

Sawbones 169: Silver

Published on January 20th, 2017

[Listen on TheMcElroy.family](#)

Clint: 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 music plays]

Justin:

Hello, everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine*. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Oh, Syd.

Sydnee:

Sounding a little nasally—

Justin:

A little nasally?

Sydnee:

... over there, Justin.

Justin:

A little nasally, a little congested.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Ugh. Golly, it's been a rough, [laughs] it's been a rough couple weeks at casa del McElroy, friends.

Sydnee:

Yeah. That's, uh, you may have noticed we didn't have an episode out last week because we have been struck by illness. I mean, we're okay.

Justin:

Yeah, we're—

Sydnee:

I have... Well, lemme clarify, though. I have a—

Justin:

Oh, yeah. You're, you're, you're—

Sydnee:

Um—

Justin:

You're livin' it up.

Sydnee:

I have an amazing immune system, basically almost like a super power, I think you could say.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Like a superhero kind of...

Justin:

Yeah, it's because you work at a hospital. And, and—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... just think, kids. For hundreds of thousands of dollars, this amazing super power—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... could be yours.

Sydnee:

All you have to do is dedicate, uh, what did I, a third of my life-ish—

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... to my training, um, sink into six-figure debt, and then you too—

Justin:

You too can—

Sydnee:

... can be immune to colds that your husband and baby get.

Justin:

Yeah, Charlie and I got the same thing basically on the same day, except I got it like three hours earlier.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

And I was feeling bad, and I was like, "Oh, yeah. Here comes some baby time. I'm gonna need to be babied. Um, I'm gonna need to snuggle up in a, in a bed with some soup and just be pampered."

Sydnee:

[in a mocking baby voice] I need some ramen.

Justin:

I need ramen. Get me pampered.

Sydnee:

[in a mocking baby voice] I need some Gatorade.

Justin:

Yeah. And then three hours later, uh, Charlie started runnin' a fever and it was like, "Well, that's it. I get... I hope I enjoyed my three hours of pampering 'cause that's all I get."

Sydnee:

That was it. That was it.

Justin:

And then my body got better. [laughs]

Sydnee:

It did.

Justin:

Right afterwards.

Sydnee:

It's the dad power.

Justin:

[coughs] So anyway, we didn't have a, uh, episode last week. Um, it's—

Sydnee:

Sorry about that.

Justin:

... just been buck wild and—

Sydnee:

Justin just couldn't... He's just... He's very sensitive, you know. He's a very...

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

His constitution is very—

Justin:

Listen.

Sydnee:

... fragile.

Justin:

Fragile, no. Uh, uh, no. You know what it is? It's, um, allopathic medicine has let me down.

Sydnee:

Traditional medicine failed you. You could say that—

Justin:

Traditional me—

Sydnee:

... osteopathic too. Like, we're all in this together. But—

Justin:

It has failed me.

Sydnee:

... traditional medicine failed you.

Justin:

It has failed me and my daughter for the last time. It was okay when it was just me, but now it's come after my family. Traditional medicine has failed me. I'm going... In 2017, Sawbones goes off the grid—

Sydnee:

No, no.

Justin:

.... to find the buck wildest... [laughs]

Sydnee:

Not, not Sawbones. Not Sydnee. Sydnee's staying right here.

Justin:

The J-Man—

Sydnee:

Uh, that—

Justin:

... goes off the grid.

Sydnee:

What are you gonna use?

Justin:

Uh, goji berries, yes. Super fruits definitely. Blueberry essence, for sure.

Sydnee:

You're just naming berries. Is that all you have?

Justin:

Buck—

Sydnee:

You just have fruits and berries. That's all you're gonna do.

Justin:

Buckwheat husks, um, in my pillowcase for better sleep, a more rested sleep.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Uh, um, air, scented air, different scents of air.

Sydnee:

Right. Scented air. Mm-hmm.

Justin:

All that stuff. Um, uh—

Sydnee:

Silver?

Justin:

I what g—what? Silver?

Sydnee:

You wanna use silver?

Justin:

Mmm, you know, I once heard a tape that I got at my church about colloidal metals—

Sydnee:

Uh-huh.

Justin:

... and how they're, like, way better for... Like, vitamins don't do anything—

Sydnee:

Oh.

Justin:

... and you need to take colloidal—

Sydnee:

At your church?

Justin:

It wasn't like a church-sponsored tape.

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

It was... We ha—used to have this tape rack—

Sydnee:

Uh-huh.

Justin:

... full of, like, inspirational messages, right?

Sydnee:

Uh—huh.

Justin:

So it was like if you were struggling with something, you would take a tape off this rack and listen to it.

Sydnee:

And it tells you to take a colloidal metal?

Justin:

No, I, I used to take them and use 'em as blank tapes. I would, I would record over them—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... with my music.

Sydnee:

That's terrible.

Justin:

Yeah, it was terrible, but the one time, I yonked one and it... instead of it being, like, an inspirational message about, um, Jesus and stuff, it was this guy just talking about colloidal metals. And it was just a doctor just doing like a 45-minute long talk about colloidal metals. And it was, like, fascinating and I seriously listened to it like 50 times, except I don't remember any of the, the details about it.

Sydnee:

Right, so okay.

Justin:

I would love to hear this tape again, but I could never, I could never find it.

Sydnee:

Well—

Justin:

But I was... I didn't know how to get colloidal metals—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... but I knew they were the only thing that was gonna save me.

Sydnee:

Well, how 'bout instead of that, uh, I give you 30 minutes of a doctor telling you why you shouldn't?

Justin:

Well, Syd, that's not a great deal [laughs] but keep going.

Sydnee:

So why don't we talk about colloidal silver?

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And, and a little bit about silver in general because it's... I mean, it's pretty hot. It's pretty, pretty trendy.

Justin:

Pretty expensive. It's right underneath gold, as far as I know.

Sydnee:

Well, let me... We'll get there.

Justin:

[singing] Silver and gold, silver and gold...

Sydnee:

[laughs] A lot of people wanted us to talk about this. Um, a lot of people were sending me pictures of blue people and asking me to talk about it, and I'll get to why they were blue. So thank you, Jessica and Miriam and Steven and Ashley and Chris and Kristin and Elizabeth and Greg and Caitlyn and Sarah and Maureen and David and Adam and Katy, and there were even more, who tweeted and sent Facebook messages. Everybody wants to know what the deal is with silver.

So the use of silver in medicine actually does date back to ancient times, just as all of the websites that tell you to use silver—

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... as medicine will insist. They're correct. Uh, the Greeks and the Romans both believed that silver had cleansing powers of some kind for food and drink. And in light of that, they would often use silver vessels to store food

or, or water, or the Romans often stored wine in them because they thought it kept it more pure.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

More clean. Uh, Pliny, our old buddy Pliny the Elder, he advised, uh, not just storing food and drink in it, but actually applying it to wounds. He thought that if you included it in, like, a plaster that you were applying to a wound, like a bandage kind of situation—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... that you were applying to a wound, it would help it heal faster if you put silver somewhere in there.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Somewhere up in the mix. During the plague years, silver was thought to be especially helpful in, again, uh, warding off the plague, whatever it was. I mean, I know what it was. Uh, you know, germs, but—

Justin:

Germs, right.

Sydnee:

Right, but, like, they didn't know that. Whatever the plague, whatever miasma or bad air, whatever they thought the plague was, they thought silver was pretty good at warding it off. And so again, they would eat off silver plates and use silver utensils, especially the very wealthy.

Justin:

Uh, well, they... I assume silver was, uh, slightly easier for them to come by, right?

Sydnee:

Well, exactly.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But it was also... I mean, It was specifically chosen. I mean, if you're very wealthy, you have a variety of precious metals you could make your plates and forks and whatnot out of.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

You would choose silver because it was thought to have this power, this germ-fighting-before-we-knew-that-they-were-germs power.

Justin:

So what did they think they were fighting? Just, like—

Sydnee:

Something bad.

Justin:

... sickness something? Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Well, like, like I said, maybe miasma, like the idea that there is bad air, like, you know.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, a—and this is, this may be part of where we get, like, the phrase born with a silver spoon in your hand.

Justin:

Oh. Interesting.

Sydnee:

Although, although there were a couple different, like, sayings that supposedly came from the use of silver and from some of the complications of it and I—I—

Justin:

There—

Sydnee:

It's with anything... Yeah, I think with a lot of, like, those kinds of expressions, it's never a hundred per—well, I'm sure it is sometimes. But most of the time, I think it's not a hundred percent clear where it came from.

Justin:

There is certainly a lot of connotations connecting silver to purity, I think.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Th—the, um...

Sydnee:

And wealth.

Justin:

Yeah. It kills—

Sydnee:

And success.

Justin:

It kills werewolves. Like, it probably, you know.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It, it was often... No, like, silver, the idea of having silver items—

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

... I think has more of a, um, spiritual connotation than, like, gold, I think, for example.

Sydnee:

Right. I, I get that. It's good for binding vampires up, according to True Blood.

Justin:

Yes, yes, yes, yes. That, that too.

Sydnee:

Sure. Uh—

Justin:

What can't it do?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Kill germs.

Sydnee:

Well, yeah. Cure most disease.

Justin:

Or—

Sydnee:

Or any.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

But, uh, pioneers used to put silver coins in their water jugs, uh, as a way to try to prevent any con—any kinda contamination. Again, before really knowing what they were preventing, like, just stick some silver in there. Um, same thing, uh, in milk jugs, it was very common that you would wanna stick a silver dollar in your milk jug.

Justin:

How much did milk cost—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... in these times? Does that, I mean, does that... Is it just rolled into the cost or—

Sydnee:

Well, I'm assuming this is the milk silver dollar. Like, you keep it...

Justin:

It's your one—

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

"Hezekiah, did you throw out that milk?"

"Uh, yes, yes I did."

"Hezekiah, did you get the silver coin outta the milk?"

"No, darlin', I didn't. I'm sorry."

Sydnee:

That's a speci—it's like that, it's like that box of, you know, baking powder, baking soda, not powder, baking soda that's in the back of your refrigerator.

Justin:

Yes, right.

Sydnee:

Like, you're not gonna use it for baking soda purposes.

Justin:

Poor baking soda, man.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

If you get opened, you, like, think, "Man, they're gonna put me in cake. They're gonna put me in bread. I'm gonna be so useful." They bring you home, finally get you off the shelf after months of waiting. You're gonna like, "Yeah, time to be put to use," and they tear you open and put you in the fridge. That's gotta be so... 'Cause you've gone from, like, being very useful to like, "Oh man, I'm just gonna absorb stink for months."

Sydnee:

Can I [laughs] can I, can I ask—

Justin:

It's a rough life.

Sydnee:

In what world do you buy a box of baking soda, anticipating that someday you're gonna put it in your fridge? Doesn't everybody just move into a new house, buy a box of baking soda, stick it in the fridge and then forget why they ever put it there, find it when you move out and throw it away?

Justin:

You're looking at me like I'm gonna help you with this—

Sydnee:

That's not what you do?

Justin:

... and you've come to the wrong rodeo, my dear.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

No. What you do is you write a date on it and it's three months after you install it, and then you replace it. Does your wife notice?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Apparently she does not. After 10 years of marriage—

Sydnee:

I never knew you did that.

Justin:

... she does not, apparently.

Sydnee:

I thought we had the same one in the fridge that we've always had in there.

Justin:

That's why, that's why when you open our fridge, you don't get overwhelmed by visible stink lines, 'cause I put the time in.

Sydnee:

That's not a medical thing, but someday I'm gonna look up how, how effective those really are.

Justin:

Very, very effective, Sydnee. They wouldn't advertise it if it... Oh no, I've made a huge mistake.

Sydnee:

Again, this was kind of thought to purify the water, keep it clean. So from all of these uses of silver, mainly for, like, food and drink-like purposes, um, in the 1800s and, uh, or late 1800s and early 1900s, we start to see, like, an expansion of what we think silver is good for.

So, uh, one use in particular is, uh, for newborns whose mothers may have had certain, uh, sexually-transmitted infections, especially like gonorrhea. Uh, there was concern that they could have different infections of their eyes, uh, the babies when they were born. And so silver eye drops were actually put in newborns' eyes to help prevent complications from different illnesses.

Justin:

That sounds problematic.

Sydnee:

Not necessarily.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

That's not, that's not what I, you know, we use in our hospital today, but some places in the world, that could still be in use, actually.

Justin:

Huh. Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, silver salts in nasal sprays were very common for different cold, allergic complaints, anything that affected you, um, made you have a runny nose or cough or congestion or anything like that.

Justin:

Huh.

Sydnee:

Uh, wound dressings, it was very common to put silver, just as Pliny had recommended, in wound dressings. Um, and in World War I, silver was often used—

Justin:

Are—

Sydnee:

... in the bat—, in the battlefield to dress wounds.

Justin:

I'm, I'm pro—can you clarify something? And please, if, if, if I'm getting ahead of you, please let me know, but, like—

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

... do we have... Like with mercury, I know, like, exposure to that, um, is, is not great.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

Is it a spoiler to ask you if, like, exposure to mercury is the same kinda dangerous or has the same sorta dangers?

Sydnee:

You mean to silver, and there is a danger.

Justin:

To silver, yes.

Sydnee:

Yes, but not, not the same as mercury—

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

... as you're gonna see. Uh, it is not as dangerous as mercury.

Justin:

When I think about liquid metal, I just... I don't know.

Sydnee:

Right. Well, I mean, it's best not to ingest it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But, um, putting it on topically was not necessarily always dangerous. Was it effective? Often no. But—

Justin:

History will be the judge of that.

Sydnee:

Right. But, but was it, was it dangerous? No. And, I mean, it was commonplace for surgeons to use silver sutures for all these reasons.

Justin:

Dang.

Sydnee:

To have silver-impregnated sutures.

Justin:

I know why silver's so expensive—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... 'cause these old-time people were just, like, throwing it around, huh?

Sydnee:

Putting it in everything.

Justin:

Put it in everything.

Sydnee:

Uh there—

Justin:

Used it all up.

Sydnee:

There were all kinds of health tonics you could buy, too, big, you know, bottles of various mixtures of, uh, you know, patent medicine standards, things like, you know, opium and cocaine and alcohol—

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

... and all that stuff that makes you feel good.

Justin:

And also silver.

Sydnee:

Also silver. Um, especially for, again, for gonorrhoea, for epilepsy, for stomach disorders, for colds, there were lots of different silver-based, usually liquid medicines that you could drink, uh, for these things.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, now in the 1940s with the antibiotic era, we came up with the idea of fighting infections, you know...

Justin:

Effectively?

Sydnee:

Effectively.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

So, so the use of silver kind of declined because these were all thoughts to, like, keep you healthy, kill germs before we knew there were germs and then even after we knew there were germs, um, but then that became unnecessary with antibiotics. Uh, but that... the use of silver for different medical reasons did not die off. Um, we kind of saw this spike again, uh, in the... with, like, the search for more natural cures that kind of started, maybe we could say, in, like, the '70s and then pervaded in the '80s. And then by the '90s, silver was kind of a thing again.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

It was back in fashion. Um, and you even see, like, in 2003, there was a clothing line of different kind of lingerie and sportswear that had silver ions in it to help prevent odor and bacterial growth—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... in your clothes. Um, colloidal silver, the silver that everybody's talking about, became really popular again in the '90s as a cure-all of sorts. And

when we say colloidal silver, what we really just mean is, like, water with silver ions floating in it.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

So that's what I'm really talking about.

Justin:

Does it take a lot of silver to make that?

Sydnee:

Uh, you can put different amounts in it.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

A lot of, a, a lot of the people we're gonna talk about made it themselves.

Justin:

Mm.

Sydnee:

Um, so it's advised, of course, for infections. Uh, and this is based on... I don't think I've said this yet. This is based on the fact that, um, there were studies done in labs, so in vitro, meaning in labs, that, uh, showed that silver can kill bacteria when directly exposed to bacteria. Uh, so we discovered bacteria. We put silver on 'em. It killed 'em and we went, "Yes."

Justin:

Did it?

Sydnee:

"We have a cure."

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Now, not everything that you can do in a lab is easily replicated in the human body, as we've said before. So as I'll, as I'll get to at the end, this becomes problematic, but that's based on those early studies and then these ancient uses of silver. We see people advising it for everything: infections, for general wellness, just keep yourself healthy and infection-free by taking silver, um, all these you will vague claims. But also for things, specifically like herpes, silver became a very popular recommendation for herpes in the '90s.

Justin:

Yikes.

Sydnee:

For diabetes, for tuberculosis.

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

For HIV—

Justin:

In the '90s? The 1990s?

Sydnee:

In the 1990s for HIV and for cancer.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

That's where you I—well, you already lost me, actually. You didn't, you didn't lose me at cancer.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

You already lost me.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Um, it's now... By now, you'll find people who promote silver for the cure of 650 diseases. I'll be honest—

Justin:

650... In all our cure-all listings—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... I don't think we've ever gotten past like two dozen.

Sydnee:

I—I'll be honest. I'm a physician and I, you know, I went to medical school. I don't have, like, a list of diseases. Like, there was no point in history or in, in my medical training where I had to, like, memorize like, "Here are all the diseases. Now memorize them." I don't know that there's 650. [laughs]

Justin:

Well, there's a lot of fragmentation, you know? They don't just say a cold. There's, like, a really bad cold, a summer cold, a kinda bad cold that you get over. You know, you gotta break it up.

Sydnee:

I mean, if we're talking ICD-10 codes, there are thousands, so, like, way more of those. But I don't know. Anyway, these were probably based on studies where they killed various bacteria and viruses in the lab. Um, the reason that... Everybody's, uh, argument, the reason I don't want to give you silver and I would rather give you penicillin is because big pharma pays me to do that, I can assure you big pharma has never called me and asked me to prescribe you penicillin or any other antibiotic.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Um, there was so much of this that in 1999, the FDA issued a final rule on colloidal silver, establishing that, and this is a quote, "all over-the-counter products containing colloidal silver ingredients or silver salts for internal or external use are not generally recognized as safe and effective, and are misbranded."

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

"Many OTC, over-the-counter, drug products containing colloidal silver ingredients or silver salts are being marketed for numerous serious disease conditions, and the FDA is not aware of any substantial scientific evidence that supports the use of OTC colloidal silver ingredients or silver salts for these disease conditions."

Justin:

But what about blue people, Sydnee?

Sydnee:

Well, people still... I... People don't like to listen to authority, so taking silver supplements are... is still very popular. And chronically, if you continue to ingest silver... Well, here's the thing. Your body doesn't really need it.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

There are lots of trace, you know, elements and, and, and materials that we need very small amounts of in our body. You don't—

Justin:

Iron.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

That's a metal.

Sydnee:

Well, we, we need more of that. That's not trace. But there are lots of things that we only need a little bit of. Silver's not that. We don't need it. You don't need silver.

Justin:

Niacin.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Is that one?

Sydnee:

Yes, we need that. We need that one.

Justin:

But that's an amino acid, right?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Dang.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Man.

Sydnee:

It's a vitamin. That's a vitamin. Uh, but we, we don't need silver, so it's just gonna accumulate in your body. Where does it accumulate? Mainly in your skin.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

When enough silver deposits in your skin, you're gonna start to change colors. You're gonna start to look kinda grayish, kinda blueish if you continue this. This is a condition called argyria, and it is from taking, primarily from taking silver supplements. In the early 1900s, some people who were already doing this were actually in, in freak shows at the time, uh, where they would travel as the Blue Man. You know.

Justin:

Gr—

Sydnee:

Not the group.

Justin:

Group?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

The Blue Man Group.

Sydnee:

No, I, I do not think they have argyria. I do think they paint themselves that color.

Justin:

Some of them have argyria.

Sydnee:

No, I'm pretty sure that they—

Justin:

It's very sad.

Sydnee:

... just apply paint externally.

Justin:

They use si—they use a lot of silver drums and silver percussive equipments. Not drums, of course. Th—you know those guys. They're always tubes, whatever's around. But they were all silver and they all turned blue, and that was how the first... Th—they used be, used to be called the Man Group.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

A lot of people didn't know that.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

And then the blue happened.

Sydnee:

Uh-huh.

Justin:

That was with the original guys, though.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

Everybody else is a pretender to the throne. If you wanna be legit.

Sydnee:

That... Uh-huh.

Justin:

If you wanted to be taken seriously, if you want, like, if you at the conferences—

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

... 'cause this is hard to hear, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

Listen, you should sit down.

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

There's more than one Blue Man Group. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Uh, Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Which is over soon, right?

Justin:

Soon, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah. It's leaving.

Justin:

In spring, I think.

Sydnee:

There was, there was a blue man who famously traveled with, uh, with the circus in, in... back when they had freak shows. And what, uh, they... He had one of the worst cases ever of argyria. Very, very blue. That—that's all I mean by that. He was just quite blue.

Justin:

Just quite blue.

Sydnee:

Um, they diagnosed it at Bellevue in 1923 on autopsy where they kind of figured out how this happened. Um, there was also one in the Coney Island circus, uh, who was named Captain Fred Walters, who initially took, uh, silver nitrate for some sort of neurological condition, but then when he realized that he turned blue and he could tour with freak shows to make money, he kept taking it, you know, to get bluer.

Justin:

Sydnee, I gotta hear about more blue people.

Sydnee:

I'm gonna tell you about more blue people but first, Justin, why don't you come with me to the billing department?

Justin:

Let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Justin:

Sydnee, I demand to hear about more blue people.

Sydnee:

Okay, so another, another unfortunate victim of, uh, drinking silver was Rosemary Jacobs. Back in the 1950s, as an 11-year-old girl, she was prescribed silver-containing nasal drops. That was a very common preparation of silver back in the day, were nasal drops.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, and often used for things like allergies and chronic sinusitis. Uh, she used them just as the doctor prescribed for years, uh, just as needed and it turned her skin kind of a silvery gray, which it still is to this day despite, um, uh, treatments that she's, she's had to try to kind of, uh, peel off the silver layer—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... uh, that have not been completely successful. Now, uh, Miss Jacobs uses this as a platform to speak out against the dangers of unregulated alternative medications, uh, because she was following her doctor's orders. So, so, uh, just one, one more reason to be suspicious of non-evidence based medicine.

Uh, now, uh, many of you sent me pictures to inspire this topic of a guy who was blue, and those pictures are of Paul Karason. Um, he... You, you, if you

have seen someone with argyria, this is probably the gentlemen you've seen because he has—

Justin:

He's the poster boy.

Sydnee:

... an impressive beard and he... an impressive white beard and he is quite blue.

Justin:

Go on.

Sydnee:

So many people have called him, not me, but on TV, have called him Papa Smurf.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

Sydnee, that's... You're a physician, right? That's horrible.

Sydnee:

I didn't call him that. He was called that. He was on, like, the Today Show—

Justin:

This poor man.

Sydnee:

... and they called him that. And that was not me.

Justin:

Tut-tut, tut-tut.

Sydnee:

Uh, he had a, um, skin infection and, um, some dermatitis and some other skin conditions. He did a little reading, figured out that, uh, silver was this alternative medicine that, you know, doctors don't want you to know about.

So he made a salve for his face out of silver and he also made a... his own homemade tonic out of distilled water, silver and salt and drank it and turned blue. But he did insist that it cleared up all of his skin conditions.

Justin:

Except for one, which is having blue skin.

Sydnee:

Now, another famous—

Justin:

Wait. Before you go on, I have a question.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

The... Okay, so I'm getting kind of conflicting reports from you, and I need you to clear it up for me.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

If you stop taking the silver—

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm.

Justin:

... will your skin change back?

Sydnee:

No, this is often a permanent condition.

Justin:

So why did my guy, the captain, Captain Fred, keep poundin' the silver?

Sydnee:

Well one, the more you take, the more impressive the color will be.

Justin:

Impressive.

Sydnee:

Well, the more...

Justin:

[laughs] The, the more vibrant, perhaps.

Sydnee:

The more vibrant. Um.

Justin:

Look at that g—whoa, honey.

Sydnee:

He's very blue.

Justin:

Hey.

Sydnee:

He's quite blue.

Justin:

Hey, hey. Look at this Jekyll. What an impressive—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... hue of blue you are, sir. You really knocked my socks off.

Sydnee:

The other thing is that even though, even though this is often an irreversible condition, it could fade somewhat with time.

Justin:

So it's not really like a, like... You're not... It's not like an actual, like an accumulation of silver, right? Like—

Sydnee:

No, it's a deposition of silver in your tissues.

Justin:

But you just don't process it, like—

Sydnee:

No, you're, you're not...

Justin:

... 'cause you don't know how.

Sydnee:

No, your body—

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

We're not made to.

Justin:

That makes sense.

Sydnee:

Right.

Justin:

That makes sense.

Sydnee:

It's a good, it's a good clue it doesn't belong in your body when you're not made to process it.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Just puttin' that out there. Uh, another guy who turned himself blue, uh, drinking an unapproved, uh, homemade, silver-based antibiotic was Stan Jones. Now this—

Justin:

An unapproved... [laughs]

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Unlike all those FDA-approved, homemade silver antibiotic. Listen, the FDA has really gone off the rail. This looks good. Yeah, what's that in there, silver? [laughs] Rubber stamp.

Sydnee:

Uh, this... If, if you've heard of Stan Jones, he was a... he is a Libertarian from Montana who ran for the Senate and did not win. He actually ran for, like, multiple positions in Montana in the government. He ran for, like, governor and he ran for the Senate. I mean, he, he, he... I don't think he is running in any races more recently, but—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... throughout the 2000s, he ran multiple times for different, uh, government offices. Um, he did not win the Senate race, but he probably had an effect on it. I guess he, as a third party kinda candidate, probably tipped the scales, uh, in the direction of the Democratic candidate.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So he's credited with influencing, if not winning, [laughs] a Senate race. Uh, he... Back in 1999, he became very worried about Y2K, which of course was what was thought to be the apocalyptic end of humanity when all of the computers got confused, because we went from 1999 to 2000 and they didn't know how to cope with it and—

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Anyway, uh, he thought that the world was gonna end and we were going to need to learn how to take care of ourselves, and part of that was going to be making our own medicines. So he started making himself a homemade silver antibiotic.

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Uh, he did it by charging two silver wires in a glass of water, releasing silver ions into the... silver particles into the water. Um, he initially was making it, anticipating that he would stockpile it and use it in case of infection.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

But then as he did more reading, he found that people recommended it for general wellness and, and health, so he just started drinking it every day.

Justin:

We need a different word for reading on the internet—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... is the thing. We, we really shouldn't call it reading.

Sydnee:

As he started—

Justin:

Slurping?

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Eye slurping? I don't know.

Sydnee:

Ingesting information on the internet.

Justin:

Trawling information on the internet.

Sydnee:

Uh-huh. He, he didn't... Now, here's the thing. So he's drinking silver water. Uh, he does not realize, or at least this is what he said, he didn't realize that he had turned blue until he was participating in a Senate debate in 2002. And after it was over, a reporter came up to him and said, "Are you okay? Because you look really blue." Uh, he didn't know, so he went and he saw a doctor and then from there, was diagnosed with argyria from drinking homemade silver.

Uh, I believe that did not stop him. He continued to drink silver, and it kind of become part of, in addition to being a political candidate, what he was known for. Oh, he's that blue guy. [laughs]

Justin:

Um, yeah. And then also, um, uh, I did a quick Google... Because I've been Googling all these people—

Sydnee:

Uh-huh.

Justin:

... to see how blue we're talkin'.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Uh, and I've been giving them little ratings in my head on blueness. Um, and, uh, my guy is still, uh, still, uh, endorsing it and getting out there and spreading the word and, uh, just lettin' people know about how great this stuff is.

Sydnee:

What's the argument, that we're supposed to be blue?

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

I mean, what's the argument there? You drink something—

Justin:

That it's working for him.

Sydnee:

... and it turns you blue, and so then what do you say? Like—

Justin:

He's blue, but he feels great.

Sydnee:

Well, but obviously we... humanity was meant to be blue. Um, in addition to turning you blue, uh, there have been instances of colloidal silver, ingesting colloidal silver, causing things like neurological problems, kidney problems, liver problems. That's not as common, I'll be honest. In terms of how dangerous is it, uh, it's not... It could be dangerous but for most people, it's just gonna turn you blue. Now, the flip side of that is it also won't help you in any way. So you will just be—

Justin:

Blue for no reason.

Sydnee:

... sick and blue. Yeah. You, you, and you will not be healthy and blue. You'll be sick and blue.

Um, now there are uses... Uh, we do use silver somewhat in medicine. There are silver dressings, uh, for wounds, specifically for burns, that are still used today. I've ordered them in my career. Um, silver sulfadiazine—

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

... is the, the form of it. It's not a colloidal silver, but it's a form of silver, um, uh, that we can put in... on wounds to help try to prevent bacterial growth 'cause as I said, like in labs, silver can be used to kill bacteria. It's just, when we have tried to reproduce those studies by dumping it into humans, we've never seen those same results, which happens. Um, we also

use silver nitrate on wounds, which I've talked about before. It's another kind of form of silver that we can use for wound healing and debridement, but, um, or to stop bleeding, but again, um—

Justin:

What's abri—debridement?

Sydnee:

Uh, for dead tissue that we wanna kinda get rid of.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, although it can be somewhat corrosive to the skin.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Uh, and it can also stain your skin, as we've already talked about with silver. And it was really, um, worrisome to me as I was reading about this, the evidence for using these things that I use, that we use in medicine, actually isn't as strong as I thought it was.

Justin:

Uh oh.

Sydnee:

Especially silver dressings, which I thought were kind of obviously these work. Um, there have been some studies that have questioned if they're any more effective than placebo at preventing bacterial growth so... Now, some studies say they are, but some studies waver on that, so... And that's something we use in medicine today, so I thought that was really interesting.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Now, again, we have no evidence they're harmful. We just don't necessarily... Anyway, we've investigated it for other uses. We've tried to

coat, like, endotracheal tubes, things we use for ventilation, like when we intubate somebody. We've tried to coat those with silver to prevent pneumonias that can happen. Um, it hasn't... We haven't really seen success with that yet. We've tried it with urinary catheters, uh, that we, you know, insert if somebody needs a catheter.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

That didn't work. It just made really expensive catheters. Uh, Russian space programs have tried it to keep water sterile. Um, it's been used in some water filtration and sewage systems around the world. There's some evidence that it might be helpful in some of those, like, bacteria-fighting environments. Um, and they have tried giving patients, uh, silver acetate, this is actually something you would ingest, for smoking cessation, but they never saw any effect from that.

Um, here's the, the skinny on silver. Just don't take it. You don't need it. Your body doesn't need it. We don't use it. We have real medicine. Um...

Justin:

Cut it out.

Sydnee:

Using antibiotics judiciously is certainly very important because they are overused and there is a danger that bugs become resistant and they won't be as effective. Silver is not the answer, everyone. Just use your antibiotics smarter. Just be better stewards of antibiotics. Don't, don't take silver, please.

Justin:

Listen. I, I know during this episode, it may have sounded like I was making fun of people with argyria, and I just wanna say I am not making fun of anyone who is actually prescribed it by a real doctor because they were tricked. But if you read about it on the internet...

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... or from your friend's friend or whatever, I am, in fact, making fun of you 'cause you're fine. You're just blue 'cause you, you did something that is

inadvisable. I'm not making any character judgments about you. I am just making fun of you for being blue. And I'm sorry for that.

Sydnee:

Please stop drinking silver, everyone.

Justin:

Stop drinking silver.

Sydnee:

Please stop drinking silver.

Justin:

This one's not even that hard.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

A lot of health things are hard. Just don't drink silver.

Sydnee:

If something turns you blue, it probably is not the answer.

Justin:

Um, that's gonna do it for us, folks. Thank you so much for listening.

Um, this is probably gonna be our last reminder of this, but we're gonna be on the Jonathan Coulton Cruise. Uh, that is March, uh, 4th through March 11th. Uh, we're going to go to a bunch of different ports of call at Cabo San Lucas and an overnight land festival at Lo—Loreto? Lore—... I don't know. It's... I'm, I'm really looking forward to it. There's a ton of great people on the, um, ship besides just us. Who cares? Uh, well, I care about Sydnee, but not me. Um—

Sydnee:

And our daughter.

Justin:

And our daughter, the Chuckster.

Sydnee:

She's great.

Justin:

Welcome to Night Vale, Nerf Herder, uh, Max Temkin, creator of Cards Against Humanity, Rebecca Sugar is a new add, creator of Steven Universe. Are you kidding me? I'm flipping out.

Sydnee:

Justin's gonna lose his mind.

Justin:

Flip—you're gonna lose your mind.

Sydnee:

Well, I am, too, but—

Justin:

We're all gonna lo—

Sydnee:

... you more so.

Justin:

Yeah. Collectively, we're gonna lose our minds.

Sydnee:

Yeah, you're gonna geek out even more.

Justin:

Um, but it's gonna be great. And you... There are still... Believe it or not, there are still, uh, uh, uh, some cabins available. Very limited though. Go to jococruise.com, J-O-C-Ocruise.com, and uh, uh, get onboard literally. That's my new tagline.

Sydnee:

Right, 'cause it's a boat. [laughs]

Justin:

Thanks to The Taxpayers for lettin' us use their song Medicines as the intro and outro of our program. Thank you to all our sponsors. Thank you to you for listening. Sorry about missing a week, but it's life, you know? C'est la vie.

Sydnee:

We'll be better.

Justin:

We'll be better. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Like, as in healthier, like, you know. We're, we're getting there.

Justin:

But until next week, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org.

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Listener supported.