

Sawbones Episode 102: Birds

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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 and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I am your cohost Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

All right, fine. Fine. That's how it's going to be, Seattle.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

You can just go if you want.

Justin:

Huh.

Sydnee:

You know, I'll- I'll come get you later.

Justin:

Yeah, you say that now, but when you're trying to do a fart joke later and it doesn't land-

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

... you'll be so happy that I'm here.

Sydnee:

That's fair. I depend on you solely for the fart jokes in our, in our show.

Justin:

I was going to wear a t-shirt tonight that said Dr. Fart to really highlight the fact that fart is the worst word I can say on *Sawbones*.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Um, which you really put to the test during live shows, but, we haven't failed once, so...

Sydnee:

No, well, it's all on you really.

Justin:

Yeah, well, that's fair.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

There are a lot of you. When you came in tonight, did you think about how many of you there were, and think, "Wow, there are a lot of us here, huh?".

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

"There's so many, we're going to make them uncomfortable I think with how many of us there are." I'm not complaining, but uh, it's great to be in-

Sydnee:

So if some of you just want to leave-

Justin:

If some of you want to go-

Sydnee:

No, I'm kidding.

Justin:

It's fine. Uh-

Sydnee:

Of course I'm kidding.

Justin:

... we're so happy to be in Seattle. It's beautiful here.

Sydnee:

He's pulling the easy one.

Justin:

Yeah, right?

Sydnee:

Just name Seattle-

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... and then they cheer [laughs].

Justin:

Uh- uh, we have seen the part where you drive in from Portland.

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Justin:

And we saw the part between here and the hotel.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

And all of it-

Sydnee:

That was about a six minute part.

Justin:

Six minute part, but it was primo. If there is... If that is a vertical slice that is representative of the rest of your city, choice.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Choice city.

Sydnee:

And as we drove in, every few minutes, we had Justin looking out the window going "The Space Needle!"

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

"It's there, the Space Needle!"

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

"There it is, the Space Needle!"

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Yes, we- we're all... Yes, we see it, we're all good.

Justin:

Yeah, okay. This is accurate, but we also had Sydnee as we were driving in past a body of water, wake her sister up, she was listening to music, wake her sister Riley up and say, "Hey, look, water."

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Riley takes her headphones out and is like, "What?". And Sydnee said, "W-water."

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

And I said, later we we're giving her crap about it. She said, "Well, it was... "

Sydnee:

It was really pretty.

Justin:

Okay. She didn't say "Pretty water. Look, pretty water". That would have been great. I could've enjoy an aqua vista.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

I can enjoy a pretty water, but it's just water. Anyway, Seattle's great. I know a lot about the town, and uh...

Sydnee:

Oh, you do?

Justin:

Uh, yeah kinda.

Sydnee:

What do you know?

Audience member:

Prove it?

Justin:

What?

Audience Member:

Prove it.

Justin:

Rubins? What?

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

No, I think, I think he wants you to prove it.

Justin:

Prove it, free, um, Grey's Anatomy.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

The most accurate medical show ever made.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Obviously.

Justin:

Uh, yeah. Rileigh is a big fan of Grey's Anatomy, and she said yeah, I said, "So, you're kind of an expert in Seattle?" And she said, "Yeah, if you where to... [laughs] If you need a neurosurgeon, I know just the one to get."

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughs] Not anymore.

Justin:

Not anymore. Apparently, they're all dead. Yeah, that's all I know about Seattle. What about you Syd, you such an expert?

Sydnee:

Uh, well, I know one thing about Seattle.

Justin:

Hit me.

Sydnee:

I know that Robert Stroud is from Seattle.

Justin:

Any Stroudheads in the house?

Audience:

Yeah.

Justin:

Shut up.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

What's the... here she's right here sir.

Sydnee:

I hope not. Do you know who that is?

Justin:

No, who's that?

Sydnee:

The- the Birdman of Alcatraz.

Justin:

He's from Seattle?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Uh, what- what's his deal?

Sydnee:

So, the Birdman of Alcatraz, I'm sure everybody already knows this, obviously, because he's from Seattle, obviously everybody knows this story. Uh, was born in 1890, um, he ran away from Seattle and moved to Alaska after a while.

Justin:

That's where he went wrong.

Sydnee:

Yeah, exactly.

Justin:

Should have never left!

Sydnee:

Because at that point, he became a pimp. And there was a bartender who either owed him some money... I think that's the real story. He really, he owed him some money, and so he killed him.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

And so he went to jail.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

He went to prison, 12 years at McNeil Island, and that's where he was initially. Except he was a total jerk and everybody hated him [laughs]. And he was really rude to everybody.

Justin:

In contrast to like the cool super nice criminals at that prison?

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

I'm assuming there are some. On *Orange Is the New Black*, there are lots of nice ones.

Justin:

They're all nice.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

They're all like super nice.

Sydnee:

But he was like a big jerk, and he assaulted people and so after a while, they were like, "Forget this guy, we're going to send him to Leavenworth. And [laughs]-

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

I bet that's how the meeting to... "Warden, listen, we've talked a lot, uh, me and the other guards, and forget this guy."

Sydnee:

[laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

"We're sending him to Leavenworth."

Sydnee:

What he said... And he got there, and it got worse 'cause he actually, he- he killed a guard there.

Justin:

Oh, man.

Sydnee:

So it got even worse. Um, so they-

Justin:

That's like one of the top things you can't do in prison.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

That and shivs.

Sydnee:

And so-

Justin:

Those things too, I know are bad.

Sydnee:

So, they end up putting him in solitary for life.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Like not just solitary, like he's in total isolation.

Justin:

Throw away the key.

Sydnee:

This guy sees nobody. He was almost put to death, but Woodrow Wilson saved him.

Justin:

Ugh.

Sydnee:

And, so he was, so he was allowed to live, but he had to live completely alone. And one day, he was out in the prison yard and he found three sparrows that were little babies and didn't have their mom and were going to die.

Justin:

Aww.

Sydnee:

And so, he took them in and nursed them back to health. And he became like obsessed with studying birds after this. So, they just, like- like had... He had like two adjoining cells, I don't know how you get that deal.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

I don't know how long you have to be in jail before you get two. But he got... He had two and they let him just keep like keeping birds and nursing them back to health. So like, over the course of the stay there, he nursed like 300 birds back to health. And he would study them and learn their physiology, and he actually like published two books about birds from jail.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

So he published *Diseases of Canaries* and then later *Stroud's Digest on the Diseases of Birds* which are like used sometimes as like reference books about birds.

Justin:

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Sydnee:

Uh, but eventually, the uh, the guards and all the staff there got really sick of having to deal with all the... Like the mail exchange. He had like his own secretary basically 'cause he would mail out copies of his book.

Justin:

Why wasn't he sending them a carrier pigeon?

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Funny joke.

Sydnee:

You feel-

Justin:

You, If I think of it... If I hadn't have been here, nobody would have said that [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

You feel good about that?

Justin:

I didn't answer. I was drinking-

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

... so I didn't have to answer.

Sydnee:

Yeah. So- so anyway, after that he was sent to Alcatraz 'cause they were sick of dealing with his birds and he didn't get to work with birds anymore. Um, but it's really interesting because there is a lot of information that we know about birds, specifically canaries, if you have an interest in canaries, that come from the Birdman of Alcatraz.

Justin:

Did he break out?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

God! What a loss to Batman.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

Can- can you imagine how bummed Batman was when that fool didn't break out. 'Cause he's like on the edge, right?

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

He's like so... I mean he's called the Birdman like it's right there. It is just... He's just a villain, what... Like we can Clock King but the Birdman of Alcatraz can get it together to get out.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Why did you tell me that?

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

Why did you tell me any of that?

Sydnee:

I wanted to talk about bird diseases, and I thought that would be a good in [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Okay.

Justin:

Well, tell me about bird diseases.

Sydnee:

Okay. So, I- I don't know if you felt this way growing up, but my mom... and I guess my dad, like adults in general kind of make me scared of birds. Like, "Birds are dirty, don't touch them. Stay away from birds." Like you would see a dead bird on the sidewalk, and they'd be like, "Oh get away, get away." And I always had this impression like birds are really dirty, I don't know why. I don't know how they get so dirty.

Justin:

They're gross.

Sydnee:

They're up in air.

Justin:

Yeah, that's true.

Sydnee:

All the time, I don't know how you get dirty.

Justin:

But they're gross. Like, they... I think it's because they poop everywhere, and people hate that.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughs]I mean that's true.

Justin:

Think about it. In your day to day life, you probably see an equal number of pigeons and squirrels, or at least we do at home. Um-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

... I see pigeon poop all the time. I've never identified anything as squirrel poop.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

I don't think the squirrels are as dirty. They're just like my pigeon friends on the ground with fuzzy tails that don't poop.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

But even this... A- a- and I think a lot of us have this idea that like birds poop all the time, so maybe they're kind of gross.

Justin:

Constantly pooping all the time.

Sydnee:

All the time. They do, they do, actually.

Justin:

They do poop all the time.

Sydnee:

But people have been keeping birds as pets for a really long time.

Justin:

I just can't-

Sydnee:

So-

Justin:

... imagine what about their whole thing makes people want to have them living with them.

Sydnee:

In [laughs], in Ancient China, they kept pheasants. The Egyptians had whole zoos, and- and that included tons of birds that they would keep. Uh, the Greeks were big fans of parrots, the Romans liked mockingbirds. Uh, in general, any bird you can teach to like say something was always very popular because then it could be like a, like a party. Like before you had a TV, you would just have a bird [laughs].

Justin:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

That would talk. So everybody'd sit around and watch the bird talk. [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Woof. Thrilling time.

Sydnee:

Uh, throughout medieval times, parrots especially were popular 'cause you could teach them like prayers and stuff and have them demonstrate your-your piety.

Justin:

I'm sure that, I'm sure that's what Jesus intended when he wrote them.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

"Someday I hope these are voiced, by Vocabularry the parrot."

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Vocabu-Larry, if you will.

Sydnee:

Like it's vocabulary but his name is Larry.

Justin:

His name is Larry but the show is called Vocabu- Larry. It's on *BabyFirst*.

Sydnee:

And he identifies objects for your kids.

Justin:

For your kids, they learn about the objects.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. We could sing the theme song.

Justin:

No, it's okay.

Sydnee:

[laughs]. Like Charlie-

Justin:

Who's that swinging up and down? Okay, when I point at you guys, you guys have to say,

Sydnee:

Larry.

Justin:

... "La- larry." When I point you got to say "Larry". Who's that swinging up and down?

Audience:

Larry!

Justin:

Join him as he has some fun.

Audience:

Larry!

Justin:

Look at him, he's so bright.

Audience:

Larry!

Justin:

Learns new words and gets them right.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

That was good guys.

Sydnee:

Now we can play this episode to our baby, and she's going to love it.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

She'll like thirty seconds of it. She's like, "Finally you guys are on some good stuff."

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Listen, I've never liked anything you guys have done.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

But this Vocabu-Larry vein right in the middle, I think you struck gold there."

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Now once canaries were discovered, they kind of took over as everyone's favorite like, I don't know, display pet. Um, especially like, upper class ladies would have canaries and like greet you at the door with them.

Justin:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Like on their fingers.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Like, "Hello, come into the parlor. This is my canary."

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

And like, that would be the- the thing, is that you're- you're very fine, you're hair looks great, your dress is on point, and you've got a canary.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Sure-

Justin:

Here's the only acceptable response to that.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

This is not a party you want to be at.

Sydnee:

What's weird to me is that... So canaries were popular to like greet people in like dinner parties, or they were also used, you know, in like mines.

Justin:

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh yeah I forgot about that.

Sydnee:

The canary would send the... we have the mine and we'll see if we'll-

Justin:

Less a pet. Not really a pet.

Sydnee:

Yeah, not so adorable, like if you're keeping it to say like, "Oh the canary's dead, we got to leave." There's- there's gas in here, that's not very... I don't know, that's not very cute.

Justin:

No, but like you feel it more. I guess you want to be attached because you want people to be alarmed when they see that dead canary. If none of them liked the dead can... The canary, and then it dies and they're like, "Eh, well--"

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

"... win some, lose some, back to mining."

Sydnee:

[laughs] Now, there are a lot of, uh, diseases specifically that we link with birds. Things that we think about like it- it's one of those things. In med school, we call them like the- the clang association. It's like you hear this thing in a question, and you know immediately like, "Oh, this is the answer. That's what they're shooting for." So like if somebody in a question on a board exam has pigeons, they've got cryptococcus, like we know that instantly. Like, "Oh okay, well I already- I can just write that down?" So like, you know-

Justin:

If they have pigeons??

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing]

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

Like people who hang out with pigeons a lot.

Justin:

Okay. Oh, you mean like that lady in *Home Alone*, the only person that's ever done that?

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

If you're Brenda Fricker from *Home Alone 2*, then you probably have that disease Sydnee mentioned earlier.

Sydnee:

You know her name?

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Yeah, I know her name but-

Sydnee:

You just have that information there?

Justin:

... I know her name but I can't remember the disease you mentioned twenty seconds ago.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

It's a good noggin. I missed my calling as a physician.

Audience:

[laughing].

[ad break]

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Like, so cryptococcus is associated with pigeon poop. It's something you can get from pigeon poop. You actually like, if the, if the droppings get like, like dried and dusty and like aerosolized and you breathe it in, which is pretty gross. And- and it can be a pretty serious infection, you can get pneumonia or it can infect your, infect your central nervous system. And so it's not... I mean, I don't wanna say it's common, but when we think of bird related diseases, it's probably the first thing a lot of people think of who think about these things.

Justin:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Um, and so I started reading about it, 'cause I was like, "Oh, there's gotta be a lot of really interesting stuff about cryptococcus." And if you're talking from like a, like a biology standpoint. There are all these papers written about cryptococcus and they call it like a- a peach of a fungus. The Cryptococcus, because it was first found in fermented peach juice. You get that joke?

Justin:

They think it's a pretty good one.

Sydnee:

It's a peach of a fungus!

Justin:

I wanna meet that guy whose like, "[laughs] Got 'em again, Gerald."

Sydnee:

[laughing]

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Another great goof.

Sydnee:

But unfortunately it's not that interesting. We did... we only... We didn't figure it out that long ago. And it's... I mean, it's in pigeon poop. So like stay away from pigeon poop and that's pretty much it. So I don't, I don't have a... I kept looking for something interesting. So other than that, it's a peach of a fungus, that's all I got.

Justin:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Which I appreciated. Like I liked that, like if I were at like some sort of, you know, medical conference and they were like, "This is entitled, a peach of a fungus." [laughs] You know, I'd snicker.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

So just to recap, you won't listen to my other podcasts.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

But, a peach of a fungus is a pretty good goof.

Audience:

[laughs].

Justin:

Right on. You're lucky I'm here. I'm just saying you're proving. Oh, time and time again, you're really lucky-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

... I'm here.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

You've just never been to some of these conferences.

Justin:

No, I'm sure you need a laugh.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

I'm not. No- no... Uh, I won't begrudge you that.

Sydnee:

Um, another disease you can get from birds. So everybody who owns a bird right now is like, "What? I don't wanna know any of this."

Justin:

No, yeah... we... This is where... I should mention, this is part of like a series we're doing, this for the Pacific Northwest tour. We're putting pets on blast.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Last night, it was everybody that owned a snake, tonight it's everybody that owns a bird, sure.

Justin:

We're not putting you on blast. We're letting you know that the- the threat is just inside the cage.

Sydnee:

We're putting your birds on blast.

Justin:

Putting birds on blast. They've had it easy, long enough.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Excluding of course the coal mine thing, which we're very sorry about.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

So there's another- another-

Justin:

And carrier pigeons, we made the extinct. But other than that, all pets on blast-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

... all weekend.

Sydnee:

Um, so another thing that we may, or another- another problem histoplasmosis is one that hits kind of close to home for us, for me. Because we have it where we're from, West Virginia. And the Ohio River Valley and the Mississippi River Valley you see lots of histoplasmosis. This is something I've seen before. And it's another thing that can come from bird poop and you inhale it. Um, and it... Like a lot of us could have inhaled it, uh, from time to time, but it really only targets people who, yeah, like them.

Justin:

Sleep tight.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Oh, it'll get scarier later, just wait. Um, this one really only affects people who have like compromised immune systems. So you might not know. Um, what's interesting about histo is King Tut.

Justin:

What is, um-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Like, okay, can you connect those two for me?

Sydnee:

I was hoping you'd ask.

Justin:

60 degrees of King Tut.

Sydnee:

It's a, it's a peach of a fungus.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

I'm starting to come around honestly, it's getting funnier each time.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

So in- in 1922, when King Tut's tomb was opened, um, and everybody kinda like went in and explored it. Some of the, uh, original team that first went in, started to die of some kind of respiratory illness and they called it like the

Pharaoh's curse. And it was like, "Oh, it's 'cause you went in and disturbed his tomb. And you know, now you're dying because of a curse and it may have actually been histo."

Justin:

So it actually what, had just been lingering the entire time?

Sydnee:

Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Just living there waiting.

Justin:

So the cursing wasn't that far off really. Like they were kind of right.

Sydnee:

Aww [laughing].

Justin:

... cursed by any other name, right? Like it... I mean, um, yeah, right, basically.

Sydnee:

Uh, Johnny Cash wrote a song about histoplasmosis.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

One of his lesser known hits I'm assuming.

Sydnee:

In- in his song *Beans for Breakfast*, they talk about histo.

Justin:

Oh, I thought it was *a Bird Named Sue*.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Also at first, when you said the sentence-

Sydnee:

Uh-huh [affirmative].

Justin:

... I was still processing it and I thought you said Johnny Cage.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

That was a weird few minutes.

Audience:

[laughing]

Sydnee:

Uh, Bob Dylan also had his histoplasmosis.

Justin:

Had or wrote a song about?

Sydnee:

No, just had it.

Justin:

Oh, just had it, okay.

Sydnee:

Just had it. Yeah. Um, but I think, I think that my favorite bird disease to talk about is-

Justin:

And everybody has their own, right?

Sydnee:

Right. I mean it's-

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

... and- and it's so contentious, you know, when you're like, "My bird disease."

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

... and other people are mad-

Justin:

Also-

Sydnee:

... and you lose friends, families fall apart.

Justin:

Yeah, I lost a lot of friends that way.

Sydnee:

Um, is parrot fever.

Justin:

Ah, this... Now this I'm into.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

I thought you would like this one.

Justin:

I've, uh... Yeah. Parrotheads I know.

Sydnee:

Right, it's- it's when you love Jimmy buffet too much-

Justin:

You love Jimmy buffet so much.

Sydnee:

You get an apparent fever.

Justin:

You get an apparent fever.

Sydnee:

That's yeah.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

No, it's not really that. Um-

Justin:

Are you sure?

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

I mean, I- I had... Now to be fair, can we set the record straight? Like I had parrot fever first.

Justin:

Sydnee, you-

Sydnee:

And caught it from me.

Justin:

... I did catch a terminal case of parrot fever from you-

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

... that's true.

Sydnee:

Just to... I just wanna clarify that. I was the original parrothead.

Justin:

You gotta be careful, you gotta be careful with JB because I liked him ironically at first, and then I just had this... I woke up at like 4:00 AM one morning. I was like, "Fence to the left-

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

... fence to the right. Oh my God. I'm deep... I'm too deep in." I didn't know how to get out.

Sydnee:

I got to him.

Justin:

Parrot fever.

Sydnee:

So parrot fever also called Psittacosis. Um, which is-

Justin:

It's a wasting disease, right? As in wasted away again of my own.

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

That was, a- a peach of a joke.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughs] Thanks.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, that's my favorite joke that you've ever told [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

Tell me about another disease.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

So- so Psittacosis, which comes from the word, uh, Psittacos, which is-

Justin:

Did somebody just share for Psittacosis?

Sydnee:

Whoo! Um, [laughs] we first started hearing descriptions of something like this in like as early as the late 1800s. Um, but we finally named in 1895, but it took us a long time to figure out what caused it. We knew there was something that you got from birds that made you... From parrots that made you really sick, but we didn't know what it was. Um, and it's really... It's a bacterial infection. You can get fevers, chills, you can get pneumonia. There's more serious complications that you usually don't get. Um, but again, it's the same thing as our other bird related illnesses. You get it inhaling, dried poop from, you know, birds.

Justin:

Why are you even doing that?

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

I don't know, so stop that. Uh, you can get it from parrots, but you can get it from a lot of other birds, like parakeets, macaws, cockatiels, uh, you can also get it from chickens and turkeys. Um, but it's pretty rare and it's completely treatable.

Justin:

Good. Good, good.

Sydnee:

And we know that now, but we didn't know that in 1929, when there was an epidemic of parrot fever.

Justin:

Whoa, that sounds like my house every July and August [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

So- so I think this is the most interesting bird illness story for me. Is in 1929, uh, there was a shipment of birds from Brazil to Argentina, uh, that arrived there to be sold on like the- the tropical bird market, uh, to people who like [laughs] birds. Um, and when they got there, they knew right away that they were sick. All these birds were sick. Uh, but the bird dealers, I guess, were not like upstanding citizens. So they sold them anyway [laughs]. 'Cause they wanted to unload this crate of sick birds, and not have to keep them.

Um, and so they didn't tell anybody that the birds were sick and they sold them and they actually kinda like made their way out to 12 different countries before this was figured out. Uh, it- it started... The epidemic started with an actor who was playing some sort of pirate role. And so he had a parrot [laughs]-

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

... on stage all the time [laughs]. And- and his parrot got sick and died. And then he started getting sick and everybody got freaked out because then soon after that, like a hundred people in this community all got sick. And-

Justin:

Did they all hang out with the parrot?

Sydnee:

Well, they all hung out with a parrot.

Justin:

[laughing].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Some sort of parrot.

Justin:

Okay. Got it.

Sydnee:

Um-

Justin:

Wait. How did this happen like, at once? Did somebody show up with like a shipment of parrots?

Sydnee:

I said that yes-

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

... there was a shipment of parrots from Brazil.

Justin:

Sorry. I was listening to, um-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

... *Son of a Son of a Sailor* in my head.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

So all these people are getting sick in Argentina, from parrots, from some... Well, from something they're all sick, there's something bird related. Nobody knows why. And the... But meanwhile, like it's like a, it's like outbreak. It's like the birds have traveled. The birds have already made it to other countries and nobody else knows about this. So in the US where the epidemic really... That's- that's what we're gonna talk about, really heats up. Simon Martin, who was the secretary of the Annapolis Chamber of Commerce, uh, decided to buy his wife a parrot for Christmas, which was actually like a really common present at that time period. Like this is something-

Justin:

She would put in her giant hairdo, right? I've heard about this.

Sydnee:

[laughs] No, what? No.

Justin:

Well, ladies would have big hairstyles and they'd put birds into 'em. I saw it in a book.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

[laughs] Sure. So he's gonna give her a pair... A hair parrot... A parrot for her hair.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

And [laughs], and he doesn't want her to know about it ahead of time. So he asks his daughter and son-in-law, "Hey, will you keep..." Man, that's a big favor. "Will you keep this parrot for the next, like two weeks until Christmas? Because I got it early and I don't want my wife to know. So hold onto this parrot." Um, so they do and they keep the parrot and the parrot is getting sicker and sicker throughout the weeks before Christmas. And it's pretty obvious. And so he gives it to her on Christmas day and it actually dies that same day, like right after he gives it to her-

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Merry Christmas!

Sydnee:

[laughs] Which is a rough Christmas.

Justin:

I think it's bad when people forget the batteries for toys that get me, this is like way worse.

Sydnee:

So- so the parrot dies, which bad enough, but then the- the daughter and the son-in-law, they start to get sick. And- and they don't put it together right away. They just... I mean, 'cause you know, it's like Christmas, it's cold out. It's winter like a lot of people are getting kind of like cold flu, pneumonia looking kind of thing. So it doesn't occur to anybody at first, but there's a local doctor who actually takes care of who had heard about what was going on in Argentina who had read like a news story about this bird outbreak in Argentina and goes, "Oh, I wonder if they were around a parrot." And so he questions them, and, uh, of course they were around a parrot.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

And so this guy freaks out and he notifies, uh, the US Public Health Service. He gets the health departments of both the city and the state. He gets the, uh, National Health Service, he gets the Army and the Navy [laughs] involved.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

And the entire government basically descends on Annapolis to investigate these two cases maybe of what... Thi- this Argentinian parrot fever that nobody understands. So they-

Justin:

If you're wondering why parrots are extinct in America, this is why.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

That's not true [laughs].

Justin:

You have this guy to thank.

Sydnee:

Um, everybody gets involved and the media actually gets involved. Somebody calls the media and lets 'em know. And then this just becomes this big frenzy. So you have people like announcing on a public stage, like representatives of the, of the National Health Service and everything who are, who are going out and saying like, "Listen, what I want you to do is choke your parrot to death."

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

"Just real quickly [laughs]. So that it doesn't give you this awful parrot fever." Uh, they start advising sailors who have parrots, 'cause I'll say... Right? Like in all sailors have parrots [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

That's what... I mean I think so.

Justin:

To my loss.

Sydnee:

To just- just take your parrot and chuck it overboard-

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Which they fly, right? Like how does that even work [laughs]?

Justin:

And some of it was like, they wouldn't... like kept... They kept flying back around.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Eventually he had to punch the parrot-

Sydnee:

[laughing].

Justin:

... in the face like in *Harry and the Hendersons*.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

Like, it just wouldn't go. So sad. [parrot voice] "Wait, are you sure? I said, things were good. Where'd I go wrong?" Poor parrots haven't they been through enough.

Sydnee:

People are abandoning their parrots left and right. And- and all these stories are popping up. Because there- there were a lot of Christmas parrots that people got their Christmas hair parrots. And so people are either abandoning them or their, or the parrots may have actually been sick and die and

they're shipping them all to Washington. So Washington's getting flooded with all these dead Christmas parrots [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

And- and everybody's basically freaking out. There's a story of like, there's a woman in Toledo who got pneumonia and supposedly she'd been around a parrot. And then there was another woman who was in Baltimore and there was... And she touched a parrot two weeks ago. And so everybody's freaking out and everybody who gets any kind of respiratory illness... Which I mean, again, it's winter, so a lot of people. They're assuming that they were in contact or they're trying to connect 'em in some way to a parrot. Um, there are lots of false alarms. There are a lot of news reports of like healthy parrots, like, "So and so owns a parrot. And it so far has shown no signs of illness."

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

So you can go visit their house, I guess. Like if you-

Justin:

You can see their parrot, if you miss your parrot.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

I just need some parrot in my life.

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

I don't care whose parrot it is.

Sydnee:

[laughs] Um, there's a doctor who starts investigating all this. Who's actually put in charge of investigating and putting it all together, Dr. Charles

Armstrong. Um, and he's supposed to- to get all these different samples from these parrots and these sick people and go to what was called the Hygienic Laboratory and study it all. Now, unfortunately the Hygienic Laboratory was hygienic in name... and that appears to be it.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Uh-

Justin:

Well now... Let's say there... we... in case we have some laymen in the audience who don't know what hygienic means off the top of their-

Sydnee:

I mean like, like just say clean.

Justin:

Oh, okay. Got it, got it, got it.

Sydnee:

Like we're using proper precautions. Like it's hygiene you know, like hygienic.

Justin:

You're welcome laymen.

Sydnee:

Like we're washing our hands we're were cleaning the floor. Um, and he even noted, Dr. Armstrong said later, like, "Well, we couldn't be too careful 'cause we had to figure this out quickly. So we weren't careful." Obviously that's science [laughs].

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Um, so as- as they're investigating this outbreak, people in the Hygienic Lab start getting sick. So all of these employees of the lab and all these doctors and scientists are also getting this parrot fever. Um, and this just adds to the panic because then everybody's freaking... 'Cause it's like, you now,

okay now even the scientists who are studying this also get sick. Um, so the- the good news is as they get sick, they start to learn more about [laughs] the disease. They... And we've talked about this before. They study themselves, they figure out what's going on, they connect it to the parrots. They still don't know exactly... It takes them to the end of the outbreak before they're able to isolate the bug and they're able to figure out what the psittacosis that caused the whole thing, which is great.

And a lot of them actually do get better, which is good. Um, but at the end of the day, they can't go back into the Hygienic Lab because everybody goes back into try to do more studying, gets sick.

Justin:

Just burn it down.

Sydnee:

Well they do. Dr. McCoy-

Audience:

[laughing].

Justin:

[laughing] The best. The best.

Sydnee:

Doctors they don't, they don't, they don't literally burn the building to the ground, but essentially Dr. McCoy goes in and just kills everything in the lab, fumigates the whole place just like sprays it down with cyanide.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

They- they- they noted that like- like people who were walking by could see like birds who were in the air who got like hit with like plumes of cyanide, like dropping out of the air.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

Like they just-

Justin:

Because we have it enough with the birds.

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

But they did such a great job after they completely like, you know, basically burned the place down. They did such a great job that Congress rewarded them, the Hygienic Laboratory by renaming them the National Institute of Health. And so [laughs]-

Audience:

[laughing].

Sydnee:

... there's the story.

Justin:

And now, you know-

Sydnee:

Fun right?

Justin:

... the rest of the story. Oh, Syd thank you, I feel a lot smarter now about birds.

Sydnee:

You're welcome. In general, my advice with birds would just be like, I mean, wash your hands and don't touch bird poop. I mean, don't touch poop. Like I think that's pretty...

Justin:

They need to exist. Don't touch poop.

Sydnee:

Like our poop is pretty gross too. So like just don't touch the poop.

Justin:

Don't touch any poop. What do you think?

Sydnee:

No.

Justin:

Uh...

Sydnee:

It's my... There's my doctor advice for you...

Justin:

So I guess you-

Sydnee:

I guess, don't touch poop.

Justin:

... Yeah, I guess you've learned a little something. Uh, that is, uh, gonna do us. Thank you so much Seattle for being so cool to us here.

Sydnee:

Thank you guys.

Justin:

Um... Uh, there... Uh, we're gonna take like 15 minutes. And-

Sydnee:

Thank you. Wait first, thank you to Lindsay and Leo.

Justin:

Oh thank Lindsay and Leo.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

They got, they got us, uh, some beer and they made, uh- uh, there was the... What?

Audience member:

A yeti.

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

The Yeti.

Justin:

The Yeti. Yes. Charlie is playing with the yeti back stage.

Sydnee:

Yeah, so Charlie- Charlie loved the Yeti.

Justin:

Right now.

Sydnee:

She hugged it instantly.

Justin:

Thank you so much, you're very sweet.

Sydnee:

And then made some- some blood cells and yeah, I love them.

Justin:

Yeah. That is awesome.

Sydnee:

So thank you, thank you.

Justin:

Thank you so much. And uh, thank you to all of you for coming to have fun with us and hang out with us. Uh, *My Brother, My Brother and Me* will be in, in like 15 minutes we just need to take a quick break. And uh, until the next time we have a medical disorder to talk about, or we get another case of parrot fever. I am Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

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

[theme music plays out]