so, the Salisbury steak became more popular. Because it's kind— I mean, it's kind of a hamburger.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** It's a hamburger.

**Justin:** Yeah, it's basically a hamburger.

**Sydnee:** It's basically a hamburger, just with specific things in it. But it's basically a hamburger. But that may have been why it stuck around and persisted and became like, the, your school lunch staple, your TV dinner staple.

**Justin:** Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:** The fad only lasted about 20 years, but of course we have things that echo that today. I think there are a lot of meat-based diets that aren't that extreme.

**Justin:** No.

**Sydnee:** But certainly would tell you to stay away from starches and to limit a lot of other things that might also be good for you.

**Justin:** And they're alright.

**Sydnee:** I think doctor— No, they're not alright. No, they're not alright! Don't throw that in there.

**Justin:** Oh, sorry.

**Sydnee:** Don't try to slide that past me.

**Justin:** Got it.

**Sydnee:** Uh, and I think Dr. Salisbury would be pretty disappointed today, though. If he saw the way his steak was served alongside, like, mashed potatoes and corn and a big roll.

**Justin:** [as Dr. Salisbury] "My beautiful steak!"

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "It used to be so dry on the plate, on a cold plate."

**Sydnee:** [as Dr. Salisbury] "Where's your pint of hot water, school child?"

**Justin:** [cackles]

**Sydnee:** "What is this, milk? No!"

**Justin:** Aw, man. Right now, there's a spouse who— or a boyfriend or a girlfriend or good buddies listening to this show and they're thinking, "God, every time that we go to a restaurant where they serve Salisbury steak from now on, this person is going to be insufferable."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "I'm gonna be hearing this anecdote for the rest of my life."

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] "You know where Salisbury steak comes from?"

**Justin:** "You know? Oh! Did I see you eyeing the Salisbury steak?"  
[crosstalk]

**Sydnee:** "Trying to prevent tuberculosis, are you?"

**Justin:** Let me back up.

**Sydnee:** And by the way, that person's me.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Sorry. [laughs]

**Justin:** [laughs] And also me. From now on, I'll try to beat you to it. Um, folks that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much, uh, for listening to our podcast. We hope you've enjoyed yourself. There's a lot of other great shows on the MaximumFun.org network that you can go try and enjoy and I would highly recommend you do so.

Thank you to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song *Medicines* as the intro and outro of our program.

**Sydnee:** And thank you, as always.

**Justin:** Thank *you* for listening.

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] For listening.

**Justin:** You're the best. If you get a second, go give us a review on iTunes. That would just mean the world to us. Thanks.

**Sydnee:** Thanks!

**Justin:** Thanks! Anyway, that's 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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