

Sawbones 29: The Father of Homeopathy

Published February 4, 2014

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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 and welcome to Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine. I am your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Hey, Sydnee. You look angry.

Sydnee:

Yeah, Justin, you know, it's a— It's a new year and I really thought as part of the new year you were trying to like, you know, take a little better care of yourself, like eat a little healthier and...

Justin:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

...get a little more exercise, you know.

Justin:

Correct, true, true, all true.

Sydnee:

Take care of the old ticker there.

Justin:

Yup.

Sydnee:

You were—

Justin:

Not getting any younger.

Sydnee:

So you were trying to do that, right?

Justin:

Uh-huh, yup, yup, yup.

Sydnee:

Well, see that's interesting because, um, I noticed in your office trash can today, um, a KFC bucket.

Justin:

Well, okay, technically speaking, it's a go cup that... I mean, it's just— I guess it's bucket shaped. It's technically a small bucket that once held chicken tenders and french fries.

Sydnee:

Wait, so there's, hold on— On a side note, are they serving chicken in a go cup now?

Justin:

Yeah, it fits in your cup holder, so you just slam it.

Sydnee:

So you can— [laughs]

Justin:

It's a small bucket.

Sydnee:

Do you just eat it out of the cup?

Justin:

Yeah, right.

Sydnee:

Do you use your hands, or do you just like stick your head in it?

Justin:

[munching noises] Oh no, it's, uh, yes, Sydnee, you're right, uh, that is a KFC cup. Uh, but, I had to.

Sydnee:

You had to?

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

For your health you had to— For your new healthy lifestyle, taking care of your body...

Justin:

Yes. It's true.

Sydnee:

... you had to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken?

Justin:

It's prescription. It's prescription, homeopathic treatment for my, uh, asthma.

Sydnee:

Okay, a couple points. Uh, one, you don't have asthma.

Justin:

So, it worked.

Sydnee:

Okay, uh, two, chicken doesn't treat anything.

Justin:

Uh, it's a homeopathic treatment. It wouldn't surprise me, uh, that you haven't heard about it. This is a stumbling block that we run into a lot. I know you're more on that allopathic tip, but it's a homeopathic cure that I read about on Reddit...

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

...for asthma.

Sydnee:

Do you even know what homeopathy is?

Justin:

It's—

Sydnee:

What a homeopathic cure is?

Justin:

It's basically like when you make something up, right, and then you just say that it helps.

Sydnee:

No, no.

Justin:

That's how I've been using it for the past few years.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

[laughs] And you haven't corrected me.

Sydnee:

No, that's not... Homeopathy is like a thing, like it's a whole thing, and there are certain definitions, like it means something. It's not just, you know, stuff that you're not supposed to have that you pretend cures something.

Justin:

[laughs] Okay, so why don't you help me out? Where did— ... If it's a real thing, then someone had to have come up with it, yes?

Sydnee:

Yes. All right, you want me to tell you about homeopathy? If we're gonna, if I'm gonna tell you about homeopathy, I'm gonna tell you about Samuel Hahnemann.

Justin:

All right, I like the sound of that.

Sydnee:

Or, uh, actually, his full name was Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann, but that just seems like a lot.

Justin:

Yeah, so we'll just go with Sammy.

Sydnee:

He seemed... I'm guessing he went by Samuel. That seems to be what I found.

Justin:

Or Sammy maybe.

Sydnee:

Maybe Sammy. Sam.

Justin:

Sam.

Sydnee:

The Sammeister.

Justin:

The Samster.

Sydnee:

Maybe, I don't know. I don't know what his friends called him. So he was a German physician. He lived from 1755 to 1843. He was born near Dresden, um, and he was a super smart guy.

Justin:

Really, really smart.

Sydnee:

Yeah, that's number one thing you need to know about Hahnemann. He was like a really wicked smart guy, um. When he was younger, his, uh, I guess he must've come from pretty smart family, um, his dad really wanted him to kind of stay home and be homeschooled more or less 'cause he thought...

Justin:

Mm-hmm .

Sydnee:

...formal education wasn't going to like do his mind justice.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

And he would pull him outta school periodically to like practice thinking lessons with him.

Justin:

That's a great idea. I wish my dad had done that for me.

Sydnee:

I don't know, I was thinking about that. Is... Would that be fun?

Justin:

Maybe if you [laughs] didn't know it was coming, and you were worried about it all the time. That would really keep you on your toes, like "Whoa, whoa. I thought that was my dad."

Sydnee:

But think...

Justin:

"Sorry, I got scared."

Sydnee:

...about what a bummer like you get called to the office and your dad's there, and he's like, "I'm taking you home for the rest of the day. I don't want you in school anymore," and you're like, "Score. I'm out of school."

Justin:

Unless he come, like what if he only comes during like cooking class or gym.

Sydnee:

I guess that would be a bummer.

Justin:

Yeah, he like...

Sydnee:

Maybe recess.

Justin:

Yeah, he like comes [laughing] during recess, yes.

Sydnee:

Well, but, I mean, eh, whatever he pulled you out of, if like, if it was to do a thinking lesson, I don't know how much fun that would be.

Justin:

Hm. It seemed pretty fun in Finding Forrester when Sean Connery was giving that kid thinking lessons. I didn't see the movie, but that's what it seemed like was going on in the trailers.

Sydnee:

He gives him thinking lessons? [laughs]

Justin:

"You're the man now, dog, you learned to think."

Sydnee:

What is a thinking lesson?

Justin:

Like [laughs] ...

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

... I don't know. I clearly haven't had any.

Sydnee:

So in addition to his thinking lessons, he, uh, also studied, I mean, I guess actual subjects, um. He was interested in pharmacy, botany, physics, basically everything. He learned a ton of different languages. Uh, that was something that would persist throughout his life. He could work as a translator actually later...

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

... because he knew so many languages, um. But despite his father's urging otherwise, actually, he was really interested in medicine.

Justin:

What kid doesn't, what dad doesn't want their kid to do medicine?

Sydnee:

I don't know, I don't know what he wanted him to do instead. I guess think more?

Justin:

Maybe. Yeah, that's gonna really cut into your thinking time, son.

Sydnee:

[laughs] To stay at home and think?

Justin:

Ponder.

Sydnee:

I don't know, maybe I should do, maybe we should do another episode on his dad and figure out what his deal was.

Justin:

Yeah, sounds like real, real cutting edge dude.

Sydnee:

So he, so he went and he studied medicine, um, medicine. He went to a couple different places. A lot of this was due to the fact that he was from a, uh, poorer family, and so he studied at Leipzig, and he had to go to Vienna for a while, and he finally went to the University of Erlangen, Erlangen and got his MD there.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

Uh, I thought this was kind of interesting just as a little bonus fact, his graduate thesis was a dissertation on the causes and treatments of cramps.

Justin:

So far except for weird dad, he seems like a pretty average dude.

Sydnee:

Well, he was, I mean, and a dude who was really interested in cramps.

Justin:

Yeah, [laughing] okay.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Yes, fair.

Sydnee:

I'm guessing...

Justin:

Fair point.

Sydnee:

... if it could fit a whole dissertation, he meant like all cramps.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Like whenever I hear cramps...

Justin:

Had to be wide reaching.

Sydnee:

... I think like, you know, like, oh, my cramps are so bad. This is gonna be a really heavy one.

Justin:

Come on.

Sydnee:

Well, I mean, that's what I always think of, but I mean, I guess it's like, ah, my leg cramp. Ah, I'm never...

Justin:

Yeah, Syd, I think it's—

Sydnee:

...gonna win the race now.

Justin:

... [laughs] I think it's probably all cramps.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I don't think at some point he was like, "This is just too broad for my thesis. I have to narrow it down to certain types of cramps."

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

"There's too much to cover. This is my Everest."

Sydnee:

So, like you said, he seemed like a regular guy, and at that point, what he did was pretty, pretty ordinary. He moved to, uh, a place, Mansfeld, Saxony. He worked in like a, a mining village as like a village doctor.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, he got married. He had 11 kids.

Justin:

Yeesh.

Sydnee:

Yup, a lot of them. And that could've, that could've been kind the whole story, work there as a doc, had a big family, took care of people.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, but it's important to remember the time period. So, uh, like I said, we are now in like the late, later 1700s at this point, okay?

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And this was during what would be known as the "Age of Heroic Medicine" or the "Age of Heroic Medicine."

Justin:

They sound... Now, listen, I don't know anything about it.

Sydnee:

"Heroic Age of Medicine."

Justin:

It sounds exciting.

Sydnee:

Well, it does sound exciting, um, and it was probably exciting to be a doctor at the time. I don't know that it would've been very exciting to be a patient. The idea was that, okay, the medical profession got together and said, "Look, we're not doing very well."

Justin:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

We don't...

Justin:

"Listen, I've got a real legitimate fear this is gonna sound crazy. Uh, I'm worried that someday people will invent electronic audio communication..."

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

"...downloadable weekly, and there's gonna be two whippersnappers that are just taking us apart."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I mean, you think about the things we've done. They don't make a lot of conventional sense."

Sydnee:

"And it's not like we try to justify it in any way."

Justin:

"We don't even have a point. I mean, we know we're making it up, but what if future people discover this? We'll be a laughing stock."

Sydnee:

Well, and this is, but their answer to this, I mean, 'cause that's what they said is like, "We don't really know what we're doing, um. People are dying. We're not preventing illness, so basically, new ideas are welcome. You got an idea, let's try it."

Justin:

Anything.

Sydnee:

Yeah, we are, we... It was like, it was like a—

Justin:

It's a clean whiteboard. [laughs]

Sydnee:

... a Kickstarter for medical theories. Like, "We will make it happen. Come here and bring us your bloodletting, bring us your arsenic, uh." Blistering became very popular at the time where, "Oh, you're sick? Well, I'm gonna take a hot iron and blister your skin."

Justin:

'Cause why not?

Sydnee:

And then I'm gonna keep the wound open for months...

Justin:

Ew, no, thank you.

Sydnee:

... and make it infected periodically.

Justin:

Cool.

Sydnee:

I, yeah, and tons of different ways to make people vomit, lots of different...

Justin:

Lots of vomit.

Sydnee:

... substances to make people vomit. And Hahnemman, um, you know, as a practitioner in this time, was not thrilled about any of this.

Justin:

Oh, yeah?

Sydnee:

No, very...

Justin:

Oh, there's a point in his column.

Sydnee:

Yeah, very reasonably, he thought it was kind of crazy, um. He noted that we were not helping a lot of people, that we didn't really have good reasons for doing any of this stuff, um, and that overall, we were probably causing more harm than good.

Justin:

"Look at Kevin over there. He's just blistering people."

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

"What are we doing?"

Sydnee:

"That other guy's just getting all his patients drunk."

Justin:

"He's just getting people drunk. It's like an episode of Girls Gone Wild in here."

Sydnee:

"Are we— Are we giving opium to babies?"

Justin:

"What's wrong with us?"

Sydnee:

"What are we doing?" And so in that spirit, he, you know, he tried to resist, uh, the common treatments. Um, at first, he just, you know, in the absence of any— You know, 'cause if you erased a lot of the, uh, popular, uh, cures at the time, you ended up with nothing [laughs].

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Um, so the— Well, I'm not gonna do anything dangerous, so I've got nothing left. So he started prescribing just kind of like good, clean living. Healthy food, fresh air, exercise.

Justin:

Like Dr. Oz figure, I like it.

Sydnee:

Yeah, uh, you know, just nothing too severe, um. Uh, I don't know if, you know, what, were his patients happy with this? Maybe not, um, they...

Justin:

Not as, the problem with clean living, it's effective but it's not fun or dramatic.

Sydnee:

No, not like blistering. So, um, eventually, he just abandoned the whole medical practice.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

He got frustrated with it, and he said, "You know what? I know all these languages. I'm really good at translating stuff. I'm gonna start using that combined with my science background and translate various scientific, uh, textbooks into German."

Justin:

So he wanted to, he wanted to get out of medicine, go where the money was.

Sydnee:

[laughs] In translating textbooks.

Justin:

Translating German.

Sydnee:

So he started doing that, and among the things he was translating, he translated William Cullen's, uh, book on Materia Medica, which, uh, included a bunch of different, um, cures and treatments and stuff. But among them was, um, his theory on the cure for malaria, which was, uh, the cinchona tree bark.

Justin:

That's legit, right?

Sydnee:

Yeah, it includes— It, uh, contains quinine.

Justin:

I knew about that from Elizabeth Gilbert's book.

Sydnee:

Really?

Justin:

Yes.

Sydnee:

Well, that's interesting.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Well that is totally true. It contained quinine.

Justin:

Signature of All Things, by the way is what it's called, if you wanna read it.

Sydnee:

You're a big fan of that.

Justin:

Yeah, it's a great book.

Sydnee:

So, he was right. Quinine is, uh, was and still is a treatment that we use for malaria. Um, well, Hahnemann didn't buy it right away. He was translating this book. He read that. He said, "Eh, I wonder if this is true." And as part of his dissatisfaction with the whole medical practice in general, he was kind of trying to debunk some of the things we did. And so he thought, "Well, I'm gonna give this a shot. I'm gonna get some of this bark, and I'm gonna dose myself with it and see what happens."

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Now it should be noted that he doesn't have malaria.

Justin:

Good. That's good for him.

Sydnee:

So he gives himself, uh, big doses of, of quinine essentially, and he starts to develop what he interprets as malaria-like symptoms.

Justin:

Oh...

Sydnee:

Fever, sweats, chills, nausea, diarrhea, um, all kinds of symptoms that you might see with malaria.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Now on a side note, we should point out that if you take too much quinine or even just a therapeutic dose of quinine, by the way, you can develop cinchonism, which has a lot of those same symptoms.

Justin:

Okay, so we can safely assume that's probably what was happening.

Sydnee:

Yeah, it— I mean, it's toxic in high doses and even as anyone who's ever been treated with quinine for malaria can tell you, even in regular doses, it creates a horrible roaring sound in your ears that prevents you from hearing anybody for days while you're on it. So it's not a pleasant medicine to take. Well, he took it. He got really sick.

And he, with symptoms that he identified as malarial symptoms and said, "Huh, so maybe if this medicine that works to fix malaria in a healthy person, or in a sick person, causes malaria in a healthy person, maybe in general, like cures like. So if you take something that would be toxic in a healthy person, it will always cure that thing in a sick person." Do you understand what I'm saying?

Justin:

Yeah, so like.

Sydnee:

It's the law of similars, like cures like.

Justin:

So, I know it doesn't, uh, work this way, but like, uh, sorta like, well, sorta like vaccines, right?

Sydnee:

He actually, that— Well, and that's actually— He didn't draw this, uh, comparison, but in a lot of the reading I did on homeopathy today, they'll, they'll use that example a lot, uh, patients who get flu shots which have killed flu germs in them...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... um, as a way of preventing the flu.

Justin:

But, I mean, but basically in his way of thinking...

Sydnee:

It's kinda different.

Justin:

... like for instance, if ipecac makes you throw up, then if you're throwing up, you should be able to take ipecac and it will make you feel better.

Sydnee:

You know, you'd think yes, I mean, that isn't, I did not find ipecac in the homeopathy remedies, but, yes.

Justin:

No one's ever, like actually seen ipecac. No one knows what it actually is.

Sydnee:

No, I mean, it is a real thing.

Justin:

Eh.

Sydnee:

Like it will make you throw up. We don't use it anymore, but...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

...but it does exist. Um, but yeah, I mean, you get the idea, um. And so he began to experiment with this with other substances, um. He tried some more benign things, like just different herbs to see in, you know, various doses how, what effect they had on people. And then he also tried more dangerous things like snake venom.

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

Um, and I think what's really interesting is he tried these experiments on himself. He also enlisted friends and some of his children to help him out with this.

Justin:

Ah, come on, Sam.

Sydnee:

I mean, he had 11.

Justin:

[laughs].

Sydnee:

Not like he couldn't spare some.

Justin:

He's got, he's just using a burner. It's just a burner kid. I don't know. I had this, [laughs] I had this one to experiment about malaria with.

Sydnee:

Now to be fair, I got the impression from my reading that they were older and, uh, complicit...

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

...and wanted to help out with dad's research [laughs].

Justin:

I'm staying it with mine, "Dad, why'd you name me crash test dud?"

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

"That'll always give me a complex."

Sydnee:

"Don't worry about it. Drink this snake venom."

Justin:

"Drink this snake venom, there pincushion."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, now initially, when he started giving, uh, actual sick people these toxic substances, they just seemed to get sicker.

Justin:

Hm. What— Wait.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So he, he thought about that, and he said, "You know what? It must be that when you are sick, there's already something going on with you. You know, you're already imbalanced, so we need to give you a smaller amount." Um, and this is where, uh, dilution comes in with homeopathy, and if anyone's familiar with it, you kind of know what I'm talking about here. You take the, whatever the toxic substance, disease causing substance, whatever the herbal thing, whatever it is that you're using, you take one drop of it, and you put it into 99 drops of water or alcohol, depending on what you're using.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, you then continue that dilution several times over. How many times, I'm assuming it depends on the patient and the disease and the substance, but you keep doing that.

Justin:

Okay, I will probably lose count, but can't matter.

Sydnee:

Uh, eventually, the idea is that no actual quantity of the substance exists in the mixture, um, but kind of the footprint or the echo of it.

Justin:

The vibe.

Sydnee:

Yeah [laughs].

Justin:

The vibe.

Sydnee:

The vibe of it still exists.

Justin:

Now that's a lot. That's not true, right? I mean, it's still in there.

Sydnee:

That's the basis of homeopathy.

Justin:

But I'm not a scientist, but it seems like it's still there.

Sydnee:

And so, well, I'm sure there are some, there's some atom of it left.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

But that's not the idea. It doesn't matter. The concept is not that there is an atom of it left. It's what it did to the substance to be, you know...

Justin:

Gives it its vibe.

Sydnee:

Yes, and then...

Justin:

It's mojo.

Sydnee:

... that's what you give to the patient.

Justin:

Okay, drink this mojo.

Sydnee:

And that is homeopathy. And it's different, I should note, it, uh, from my reading, again, I am not trained in homeopathy, it's different for different

patients. So you and I might have the same illness, um, but depending on our emotional and mental state, we may have completely different cures.

Justin:

Sound a little hippy-dippy to me, Syd, I don't know. I'm gonna stick with my KFC treatments for asthma, at this point, right now.

Sydnee:

Uh, they're, they're still not homeopathic. I don't know if you...

Justin:

Oh, well, okay, agree to disagree.

Sydnee:

Are you diluting the chicken in some way?

Justin:

With fries.

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

With Coke, Diet Coke...

Sydnee:

You're diluting the chicken with Coke?

Justin:

I mean—

Sydnee:

Does that come in the go cup?

Justin:

Am I telling—

Sydnee:

Do you just pour Coke directly in...

Justin:

[laughs] Yeah.

Sydnee:

... in the chicken and fries?

Justin:

The go cup itself is actually a blender. You just throw in the Coke, make a slurry, and jam it.

Sydnee:

Ugh.

Justin:

Sorry.

Sydnee:

Does KFC serve fries?

Justin:

Yeah, pretty good fries, a little thick. But, okay, this is off topic.

Sydnee:

Okay, I just want some fries now. Okay, so in addition to this, and again, if you are familiar at all with homeopathy, this all sounds very familiar to you because we just kind of described the basic tenets. On a side note, I think it's worth mentioning, uh, that Samuel Hahnemann for a while toyed with the idea that most disease was caused by coffee.

Justin:

Now, I'm no barista, but, uh, I've found coffee, it usually fixes me up, makes me feel real good in the mornings when I need it, a little pick me up, a little go juice.

Sydnee:

I'm assuming this was the beginning of, you know, because I feel like every couple years in the medical literature, like we release some new report about coffee, and then it gets printed in the, you know, in the mass media, like, "Coffee's good for you. You should drink coffee. You'll live longer," and then like two years later, we're like, "Never mind. Coffee's killing everyone."

Justin:

It was bad the whole time.

Sydnee:

This, I guess this was where it started [laughs].

Justin:

So he, you're saying Samuel Hahnemann's right half the time about coffee?

Sydnee:

Right, so it depends on what year it is. 50% of the time he could be right. I don't think most diseases are caused by coffee.

Justin:

Well, everybody's entitled to their own beliefs, I guess.

Sydnee:

Uh, from what I could tell though, this was not a long held belief. He quickly kind of abandoned that because, um, he later spoke of the idea of miasmas. Now, I think we've mentioned this before...

Justin:

Maybe.

Sydnee:

... miasma theory. The idea that there are forces like these kind of intangible things around us, I guess like the Force.

Justin:

Vibes.

Sydnee:

Yeah, that cause disease.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So he introduced the idea, um, in his 1828 book, *The Chronic Disease*, of three major miasmas. Now I don't think this was groundbreaking for him to name these three. I think these were already kind of around. He just defined them and kind of put them in this context.

Justin:

Mm-hmm .

Sydnee:

Um, the big one that we need to talk about is psora.

Justin:

Now is psora coffee?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Well, psora isn't coffee, but he did list a lot of the same diseases, uh, that he said were caused by coffee as now being caused by psora.

Justin:

Oh, okay. Passing the buck.

Sydnee:

So he, so he said— Maybe he started liking coffee, then he said, "Never mind."

Justin:

"Listen, I tried it. I've been, I've been having..."

Sydnee:

"I was so wrong."

Justin:

"...it black the whole time and apparently, that's just not what I like. I like it with a little half and half and a little Splenda, so now I'm into coffee."

Sydnee:

"Now I'm into coffee..."

Justin:

"Coffee's my thing."

Sydnee:

"... but I'm not into psora."

Justin:

"Not into psora. Keep that away."

Sydnee:

Now psora is the miasma that's responsible for like 85% of disease, so it's the big one. Um, it references some kind of force, like I said, and this particular one, psora can, um, cause stomach ulcers, swollen glands, organ disfunction, epilepsy, TB, asthma. Well there you go, asthma, not chicken.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, anything, so...

Justin:

No, no, no, you don't understand. The psora caused my asthma, which I cured with chicken.

Sydnee:

With a dilution of chicken.

Justin:

With a dilution of delicious chicken, boneless, thank you.

Sydnee:

I'll never understand that. So psora causes most of the disease. Uh, there are two other miasmas.

Justin:

You can— Okay, Sydnee, I love you. You keep saying the, you keep saying that psora does these things. Psora's not real, right? Like 'cause you keep saying it, and it's getting very confusing for me in this seat over here.

Sydnee:

In the theory of homeopathy, there are three miasmas that cause disease.

Justin:

So if you were writing it as a paragraph format, that would've been underlined at the top, and then you would've put this below it 'cause you keep saying these things, and I don't know if you know this, I— Whatever you say, I just accept it verbatim.

Sydnee:

Okay, well, I'm not saying that I necessarily believe that.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, this is, okay, I'll go ahead and put this out there. I am not sure if a modern homeopathic physician believes this or not.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

I am really not sure. I found some articles where they do, and then I found some articles where they were arguing that maybe it needs to be, um, looked into again.

Justin:

When there's not a lot of research to back things up, it can be hard to reach a consensus.

Sydnee:

Exactly, and there's not, as far as I can tell. This medicine is a lot more based on experience, and it's— That is stated. Hahnemann said that. This is the medicine of experience, not the medicine of experiment, I guess. I made that up, but...

Justin:

That's good.

Sydnee:

But that was the basis for it. This works.

Justin:

That was good. You just come up with that off the top of your head?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

That was good.

Sydnee:

Thanks.

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

But it worked, so they did it again and again. Uh, or they said it worked. I don't know if it worked. They said it worked.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

People think it works.

Justin:

People say.

Sydnee:

[laughs] So in this theory...

Justin:

Some claim.

Sydnee:

In this theory, there are two other miasmas you should know about.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

There's sycosis, that's with an s not with a p.

Justin:

[laughs] Okay. Not to be confused.

Sydnee:

It's from the Greek for fig, which is because sycosis, uh, the big thing, the hallmark of sycosis is that it causes warts, [laughs] which I guess look like figs.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, so if you have, uh, warty protrusions anywhere, you've got sycosis. It can also cause sexual and urinary diseases and anything that's worsened by damp weather.

Justin:

Just...

Sydnee:

Like arthritis.

Justin:

Like arthritis, okay.

Sydnee:

Um, strangely, the third miasma is not the one that causes sexual and urinary diseases, and it's called syphilis. Not to be confused with syphilis. [laughs]

Justin:

This is why there can't be, like, a whole other kind of medicine 'cause I can't even keep the other ones straight, and then somebody just made up another kind. I don't know.

Sydnee:

And—

Justin:

Syphilis is already a thing. There's also warts. Just use one of those words.

Sydnee:

I found in one thing I was reading about homeopathy that the theory that Hahnemann were he to rename this today would almost certainly not use the word syphilis for it, uh, because he...

Justin:

'Cause he'd have Google?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Uh, syphilis obviously already exists, and we've talked about this before. Syphilis has been around for a really long time, um, but it was named for— Syphilis was seen as a disease that caused a lot of destruction. And this particular miasma can cause mass destruction of the body, some really bad stuff, so that's why it was named syphilis. Uh, so it can cause

nervous system disorders, blood, skeletal problems, any psych stuff, alcoholism, heart disease.

Justin:

So, okay, are these, uh...

Sydnee:

And anything that happens at night, by the way. [laughs]

Justin:

And I— [laughs]

Sydnee:

Anything that tends to, if it's a disease that tends to happen at night, it's caused by syphilis.

Justin:

Okay, I know this, uh, we're a little bit outside of your area of expertise right now, but like were these just like clouds of stuff, like floating around? Or were there just like waves of it, permeating—

Sydnee:

Well, it's just— They're just forces that are around us and within us.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And that cause chronic dis— So if you were somebody who has allergies or asthma or something that is chronic or you're somebody who keeps getting bouts of an illness over and over again, you have one of these...

Justin:

So like the humors kind of?

Sydnee:

Well, sort of except that your humors are always in you.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

They just need to be balanced. These aren't necessarily in all people.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And when you have them kind of attach to you or within you, they change your...

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

...your health.

Justin:

Okay, got it.

Sydnee:

They imbalance you.

Justin:

I understand it as well as I'm going to.

Sydnee:

So you have to treat them homeopathically.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

Now as you may imagine, this was controversial.

Justin:

[laughs] Yeah, I would think so.

Sydnee:

He had, eh, as many detractors...

Justin:

"Uh, excuse me—"

Sydnee:

...as he did defenders.

Justin:

"...uh, Mr. Hahnemman, Dr. Hahnemman, sorry. You named one of them syphilis?"

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Do you know that that's... I don't wanna start a controversy, but you know that's a thing? Okay, just wanted— Gotcha. Don't— Sorry, go right ahead."

Sydnee:

So this was the other syphilis, syphilis two.

Justin:

This is syphilis two. It's back. This time it's personal.

Sydnee:

There so many weird things you can name things.

Justin:

This time, it's all over, not just in your bathing suit area.

Sydnee:

And syphilis is such a thing.

Justin:

Syphilis is like a total thing, okay.

Sydnee:

It's a big thing.

Justin:

I'm— I can't get hung up on this, I'm sorry.

Sydnee:

So, okay, so it was very controversial, um. He was not recognized by a lot of the traditional medical organizations, um. He was seen as a quack for his theories, but, uh, there were definitely people who followed him, especially in the U.S., who kind of latched onto this idea and began to practice it.

And in particular, a lot of the reason that he was protected and allowed to practice and teach his craft was that there was an archduke who, um, in his whatever his, I don't know, city-state, realm, county, whatever archdukes...

Justin:

Let's go with realm. That's good, I like that.

Sydnee:

... [laughing] whatever archdukes, uh, lord over, um, who was a firm believer in his practices and kind of protected him.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, so he was allowed to continue to work and teach, uh. He eventually, his wife died at some point. He married a much younger woman, and he moved to Paris and lived out the extent of his life, died at 90...

Justin:

Huh.

Sydnee:

... still practicing homeopathy.

Justin:

Living to 90 in 1843, uh, at least he had something right.

Sydnee:

Yeah, I mean, he was doing something right. Um, however, homeopathy did not die.

Justin:

Did not die with Sam.

Sydnee:

No, no, no. It continued on past him. I think it's interesting the main reason that it flourished in the U.S. was a Doctor Constance Herring, uh, who was an MD who was actually working to disprove homeopathy.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

Um, he was working with some sort of, uh, disease causing substances in a lab. Uh, some sort of accident left him with a severely injured hand, and traditional medicine at that time would've just advised amputation.

Justin:

Is this how he found a follower or a Batman villain?

Sydnee:

[laughs] Both?

Justin:

Both, okay.

Sydnee:

If you're looking for a new Batman villain.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So, uh, he did not wanna amputate his hand, um, even though at the time the thought was that the infection would spread and he would die. So he started using the homeopathic remedies that he was trying to disprove, and his hand healed, and he didn't have to amputate it. And so he became a, uh, a believer at that day, at that moment.

Justin:

Wow. So is this, like, is it still happening or did it continue, or?

Sydnee:

It did, um. It had a huge— At the time, he opened like the Philadelphia's Homeopathic Medical College, which actually later became the Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital, which still is named the Hahnemann-something hospital in that area. I'm sure a lot of people in that area are yelling like, "Oh, it's the Hahnemann blah, blah."

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

It's still a hospital today, named for Hahnemann.

Justin:

We can't hear you, by the way. It's just a one-way thing.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, by 1900, there were 111 homeopathic hospital and 22 med schools in the U.S..

Justin:

Wow.

Sydnee:

Uh, however, with the introduction of, like, medicines like penicillin and the antibiotic era in the '40s, um, stuff started to fall out of favor. Uh, by 1923, it

had dwindled to two med schools, and then there are no official programs that exist today.

Justin:

Hm.

Sydnee:

Um, there are some schools that can issue certificates, I believe. You can be, you can be certified in homeopathy, but there's no like licensing, um. There are a lot of people who get MDs or DOs or other degrees and then also learn and practice homeopathy and then certainly independent practitioners, but it's not a, um, a formal, you know, program.

Justin:

Do you think I could get a certificate in homeopathy?

Sydnee:

I think if you went to one of the schools. I don't— I—

Justin:

It seems like a lot of work.

Sydnee:

I think everything's available online.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

You know, you can be an ordained minister online, too, so probably.

Justin:

I'll just Photoshop it. It's not a big deal.

Sydnee:

Uh, in the '60s, there was a huge resurgence, which is why it's still around today, probably, um. Well, you know, there was a return to nature and...

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... more natural solutions. Uh, and it, I will say this, that in the '90s, it became recognized as a part of what a lot of us traditional practitioners call CAM, complementary and alternative medicine practices, uh. And, um, JAMA, the Journal of American Medical Association, actually wrote an article saying that we should just consider homeopathy another tool in our belts in the '90s.

So it's used more widely in other countries. Um, I'm sure some of our listeners from outside the U.S. are very familiar, but there are certainly practitioners, uh, in the U.S. today. Does it work?

Justin:

Uh, are you asking me?

Sydnee:

I—

Justin:

I'm not a doctor.

Sydnee:

I don't know. No, I'm telling you, I don't know.

Justin:

Probably sometimes it works, or at least is conducted at the same time...

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

... as the person being cured.

Sydnee:

Uh, the official standpoint, uh, of, you know, any medical organization would tell you that, um, it is regulated by the FDA, so there's no reason to think that it's harmful, the medications that are used or the homeopathic— I don't know if they would like medications, homeopathic remedies.

Justin:

Treatments or remedies.

Sydnee:

Treatments.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, but it should not be used as the only method of treating something. So if you have been diagnosed with cancer and you want to also visit a homeopathic practitioner, that's great, but you should probably go ahead and see somebody with traditional medical background as well, and both can be used in conjunction. That's usually the stance of most medical organizations. There's not a lot research, not a lot of evidence, so I don't know how to advise you otherwise.

Justin:

And we wouldn't anyway, because we're a podcast.

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

A podcast that you listen to every Tuesday, or, you know, whenever you want to. It's completely up to you. Uh, we record it for you so you'll enjoy it at your leisure, um.

Thank you so much to people who were, uh, sharing our show and, uh, tweeting about it this week. Uh, people like, uh, the, our friends at, um, Games By Play Date, who are working on the Sawbones game. They'll share it with you as soon as we can.

Sydnee:

That looks fantastic.

Justin:

That looks like a lot of fun. Daniel Kobel, Justin Dale, uh, Charles B., Rob Soden, Tara Nicole, Louie Bertani, uh, Lindsey Gates-Markel, Fred Wood, Chris Day, uh, Baron von Chickenpants [laughs].

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Justin:

All right, all right...

Sydnee:

I like that one.

Justin:

... there, hotshot.

Sydnee:

Thanks.

Justin:

Slow your roll, there. Uh, thank you to so much people sharing the show. We sure appreciate it and that's the only way that we can bigger. So please, take a couple minutes this week and tell people to listen to Sawbones.

Sydnee:

And how can they send us emails, Justin?

Justin:

Yeah, you can just send that on over to sawbones@maximumfun.org. Speaking of that URL, Sydnee, that's where all the other great shows on the Maximum Fun Network are, shows like Stop Podcasting Yourself, The Goosedown, the New International Waters with, uh, our buddy Dave Hill, um.

Sydnee:

My Brother, My Brother and Me.

Justin:

Thank you, Sydnee. My Brother, My Brother and Me, One Bad Mother, uh, Jordan, Jesse, Go!, Judge John Hodgman, so many others for you to enjoy. Uh, um, and they're all worth listening to, so go give them a few minutes of your valuable free time.

Uh, thank you to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song "Medicines" for our opening and closing. You can find them on Twitter, The Taxpayers, and thank them for their generosity and buy all their flipping music.

Sydnee:

Hm.

Justin:

Please, and, uh, be sure to join us again next Tuesday for another episode of Sawbones. Until then, I'm Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays]

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