

Sawbones 83: Heroes of Patent Medicine, Vol 2.

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[theme song plays]

Justin:

Hello? Hi. Hello, Milwaukee.

Audience:

[cheers]

Justin:

This is nice. Hi, I'm uh, Justin McElroy. Welcome to Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine. I, as I just said, am your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Audience:

[cheers]

Justin:

Okay. That's cool. Cool start to the show, uh...

Sydnee:

Now, if you could all just keep it down. We have a baby.

Justin:

Yeah. Just pipe... Shh.

Sydnee:

She's asleep upstairs. So just—

Justin:

Just pipe down a little bit. Um, yeah, just don't get too rambunctious. We'll—

Sydnee:

That's his brother's problem now, so...

Justin:

Yeah. What—

Sydnee:

Just, you know, scream as much as you want.

Justin:

So, uh, we've been visiting here in Wisconsin. Uh, we went through the, uh, Wisconsin Dells on our way here. Shout out, shout out to the, uh, Paul Bunion Lumberjack Show, was it?

Sydnee:

We didn't mean to stop up there. The baby just needed to eat, so...

Justin:

Yeah. Wait, there we were.

Sydnee:

And we were like, "Where are we?"

Justin:

Sydnee, have you, um, have you visited Milwaukee before?

Sydnee:

Uh, no, Justin, I haven't, but you know, Milwaukee has certainly had its share of visitors.

Justin:

Uh, is that right?

Sydnee:

Yeah. In fact, French missionaries and explorers have been coming here as early as the late 1600s.

Justin:

Uh, in fact isn't Milwaukee a Native American word?

Sydnee:

Yes, it is, Justin. It's actually pronounced mili-wa-keh, which is Algonquin for 'the good land.'

Justin:

Does this girl know how to party or what? It's my favorite movie? Uh, well, oh, wait a minute, we don't have a transition. What is the show about?

Sydnee:

I do.

Justin:

Oh, you do? Okay. Got away...

Sydnee:

No, I thought about this.

Justin:

Pretend I didn't say that. We'll get it in post.

Sydnee:

Speaking of Native Americans.

Justin:

Okay, cool.

Sydnee:

Uh, we've talked before about patent medicines.

Justin:

If you're... If a podcast host starts a conversation that way, you're cool. If your uncle does at Thanksgiving, you should just leave the room. Things are about to break bad.

Sydnee:

We've talked before about patent medicines...

Justin:

Correct.

Sydnee:

... do you remember this?

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

You're familiar?

Justin:

I am.

Sydnee:

'Cause I told you about it, so...

Justin:

Oh, yes.

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

We are in the middle of a three part series. You don't know this yet, but you are a part two of a three part series during this, uh, lovely Midwest tour of, uh, of patent medicines.

Sydnee:

Right. Heroes of patent medicine.

Justin:

Hero— "Heroes" of patent medicine. If you're listening, uh, I just did air quotes.

Sydnee:

And the way this ties in more or less to what we just did is that, uh, one of the... so patent medicines, let's talk about what they are first.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Okay. So go ahead. I've told you before, I'm gonna let you, I'm gonna let you educate everybody.

Justin:

Oh, well, Sydnee, surprised you don't know. Well, little lady, just sit back, let me explain it out to you. Uh, patent medicines are defined almost by their absence of having a patent because to get a patent in the way that we traditionally think of it would mean registering their ingredients with the government and their ingredients were usually, uh, poison and garbage. So you don't want to put that on...

Sydnee:

And booze.

Justin:

And booze. You don't wanna put that on a label.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

So the patent that they're referring to is actually a patent issued by, uh, royalty, basically akin to, like, a celebrity endorsement is, is how they would use patents.

Sydnee:

And these were really popular in the US, especially in the 1800s and into the early 1900s. And basically, they were heavily marketed and advertised, but they didn't really do anything. And one of the most popular kind of themes that you'd find in patent medicine was to call on like the wisdom of the Native Americans to market their product to you. Like, uh, you know this is good because it's all natural. And we talked with some Native Americans and they told us it was good.

Justin:

It was good stuff. We went to the trees that they were shaving bark off of and said, "Hey, let me get a slice when you're done with that."

Sydnee:

And anybody who wasn't white basically, was seen as a great resource for kind of medicines that were closer to the land and more natural. So a lot of these salesmen would pretend to be some other ethnicity in order to, to sell more of their product.

Justin:

Can you gimme an example?

Sydnee:

So our first hero of patent medicine that we wanna talk about is Prince Nanzetta.

Justin:

That sounds exotic.

Sydnee:

Doesn't it?

Justin:

From a distant land.

Sydnee:

From the distant land of Los Angeles.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

Yes. So he was from LA. He was... Actually, his heritage was Mexican. Uh, but he was from LA and he was a patent medicine salesman and he wasn't very successful at first. He would stand on corners and just sell whatever, you know, mix of alcohol or opium or cocaine or whatever that people would buy that day. And he would use a... do you know what a tripe and keister is?

Justin:

No, ma'am.

Sydnee:

It was one of those, if you've ever seen like the suitcase on the tripod thing.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

You know? And he just...

Justin:

Tripe... Yeah, I know.

Sydnee:

Tripe and keister.

Justin:

Like the wizard, like the wizard of Oz had...

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

... when he was crappy?

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

Like just a regular dude. At the beginning in Kansas.

Sydnee:

Right. When he was crappy.

Justin:

He was... Well, he was just like... He was crappy. He was like, wasn't giant or green or anything, he was just a regular black and white dude. He's kind of crappy by comparison. Crappy.

Sydnee:

Well, when the prince was just pitching as just a guy, he wasn't selling very much medicine. So he was like, you know, people don't really know what ethnicity I am just by looking at me, so I could say I'm anything. So he made up this whole story about being from the Himalayas. And he said, "So my family was captured by a tribe of Himalayan yak herders."

Justin:

Notorious, the notorious Himalayan yak herders.

Sydnee:

Exactly. "And, uh, all of my family was killed, but they spared me because they liked me, but they made me a slave because they didn't like me that much."

Justin:

So it's like Princess Bride. It's basically Dread Pirate Roberts, basically.

Sydnee:

Yes. And that's exactly what happened. Eventually they were like, "Hey, do you, do you wanna be a prince instead of a slave? We like you a lot."

Justin:

"Oh, I don't know. Let me ponder for a second."

Sydnee:

"I might kill you in the morning."

Justin:

"I don't really like working for free all the time till I die. So yeah. I guess prince sounds pretty good."

Sydnee:

So they made him a prince.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Can you just make somebody a prince? Don't you have to like be born something?

Justin:

Well, if your whole story is a complete and utter fabrication, I mean, you... I guess you can do whatever you want. Yes, and, right?

Sydnee:

And as you do with princes, they taught him all of their medical secrets, of course.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Which was what...

Justin:

That's the first thing about being a prince. That's why it's so exhausting.

Sydnee:

You know all the medical stuff. And then...

Justin:

You ever see Prince in concert? If you... If somebody breaks a bone in the first five rows, he's like, "Hold on one second. Dearly beloved, dear, dearly beloved, I need to make a splint."

Sydnee:

"You are about to get the sexiest splint anybody's ever gotten."

Justin:

"It's pure velvet. Velvet splint."

Sydnee:

So he... So the prince learned all of the medical secrets and then one day he escaped, which, why would you escape? You're a prince.

Justin:

Yeah. He learned all the medical secrets, he had to get out there on the road.

Sydnee:

So he escaped and he brought them back to the US and, and to support this whole story that he'd created and this and this new persona that he had, he would wear these long crimson robes, 'cause like the people he was selling to, they didn't really know like what the appropriate clothing would be or what people from, you know, anywhere in the Himalayas looked like or would wear. So he would wear these long robes with gold trim and he carried a sword in an ivory case. And he said that it was the royal sword of Tibet.

Justin:

Mm.

Sydnee:

And I mean, does Tibet have a royal sword? What does it look like? I don't know.

Justin:

How flimsy is their customs department there? "Is this from..."

"No, no, no, no, no. Replica, replica, not real. It's fine. I'll just go ahead and take it, take it through."

Sydnee:

He would wear a medallion that he said was the royal seal of Tibet. And again like there's no Google, I don't know, maybe it was.

Justin:

There was Google, but it was just a giant book and you... only one guy could have it at a time. So it was like, who has the time to wait?

Sydnee:

Check Google, hold on, boom. Um, this guy was so convincing and this worked, he sold tons of medicine this way and he, and he was so convincing that at one point a politician that was popular in that time period, Mark Hanna appeared with him on the campaign trail, like invited him to sit with him up on the stage as he was making his speeches and was like, take it from my buddy Prince Nanzetta.

Justin:

Prince Nanzetta.

Sydnee:

He's got his royal sword here and he's gonna vote for me, so you should too.

Justin:

I would... I mean, I'd vote for somebody who had the guts to do that for sure.

Sydnee:

He also... One other fact about him that I really like, he had a valet that would carry around his, his sword or whatever. And he would get the... The amount that he would get paid each day was based on how many times he referred to him as your Royal Highness in public.

Justin:

That sounds good, but like could get obnoxious basically pretty quickly. Like, did you want ketchup your Royal Highness?

Sydnee:

I don't think it would. Do you wanna, do you wanna try that? Do you wanna maybe...

Justin:

Oh yeah. I'll give it run sweetheart.

Sydnee:

Let's, let's give it a run today.

Justin:

Let's give it... Yeah. We'll give it a try and see...

Sydnee:

... and just, you know, just a trial run and see like—

Justin:

... see how it feels. Try it on, your Royal Highness.

Sydnee:

Thank you. There we go. Okay. No, it's fine. It's, it's really... It's fine. I like it.

Justin:

It's fine? Okay, yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah. It's good. No, keep that up.

Justin:

Feels right.

Sydnee:

So let's talk about somebody else.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Okay. So another, another one of our favorite, uh, patent medicine salesman was J.I. Light Hall.

Justin:

J.I. Light Hall.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Those are weird initials to like, like to go but.

Justin:

Julio Ignatius.

Sydnee:

J.I.?

Justin:

Julio Iglesias Light Hall.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, what's better, he was known as the Diamond King. And I think if I were him, that's what I'd go by.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

It's... Yeah. It's easier to remember.

Sydnee:

So the Diamond King was born in Illinois in 1956 and he left home at 11 to seek his fortune.

Justin:

11?

Sydnee:

11.

Justin:

Was he kidnapped by Himalayan yak herders?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

He left of his own volition, huh?

Sydnee:

He was not yet the Diamond King. He was the diamond, uh...

Justin:

Prince, I guess.

Sydnee:

... elementary school...

Justin:

Yeah, okay.

Sydnee:

... student. [laughs] Um, he called on his heritage. So, so as we talked about, something exotic or something that wasn't like a white guy was seen as like, oh, you have more wisdom, and so you probably know more about medicine. And he was one eighth Wyandot Indian.

Justin:

Wyan—? So Wyandot?

Sydnee:

Wyandot.

Justin:

Wyandot.

Sydnee:

Wyandot. And so he would use that, that, "Hey, I'm one eighth Native American to try to form relationships with Native Americans that he met in his travels. I'm sure that went over great, by the way.

Justin:

Uh, yeah, I saw, uh, people try that in college and it never panned out very well. "Oh, you're one-eighth... Yeah, me too. I have like 116, 132."

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Something like that. Some fraction of...

Sydnee:

Look at this feather. [laughs] See? That I'm wearing?

Justin:

"Yeah. Look at my hair, see how it just lies flat like that? I'm like, half Algonquin."

Sydnee:

Um, so he really did wanna learn about Native American medical traditions. And so he really tried to study herbal medicine. He, he liked the idea that vegetables would be a great source of medicine. And so he tried to make all different kinds of medicine out of vegetables.

Justin:

Sesame street has been trying to sell you that line for years, though. I don't see why this guy's such a bad... But how many times do you have to see Popeye jam spinach and get huge muscles? Nice try. Nice try, science. Nice try. Now I know you're a fraud.

Sydnee:

But he wasn't, he wasn't having a ton of success. I'm assuming, because at this point he's like what? 12, 13? I don't know. I mean, remember he started when he was 11, so...

Justin:

Yeah. On the— Listen, if an 11 year old tried to sell me patent medicine, I would guaranteed 100% buy it. Especially if he had scrawled the label, like with crayon or whatever they had instead of crayon back then, 'cause it sucked, like charcoal. I don't know. Charcoal, uh, and I... and he was like, "Hey mister, you want some stuff? It's not poison and garbage. I promise." And I would know it was poison and garbage and booze, but I'd buy some anyway. You know? I might even take a bowl just to placate that old guy.

Sydnee:

Well, things really took off for the Diamond King, I'm assuming, after his voice changed. And then also, um, when he met up with Dr. Neff.

Justin:

Dr. Neff.

Sydnee:

Dr. Neff. Dr. Neff was out, uh, digging ginseng and ran into to the Diamond King. And they struck up a conversation and he said, "You know, we could really sell this stuff if you just stop trying to like, talk about what it does and why it really works. And don't worry about the science so much, let's just market it really well and just say that they're all secret Native American cures that nobody else knows about."

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And so the Diamond King was like, "Okay, I'll try that." So he made a bunch of different medicines.

Justin:

He was the Steve Jobs of the pairing to the Wozniak of the Diamond King.

Sydnee:

Sure. I don't know. This is...

Justin:

Trust me. Trust me.

Sydnee:

Okay, okay, sure.

Justin:

Yeah, it was... He totally was. He was... It was, it was great. It was great. Somebody afterwards tell her how great that was. That made a lot of, it was really apropos and a great poll. Just tell her later, save my dignity.

Sydnee:

So they started creating all these medicines together. There was Spanish oil. There was... their most popular was called king of pain.

Justin:

Okay. So wait a minute. Okay. Hold on. This guy's like, "Okay, kid," big fat cigar, that's what this is. I'm just telling you I'm not good with prop comedy and like invisible mind stuff. So I'm just telling you it's a big fat cigar. Oh, big fat cigar. "Listen kid. You gotta get better at marketing. What's this one here?"

"Uh, headache tonic."

"That's no good. I got a name for you. King of pain. It's a medicine called king of pain. It's irony. It's gonna be real big in 100 years. You're gonna be ahead of the curve. Trust me, kid. Where are you going? Hey, come back. I'm trying my best. I just see the shot."

Sydnee:

The thing about the Diamond King [laughs] he was really, he was really trying, like he really...

Justin:

I'm like Darth Vader there at the end. I'm sorry.

Sydnee:

He was really trying to do good. He, he thought... like he was really studying like herbal cures and he was trying to, to help people. So when you look at like the recipes for things like that, like the king of pain and there was a blood purifier and, and Indian hair tonic, and all these different things, um, there were things like, okay, one recipe: rattle root, prickly ash, sarsaparilla, poplar bark, dog wood, wild cherry.

But then all of them specify that you cut up all these... You'd get all these ingredients, you cut them up very fine. You fill a bottle half full of that stuff, and then you fill it up the rest of the way with whiskey and then you take it. And that is every recipe ends that way. Half whatever root, half whiskey.

Justin:

Somebody's been working out of my Nonny's recipe book. 'Cause most of her recipes end that way too. Sometimes it's not even in the book. She's just like, "Trust me on this one, Jay man." Glug, glug, glug, glug, glug. I'm just kidding, Nonny. I love you.

Sydnee:

You're sort of kidding.

Justin:

Or sort of... I'm half kid— I'm one-fourth kidding, Nonny. I'm worried about you, Nonny. This is the venue I've taken here in Milwaukee to tell you in front of 600 of your closest friends from Milwaukee. Nonny, I'm worried about you. Love your son, the Diamond King. Grandson, whoa, sorry.

Sydnee:

Slow it. Slow it down. Slow it down.

Justin:

It's good. It's medicine. It's half medicine. It's halfway to medicine.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Sydnee:

So once he started adding whiskey to everything, he really took off.

Justin:

No kidding.

Sydnee:

So this is when he started calling himself the Diamond King. And to keep up with that name, he had to look the part. So he started wearing, like, seal skin coats and hats, red velvet suits, jackets with big gold pieces on them for buttons. Um, and then just covered in diamonds. He would sew diamonds all over anything, like a red velvet suit covered in diamonds.

Justin:

It's a cool look.

Sydnee:

Which... Who else do you wanna buy medicine from? He liked to wear a sombrero a lot that he would tell people this was given to me by the president of Mexico. Um, and whenever he would come to town, he would be led by like brass bands. And he would have all kinds of, um, like he'd recruit Native Americans to come along with him and just it'd be like a big party. And the band would come into town and he would ride in a chariot...

Justin:

Nice.

Sydnee:

... covered in gold. And everybody got excited.

Justin:

Nice. If any of you were, uh, downtown a few hours ago, you would've seen us arrive that same way. We demand, it's in our writer.

Sydnee:

Justin's red velvet suit that's covered in diamonds is actually at the cleaner right now, so...

Justin:

Yeah, so I'm wearing this, but you come back tomorrow. Whew. It's gonna look good.

Sydnee:

And he always kept a doctor on staff, which is something you see in a lot of these cases, you would keep usually a doctor who lost their license because they were drunk all the time. That was typically the case. Not me. Um, but you would keep somebody on staff so that you could say, when the feds showed up, be like, "Eh, look, I got a doc." He says, "It's great." He says, "It's fine."

Justin:

"Yeah, it's good stuff. Take it from me. I probably have one of those big, shiny discs on my forehead. I'm official. Look at my bag. My leather bag that I carry around."

Sydnee:

The laws at the time were pretty much as long as you have a doc hanging out with you, who's saying like, "Yes, prescribe that," you're fine. Whatever it is, what... you know, you're fine.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Go for it. Um, but this was not enough for the Diamond King. He's wearing the suits and he's selling the whiskey medicine and he's making tons of money, but he wants something showier something that'll like really draw crowds. So he decides to start pulling teeth.

Justin:

Awesome.

Sydnee:

In front of everybody. Like, so he'd have the medicine show come in, he'd set up his stage and he'd say, "Who has rotten teeth? Get up here."

Justin:

Here we go.

Sydnee:

And it wasn't enough, of course, just to pull them in front of... which who wants to watch teeth being pulled?

Justin:

I mean, I bet it's on YouTube. I bet it has a million views.

Sydnee:

Yeah, somebody wants to watch.

Justin:

Guaranteed.

Sydnee:

Yeah, no, for sure.

Justin:

Somebody wants to watch everything: YouTube. That's their slogan now, by the way.

Sydnee:

But the reason people wanted to watch him pull teeth is how fast he would pull them. So he could pull up to 14 teeth in 19 seconds was his record. So that was really... that was part of the show, was just calling up volunteers and they'd strap him down to a chair and they would actually have like a band playing and the band would get louder as he was about to pull the

teeth and like build up the suspense. And then it would play really fast, and he would just yank, yank, yank, yank as many teeth out as he could, until-

Justin:

I hope it was Losing my Religion. Wouldn't be the best? That would be the best. That would be transcendent. I'd pay \$30 to see that.

Sydnee:

Um, eventually the patient would either like pass out or start screaming or get loose of their like restraints and run, and then he would have to go on to somebody else.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Um, but he said... One, he told people it was painless beforehand.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Which, I mean, if they had had enough of any of his products...

Justin:

Yeah, right. Eventually it would be, wait long enough.

Sydnee:

Maybe. Um, but because of that, uh, he owned this huge house in Illinois and he said that he paved the garden paths with human teeth, that he had pulled so many. I don't know that that's true.

Justin:

I don't think that you would've paved over that. Right? Like if you bought the house that had that, like you would probably preserve it. Like you should be able to go see that. Nobody's gonna cover that up. That's amazing.

Sydnee:

Do you think they say that on Zillow? Like, "We've got granite countertops and stainless steel appliances and then the garden path paved in human team."

Justin:

"...with human teeth. And a jacuzzi. Well, it's not a jacuzzi, It's a pad for a jacuzzi. And it... Yes. It's made out of human teeth. Fine."

Sydnee:

Now, unfortunately for the Diamond King, he has a sad ending to his story.

Justin:

Uh, things are going so well.

Sydnee:

I know, I know he... So he was at the height of his career and he had just made these, um, liver pads that you would wear. Liver pads were really popular in the patent medicine era and they were basically... A lot of people thought that any problem you had, you were tired, you were weak, you just don't like getting up in the morning, it's your liver. Your liver is the issue, you need to wear something or take something that will stimulate your liver and give you more energy.

And so liver pads were really popular. His liver pads were just these like sacks of herbs that you would hold on your side. A lot of them would have something like cayenne pepper or something in them, so it would burn a little bit.

Justin:

By the way, before you laugh too hard, go to your local CVS, they're still liver pads available. They go on your feet. Uh, and they remove toxins. "Remove toxins." But I mean, really, they just change color reacting to your sweat, but they're still available. You can buy some liver pads if you want.

Sydnee:

Now, now the... That's true. These liver pads specifically were supposed to prevent smallpox.

Justin:

Cool.

Sydnee:

And here's the sad irony, as he was selling these liver pads and making tons of money, he died of smallpox.

Justin:

Oh, man. That's gonna put a cramp in business, both the being dead, but... for sure, but also, um, that's not a good endorsement for the product, I don't think.

Sydnee:

His legacy carried on for a little while because his wife said, "Well, wait, no, I'm the Diamond Queen. And she sold his meds for a little bit."

Justin:

Nice try. Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, she got in trouble because she kept giving babies opium. So that was the end of her career.

Justin:

Spoil sports. Maybe they just wanted 30 minutes to themselves, for once.

Sydnee:

Why didn't they just do a podcast?

Justin:

There you go. Can't bring a baby to a podcast. Sometimes we do bring a baby to a podcast.

Sydnee:

Yeah. No, no, we... You can't bring her out here. We learned that first time.

Justin:

Oh, man. We did a show in, uh... well, some of you might have heard it. We recorded it in Huntington and we had this great bit where we were gonna pass the baby... You're supposed to pass a newborn around something. So we were gonna pass...

Sydnee:

It's supposed to be like under a donkey. And instead we were passing her around a Santa.

Justin:

In our [crosstalk]. To our credit, we didn't try to pass her around a donkey. But, um, she didn't like that. Uh, so we learned our lesson the hard way, she doesn't come out anymore. She gets to sleep in the back.

Sydnee:

Um, I wanna tell you about my favorite though. This is my favorite hero of patent medicine.

Justin:

Favorite. Give me your favorite.

Sydnee:

Okay. So Brother Jonathan. Um, Jonathan Maloney, better known as Brother Jonathan operated towards the end of the 1800s, and he sold a— Sold. He sold a cure all, uh, called the giver of life.

Justin:

Now that's— That... See, that's all over king of pain, way better than king of pain.

Sydnee:

And the thing about it is that he, he wanted to market that name, the giver of life all the time. And so as soon as he would meet you, he would introduce himself to you saying, "Hello, I'm Brother Jonathan, the giver of life."

Justin:

Why would he, why would he do that?

Sydnee:

So say it like under his breath. And then you would think like, "You, you?"

Justin:

"You are the giver of life?"

Sydnee:

"You?"

Justin:

No, it's just his medicine.

Sydnee:

Right. No. Um, the formula for the giver of life was mostly water. Uh...

Justin:

Boring.

Sydnee:

... so this wasn't as fun. I know. This was a pretty boring one. He also had some other stuff, some Epsom salts, rhubarb, licorice powder, winter green and sugar, so it tasted pretty good, I would say. Uh, but he was criticized a lot because people would say, "You know that's mainly just water, right?" And he'd say, "Yes, three-fourths of the Earth's surface is water. So water is clearly the greatest. It's fine."

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And this worked.

Justin:

Yeah. Well of course, back then. I wouldn't fall for that today though. Don't worry, Syd.

Sydnee:

You'd fall for this guy.

Justin:

I'd fall for it in a heartbeat.

Sydnee:

You would fall for this guy.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

He had... So, Brother Jonathan, the giver of life, he had a long mustache, he wore a dark suit with a long coat. He had matching gloves and spats. He had the whole look going on. Um, he carried a gold-headed walking stick. And the inscription on it said, "To the giver of life from the children of Chicago."

Justin:

[laughs] I'm glad that children of Chicago could finally get together on something for once. They always have their meetings and they're like, "We totally got it next time. No, next time we'll do something for sure. We got a lot of, uh... We gotta figure out the, you know, the policies for the group and everything."

For once, the children of Chicago were like, "Guys, this time we're gonna do it. We're gonna actually make an impact. We're gonna buy a patent medicine salesman a walking stick. Take up a collection."

Sydnee:

Um, everywhere he went, he would carry two books with him. A Bible...

Justin:

Yeah. Saw that coming.

Sydnee:

... and an anatomy textbook.

Justin:

Hey, you cover all your bases.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Uh, like our other patent medicine, uh, themes, heroes, he also had an... a doctor on his payroll. He was named Fitz Morris. He was definitely an alcoholic because he was paid in quarts of old Kentucky bourbon.

Justin:

It's nice work if you can get it, I guess.

Sydnee:

Is anyone hiring?

Justin:

Yeah. Is the giver of life hiring?

Sydnee:

Wondering.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, some of us are willing. No, I don't like bourbon.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

But beer... Um, now of course, like all the other doctors who worked for these patent medicine guys, he had lost his license, so this was pretty much the only gig that he could get that was legal. So what he would do is have consultations while the medicine show was in town.

So Brother Jonathan would bring his show in town 'cause that's... all these people operated in medicine shows. You would have like this big medical

carnival that came to town and you could schedule a consultation with the doctor who was drunk, and you'd sit down with him and he'd say... he'd listen to all your complaints and say, "Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. You need the giver of life. Next." And that was pretty much the whole...

Justin:

Yeah. One size fits all.

Sydnee:

Yeah, exactly. Whenever he would show up in a new town, Brother Jonathan would... these were... this was his opening move. He would stroll up Main Street, he would introduce himself to the mayor, to the sheriff, and to the newspaper editor. And then he would head to the pharmacist and he would give him as many bottles of the giver of life as he could fit on his shelves.

Justin:

And then just build a business there.

Sydnee:

And of course he sold a ton that way.

Justin:

Well, that's good... That's a good thing to do if you come into new towns and introduce yourself to those people, because if somebody doesn't trust you, then you just be like, "Well, I heard that guy knows the mayor and also the chief of police and the guy who runs the newspaper. So he is gotta be okay, he's gotta be an alright, dude."

Sydnee:

Now like, uh, most of our patent medicine salesman, uh, who didn't die of smallpox, the ones that lived, um, were foiled by things like the FDA was formed. And, uh, eventually we started to make laws about like what you could put in medicine and that you had to tell people what they were taking. And so a lot of these guys...

Justin:

Boring!

[audio cut]

Justin:

So that's the end of our show. Uh, as, as you heard there, it got kind of cut off. But, uh, the only thing we said then...

Sydnee:

It was, it was basically the way Justin wants to end all of our shows, which is telling me that I'm boring and moving on.

Justin:

Uh, so now... Thank you, dear. Now we're recording a...

Sydnee:

I'm kidding.

Justin:

... a special exclusive outro here next to where the baby is sleeping. So we're trying to be quiet.

Sydnee:

Yeah, you didn't miss much. We were just basically like, thank you so much. And then there was like a huge standing innovation and like...

Justin:

Huge standing ovation.

Sydnee:

... people like rushed the stage to hug us.

Justin:

That's gonna do it for us. Uh, until next Wednesday. I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays]

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