

Sawbones 405: Star Jelly

Published March 15, 2022

[Listen here on themcelroy.family](#)

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 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: What's, uh— what's goin' on, Syd? How are things going?

Sydnee: How— like, for me? For the world?

Justin: Yeah, we haven't talked in a little bit.

Sydnee: I mean, that's— that will give our listeners a strange view of us. We do talk every day.

Justin: We haven't seen each other than the last recording. I mean...

Sydnee: No, we— is this an illusion we're creating? That we don't see each other except—

Justin: This a different Ju— no, this is a different Justin. This is, like—

Sydnee: Oh, this is podcast Justin.

Justin: Pod— this is "time to shine" Justin.

Sydnee: [laughs] "Time to shine" Justin?

Justin: "Time to shine" Justin only shows up for podcasting.

Sydnee: I like the idea that if you were, like—

Justin: He's effervescent.

Sydnee: —a series of, like, dolls, there's, like, regular Justin, and then there's "time to shine" Justin. They do that with Jojo Siwa, 'cause the kids love the Jojo Siwa dolls, and they have different, like— there's, like, pop star Jojo Siwa and, like, the regular, like, hanging out, casual Jojo Siwa. Like, there's different ones.

Justin: There's the taekwondo Justin.

Sydnee: Uh-huh.

Justin: Comes with his own dobok, and different colored belts. There's, uh, Justin's in the shop, which is like a woodworking one that has, like, protective gear, and— and aprons and, like, your own glue [laughs quietly] comes in it, and some wood for free is in there. It's like a whole line of dolls.

Sydnee: Does it come with my storage space that's now filled with a woodworking shop?

Justin: Huh, that's interesting.

Sydnee: And, like, me— or, like, a little picture of me looking sad.

Justin: Can I tell you something?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: That's actually not something you want to discuss with "time to shine" Justin.

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Justin: That's really more like a regular Justin or husband Justin kind of discussion.

Sydnee: Alright.

Justin: I'm just here to be effervescent and charismatic. Um, and shine. I mean, I don't know how else to put it. And you're— right now, you're dulling my shine a little bit.

Sydnee: Oh!

Justin: Which many inspirational images on Facebook say that I'm not allowed, uh, to let anybody do.

Sydnee: Well, I just can't help but be me all the time.

Justin: Hm, that's lovely. [laughs]

Sydnee: There's just the one me. What you see is what you get.

Justin: That— WYSIWYG. That must be exhausting. Actually, that sounds exhausting. Well, what— what is the Sydnee that I see? What am I getting from her today?

Sydnee: Uh, well, from me today Justin— this sort of fits in with "time to shine" Justin.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Because perhaps "time to shine" Justin is made of Star Jelly.

Justin: Oh boy! I love that. I love Star—

Sydnee: Do you love that?

Justin: —I love Star Jelly. I la— I actually lather it up on my face before every time that I shine, so it actually is perfect.

Sydnee: Have you— let me ask you, have you actually heard of Star Jelly?

Justin: I've never heard of Star Jelly—

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: —in my entire life?

Sydnee: I had not either. Thank you, Courtney, for letting me know about Star Jelly, because I had not heard of this, and now I'm fascinated, and now we're gonna do a show about it. Um, there is a medical reason to talk about Star Jelly, believe it or not. Um, Justin.

Justin: Sydnee!

Sydnee: With all that is going on, are you surprised to learn that apparently there has been some sort of gelatinous ooze that's either coming from the Earth, or most likely people thought, falling from the stars, falling from the sky, for centuries!

Justin: Ooze has been falling from the sky for centuries and nobody noticed?

Sydnee: And nobody knew! Well, some people know, and that's why we're doing an episode about it. But we didn't know.

Justin: I certainly didn't.

Sydnee: Did you— do you ever— do you ever, when you're taking your...

Justin: My constitutionals.

Sydnee: Yes, your morning stroll through the— through the dewy... fields of... Huntington. I don't know.

Justin: Yeah, through the thicket.

Sydnee: Yeah, do you—[laughs] on the moors, when you're taking your strolls on the moors...

Justin: Mm-hmm?

Sydnee: I wish we had moors. Um, do you ever find, like, goo that you can't explain on the ground? Like, jelly or goo. Ge—ge—gela—gooey? Gelatinous gooey? [laughs]

Justin: Yeah, but—

Sydnee: Gooley-ooey? Ooze? Gooze? [laughs]

Justin: Yeah, but, uh, several summer camps have taught me to just leave that, uh, where it is.

Sydnee: Have you ever seen that?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: No, me neither. Okay, so what are we talking about? It looks like... I'm gonna get into what people think this is, so don't worry, we will get there. But Star Jelly looks like a translucent pile of jelly. It's like sort of a... it's usually— it's not completely clear. Like, it's not see-through, like I said. It's not transparent, it's translucent. And white and... cloudy. And... jelly. Okay?

Justin: It's— yeah.

Sydnee: Various sizes. Like, throughout time, throughout different encounters with this substance. Um, and it's been found all over the world, just sort of lying about the ground. Uh, like I said, the stories of color and shape stuff, they vary sometimes. Um, and the effects of it also vary. Like, what it does to you, if it does anything at all.

Um, most agree that it just sort of dissolves into dust with time. Like, if you leave it outside it'll just kind of, like, dry, crumble, and... fade away.

The first mention of Star Jelly goes all the way back to a book written between 1305 and 1307 by a medieval English doctor named John of Gaddesden.

Justin: Sorry, say again?

Sydnee: Gaddesden.

Justin: Gaddesden.

Sydnee: Gaddesden.

Justin: Daddesgen.

Sydnee: Uh, he wrote a book that was called the *Rosa Medicinae*, or also called the *Rosa Anglica*. Which, by the way, I need to tell you about this book before I tell you about what he wrote about it.

But anyway, so, he wrote this book, uh, and he— first, he gathered up a ton of, like— it's a medical text. And he gathered up a ton of, like, already known sort of medical writings from famous physicians and such throughout history. So, like, Galen's in there, Ibn Sina's in there, Dioscorides, a bunch of different— like, "Here's their thoughts on something."

So he put that in the book. And then he wrote a lot of his own sort of, like, remedies. Like, there's tons of prescriptions, basically. Like, recipes for stuff that he's made.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Um, and then there's a lot about him? Just, like, a lot about who he is as a person and, like, what he's into, and, like, his successes. Like, here's a prescription for something, and by the way, I sold this baby to the barber surgeons for, like, tons of cash.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: And its main ingredient is tree frogs, which is weird. But, um— so this is this book that he wrote. Uh, he named it the *Rosa Medicinae*, for the rose, rose of medicine. He named it this for two reasons. One because it's got five parts, and a rose has five, like, petals.

Justin: I will have to take your word for it on that.

Sydnee: I guess. I don't know. That's what it— that—

Justin: I'm not a flower guy. That seems low?

Sydnee: [crosstalk] A rose sepal— sep— five sections. I don't know.

Justin: [laughs] This is not a flower podcast, people!

Sydnee: This is not a flower p— this is a bad flower podcast. Um, the rose— a rose has, like, five sections, or something about roses. Anyway, the other reason

he named it this is because the rose was thought to be the best flower, and this is the best medical book ever written.

Justin: A red rose does just have five petals. There you go.

Sydnee: There you go.

Justin: There you go.

Sydnee: There you go. And the— he— he felt like he had written the greatest medical book ever written, so it's the rose of all medical books. It's the *Rosa Anglica*. There you go. This is this guy.

Um, you know, uh, *The Canterbury Tales*?

Justin: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Cau—

Sydnee: Uh, by Chaucer.

Justin: Chaucer. Nasty stuff.

Sydnee: You know there's a doctor is one of the— one of the travelers?

Justin: Oh yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: The physician in *The Canterbury Tales* may be based on this guy, John of Gaddesden. He may have been inspired. Like, his, um— like, in the prologue they list, like, his personality traits. Like, he's smart, but he's very boastful, and his main motivation is cash. Like, that's why he helps people, really, is not out of altruism but, like, money. It may have been based on this guy. I just thought that was kind of a cool aside.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Anyway, he was the first one to write about Star Jelly, or stella terraes, star of the Earth, what we would eventually call Star Jelly.

He, uh— he described it as a certain mucilaginous substance lying upon the Earth.

Justin: [shudders] That's a rough word. Woof. Moosila—mu—mucilaginous. That's tough.

Sydnee: It is tough, isn't it?

Justin: That's a tough one.

Sydnee: Yeah. And he suggested that it's good for abscesses.

Justin: I'm assuming that...

Sydnee: Just moosh it on there.

Justin: Just moosh it right on your abscess. It'll be fine.

Sydnee: Moosh it on your abscess. and it'll go away. Um, and you find, like—

Justin: Oh, no, no. He didn't say it would go away. I just told you to moosh it on your abscess.

Sydnee: That's true. He doesn't—

Justin: What happens next is on you.

Sydnee: It didn't guarantee. Just said it may be helpful for abscesses. That's a pretty benign statement.

Justin: Maybe.

Sydnee: It may be.

Justin: Maybe!

Sydnee: I don't know.

Justin: That'd be a fun doctor. Just like, "M—m—maybe. I don't know. Try it!"

Sydnee: You just ask him anything. Maybe!

Justin: Will this help? [makes "I don't know" noises]. Try it!

Sydnee: Maybe. Maybe. Um, there— and similar from this initial description, you start to see, like, other, uh, descriptions of it pop up in various medical writings and dictionaries from, like, the 13 and 1400's. So— but the names vary. So, there are lots of different— I'm calling it Star Jelly 'cause that's kind of, like, the most common. But you—

Justin: And the funnest to say, I think.

Sydnee: I like Star Jelly. But a lot of these things you may have heard are the same— were talking about the same substance. So there's star-fallen, star-falling, star-shot, star-slime, star-slough, star-slubber. [laughs quietly]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Star-spurt, star-slutch.

Justin: Star-slutch?!

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, the Welsh *pwdre ser*, which means rot from the stars. There's a word, *uligo*, which is a certain fatty substance emitted from the Earth. These are all different—

Justin: God, a lot of rough words this ep!

Sydnee: Yeah, a lot of ways to describe.

Justin: The o— like, the opposite of cellar door over here with, like, the... the way it soun— ew.

Sydnee: Star-slutch.

Justin: Star-slutch.

Sydnee: Star-spurt. That's...

Justin: It's terrible!

Sydnee: ... questionable. Uh, in addition to abscesses., there was another folk recipe that popped up that was like, "Hey, this might be good for puerperal fever," or what we used to call child bed fever. It was— we've talked about this before. It was an infection that after a person had given birth, they might get this infection, and we eventually learned it was because... of not washing your hands when you deliver babies. Remember, we talked about this?

Justin: That's an important one.

Sydnee: So, um— so yeah, it would not help for that. Um, now the— the common belief— like, why did we call it this? It was because people thought it was from stars.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: People would see it on the ground and go...

Justin: It's a weird pick, 'cause the stars are in the sky and the jelly's on the ground, but yeah, I mean, it has to come from somewhere, right?

Sydnee: Well, but like, they knew of the existence of falling stars. Like, they would look up and see a shooting star.

Justin: Yeah. Then they'd look down and be like, "Aw, dunk! There's jelly on the ground!"

Sydnee: The implication was that shooting stars eventually hit Earth...

Justin: And just get smooshed.

Sydnee: And they t— and they— and they break apart, and this is what they're made of. This is, like— this is— thi— if you could reach up into the sky and grasp a star, it would be a big, gooey... [laughs]

Justin: [laughs] It would be ill-advised, to start off with.

Sydnee: It would be— it would be a gummy, gooey, oozy thing. Mucilaginous, even. And so that was— okay, these are stars that somewhere they fall to Earth, and when they do they bust open, and here are the bits of them, scattered among the ground.

But because of that, not only did some people ascribe medical properties to it, but it also, of course, took on this sort of mystical, magical, poetic... you know? Like, there was this whole other side to Star Jelly. It wasn't just about the... the medicine or, like, what it might do for you. It was that it was this magical kind of thing.

So you start to see throughout the 16 and 1700's this view of Star Jelly, and it shows up in a ton of different poems. Which, like, I don't know that I would've realized— like, there's one from 1656 by Henry More. He writes, um, "That the stars eat, that those falling stars, as some call them, which are found on the Earth in the form of a trembling jelly."

Justin: Mmm.

Sydnee: Trembling jelly.

Justin: Trembling je— quivering.

Sydnee: John Suckling in 1641 wrote... [laughs quietly]

Justin: [holding back laughter] Can't catch a break this episode.

Sydnee: "As he whose quicker eye doth trace a false star shot to a marked place, does run apace, and thinking it to catch, a jelly up do snatch." [laughs quietly]

Justin: Hmm. Lovely. A lovely pee-um.

Sydnee: Um, and there are lots more. You can find lots of examples of people saying, like, "Go— if you see a falling star, go run over to where you think it fell, and you're gonna find... " as Sir Walter Scott writes, "some foul jelly." [laughs quietly]

Justin: [wheeze-laughs] Oh, man. Imagine just seeing a shooting star and being like, "Aw, no. [wheezes] Oh no, that jelly's headed for my house!"

Sydnee: "[groans] We're gonna see some foul jelly." Um, in modern times you see this, too. There is a Lovecraft story, *The Color out of Space*, that talks about, like, some sort of jelly from space. Some sort of, like, ooze. Like, same kind of thing.

Um, and in 1950— and I'm gonna go into some of the incidents where we have found Star Jelly throughout history. Um, in 1950, there were four police officers in Philadelphia, uh, who saw something fall from the sky, they thought, went to the place where they thought they saw it fall, and according to them, found... a domed disc of quivering jelly six feet in diameter, one foot thick at the center, and an inch or two near the edge.

They tried to pick it up, and it dissolved into an odorless, sticky scum.

Justin: Gross.

Sydnee: This story from 1950 Philadelphia is the inspiration for *The Blob*.

Justin: Oh, really?

Sydnee: Yeah. This is why we have— *The Blob* is inspired by Star Jelly!

Justin: Hey, that's huge.

Sydnee: Um, *The Blob* is so much scarier than it should be, by the way.

Justin: I've never seen that.

Sydnee: You've never seen *The Blob*?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: I find *The Blob* truly horrifying, and it's just— I mean, it's...

Justin: It's a blob.

Sydnee: Just a blob. I find it very upsetting. Um, and there were other reports of similar goos and jellies like that, through— all over the place. Lowville, New York. North Reading, Massachusetts. Kempton, Tasmania. Everett, Washington.

Throughout Ireland, Scotland, England, like, you hear all of these stories all over the place. In one situation, instead of medicine, however... like, so in all of these other situations, it was either just "Ew, we found some weird jelly," or like, "Hey, it has this beautiful, mystical connotation," or "Maybe it could heal you in some way."

Like, all of these different— I would say not— not very negative properties ascribed to it.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: But in one situation, it actually seemed to cause harm.

[pause]

Justin: What was it?

Sydnee: And so I wanna tell you about—

Justin: No!

Sydnee: —the Oakville Blobs.

Justin: [wheezy laughter]

Sydnee: But before I do...

Justin: One of my favorite minor league ball teams. Hands down.

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, let's go to the billing department.

Justin: Let's go!

[ad break]

[music plays]

Jesse: Hi. I'm Jesse Thorn, the founder of Maximum Fun, and I have a special announcement. I'm no longer embarrassed by *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*. You know, for years each new episode of this supposed advice show was a fresh

insult. A depraved jumble of erection jokes, ghost humor, and— frankly, this is for the best— very little actionable advice.

But now as they enter their twilight years, I'm as surprised as anyone to admit that... it's gotten kinda good. Justin, Travis, and Griffin's witticisms are more refined, like a humor column in a fancy magazine. And they hardly ever say Bazinga anymore.

So, after you've completely finished to listening to every single one of all of our other shows, why not join the McElroy brothers every week for *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*?

[music and ad end]

[*Star Trek* comm noise]

[music plays]

Adam: Are you ready to binge watch something... old?

Ben: *The Greatest Generation* is a podcast about *Star Trek* by a couple of hosts a little bit embarrassed to even have a *Star Trek* podcast. Hosted by me, Ben Harrison...

Adam: And me, Adam Pranica. We get into the critical, the technical, the science fictional aspects of the show we love, while roasting it and each other at the same time.

Ben: We've completed an entire series about *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and another one about *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and we've just begun *Star Trek: Voyager*, so now is a great time to start watching a new *Star Trek* series with us.

Adam: So subscribe to *The Greatest Generation* on Maximumfun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts, and become a friend of DeSoto today.

[*Star Trek* comm noise]

[music and ad end]

Justin: Stepping up to the mound for Oakfield Blobs! It's Sydnee McElroy!

Sydnee: Alright, Justin. It's August 7th, 1994.

Justin: No it's not.

Sydnee: In my story.

Justin: Got you— got you already.

Sydnee: In my story. It's August 7th, 1994. We're in Oakville, Washington, and it's raining. I would guess that this is not strange. I feel like— doesn't it rain a lot up there? [laughs quietly]

Justin: In Washington? Yeah. I mean, the times that I've been, it rains a lot. Most of the episodes of *Frasier* were about that.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] So it's raining in Oakville, Washington. That's not particularly interesting. However, the next morning everybody wakes up after the rain, and they find, uh, small gelatinous blobs. Um, some people talk about 'em, like, the size of, like, half a grain of rice, so pretty small, right? Little teeny, teeny...

Justin: Okay, yeah.

Sydnee: ... balls of jelly.

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: Um—

Justin: Orbeez, basically.

Sydnee: Orbeez have fallen from the sky. [laughs quietly] That is what people began to assume. They find them all over the ground and they think, "Well, these must have fallen from the sky."

Justin: Of course.

Sydnee: 'Cause they're scattered all over the ground. Um, and this would continue to happen, by the way, for the next three weeks, about six different times over the next three weeks.

Justin: That's bizarre. That would be very disconcerting.

Sydnee: Uh, one police officer who was driving in his patrol car when this started falling, uh, his name was David Lacey, he noted that the reason he figured out it wasn't just rain— 'cause it was very small, you may have thought it was hail or something like that. But he turned on his windshield wipers, and they smeared across his windshield the way you imagine, like, petroleum jelly or something on your windshield, right? So, like, they smeared across his windshield, and so he knew right away, like, "Hmm."

Justin: "Hmm, we got a jelly thing."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "This is a jelly situation we got on our hands."

Sydnee: What do you think the number for that is? You know, you've got, like, a number associated with different crimes.

Justin: Uhh... I don't know.

Sydnee: I don't know if there's a number for a jelly.

Justin: I can't come up with any funny numbers.

Sydnee: Uh, [laughs quietly] there aren't enough funny numbers.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: Except for the, like, ones that are funny 'cause you're making sex jokes, and that's inappropriate.

Justin: There's the sex number, the weed number... nerds like the— the Hitchhiker number. Um, those are the only fun numbers.

Sydnee: You're a nerd.

Justin: Whoa.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Whoa-ho-ho-ho.

Sydnee: I'm just saying.

Justin: Yikes.

Sydnee: Uh, there was another resident, Dotty Hern, who reported that she went out into her yard, discovered these jelly things, and picked one up thinking, like, "Oh, hail fell."

Justin: Classic human behavior.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: "Oh, what's that? A mysterious substance. Lemme grab that real quick."

Sydnee: Yep. Dotty picked one up, and Dotty was surprised at how gooshy it was. She was able to goosh it right up. And she was like, "This is weird. I thought it was hail, and it's not hail." Dotty was confused.

Justin: Okay. I just... [wheezes] I just don't understand how you know about that.

Sydnee: Um, this—[laughs] this—

Justin: Because it's like, I've picked up lots of things—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] This may've—

Justin: —and sometimes I think, "This is gushy." And not once have I been like, "Hey, history? It's Justin! I picked up something gooshy. Can you write that down?"

Sydnee: So, full disclosure, this particular part of the episode, uh, is from *Unsolved Mysteries*. [laughs]

Justin: [applauds]

Sydnee: I love the—

Justin: [loudly] No!

Sydnee: —[through laughter] I love the show *Unsolved Mysteries*! [sighs] Anyway. So, that's why we know Dotty picked it up and gooshed it. *Unsolved Mysteries* told us.

Justin: I guess that makes more sense than her calling history.

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean, I love the— I love the way that *Unsolved Mysteries* gives color to these stories, right? Like, people and stuff. Like, I always admired that. I think that that probably inspired some of what I do on here, is try to *Unsolved Mystery* the story. You know? Like, um— so, I— you know. Maybe there wasn't a Dotty. Maybe Dotty is an amalgam of several different people that was created for the joy of television audiences. Um...

Justin: [laughs breathlessly] Thank you, thank you for admitting that, because if you had not and some internet sleuth was like, "Um, I don't wanna—"

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: "—[through laughter] but I'm pretty sure this part's from *Unsolved Mysteries*!"

Sydnee: It is. It's from *Unsolved Mysteries*. The Oakville Blobs are real. That happened. Now, all of these characters... I don't know exactly. But the— you get— you're gonna get the sense. The Oakville Blobs are real.

Justin: Okay. Okay.

Sydnee: This really— this did happen.

Justin: Did the police officer— is he *Unsolved Mysteries*, too?

Sydnee: The names have been changed to protect the innocent.

Justin: [squawks]

Sydnee: I don't know. Uh, no.

Justin: So somewhere there's footage of a reenactment of David La—

Sydnee: Yep.

Justin: [dramatic voice] Officer David Lacey.

Sydnee: [through laughter] With his windshield wipers smearing.

Justin: [dramatic voice] With his gooshy windshield wiper.

Sydnee: Okay. After Dotty picked up the gooey ball, she started feeling bad.

Justin: 'Cause she did that. [wheezes] She was like, "Why'd I do that? It's gooey."

Sydnee: She started to have difficulty breathing. Her vision got blurry. She started becoming nauseous. She got vertigo.

Justin: Oh my gosh. That's a lot all at once.

Sydnee: Uh, about an hour into her symptoms, her daughter, Sunny Barclift—

Justin: [quietly, with feeling] What?

Sydnee: Found her —found her passed out on the bathroom floor, sweaty and pale. Why are you reacting to this?

Justin: Because it's made— it's a made-up thing you saw on *Unsolved Mysteries* one time!

Sydnee: It's not— no, the Oakville Blobs are real!

Justin: Okay. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Okay. So she t— so anyway—

Justin: [strained, through laughter] This is, like... turned into—[wheezy laughter]

Sydnee: She took—

Justin: This show's turned into your own cryptozoological expedition here. [laughs] This is supposed to be medical history.

Sydnee: Oh... [sighs] I— the Oakville Blobs fell— do you want me to— like, I could give you the dry version. Some gooey stuff fell from the sky and nobody knows why.

Justin: No, no, no, no, no. I much prefer your episode recaps of *Unsolved Mysteries*.

Sydnee: She— so she took to— so she went to the hospital, and she was there for three days. She had an ear infection. But it wasn't just Dotty—

Justin: [wheezes] [laughs loudly]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Mystery solved!

Sydnee: David the cop got sick. Other residents got sick. There was a local human, Beverly Roberts— I don't know what her job in the town is— but she said pretty much everybody got sick, and several dogs and cats died.

Justin: I mean, that's probably de rigueur. Dogs and cats do tend to do that, but sure, okay, maybe it's blob-based.

Sydnee: And let me say, let me say, I don't know if everybody in town got sick. I know that the truth— like, the facts are people found weird gooey stuff on the ground, and then some people did get sick around this time. Obviously, correlation does not equal causation. I am not implying that these blobs actually made people sick, but I am saying that people in town think the blobs made them sick.

Justin: Okay, got it.

Sydnee: That is definitely— people really did think that. Um, anyway... [laughs quietly] Sunny went out and got some of these gooey things and took them to the hospital and was like, "Can you check these out in the lab?"

That poor— can you imagine that lab tech?

Justin: "Hi, I've got some balls of goop. Can you take these to "the lab"?"

Sydnee: And check them out. And reported that there was, like, a white blood cell from a human. But, like, that was all that they saw. They didn't know what it was. So then it was sent to the Washington State Department of Health, and a microbiologist there, Mike McDowell, analyzed it, and he found two bacteria that are usually found in the human digestive tract.

Justin: This is normally when I'd call UNIT, um, and, uh...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: ... get— get the doctor in here to check—

Sydnee: We need the doctor.

Justin: —yeah, to check this stuff out.

Sydnee: This is a slow invasion. Um, so anyway, what was it?

Justin: I don't know!

Sydnee: Nobody knew. There was a theory. Like, some people tried to— tried to propose the idea that perhaps an airplane flying overhead had dropped what I have learned is called blue ice?

Justin: Oh, the— the— from the toilets.

Sydnee: Yes. Um, but two reasons that doesn't really work is that one, they're not really supposed to drop it midair.

Justin: That would be wild.

Sydnee: That would be wild if that's how that worked.

Justin: We're not— we're— we need to make better time, quick! Drop the dookie ice.

Sydnee: [laughs] That's what it is, yeah. It's bathroom waste.

Justin: That's what I s—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: I was trying to say it politely, but... yeah.

Sydnee: Um, and also it has to be dyed blue. Like, it's an FAA rule. Like, you're supposed to dye it blue.

Justin: To make it—

Sydnee: So you know what it is.

Justin: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: And this wasn't blue.

Justin: In case someone else found stinky clear ice and they were like, "What could this be?" On the plane.

Sydnee: There was also a really great theory that— okay. During this time— and it was confirmed that the Air Force was practicing, like, bombing out over the Pacific during this same period of time.

Justin: That maybe they, like, nuked a whale, and all its giblets flew up onto shore?

Sydnee: Well, you're close. Jellyfish.

Justin: [very quietly] Oh, God.

Sydnee: There was a thought that what if they're— what if they're exploding jellyfish [through laughter] so hard that the jellyfish are raining down on Oakville?

Justin: [hisses] Probably not that. Probably not that.

Sydnee: People did not— that is not— yeah. I think there are multiple— and also, like, they didn't find jellyfish DNA, so. I don't think it was that. Anyway.

Justin: That seems— that one seems— case closed on that, I think.

Sydnee: Unsolved to this day. Some residents still believe it was a biological weapon that was accidentally tested on them.

[pause]

Justin: That'd be a pre— pretty easy to avoid [through laughter] biological weapon. Just don't pick up the goop!

Sydnee: Star Jelly's story once takes us to Oakville, Washington, and there's this weird thing, and you can watch it on *Unsolved Mysteries* if you really feel inclined. Um, I'm sure with the reenactments it's even better. Um, what other theories, though, other than these that we've talked about— what other theories have cropped up from some of these things?

Sydnee: Well, there are a couple cases where we think we know what it was. So, there was one time in August of 1979. Uh, there was a person, Sybil Christian, who lived in Frisco, Texas who, um, one morning came out to her front yard and found some purple blobs on her yard. Like, little purple blobs.

Um, and she connected it to the night before, the Perseid meteor shower had occurred.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So the thought was like, "Oh my gosh. The mete—"

Justin: Everything old is new again. This is definitely from stars again.

Sydnee: Uh-huh. Meteors are made of purple goo, and we didn't know. Um, however, what they eventually discovered is that there was a battery reprocessing plant, um, which used caustic soda to clean impurities from lead in the batteries, and the resulting stuff, like the stuff that's made as a byproduct, is purple.

Justin: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: So the thought was that maybe it had gotten— which isn't great. Like... that's disturbing in a different way.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Right? 'Cause, like—

Justin: That's, like, less fun disturbing.

Sydnee: No, it's like, well, this isn't from space, but also why is it in my front yard? That seems troublesome. So that was one instance of Star Jelly they thought they solved.

There was another one in Dorset, where they thought it was Star Jelly. They went and analyzed it, and it was, uh, sodium polyacrylate, which I guess is a kind of, like, super absorbent polymer that you can use in agriculture. So, like— and so, like, if you put it out on your yard and then it rains, it will swell.

Justin: Like diaper.

Sydnee: So it would look like— exactly, like the stuff in diapers. You wouldn't know it was there, maybe, if conditions were dry. And so then if it rained overnight you would come out and it would look like it had rained goo, when really it was just all of these things absorbed water over night and became really large. So again, like Orbeez, or the stuff that's in diapers. Which, um— which there are a lot of science kits these days that kids play with, and that's what they come with. They come with Orbeez and the stuff that's in diapers.

Justin: It's fun.

Sydnee: They just— yeah, they love that stuff. Um, there were some substances that have been found to be certain kinds of, like, molds or fungi. Uh, there's one called, uh... you guys don't want the scientific names, do you?

Justin: No, we don't.

Sydnee: I have the scientific names here but, like, you guys don't even—

Justin: We don't.

Sydnee: Anyway, there are certain kinds of [laughs quietly] molds that look like slime, that look like goo. I mean, you can find these things, and that's just how that they naturally occur out in the world. Like, you would find them and it would look like a pile of goo, and it's a fungus, it's a mold.

Um, there's one in sp— the— one specifically, it's a kind of blue-green algae called nostoc that shows up after rainfalls. And so that one was— that has been a lot of cases of Star Jelly has probably also been nostoc, and it has kind of this own, like, mythology around it and, like, medical applications. And, like, that specific algae has its own kind of folklore. [laughs quietly] Outside of Star Jelly. But it is often included in the list of things that we have accused of being Star Jelly.

Justin: Gotcha.

Sydnee: Um, there is a theory that seems to have been borne out by some evidence. Like, this may be— all the times where we didn't know, where it wasn't one of these things I've already mentioned, it may have been this.

So, um, there was a theory that it was a substance that was regurgitated by an animal. That we're seeing something that was inside of a creature and now has been puked back up.

Justin: Great.

Sydnee: Like a bird or something has puked up whatever this gooey stuff is.

Justin: Have to be a lot to cover a whole city.

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] So, as you can imagine, over time we have looked at this stuff under a microscope in different occasions to try to figure this out. Um, and at one point they found, like, what looked like amphibian DNA in one of these things. Like a frog.

Justin: Weird. Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Okay? And then in one they found that, and some— something like a predator DNA, like some sort of predatory bird. Okay? So then they started

theorizing, maybe this is the innards of, like, a frog or something that's been puked back up...

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: ... by a predator.

Justin: [quietly, through laughter] Okay.

Sydnee: And then in one sample of Star Jelly that was collected from Dartmoor in 1926, they found oviducts and ovaries and some eggs, along with some other bits of a frog. Okay?

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, the thought is that what we are seeing... is a collection of mainly this, um— this gooey jelly stuff that's in, like, the oviducts of frogs that have been eaten by a predator, and then the predator puked back up this part of it, 'cause it's not easily digested or whatever.

Justin: Gross. Yeah, gross.

Sydnee: Um, especially if you find it in the autumn. This would be the time of year where, um, the adults—

Justin: Big time for frog-eatin'.

Sydnee: The adult female frog carries a batch of eggs that they're ready to lay, okay? As the eggs pass down the oviduct, they're surrounded by some jelly that, like, the oviduct walls squirt out this jelly and surround the eggs in this jelly. Um, it's not a lot. Like, it's a teeny— you can imagine, we're talking a teeny, teeny amount of jelly, so that you might wonder, like, but that seems like it'd be almost microscopic. Like, how would we be seeing this with the naked eye? Because when it comes into contact with water, it expands. It gets really, really big. So if a predator eats the frog and digests bits of it, um, it will release this jelly. And then if they puke it back up, it will absorb water from the soil, or if it rains or whatever, and you'll see this big mass of gooey jelly stuff that's actually frog innards.

Justin: [wheezy laughter]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Justin: Such a gross episode! And there's no human body stuff in it.

Sydnee: Um, so that's probably what a lot of the cases where they can't ascribe it to, like, a mold or a fungi or an algae, or something that you use in your garden, or if you unfortunately have ... a ha— a— a battery reprocessing plant that doesn't seem to be regulated very well near you.

Justin: But why did it make people sick?

Sydnee: Why did it make people sick? I don't know. What I would say is this.

Justin: It's an unsolved mystery, after all.

Sydnee: Did it make people sick?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: My guess is that it did not. Um, not to deny the residents of Oakville their story. Certainly I don't know what happened. But my guess is that people just got sick around the same this happened, and because it was scary and unknown, um, and different, you connected the two events. And that is— that's what we humans do, right? We do that constantly, and connect events that actually maybe weren't related. We connect them because temporally they were related, and so that makes sense to us. Um, it probably didn't make people sick. It probably doesn't help with abscesses. or fevers. Um, most of the time— it's probably not an exploded jellyfish. It's just some frog innards. And, I mean, I wouldn't wanna pick 'em up, but I guess...

Justin: Old— old, uh, Patty— Patty sure did.

Sydnee: That's that— that's the—

Justin: Dotty, 'scuse me.

Sydnee: —the mystery of Star Jelly.

Justin: [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Still unsolved, after all this podcast.

Sydnee: Still unsolved. Don't know if it— my guess is it didn't actually make people sick. There you go. There's my two cents.

Justin: If you see jelly on the ground, don't touch it.

Sydnee: I mean, you know, I think it's a good rule of thumb—

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: —and I do this. Like, as a doctor I have this habit where somebody'll be like, "Look at this rash or bump or something," and my immediate instinct is to touch it. Like, bare hands. Like, "Oh, let me touch that."

Justin: That's humanity.

Sydnee: And I always have to have— I have this voice in my head that goes, "Put on gloves!" And then I go put on gloves, and then I examine whatever I'm gonna examine. Um, so put on gloves. If you wanna pick up Star Jelly...

Justin: Put on gloves.

Sydnee: There you go. Then you'll be safe. Or just don't.

Justin: Or just don't.

Sydnee: Take a picture.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: 'Gram that.

Justin: 'Gram it. Hey, thank you so much for listening to our podcast. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song, "Medicines," as the intro and outro of our program. Thanks to the Max Fun network for having us as a part of their extended podcasting family, and thanks to you for listening. We sure appreciate it.

Hey, we got a book, in case you want a book of us. It's called *The Sawbones Book*. It's in paperback with stuff about pandemic and things like that. There's also a hardback version if you want.

Sydnee: And lighter stuff.

Justin: And lighter stuff. There's an audiobook version too that you can listen to, which is... eerily like this podcast! [laughs] Uh, thank you so much for listening. Be sure to join us again next week for *Sawbones*. Until then, 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]

[chord]

Maximumfun.org.

Comedy and Culture.

Artist Owned.

Audience Supported.