

Sawbones Ep 019: Baldness

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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 song Medicines by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin:

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

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

We're in the full swing of Halloween now, and Sydnee, I have great news. My costume is coming along wonderfully.

Sydnee:

Oh, is it?

Justin:

Yeah. I've, uh, I got the wheelchair. I've got the cool Cerebro helmet. Um, uh, I got a suit. I want to be, uh, Professor X from, uh- uh, *X-men*, Professor Charles Xavier.

Sydnee:

Oh, that's definitely a cool costume.

Justin:

Yeah. Thanks, I thought so too. I mean, with *Days of Future Past* coming out next year, I feel like I can get ahead of the rush for Professor X.

Sydnee:

Right. What is that- now is that a movie? Is that a video game?

Justin:

It's the newest film in the *X-men* franchise.

Sydnee:

Oh, okay.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I didn't know that.

Justin:

I am worried about one thing though with my costume.

Sydnee:

What's that?

Justin:

Um, I'm not gonna buy a bald cap.

Sydnee:

Oh. So not the X-men powers. You're not worried about that part, like that you don't have any superpowers?

Justin:

No, this is a costume. It's illusion. Uh, but I am worried about not having a bald head like Professor Charles Xavier, so here's what I'm counting on. That I'm gonna start going bald.

Sydnee:

Well, I- that's interesting 'cause when I married you, I was actually counting on the exact opposite, but fair enough.

Justin:

Yeah, it's- it's, uh, it's- it- I know it's a long shot since Halloween's tomorrow.

Sydnee:

And you got a lot of hair up there.

Justin:

And I do have a lot of hair up there.

Sydnee:

I mean, like, thick, luxurious, curly locks.

Justin:

Thank- thanks. But-

Sydnee:

I just want to- can I just run my fingers through them?

Justin:

Yeah, go ahead.

Sydnee:

Just real-

Justin:

Go on. Help yourself.

Sydnee:

Oh yeah.

Justin:

Treat yourself.

Sydnee:

That's what I like. [crosstalk 00:02:36] just want to grab your head right-

Justin:

Uh, now I did get a- um, thanks.

Sydnee:

Okay. Sorry.

Justin:

Uh, I got a- I went down to the boardwalk, and I got a curse from a fortune teller.

Sydnee:

Uh-huh [affirmative] Uh- what- wait, what?

Justin:

I got a curse from a fortune teller that I—

Sydnee:

No, I'm more concerned with the fact that there- where did you find a boardwalk in Huntington?

Justin:

Just got with the premise.

Sydnee:

Oh, okay. Yeah, the boardwalk.

Justin:

Uh, so I went down to the boardwalk where the, you know the fortune teller there. She-

Sydnee:

Right, the fortune teller- board- the boardwalk fortune teller down- down on the boardwalk on the river.

Justin:

She cursed me with baldness, um, and so I'm confident that that's gonna be fine. That area of my costume is settled. My worry is how do I come back from that?

Sydnee:

Oh, so you want a cure for baldness, huh?

Justin:

There's n- it's- she said an uncurse would be very expensive, and I'm- I'm trying to be a little bit more thrifty.

Sydnee:

Right, well I think first we should figure out if you're actually losing some hair.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So I- there are some tests to figure out if you're losing your hair.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

First is called the pull test.

Justin:

Okay, Syd, now how does the- how does the pull test work? Ow. Ow. Ow. You pulled my hair.

Sydnee:

Well that's how it works.

Justin:

That's the te- okay. That's the test. You know, I could have- I could have edited that sound effect back in. You know, I could have done that in post. You didn't need to actually pull my hair.

Sydnee:

Well, I thought that you really wanted to know how it worked.

Justin:

Okay, so, uh, you grabbed- how many hairs would you say you grabbed?

Sydnee:

So you grab a group of, like, 40 to 60 hairs in, like, three different areas, and you pull on them, and if more than three come out, you're balding.

Justin:

Uh, I had none come out. So I'm worried that maybe the magic just hasn't taken shape yet. Is there any other test that I could- I could use?

Sydnee:

Well, yeah. If the pull test is negative, but you're still convinced that you're losing hair, you could always try a daily hair count.

Justin:

Oh, what does that entail?

Sydnee:

So basically you're just gonna collect all of the hair that comes out every day-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... in a clear plastic bag for two weeks.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And then you're gonna count them all, and if it's more than 100 a day, that's abnormal. And if it's less, it's normal. Except for if you're shampooing, 'cause you can lose, like, 250 hairs.

Justin:

Okay. I have a point of order here. It is abnormal regardless, because you have a bag of your hair. How do you explain that to people?

Sydnee:

Well you just tell people that you're doing daily hair counts.

Justin:

I'm just counting my hairs, and storing them in a bag. Now, okay, now here is another question for you that the daily hair count does not take into effect. Why do I have to count at the end? Can I do- can I just keep a pleasant little notebook next to the side of the bed, and count as we go? Is that not a possibility?

Sydnee:

Well, two things. One, uh, accountability.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

As your physician, how do I know that I can trust you?

Justin:

Okay. This is the bag of hair I brought in, doc.

Sydnee:

And- and two, how else would we convince people to carry around plastic bags of hair-

Justin:

Doctors...

Sydnee:

... if we didn't tell them to do this test.

Justin:

And your doctor tricks. Okay, so barring a- a daily hair count, 'cause I'm not gonna have two weeks to- to work that up, what are some ways that we've tried to address this problem throughout history?

Sydnee:

Well, it's funny because if you look into the history of baldness cures, um, people have been trying to figure out how to fix this problem since, like, the ancient Egyptians. This is not a new issue. Um, hair- the growth of a lot of hair, especially in men, not so much in women, especially these days, is, uh, associated with, uh, virility. You know, you're a manly man if you're a hairy man. And so men have been trying to figure out how to maintain their hairiness in their old age for thousands of years.

Justin:

And this- this is a- a trait we've actually seen, uh, many times, in that if an issue affects mainly men, throughout history I think we've seen, uh, more- more gusto applied to, uh, to that problem. We saw that with erectile dysfunction. Um-

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

And- and I think that that- that is- is carried, uh, that- that through line narrative is- is carried here.

Sydnee:

Yeah, men problems always get way more attention than women- than women problems.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So how do we treat—

Sydnee:

Which are often disregarded as women problems ironically.

Justin:

So, uh, BCE 1500s, how do we- how do we do it?

Sydnee:

So if we look back at- to what we've referenced before, the Ebers Papyrus, so some early, uh, Egyptian writings, uh, they have many cures for baldness. Most of them are, like, compounds that you're gonna create out of various substances, and then just put on your bald scalp.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

To try to make the hair grow back.

Justin:

Okay. That seems good. It's direct.

Sydnee:

Right. So one mixture could be, um, so you take the fat from several different animals. A hippo, a crocodile, an ibex, a snake, a tomcat. You mix all that fat together. I'm assuming you're gonna have to, kind of, like, cook it down, 'cause it's, like, it's thick, and you've gotta make it melty. And then you put it on your head.

Justin:

And it looks like hair? Is that the- is that the idea?

Sydnee:

No. It-

Justin:

It's a convincing simulacra of hair.

Sydnee:

It doesn't work, but it certainly took up your afternoon.

Justin:

Sure, it distracts you for a while, from the baldness, which is nice.

Sydnee:

You could also try, um, boiling some porcupine hair in water, and then putting that mixture on your head for four days.

Justin:

Now that- now that is supposed to look like human hair, right?

Sydnee:

That's what I think. I- when I was reading this, I thought, "Are they really just going for, like, it's, like, fake hair?" Like, it's porcupine-

Justin:

History's oldest toupee. Porcupine.

Sydnee:

This porcupine- like, boil- like, if you boil it in water, maybe it'll congeal, and then you can, like, mush it up there?

Justin:

I guess.

Sydnee:

Uh, one of my favorites though is that- so you take the leg of a female greyhound.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And you take the hoof of a donkey. And then you saute them together in oil.

Justin:

Yum. Okay. I'm into it. And then you just-

Sydnee:

You're into that?

Justin:

And then you just eat it?

Sydnee:

No, you don't- what?

Justin:

You just eat it?

Sydnee:

You eat it?

Justin:

I saw this on 30 minute meals. You do the female greyhound, hoof of a donkey, a little EVOO, some parsley. You're- you're on point. You're gonna just enjoy that. It won't make your baldness go away, but it hits the spot.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It might.

Sydnee:

You think so? Just pour that over some fett- fettuccine?

Justin:

Fettuccine. Yes, that's a posit- I'm assuming they put it on their head?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

How would you even put that on your head?

Sydnee:

I don't know.

Justin:

What if it- they didn't invent glue.

Sydnee:

I think that the oil that's left over.

Justin:

I'm invent- "What are you doing, Clapornicus?"

"Me? I'm inventing glue."

"Oh, that sounds very useful. What's glue?"

"That doesn't matter right now. The point is, I need-"

Sydnee:

I'm gonna put this on my head.

Justin:

"I'm gonna put this female greyhound leg on my head, and also a donkey hoof."

Sydnee:

I think it's, like, the- at the end-

Justin:

Maybe he just had to play Rudolph in the school play. That's a possibility.

Sydnee:

[laughs] My- my take was that at the end, you would have, like, an essence of female greyhound, and hoof of donkey, oil, that you could kind of rub on your scalp.

Justin:

Okay, that makes more sense than mine.

Sydnee:

Like massage in there, you know.

Justin:

That is better than mine, yeah.

Sydnee:

Don't you think that- yeah. Like old timey barbers used to do.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Like, squirt that stuff, and massage it in there.

Justin:

Yeah, it sounds nice.

Sydnee:

That was on, like, Looney Tunes, right.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

If all else failed, um, even the ancient Egyptians wore wigs. Men and women wore wigs and fake beards. As in women wearing fake beards, if you didn't put all those together.

Justin:

Wow, really?

Sydnee:

Yeah, I guess it was really good to be hirsute. That's hairy.

Justin:

Yeah, apparently.

Sydnee:

So you- it was very attractive, so why not. So wear those big wigs-

Justin:

Go for it.

Sydnee:

Wear those fake beards. Fake mustaches were not a thing yet. Not until hipsters in the year 2013, but.

Justin:

I don't think they have fake mustaches. I don't think that's part of the hipster culture.

Sydnee:

I- they love mustaches.

Justin:

I, um, I think it has to be legit though.

Sydnee:

Those kids today, they love their mustaches.

Justin:

So what was next?

Sydnee:

Um, Hippocrates, you may have heard of him.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Of oath fame.

Justin:

He's the reason you won't- you won't stab people in their sleep.

Sydnee:

Exactly, that's part of the Hippocratic oath.

Justin:

First- first do no stab.

Sydnee:

A lot of people don't know that. Yeah, do not stab people in their sleep, only when they are awake.

Justin:

Only when they are awake.

Sydnee:

We cut that part out. Not popular in this country.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, it was a very, uh, it was a very personal problem for ole Hippocrates, being a bald man.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And so he came up with his own, uh, cure for baldness. So you just take some opium-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... some horse radish.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Some beet root, some spices, and of course, some pigeon droppings.

Justin:

Sure. Sure, gotta grab those. Gotta get those in there. What's the point otherwise? It's a catalyst.

Sydnee:

Yeah. You just put that on your head.

Justin:

I would love to know- I mean, we didn't know anything. Was it just- I mean, is it just guessing? Is that what it is? I mean, is it just guessing?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

I mean, it-

Sydnee:

I- I do. I think a lot of it is just guessing, and then things that seem- so I have- okay. Horse radish, uh, when you eat it, like it, you know, makes your sinuses open up.

Justin:

It's bracing.

Sydnee:

So maybe the thought is that it's- it's stimulating. It's, um, arousing. I don't know. So maybe it'll do the same for whatever cells stopped working that made your hair go away. I- it's a very simplistic way of looking at it, but they had no other way of looking at it.

Justin:

Any- did he have any other solutions?

Sydnee:

Well, he noticed that eunuchs rarely went bald, so his other proposal was, "I'm not gonna do this, but if you're interested, maybe castration."

Justin:

Maybe worth a shot. Now is there any- does that make sense at all? 'Cause I know that hormones are a big part of- of baldness.

Sydnee:

It's interesting. Uh, it probably did make sense. It- it probably, um, castration would be a, uh, a way to prevent genetic baldness, in a sense. Not that I'm proposing that, and not that-

Justin:

Don't do this.

Sydnee:

... there wouldn't be other reasons you could go bald, but, um, a lot of baldness is caused by- it's not- a lot of people think it's the amount of testosterone. So men who are bald say, "Well, I've got more testosterone. I'm bald. I'm manly and bald."

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

That's not necessarily what it is. It's actually the sensitivity to dihydrotestosterone, which of course is an androgen- an androgenic hormone, related to testosterone. Like a male hormone. You can think of it that way. Um, but it's the sensitivity to it that you inherit, not the amount of it.

Justin:

Okay. That makes sense.

Sydnee:

You know what I mean?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So you're more receptive to it.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

So- so there is- it does make some kind of sense that if you're removing the testicles, that, you know, you're changing the ho- kind of hormonal mix, and yeah. You could prevent baldness that way.

Justin:

Anything else? Any other big ones from this time period?

Sydnee:

Yeah. There were some other ones. Um, not just, like, things you would put on your head, but how you would get it on and off your head. So, like, you could put a mixture of, um oats and molasses, like a paste of oats and molasses on your head, but-

Justin:

Well that wouldn't do anything.

Sydnee:

Well, only if you have a cow lick it back off.

Justin:

Okay. Okay. That makes perfect sense. Now- now that adds up. Maybe the cure for baldness is just getting tickled, 'cause that would tickle me.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I think that would tickle.

Sydnee:

I think it'd be pretty funny.

Justin:

I think I'd get the giggles.

Sydnee:

Uh, the other thing you could do is you could take some beer, some boiled wheat, and some honey, and you could put it together, but don't just put it on your head. Don't just anybody. You gotta have a virgin rub it on your head.

Justin:

That sounds like somebody trying to win a bar bet to me. I don't think that's a real tr- hey.

Sydnee:

"Hey, you think I could get that-"

Justin:

"Hey."

Sydnee:

"... that chick over there to put this on my head?"

Justin:

"See her? Bet she'll rub boiled wheat on my head."

Sydnee:

"Hey."

Justin:

I just won some kopex from you, or something. What was old timey money? Kopex? Yeah, I'll go with kopex.

Sydnee:

That- that used to be a euphemism.

Justin:

Some zinny.

Sydnee:

For I'm a virgin." Hey, I bet if I rubbed some beer boiled wheat and honey on your head, your baldness would go away."

Justin:

Hint hint.

Sydnee:

If you get my drift.

Justin:

Did you catch what I was saying?

Sydnee:

'Cause I guess that was a good thing. I don't know.

Justin:

I- I guess. What's next?

Sydnee:

Uh, Julius Caesar, also a bald man.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, invented the comb over.

Justin:

He did not.

Sydnee:

Yes he did.

Justin:

I bet he claimed it.

Sydnee:

History's first comb over.

Justin:

Was Julius Caesar.

Sydnee:

Yup. Well, who knows.

Justin:

Who knows.

Sydnee:

But we know that Julius Caesar definitely practiced the comb over.

Justin:

And he definitely told people he invented it. "This? It's a new thing. Check it."

Sydnee:

"Look at this look. It's really cool."

Justin:

"I made it up."

"I saw David do that last week."

"I made it up."

Sydnee:

"I'm- I'm Julius Caesar. Are you really gonna argue with me? I'm Julius Caesar."

Justin:

"Et tu, Brute? Why would you say that? I- no. Listen. It's me, Brutus. Your friend."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I'm just telling you I saw David do the comb over. Et tu. Come on. You're hurting my feelings."

Sydnee:

When that stopped working, um, he just went ahead and put a laurel wreath on his head.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

'Cause that was easier.

Justin:

That's better.

Sydnee:

Which-

Justin:

Yeah, but that was original at least.

Sydnee:

Which, uh, you know, in the 17th century, that, you know, was much more- the idea was it would be much easier instead of trying to fix balding, let's just hide it.

Justin:

Yeah, absolutely. That seems to make a lot more sense.

Sydnee:

So men started wearing those giant, curly wigs.

Justin:

Oh, like a- like you see barristers wear, and-

Sydnee:

Ex- exactly. So those really long, really, um, almost, like, ornamental. Not- not just hair. I mean, they were obvious- and- and I think that was the idea, like, "Okay, we can't wear things that are fake hair without people noticing." I guess there just were no high quality wigs at the time.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So just wear some really big, giant curly wigs, and say that it's a fashion thing.

Justin:

It's, like, going bald and loving it.

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

Just leaning into it.

Sydnee:

I'm just- this is- this is my thing. I'm bald, and I wear these big, curly wigs.

Justin:

I'm Mr. Wig. You don't even know because everybody is wearing wigs, so let's just keep it, like, a secret.

Sydnee:

And this was popular all the way up until, you know, when you go into, like, the American Revolutionary period, where, um, being of royalty, you know, being seen as, like, the- the bourgeois, like, kind of person, it was not cool anymore. And so then you wouldn't want to wear one of those big wigs, 'cause you wanted to be, you know, more simple. You wanted to be of the common man.

Justin:

Sure, that makes sense.

Sydnee:

So then we came up with, uh- a patent medicine-

Justin:

Hey.

Sydnee:

... for balding. Of course.

Justin:

You remember patent medicines? The- if not, go listen to the episode we made about patent medicines. We have a new one every Friday. What are you doing missing them? But basically these are pat- uh, medicines that, against all odds, they're medicines that did not have patents. Right?

Sydnee:

No, they did not have patents. Absolutely they didn't. Uh, but they were called that, um, because once somebody named it something, you better not try to steal their name for their thing that didn't work.

Justin:

Now what was our- what was our me- mystical hair growth tonic?

Sydnee:

Now there were- I'm sure there were many, many, man. But one that I- I liked the name of was the Seven Sutherland Sisters Hair Grower. It's direct.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And it was actually- it was, um, based on the seven, uh, presumably, Sutherland sisters.

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

Their last name, I guess. Who traveled with a, uh, like a side show act.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And they would market this, like in the, um, we talked about in patent medicines, they had these medicine shows that would travel the country. Well, the seven Sutherland sisters would travel around with their really super long hair, so these were just women with really, really long hair, and advertise this, uh, hair tonic.

Justin:

We laugh, but, like, Tresemme is still pulling this stunt. I mean, it's still the same basic principle.

Sydnee:

Oh yeah.

Justin:

You see a woman spinning around, and her hair is impossibly shiny, as though it has its own religious inner glow, and you think, "Okay, I'm- I'm gonna pick some of that up."

Sydnee:

Like- like my hair, right?

Justin:

Exactly like your hair. You- but you're the only woman on earth that can actually achieve the look.

Sydnee:

Thank you, honey.

Justin:

You're welcome, sweetie.

Sydnee:

I believe every word of what you're saying.

Justin:

Let's just go with that. Anything else? Other remedies?

Sydnee:

Uh- uh, cold India tea was a pop- popular remedy at the time. You just rubbed that in your head, and then some hunks of lemon.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Which, I think, just sounds like it's convenient. I got some tea. There's some lemon there in my tea. Maybe that too.

Justin:

Not great for baldness, but it's good for a sore throat, so.

Sydnee:

Yummy?

Justin:

Why not. It's delicious.

Sydnee:

You know?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Pour a little on your head, drink the rest.

Justin:

Head smells great. Your head is so soothing.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Is that chamomile?

Sydnee:

As we get to the 1900s, um, just, like, as we've talked about before, when we started, kinda, the industrial revolution, and the idea that we could not just- not just make medicines out of, like, um, you know, uh, naturally occurring herbs, and spices, and whatever, we can actually have, like, electronic devices, or, you know, mechanical things that could make us healthier, and, uh, 1920 brought the Thermocap.

Justin:

The Thermocap. Okay, see, I like the sound of this.

Sydnee:

It- it was basi- it was a cap. It looked, um, it was kind of cone shaped ish. It looked a little like a dunce cap.

Justin:

Okay. Appropriately enough.

Sydnee:

And you would put it on your head, uh, obviously. It released heat, and then, like, a blue light, and you would only have to wear it for, like, 15 minutes a day. And it would-

Justin:

"Best 15 minutes of my day is sitting in my armchair, wearing my Thermocap. What do you think that says about me, Debra? Best 15 minutes of my day!"

Sydnee:

You could buy this, but a lot of these would also, um, have existed at your local barbershop. So I- I loved the, like, the image of all these guys sitting around the barbershop, wearing their Thermocaps.

Justin:

Yeah. I'm not going in there. I know who- I know where his head has been. I'm not- I'm not putting my head in the same one as Dave.

Sydnee:

Uh, they also- based on the same, um, kind of idea, they came up with an electric comb at the time, that you could- for the hair you did have left, you could comb with this electric, like, you know, you plug it into the wall, and comb your hair in hopes that it would grow.

Justin:

You're basically- it's like a retention bonus. You're just hoping to hold on to it a little bit.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

Like come on, look what I'm willing to do for you. This is an electric comb. I'm treating you well.

Sydnee:

I thought- in 1936 there was a new invention, another cap. Uh, but not- no heat technology here. I thought you would ap- particularly appreciate this one, Justin. The, uh, the Zervac, which was a cap with a vacuum.

Justin:

Helpful alien that came to earth.

Sydnee:

Zervac.

Justin:

I am Zervac.

Sydnee:

I will grow your hair.

Justin:

I'm Zervac, the hirsute.

Sydnee:

Uh, it was a-

Justin:

On the planet Folliculus.

Sydnee:

So the Zervac was a cap with a vacuum in it.

Justin:

Perfect. That sounds great.

Sydnee:

So you would put it on your head-

Justin:

So it's like a f- it's like a Flowbee basically.

Sydnee:

It's- it's a- it's a suck cut.

Justin:

Okay. It sucks as it cuts.

Sydnee:

And it would- it would suck on your scalp, and pull the hair right out of there.

Justin:

Like a french kiss for your head.

Sydnee:

Um, in 1939, that was actually the first invention of hair transplants, which we still do to this day.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

But they used to, um, nowadays they- they're, you know, very advanced, and they can actually do hair transplants, you know, hair from one part of your body to another part of your body, or I'm assuming from other donors now. Um, but at the time, they would just take hair from one place, put it in another, and they would do that by, kind of, uh, making holes in your scalp.

If you think of, like, an old, uh, plastic doll, you know all the holes in its head, where the little tufts of hair are.

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

So that's what the scalps kind of looked like. And then they would implant hair into all those holes.

Justin:

Oh God. I just- I will just go with the baldness, thank you.

Sydnee:

Yeah, it- if you look up some pictures of this, it's pretty horrific. And that made, you know, it- it was pretty horrific at the time because the technology wasn't there to- well, to do it well. To make it look right, or to keep it very, uh, sterile. And so there were definitely a lot of infections, and such. Now that is not true nowadays. Before the, uh, the hair transplant people jump all over me. But in 1939, that was kind of the status quo.

Justin:

These hair transplant people.

Sydnee:

Get-

Justin:

I don't wanna-

Sydnee:

Once they get something stuck in their craw, it's, like, let it go.

Justin:

I don't want to run afoul of the hair transplant union.

Sydnee:

Sure. Uh, in 1968, you may be familiar with the Hair Club for Men.

Justin:

I've heard of it, yes.

Sydnee:

That's when it started.

Justin:

I'm not just a member, but also a client. Not just president, also a client.

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

That guy.

Sydnee:

His- the founder was Sy Sperling. And, um, he started the Hair Club for Men because he got a really awesome weave.

Justin:

He was like, "Yes."

Sydnee:

And he was so excited about this weave, he wanted to share it with everybody.

Justin:

"I am starting a club for my weave."

Sydnee:

"I'm gonna- I'm gonna get everybody down with these weaves."

Justin:

"Hey. Hey. I got an- starting a new club. It's called Hair Club. It's for men only. First rule of Hair Club--"

Sydnee:

Don't talk about Hair Club.

Justin:

"No, tell everyone. Get at this sweet weave."

Sydnee:

Oh. Check out my weave.

Justin:

"Tell- tell them about my weave. That's the second rule too, is check out this weave."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Hair Club.

Sydnee:

"Sy, I am so tired of hearing about your frickin' weave, man."

Justin:

"That's rule three is never say that to me out loud!"

What else? Just weaves? Weaves is the Hair Club?

Sydnee:

The Hair Club For Men was just, like, weaves, toupees, wigs, just, like, non, uh, surgical, or pharmacologic solutions for hair. Fake hair.

Justin:

Fake hair.

Sydnee:

Fake hair. Which, I- you know, I'm sure kept many men satisfied for a while, but then finally in 1978, people fin- started realizing that there was a medication that could promote hair growth. Now this was not yet available. Um, it was called Minoxidil, and it was being investigated for a blood pressure med- as a blood pressure medication, but they recognized that it actually caused hair growth unintentionally.

Justin:

Now- so 1978, does Minoxidil not work, like, for everybody, or is it- has limited impact? 'Cause I- like, I mean, I still see bald people walking around. And it's- I don't know if they're all doing it by choice or not.

Sydnee:

No, it doesn't work for everybody. And I should clarify, so by 1988, it was actually safe enough to be sold as a cream that you would apply to your head, and it's Rogaine, is what we're talking about. Minoxidil is Rogaine.

Justin:

Now does-

Sydnee:

Because initially-

Justin:

Does Rogaine work?

Sydnee:

It- it works for some people, but it doesn't work for everybody.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Same as, you know, the other medication came out in 1997, um, Propecia, which again, Finasteride was the medication that was, uh, initially just used for, um, an enlarged prostate.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Still can be used for that certainly. But you can also take it for, uh, for baldness. But these medications are not a cure. So they- they are a treatment but not a cure. You know, any- one of my professors in med school used to say that if you have any disease where you have more than one treatment for it, it's just a sign that we don't fully understand it yet. And we- 'cause if we did, we would have one cure for it, right?

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So, you know, it's like anything else. We have lots of things that work for it. Some things work better for some people. Um, but nothing is a 100% effective in 100% of our patients. And that's the same for Rogaine and

Propecia. Um, the '90s also gave birth to one of my favorite, uh, infomercials. Justin, I know you share my love for Ron Popeil.

Justin:

He's a genius.

Sydnee:

He's a fantastic salesman.

Justin:

Oh, you're talk- you're talking about GLH.

Sydnee:

That's right.

Justin:

GLH. The hair in a spray can that Ron Popeil swears look like real- looks like real hair.

Sydnee:

Now what does GLH stand for?

Justin:

Great looking hair.

Sydnee:

That's right.

Justin:

God, I love that ad.

Sydnee:

Great looking hair.

Justin:

Great looking hair.

Sydnee:

Uh, I hope there are people out there who also fondly remember the infomercials for Great Looking Hair. Which was, as Justin said, hair in a

spray can. Um, it had something to do with, like, static electricity. It looks like little hairs standing up on your head through static electricity.

Justin:

Does it though?

Sydnee:

They- they say it's not spray paint. Now this is- I have never seen it in person.

Justin:

No. Well, maybe you have, and it's just fantastic.

Sydnee:

Well, that's true. Maybe I-

Justin:

It may be-

Sydnee:

Maybe that's a testament to it. I- maybe every man on earth- maybe Justin's using it right now, and I don't know.

Justin:

I may be. Don't- don't look in the closet.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, but it's still around today.

Justin:

Yeah. I- we- we looked up the website today when we were talking about this, and you can totally still buy GLH if you want. You can also grab a pocket fisherman, as long as you're on the fucking website.

Sydnee:

And it's available in, like, four colors.

Justin:

Yeah. Perfect.

Sydnee:

Which is all the colors of human hair. There are four of them.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

One of them is an auburn that is- I do not believe is a color that naturally occurs in nature.

Justin:

It doesn't matter anymore. You're riding the chemical highway. You can make your hair whatever color you want.

Sydnee:

It was certainly a lot safer. At the same time period, they had scalp reduction surgery was created.

Justin:

Yikes.

Sydnee:

Which is exactly what it sounds like. You reduce the amount of scalp you have.

Justin:

Theory being that the hair's trying to push through, it just can't, right-

Sydnee:

There's just too much scalp

Justin:

Exhausting.

Sydnee:

It really was based on the idea that there was so much scalp there, and if we reduced it, we could promote more hair growth, and it doesn't, and it was very painful, so don't. That's not really done anymore. Um, the 2000s gave birth to, uh, what you can still find in *Sky Mall*, if you are a fan of *Sky Mall*. Which I am.

Justin:

I am.

Sydnee:

'Cause who buys that stuff? Uh, there is, uh, there are- is a laser helmet, the Igrow Laser Helmet for hair growth. It emits, like, a red laser, and will stimulate, um, stimulate hair follicles.

Justin:

Syd.

Sydnee:

There's also a laser comb.

Justin:

Syd, wait. Will it?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Okay. Okay, 'cause you were saying it would, and you being a doctor, and all, I just wanted to double check.

Sydnee:

No. And that's- a lot of the things I'm mentioning, with the exception of, you know, certainly Rogaine and Propecia, are, um, regulated by the FDA, so they couldn't tell you that it would, uh, promote hair growth if they didn't.

Justin:

I imagine the FDA is not, uh, dipped into laser comb technology yet.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

It- did you know when I was, uh- uh, when I was working at Joystick, the last job I had, uh, writing about video games, I was actually emailed to see if I wanted to check out a laser comb. I do not know where they thought that- the- the gaming- the gaming connection was for laser comb. It wasn't a peripheral, or anything. Just a laser comb.

Sydnee:

What I want to know is why you didn't get that frickin' comb?

Justin:

I know. I- I- I almost did. We had discussions on the- the Joystick podcast about- about the possibilities, and ethical repercussions of getting a review laser comb, but we never went through with it.

Sydnee:

Well, and also the danger, 'cause you have so much hair already, can you imagine the length of the hair that would result?

Justin:

Oh my God. It would be like Eddie Munster running around this piece.

Sydnee:

Now I should say that there- you know, the- the laser comb, and- and laser helmet people, um, would tell you that there is research for this. I'm just saying that it's not something-

Justin:

You would prescribe.

Sydnee:

I- I- yes.

Justin:

Uh, what-

Sydnee:

Nor would I recommend paying- it is, like, it's, like, \$600, maybe even more.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

I think, like, some of the versions I saw advertised were- were on, uh, British websites, so they were saying they were 600 and some pounds.

Justin:

Yikes.

Sydnee:

Which, you know.

Justin:

That's very- I think that would be about 900- 900 or 1000 [inaudible 00:28:44] right now.

Sydnee:

Would be like a th- a thousand bucks or something, so.

Justin:

Uh, so Syd, what are we- what are we doing now? What do we got?

Sydnee:

Well now we've got, you know, there are new, um, kind of, frontiers of baldness treatments. Uh, they're looking into these, um, new hair transplants. Hair transplants are still done now, and they're much better than they used to be. And there are certainly probably men in your life who have had them that you don't know, because it looks so good. Uh, they're looking at better ways to do that.

They think that there are these 3D sphere- spheroids of hair that they're putting together, like in Petri dishes. Where, like, if you kinda put all the little hair cells together, they form these little balls. And that those transplant better, they're more robust. So they're working on that. Um, they're working on things like blocking stress hormones as a way to initiate growth, or, um, there's a medicine called Latisse that women use on their eyelashes-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... and they're- they're trying to figure out if that could work on your head too. Um, a lot of this stuff they're just doing in rats right now-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

But- but that's kind of the next frontier.

Justin:

That sounds good. Any- anything else? We got any other solutions?

Sydnee:

Well, um, one solution that I stumbled across as I was doing my research for this topic came actually from an unlikely source. Or a likely source, depending on your- your bent. Uh, from Wikipedia.

Justin:

What did Wikipedia have to say?

Sydnee:

Wikipedia in their article on baldness had one, uh, subsection called, "Embracing Baldness."

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, and this is a quote directly from their website. "Instead of concealing hair loss, one may embrace it. A shaved head will grow stubble in the same manner, and at the same rate as a shaved face. The general public has become accepting of the shaved head as well, though female baldness can be considered less socially acceptable in various parts of the world."

Justin:

Wikipedia, a site for aliens.

Sydnee:

So there's the- there's the last resort. You know, and there are a lot of really attractive bald- and I was gonna say men, but men and women out there.

Justin:

Absolutely.

Sydnee:

So, you know, why- why fake it? Just be beautiful and bald.

Justin:

Real quick, Syd. Bullet points. Hit me, uh, I- I know there are myths about this that aren't just, uh, you know, misguided treatments.

Sydnee:

So, uh, one myth that you might stumble across is that if you are losing your hair, that you can stand on your head, and that that will help it grow.

Justin:

Nope.

Sydnee:

Nope.

Justin:

Nope.

Sydnee:

Nope. Won't work. Um, uh, if you're worried that over shampooing will make you lose your hair, that's not true. Shampoo as much as you like. Uh, like I said, I already mentioned this. It's not just the testosterone, it's the sensitivity. So don't think you're all manly, or that you're not too manly, depending on how much hair you have. It's not just on mom's side.

Justin:

Oh really?

Sydnee:

Common misconception. There's a lot of genetic influences. A lot of different genes, and epigenetics. So it's not just your mom's dad's fault. Don't blame it on him. And, uh, hats don't hurt. So wear hats to your heart's content.

Justin:

Uh, I want to thank our buddy, Brental Floss, who, uh, actually suggested this topic, uh, at my brother Travis's wedding. He said, "Hey, got a topic for you guys," and he suggested baldness.

Sydnee:

And it was a really great one. I- I only scratched the surface. There's actually a lot more out there, if you're interested in this idea. You know, do your own research. There are a lot of other things to learn about baldness.

Justin:

Are you saying we're not comprehensive?

Sydnee:

I'm saying I only have so much time. I'm one woman.

Justin:

Thank you so much for joining this one woman, and this one man, on this one adventure.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Through the history of baldness. We do this every Friday. We hope you'll come back, and, uh, join us. Until that time, you can follow us on Twitter. We're @Sawbones. She's at @SydneeMcElroy. S-Y-D-N-E-E.

Sydnee:

And he's at @JustinMcElroy.

Justin:

We're a proud member of the Maximum Fun community. Uh, maximumfun.org has a lot of great shows for you to enjoy like *Stop Podcasting Yourself*, *Judge John Hodgman*, *Wham Bam Pow*, *One Bad Mother-*

Sydnee:

My Brother, My Brother, and Me.

Justin:

Ah, thank you so much. Check those all out, and head over to the forums. Chat about the show. We got a thread every week with- alongside every episode, so you can let us know what you think there, or you can just tweet at us, uh, like I said, @Sawbones.

Sydnee:

Or feel free to review us on iTunes.

Justin:

Syd reads all those, and the good ones make her really happy. So go give us a nice review.

Sydnee:

Yeah. I check all those out

Justin:

Uh, want to thank our buddy Dan Savage for having us on his show. Uh, we did a little bit there about sexually transmitted disease treatments on, uh, his most recent episode. So, uh, thanks to him for having us on there. And, um, [inaudible 00:33:05].

Sydnee:

That was a real treat. We were very excited. So thank you, and check out his podcast.

Justin:

Yeah, savage- the, uh, *Savage Love Cast*. Uh, and, um, thank you- so much to you for making time in your day to- to hang out with us. We hope to see you again next Friday. Until then, I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

As always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays out]

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