

Sawbones Episode 88: Typhoid Mary

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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 am your co-host Yo-yo Justin.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee. Wait, what, what did you say your name was, Justin?

Justin:

Uh, my name is Yo-yo Justin McElroy. I-

Sydnee:

Wait.

Justin:

Yeah. Well-

Sydnee:

Whe- Okay. When did the... When did Yo-yo Justin McElroy become a thing?

Justin:

Well, the thing is Syd, I've been feeling like I don't have enough, like, a personal brand. Like I've been trying to build my personal brand. That's kind of the arc of my life.

Sydnee:

I think it's podcasting but go ahead. [laughs]

Justin:

I'm trying to build a personal brand and like, I wanted to identify mys- like I wanted to get so deeply into something or good at something that people would come to think of me by that thing. So like, you know how, like, we've got friends, like Star Wars Greg, and-

Sydnee:

Go ahead. Who, who are other friends who have names like this?

Justin:

Ah, Wedgwood Dishware Mike-

Sydnee:

Uh-huh [affirmative].

Justin:

... and, uh, you know, Blenko Glass Bob. So we have all those friends and-

Sydnee:

And Drinky Joe.

Justin:

And Drinky Joe, the Joe who loves drinking. Joe's just an alcoholic.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Um, so I kind of want... I thought like, "Well, what could I build my brand around?" And it could be that I'm like sick at yo-yo or practicing, trying to get good at yo-yo. So like Yo-yo Justin.

Sydnee:

Okay. Well, two things. Would you consider yourself sick at yo-yo?

Justin:

Not yet, but I, I have, uh, high hopes. If, I feel like, if I name my... If I rebrand myself as Yo-yo Justin, I'm gonna have to get good, right?

Sydnee:

Right. Okay. Like you're stuck with it then.

Justin:

I'm stuck with it.

Sydnee:

Do you think that was the best name? Yo-yo Justin. Like that might be confusing 'cause what if somebody's trying to get your attention?

Justin:

They just say "Yo, Yo-yo Justin."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Exactly.

Justin:

Yeah. That is a mouthful.

Sydnee:

Don't you think that'll be confusing after a while?

Justin:

I don't have a lot of people trying to get my attention by saying, "Yo," but I do see how that could be, uh, an issue.

Sydnee:

I am gonna start doing that now-

Justin:

Fair enough.

Sydnee:

... so it's a problem for you.

Justin:

It's important, Syd. You gotta have a brand. You gotta build your brand that way.

Sydnee:

Did you consider anything else other than yo-yo?

Justin:

Nope. Uh, thought about Karate Justin, but don't know any of that. Um, and I thought about TV Justin, 'cause I'm already pretty good at that.

Sydnee:

Right. You watch a lot of TV.

Justin:

So like I thought I'd be good at that, but like-

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Justin:

... that doesn't have the same drama as Yo-yo Justin. Nobody's gonna say, "Hey, can I see you watch TV?" But they might say, "Hey, can I see some yo-yo tricks?"

Sydnee:

Well, um, good luck with that-

Justin:

Thank you.

Sydnee:

... endeavor.

Justin:

Thank you.

Sydnee:

Um, um, I don't know that I support it, but you know, instead of yo-yo, if you would wanted to, you could have maybe picked like a disease to name yourself after.

Justin:

Uh, like, um, IBS Justin.

Sydnee:

[laughs] IBS Justin?

Justin:

Mild cat-

Sydnee:

Irrit- Irritable Bowel Syndrome Justin. I think that's actually perfect.

Justin:

Mild cat allergy Justin. It's not that great.

Sydnee:

That... There's not a great ring to it. I think you need something a little more devastating before you get to-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... You know, like a bigger disease.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Like, you know, like Typhoid Mary.

Justin:

Generalized anxiety disorder Justin. How's that?

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

That's good but like some days I'm not in that vibe, you know what I mean?

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

Sometimes I... Today I'm just on like a groovy, like sunset, so chill vibe so I don't want... If I introduce myself like that, people are gonna expect me to be, be more anxious than I may feel like that day. I can't have that stigma.

Sydnee:

I also don't know how people... Like, what if you tell somebody like that at the bank? Like, "And what's your name, sir?" "General anxiety disorder Justin." How are they gonna... I mean, they're gonna wanna be comforting, like-

Justin:

I'm gonna have to shorten-

Sydnee:

... is there something I can-

Justin:

Is there something I can do?

Sydnee:

... do? Can I help you out? And then like you don't wanna have that conversation with the guy at the bank.

Justin:

Maybe I gotta shorten to something hotter, like GAD, maybe like GaD [pronounced 'gaddy'] Jay.

Sydnee:

There... You're GaD Jay now.

Justin:

Oh, I don't like that one.

Sydnee:

That's your thing now. Nope. That's it too late. You came up with that.

Justin:

Okay. So who's better than that? What's better than IBS Justin?

Sydnee:

Well, like I said, Typhoid Mary.

Justin:

Oh, right. Typhoid Mary.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Do you know anything about Typhoid Mary?

Justin:

She loved typhoid.

Sydnee:

No. Nope.

Justin:

No? No?

Sydnee:

That's wrong. No. Did not love typhoid. No.

Justin:

Super into typhoid.

Sydnee:

Oh, you've probably heard of Typhoid Mary.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

You've probably heard the... And in general I think that's become like, um, a, like a term we use for people.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Like you're a real Typhoid Mary if you're, you know, getting colds and giving it to-

Justin:

Giving it to people.

Sydnee:

... people.

Justin:

Got It. Yeah.

Sydnee:

You're spreading disease. Um, but a lot of people don't know the whole story behind Mary and uh, so I thought we would talk about that-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... and I'll give you a little background on typhoid too.

Justin:

Great.

Sydnee:

A lot of people want us to talk about this-

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... so I'm gonna tell you all their names now.

Justin:

Love crowd pleasing.

Sydnee:

Yes. Remember all these people, Daniel, Cassie, Emma, Grace, Todd, George, and Vanessa. Thank you.

Justin:

Thank you.

Sydnee:

For all of you recommending typhoid fever and or Typhoid Mary. One of the two. And now we'll talk about 'em.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Are you ready?

Justin:

Commencing words now.

Sydnee:

So it's 430 BC.

Justin:

No, it's not.

Sydnee:

Shh. This is the fantasy.

Justin:

Oh, you're whisking me away. Okay.

Sydnee:

Yeah. We're in Athens, Greece.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That sounds lovely, doesn't it?

Justin:

Everybody—

Sydnee:

Athens, there's all the columns.

Justin:

To your right there's the first Pita Pit that was ever opened.

Sydnee:

The food here is delicious, everybody's in togas.

Justin:

It's great.

Sydnee:

Sandals are beautiful. Um, it's the second year of the Peloponnesian war.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

It's a little less-

Justin:

Little less picturesque but okay.

Sydnee:

Yeah. And now a devastating plague has hit the city.

Justin:

Oh, man.

Sydnee:

Maybe we don't wanna imagine this.

Justin:

I don't wanna get whisked away anymore. I wanna whisk back home.

Sydnee:

So this was a big war, if all you historians know, this was a big, important war, the Peloponnesian war. And it forever changed the, the, kind of, the landscape of Greece as a result of between Athens and Sparta, who like, there are lots of TV shows about this kind of thing, right?

Justin:

This, this period.

Sydnee:

Um, the, the Athenians were kind of living in, in not the greatest conditions. They were all like crowded along the long city walls, um, while the war was going on and so it was like the perfect setup for people to get sick, right? People living in tents and crammed together, sanitation was poor. Uh, everybody got really sick, pretty much. Um, this, this plague, whatever the, the plague of Athens was, um, devastated the Athenians and largely contributed to them losing the war, not the only factor, but largely

contributed. About 25% of the city died. Now this is a great opening for typhoid fever if we in fact knew that this was typhoid fever, but we actually don't. But I just thought it was a really dramatic opening.

Justin:

It is dramatic.

Sydnee:

We think maybe it was typhoid. There was an argument that it was typhus, some people thought it was the plague. Um, and then there was, like, this DNA study done where they, like, found this teeth pulp... Calling it that grosses me out.

Justin:

Ugh. What is that?

Sydnee:

Yeah. They studied the DNA from like the inside of your teeth, like the pulp.

Justin:

Oh I hate this-

Sydnee:

I know-

Justin:

... I hate this.

Sydnee:

... I know. Isn't that uncomfortable? But they went back and they found teeth and they extracted the pulp and they studied the DNA and they said, "Oh, we see typhoid." And so they were like, "This... It must have been typhoid." But then a lot of people got upset about that. There are a lot of people with strong opinions about what the, the plague of Athens was.

Justin:

Many more than you think-

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

... than you would assume.

Sydnee:

This is a big... I am not wandering into this quagmire, I'm just saying maybe it was typhoid. I don't know. Uh, it may have killed everybody in Jamestown, Virginia.

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

Maybe. We don't... We're not sure about that. We know for sure it killed a lot of people in the civil war, in the Spanish American war.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

We're very certain about that. Um, but typhoid fever really makes a name for itself in the 1800s. Uh, and I'm gonna tell you about that, but first, do you know anything about typhoid?

Justin:

Not the first thing.

Sydnee:

Most people don't. Could you even like name a symptom?

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

Yeah. I, I found that most people don't know much about ty- uh, typhoid. It's caused by Salmonella enterica Serovar Typhi or just Salmonella Typhi is what we tend to call it. That's probably what you know it by, right? Salmonella Typhi.

Justin:

That's what I call it by, but we're close so...

Sydnee:

Um, which you probably recognize salmonella.

Justin:

Yeah. That's the one from raw chicken.

Sydnee:

Right. And turtles.

Justin:

It's the one that is like-

Sydnee:

You can't have a pet turtle.

Justin:

... like in all the Lysol commercials. It's like the squiggly little monsters that are cruising around on your counter.

Sydnee:

After everybody is prepping raw chicken on their counters.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

All the time.

Justin:

Stop it.

Sydnee:

Just like use a cutting board, or a plate or something.

Justin:

Use a cutting board or a plate, or something.

Sydnee:

Uh, so it's a bacterial infection. It's transmitted through my favorite route, the fecal oral route.

Justin:

Oh yeah.

Sydnee:

That's the best route.

Justin:

The party highway, we call it.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Meaning it goes in through your mouth and comes out your butt and goes into somebody else's mouth. So don't think about that too much.

Justin:

That is a... That, that cycle's way more unbroken than it should be, huh?

Sydnee:

Um, it... Once it gets in-

Justin:

I think that be a dead end road, but no, it's like a clover leaf with exits everywhere.

Sydnee:

Humans are bad at hygiene.

Justin:

Bad.

Sydnee:

It... So once it gets in through the oral route, it adheres to the, the cells in your ileum, which is part of your small intestine. So it kind of clings to those cells-

Justin:

Those are little hairs, right? That stick down and... or is it cilia? I'm thinking of cilia.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Yeah. No.

Justin:

Sorry.

Sydnee:

That's okay.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

We're talking about your small intestines.

Justin:

I'll get 'em next time.

Sydnee:

Um, so it gets, it gets into the cells and the lining of your intestines and it gets passed through your bloodstream, your lymphatic system, it's in your liver, your spleen, and it can get stored in your gallbladder, which is important because you can carry it around in your gallbladder, even if you don't have symptoms.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

But it's still like coming out like, your butt.

Justin:

Off the butt.

Sydnee:

Right. It's still, it's still... The fecal part of this route is still happening. Um, now if it does make you sick, which most people are gonna get sick with it, you're probably gonna have some symptoms that are, are kind of nonspecific. You're gonna get a fever, you can get a really high fever, um, you can get abdominal pain, you can feel really weak, headachy, a loss of appetite. One weird thing is that with your fever, your heart rate will actually go down. You get this weird bradycardia with a fever, which is unusual. Usually your heart rate goes up when you have a fever, but it goes down to...anyway,

Justin:

Blood, blood pumping, your face gets all red?

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And your heart-

Justin:

You think your face still gets red?

Sydnee:

With... I don't this-

Justin:

This special fever.

Sydnee:

Yeah, yeah.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

With a special fever. Yeah. I think probably.

Justin:

I don't know.

Sydnee:

You can get a rash, uh, not everybody does, but it's like a fat rose colored spotty rash. And you can get, um, constipation or some people had diarrhea, but not typically-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... so really nonspecific. So some people wouldn't have even known they had it necessarily, unless you got really, really sick with it and then some people can even die.

Justin:

So some people c-

Sydnee:

30% can die.

Justin:

So some people just caught it really hard.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Some people got it worse. And like I said, it, you know, it— Untreated, there is a significant percentage of people who can die from it. Um, and this is still a problem as we'll talk about. But in the 1800s, typhoid was already pretty well known, in the sense that there would be outbreaks, a lot of people would get sick, some people would die and then it would disappear for a while. Um, in the 1800s, we actually figured out pretty quickly like, we isolated the bacteria, we knew it had something to do with food and water, we didn't completely understand how it was getting passed from person to person, but we knew it was food and water. Um, by 1896 we had a vaccine.

Justin:

Oh, nice! Wow.

Sydnee:

Which is pretty cool.

Justin:

Deadass!

Sydnee:

Um, it, it's not... It continues to not be a hundred percent effective.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

And of course not everybody was on board with getting it and the only-

Justin:

Did I get it?

Sydnee:

Yeah, you did.

Justin:

Oh, good.

Sydnee:

Remember when we went to Honduras?

Justin:

That's right.

Sydnee:

The pills?

Justin:

Okay. So I did get it.

Sydnee:

You took the pills.

Justin:

Not everybody would have it, but I got it.

Sydnee:

No, no. Not everybody gets a typhoid vaccine, um, but we have had it. Um, but, uh, like I said, initially, people were a little resistant. Like, "Why do we need this?" Uh, the main way of dealing with it was isolation and quarantine. You find an outbreak and everybody, like, freaks out and runs away from people and it's awful and stigmatized, which is a great way to lead us into poor Mary Mallon.

Justin:

[singing] And then along comes Mary.

Sydnee:

[singing] Mallon.

Justin:

[singing] Mallon.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So in 1906, like I said, we already knew about typhoid, we already had a vaccine against typhoid. Um, but it was thought in the US that people who got typhoid were probably people who were kind of dirty.

Justin:

Lesser.

Sydnee:

Yes. Like, they didn't have good sanitation, they, um... I mean, you knew it had something to do with, like, bathroom activities.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Most of these things do.

Sydnee:

Yes. Um, and nobody's immune at that guys, we all go to the bathroom.

Justin:

Deal with it.

Sydnee:

Everybody poops. So, uh, it would, it was unusual to see an illness like this among people, such as the Warrens. The Warren family was very well to do.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

Yes. They, they were-

Justin:

I assumed that through context clues but I'm happy to hear it reinforced.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, you look, you looked kind of concern- like clueless. You looked like you didn't know what was going on.

Justin:

I keep that look all the time. It's my natural defense mechanism.

Sydnee:

Okay. Just so-

Justin:

People never see it coming like the asp, like the, like the, like the dumb looking asp sliding through the grass until you least suspect him.

Sydnee:

Does the asp look dumb?

Justin:

A dumb looking asp does, yes.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Sydnee try to keep up. I know your forte isn't nature but...

Sydnee:

So I already told you, the Warren family was well to do. If you didn't know that you would know from-

Justin:

Sssssss. What's that?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's the asp.

Sydnee:

It's a dumb looking asp.

Justin:

I know it is. Well, he, he doesn't mean me harm. Ka-Snap!

Sydnee:

Is that how snake sound when they bite you?? Ka-Snap??

Justin:

Dumb looking asp do.

Sydnee:

We're gonna have to cover snake bites at some point. Um, so if you didn't already know that they were, Tony, you would, from the next end say, they were summering somewhere.

Justin:

Oh my.

Sydnee:

If you could just summer somewhere you know you are well to do, right? I've never summered anywhere. I would like to. Uh, so they were summering, uh, that year at Oyster Bay in Long Island. Uh, and they had taken along, this family had taken along, their cook that they had hired, Mary Mallon.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So it's pleasant, they're at the seashore, you know. Mary Mallon is an expert at making peach ice cream.

Justin:

Oh, that's nice.

Sydnee:

Sounds delicious, doesn't it? Sitting next to the, sitting next to the beach, eating your peach ice cream, letting the waves roll in. Um, but then by August, something had gone awry.

Justin:

Oh no.

Sydnee:

One of the Warren daughters had become ill.

Justin:

Uh, what'd she have? Typhoid.

Sydnee:

Good, good guess.

Justin:

Crushed it.

Sydnee:

Great job. Uh, first she gets sick and then Mrs. Warren gets sick. And then two of the maids get sick.

Justin:

Oh no.

Sydnee:

And then a gardener gets sick. And then another daughter gets sick. All in all out of the 11 people there at the summer home, six people were sick.

Justin:

They had to bring their gardener with them?

Sydnee:

[laughs] I don't know if its just-

Justin:

That is some crazy summering.

Sydnee:

Maybe it was just-

Justin:

That's not roughing it.

Sydnee:

... like, the properties gardener.

Justin:

Okay. Maybe. Yeah.

Sydnee:

But we're gonna guess that. Um, the... 'Cause the, the, the home they were staying in was owned by another family, the Thompsons, which I only mentioned because uh, they got really into this really quickly. Because at

the time, if your home was known to be, you know, infected with typhoid, you were probably not gonna have a lot of luck renting it again.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

You know like, "Hey, we have this lovely seaside cottage, three bedrooms, two and a half baths-

Justin:

A million bajillion typhoids.

Sydnee:

... a little over half of people that lived here got typhoid."

Justin:

It's like you... That's why you see those signs in the hotel like, no smoking, no typhoid, please.

Sydnee:

Please, no typhoid.

Justin:

I like a no typhoid room please.

Sydnee:

So the Thompsons immediately, when they found out about the Warren's illness, hired an investigator to try to figure out, "Okay, what... You know. We know that this can be spread some in food and water, or somehow this is... this is a wealthy family so we gotta get all over this." When rich people get sick-

Justin:

Was-

Sydnee:

... now you know it's a problem.

Justin:

Was Sherlock home still kicking around during this time 'cause that, that would be cool if they hired him. It'd be a cool little story. I, I could write, sell to somebody.

Sydnee:

Well, we're in the... We're in long island.

Justin:

He took a boat.

Sydnee:

He took a boat. So this is a, a history where Sherlock Holmes takes a boat.

Justin:

Took a boat, America, stateside.

Sydnee:

Okay. Right.

Justin:

To break this typhoid case wide open.

Sydnee:

Sure. So they hired Sherlock Holmes to figure out the sorts of the typhoid outbreak and he was-

Justin:

Now this episode's getting good.

Sydnee:

... he was-

Justin:

See a lot of times your episodes just need a little juice. And that is another way of referring to myself. I'm... I just need to inject him with a little bit of... um, just hype him up a bit.

Sydnee:

Well, he was unsuccessful.

Justin:

Uh, impossible.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Sorry. Sorry. The game... Once the game's afoot he always gets his man.

Sydnee:

Well he doesn't. I don't, I don't wanna give Sherlock Holmes credit for this 'cause there's a real person who really figured it out.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, George-

Justin:

John Watson.

Sydnee:

No, no.

Justin:

Class twist.

Sydnee:

George Soper. You can write a book about him.

Justin:

Not... Okay. That's fine. It's not like a... Doesn't have the same ring, but we'll try it.

Sydnee:

So-

Justin:

Maybe I'll, maybe I'll patch it. Maybe I'll uh, I'll punch his name up in, in the transition into fiction.

Sydnee:

So George Soper was like a, a civil engineer I believe, who-

Justin:

George... It's actually George, George Danger.

Sydnee:

Okay. George Danger Soper-

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... George Danger Soper uh, was contacted by the Thompsons 'cause he had traced some outbreaks before and so they were like, "Hey, can you help us? 'Cause we... our summer home has been... we've been trying to rent it for the last six months, we've had no, no, uh, luck." So he starts investigating.

Justin:

But, he's worried about going... They're worried about him coming. They're like, "Be careful. It's very dangerous." Then do you know what he says then?

Sydnee:

What? Go ahead. You tell me.

Justin:

"I'm not afraid about it."

Sydnee:

That's what he says?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

That's what George Danger Soper says?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

In response to be careful, it's dangerous.

Justin:

Yeah. I bet you thought I was gonna say "Danger is my middle name", but what kind of hack do you think I am?

Sydnee:

[laughs] I, I'm sorry I underestimated you.

Justin:

Thank you.

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

And proceed.

Sydnee:

All right. So by this time, uh, when George Danger Soper is investigating, Mary had already moved on to other employment. She'd already... Uh, I mean all these people were sick, she had nobody to cook for. Nobody was very hungry, they had typhoid. So, uh, he began to research her. Um, so the... So Mary Mallon had immigrated from Ireland around 1885 or so, uh, and pretty much had worked for a domestic servant since she'd been in the US, as a domestic servant, mainly as a cook. She had a knack for it and you got paid more to be a cook.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So if you were good at it, it was a, it was a good job to had... to have. He figured out that since 1900, which is as far back as he could trace her employment, she had worked at seven different homes and facilities and all in all, 22 people had become sick between those places, um, with something that sounded like typhoid. Uh, one young girl had even died.

Justin:

Now, wait a minute, you said earlier that like 30% of people died. That, that... I, I don't understand how one out of 22 died.

Sydnee:

Well, these are probably just people that he figured out.

Justin:

Well, you know what also, I guess when you quoted that stat-

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Justin:

... it was in regards to, to Athens where we had like basically no medical, you know?

Sydnee:

And, and let me say up to 30%. I think like the stats are like 10 to 30% of people.

Justin:

Well and I would have to assume there are different strains, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah. And it depends on, I mean the outbreaks are different, it depends on if there's immunity already. Like typhoid is endemic in some areas-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... so like people may have like a low level immunity to it all the time and-

Justin:

Huh. Okay.

Sydnee:

... and I mean, these were during... these were times when a lot of people were getting exposed to typhoid, so-

Justin:

Gotcha.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Different place, different time. And I mean, who knows how great his investigation was? It's not like we had the kind of records we have today.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Now, if you get typhoid, you need to report it to the health department. That wasn't always the case.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, only one that he, that he figured out had died. Um, so he starts worrying that there's something up with this Mary Mallon. Now at this point, the idea that she would be healthy and be giving people typhoid was not really well understood.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, so he's kind of just... he's working on like instinct here.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Good old George Danger Soper. So he starts tracking Mary down. He finds her working at another home, I guess, serving more people typhoid ridden peach ice cream. And he basically corners her in the kitchen. Well, he doesn't corner her, he, he approaches her. You get the impression from reading about him, that he really is just like, it's in the spirit of scientific inquiry.

Justin:

Just doing his job.

Sydnee:

He finds her and he is like, "Hey, you don't know me. I'm, I'm working for a family who's trying to figure out who started a typhoid outbreak and I'd like you to give me samples of your blood and poop please."

Justin:

And she was like, "Uh, no, thank you."

Sydnee:

Yeah. So you can imagine that she was not pleased with this. Um, and she chased him out of the kitchen with a carving fork.

Justin:

Okay. So perfectly rational response.

Sydnee:

He brought a friend along, he had a, a, like a co-investigator. He was like, "Hey, I'm gonna try to talk to this woman again. I'm gonna go by her house. Will you come with me?" 'Cause they thought that would work out better. So this woman is alone at her home and two men show up at her door and start demanding that she poop in a cup.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Like that's gonna go over well. So she basically chased them off screaming and cursing at them again. Uh, and that's when George Danger Soper decided this had gone a little above his pay grade and he called the health department and was like, "Hey, listen, you're gonna have to deal with this. I am not talking to this crazy lady again."

Justin:

That doesn't sound like George Danger Soper I know, but that's fine. What... So what happened next Syd?

Sydnee:

Well, I'm gonna tell you the next chapter of this thrilling Sherlock Holmes story, but first follow me to the billing department.

Justin:

Let's go.

[theme music plays]

Justin:

So what's next for Typhoid Mary.

Sydnee:

So going on with Typhoid Mary. Uh, at this point, she's scared off George Danger Soper twice, um, and he has turned her over to the health department. So the health department, uh, enlists Dr. Josephine Baker to go try and, and reason with her.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

I don't know what the... My theory is that the rationale is she's a woman.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

That's what my thought is.

Justin:

She'll get through to her.

Sydnee:

Yeah. So let's, woman to woman, let's talk about your typhoid. So she, she shows up at her house and again, tries to talk with her and Mary's not having any of it. At this point, she gets the... like, "I don't know who these weirdos are, but they're accusing me of being sick and I'm clearly not."

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So-

Justin:

I feel great.

Sydnee:

So Dr. Josephine Baker, uh, leaves and comes back with five cops and an ambulance. So this time Mary's ready for her. So as, uh, Baker approaches the door, Mary lunges at her with a kitchen fork, does not injure her, um, but then takes off. And there's some confusion at first, as everybody's kind of stumbling around and, and Mary Mallon is, is running. Uh, and so they start searching her house and they can't find her. So they're looking all over her home, um, and then they notice in the backyard, footsteps, footprints, footprints going to a chair up against a fence. You can't make this stuff up.

Justin:

Yeah. This is wild.

Sydnee:

So they follow the footprints-

Justin:

Well, we don't get a lot of these moment to moment accounts in *Sawbones*. This is... I really appreciate this.

Sydnee:

Is this too much?

Justin:

No, like you just... Like, you don't get a lot of... Like, I don't know, colorful situations that are richly detailed. There's all like, "And then for 50 years, everybody died."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, I'm trying,

Justin:

I appreciate it.

Sydnee:

I'm trying to mix it up for you, keep you interested.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So they, uh, so they follow the footprints to the chair, uh, they climb over the fence and there's, uh, another house, another property right there. So they start searching that property too. All in all, it takes them five hours of searching, which I can't imagine these were too big areas. You know? I mean, she was working as a cook. Like she wasn't paid that much so, so it takes 'em forever. And they finally note that they see sticking out of a, of a little closet under a stairs, I, I imagine it's kind of the closet that Harry Potter-

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... stayed in. Like-

Justin:

If Harry Potter had typhoid.

Sydnee:

Right. Then, then that's why he was in the closet under the stairs. Um, however, he did not wear blue Calico, apparently Mary Mallon did.

Justin:

Can't play with the Dursleys for that one. Kids got typhoid. I don't care how magic he is. He can be magic as anything.

Sydnee:

Let's keep him under the stairs.

Justin:

Keep him under the stairs. He's got typhoid.

Sydnee:

So they see a little piece of blue cloth, um, underneath the closet door. They open the closet door, she comes out, kicking, screaming, uh, cursing a blue streak, doing everything she can to fight these police officers. Um, but they managed to get her in an ambulance. Dr. Baker would rather... would later describe it as she was a caged lion in the back of the ambulance, just screaming and yelling and throwing a fit. Um, they take her to the hospital. They force her to give blood and stool samples.

Justin:

Oh, cool job.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

"Hey my cool... What's my cool job? Well, my cool job is I get to get a stool sample from a lady who's trying to kill me. That's a cool afternoon.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's a fun.... That's really a no... That's really a kobiyashimaru there, huh?"

Sydnee:

That sounds like a, a great job for the medical student. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I'm kidding! Um, so they take blood and stool samples and this confirms their suspicion. They, they do find the typhoid, uh, bacteria in her stool.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So they send her to North Brother Island, which an island I think like up in the Bronx.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, and to an isolated part of, of a, a hospital, Riverside hospital, for quarantine.

Justin:

Excellent.

Sydnee:

And say, "Just go there and stay. That's where you live now, Mary Mallon-

Justin:

Perfect.

Sydnee:

... on this island." Uh, she... They basically had no end in sight. There was no plan. It's not... They didn't understand like, "Why are you healthy but you're giving people this bacteria? We don't really understand." They didn't explain this to her either. They took some samples, they saw the bacteria and they shipped her off for quarantine. Never explaining to her why in the world... I mean, 'cause at this point, why would she think she had typhoid? She was healthy.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So she gets mad about it. And in 1909, she actually sues the health department. This whole time they were making her send samples to the health department to be analyzed so over, over the course of time, she'd been there so far 163 samples that she'd sent. Of those, 120 were positive. Um, which is just probably indicative of that. She wasn't constantly shedding the bacteria and sometimes they missed it, you know, that kind of thing. Um, but she was having her own doctors run samples on the island and they said they were all negative. I can't really explain the discrepancy, but either way she gets mad, she says, "I don't even have this. They're keeping me here and these doctors are telling me I don't have it." So she sues the health department and the health department wins.

Justin:

Yeah. Clearly.

Sydnee:

So she's still stuck there.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

Until the following year when a new health commissioner takes over and he takes some pity on her. And I will say at this point she was well known in the media. She was called Typhoid Mary. It was all over the newspapers. Like, they had already dubbed her this, um, and, and had made cartoons about her and you know-

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

... she was this, this figure of ridicule. But some public sentiment had started to turn in her favor. There were some people who were starting to sympathize with her and say like, "At least let the lady off the island."

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Why does she have to live... you know. She's healthy-

Justin:

She didn't commit a crime.

Sydnee:

No, she didn't mean to. She didn't know what she was doing. So in 1910, the new health commissioner takes pity on her and allows her to go free. But he says, "This is your contingency. You can't work as a cook, okay?"

Justin:

Let's just be rational.

Sydnee:

"You can't make food for people."

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

So miss Mary Mallon goes on her way. And then in 1915, there's another outbreak of typhoid. This is at Sloan maternity hospital in Manhattan, 25 people become sick and two of them die.

Justin:

Oh no.

Sydnee:

So they go to investigate what's going on at this hospital, to try to figure out where it's coming from and they find a, a cook named Mary Brown who looks suspiciously similar to Mary Mallon, who was not supposed to be cooking for anyone ever again.

Justin:

Uh, It's all she knows though. Cut her some slack.

Sydnee:

So why did, why did Mary go back to cooking? Um, who knows? Part of it is probably, she didn't really understand why she wasn't supposed to. She still didn't believe that she had whatever they told her she had. She didn't... She claimed she never had typhoid to begin with so why would she think she had it? Um, she also probably made a lot more money as a cook than as another domestic servant so it was a better living. Um, when they captured her at this point, the public took no pity on her. Everybody pretty much made her a, a figure of ridicule and she was ostracized. She was sent back to North Brother Island and she lived the remainder of her 23 years-

Justin:

That's sad.

Sydnee:

... quarantined on this island.

Justin:

I know that she, she made... Listen, she made some mistakes, but that's still... I, I still think that's hard.

Sydnee:

Well, it's interesting because in general we kind of look back on Typhoid Mary as like a, as like a bad guy because she, she had this and then she went and worked again and, and people died.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, but to be fair, if I could be a Typhoid Mary sympathizer for a second, uh, she didn't understand, because nobody ever tried to explain it to her. And it... There weren't really a lot of healthier carriers known. Now, after they found her, they started researching this. They started looking for other people who were carriers, but were healthy. And by the time she died, they'd found 400 other people who were also just healthy people who carried typhoid.

Justin:

So here's my question about this that's, that's confusing to me that maybe you can help me clear up. The... She is a healthy carrier, right?

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

So she can infect other people with typhoid?

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

If I were to get typhoid in this time period, and then get through it, I would no longer be contagious after that time period, correct?

Sydnee:

Most likely. Yes.

Justin:

So, so why was her body sort of like in this state of...

Sydnee:

Some people just do. Some people, it lives in their gallbladder, it just kind of takes up, takes up residence there, colonizes them and then it's there for good.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, there was actually... They tried at one point to force her, to have her gallbladder removed theorizing that that may fix this.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, she refused-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... because again, they didn't explain, they just said, "Hey, we want you to have a surgery too."

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

And she said, "No." But, um... So some people did become healthy carriers. Most didn't. Most would just clear it and be done with it. Um, but I should make note, other people were quarantined when they were found to be healthy carriers, were only kept for a couple weeks and let go. There was even one guy who owned a restaurant and baked, who was told to stop doing this if he, uh... in order to... you know, because he was found to be a healthy carrier. And he's basically just said like, "Yeah, I won't do it anymore." And they didn't even like follow up on that. So it's not like she was the only one-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... she was just the only one who was treated this way. Um, nowadays typhoid is still around. There's not as many cases in the US. Uh, usually just returning travelers, people who've been to parts of the developing world where we still see, where we still see a lot of ty- typhoid up to 21.5 million cases a year. There is a vaccine. it's not a hundred percent effective though.

Justin:

You didn't tell me that

Sydnee:

It's not. Uh, so there's the pill-

Justin:

[crosstalk 00:34:47] before we left.

Sydnee:

... you could get a vaccine pill, or you can get a shot either way. Um, antibiotics can treat it. Uh, but the best thing to do is when you're traveling, be careful about your food and water, make sure that, you know, you boil it or it comes from a bottle or that, you know, you know, if you, if you're getting food that rinsing it in water, that's clean and-

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

... like fruits and vegetables, that kind of thing. Um, one thing though, there is a drug resistant strain of typhoid out there now.

Justin:

Great. Excellent.

Sydnee:

So that's, that's horrifying.

Justin:

Okay, good.

Sydnee:

Sorry. I don't have like a silver lining to that.

Justin:

So I'm back to being-

Sydnee:

Sanitation, wash your hands.

Justin:

Okay. Wanna say a big, thanks to the Maximum Fun Network for having us as part of their, uh, uh, family of podcasts. You can hear a lot of, uh, uh, other programs that I guarantee you will like. Check out *Oh No, Ross and Carrie*. It's a, it's a couple, uh, great folks who investigate, uh, uh, everything from cults to weird treatments to everything. If you like *Sawbones*, I bet you will like *Oh No, Ross and Carrie*. That, that is my promise to you, the viewer or the listener. Um-

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

And there's a lot of great shows on the network to checkout. So make sure you do that. Uh, follow us on Twitter @Sawbones. I'm at @JustinMcElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm at @SydneeMcElroy.

Justin:

That's S-Y-D-N-E-E. Thanks to Taxpayers for letting us use the song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. Hey, we're gonna be coming to, uh, Vancouver and Seattle in the, the end of August. If you wanna get tickets to see us with *My Brother, My Brother and Me*, you can go to, uh, bit.ly/mbmbam Seattle, or bit.ly/vanmbmbam. Now these are reserve seats so, uh, if you wanna go to those shows, make sure you do that right this second. And I think that's gonna do for us, Sydster.

Sydnee:

I think so. Thank you, Justin.

Justin:

Thank you. Uh, uh-

Sydnee:

Yo-yo, Justin.

Justin:

Yeah, Yo-yo Justin. Uh, until next Wednesday, when we have another, uh, topic to talk about, I am Yo-yo Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydney McElroy. [laughing]

Justin:

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

[theme music plays out]

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