

## Sawbones Episode 104: Lice

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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 cohost, Justin McElroy.

### **Sydnee:**

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

### **Justin:**

Sydnee, we did not talk about what we were going to say at the beginning of this show. Why would we not do that? That's like a r-, a real head-scratcher, you know?

### **Sydnee:**

We've already done this bit as an opening bit before, where we didn't come up with a bit-

### **Justin:**

Yeah, but why-

### **Sydnee:**

... that bit has been done.

### **Justin:**

Why didn't we do that? It's a real head-scratcher, Syd. I don't know why... It really makes you think.

**Sydnee:**

Oh!

**Justin:**

Like, it's a real head-scratcher why-

**Sydnee:**

It is a real head-scratcher.

**Justin:**

It's a real head-scratcher why-

**Sydnee:**

Is your head getting itchy?

**Justin:**

It is making my head itch just thinking about it.

**Sydnee:**

Is it?

**Justin:**

Yeah! It's just, you know, like, it's a puzzle, it's a, it's a head-scratcher.

**Sydnee:**

Does it make you itch anywhere else?

**Justin:**

Uh, no.

**Sydnee:**

Are you starting to itch all over?

**Justin:**

Yes.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Now that you say that out loud, yes.

**Sydnee:**

You know other things that make you itch.

**Justin:**

Like what, Syd?

**Sydnee:**

Lice!

**Justin:**

[makes explosion noise with his mouth] Segue. S-s-s-s-s-segued. Expert segue.

**Sydnee:**

I didn't know where you were going with that.

**Justin:**

Yeah, well, that, you're in the hands of a pr-r-r-r-r- professional broadcaster, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:**

Do you wanna, do you wanna know more about lice?

**Justin:**

Sure. Hop on my back.

**Sydnee:**

Lice of all flavors, not just head lice?

**Justin:**

Hop on my professional back as we coast the wa-, the rocky waters of broadcast excellence. Come with me. I'll cradle you.

**Sydnee:**

Now, everybody prepare, uh, to get really itchy, because I've found that when you talk about lice-

**Justin:**

Yep.

**Sydnee:**

... when you say the word lice-

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

... when you think about lice, you start to... Are you getting itchy?

**Justin:**

Why would anybody-

**Sydnee:**

You're getting itchy-

**Justin:**

Wh-

**Sydnee:**

... aren't you?

**Justin:**

Why would we even do this topic? Who would even do this to us?

**Sydnee:**

Well, [laughs] none other than our good friend, Dwight.

**Justin:**

Oh, classic Dwight.

**Sydnee:**

Thanks, Dwight, for the lice... suggestion.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Dwight didn't actually give us lice.

**Sydnee:**

No. Dwight didn't give us any lice. But Justin's, Justin and my good friend, Dwight, Slappe, suggested this topic.

**Justin:**

Good friend and cohost.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. And so, uh, a cohost of what is that now?

**Justin:**

I, uh, can't recall off the top of my head.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, okay. Well, if by the end of this sh-

**Justin:**

*Things I Bought at Sheetz*, is-

**Sydnee:**

Oh, that's what it is.

**Justin:**

... my YouTube food review quiz show, unlike any other. It's on YouTube; just search for *Things I Bought at Sheetz*, you can really... Make sure you watch from the beginning though, there's a rich storyline. Okay, Sydnee, enough promo plugging. Let's talk about lice!

**Sydnee:**

So lice and humans have a long and sordid history.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. 'Cause-

**Justin:**

Best, best friends since time and memorial.

**Sydnee:**

We, we really have been. They've been living on us and among us-

**Justin:**

You look cold. Are you cold?

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

Okay, I'm sorry.

**Sydnee:**

They-

**Justin:**

You want me to ch- change the temperature, or? You can do the lice spiel and I'll go turn the AC off. No, no problem.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Well, it's just, it's just me now, talking about lice. So they, they've been living on us and in our clothing for centuries. Uh, there are two main, uh, gen- genuses, geni, genuses, uh, genuses, of lice: uh, head and body lice. Head lice being pediculous and, uh, pubic lice being theorous.

**Justin:**

Pubic lice?

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

That's just what I was hoping you wouldn't say.

**Sydnee:**

I'm not gonna talk too much about pubic lice, because-

**Justin:**

Famous last words.

**Sydnee:**

No, I'm not, I'm just not gonna do it, because I'm gonna mainly focus on head and body lice. I think they're more interesting, um, and I'm, I'm not just, I'm not going for the cheap snickers here, the, the giggles and the snickers and the chuckles and the-

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

All right.

**Sydnee:**

We're not going for that. Um, head lice, which are the capitus species, uh, do not carry any diseases; they just live on your head and people don't like to have them.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, body lice, uh, humanus is the species, they actually can carry a lot of diseases, so they're a little more dangerous in terms of, you know, you don't like to have lice anywhere, uh, but specifically, body lice can carry typhus, uh, which is a show unto itself, so we're not gonna talk too much about typhus right now.

**Justin:**

You know, that being said, if you do get head lice, you probably wanna go ahead and knock that out. Don't sit at home and think, "Well, it's fine. There's nothing serious to worry about there. Just lice."

**Sydnee:**

Well, it's not something serious to worry about, but, like, I mean, most of us don't like having lice. I mean, if you do, I guess that's, that's fine. If someone's, you know, we don't talk about, we've never talked about this, but, like, foot fungus, if you wanna have athletes' foot, you go for it. I mean, for the most part, it's not dangerous. I mean, it'd have to get really bad to be dangerous. So, so if you wanna have head lice, I guess, that's your thing-

**Justin:**

It's a personal choice, just don't leave the house, because other people shouldn't have to be subjected because of your u-, your unorthodox lifestyle.

**Sydnee:**

But body lice, on the other hand-

**Justin:**

Cool! H-

**Sydnee:**

... uh, like I said, they carry typhus, trench fever, relapsing fever; they're just, they're generally bad news, so you know, you should get that taken care of. All lice are sucking lice. All of our important lice that we're talking about are sucking lice.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

As in, they suck your blood.

**Justin:**

Great. Excellent.

**Sydnee:**

Which is no fun.

**Justin:**

No, not at all.

**Sydnee:**

Uh-

**Justin:**

I need that for life.

**Sydnee:**

Yes, we need blood. Good, hey, have you picked that up from *Sawbones*?

**Justin:**

Next.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, so lice have been living on primates for probably 25 million years, um, and the same genus, uh, that hangs out on humans hangs out on chimpanzees and gorillas. They're all the same. There's, like, humans, we, we have both kids of lice-

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].



**Sydnee:**

... and then chimpanzees have one kind, and gorillas have one kind, and then both live on us.

**Justin:**

Perfect.

**Sydnee:**

And it's interesting, because if you start, like, and people have done a lot of studies on, like, the, the genealogy of lice, like, where did this, you know, species come from, and how did it get from, from this primate to the humans, and when did it split off, and all that kinda stuff. Was it just evolution, or did we get it from a gorilla? And it looks like that we somehow acquired the one that's on gorillas, the genus that is specific to gorillas, um, about three or four million years ago, and that's the, the pubic lice variety.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And that we probably got it through some kind of direct contact with a gorilla.

**Justin:**

What kinda direct... Like a hug?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Probably a hug.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, a, a lotta people like to talk about this. This is, like, something that, I guess, makes, like, I don't know, evolutionary lice biologists snicker, like, "We got it through direct contact with a gorilla."

**Justin:**

It's a good lice biologist joke.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. But, um, but, I, it coulda just been, like, hanging around the same place gorillas hang around, so, you know. Don't get too excited now, guys.

**Justin:**

Yeah, sorry. It's not that kinda episode.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] We have found lice on mummies, and mummification preserves lice pretty well.

**Justin:**

Perfect.

**Sydnee:**

So-

**Justin:**

That was my main concern: I just wanna make sure they were okay.

**Sydnee:**

We've talked about, before, like, mummifying animals, like cats and dogs. I don't think anybody was attempting to mummify a, a louse.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

That would be very difficult.

**Justin:**

"Shh, shh, gentle, gentle now."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

"Wait for the moment."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

"Wait til his back is turned; don't want him fleeing."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Um, also, uh, when we, if we look back and notice, like, where there's a split in the kind of louse, like, the, that lives on our body and the kind of louse that lives on our head, you know, 'cause they're t-, they're slightly different, when you kinda trace that back, uh, you can, uh, that helps us figure out when humans started wearing clothes-

**Justin:**

Mmm.

**Sydnee:**

... which is a really interesting, like, w-w- why did we start wearing clothes? Um, I've found estimations, like, as long ago as 170,000 years ago to as recent as 40,000 years ago. I-I-I-It's interesting, 'cause you look at this time period where it wasn't cold enough, probably, that we needed clothing, but we had already become hairless.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Like, we, you know, we'd e-, we'd evolved to a point where we weren't covered in hair. So, like, we're just walking around, like, hairless and naked for some periods of-

**Justin:**

Sounds pretty chill.

**Sydnee:**

... tens of thousands of years, so, so why did we start wearing clothes is an interesting question.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Which, I don't know. Lice didn't answer that for me.

**Justin:**

It was cold.

**Sydnee:**

It go-, I guess it got cold at some point.

**Justin:**

Needed a jacket.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. At some point we started deci-, we, I don't know.

**Justin:**

Someone was leaving the cave, and the, the, this, the cave woman was leaving the cave and her husband said, "Hun, it's, uh, it's chilly out there. You should take a jacket." And she said, "What are you talking about?"

**Sydnee:**

"I don't know any of those words."

**Justin:**

"What could a jacket be? Like, What do you mean?" And then they invented clothes.

**Sydnee:**

And then he was like, "Wilma!"

**Justin:**

"Wilma!"

**Sydnee:**

Is that right?

**Justin:**

Yeah, that's how *Flintstones* worked.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Um-

**Justin:**

So you're saying there's a chance that *Flintstones* is inaccurate with its depiction of clothing, that it should have just been a wild, nudist romp.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. I am suggesting that. I don't know.

**Justin:**

That wouldn't have been as popular on TV, I think.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know the history of clothing. That's a whole other-

**Justin:**

This isn't about that.

**Sydnee:**

I d-, I just know about lice. Um, so, and it's interesting, 'cause we can look back at these, these mummified lice and pick them off of them, and we have. We have, there are lots of times in history where we've discovered mummies and then found lice on them, and then there's, like, this great report about, "We found pubic lice on this mummy. We found lice on this... " Which is, like, an awful thing. Like, you've been mummified, now we've found you, like, thousands and thousands of years later, and the first thing we write about is how you have lice.

**Justin:**

Or put you on blast, like, as soon, yeah, as soon as we find you. It's not like, "He, he seemed to have cool muscles! He seemed like a handsome dude!" It's like, no, "Pubic lice."

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, no. "And we found a ton of lice in his shirt, too."

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Um, but it, it teaches us a lot about migration patterns of disease. Like, where, like, did this disease start in the old world and get to the new world, or did we have it in the Americas to begin with, or you know, was it two different kinds? I, I don't know. Some of that is, I guess, just good for blaming.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Right.

**Sydnee:**

It's like, so we can look back and be like, "You Europeans!"

**Justin:**

[laughs] A lotta finger pointing.

**Sydnee:**

"We wouldn't have gotten pubic lice if it weren't for you guys!"

**Justin:**

"It would have been a cool, pubic lice-free existence!"

**Sydnee:**

But, uh, but I, I don't know.

**Justin:**

I, I just wanna point out something, by the by: you said you didn't wanna talk about pubic lice; it is literally every example of lice, so far, you have used is pubic lice.

**Sydnee:**

I'm, okay. I'm gonna get better.

**Justin:**

Rein it in!

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Let's talk about head lice.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

We all worry about lice, uh, specifically amongst school kids, right?

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

That's when, when you think about head lice, you think about, "Uh-oh, it's the fall, all the kids are going back to school, and they're just, I don't know, rubbing their against each other."

**Justin:**

Lice time.

**Sydnee:**

It's, like, instantly, like, my image is that kids get to school and the first thing they do is go, "I like your hat! Can I try it on?"

**Justin:**

"Can I rub my head on your head?"

**Sydnee:**

"Can I try your hat on, too? Let's all try each other's hats on!"

**Justin:**

"Wee! We all have lice." Boom.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. That's what happens in schools. Um, it has been around for a really long time. It plagued the ancient Egyptians; they hated it. They hated having head lice, and many of them did. Um, so there were cures found for it. Uh, most i-, I, I didn't know this, but this was true, it was very common to just shave your head-

**Justin:**

Oh!

**Sydnee:**

... because you didn't wanna have head lice. So when we see some depictions of ancient Egyptians, they're probably wearing wigs.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

And it was, it was very fashionable and common to have many wigs. It was okay. It wasn't like something that you hid, like, "Oh, this isn't my real hair." No, you just wore lots of different wigs, some of them very, you know, elaborate and fanciful, some of them just looked like natural hair, um-

**Justin:**

Some of them with lice in them, probably.

**Sydnee:**

Probably. Probably lice would get in them and then you would, I guess, get rid of that one.

**Justin:**

Yeah, wh- who can-

**Sydnee:**

I'm assuming.

**Justin:**

... afford a new one though? I think you'd just rock it.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] If you wanted to get rid of the lice in your wig or in your real hair, uh, you could, uh, the Ebers Papyrus recommended a mixture of water and dates, and then you chew it up, and then you spit it out wherever, like, and put it on wherever the lice are, so whether it was hair or body lice, you could just put it there.

**Justin:**

Mmm. I mean, I guess.

**Sydnee:**

I, no.

**Justin:**

And smother the lice?

**Sydnee:**

Y-, that is a, that, that is a theme. You will find a lot of things, throughout the history of lice treatment, that the, the goal was mainly to, like, plug up their little breathing holes, and-

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**



... make them die. Which is, like, a, a good idea, it's a good concept, but it didn't get out the nits. And anybody who has dealt with head lice will tell you, you got to get the nits.

**Justin:**

Okay. Let's keep moving, 'cause my head is, like, crazy itchy now.

**Sydnee:**

Um, if you were a priest, you may just remove every speck of hair from your body.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

As a way to stay, you know, like, purified and clean-

**Justin:**

One step ahead of the lice, 'cause what do you care?

**Sydnee:**

No, you don't, I mean, and I mean everything. Like, your eyelashes. Like, every-, shave your eyebrows-

**Justin:**

A powder look.

**Sydnee:**

Every bit, yes. Every bit of hair from your body, because lice can live anywhere. Um, there were, we have found throughout history, like, special life- lice combs, as well as lice tweezers, uh, not just the ancient Egyptians, like, different Asian cultures. You can find, like, very elaborate, beautiful lice combs, like, carved ivory lice combs.

**Justin:**

Just 'cause you're dealing with lice doesn't mean you can't do it in style.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Which is a good idea! Like, combing out, I mean, we do that now, right? After you have lice, w-, you treat it and then you gotta comb it all out.

**Justin:**

I guess. I've never interacted with lice in my entire life.

**Sydnee:**

Really?

**Justin:**

Never had them, never saw somebody with them.

**Sydnee:**

Ah.

**Justin:**

I led a lice-free existence.

**Sydnee:**

I had lice once as a kid.

**Justin:**

Ah! Why didn't you tell me before we got married?

**Sydnee:**

I got it, I got it in school. I did.

**Justin:**

Should put that in our prenup.

**Sydnee:**

I was, and I was one of, of, at the time, two girls, now three, with very long hair, and it was a constant threat to us.

**Justin:**

The lice party.

**Sydnee:**

Um, uh, Pliny had some advice.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Of course. Pliny always does. Pliny the Elder, if you're new to our show. One of our favorite recurring characters. [laughs] Um, so you could try a couple things. And if you look at all, like, the other lice treatments, they kinda make some sort of sense, and then Pliny always comes in here with, like, this weird... I feel like he's just making it up.

**Justin:**

I feel like he was, like, a- also had a general store where, where he sold stuff, 'cause he, like, specifically picked things he had, like, extra stock of that he was trying to move.

**Sydnee:**

So this week he was trying to get rid of dogs' fat, so you could eat some dog-

**Justin:**

I got this dogs' fat was just sitting on the shelves.

**Sydnee:**

Or if you had some snakes around, just lying around, you, what you wanna [crosstalk 00:15:01] do-

**Justin:**

I'm gonna leave the room.

**Sydnee:**

Le- leave the room. No, kill them and then cook them like eels. So I don't know how you cook an eel, but cook the snake like you cook an eel. So figure out how you cook an eel-

**Justin:**

You cook it just like you would cook a snake.

**Sydnee:**

Oh. This is endless.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and then eat that.

**Justin:**

Mmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, or you, u-, or you could, if you didn't wanna eat it, you could take the skin o-, that I guess you removed from the snake, probably, when you cooked it, I don't know, however you cook an eel, um, you grind up that snake skin, and then you drink it.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Or you could try, uh, something that he recommended, and then this was recommended, um, for a very long time by many different people, so this wasn't just old Pliny's idea, uh, the powdered seeds of a plant delphinium, uh, staph-, staphisagria. Staphisagria.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Stavesacre is what it's more commonly known as.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Um, it's also called lice-bane.

**Justin:**

Okay. Well, that, I mean, that should'a been a good initial clue to them that it would be useful in the battle against lice.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, it was used in different preparations against lice for a really long time, as in, like, uh, like, the British soldiers were issued it in the Battle of Waterloo, it is still around today in some, like, herbal, natural preparations for, for lice-

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

... killing purposes. Um, you see it all throughout, you know, the 17s, 18s, 1900s, y-, I mean, this is still around today. It's extremely toxic, this plant, stavesacre, extremely toxic. It can irritate your skin if you put it all over you for, like, body lice-

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

... um, also, if you ingest it, you'll puke and die. So-

**Justin:**

So don't.

**Sydnee:**

Don't eat it.

**Justin:**

Don't eat it.

**Sydnee:**

Don't eat it.

**Justin:**

What if I got really bad lice though?

**Sydnee:**

Don't eat it.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So it's a bad idea. But it was, it, it, like I said, it's still around today. Uh, the Aztecs used to just use, like, hair dye to try to remove them, so it would, like, double purpose.

**Justin:**

Oh!

**Sydnee:**

You'd dye your hair a really nice, uh, shiny black color-

**Justin:**

And have no lice.

**Sydnee:**

And no lice. Um, in the Middle Ages, there wasn't a lot of bathing, espec-, and we talked about this in our hygiene episode, it, bathing became very unpopular for a while, and so-

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] ... you would wear the same clothes for a long time, which allowed a lot of, uh, body lice to flourish, but also head lice in, like, the big, elaborate wigs, and then later, just in your own hair.

**Justin:**

The Middle Ages were kinda humanities toddler phase, weren't they? Things, just when things seemed to be improving, they just got dramatically worse.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] We know that now.

**Justin:**

"I'm not taking a bath!" "Yes you are, Middle Ages." "I'm not gonna do it!"

**Sydnee:**

"I wanna wear this shirt every day! I love this shirt!"

**Justin:**

"I love, this shirt's my favorite!"

**Sydnee:**

"I know it's got food all over it, but I wanna wear it again tomorrow!"

**Justin:**

"I wanna wear it again tomorrow! I want a sword! I can pull the sword outta the stone! No problem."

**Sydnee:**

Uh, sometimes people would have so much head lice for so long that it would start to become kinda matted and sticky with, like, the exudates from the lice, and then from your own hair, like, the oil from your own hair. Like, you'd get this, like, big sticky mass of hair, or, like, several different masses of hair-

**Justin:**

Okay, okay, okay, okay.

**Sydnee:**

... and then that would get infected sometimes, with, like, like, usually fungal infections would start to grow on, like, the sticky mass of lice hair-

**Justin:**

I'm begging you. I'm begging you.

**Sydnee:**

And there's a name for this: plica polonica.

**Justin:**

Hell on Earth.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Uh, no. Plica polonica. And this is something, again, that there are still cases up to this day, [laughs] of plica polonica. Not nearly as common as there used to be. Um, and there are so many names for it because it's been written about all throughout history. Like, you can find a lot of different, like, poetic, and, like, in different plays and stories and stuff, references. Um, marinlock, elvish knots, they were called elf locks, marilock-

**Justin:**

Elvish knots, take that!

**Sydnee:**

Elvish knots?

**Justin:**

Take that, Lord of the Rings fans. How's that add to the romance of your setting?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Yuck.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, this may be the origin of the Medusa myth.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

You know, snakes in her hair. 'Cause it would look like, like, coiled, big, thick, you know. Um, there was a cure that I found for this. Um, other than, like, the obvious, like, just shave your head-

**Justin:**

Cut it off!

**Sydnee:**

... just cut it off, but y-, but there was once cure that was, you wait until Easter and then you cut it all off.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

And you could just bury it, or, or if you're feeling more exotic, you could take the hair that you've, if you can even call it hair at this point, that you've cut off, tie a piece of copper money up in it, and then throw it into the ruins of an old castle whe-, uh, not just any old castle, a castle where evil spirits lodge. But don't look when you do it; just toss it in there and run home really quickly.

**Justin:**

Some, it sounds like somebody made that up to get some free hair.

**Sydnee:**



[laughs]

**Justin:**

Or, or gol-, or copper coins.

**Sydnee:**

I-, thi-, this is referenced in the Mercutio speech about Queen Mab. He talks about elf locks.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. And, um, and, uh, some other things that you could do for head lice, uh, English tobacco juice, rosemary, quinoa water.

**Justin:**

Uh, uh, just the water after you make some-

**Sydnee:**

Like, the wa-, like, make some quinoa and then pour the water on your head.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So I mean, I, I don't know.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Quinoa's good. Um, in the 1800s, in the US, there were some school kids who would, uh, wear sacks of powdered brimstone around their neck to drive away lice.

**Justin:**

Sydnee, I love you. I literally can't talk about head lice anymore. Can you tell me about a different kind?

**Sydnee:**

All right. Well, we will move on to body lice right after we visit the billing department.

**Justin:**

Let's go!

[ad break]

**Justin:**

Okay, Sydnee, body lice. I'm ready.

**Sydnee:**

All right. Body lice is not nearly as common. It tends to crop up in times, um, where people are, like, really crowded, you know, stuck in the same place, close together, um, not able to access, you know, baths and showers regularly and cleaning their clothes, um, because it tends to live in the, in the clothing.

**Justin:**

So, Burning Man.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Basically, The Burn.

**Sydnee:**

Don't put Burning Man on blast!

**Justin:**

I'm not putting put Burning Man on blast.

**Sydnee:**

Nah, that just ended, right? So, like, [crosstalk 00:23:58] everybody got home and had to-

**Justin:**

Maybe they're listening on their way home. I'm just kidding, Burn- Burners. You didn't get body lice.

**Sydnee:**

I hope you didn't.

**Justin:**

I hope you didn't. Hope you took pictures, too, 'cause it seems crazy.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. We're gonna go some year.

**Justin:**

Some year-

**Sydnee:**

... and not get body lice.

**Justin:**

... you watch. You watch us. We're gonna bring our baby to the Burn.

**Sydnee:**

Um, no, typically it tends to crop up in times of, like, war, uh, people who are stuck in, like, trenches or, like, close together and not able to, you know, change their clothes a lot-

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... refugee camps, people, just in general, who have to, you know, who don't have access to, to bathing.

**Justin:**

Sorta nature's way of saying, "Time for a change."

**Sydnee:**

Exactly.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Clean your clothes if you can. Um, ancient Chinese medicine involved using a lot of kinda toxic substances for this. Arsenic was very popular, mercury was very popular. And you find this, again, the-, it, it's, like, sometimes these, like, really weird, toxic treatments pop up, and then they just stick around for a long time. Like Arsenic continued to be used up until, like, the 1960s in some places.

**Justin:**

The unexamined life. Be careful, people. Every time you treat yourself for body lice, ask, "Is this poison?"

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Because if so, you probably wanna try something new.

**Sydnee:**

It's, I think it's that, we've talked about this before, if something did something, for a long time it was considered to be effective.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

No matter what it did-

**Justin:**

Something's happening in there.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Like, "I feel really sick, it must be working. I just puked, I just," you know, "I threw up all this blood, something good must be happening."

**Justin:**

Something's happening.

**Sydnee:**

Um, Hippocrates thought that body lice came out of humans. Like, it arose from human flesh.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Especially if, like, we were sweaty; that was a theory. Like, w-, you would get really sweaty and then lice pop out everywhere.

**Justin:**

Gross.

**Sydnee:**

Um, this, this spontaneous generation, which we, you know, this, not just, does not just apply to lice, like, we thought this about a lotta different things.

**Justin:**

We used to think that, um, flies came outta dog doody, right?

**Sydnee:**

Well, meat.

**Justin:**

Oh, meat, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Rotting meat.

**Justin:**

Yeah, maggots come outta meat. But I've also heard flies come outta dog doody.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, maybe. Yeah. Well, probably, we did. We thought that, we thought that things came out of things, yes.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Um, just spontaneously. And this, this persisted until 1864. Pasteur disproved that.

**Justin:**

Good.

**Sydnee:**

Lice, among other things.

**Justin:**

Thanks for sorting us out, Louis.

**Sydnee:**

So, some cures for body lice, which, like I said, is a bigger deal because they can carry disease. Um, Greek cures included pitch from the cedar tree, which doesn't sound great, or garlic boiled with oregano.

**Justin:**

Nice.

**Sydnee:**

That sounds delightful.

**Justin:**

Get yourself tasting really nice.

**Sydnee:**

I like that, 'cause you see some of these, like, Greek cures, and then especially with, like, Roman cures, that are, that's a little indulgent.

**Justin:**

Yeah! Treat yourself.

**Sydnee:**

You know?

**Justin:**

You got body lice. You've earned it.

**Sydnee:**

Boil some, some garlic with oregano, have a nice glass of Merlot.

**Justin:**

Merlot? I guess. Grog? I don't know my history.

**Sydnee:**

Oh. I just don't know anything about wine.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Um, sweet wormwood was a cure for a while, chrysanthemum is something that you find suggested various times throughout history. And that is really interesting, 'cause as we're gonna talk about in a minute, they may have been onto something.

**Justin:**

Ah!

**Sydnee:**

Using, like, powdered or dried chrysanthemum on your body for lice. Um, one suggestion I found was coat your kid in honey.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, again, this was probably like the smothering theory, right? Like, not your kid. Don't smother your kid.

**Justin:**

No.

**Sydnee:**

Like, smother the lice.

**Justin:**

No, that won't fix anything.

**Sydnee:**

Like, it's sticky, you know? And so you'll just coat yourself in it and it'll, like, smother all the lice to death.

**Justin:**

But, like, you, we do have some, like, I mean, the thing that's weird is, like, that works for, like, ticks, right? Like, you can do that with ticks.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, yeah, to, like, smother a tick?

**Justin:**

Smother it, and then they pop their head out, like, "Aha aha, what's going on?" Then you just flick them off.

**Sydnee:**

Sorta. You kinda have to pick them off.

**Justin:**

Blah! How could you?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Um, you could wear a mercury necklace.

**Justin:**

You know, one time I came back from camping and I thought I had a lump of, uh, marshmallow from s'mores stuck in my hair, uh, and I picked at it, trying to get it out, for about, uh, maybe a half hour, trying to get it out. And when I finally just pulled and yanked it out, it was a tick, and it was the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I still have the, like, I was probably 10 years old. I still have the exact image of what it looked like in my head. It was a nightmare.

**Sydnee:**

I'm really sorry that happened to you.

**Justin:**

Yeah, and it's an important story to share with people just to let them know it's not marshmallow.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] That thing on your head, it's not marshmallow.

**Justin:**

It's not marshmallow!

**Sydnee:**



For all you people out there who've felt a bump on your head and assumed, assumed it was marshmallow-

**Justin:**

It's not.

**Sydnee:**

... like we do-

**Justin:**

It's not.

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

It's a tick.

**Sydnee:**

Um, some other things you could do for body lice: uh, mustard, just coat yourself in mustard, coat yourself in vinegar, and lye, don't do that, don't use lye.

**Justin:**

No?

**Sydnee:**

It's toxic, again.

**Justin:**

Don't lye.

**Sydnee:**

Um, in World War II we had a great idea. By the end of World War II, we were coating everybody in DDT.

**Justin:**

Great! [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Uh, this was not just for lice; it was also for mosquitoes.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Uh, you know, to, for malaria, was the big fear, but also, um, for typhus, for body lice. Uh, and DDT does, in fact, work against body lice.

**Justin:**

Well, that's gonna do it for us, folks. Another great episode-

**Sydnee:**

Nope!

**Justin:**

... in the books-

**Sydnee:**

Wait, nope. Nope. No. Um, [laughs] it, it actually, it was so effective that we didn't, you don't see, like, there's this period of time from, like, the end of World War II up until, like, about the '70s, where you kinda see not so much, um, head lice or any kinda lice, really. Like, lice is just kinda gone for a while.

**Justin:**

Cracked that problem.

**Sydnee:**

Um, because DDT definitely did kill mosquitoes and lice. Unfortunately, it killed a lot of other things, too. Um-

**Justin:**

Oh no.

**Sydnee:**

Everybody's heard of the book *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson wrote in 1962, I think, um, which called, i-, she was a biologist, called attention to the fact that DDT was a very toxic, harmful substance to the environment, it had a lot of unintended impact on other, other animals, like the bald eagle-

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... probably would be extinct if we hadn't banned DDT, um, as well as humans, possibly a carcinogen. And so, um, in the '70s, we banned DDT, and, which is good. Don't use DDT on yourself.

**Justin:**

But then the lice thing is back.

**Sydnee:**

Don't spray DDT on yourself. But then o-, but then of course we see, uh, mosquitoes and lice come back, so yeah.

**Justin:**

Ugh.

**Sydnee:**

Too bad. Um, some home remedies that you may find for lice that have been around a long time but are still around today, um, because it's like anything that-

**Justin:**

Can you clarify, like, are these real?

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

No, these are not real. I'm gonna tell you what to do about lice.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, there are many suggestions on ways to, like we've talked about, really just suffocate the lice. Uh, the problem with that is, while it will kill the lice, the actual live little lice, it's doesn't kill the nits; it doesn't get rid of the eggs that are clinging to the hair.

**Justin:**

Is that what nits are?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So it doesn't get rid of those, and, um, then they hatch and you've got more lice.

**Justin:**

They're back!

**Sydnee:**

It's, you have to get rid of the nits! I'm gonna say that over and over again.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

I say that a lot. You know, you gotta get rid of the nits. You can't just treat it; you gotta comb. Um, in the early 1900s, gasoline and kerosine became really popular treatments. [laughs] So just coat your head in gasoline or kerosine, which probably did kill the actual lice, um, but then the eggs hatched and you have more lice.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, this is still a thing that people will tell you to do; don't do that.

**Justin:**

Nope.

**Sydnee:**

It's just a bad idea. Dousing yourself in gasoline is generally frowned upon.

**Justin:**

[laughs] If you learn nothing else from *Sawbones* and your time with us...

**Sydnee:**

Don't drill a hole in your head, and also don't douse yourself in gasoline.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Um, the University of California department of entomology has studied a lot of these kinds of, like, like, folk, home remedy kinda things-

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

... to see, "Is there any truth?" Because you've probably heard people say, like, "Oh, you got head lice? Just put mayonnaise on your head. Use some peanut butter. Try some, uh, Vaseline. That'll work." Again, th-, um, all these things didn't really help. So mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, butter, vinegar, um, isopropyl alcohol, none of these things will fix the problem. They may kill some lice, but it doesn't fix the problem. Essential oils are something else you'll hear, specifically tea tree oil is something that I've found a lot of people recommending, um, to this day. Uh, it doesn't, it is, it does kill fungus, some fun-

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

... some fungi, it does kill some bacteria; it doesn't really do anything for head lice. Um, the idea is that lice hate the smell of tea tree oil-

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

... and so they will flee from your head when you, if you put it on there. But, like, that doesn't even sound right.

**Justin:**

If that doesn't sound made up to you, you've not listened to enough of our program.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

That's nonsense.

**Sydnee:**

Also, tea tree oil can be toxic to your liver-

**Justin:**

You train the lice, you see. You train them. You put them in areas you don't want, and then eventually you'll have them in a little lice circus, like John Hammond.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

They, people could, that's [inaudible 00:32:38], "Mommy, can you see the lice?"

**Sydnee:**

But that's, but that really, 'cause they tell you, like, if you're gonna use this, that not just on the person who has lice, but, like, everybody in the family has to put it on their head, 'cause otherwise the lice will, like, pack up their little lice suitcases and be like, "I, the, the new world is right over there, on his brother's head!"

**Justin:**

"On his brother's head! Let's-"

**Sydnee:**

"We gotta head over to his brother, to the new world!"

**Justin:**

You gotta coat your whole situation in tea tree oil. Guess who came up with that one, Syd? Someone who was selling tea tree oil, probably!

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So also, tea tree oil can be toxic to your liver in large doses, it can trigger allergic reactions, and you can't use it by ba-, you can't use it on babies, certainly, or young children, you can't use it on pregnant women. Just, I, my advice would be, if you have lice, don't, don't do this.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

**Sydnee:**

Just don't do this. Um, us, a little side note on pubic lice, we weren't gonna talk about it, but just one thing that you should know is that we call them pubic lice, they can actually be anywhere.

**Justin:**

Great.

**Sydnee:**

On your arms, your legs-

**Justin:**

Great.

**Sydnee:**

... uh, in your beard. They've found them in eyelashes. Just a, so I just wanted to leave you with that little treat. Um, but as far as actually treating lice, so since, uh, 1800, we knew about something we used to call Persian Louse Powder, which included this, like, chrysanthemum that was dried and crushed, and it had these substances called pyrethrins in it, um, which is a contact poison to lice; it affects their central nervous system. And it actually is effective for lice.

**Justin:**

Whoa!

**Sydnee:**

It is known today as Nix. It was introduced about the '70s.

**Justin:**

Ah!

**Sydnee:**

So w-, we still, you know, Nix is available over the counter, and a lotta people still use pyrethrum, uh, for body lice and head lice today. Um, in n-, in 1984, Ovide, which ha-, is malathion, which is another way to cure lice, uh, came around. So those are mainly what we, what we give people today. Usually pyrethrum.

**Justin:**

Is Rid lice?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

You can use Rid, too. Yeah. And the, and, and any of these things-

**Justin:**

There's a Rid 2 out?

**Sydnee:**

No. [laughs]

**Justin:**

I've been wanting to see what he's gonna follow up with.

**Sydnee:**

But these are all treatments for lice, um, that I would recommend. Uh, talk to your doctor, or they sell them over the counter, um-

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

But the big thing, again, is you got to get the nits.



**Justin:**

Gotta get the nits.

**Sydnee:**

So you can treat the lice, and when you treat your kid for lice, you probably just all wanna use the lice shampoo. I usually say that. Like, "Why don't just everybody take a round of lice shampoo?" Um, as long as there's no reason you can't. Um, because it, they do, they do tend to spread in families pretty quickly.

**Justin:**

Cool.

**Sydnee:**

You know, anybody who shares pillows or blankets or, you know, close enough. I mean, they can jump from head to head, so if you're close enough to somebody with head lice, they can get on your hair. So, um, everybody needs to wash. You need to wash all the clothes, bedding, stuffed animals, whatever, um, and you need to comb, comb, comb, comb out all the nits.

**Justin:**

Gotta get the nits.

**Sydnee:**

Gotta get the nits.

**Justin:**

Uh, thank you so much for listening to our program. Uh, we hope that your head doesn't itch too bad, even though it totally, totally does. Just reminding you that you probably don't have, uh, lice.

**Sydnee:**

Although, there is a special super strain of lice out now that's resistant to a lotta these treatments, so watch out!

**Justin:**

Great! Great.

**Sydnee:**

Watch out. Sleep tight.

**Justin:**

Great. Thanks to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song, *Medicines*, as the intro and outro of our program. Thanks to Max- Maximum Fun Network for, uh, for having us as a part of their podcast family. There's a ton of great shows you can listen to there on, uh, Maximumfun.org. And, uh, b-, thanks to everybody who came out to our, uh, shows in the pacific northwest. That was a lotta fun.

**Sydnee:**

Absolutely. We had a blast. Beautiful part of the, of the world that I-

**Justin:**

It's gorgeous.

**Sydnee:**

... we'd never been to.

**Justin:**

It's gorgeous. Um, and, uh, that's gonna do it for us. Hey, we're on Facebook. We haven't mentioned that in a long time. Search for *Sawbones* on Facebook, uh, and come join the, the group there, and, uh, follow us on Twitter @sawbones. And, uh, that's gonna do it for us until, uh, 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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