Sawbones 361: Blue Light

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

[theme music plays]

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

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: Welcome to the number one medical podcast on the internet.

Sydnee: You just declare that. I don't think you know that.

Justin: I do, I frequently declare that. I don't think you can beat it.

Sydnee: I don't know what metrics you're using though. When you—see, I'm a scientist. I like to back up my statements with evidence, and this seems like a statement that you are making with no evidence.

Justin: I don't think I am. I'm pretty sure I'm right. Uh…

Sydnee: That's science! I don't think I am, I'm pretty sure I'm right. [laughs]

Justin: [simultaneously] I'm pretty sure I'm right. Hey listen, if it weren't for that sentiment, we wouldn't have a podcast. That sentiment has been a very profitable one for us over the years, Sydnee.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: If humanity didn't have that gut instinct that gosh darn it, they were right, then we wouldn't have a show to do.

Sydnee: You know, I think that's a good— that is a nice transition to our topic this week. The, to go with the gut instinct that something seems right and run with it, that's a pretty apt description of what I wanna tell you about.

Justin: I'm all ears.

Sydnee: So, I— first of all, I wanna thank Robert, who sent us an email asking about this topic and inform— basically, informing me that it existed. Because I had not heard of this specific sort of medical history moment before. I wasn't aware of it. And I think in part because what it ultimately will lead to is largely pseudoscience, but it was a really interesting story and I had never heard of it. And I guess Robert's interest started when he started investigating why so many houses from a certain period of American history have blue panes of glass in their windows.

Justin: Hmm. Yeah, that's weird. I've never noticed that actually.

Sydnee: Well, apparently it must be true. Probably not here in West Virginia, but in other places.

Justin: I have not seen much blue glass.

Sydnee: No. But there was something called The Blue Glass Craze. Blue— not bluegrass craze, that's still happening.

Justin: That's still happening, babe, we're living in it. You kidding me?

Sydnee: And very much in West Virginia. That's all over West Virginia.

Justin: Can't take a step without tripping over a banjo.

Sydnee: But the blue glass craze was—

Justin: You're gonna be fighting to not say bluegrass.

Sydnee: I am.

Justin: For the rest of the show, if we say bluegrass we mean blue— [laughs] blue glass.

Sydnee: And if I do say bluegrass, I'll make a banjo noise or something?

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Okay. So anyway, I wanna tell you about this. I need to tell you first about Augustus James Pleasonton.

Justin: That's a lovely name.

Sydnee: Yes. Or A. J., if you prefer. To his friends.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: We'll be his friends.

Justin: Yeah. We'll be buddies.

Sydnee: A. J. Pleasonton. He was born in 1808 in Washington, D.C. His dad worked in the state department, was also a hero. He fought in the war of 1812. And he was chief of the Lighthouse Department.

Justin: A very important job. Gotta keep those boats coming in safely.

Sydnee: I just really liked the idea that there was a point where we had a Lighthouse Department. Like, a whole state department, there was the Lighthouse Department and he was in charge of it. That seems like a really fun department to be in charge of.

Justin: He's the guy at the bottom who's yelling up like, "How's it going up there?" and they're like, "Good, it's on!" and he's like, "Excellent! Keep doing—" "Yeah I know, keep doing it! Keep it on?" "Yep." "Thumbs up."

Sydnee: Well, we've talked about on previous episodes how important sailors were and like, the shipping industry and everything, so like, you gotta imagine lighthouses were pretty darn impoy— important.

Justin: Impoy-tant. [laughs] Just like proper pronunciation.

Sydnee: [sighs] It's gonna be a rough one today.

Justin: What was the sailor's thing recently, where we talked about the reason we have some sort of… um… insurance? Or something like— what was that?

Sydnee: Well, we talked about the beginning— yes. Because we talked about the hospitals that they set up.

Justin: Oh right, for the— yeah, yeah, yeah, I gotcha.

Sydnee: And how that led to the creation of the public health system and then the Surgeon General.

Justin: Yeah, Surgeon General, that's what it was. Okay. Sorry. I'm getting distracted.

Sydnee: I think the Coastguard actually runs the lighthouses now. They're in charge.

Justin: Seems like a good fit.

Sydnee: Yes, that seems like a good place for the lighthouse department to go. I think it was like— well, we talked about this, a lot of things that sort of shuffled around different government departments for a while, it was like in the Treasury. The Treasury was like the catch-all, I believe, because they only made three and then they threw everything they didn't know what to do with in the Treasury. It was like the junk drawer of the government.

And then they were like, "We should make something new. Let's make a coastguard and put the lighthouses there. Anyway. A.J. followed his dad's footsteps. He served his country. He was in the Pennsylvania militia. He once tried to stop some rioters in Philadelphia in 1844. I only mention this because he got shot while that was happening. He does not die at this time. That would be a weird episode.

Justin: "Anyway, that's the whole bit."

Sydnee: "That's it. It has nothing to do with medicine." No, but he got shot and he forever had a musket ball in his groin. It was just there forever.

Justin: I bet that made walking through metal detectors really annoying.

Sydnee: Well, you know in 1844 there probably weren't any—

Justin: I know, they trained dogs to detect metal. I know, Sydnee, I know.

Sydnee: I don't think that's… accurate. During the Civil War, he was appointed the rank of Brigadier General of the Pennsylvania militia, and he basically worked to defend the city of Philadelphia. That was his—

division's… his group… his club? That's not what it's called. [laughs] My civilian-ish-ness is showing. [laughs]

Justin: I bet his dad was very judgmental, like, "Oh, nice, defending Philadelphia. Get a lot of lighthouses there? Kind of an embarrassment to me, son." There's very few lighthouses in downtown Philadelphia.

Sydnee: But there probably are lighthouses in Philadelphia, right?

Justin: I have no way of answering that question—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: And neither do you, and this is the exact thinking that got us into trouble at the beginning of the episode.

Sydnee: Well, why don't I tell you more about A.J. and you really quickly google how many lighthouses are or aren't there in Philadelphia? Thank you. After serving honorably and returning from the military, he was bored, I guess. He was in retirement, he needed a project. That happens to so many people. My grandpa retired and then he started a microfilming business. [laughs]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, you know, you gotta have a project. A.J. decided to get into two things. He had a couple passions. Have you figured out the lighthouse question yet?

Justin: Yeah, they got some. Most notable seems to be the Turtle Rock lighthouse which was built in 1887, which is a little bit after his tenure there. Although maybe he was walking around Philadelphia like, "God, we could use a lighthouse down here." [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "There's something in my DNA that says to me we need a lighthouse."

Sydnee: So, I am at the point where he was left the military and he is getting into other things.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. So, he liked growing and farming. Or maybe he just had to do it out of necessity. Anyway, it was something he was going to be doing. He also liked colors.

Justin: Mm. Who doesn't?

Sydnee: Much like my children, he liked colors. So, I guess it was either, like, he could make one of those Fisher Price little people farms, because those have growing and farming and they're very colorful, or he could do something else.

Justin: If he had invented that he would've been rolling in it.

Sydnee: He really should've. Cause— well— yeah. He would've made a lot more money that what he—

Justin: So he'd be like, "Anyway, they're made of plastic," and everybody'd be like, "What are you talking about?"

Sydnee: [laughs] I like the idea that he said they're made of plastic without, like, I don't know what plastic is or how to make it, I just know they will be made of plastic. I'm putting the big idea out there. I've got no way to achieve it, but I'm gonna put the big idea out there.

Justin: Okay, plastic was invented in 1862, so I feel very confident in my assertion that it hadn't really ramped up enough. I mean, maybe he heard about it in the…

Sydnee: This is… yeah. This would've been— so, plastic was in existence.

Justin: That is settled. [laughs]

Sydnee: It would be so new.

Justin: Why do people keep asking if he made Fisher Price little people? He didn't, folks.

Sydnee: He didn't.

Justin: You gotta let it go.

Sydnee: He didn't have anything to do with plastic. This is not where we're going. He was investigating the health benefits of different colors.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: That is the interest he had.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: He wanted to know— specifically different colors of light is where he really sort of focused. Color in general, but like, the idea of light filtered through different colors, like panes of glass or something, and the impact that could have on living things. Now, this is before— you've probably heard— you're hearing this and you're thinking, "Well, so he was interested in chromotherapy."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Because that is what that is. The use of color to heal or treat or whatever.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: It is not a— it was not a thing yet. This is before that was a thing. There were previous, like, moments throughout ancient history where people had sort of talked about color as part of different health regimens and that kind of thing, but the concept of chromotherapy did not exist yet at this point in history. You can find, like, some reference in ancient Greek, in Egyptian medicine, to an extent you could kind of compare some of chromotherapy to like, the chakras, you know, but that's not exactly what we're talking about either, right? The idea of just like, here's some… purple for your cough… was not…

Justin: [laughs] "Here's some purple for your cough."

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't know if purple is for coughs. It's not real medicine so they didn't teach me that. Ibn Sina had discussed the importance of color in diagnosing different ailments and had mentioned a little bit of this sort of idea in his writings of like, you know, red is— you've gotta be careful with red colors because they can motivate the flow of blood and things like that. So like, this idea that color had some physical impact on the body. It had been introduced.

But by the 19th century we had really— like, all of these sorts of concepts of color and its healing abilities and all that were still very much linked to spiritual traditions of medicine, which medicine was for a long time. It was

very closely tied to spiritual beliefs. By the 19th century, those were separating. Medicine was becoming a very empiric, well, slowly empiric thing. Something in the physical world, something you could see and measure, and something quite detached from spiritual traditions.

Justin: Got it.

Sydnee: So, when Pleasonton introduced these ideas of like, color as some sort of medicine and the impact that like, looking at a color or being bathed in a color could have on your body, this is kind of calling back to these more ancient traditions and sort of revolutionary at this moment. Um, if you can call something revolutionary that's wrong. Can you do that? [laughs] Is it revolutionary if it's also not gonna work?

Justin: Wuh… yeah… revolutionary… I think yeah?

Sydnee: It flies in the face of—

Justin: Because if it changes something, I mean if it changes the way we do things, it's a revolution. So if we didn't used to think a bad thing and then we started thinking a bad thing [laughs] I guess it is, in a sense, revolutionary.

Sydnee: So, he started working on experiments. I mean, he wanted to test his theory. He wasn't just like, saying this was true. He wanted to actually try it out and see if he was right, to see if different colors, specifically colored light, had any effect on living things. And the first color he chose to explore was blue. Why?

Justin: I don't know.

Sydnee: Basically, the sky is blue.

Justin: True.

Sydnee: And that must be important for our human bodies.

Justin: Why else would it be blue if it wasn't for humans?

Sydnee: And animals. And so, we must be living in part because of the blueness that we're exposed to of the sky. And for more proof of that, compare how plants do in the spring and summer when there's lots of blue sky to how plants do in the fall and winter…

Justin: When there's not.

Sydnee: When there's not.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Right?

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Which, it's so funny, because this is like a perfect illustration or correlation [laughs] and not causation.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, it's the sky is— you see more blue sky in the spring and summer, plants are alive, hence blue makes plants live.

Justin: It's like every— guys, I've noticed every time we put on these incredible bikinis and bathing trunks, it gets hotter. It's like every time you see people in those, check the temperature. It's hot. And it's like, if we want some nice months in December and January, let's get our bikinis on, let's get our trunks on, let's get out there. And then it'll be warm.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: It always works that way.

Sydnee: It's really fascinating, because it's this idea that like, if you did nothing else to plants but put them in a blue room, they would grow.

Justin: I don't know if that would work or not. [laugh-wheezes]

Sydnee: No. [laughs]

Justin: I bet they knew they still need the water and stuff.

Sydnee: And well, and Pleasonton, I'm saying this sort of in jest, because Pleasanton obviously did know some things about growing plants, farming, and as we'll see, tending to animals and crops and what-not.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Clearly, he had some other knowledge. So, he knew that it wasn't just the blue, there were other things plants need. Like dirt. And water. But the blue, to him, seemed to be an important part of life and health and growth and all that good stuff. It wasn't just the other things associated with those seasons. It was the blue itself. The color of the sky itself. So, he decided to start experiments to prove this theory about blue. He started with grapes. So, he had a greenhouse…

Justin: Uh huh.

Sydnee: And he—

Justin: That's a bad start. Should have got a blue house. [laughs]

Sydnee: He— so he put panes of glass in the greenhouse. Some of them were like, cobalt blue.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And some were still regular old glass, right? Because you gotta have a control group. And he—

Justin: Sounds like science so far, Sydnee.

Sydnee: Which like, this must have been a lovely looking greenhouse, right? Wouldn't that be beautiful? Alternating panes of cobalt blue and transparent glass. I bet it was a lovely building.

And he grew grapes in it. And some of them were bathed in this blue light, some of them just got regular old light, and after months of observation, it was pretty clear to him, the grapes that were growing under the blue light were just better.

Justin: Okay…

Sydnee: They were like, bigger and juicier and lusher.

Justin: So it's settled. What are you all up in a fit about? Like, it sounds like he's right and it's settled.

Sydnee: [laughs] So, he—

Justin: You love science, right?

Sydnee: But that's just grapes, right?

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, he wrote— and he— there's a whole book I'm gonna get to that, that you can read about this. So, you can read exactly how he measured everything. But basically, what he said was, "The grapes are better. The blue grapes are better, my blue greenhouse grew better blue grapes than the clear grapes."

Justin: **"**But the grapes aren't blue. I can't stress this enough."

Sydnee: No. "They just look blue because of the light, but if you take them into the other part of the greenhouse with the clear panels of glass, they'll look regular."

Justin: Because we don't really have blue food. We heard about this on the, that episode of uh, um… [drums fingers on table]

Sydnee: Decoder Ring.

Justin: Decoder Ring! Yes, thank you. Excellent. Oh gosh, that was frustrating.

Sydnee: Yes. So anyway, the blue greenhouse grew better grapes.

Justin: The blue green… [laughs] The blue greenhouse grew better blue grapes.

Sydnee: So anyway, he patented his blue greenhouse, which is great, like, I'm onto that.

Justin: Already good.

Sydnee: But that's not enough. He's not gonna stop there. He's got more science to do. And I'm gonna tell you about it.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: But first, let's go to the billing department.

Justin: Let's grow. [pause] Cause the greenhouse? Cause…

Sydnee: Oof.

[ad break]

[Max Fun ad plays]

Justin: Alright, so our man Augustus just took a brief detour off of science to dip his toe into commerce. [laughs] Had to get that patent real quick. And then back to work.

Sydnee: So, he started putting pigs in blue light next.

Justin: Mm…

Sydnee: Like I said, it wasn't just plants. He wanted to check it out on animals. So, he raised pigs that were exposed to light, and again, this isn't like a dangerous thing, it's just putting panes of blue glass in windows so that the light that filters through is blue. And so, the pigs spend a lot of time— cause I guess maybe pigs lay around a lot, right?

Justin: Yeah, seems like it.

Sydnee: So, like, you could just like… make sure their pen…

Justin: Don't let Babe or Charlotte's Web fool you.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Pigs are inactive animals.

Sydnee: And he compared them to regular old… lighted pigs. [laughs] Whatever light pigs usually like?

Justin: Reg-lee-ar…

Sydnee: A ring light or a spotlight or… [laughs] I don't know. Anyway, he compared them and he said the blue pigs win, again. They're just better pigs.

Justin: The blue pigs win again!

Sydnee: So, then he moved on to cows.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And he did the same thing. Same design. Blue cows. Regular cows. Blue cows won again. They're better.

Justin: Blue cows.

Sydnee: Yeah, they just grow better. And he wanted everybody to know, like, farmers and grape growers, everybody, hey, if this works for things as diverse as grapes and pigs and cows, oh my… [laughs] it will work for any living thing. So, he started by giving like, speeches, and he started targeting like, the agricultural industry initially.

Justin: That's a good place to start.

Sydnee: Yes. "I want you all to know about this sort of revolution and you could do this in your farms and your greenhouses. And you could also grow better things and sell them, I guess, for more money and everything would be better." But then it occurred to him, you know, if it works this great in plants and farm animals, what about humans? So, he decided we needed to try these methods out on human beings and see if it also had the same effect on human bodies. So, he tried it out on two patients.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: A mom who had just given birth to a baby that was early. Premature. And they needed to stay in sort of— they were kind of staying in the hospital for the baby to grow and to sorta keep an eye on them both. You know, because back then, we didn't have a ton— we weren't really great at taking care of premature babies yet.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: So, they knew they needed to keep them there and watch them for a while and make sure everybody's gonna be okay. And so, one of the things he said is let's keep them in a room with blue light. Right? Let's put some blue panes of glass in here and—

Justin: "Trust me, it works on pigs."

Sydnee: And give them some blue light. Yes, it worked for the pigs and the cows and the grapes so it's gonna work for mom and baby. And apparently, they did really well. Which is a great ending to that part of the story, regardless of the pseudoscience. I am really glad that that happened. But they did really well, and so he thought, "Okay, well, that's

two humans. Let's try it on some more." So, he also tried it on, there was like a chronically ill woman who couldn't walk because of her chronic sort of pain and arthritis, was the kind of picture I got from the description. And he put blue light on her and then she could walk.

Justin: Hm!

Sydnee: And her pain was gone. There was a guy who had, like, an arm that had rheumatism, and he put his arm in blue light and it got all better and he was fine.

Justin: Amazing.

Sydnee: Somebody had their baldness healed. [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Someone else's fertility was restored. Um, a lot of people would sleep under blue light and say that their sleep was so much better sleeping under blue light than, I guess, darkness.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Lower back pain. [laughs] All the major ailments. Healed. Fixed. Cured. Treated. Completely better. Simply by putting— I mean, for the most part, by putting panes of blue glass into windows so that the light that filtered through was blue. Certainly, I guess there were other ways to expose people to blue, but that seemed to be the big way to do it. And he published a book on the topic in 1877. The title of this book is very long.

Justin: I'm ready.

Sydnee: The Influence of the Blue Ray of the Sunlight and of the Blue Color of the Sky, and the subtitle, in Developing Animal and Vegetable Life, in Arresting Disease and in Restoring Health in Acute and Chronic Disorders to Human and Domestic Animals.

Justin: Based on the novel Push by Sapphire.

Sydnee: [laughs] That's always what you say. It's one of my favorite jokes of yours.

Justin: Okay, well as long as you like it, that's fine. I don't care if I repeat myself, if it gets a laugh outta you I'll keep doing it.

Sydnee: [laughs] Anyway, so he wrote this book and published it. And by the time he actually published his book, I should say, this had caught on sort of in the lay public. People were interested and intrigued and liked this. It was already out there from his speeches, and like, he had published single-sheet papers and stuff on it previously. And so, word of this blue therapy had already spread. Even though a lot of people had interest in it, the medical community, the scientific community was, I mean, skeptical.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. To say the least, they were quite skeptical. But the public was enthralled, everybody wanted in on it, and it seemed like something that you could have access to pretty easily, right? Like, if you had the money, you could replace panes of glass in your windows with blue. And that is exactly what a lot of people did.

The price of blue glass would increase like, 50%. People were putting blue glass in their— not just in hospitals were doing this, but like, and in farms of course and the agricultural industry, but also in just their homes. Like, were replacing glass with blue glass so that all the time they would be bathed in this blue light.

They started making drug vials out of blue glass instead of— which was actually one of the things that specifically upset a lot of scientists and got a lot more backlash is that for certain medicines it's really important that they're stored in opaque vials and they started making them out of this, like, pretty blue glass. [laughs] Because it was the fashion.

Justin: Reducing their efficacy.

Sydnee: Yes. So, it was like, bad. And so, there were a lot of articles written about it. It was a very viral trend. And so, all the papers were writing about it and like, depending on who covered it, it was either with some earnestness like, "I don't know, seems like blue light's great and everybody loves it."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: And others who were like, specifically there was an article in the Boston Globe where they were like, "This is ridiculous and while it seems amusing it's like, basically we're running out of patience for this and could everybody stop, please? This is ridiculous."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: The scientific community was pretty much united that, "This is nothing. Could you please stop with the blue glass?"

Justin: Yep.

Sydnee: Or if you must, at least don't do it to drugs. Anyway, just as quickly as it was popular, as with many viral trends, it faded. By the end of 1877, the same year his book was published, people stopped buying blue glass like that.

Justin: Burn-out.

Sydnee: Yeah, it was— it built. 1877, the year he published his book was really both, like the peak year and the end. Like, you know, the year it started to fall off. Because he had already gotten that information out there, mainly through the media and everything, prior to publishing his book.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: So, the trend vanished pretty quickly. There was so much backlash from the scientific community, maybe that was part of it. Maybe it was that it didn't work and so people kept doing this, spending all this money to put blue panes of glass, replace all the panes of glass in their house and then it didn't do anything?

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Maybe it was that people just lost interest. Something else happened that was cooler that was weirder or you could spend your money on to distract yourself. I don't know.

Justin: [laughs] Green light became— green light got hot.

Sydnee: A different color. Um, so anyway, the idea— the ideas didn't disappear. Even though the blue glass industry stopped making so much

cash, the idea stuck, because A.J. inspired another young thinker, a man named Edwin Babbitt, who initially got his start writing books about penmanship, which [laughs] is a fascinating thing to write books about, by the way.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I have to find these books.

Justin: It's important.

Sydnee: I'm worried. What do you write about penmanship other than, "Here is good penmanship and here is bad penmanship," and you just demonstrate it?

Justin: Maybe it's printed in your handwriting? Like, "Anyway, here's how I do it."

Sydnee: If it's gonna be about penmanship…

Justin: You would think, right? There was a— the girls have this book, Charlie's handwriting textbook for school has a letter from the author at the beginning, which is like, "Okay, bud. Calm down." [laughs]

And he puts his signature at the end and it is absolutely maddening. It is insane, like, these flourishes on the Hs and Ls that dip into the— it is absolutely just like, "Anyway kids, here's how I do it. Maybe someday you'll get to my level." It's like, "We all have phones! Stop it!"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "This is a waste of time!"

Sydnee: I don't have—

Justin: She had handwriting classes for the first half of the year, and then starting at Christmas they just stopped. And I think that finally we all decided, like, this is a waste of time. [laughs]

Sydnee: It is really interesting, I don't know. I don't have a strong feeling. I feel like we're gonna get emails about this, because I imagine that there are people out there who have really strong feelings about kids learning, like, cursive.

Justin: Oh, don't even start.

Sydnee: Do you have strong feelings on this?

Justin: Yeah, I do.

Sydnee: I mean, I'm fine with it.

Justin: Extremely strong feelings about this.

Sydnee: I'm not gonna protest our kids learning cursive, but I would say it's not among, like, the top things I need them to learn.

Justin: They absolutely shouldn't know cursive. They should know how to sign their name and that's it.

Sydnee: Of course you have a strong opinion about this.

Justin: Of course I do. I'm a white man. I've got a strong opinion about everything.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Come on.

Sydnee: We're gonna get emails about this, I already know.

Justin: Whether you want it or not, I got opinions coming out of my caboose.

Sydnee: So, after he wrote these books about penmanship, he turned to spiritualism.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: As you do.

Justin: He prayed to be more interesting. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] I'm not telling you too much about this guy, cause I feel like this will be a whole other episode—

Justin: You got another one brewing?

Sydnee: —that we're leading into here. So, he would then later award himself a doctorate of magnetism from his own school.

Justin: You can do that?

Sydnee: Of magnetism. Well, I guess if you start a school and then you graduate from it [laughs] then you get your own doctorate.

Justin: How do you know when you graduate from your own school? Just like, "I've gone as far as I can go here." [laughs] "I'm gonna get online and get a cape and a cap and gown."

Sydnee: [laughs] He also, he became a doctor of magnets, which like, I bet… I bet Insane Clown Posse wishes they knew that there doctors of magnets out there who could answer their question.

Justin: Dr. Magnet does sound like a fantastic, like, Green Lantern villain.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, there's al—

Justin: "I'm Dr. Magnet, you'll never stop me!"

Sydnee: There's already Magneto.

Justin: Yeah, but Dr. Magnet is like DC's rip-off of Magneto.

Sydnee: Ohh, okay.

Justin: Trying to cash in on it.

Sydnee: Okay. [laughs] So—

Justin: You know how like they made, they have to call Captain Marvel books "Shazam" because Captain Marvel is already a thing over in Marvel's neck of the woods?

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: So those books have to be called "Shazam" even though his name's not Shazam and never will be Shazam. And if you call him Shazam you sound like a clown.

Sydnee: Is his name Captain Marvel?

Justin: His name's Captain Marvel. It's not Shazam.

Sydnee: So, DC made somebody named Captain Marvel?

Justin: Yeah, the book's called Shazam.

Sydnee: I know, but like, there was already Marvel. Why did they make a book about a Captain Marvel when there already was Marvel and Captain Marvel and that fits?

Justin: Uh… Sydnee's Twitter handle is @SydneeMcElroy…

Sydnee: No— [laughs]

Justin: So, if you just tweet at her the answer to that. And that as many tweets as you like.

Sydnee: No! [laughs] Don't.

Justin: There's no price tag on tweets, folks. Stretch out.

Sydnee: Nooo! Is it just because Captain DC sounds silly?

Justin: Get deep into there!

Sydnee: [dramatic sigh] So many emails I'm gonna get now!

Justin: Go all the way back.

Sydnee: I'm the one who reads them, so if you're yelling at Justin, just remember I'm the one who reads them. [laughs]

Justin: You could start—

Sydnee: I'm just gonna forward them to you.

Justin: Just start at DC Comics, don't go back any farther than that. '44 is as far back as we need to go. And just walk Sydnee through the entire history.

Sydnee: So, Dr. Magnets—[laughs] wasn't satisfied with this form of pretend medicine. He needed a new form of pretend— it was like the— he was like the Gwyneth Paltrow of his time basically, right?

Justin: Drag her.

Sydnee: He needed something new. And so—

Justin: Drag COVID survivor Gwyneth Paltrow, Sydnee.

Sydnee: No, I'm not— I am very— we have discussed this. I am very glad that she survived COVID and I encourage her to do whatever she personally feels helps her on her health journey, just please stop trying to sell it to other people. [laughs] Who are maxing out their credit cards to buy your shoes and necklace.

Anyway, he started looking for something new, and he found a book. He found— a very succinctly titled, The Influence of the Blue Ray of the Sunlight and the Blue Color of the Sky in Developing Animals and Vegetable Life and Arresting Disease and in Restoring Health in Acute and Chronic Disorders to Human and Domestic Animals. And he was—

Justin: Is that the full title? Cause I thought at the end it was— what was the… ?

Sydnee: [laughs] Anyway, so he found this book by A.J. Pleasanton and he was inspired. And even though the blue glass craze had ended and A.J. went back to— I don't know, whatever. Whatever he was doing. I'm not gonna— I know usually I kill them off in these episodes. [laughs]

Justin: You're not gonna follow him to the grave.

Sydnee: I'm not. I'm not. A.J. finished out his days doing…

Justin: Something. [laughs]

Sydnee: Probably more experiments on blue light.

Justin: Not relevant to our podcast. [laughs]

Sydnee: Something with grapes and cows and pigs, oh my. But Babbitt took up the mantle. And in the following year, he published The Principles of Light and Color Including, Among Other Things, the Harmonic Laws of the Universe, the Etherio-Atomic Philosophy of Force, Chromo Chemistry, Chromo Therapeutics, and the General Philosophy of the Fine Forces Together with Numerous Discoveries and Practical Applications—

Justin: I blame A.J. actually, for that. Cause like, Edwin looked at that and was like, "I guess that's how you right a big one— I mean, I guess that's how you get a big hit. You gotta stretch out the title."

Sydnee: And following that, the next year, even after writing all that title in 1878, which like, that must have taken the whole year. But he did it and put a book with it. Then he published The Wonders of Light and Color Including Chromopathy, or the New Science of Color Healing.

Justin: Better.

Sydnee: In 1879.

Justin: The Wonders of Light and Color, end of title. And then like, maybe sub— I don't know. I feel like he's getting there, though.

Sydnee: This is the birth, really, of chromotherapy. And it doesn't work, but here is where it started.

Justin: That seems like— if you're gonna talk about chromotherapy, it seems like a future episode. It seems like a spoiler to tell us now that it doesn't work. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, don't we all know that looking at the color red won't heal you? Don't we know that? Don't you know that like, if your arm hurts, if you expose it to blue light… it doesn't help it? And I know, you could get sort of pedantic about this and start talking about like, blue light in exposure to screens.

Justin: Yes?

Sydnee: And our concerns, you know, on our eyes.

Justin: Fair.

Sydnee: But this is a diff— that is— can we accept that that is different than the idea that like, standing next to a blue wall makes you feel better?

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And again, I am not talking about emotionally or spiritually. I am talking about physical effects of seeing a color on the human body.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And we'll have to do an episode on chromotherapy at some point.

Justin: But not now. Because now this episode is—

Sydnee: No. This episode is done.

Justin: This episode is concluded. And thank you so much for listening to it. We sure appreciate you. We got a book. It's the, uh, the Sawbones Book, now in paperback with new content about quarantines and stuff like that. Please buy that book.

We've also got, uh, some cool merchandise. If you go to McElroyMerch.com you can find a Sawbones "Have you thanked a horseshoe crab today?" shirt. Um, you can find probably some other stuff on there too. Oh, "Cure-alls cure nothing", we got our vaccine shirt and um, thank you for buying those. The vaccines products help to support the Immunization Action Coalition, which you can find more information on at immunize.org. They've got a lot of great resources there.

Sydnee: And thank you for getting your vaccine.

Justin: Go get your vaccine if you can!

Sydnee: Yeah. Go get your COVID vaccine if you're eligible. I encourage everybody to do so and I really love all the tweets we get showing me that you're— showing us. I think of them for me, but I guess they're for you too, Justin. Showing off that you've gotten your vaccine and you're part of the charge towards herd immunity. Thank you.

Justin: Thank you. Thanks to The Taxpayers also, for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you for listening. That's gonna do it for us. So, until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[theme music plays]

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