

Sawbones Episode 99: Hygiene

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Intro (Clint McElroy):

Sawbones is a show about medical history and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme song Medicines by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin:

Hello, everybody. Welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I am your co-host Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Uh, Sydnee. It's a very exciting day as you ell know.

Sydnee:

It is an exciting day.

Justin:

I don't know about you.

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

It is the, uh, it is the birthday, first birthday of our daughter- daughter, Charlie Gail McElroy.

Sydnee:

Yay!

Justin:

Happy birthday, Chuck.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

Um.

Sydnee:

We've told her several times today but I don't really think-

Justin:

Not sure she got it.

Sydnee:

... it's clicked.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

She doesn't seem to understand why we keeping singing at her.

Justin:

Uh, but she seems to be happy with her new toy piggy bank and her Potsy the Pot. Seems to enjoy.

Sydnee:

Yeah. No. O-overall, she seems pleased with the fact that she got new things today.

Justin:

Yeah. That seems to have clicked with her.

Sydnee:

So that-

Justin:

You know, there's so many changes in the first year. I think that the one that's probably the most profound and moving to me as a parent is that the things-

Sydnee:

We kept her alive this long. Is that-

Justin:

Yeah. That was an- an achievement in itself. But-

Sydnee:

'Cause that's a big thing. Like-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

You know? We did it!

Justin:

Um, we did it. Yay! Not, um, the things you clean up as a parent get grosser, I think, over the first year of life.

Sydnee:

I think that's very true. Like, if you start first with the obvious like, um, when they poop. It's just like, you know, at first, it's just like, kinda yellow and mustardy and-

Justin:

Whatever.

Sydnee:

Whatever.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It doesn't smell like anything really.

Justin:

Not really. No.

Sydnee:

That is not true after they start eating food.

Justin:

No.

Sydnee:

No. Then, I mean, then it's like, well, I mean, you probably know 'cause it's like-

Justin:

I- I used to know what go- what went into her body was just breast milk so it was like, you could only be so freaked out. Now I don't know what all goes in there. She sneaks a lot of things in there when I'm not looking. Car-

Sydnee:

I-

Justin:

Carpet lint.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Yes.

Justin:

Saltines. Saltine crumbs from the carpet.

Sydnee:

She... Yes. She finds like, her remnants from earlier. Maybe she remembers where she leaves them.

Justin:

Yesterday, I-

Sydnee:

Maybe it's intentional.

Justin:

I looked through her vomit and said, "You know, I think those chunks of cheese we're giving her too big."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

These don't seem very well chewed. I'm just like, staring at it like, just three in the morning-

Sydnee:

Charlie's not sick. She just... I- I think she just got too worked up and I... Actually, that was on her birthday and so she'd had cake.

Justin:

Well, today is her birthday.

Sydnee:

Well, okay.

Justin:

It was her birthday party.

Sydnee:

It was on her birthday party.

Justin:

Anyway.

Sydnee:

And she'd had cake. Anyway. And so she puked and like, you really see everything. I mean, she puked all over me.

Justin:

It's the worst.

Sydnee:

So I was intimately familiar with it. Like, I threw the shorts away. Literally, I just threw them away.

Justin:

Threw them in the garbage.

Sydnee:

'Cause like, they were covered in pieces of meat stick, which that's a... Anyway.

Justin:

But, uh, you know, clean up, I think, keeping her hygiene straight is, uh, is the- is the biggest change, I think, over the past year.

Sydnee:

Well, you know, Justin.

Justin:

And more hair. Also more hair.

Sydnee:

Well, yeah. That too. But hygiene is very important.

Justin:

Well, I'm glad to hear that because if I've been wasting my time cleaning up, uh, after her, uh, vomit then I would be very frustrated I think.

Sydnee:

No, no. You've not been wasting your time. We've known for a long time that cleaning ourselves in different ways to various degrees is important. Um, and, uh, and I think that may be an interesting thing to talk about.

Justin:

Do it then, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

All right. Well, let's talk about some hygiene. I wanna thank several people who suggested this topic. Thank you, Lauren, Annie and Russell. Uh, hygiene, the word hygiene comes from the- the Greek goddess of health, Hygieia.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

And it's interesting 'cause if you think about it, why... 'Cause I'm gonna talk about some- some old, old, you know, ancient hygiene practices. But why do we, as a species, naturally tend to, you know, clean ourselves? Why do we- why do we think that's important?

Justin:

I... You know, I don't know. I mean, I- I would think that it just feels right. It feels better than being dirty, I think.

Sydnee:

A lot of people have looked into this to see is there some connection? Is there some evolutionary advantage to feeling gross? You know?

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

So to speak. Uh, to getting yucked out [laughs] at yourself and to wanting to get cleaned up.

Justin:

Your own filth.

Sydnee:

Um, yeah. And the- the thought is that there probably is an evolutionary advantage because when you're growing, you know, like, fungal infections or if there's bacterial infections stewing in places on your body, it smells bad. And so the, you know, the quest for no B.O. is probably, you know, ingrained in our DNA as a quest to remove possibly disease causing organisms.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

And that's, uh, indicated by the fact that ants clean themselves.

Justin:

Really?

Sydnee:

To remove fungus. Like, little fungal organisms that grow on them, the ants clean sometimes. Spiny lobsters will actually avoid other lobsters when they have viral infections. So they'll stay away from lobsters that may be gross. Um, and, uh, bees actually leave the hive to go to the bathroom. Like, to, you know, have a-

Justin:

How polite.

Sydnee:

... a number two. A bee number two.

Justin:

How polite.

Sydnee:

Yeah. They don't wanna contaminate it.

Justin:

That- that's very mannerly of- of bees. I- I think... I already thought- I already a lot of them 'cause, uh, I really like the honey sriracha glaze from Pizza Hut.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

But now I'm like, way more into bees.

Sydnee:

I don't- I don't know that bees invented that.

Justin:

Well, they didn't invent it but they play an integral role.

Sydnee:

It's very inter-... It's contrary to, I think, the human inclination to return home, you know, for your private-

Justin:

For- for-

Sydnee:

... bathroom time.

Justin:

Yeah. For your-

Sydnee:

To make a bathroom.

Justin:

Secret bathroom.

Sydnee:

Um, most fish, birds and mammals clean themselves and their area, you know, their nests or their hives or their, you know, huts or hobbles or whatever, in some way. So it's not just humans. Everybody tends to- to stray towards cleanliness. Um, they've even seen chimpanzees cleaning each other, specifically, um, mommy and daddy chimpanzees cleaning off baby chimps butts after they poop.

Justin:

How sweet.

Sydnee:

So yeah. So this is something that, I mean, it kind of... It goes beyond social construct, most likely. Um, for us, like I said, it- the way that it manifests is probably disgust. When we see something that we identify as like, that's gross. That's yucky. It's probably because it causes some kind of illness and so it's our- we're biologically programmed to say, "Ugh! Stay away from that." Or, "Get it off me."

Justin:

Yeah. Yucky. Yucky.

Sydnee:

Um, they've- they've done a lot of studies to try to figure out what we think is yucky. [laughs] Like, showed people pictures of things and said like, "Is this yucky or is this yucky?" And-

Justin:

Anchovies. Dirt. Mushrooms. Um.

Sydnee:

Of these yucky things.

Justin:

Other peoples pee pee. Yeah. Those are some yucky things I know about.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I could go for literally minutes naming yucky things. Don't test me.

Sydnee:

Don't. Let's not... That... You know what? You can do your own separate episode later which is just you naming yucky things for-

Justin:

For a half hour?

Sydnee:

... for a half hour.

Justin:

Do some ASMR stuff. People would love that.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, it seems also that they found that younger people-

Justin:

Stale chips.

Sydnee:

You're- you're gonna keep doing this throughout the-

Justin:

No, no.

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

I promise I'm not.

Sydnee:

They've also found that younger people-

Justin:

Rotten cottage cheese.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yep. This is our- this is our show. And women are more susceptible maybe to yucky feelings. And then there was some thought as like, is that because women are involved in like, bearing children, carrying children, bearing children so they- they need to be yucked out by things more easily so they can stay healthier.

Justin:

Wow. Yeah. Maybe. I don't know.

Sydnee:

So we can further the species. You know?

Justin:

I'll take your word for it.

Sydnee:

So you can give birth. I don't know.

Justin:

I tend to not comment on things like this.

Sydnee:

Anyway, it's an interesting- it's an interesting idea.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Although, I would say between the two of us, you are much more easily yucked out than me.

Justin:

Um, yeah. Probably. But like, you're kind of a special case because you have- you like, have cut people open a lot of times.

Sydnee:

I wouldn't say a lot of times because [laughs] I'm not a surgeon so that kinda makes me sound like a serial killer.

Justin:

Okay. Fair enough. Enough times. More times than me.

Sydnee:

Yes. Well, that's-

Justin:

By a fair margin.

Sydnee:

I would hope so.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, as far back as the Paleolithic era, you see, uh, like, devices that people kind of made to like, tweeze, you know, their eyebrows and trim their beards and- and whatnot. Um, which was probably a way to remove parasites. You know, lice and stuff. So, you know, why- why else would you shave your hair? Uh, it may have also been hot, I guess. But- but mainly to get bugs off.

Justin:

Just maybe you just want a new look. Come on!

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's crazy! The only reason you shave your head is because of disease. That's wild. I know a lot of bald guys with a z- that would be really upset by that.

Sydnee:

Uh, soap dates way back to Babylonian times. Um, but the Greece and the Romans tended to use oil instead to- to clean themselves. Um, they... I don't know. They just preferred that method. They thought it felt better. You know, we've talked about that before. Uh, Romans-

Justin:

It's more-

Sydnee:

... especially rubbing themselves with it.

Justin:

More erotic.

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

More erotically charged.

Sydnee:

It's [laughs] much more erotic. Um, the Romans, of course, also had a plumbing system as well as public baths so, you know, hygiene, the idea of bathing and a waste removal system. Even some toilets that would have like, a flowing water underneath them, a way to get rid of it. That was already kind of a concept.

Justin:

Hmm.

Sydnee:

You know, that far back. Um, and again, this is before we had any idea of why it was important to stay away from- from, you know, human waste. Um, they also would use... They didn't have toilet paper, of course. In- in lieu of that, they would use a sponge on a stick.

Justin:

Ah, that's nice.

Sydnee:

Yeah. [laughs] It'd get you really clean, I bet.

Justin:

Oh, yeah. And what a great feeling too. Can't feel fresher than that.

Sydnee:

Is that true? Do you know?

Justin:

I bet. I bet. I bet.

Sydnee:

Have you, um-

Justin:

I bet. I bet. I bet. I bet you can't feel fresher than that.

Sydnee:

I don't know where you keep that, uh, but just make sure I never find it.
[laughs]

Justin:

Deal.

Sydnee:

Uh, there was also sometimes if they didn't... I guess if you didn't have really fancy [laughs] sponge on a stick, um, you could also use little ceramic pebbles, um-

Justin:

To what?

Sydnee:

That they would coat-

Justin:

To exfoliate?

Sydnee:

The pessoi. Pessoi. Pessoi.

Justin:

Like those salt scrubs you get at, uh-

Sydnee:

To clean your-

Justin:

... Bath and Body Works?

Sydnee:

No like, to clean your butt after you go to the bathroom.

Justin:

Just rub it on some rocks? Like a dog.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Just use some rocks and then like, they even note like, just like, three should be sufficient. Don't get- don't get too ostentatious with your rock usage. [laughs]

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Like, three pebbles should take care of it, I guess, for most people.

Justin:

And don't go skipping that- those stones across the pond, we swim in there. That's foul.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, it's I- I read an interesting historical side note that some of these pebbles, pessos, may have originally been what was called ostraka, which were pieces of ceramic on which, um, like, if you wanted to vote somebody out of town, if everybody hated somebody, you could all write down names on little ceramic stones and turn them in and then I guess if they had enough votes, they would get voted out of town. So... And that's where the word ostracized comes from.

Justin:

And also where the show *Survivor* comes from.

Sydnee:

Well, I thought about that. So it was kinda like *Survivor* except if afterwards, you used the paper where you wrote the name down to wipe your butt.

Justin:

[laughs] Maybe they do. They- there's a lot of editing that happens in those shows. We don't know what happens beyond the scenes.

Sydnee:

Um, but, you know, we were talking, uh, uh, talking to Romans up pretty well here. They also, although they did have a plumbing system, they also were not that afraid of, you know, dirt and- and being dirty and- and kinda the idea that you were sweaty and needed a shower or a bath because, um, it was known that they would sell the dirt and the sweat and the oil that they would like, collect in little vials off of famous athletes, um, to people to use as face cream.

Justin:

Oh, that's where, uh, Axe body spray comes from.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

A lot of people don't know that.

Sydnee:

We're gonna get a nasty letter from Axe body spray. [laughs]

Justin:

Let them come at me.

Sydnee:

Um, there's also some evidence if you look back in ancient writings, there are a lot of- of different, uh, thinkers who, uh, advise that you stay away from sick people with this basic idea that there's something out there that could make you sick. Um, we, uh, the Ebers Papyrus also mentions soap. Um, it was made back before we knew. I mean, we- we kinda always knew how to make soap. Uh, we used to make it out of like, water and these alkali salts and you could use either an oil or an animal fat so, you know, we kind of- we've known how to make salt for a long time.

Uh, Pliny was the first one. One of our favorite characters here.

Justin:

Good old Pliny.

Sydnee:

Pliny the elder, uh, who- who talked about soap or call- or it was call sapo, uh, which really is just the word for soap.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

There's nothing. It doesn't mean anything.

Justin:

They just mixed up the P and the O.

Sydnee:

It just means soap. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, noting that it was made from tallow and ashes. However, Pliny says this is really, you know, it doesn't have a lot of uses. Unlike a lot of other things that Pliny would be like, "Oh, this is good for everything." Uh, no. Soap was good for, um, hair pomade. [laughs]

Justin:

A great look. I mean, that's true. I- it's weird that he didn't see the benefits of soap and yet he was so hot on like- like, fox hair mixed up with grease.

Sydnee:

Well, he kinda wrote about it scornfully like, "all these men today with their fancy soap hair. Jeez."

Justin:

Maybe that was the only thing he could figure out to do with it. Like, what is this stuff?

Sydnee:

"In my day, we just shaved our heads."

Justin:

[laughs] Because of disease.

Sydnee:

"Because of lice." [laughs]

Justin:

Apparently. And lice.

Sydnee:

Uh, there's a- there's a story that there was a Mount Sapo where, um, and that this is where soap comes from that there were- there's this mountain where animals were sacrificed and because the animals were killed there and burned, that there was like, this collection of animal fat and ashes that kinda flowed from the mountain and that people like, gathered that up and that was the creation of soap. Uh, but-

Justin:

How- how fascinating. I never knew that origin story of soap.

Sydnee:

Well, it's not true.

Justin:

Oh, well, I've forgotten it instantly.

Sydnee:

It's a cool story. I wish it was true.

Justin:

What story? I've already banished it from my mind.

Sydnee:

Just keep thinking of gross things that you can tell me about later.

Justin:

Coming up next, coming up after the break, gum on the bottom of your chair.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Hate that. Who put it there? Not me.

Sydnee:

Uh, Galen had the revolutionary idea of using the soap that- that Pliny talked about as hair pomade for washing oneself. Um, even noting that if you wanted the best soap, you would go to the Germans and if you wanted the second best soap, you would go to Gaul or France.

Justin:

Gaul. Those were talking about it for a long time. Gaul. Home of the second best soap.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I don't-

Justin:

When you can't make it to Germany, turn to Gaul.

Sydnee:

Their soap is pretty good.

Justin:

Their soap is okay.

Sydnee:

For washing. Um, and it's also something that you'll find in- in many major religious texts, the idea that there should be certain, you know, cleansing rituals or at least, you know, keep yourself clean. Um, and that's also where we kind of, um, we've talked about before, the idea of a miasma theory of disease. Like, that disease is kind of floating around in the air and that if you inhale these foul airs, that you'll get sick.

Um, it initially was a religious term. It referred to a stain or a sin of some kind, something that offended the Gods or the- or God. Um, but eventually, it became associated with disease and you see this kind of linkage in- in religious texts where there's this, um, bad, you know, you need to cleanse yourself to- to, you know, spiritually cleanse yourself but you also need to literally like, take a bath and a shower because God likes that.

Justin:

Yeah. God approves.

Sydnee:

Um, hand washing was actually a thing long before we understood why we were doing it but really just before meals. Um, but it was- it was suggested that before you go sit down and eat, you- you wash your hands.

Justin:

Why were they doing it?

Sydnee:

I think... I mean, I... My guess would be that this is a time when there were a lot of people with really dirty hands.

Justin:

Yeah. I mean, it has to be just a visual thing if nothing else. Right? Like, your hands look dirty. You've been working-

Sydnee:

Exactly.

Justin:

... on a farm all day or whatever.

Sydnee:

Right. And you actually have like, particles that you can see of things on your hands. So you're not washing it with the intention that I'm going to remove disease causing bacteria and viruses. You're washing your hands because you don't wanna get like, cow poop on your food probably.

Justin:

Like, just because the theory of germ, well, just because germ theory wasn't a thing yet, doesn't mean like, dirty wasn't. Like, people still understood dirty. You don't have to be a, you know, particularly advanced to get that.

Sydnee:

No. And it's interesting 'cause even as... We're gonna talk about a time when bathing wasn't a cool thing to do.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, 'cause there was a time period where bathing falls greatly out of favor, you know, unlike like, we have the Romans and all of these public baths and everybody likes these long kinda sensual, kinda orgy-esque bath houses. Uh, and then we move into a lo- long period of time where that's not cool. People are still washing their hands, which is good because we usually ate with our hands.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, however, after a while, uh, we kinda move a step backwards from the- the sponge on the, um, stick idea, that kinda fades into-

Justin:

Things got worse from that-

Sydnee:

Things got worse.

Justin:

... advancement.

Sydnee:

And then you see people using, in addition to like, stones that we mentioned, like, corn cobs and leaves, snow, seashells, grass, animal fur or just your hands, um, if you had nothing else. So...

Justin:

What's next? What's the next- what's the next time period?

Sydnee:

Well, before I- before I take you there, Justin, will you come with me to the billing department?

Justin:

Let's go.

[ad break]

Justin:

So Syd, medieval times. What- what- what was going on there re- in regards to cleanliness?

Sydnee:

So when people think about like, uh, 'cause there's a lot of talk about how, uh, back in the olden days. Olden. Olden times.

Justin:

Ye olden times.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Olden. Why do we call them olden people? Whatever we... Old timey people.

Justin:

Old timey people.

Sydnee:

Old timey people.

Justin:

In the olden times.

Sydnee:

In the olden times. Uh, there's a lot of talk about how gross they were and this is usually what people were talking- are- are talking about. Is the-

Justin:

Much of it on this program.

Sydnee:

Yeah. We joke about that a lot. Uh, some of it is not well founded and then there- some of it is. So in medieval times, bathing started to fall out of fashion somewhat. Um, initially, as we enter the medieval period, it was okay. Um, it- it wasn't done in big public bath houses. Those start to fall out of fashion and you see those slowly being closed, especially by like, the churches. The church got involved. And, um, and part of it was in an effort to stop syphilis.

Justin:

Excellent.

Sydnee:

So you start seeing the closing of public bath houses for that reason. Um, but it was still okay to take a bath. And, in fact, uh, a married couple's first bath together was a really important part of you know-

Justin:

Really crowded part of their really uncomfortable-

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

... honestly, part of their... Yeah.

Sydnee:

What are you trying to say?

Justin:

I'm saying that medieval tubs were probably not the sp- the spacious-

Sydnee:

Oh, okay.

Justin:

... luxurious tubs and maybe like, you know, they're waiting all night for this night and they're like, "Move your elbow."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"I love you but please, just move your arm. I'm suffocating."

Sydnee:

"Are we done yet?"

Justin:

"Are we done yet?"

Sydnee:

Uh, there's even I- I guess there's a Fresco of a married couple having their first bath together in the town hall and, um, uh, San Gimignano- Gimi-... Say that for me, Justin.

Justin:

Oh. San Gimignano.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Italy.

Justin:

Italy. A town in Italy. You could just write a town in Italy.

Sydnee:

A town in Italy. There's a town in Italy.

Justin:

They're your notes!

Sydnee:

Well, you want me to make it up?

Justin:

Just- just write. No, just say there's a town hall in a small town in Italy.

Sydnee:

[laughs] I'm trying to be accurate.

Justin:

You're not! You just failed miserably! You made me try to be accurate for you.

Sydnee:

Over time, this, um, favorable few of bathing started to change. This is because of a couple things. First, um, you would only have access to what we would consider like, a proper bath if you were rich or- or probably royalty. Um, otherwise you may not have had a bathtub or certainly, the means to get all the water you would need to fill it up. 'Cause, I mean, obviously, you didn't have plumbing.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

So, um, if you were royalty, your bath would involve you climbing into your very fancy copper tub that was lined with something very soft and you would sit in there naked while servants came, um, bucket by bucket, heating up water and then dumping it into the tub around you and probably with some scented oils and it would be very luxurious and take a very long time.

Justin:

Sounds nice.

Sydnee:

Now, if you couldn't afford that-

Justin:

Sounds like a- sounds- what it sounds like to me is- is like, a- a dish soap commercial. Like, just a- a guy imagining himself in that scenario. You know?

Sydnee:

While he's washing dishes?

Justin:

Being whisked away. Well, he's like, you think it's that then it's like, smash cut to him like, inhaling the bottle of like, Dawn or something.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

It's like, this is where he's whisked away to.

Sydnee:

This is the new Calgon ad.

Justin:

Yeah. We got- we bought a bottle of Dawn that was like, mango beach vacation. And it's like, I... Really? If you need to be whisked away by the scent of your dish washing [laughs] detergent, you should probably like, try

to re-prioritize. Like, just do... Like, really, if you need that for... Like, if that's your like, if that's your bit of serenity in the world is like, [sniffs] "Oh God. Let's get these dishes clean." Like, I-

Sydnee:

Dish washing detergent. Amazing.

Justin:

... really, really need to reorganize.

Sydnee:

Uh, just start, you know, saving up a little bit at a time and go to the beach.

Justin:

That's said, I still bought it so like, where am I at? I don't know.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

I'm a moving target.

Sydnee:

Um, so like I said, if you couldn't afford these- these very fancy bath tubs that you're dreaming of, well, Justin's dreaming of while he's washing dishes later-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... um, then you may have like, a modest, smaller tub in your home that you could go through the time and trouble of filling up for yourself or maybe even a barrel.

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

If you didn't have anything else. Um.

Justin:

God, I always hate taking a bath in a barrel.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

There's nothing funnier than that to me.

Sydnee:

If you, uh, if you did have a bath tub like this but you weren't a royal person, then you were probably going to share that bath water with your family.

Justin:

Oh no.

Sydnee:

Because you went through a lot of time and effort if you did bother to get it heated up, to get it all heated up and fill up this big tub and then you're gonna have to empty it all out. So what would happen is that dad would get first crack at the- at the tub and then mom and then it just kinda goes down the line from there, starting with the oldest child all the way down to the youngest who goes last-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

... in the dirtiest of dirty bath water, which is where the phrase, "don't throw the baby out with the bath water" comes from.

Justin:

How nice. And also-

Sydnee:

No, that's not nice. [laughs]

Justin:

Well, that's very nice to know but that's crazy that they were making their... "Hey, baby. You ready to get that immune system cranked?"

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Hey, baby. Time to- time to activate that vitamin C that you're not getting."

Sydnee:

Um, I, you know, I... We would at least be in okay... We would've been in okay positions as the oldest children. You know?

Justin:

I guess.

Sydnee:

We would just have to go right in the middle.

Justin:

Just gotta bot- bathe in your mom and dad's filth.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Think about-

Justin:

That's going well?

Sydnee:

Think about Rileigh and Griffin. They're at the bottom of this chain.

Justin:

Right. That's a lot of...

Sydnee:

You know?

Justin:

Ugh. This is yucking me out. Can we move on to another thing?

Sydnee:

So okay. So maybe you're- you're lucky enough to not be able to afford that. Uh, then- then you don't have a bath tub at all so you may go your whole life and never be fully submerged in water.

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

Um, uh, in- in which case, you would just kind of dab at yourself with like, a damp cloth, um, and whatever water you had access to when you had the time and then you would probably just put on a lot of something floral, something scented to try to hide all the, you know, the icky smell.

Justin:

We're obviously talking, I would guess here, in places that were landlocked. If you're- if you're living, uh, on the water, as a lot of people did, uh, I imagine there's, you know, it's a lot easier to keep up with this stuff.

Sydnee:

Absolutely. And you see that. You see people who live on, uh, rivers or lakes or oceans, certainly, you know, actually going out and taking baths that way. Um, for the most part. Not- not all the time though. We'll talk about that. But, um, um, well, let's talk about that now.

Because that's the- that's the other reason you wouldn't have bathed. So let's say you did have a tub but you may not have bathed anyway for, uh, moral reasons.

Justin:

Oh, really?

Sydnee:

So there was a period of time where the idea of getting naked and immersing yourself in water was considered kind of unholy. Um.

Justin:

Like, why?

Sydnee:

Uh, the idea that just it was- it could lead you to sin. Um, because, you know, you were naked and it feels good to be in the water.

Justin:

Yeah. I'm- I would get this. There's a lot of times I catch a glimpse of myself fresh out of the shower and think, mm. Look at you. Time to get some sinning done. That is what I think.

Sydnee:

[laughs] There was a lot of association with the public bath houses as part of why this happened and those were seen as- as places of sin. Um, but just in general, there was this belief that once you were kind of exposed and submerged in water that the devil could get in and so, you know, there was also some health concern that like, you were more, um, susceptible to disease if you were naked in water. Um.

Justin:

'Cause it could like, swim in?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

We didn't know anything.

Sydnee:

No, we didn't.

Justin:

We were just guessing.

Sydnee:

We thought water carried disease. Well, which was sometimes true.

Justin:

Yeah. Fair.

Sydnee:

But that you would get it if you- if you got in a bath tub. And so there were some people who maybe even could have had access to a tub but didn't so, um, so it became like- like, for instance, there were a lot of monasteries where the monks recognized that they- they should clean themselves somewhat and so like, it would become part of the ritual like, twice a year you would take a bath.

Justin:

And they would just like, chain themselves up like, Wolfman.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Like, listen. I'ma come to you when I'm fresh out of that bath. I'm gonna say a lot of things. I'm gonna say that I wanna, uh, I wanna be gluttonous. I wanna eat too much. I wanna, uh, stay up past my bed time. You can't let me do any of this."

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

"Okay? Just- just chain me down. Wait till the impulses pass."

Sydnee:

"Wait till I get dirty again."

Justin:

"Wait till I'm dirty again."

Sydnee:

"And then I'll be fine."

Justin:

"Give me my robes and let's go pray together."

Sydnee:

Uh, another way that your life was probably better if you were royalty, which is probably always true about everything. Right?

Justin:

Yeah. Most- most everything. Yeah.

Sydnee:

But- but particularly, hygiene is that, um, you may have had a toilet of sorts if you were royalty. Um, they actually had like, little rooms with kind of basically like, a board with a hole in it over a bigger hole, uh, that emptied into the mote.

Justin:

Cool. That's gonna keep out the intruders.

Sydnee:

So think about that. That's what's in that mote. You know, all the story books, you think there are alligators. Nope.

Justin:

Nope.

Sydnee:

Much worse.

Justin:

Or- or mean alligators.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Also.

Sydnee:

They're very angry.

Justin:

Angry.

Sydnee:

They're angry about what's happening.

Justin:

"I hate people!"

Sydnee:

I'm angry about it in retrospect. [laughs] That's gross.

Justin:

Yeah, poor things.

Sydnee:

Um, however, if you- if you weren't royal then for these purposes, you probably just dug a hole and then you buried it afterwards. Um, if you were the king, not only would you have a toilet, you may have a royal potty chair,

so to speak. Like, you can- you can find pictures of these. Like, these really nice ornate [laughs] like, chairs with holes in them. They look like- like, bed side potty chairs that you'd have if you were like, in the hospital or, you know, you couldn't make it back and forth to the bathroom.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Only really nice. Like, not made out of like, PCV pipe. [laughs]

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

Like, they're really nice. Um, but in addition to this, you would also have someone who's job it was to clean you up afterwards.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

And they were known as the groom of the stool.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And their entire job-

Justin:

Excellent.

Sydnee:

... was to wipe the king's butt after he was done. Uh-

Justin:

But you hate to see that answer on the career aptitude test. Huh? This is what you're best suited for.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Oh, man. I was hoping for at least engineer.

Sydnee:

No, in fact, you would love to see that. It was a highly prized position because a lot of, uh, noble men who start well and- and noble men, they were usually very young when they would be given this position, would ascend to, um, being the king's like, private steward.

Justin:

That's like, pretty much the definition of a rags to riches tale. Huh?

Sydnee:

Yeah. [laughs] Well, they would know the king's most intimate- intimate secrets so they usually became the king's most trusted, you know, buddy.

Justin:

"Our beloved leader loves corn."

Sydnee:

[laughs] So gross.

Justin:

"Only I know how much he enjoys corn." Okay. Ple-... We have-

Sydnee:

Please. We have to move on now.

Justin:

Will we please move on.

Sydnee:

I can't talk about this anymore.

Justin:

Please move on.

Sydnee:

Okay. So- so all of these things, you know, this fear of bathing and people are- don't have toilets, this persisted. And the 18th century in particular was- was a pretty smelly time. No one bathed, uh, very often at least. Uh, there was no deodorant. Uh, most people, if they didn't go, you know, out to the bathroom and bury it outside, they would have a chamber pot under their bed where they would, you know, pee and other things and then, of course, I think we all know where those things were emptied. We've all heard those stories.

Justin:

Sure. Into the river, safely.

Sydnee:

No. Tossed out your window-

Justin:

Tossed out the window.

Sydnee:

... in the street. [laughs]

Justin:

In the street. Right. That's what I meant.

Sydnee:

Uh, toilet paper proper didn't show up until about the 1880s.

Justin:

Really, the hor- the hero of this particular tale.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, so until then, people are still using anything they can find, including their hands. Um, bed bugs were everywhere despite the fact that beds were consistently wiped down with kerosene. Um, people were constantly covered with bugs. A lot of this had to do with like, there were thatched roofs and thatched like, straw floors in a lot of places and so that didn't particularly keep the bugs out.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

You know? Especially over top. So it was not uncommon for bugs to fall from the ceiling and all kinds of manner of creatures to fall from the ceiling into your food, onto your hair, onto whatever. Um, that's actually why canopy beds became so popular.

Justin:

Oh. Oh.

Sydnee:

To protect you from all the bugs that could fall on you at night. [laughs]

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

Um, the streets were filled with animal dung.

Justin:

Takes some of the romance out of them.

Sydnee:

And... [laughs] Yes, I know. They- they have a whole new look now.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, uh, most people had lice. No one did much of anything to their teeth. Um, and we won't even talk about women and menstrual care because that's a whole... We- we already did a whole episode on that. But it was no fun either.

Justin:

Fair enough.

Sydnee:

Um, in the 19th century, bathing habits may have been even worse, if you can believe it. I mean, this is really the time period where people are just never in water. Um, but we do have toilet paper by now. So we start to see chamber pots fade away a little bit. Um, and even deodorant now exists.

Justin:

Oh.

Sydnee:

So as a- as a culture, we're getting a little less smelly. Um, and then as we move into the 20th century, we- we have the germ theory of disease, we start to understand bacteria, we start, uh, Semmelweis, who we have referenced many times and never really talked about-

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

We will. We will. Um, but, uh, we start to wash our hands a little more. We start bathing a little more regularly, um, and then, you know, we start to see hygiene improving at this point. Um, it also helps when we start changing houses to like, wood and concrete and stuff like that.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

So that, you know-

Justin:

Keep- keep bugs and stuff out.

Sydnee:

... bugs aren't constantly coming in your house. Um, one- uh, couple interesting facts. Um, one is that, uh, m- most people in the time period when you would only bathe once a year or twice a year maybe, most people used to bathe in May. I don't know why that was the bathing month but May was the most popular month for baths, which is why June became the wedding month.

Justin:

Oh. Interesting.

Sydnee:

'Cause you weren't that smelly yet. [laughs]

Justin:

Right. You're still relatively clean.

Sydnee:

It's also part of why brides carry flowers.

Justin:

Oh. Wow. Okay.

Sydnee:

Yeah. To c- cover up whatever smell they may have.

Justin:

You're so full of trivia tonight.

Sydnee:

I know.

Justin:

I'm really enjoying the trivia in this episode.

Sydnee:

Uh, many people would only have had four outfits. They would wear one a season. This contributed to the overall-

Justin:

Yeah. Stinkiness.

Sydnee:

Stinkiness. Um, and any time you see a portrait of someone with a really elaborate wig, you should probably think about all the lice that's hiding in there.

Justin:

I'd rather not. Thanks.

Sydnee:

You know, it's interesting now, we're kind of, uh, moving away. I mean, obviously, most people bathe and wash their hands and we have toilet paper and plumbing and, you know, we understand the importance of clean water and all those things. Um, but there's a movement slightly away from hygiene now. Uh, the idea that we got too hypersensitive about germs. I think we've kind of alluded to this before.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Um, but that we all have like, a normal bacterial population that lives in us.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Our bacterial flora. Um, that, uh, you- you know, I've mentioned this before. I think you're more bacteria than human. You have more bacterial cells than human cells.

Justin:

Another... Uh, so happy to return to this fact.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

So happy to hear that again.

Sydnee:

And that's important. You need those bacteria. They do all kinds of things for you and they protect you from worse bacteria, which is why we're, you know, like, Jamie Lee Curtis is telling you to eat yogurt.

Justin:

For more poops.

Sydnee:

Yes, exactly. That's where probiotics came from and, um, and the hygiene hypothesis, again, I think we've talked about this where like, if you're too clean then maybe that's where we get like, allergies and asthma and this is also why people tell you to...

We didn't really talk about this. To eat honey for allergies. The idea that you're exposing yourself through like, local honey. So if it's honey from your area, you're exposing yourself through the honey to like, local allergens and things and then you're less likely to develop allergies. You're- you're less likely to suffer from allergies to them.

Justin:

Huh. Fascinating.

Sydnee:

Yeah. So- so I don't know. Maybe we go too carried away. Maybe we're too clean.

Justin:

You know what? I'm happy where we're at. Maybe we could scale back a little bit but I don't need to- I don't need... I- I- I just know I'd be a groom of the stool. I just know me.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

That's where I would end up. I don't need to return to those days. Uh, Syd, we're going to be just like, a couple weeks from now, we're going to be in the Pacific Northwest.

Sydnee:

That's right.

Justin:

Portland, Vancouver, and Seattle. Not in that order. Portland, Seattle, Vancouver is the order. Uh, Portland is sold out. Sorry about that. But we still do have tickets. Although they're going pretty fast. They're starting to pick up 'cause the shows are getting fairly close. Uh, uh, tickets are still available for Seattle. Uh, these are shows with, uh, *My Brother, My Brother and Me*, the advice podcast with my brothers. So, uh, the address to get those tickets is bit.ly/mbmbamseattle and bit.ly/vanmbmbam. So, uh, tickets are like, 20 bucks, I think. Something like that.

And, uh, we'll be there. We're selling some cool new posters and, uh, stuff like that. But it's gonna be fun. So if you could, uh, come out to those shows, we'd love to see you.

Sydnee:

Yeah. And we're bringing along my little sister, Riley.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Chuck. Chuckster will be there.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Uh, though you probably won't see her. Hopefully, she'll be asleep. If she's not asleep yet, we have failed as parents.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Uh, which is possible. Um, uh, thank you to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song *Medicines* as the intro and outro of our- our program. You should go patronize them. Uh, just Google them. Go buy all their stuff. And, uh, thanks to the Max Fun Network for having us on.

I wanna tell you about a new show, Syd. It's called *Can I Pet Your Dog?*

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Justin:

Uh, it's about dogs. The first episode features, uh-

Sydnee:

That's a- that's a good title for a show about dogs.

Justin:

Yeah. For a show about dogs. First episode features, uh, our buddy, Lin-Manuel Miranda, uh, uh, creator of the huge smash Broadway hit, *Hamilton*, talking about his dog, Toby. And, uh, it's produced by my brother, Travis. So it's a good show and you should listen to it. And, uh, that's gonna do it for us, Syd.

Sydnee:

Yeah. And- and make sure and wish Charlie a happy birthday in your thoughts-

Justin:

[laughs]

Sydnee:

... tonight as you're falling asleep.

Justin:

Send out those birthday vibes.

Sydnee:

Send out those good birthday vibes to Charlie.

Justin:

[laughs] Till 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 out]

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