

Sawbones 82: Heroes of Patent Medicine, Vol. 1

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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 plays]

Justin:

Hello, everybody. Welcome to Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine. I'm your cohost Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy. Justin...

Justin:

Yes, Sydnee?

Sydnee:

We have 30 minutes without the baby.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's true! [laughs].

Sydnee:

What...

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Hey.

Sydnee:

What do you...

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

What do you want to do?

Justin:

What do— What do I want to do?

Sydnee:

What do you want to do? 30 minutes.

Justin:

30 minutes?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

No baby.

Sydnee:

Our brothers and sisters are watching the baby.

Justin:

They're watching the baby, [laughs].

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Yeah, what do you want to do?

Justin:

Oh. Well, Sydnee, what I want to do is take a nap.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Is there anything else you might want to do?

Justin:

Well, we've got to do the podcast.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

They came to see...

Sydnee:

We have 30 minutes and you want to do a podcast?

Justin:

Well, we have to do the podcast, though. We have to do it now. It's the time on the tickets.

Sydnee:

They'll wait. I mean, it's... They're fine.

Justin:

I don't think they'll wait for us to do that.

Sydnee:

They... You guys understand, right? Seriously.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

What about it, guys? Are you ready? Are you ready for this, uh, podcast show to turn into some sort of weird performance art?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Shut up. You'll wake the baby. I swear to God.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

She's right back there. Okay. Thanks. All right. You know, you're right, you're right. You know what, later, maybe I'll just like slip her a little Benadryl or something.

Justin:

What? You're a physician.

Sydnee:

Just a little bit.

Justin:

You're a doctor.

Sydnee:

I mean, it could be worse.

Justin:

I saw that in Grown Ups 2.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Are you taking parenting tips from Grown Ups 2?

Sydnee:

Is that wrong? Is that...

Justin:

Is the worst idea of all time.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

I mean, it could be worse. It could be, like, soothing syrup. That was way worse, back when they used to use that. That had, like, opium, and they gave it to babies.

Audience Member:

Yeah!

Justin:

I... Now, I don't... Okay.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's a weird—

Sydnee:

Somebody's in to that.

Justin:

Somebody's into... "Yeah! Babies! Slow that development!"

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, now, I don't know— I don't know soothing syrup.

Sydnee:

You remember. We talked about it. We talked about patent medicines, and we talked about, like, when we gave opium to babies. And there were all kinds of crazy medicines that we used in, like, the 1800s...

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

... that were fake. Except, they got you high or drunk or something, so everybody was like, "Yay."

Justin:

"Yeah!"

Sydnee:

"These are great!"

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh...

Sydnee:

"The baby's been asleep for 18 hours!"

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

This is one of the few topics, because of our previous episode, uh, on which I am not a total dullard, which is nice.

Sydnee:

For once!

Justin:

For once.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

So we're gonna do a three part Sawbones series about the heroes of patent medicine. It's kicking off here tonight in Minneapolis.

Sydnee:

Woohoo!

Audience:

Woo!

Justin:

I swear to God, she's a light sleeper. I will come down there.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, Minneapolis...

Sydnee:

And don't give your babies Benadryl. That was just a joke.

Justin:

That's just a joke.

Sydnee:

That was just a bit.

Justin:

If there are any lawyers in the house...

Sydnee:

That was a joke. No, we don't do that. Don't do that.

Justin:

So Syd, who are we talking about tonight?

Sydnee:

Tonight, I thought we would talk about a really great character from the patent medicine era. His name was Coozan Dudley Leblanc.

Audience Member:

Woo! Yeah!

Sydnee:

[laughs] All right.

Justin:

Some of his relatives are here tonight.

Sydnee:

Dudley's got some fans.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

What's up, all you Leblanc heads?

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And I think Coozan was like... It was like "cousin."

Justin:

But with a little verve.

Sydnee:

He was— He was from New Orleans.

Justin:

N'awleans.

Sydnee:

Coozan... I don't know.

Justin:

No, I don't know.

Sydnee:

I'm not— I don't know.

Justin:

Coozan.

Sydnee:

I don't have the Cajun thing. I don't know. Anyway, so he was born in 1894, and he had kind of some, like, failures first. He wanted to make medicine, but not real medicine, 'cause that's no fun. Let's make medicine that makes people happy. So he made a cough syrup and not much came of that. He made a Happy Day Headache Powder, which sounds great.

Justin:

Now, we should mention, Syd... Can you— Before we get too deep into Coozan...

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Uh, Dudley, I'm... Am I saying that right, all you New Orleans, uh, residents out there? Is Harry Connick Jr. here?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Could he tell... critique my singing and also tell me if I'm saying "Coozan" right? Um, what are patent medicines? Can you...

Sydnee:

Okay. So, patent medicines...

Justin:

It's a misleading name.

Sydnee:

Exactly. They were not patented. They were medicines... Because if they had been patented, they would've had to say what was in them. And specifically they didn't want to tell you what was in them...

Justin:

'Cause it was garbage.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

We were drinking garbage.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Nothing in them that would actually cure anything. But they did have fun stuff, like I said, like opium or marijuana or alcohol. A lot of them had a lot of alcohol.

Justin:

A lot of alcohol.

Sydnee:

Uh, cocaine.

Audience Member:

Woo.

Sydnee:

Cocaine was a popular ingredient.

Justin:

A lot of coke heads in the audience. Cool? I guess?

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Okay?

Sydnee:

So they were really well marketed...

Justin:

"Love that stuff."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Yeah. Not enough cocaine shout outs lately. What's up?"

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Sorry. Woo.

Sydnee:

I think, really, [laughs], the story of patent medicines is why have the FDA, because everybody was like, "This cures everything," and then finally the government said, "Uh, maybe we should make some laws about that." Like, you can't just sell stuff with cocaine that says, "Hey, this will fix your heart attack."

Justin:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Now, it seems like... Now Sydnee, I know you pulled that out of thin air. It seems like there would be some pretty easy, demonstrable evidence piling up fairly quickly.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

People fell for this stuff for a long time.

Justin:

Yeah, but if you say, "This cures my heart attack..."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I think, wait a minute. It didn't... Well, who's gonna sue 'em? [laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

So, now we know what patent medicines are, that are, by definition, not patented.

Sydnee:

Not patented.

Justin:

The patent refers to what?

Sydnee:

The patent refers to the— The origins of patent medicines was actually over in Europe like 200 years before they came here, and you would get like a kind or a duke or an earl or somebody important, somebody royal to endorse your medicine. And so it was like, it was a king's patent. "This is patented by the Duke of..."

Audience Member:

Earl.

Sydnee:

Earl! [laughs].

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

The Earl of Sandwich.

Sydnee:

So you had like a piece of paper that said like, "This duke thinks my medicine rocks," and that was your patent.

Justin:

So, like our cat food is Dick Van Patten's Natural Balance...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's a Dick Van Patten patent, which is a joke I just wrote for you.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

She, I swear... The podcast will be over, [laughs]. We will hear a crying baby and she will walk off the stage.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, sorry, Syd.

Sydnee:

So, do you want to hear about Dudley?

Justin:

Tell me about Coozan Dudley Leblanc.

Sydnee:

Okay. So, he initially worked as a pants presser, like I said, and then he wanted to make some medicine, [laughs].

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So he was like, "I'm gonna start making the medicine." He wasn't really successful, so he went into politics instead, 'cause that's what you do, right? If you can't do anything else, [laughs], go into politics. Why not? Uh, so he served in both houses of the legislature.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

He ran for governor.

Justin:

Then he wanted— He wanted a distinguished career...

Sydnee:

He didn't win.

Justin:

... after that, and decided to make patent medicines.

Sydnee:

Um, and he wasn't doing very well. So he finally... He sold... He had an insurance business. He sold that business, and he said, "You know, I'm just... I'm not getting anywhere. I've got to find some way to make a ton of money by swindling people."

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

'Cause, you know...

Justin:

And he was already in government, so you think he would've figured it out by then.

Sydnee:

And he, [laughs]...

Justin:

Whoa, this took a weird libertarian turn all of a sudden, [laughs].

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Sorry, it's not usually like this.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs], but what was really holding him back is that he was sick.

Justin:

Of what?

Sydnee:

He didn't feel well.

Justin:

Oh, he was sick.

Sydnee:

What he actually... No, he was just sick. What he actually had, what we know now is that he had Beriberi. He had thiamine deficiency.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Vitamin B1. And so, he went to his doctor, and he was... He told them all his symptoms, and he was like, "Look, I don't feel good." And the doctor was like, "Uh, take this shot of stuff that I made up. This is a great shot. I give it to all my patients, they love it. I'm gonna give you a shot of it." So he gave him a shot, and after several treatments with this, he started feeling a lot better, which made sense because it was a shot of a bunch of B vitamins.

So the doctor was actually fixing him, but Dudley didn't know that. He just thought, "Whatever's in that shot, I gotta sell it to people and make a lot of money." So what actually happened, he asked, he kept asking the doctor,

"Give me your recipe, man. Let's make a ton of money. I can really make you rich, and me, if you tell me." And the doctor wouldn't tell him.

So at one point he, like, tricked the nurse who gave him the shot. He, like, sweet talked her, and she wasn't looking, and anyway, he grabbed the bottle. And he had it, like, analyzed. I don't... How do you have it analyzed?

Anyway, he figured out what was in it, and he made that formula of B vitamins and said, "I'm gonna start selling this to people." And he really did believe, I will say this, he really did believe it was, you know...

Justin:

True believer.

Sydnee:

Yes. He believed it would cure anything. So he got the formula, and he said, "I need a name for it." And, like I said, he'd already started selling this Happy Day Headache Powder, so he liked this "Happy Day" thing. He thought that sounded good.

Justin:

Yeah. I feel better already.

Sydnee:

That's what you want to, when you have a medicine, you want it to be happy day...[laughs].

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, happy day cholesterol lowering medication.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

It sounds like a Japanese imported, uh, medicine.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So he had the Happy Day Company, and then his last name was Leblanc, so he had Ha-da-co-l, Hadacol is what the medicine was called.

Justin:

Hadacol.

Sydnee:

Hadacol, Happy Day Company L...

Justin:

It sounds real. I mean, when you say it, try saying that right now to yourself, "Hadacol." It sounds like a real medicine.

Sydnee:

When you asked him later, in later years, "Why did you call it that?" He would say, "Well, I had-a-col it something."

Audience:

[laughs and groans]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's pretty good. As a dad, I can appreciate that joke.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That hits me right in my spot.

Sydnee:

You like that?

Justin:

That's right up my alley.

Sydnee:

I thought you'd like that.

Justin:

I'm gonna put... Hold on one second.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I'm gonna tuck that one in the old pocket for a minute here.

Sydnee:

That's in his dad jacket now.

Justin:

Yeah, put that in my dad jacket.

Sydnee:

So do you want to know what was in it?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

What was really in it? Okay. Really, what was in it, in Hadacol, was a couple vitamins, B1, 2, 6, 5, niacin, iron, manganese, calcium, honey, citric acid, hydrochloric acid, but most importantly, it was 12% alcohol.

Justin:

All right.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So there you go. And the amount of alcohol in an 8 ounce bottle, which is what they usually sold, was about like two cocktails, which isn't like a ton... Well, I mean, it's medicine, so I guess that's a lot for medicine. But like, generally, [laughs], that's not a ton of alcohol. But the hydrochloric acid in it actually made you absorb it a lot faster.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Perfect.

Sydnee:

So...

Justin:

They should start adding that to regular alcohol.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

As a busy dad on the go, I can appreciate being able to absorb my alcohol faster than, uh, just swallowing it. Ugh, who has the time, [laughs].

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Drink a whole bottle of Hadacol? What am I, made of time?

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

I've got kids to put to bed.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And, [laughs]... And what was—

Justin:

She's laughing 'cause it hits a little close to home.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] And what was it marketed for? Well, everything.

Justin:

Everything.

Sydnee:

Of course. Everything.

Justin:

Cure all. And cure alls cure... nothing. That's right.

Sydnee:

Yeah, nothing. Um, so basically anything, blood pressure, ulcers, strokes, asthma, arthritis, diabetes, epilepsy, anemia, cancer, hay fever, [laughs]. Whatever you got, [laughs].

Justin:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

I hope they're listed that way on the bottle. "Anemia, cancer, uh... hay fever. Okay. That should have been earlier, but that's fine."

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

The dose, you take one tablespoon. You put it in a half glass water. You take it four times a day, [laughs]. And it was sold in two sizes. Like I said, there was the eight ounce size, and then there was also the 24 ounce size.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Or the family size, [laughs].

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Little something for everybody in the Hadacol bottle.

Sydnee:

You got to share.

Justin:

Should call it the dad size.

Sydnee:

In- in some dry counties, it was actually sold by the shot glass in pharmacies. Like, you'd go to the pharmacy and be like, "Give me a shot of Hadacol. I'm feeling... My hay fever is acting up. Feeling real anemic here. Um, there were some places where you could only buy it in liquor stores.

Justin:

Good sign, good sign.

Sydnee:

And the great thing about Hadacol was the marketing. Now, Dudley would go on to spend way more on advertising than pretty much any of the patent medicine people. At one point, he was the second largest, um, like, spender of advertiser dollars in the country. The first being Coca-Cola.

Justin:

Yeah. The thing you got to know about patent medicines is it was- it was almost exclusively a marketing play. I mean, for a time, uh, newspapers in America were, uh, able to function because of patent medicine manufacturers. They made up like 35 something percent of advertising in, uh, the nation.

Sydnee:

Exactly. So they weren't patented, but they were trademarked and branded out the wazoo. And Dudley was the king. So he said, "You know, it's one thing to sell to adults with your usual ads," like there was one ad that even had like a picture of Santa Claus saying like, "I use Hadacol too!" [laughs]

Justin:

Well, like... you laugh. 364 days a year that's fine.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

What's he got to do? Like, can you cut him some slack? He works one night a year!

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

[theme song plays]

[ad break]

Sydnee:

But Dudley liked the idea that he could enlist, like, young users of Hadacol. Like, "I need kids—"

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

"...to use this stuff." So he started marketing directly to children, um, [laughs], first of all by inventing a comic book character, Captain Hadacol.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Yeah. Coming this summer from Marvel Studios. You've all seen, uh, John Hamm in the trailer. He looks great in the suit.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And that was good for kids, and teenagers were already getting on board 'cause they... I mean, they got it. They were like, "Well, I might live in a dry county. I need some Hadacol, Mom!" [fake coughs] "Really... just, my cough. It really helps."

Justin:

"Do you need to stay home from school, sweetheart?"

"Nope. No. I don't feel, like, that kind. I feel like the kind where I need Hadacol."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"So if you could..."

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And his big thing, in addition to marketing to kids, he also had testimonials, because the thing with the testimonial is that you're not saying it. And there were some rules as to, like, if you're selling a medicine, you can't say, "This cures cancer." You can say, "Use for the treatment of..." but you couldn't say it cured it.

But if you were a patient who took it, you could say whatever you wanted. So you could say, "I took Hadacol, and it cured... whatever." You know, "It cured my pneumonia. It cured my tuberculosis." You could say that. So that was his big thing was, "Let's just get people who will come and say they used my product and that it worked on whatever they had."

And he would even take pictures of them signing the testimonials, so that he could show 'em, like if he was ever, you know, if the authorities ever showed up, like, "Look, there they are. They signed it. It's cool."

Justin:

Absolutely.

Sydnee:

Uh, some of them were really outlandish. One of my favorite was, [laughs], "Two months ago I could not read or write."

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

"I took four bottles of Hadacol..."

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

"And now I'm teaching school."

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

I... Two questions.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Just one, is he sure he took Hadacol? Because there's really no way for him to prove it.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

'Cause he couldn't read.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

What, you guys aren't into illiteracy? You got cocaine fans that don't like illiteracy jokes. Great. Cool crowd.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Twin cities.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And, [laughs], whenever the FDA would step in and say, "Hey, look. What you're saying is crossing the line," you know, "It... That's a little too much. I don't think you can back that up," he'd just make it more vague. At one point, the slogan for Hadacol was, "Hadacol is good for what ails you if what ails you is what Hadacol was good for."

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's amazing. That's a great—

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's pretty good. It's like the, "nobody doesn't like Sara Lee," of his time.

Sydnee:

And it was working. He was making, by 1949, he was making 24 million dollars a year.

Justin:

Whoa.

Sydnee:

On Hadacol, selling Had— One thing, selling Hadacol! But he was also spending a million a year on advertising. So like I said, I mean, he was— He was the king. And he continued this whole thing about like, "Well, we've already got this Captain Hadacol comic book character. We really need to get the kid market. We really need to get more..."

Justin:

Lock it down.

Sydnee:

"...kids into Hadacol." So he started with, like, Hadacol dolls, like, squirt guns, um...

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

There were like...

Justin:

So you blast a Hadacol right in. "Kids, time to get your Hadacol extreme."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

"With the super junker, blast it!"

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs], you could get, of course, Hadacol T-shirts, Hadacol lip stick. There were cowboy holsters that said Hadacol on 'em.

Justin:

And you put your Hadacol squirt guns. Quick draw, quick drunk!

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

He even—

Justin:

This was in... The... When was this time period?

Sydnee:

We're in, like, 1949, 1950s, early 1950s.

Justin:

If you ever... Sometimes you might look around and think, like, "Man, I'm living in the coolest time period ever. Can you believe we have teleportation, sort of. We have jet packs. We have virtual reality." There was a time period in this nation where you could walk down the street, [laughs], and see kids with a... You could see drunk kids with holsters full of more alcohol.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Like, can you imagine going about your business and you see a kid looking like, "Hey, what's up?" [makes choking noises]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I'm turnt."

"You're— You're eight! You're not turnt!"

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

That was a cool time period. Let me live back then. Man Men didn't go back far enough.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

I want to see Don Draper with a cocktail, sitting next to a seven year old with like a big cowboy hat on, like, "Hey, what's up? Tough day, huh?"
[imitates squirt gun] "Just squirt... just blasting some more 'Col."

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs], there was actually... I was thinking about this when I was putting this together. There was actually an episode of Man Men, do you remember that, when they got all— They all got shots of something? And they all kind of went nuts?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

I bet it was something like this.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It was not Hadacol, but something in that... Just on a side note. Just thinking about that. Anyway...

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Yup.

Sydnee:

Um, so with the kids. He— Like I said, he really wanted to get kids involved, 'cause who doesn't, [laughs].

Justin:

It's okay.

Sydnee:

Who's not thinking about the kids first?

Justin:

I believe the children are our future.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So he would give kids free Hadacol gift cards, like, "Take this to your pharmacy, and you can get one free bottle of Hadacol." And he knew, like, kids don't want a free bottle of Hadacol. So what they would do is, he actually would convince the kids to sell...

Justin:

Cool kids—

Sydnee:

... the Hadacol.

Justin:

Cool kids do want a free bottle of Hadacol.

Sydnee:

Well, yeah. Teenagers would just drink it. But little kids would go get their free bottle of Hadacol and then try to sell it to their neighbors [laughs]. How much better would that be instead of them showing up with like, "Do you want some magazines? Do you want to buy..." I don't know, whatever their...

Justin:

"Are you cool—"

Sydnee:

"Do you want to sponsor me in the walk for whatever?" [laughs].

Justin:

No. Instead, the kid shows up, he's like...

Sydnee:

"Buy Hadacol."

Justin:

"Do you party?"

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

"You cool?"

Sydnee:

So he had, like, a whole child army of salesmen selling his alcoholic Hadacol. Um, and you could also, you could get Hadacol box tops. [laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

And do what? What were those good for?

Sydnee:

You could trade those in for things like roller skates and air rifles. So...

Justin:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So then the kids are, like, going to mom and dad, like, "Mom, mom, mom, mom, mom!" [laughs] "Get me some Hadacol!" For the box top.

Justin:

"I'm still working my way through the last few bottles. Get out of here, Rusty."

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

That was also... And I think we've mentioned this before, this was also the time where there were medicine shows. So there were these, like, traveling carnivals that would go all over the country. And they would... The whole purpose was to sell you something. So in this— At this time, Hadacol. But they would also have, like, movies and theatrical performances and songs and, like, strongmen and all kinds of crazy things.

Um, but at the end of the day, all they were really trying to do was convince you, like, "Buy this stuff." The admission to any of his medicine shows were two box tops from Hadacol.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Self-perpetuating cycle, I'm into that.

Sydnee:

Exactly. Um, and he would create like these huge radio promos anywhere that his medicine show would go. That was the big thing is he knew he was gonna hit a town, and ahead of time he would start... There were— There were a few steps to it.

First of all, he would run a radio give away for bottles of Hadacol. So people could come to the show where, in places where, like, they weren't selling Hadacol yet. So they would say, like, "We're gonna have a show here, but your pharmacist isn't selling Hadacol. But we'll give you a free bottle of Hadacol, but you gotta get it from your pharmacist. How are we gonna get around that?"

So basically what would happen is all these winners would have these gift certificates for free bottles of Hadacol, and they'd go running into their drug stores, and say, "Get this stuff on the shelves. You gotta get it now! I have a free thing! I don't know what it is, but I want it 'cause it's free!"

Justin:

Yeah. "Some guy gave me a bottle, and I'm starting to sober up!"

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I need you to get more Hadacol!"

Sydnee:

He would actually pay, uh, housewives specifically. If he could find women, he would say, "What I want to do, I'll give you, whatever, five bucks... Go to your pharmacy and beg the druggist for Hadacol."

And so these poor pharmacies would just be overwhelmed with people begging for Hadacol, and so finally, they would start calling him and saying like, "Listen, man. How much? I gotta get this stuff. Everybody wants it, so sell it to me." And so then, that way he would sell more Hadacol, which is pretty ingenious.

Justin:

Yeah, it's pretty smart.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Makes me want to get in that game.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

And then of course he'd bring his medicine show to town, and he'd sell tons of Hadacol, and everybody loved it. And the medicine shows got huge. For the time, the celebrities they got were crazy.

Justin:

Like who?

Sydnee:

Okay. So some of the celebrities that were in the Hadacol medicine shows, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Mickey Rooney, Caesar Romero, Carmen Miranda, Jimmy Durante, Rudy Vallée, Hank Williams. All in the Hadacol medicine show.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

Was Caesar Romero in the Joker outfit at the time?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

'Cause I would be deeply disturbed if I had just drunk a bunch of Hadacol and then Caesar Romero popped up with that weird mustache below the makeup. Oh, just... just shave it, Caesar. With the... Was the music, uh, Hadacol themed?

Sydnee:

It was. There was a song written, the Hadacol Boogie. It was a really popular song at the time. And then Hank Williams would close out every show with a

song about Hadacol as well that he wrote, personally, about Hadacol and how much he loved it, 'cause... all the alcohol?

Um, but eventually like all patent medicines, the good days ended when the American Medical Association and the...

Justin:

Ugh! These guys!

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

I know. Buzzkill.

Audience Member:

Thanks, Obama!

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] Thanks, Obama indeed, sir.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

He ruined everything. Just trying to get some drunk kids out there.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

The AMA came out and basically said, "We hope no doctor ever tells anyone to take this for anything ever." Um, Time Magazine reviewed it and said, "It's

basically a murky brown liquid that tastes something like bilge water and smells worse," which kind of hurt its popularity.

Justin:

Squares.

Sydnee:

And then— And then, of course, the FDA stepped in and said, "Okay. I don't care what your testimonials are. I don't care what you're doing. These are all lies. This is not— This is not fixing anything. You gotta stop." Even that though, that wasn't the reason they went under. It was really just money. He was spending so much on advertising, which is crazy considering how much they were making, that the company eventually just collapsed because of how much he was spending trying to sell people more Hadacol.

Justin:

Hadacol.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs] They tried to bring it back in both 1987 and 1997, which doesn't seem that long ago.

Audience:

[laughs]

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

Yeah. There were people who tried to revive it and sell Hadacol again. And by then, I guess we're just informed enough to know, "No, that's just booze. I can buy... I got beer. I don't know. I don't need that." [laughs]

Justin:

You laugh, but you almost certainly have a patent medicine in your, uh, medicine cabinet at home right now. Syd, what are some patent medicines that are still for sale?

Sydnee:

Uh, Luden's...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Cough drops.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Those are. Um, an original, uh, Angostura Bitters was originally a patent medicine.

Justin:

Yup.

Sydnee:

So you might have that.

Justin:

Goody's Headache Powder, right?

Sydnee:

Goody's Headache Powder was, yeah.

Justin:

A lot of head... A lot of them. Uh, folks, uh, thank you so much to... for being so kind to us here in Minneapolis. Uh, thank you to the Cedar for having us here. This is a beautiful place. We've had the most fun.

Everybody's been super, super nice. Uh, they filled our whole hospitality rider, which means free booze.

Sydnee:

So, thank you.

Justin:

Great, great—

Sydnee:

I love this beer. Thank you very much.

Justin:

Thanks. Thanks, guys. Uh, we, uh... Just to let you all know, there are posters for sale. Um... Travis told me where they are, and I forget.

Sydnee:

They're over there.

Justin:

They're over there.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

The audience knows. Thank you, guys.

Justin:

The audience knows where they're for sale.

Sydnee:

Good looking out, [laughs].

Justin:

Buy one of those. They're specific to this show. So this is the only place that you can, uh, get these, they say. I mean, there's other ones that look like them that we're selling on this tour, but they're— They say the name of Minneapolis on the bottom.

Audience:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

[crosstalk] Which is Minneapolis. That is the name of Minneapolis, [laughs]. I'm assuming that's what you go by.

Justin:

Right now, look around you. This is Minneapolis. You've made it. Uh, thank you to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song, uh, the Medicines. Uh, thank you to you, Sydnee, for uh, coming with, uh, me and letting us bring the baby.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Um, thank you to the baby for apparently sleeping through the show.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Audience:

[cheers]

Justin:

Shut up!

Sydnee:

Guys!

Justin:

And uh... I think that's gonna do it for us, right?

Past **Justin:**

Sorry to interrupt past Justin and past Sydnee. It's present Justin and Sydnee. Uh, we want to tell you first off, good luck with that flight home, 'cause woof, it's a doozy.

Justin:

Uh, that's gonna do it for us until next time that we, uh, get to see all your smiling faces again. I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[Hadacol Boogie plays]