

Sawbones 457: King Tutankhamun

Published May 23, 2023

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

[theme music plays]

[audience cheers]

Justin: Hello everybody and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy!

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

[audience cheers louder and longer]

Sydnee: [laughing] Thank you.

Justin: It's been a while since I'd done a live show with Syd. Haven't missed that.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Haven't missed that little kick in the ego at the beginning of my live performance. How y'all doing, Columbus?

[audience cheers]

Justin: We love it here.

Sydnee: I know! I'm so excited to be here. One of our—we love Columbus anyway, but one of our favorite places, on—

Justin: First Wendy's.

[audience laughs and cheers]

Justin: It's kind of a religious thing for us.

[audience laughs]

Justin: We used to go to the first Wendy's and just kind of like, think WWDD "What would Dave do?" You know?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughing] One of our other favorite places, other than the first Wendy's, is right here in Columbus, and that's COSI.

[audience cheers loudly]

Justin: Very important, very important spot to us. If you grew up in Huntington, West Virginia, you went to Cincinnati for concerts and you went to Columbus for science. It was the closest science to us. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: So it was a real thrill.

Sydnee: [laughing] That's sadly true.

Justin: Yo, we went... we went to the old... Anybody here ever go to the old downtown location of COSI?

[audience cheers]

Justin: Yeah! Hey, don't forget to get your prostates checked, everybody, I mean as long as I've got a captive audience here, all of you that just cheered, don't forget.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: All you dirty dogs out there knew what we were talking about. You're like, "Oh, I know those exhibits at COSI."

Justin: Aw, yeah.

Sydnee: I checked those out when I was a preteen.

Justin: No! I meant 'cause they're—

Sydnee: Many times.

Justin: I meant 'cause they're old.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Ohh, I thought you meant that... you know...

Justin: [laughs] Yeah, there is a really cool prostate exam exhibit there.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And a testicle exam and a breast exam.

Justin: And you can squeeze a whole ball sack, no problem.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughing] They let you do it right there.

Justin: Let you do it a lot, but hey there isn't—

Sydnee: They encourage you to!

Justin: There is an alarm that goes off if you do it too long.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: I don't know the exact number, but just be careful.

Sydnee: I was inspired by COSI. I saw that they have a new exhibit. We're gonna get to go there, which, I'm really excited. It's been forever since we've been to COSI. And the kids are really excited.

But I saw that they're doing a special King Tut exhibit.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And I thought, "Is that something... Like is there something tied into medical history?"

And it turns out that a lot of people have spent a lot of time trying to figure out what happened to King Tut. What exactly... What kind of illnesses may he have had and how eventually did he die?

There has been a lot—Like, we are talking medical workups that like I know my insurance doesn't cover.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] And most of ours wouldn't. King Tut has had. So I thought that that was worth talking about.

Justin: Yeah.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: Yeah?

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: You think? You're... Fair.

Justin: Yeah, let's do it.

Sydnee: Um—

Justin: I don't understand why it's important why he died. It was so very long ago.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I—

Justin: Why are we so fixated on it?

Sydnee: We are very fixated on it. I mean, lots of papers written, lots of research done many times through the years to try to figure this out.

I will say that, and I know, like, for some people that was something they were into as a kid, was learning about... Not—Like all the Pharaohs and you know, all about ancient Egypt.

That wasn't necessarily my particular... Why—You keep moving the table closer to me.

Justin: I keep moving the table, I know. I know. I keep [crosstalk]—

Sydnee: And it's very intense. [laughs]

And I feel I should preface this with, a lot of what we have learned about not just King Tut, but like any time we've opened ancient tombs or a sarcophagus or sort of disturbed the remains of the dead.

I think in, you know, our modern times, we're calling a lot of that into question, right? Like, "Why do we do that? [laughs nervously] Is that OK?"

Shouldn't we go about it in a more respectful way than we did like in the '20s?" And, "What do we do with the things we found?"

Because I think we all know now that that sort of like, "It belongs in a museum attitude, you know, should really be, "Well, but it belongs in a museum that is located in and curated by and owned and operated by..."

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: "...the place where it came from, maybe?"

Justin: [sarcastic] Okay. So are you telling me medicine's biggest wet blanket is coming over to archeology too to kill all the fun there?

We can't have crystals. We can't tan our taints.

[audience laughs]

Justin: And now... And now we're canceling Indiana Jones, Sydnee.

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I am not trying to cancel Indiana Jones.

Justin: Messed up.

Sydnee: I am not. I'm just saying that perhaps those artifacts would be best left in their country of origin.

[audience cheers]

Justin: [inaudible]

Sydnee: Yes, that is all I'm saying.

Justin: You all laugh, but all the basketball rats come from somewhere else. They're not even from here. You didn't even know that. We stole them. The COSI basketball rats.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: [laughs] If you didn't... If you had never seen that at COSI you would have been so confused by that.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "The what? What is he saying?"

Justin: They have basketball rats, guys. They have rats that play basketball.

[audience cheers]

Justin: I hope there's at least some of you in the audience tonight that are not from Columbus that are like, "Honey, we gotta get over there. Are you hearing this?"

Sydnee: You really should.

Justin: "If there's astronaut ice cream, I'm sold!" There is.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: So—

Justin: No problem.

Sydnee: [laughs] So—

Justin: A crackerjack exhibit? You got it.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: King Tut. First of all, let's talk a little bit about, 'cause I mean, I didn't—again, this was not like a particular area of interest for me. I had a lot of other obsessions; this just wasn't one of mine.

So you may already know everything there is to know about King Tut. There are a lot of, especially like kids, who do and have always known this. Even as adults, they've retained a lot of knowledge.

Like, "Let me tell you about the boy king!"

Not me, but I learned about it because we're doing this episode.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: He ruled over Egypt [laughs] for only nine years. This started in 1333 BCE.

He was only 10 years old when his father died, and he took the throne and he was 19 when he passed away. And even like his existence was a mystery for a while. As much as we have focused on like, how did he die?

Who he was and who his dad was and what they did was a bit of a mystery because his dad was kind of, for the time, thought to be like a heretic.

When he took power, he basically said, "Look. We have all these gods and goddesses. I'm doing away with all of them. I'm changing the game. We're going to monotheism."

That... We think. All of this is still—we're interpreting. But basically he put one god above all others. Which was totally new. Everybody was kind of mad about that.

He also moved the capital from Thebes. He moved it somewhere else and he named it after his new god, Aten, that he wanted to put in charge of everything. He also made a lot of changes to like the art and architectural style.

I know that sounds like, "Why are you mentioning that? [laughs] He changed their religion and he moved the capital and you're like, 'Also, their artistic styles were very different.'"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But this actually does matter, I promise. So when he finally died and Tutankhamun, King Tut, took control of Egypt at 10 years old, he basically reversed everything.

So he went back and was like, "I don't know what my dad was doin'. I'm really sorry."

Justin: I liked the old art. It was fine.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] "I'm really sorry about everything."

And a lot of this was, as you may imagine, done through one of his royal advisors. Who, by the way, would then ascend to the throne when King Tut died. So, you know, we could all question like who really wanted it? Either way, everything went back to the way it was.

So it was sort of like these massive shifts and then just to what it was and that was it. And so then after everything went back to, you know, the way it had been before, and King Tut passed away, all of the next rulers sort of erased their names from the List of Kings.

Just kind of decided like, "Ehh, they canceled each other out."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [as next rulers] "Maybe we just don't talk about that anymore."

And so it took a while—there was sort of this understanding that there was this gap and like we don't know who was in charge. And then we think we know who was in charge.

But it took a while for us to figure out a lot about King Tut because for a while we didn't know even that he existed, really.

Now, of course, that would all change, and this is sort of the part of the story where, you know, European archaeologists decide to go in and dig up lots of things that aren't theirs.

And that this starts with an artist, a British artist, named Howard Carter.

So he had come to Egypt to actually initially, like, replicate ancient artworks that he had seen there.

But he was commissioned by a really rich royal guy, the 5th Earl of Carniver... Carnarve... ron. Carnarvon. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Carnervermer.

Sydnee: We're gonna call him George. So George—

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: That was his name.

Justin: Is that his name or are you—

Sydnee: His name was George.

Justin: That's good.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So George is really rich and royal and he's bored because he's got lots of stuff. He can have anything, right? He can—He owns tons of things, but he's bored.

Justin: Not a—not a iPhone.

Sydnee: No.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: He probably didn't have that.

Justin: I got one of those.

Sydnee: He didn't have an iPhone.

Justin: Take that, old dude.

Sydnee: [laughs] But he had all the other things he wanted. And he was like, “[teenage whine] Everybody else is getting to dig up tombs in the Valley of the Kings and I want that too! But that seems like a lot of work.”

And so he paid Howard Carter to go in and say like, “Dig up the valley of the Kings, excavate some tombs—I want—I want my own—”

Justin: [incredulous] The artist!? He was just like, “As long as you're there?”

Sydnee: So he was an artist, but he had, like, started to dabble [laughs] in other areas.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Like working in these kinds of like, “Yeah, I can... I can deal in... I can work with artifacts. I got that.”

Justin: Yeah, I'll look for a mummy, no problem.

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean, 'cause at the time like he wasn't doing the work right? He was just paying people who actually live there to do all the work.

So he got commissioned to go find a lost tomb. And it took a while at the time to—

Justin: [laughs] It being lost and all.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: It being lost. It took a while to find it of course. It took a while to like—He had to sort of convince the Egyptian government, which at the time people were willing to pay a lot of money to get to come in and excavate these sites.

And so eventually it was like, “Well, we do—We need this money. We do need this in our economy. I guess we will take this.”

But they would set rules around it. Like they had laws passed to try to protect whatever was found. Like, “Listen, you can do this, but you can't take the stuff.” But it wasn't working. Like, we all know that now. It wasn't working.

And that was the deal that they would make. Is that, “Okay, you can look for this lost tomb of, we think King Tut, you can look for it, but whatever you find has to stay here.” And he was like, “Absolutely, that is no problem.”

And that was the story for a really long time [laughs] until eventually, like, you know, here in the US, the Met was like, “Sorry, we actually have like, 19 things [laughs] that ended up here. Sorry about that.”

So today everything, we think, has been returned. But yes, many artifacts were lost during this process.

So Carter starts digging, it takes him a long time.

In 1922, he finally uncovers the tomb. And there is so much to be found. You could do... I mean, this is not the podcast we do, but you could do—

There were 5600 items found in this tomb, like other than, obviously King Tut was there.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: You know, that's the big thing.

Justin: Lotta Pogs, I would imagine. He's pretty into Pogs. A lot of Pokémon cards. Do you count those as decks or just individual cards as part of the 5600?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I'm assuming individual items.

Justin: You know, he was buried with his Meowth. [laughs]

[audience laughs and cheers]

Justin: I knew... I thought I knew how it would feel saying it.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

[ad break]

Sydnee: [laughing] So... so a lot of the things, you know, you can probably imagine. We've seen sort of like the funeral mask, the gold mask.

Which by the way, an interesting side note was probably initially made with his mom in mind, but then he passed away first. So then it was sort of re—It was used by him instead. I know, that's a bummer, isn't it?

Justin: Little bit.

Sydnee: Sorry. Sorry about the bummer.

But they found like, not just like jewelry, like stuff you would expect. Lots of you know, jewels and things. But they also found like furniture. There were all kinds of beds and fainting couches.

There were fans made of feathers. There were solid gold sandals inside. Like just all kinds of amazing riches.

Among them, they also found two smaller mummies and part of the research that we would do throughout the years to try to figure all this out, and of course they couldn't do this in 1922, but was to eventually connect the DNA.

We did DNA analysis of these two smaller mummies with King Tut to figure out that these were his kids that were actually mummified. Sorry. [laughs uncomfortably]

[audience laughs uncomfortably]

Sydnee: I know. I don't mean to be—I...

Justin: [sarcastic] What are the odds they died at the exact same time as him?

[audience laughs]

Justin: [sarcastic] Oh no!

[audience laughs]

Justin: Wait a minute. This is a comedy podcast. Why would you include that? Why, Syd?

[audience laughs more]

Sydnee: I think... I think the scope helps...

Justin: Uh-huh?

Sydnee: I'm trying to wrap my mind...

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: ... around the ensuing medical—Like the *House* episode that will follow to try to figure out what killed King Tut.

Like 'cause really that's what we embarked on afterwards, was to try to figure out like, “Gosh. This 19-year-old guy died a long time ago and I have to crack this case.”

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And lot of time and money and effort will go into this.

And I think part of that, it was this fascination with what was found initially. I think that, as I'm trying to wrap my mind around like, “Why did we do all this?”

Part of it was this, we opened up this tomb, and it was like nothing anybody had ever seen before. I think that that must be part of it.

And now of course there were their own, like, sort of medical kind of mystery connected to the opening of the tomb because there was this thought that a curse fell upon everybody who was present at the time.

Justin: [sarcastic] Next you're gonna tell me curses aren't even real.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Ugh...

Sydnee: [laughs] Specifically, George, our rich earl, who had paid for the whole thing. Of course, as soon as Howard Carter opened the tomb he was like, “You gotta get down here. I found it. You're going to be—”

Justin: [As Howard Carter] “You gotta come eat this thing.”

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] [As Howard Carter] “You're going to be so excited.”

[audience laughs]

Justin: [As Howard Carter] "Gotta come get a bite before he's all gone. We're all getting lots of vitality and youth."

Sydnee: [laughs] So he rushed down there and while he was staying in Cairo, he actually died in his hotel room not long after arriving.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And what they think is that basically he got a mosquito bite that got infected.

Justin: [giggles]

[audience laughs harder]

Sydnee: And then he got bacteremia, bacteria in his blood. He got like some sort of secondary infection. And then he died of that, which is pretty wild from a mosquito bite. [laughs] So that is... That is... That is a wild—I mean, you know?

And there was this whole like other story that like at the same time that he died [laughs] There was a power outage back home and also his dog died at the same time.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Oh my God. I was about to make a joke about a puppy dying and you were just like... Swoop right in there like, "Dream no more. That happened too.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And then Carter's pet bird got killed and it was like, "It's a curse!" [laughs]

Justin: When you... When we were backstage and you were like... You said, verbatim, "Don't worry, J-man, I'm about to bring the yucks."

And then you put your fists like this...

[audience laughs]

Justin: And I pounded your fists, I don't—I feel like you've betrayed that pound. Like that pound where you said you're about to bring the yucks, I think you said "hardcore," if I remember correct.

"Don't worry, J-man, I'm about to bring the yucks hardcore."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

[audience laughs and cheers]

Justin: Okay. Okay. Go on. I'm sure that we've passed the nadir. I have to imagine.

Sydnee: Well [laughs nervously]...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, we are going to talk about how King Tut died.[laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So I am sorry about that. But in terms of the—[laughs] I mean, I just think it's an interesting sidebar. Like eventually, what—

Like we would look back at the people who were there when the tomb was opened and who died when and how and kind of go, "It all just seems for the most part, like it's like the normal thing that happens to humans."

And it's not a curse. But at the time that was the bigger medical mystery. Like even Arthur Conan Doyle was like, "I think it's spirits from the tomb."

[audience laughs]

Justin: He did have a turn towards spiritualism late in life.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: That's not too surprising from late Arthur Conan Doyle.

Sydnee: Oh, coming in here with some extra knowledge. Some literary knowledge for us.

Justin: I know who—Listen, you get out of medicine...

Sydnee: Yeah?

Justin: I know everything.

Sydnee: Oh.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Everything?

[audience laughs more]

Justin: I... [laughing] I didn't know what I was going to say. I didn't know how I was going to end the sentence. I was as surprised as you are that I said "everything."

Sydnee: Everything.

Justin: Certainly that's not true. We know that, right? Like you've all known me for over a decade. That's not accurate.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Nigh on 16 years now that I think on it. You know I don't know everything.

Sydnee: [groans] Definitely not directions. You still get lost like in our hometown, you know?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And it's not big. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So immediately after, so eventually Carter, like it took a—It was a process, right?

Like they opened the tomb and it was a while before he was able to open the sarcophagus.

And it was in the autopsy that followed, when they realized that King Tut had been so young. I think this is when, like, the quest for like, “Oh, okay. What caused this? Is this a mystery that we need to solve?”

So a few clues were evident pretty quickly. One is that we knew King Tut had an atypically formed foot. This was thought to be... And then this was something that probably plagued him his entire life.

This has been thought to be the result of something called Kohler disease, which is basically when there's not enough blood flow to a certain bone in the foot, your navicular bone.

And as a result, I mean most of the time you just get like a lot of foot pain for a while and then it goes away and that's usually it. So it doesn't explain everything, but we think maybe he had that.

We know that he struggled somewhat with walking because they found 130 walking sticks and canes, very—[laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: That seems like too many.

Sydnee: A lot.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Some did show evidence of use, as you may imagine. Many didn't. Many were just decorative. So we know that he used some sort of device—

Justin: Wait, hold on!

Sydnee: ... to assist him in walking.

Justin: Oh, okay, never mind. Sorry, go on.

Sydnee: [laughing] What?

Justin: He used him while he was alive, you mean?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. [laughing] Did you...?

Justin: Nope. Nope. Keep going. Keep on going.

Sydnee: [laughing] Did you think I was suggesting...?

Justin: Right this way, ma'am. Nothing to see here. Keep on going.

[audience still laughing]

Justin: Let's keep on going.

Sydnee: So this—[laughs] This led to a theory that was really prevalent for a while where people said, "Well he was probably injured in a chariot wreck. And whatever injuries he sustained eventually resulted in his death."

And the clues for this were simply that there are pictures of him riding in chariots.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So... [laughs] So maybe?

But they also noted like, "Well, but you can see some other evidence, not just in his foot, but like there are these other places where it looks like some bones were broken."

But what really complicates this whole story is that a lot of what happened when they were excavating the tomb resulted in a lot of other injuries and damage, you know?

And so there's a lot of stuff in these early, like, there were theories of some sort of wreck or we'll get into, like, there were murder theories.

A lot of that is probably just the result of, like, Howard Carter's excavation team. Not really... I mean, he—This wasn't his area of expertise. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: He didn't know what he was doing.

And even after they did the initial autopsy, they sort of like, brought him back and just left him there.

And then, like, poured paraffin wax and were like, "This should do. This should be fine."

And so it gets really hard to start to tell like, what did we do and what might have caused him to die?

So there was also this sort of like... It was noted in the '60s, because people continue to go back and revisit and look again and say, "Well, this chariot

thing, we don't have a lot of evidence for. We need to... We need to revisit this. What else do we think could have happened?"

So they, eventually they did some X-rays. That was our first sort of [laughs] medical diagnostic study. We started easy. We started with some X-rays.

There was a team from Liverpool who did all these X-rays and they found that it looked like there was some sort of hole made in his head.

Justin: Uh-oh!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: He didn't listen to us. And there was a theory like, "It was murder." [laughs] Somebody bashed him in the head and that's... We've solved it. King Tut was murdered." Everyone was— [laughs]

Justin: And now the question is, by who?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But later on, other people who actually—I mean I think this is always the problem like, gosh us doctors will think we just know about stuff that's way outside of our [laughing] lane sometimes.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Because there were experts in, like mummification processes, who were like, "That's just how you... That's what you do when you're going through a mummification.

"No, that hole was made after his death. We can tell. This is a normal process that would have been done. He wasn't... I mean, we don't know if he was murdered, but that hole was not... That's not murder."

It was also noted in the '60s, and this was a big mystery for a while, where everybody went, "Hey, um, we think his penis is missing."

Justin: Mm.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But that one was... That book was closed pretty quickly because then they looked at the—

Justin: And that's how he lost it?!

Sydnee: They looked at—[dissolves into laughter]

[audience laughs]

Justin: What?! How does this dude read?

[audience laughs]

Justin: That's the wrong way to read. It shouldn't be anywhere near the book!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They look back at pictures from the original excavation and they were like, "No, it was there then."

[audience laughs uncomfortably]

Sydnee: Which I guess is a whole other mystery because then for a while, they were like, "Who stole it? Who...?"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But then they just... it was in the sand nearby. They just found it, so...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But can I say, not until 2006.

[audience laughs harder]

Sydnee: That's a long time.

Justin: Hold on. Who is in the sand...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] That was—

Justin: ... digging around and they're like, "What in the...? Hey, Kevin, do you know what I think this might be? Please don't laugh."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] They there were attempts made, especially as we... Like you have to imagine, like as medical science was advancing, we were getting these new tests.

We were like, "Ooh, X-rays, we can do those now. What should we do with them? Do we have some mummies? [laughs] Let's X-ray 'em."

And then as we begin to understand blood typing and that sort of science we were like, "Ooh, we got a bunch of mummies over here.

"Let's try to blood type 'em and figure out if they're all related. And like maybe we can pin down—"

Because there was also this sort of side quest for King Tut's dad that was happening because they thought... Like they thought they had found where he was buried but he wasn't there, they don't think.

And then they would look somewhere else and they were like, "Well, this isn't where he should be buried, but we don't know who this mummy is."

And so there was this other narrative kind of going on. So they did these sort of blood tests like in '69 and '76 and '84.

And they kept repeating the—I mean and these are all published papers where they're like, “Well, we did a very important study looking at the blood tests of these mummies.

“And here's what we think at this point,” to try to figure out who was related to who.

Eventually this would move on to DNA testing as I alluded to, to figure out like the other mummies that were present that were King Tut's kids.

And part of what threw off, as they were sort of on this quest for like, “Okay, we're doing DNA tests, blood tests, but what ultimately... We don't think it was murder. We don't think it was a chariot wreck.

“What ultimately killed King Tut?”

One thing that sort of sent everybody off in the wrong direction were the artistic changes that I mentioned his dad had instituted.

If you look at sort of the depictions of King Tut and his parents, they were very different than the artistic depictions from the previous royal family.

And so there was this thought that maybe the way that they were drawn was because of some sort of genetic syndrome they had.

And so they started theorizing all of these different genetic syndromes based strictly off of this artistic choice that King Tut's dad made.

And that was a whole other paper that was published in JAMA, in the Journal of the American Medical Society in 2007, where they were like, “Okay. We looked.

“We don't see Marfan syndrome. We don't see craniosynostosis. We don't see Antley-Bixler. We don't-”

And like, looked for all of these different genetic syndromes.

And then finally they said, "We think the art's just different."

[audience laughs]

Justin: I... I... I wish—

Sydnee: [laughs] "They just drew 'em different for a while."

Justin: I wish they had been... I could be in heaven with that guy when his friend's like, "Craig, come here. They're lookin' at your pictures."

[As Craig] "Ohh, what are they saying about 'em?"

[As Craig's friend] "Aww, man. Um... Yeah, they're good. It's just that they think that maybe has a genetic... Yeah, they like 'em. They even said they're good pictures.

"You shouldn't come over here... Let's go back to the chocolate waterfall."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So eventually a little over a decade ago, they, as they were doing these different DNA analyses, they did some CAT scans as well.

So now I mean they've already X-rayed and they've done blood type and they've done DNA and now they're putting mummies in CAT scans.

Which I was reading like... I had to read this whole paper, I'm reading like, "Was it a mobile CAT scan? Tell me. I need to know. Like, did they bring the mummies to the hospital? Did they bring the CAT scans to the mummies?"

"How did they do this?"

It was a mobile CAT scan, in case you're curious. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So I'm reading like, "How did they do all these CTs on all of these ancient dead people. Like what did they do?"

And so they did that and they did find, like there was definitely some kind of injury to his right leg that they think was consistent with something that may have occurred, like a wreck or something. You can't tell for sure.

But there was some sort of injury and they saw so much damage to the bone that they started to think, "Huh. Maybe this was like a chronic infection, like a bone infection, like what we would call osteomyelitis.

"And maybe King Tut was sort of fighting this infection for quite a while."

We still don't know if that would have been a cause of death. It could have been. But the DNA test finally kind of gave us the last piece of the puzzle.

Because when they were looking at the DNA to try to make family trees, they also found the DNA of *Plasmodium falciparum*, which is malaria.

And they said, "Oh my gosh!" [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "King Tut had malaria!" And so then they finally cracked the case. It was malaria all along.

[audience laughs, claps and cheers]

Justin: [incredulous] Y'all are cheering for malaria?

Sydnee: And it was... It made sense because he was immunocompromised by this other infection he had. He had some chronic medical issues. On top of that, he got a really bad case of malaria.

And then to add to the final piece of evidence, they looked around the tomb and there were lots of medicinal herbs from that time period that would have been used for these sorts of illnesses. For fevers and whatnot.

Justin: A little too little too late, but alright.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So it all fit together.

Justin: Thanks so much for hanging out with us for a few minutes. We appreciate it.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Want to say thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program.

We are going to take a brief intermission, so please go buy yourself a poster if you would be so kind. They're really, I mean, I think they're really cute.

That is going to do it for us. Syd, anything else for you, bud?

Sydnee: No, that's it. Thank you all.

Justin: Alright, that's gonna do it for us.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head!

[theme music plays]

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