

## **Sawbones 111: Nursing**

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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 music plays]

### **Justin:**

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

### **Sydnee:**

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

### **Justin:**

Hey Syd, how you doing?

### **Sydnee:**

I'm doing good Justin. Um, I've been thinking...

### **Justin:**

Okay?

### **Sydnee:**

... about our show.

### **Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

### **Sydnee:**

And I really think that we need to be a little more, like, topical, a little more timely with the stuff that we discuss.

**Justin:**

Excellent, that's a great idea Syd 'cause that's going to help you go viral.

**Sydnee:**

Right, well that was my thought, is like a lot more people would listen to it if, you know, if our show was connected to stuff that's going on, like, right now.

**Justin:**

Makes perfect sense to me.

**Sydnee:**

I mean which is hard for a history show, right?

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

'Cause like the whole essence of our show is that it's already happened.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Gosh, this is really... this is a lot deeper of a problem that I had...

**Justin:**

Well, let's not get bogged with the particulars.

**Sydnee:**

Do we wanna get into that? Like...

**Justin:**

What—

**Sydnee:**

... this is, like, an existential question, like, it's history, but it's now, but it's...

**Justin:**

Okay...

**Sydnee:**

... could it be topical?

**Justin:**

So what is our first, like, get me in here Syd, what's our topical hook this week?

**Sydnee:**

Okay, so our trendy— Sawbones, trendy edition...

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

... for this week is, did you hear all that stuff that Joy Behar said about nurses?

**Justin:**

Did I hear all...

**Sydnee:**

On The View?

**Justin:**

Do you mean—

**Sydnee:**

I mean, I don't watch The View, but I heard all about it on Facebook. Did you hear about that?

**Justin:**

Do you mean, like, six weeks ago?

**Sydnee:**

Well, yeah. I mean, it was probably, like, six weeks ago. But that's, like, basically now.

**Justin:**

It's not though!

**Sydnee:**

In the grand scheme of things.

**Justin:**

Yes, okay, yes, but...

**Sydnee:**

I mean, if you look at it like history in terms of eons...

**Justin:**

I'd rather not.

**Sydnee:**

... six weeks ago is the same as, like, a millisecond ago.

**Justin:**

It's definitely not though.

**Sydnee:**

More or less. I've been really busy.

**Justin:**

Okay, got it.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

Okay, good, now we're getting to the root of it.

**Sydnee:**

I work and we have a kid and, like, it was Halloween, like, trick or treat month, give me, like most people celebrate...

**Justin:**

Trick or treat month? Right.

**Sydnee:**

... that all month, right?

**Justin:**

All month.

**Sydnee:**

Like we put our daughter in, I don't know, 30 different costumes.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So this is as timely as I'm gonna get for now, okay?

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

I'm always gonna be running at least six weeks behind.

**Justin:**

I can't believe Joy Behar said, uh, the bad thing about nurses.

**Sydnee:**

Well she...

**Justin:**

What did she say?

**Sydnee:**

She said a dumb thing about, uh, a Miss America contestant who came out and her talent was that she was a nurse and she was proud of it, and she talked about being a nurse, which is a pretty awesome talent, frankly. And she, uh, was wearing a stethoscope, just a stethoscope, because there are just stethoscopes.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And, um, I believe that Miss Behar referred to it as a doctor's stethoscope?

**Justin:**

Oh, Joy.

**Sydnee:**

As opposed to a nursing stethoscope. Um, now of course, as everyone is well aware I would think by now, if you didn't already know this, there is not such distinction. They're just, like, stethoscopes.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

You know?

**Justin:**

I...

**Sydnee:**

An instrument that we use to auscultate, that means listen, that's a fancy word for listen by the way.

**Justin:**

To say listen, guys. Come on.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, that we use, that nurses use, that, you know, EMTs use, that...

**Justin:**

But she said like more derogatory things, she didn't just call it a doctor's stethoscope, right? Like—

**Sydnee:**

No. She just insinuated... I don't know exactly what she said.

**Justin:**

Insinuated that she was above her station, correct?

**Sydnee:**

Yes, yes. That it wasn't a big deal.

**Justin:**

I feel bad—I kind of— Like, obviously this is a stupid thing to say, I feel a little bit bad for Joy Behar? 'Cause like... you're just saying stuff live on TV constantly if you're, like, trying to make jokes, like that's gotta be hard to not— Like, uh, last week or maybe two weeks ago, I made a dumb joke that the punchline was fat people. And that was a mean thing to say and not really in character, but we make the show up as we go, and I didn't edit it out. So, it's hard, but it's still a dumb thing to say.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, no, I understand what you're saying. But it's hard for me to feel bad for her because, uh, nurses work really freaking hard and they do a lot of work that you don't wanna do and that I don't wanna do. A lot of things that are really hard or really challenging or sometimes frankly kind of gross that they have to do, that's part of their job. And they do it to take care of people. So...

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

... at least if you don't recognize that, I don't know.

**Justin:**

You should pick better targets, Joy.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. And then also, seriously you don't know, I mean like a stethoscope... I mean did you know? I mean, is this silly of me to ask? Did you know that there is no difference between a stethoscope, a stethoscope, a stethoscope?

**Justin:**

Do not attempt to plumb the depths of my ignorance.

**Sydnee:**

Okay, sure.

**Justin:**

On any topic.

**Sydnee:**

Fair.

**Justin:**

So... **Sydnee:**

I thought we should talk about nurses though.

**Justin:**

Let's do it! I'm excited. Can you clarify for me? Like obviously, I think like a lot of people, broadly I know what it is, um, nurses do, like, specifically where they fit in, in the, sort of, overall medical landscape. But can you, like, clarify for me? I imagine it's a pretty broad answer.

**Sydnee:**

That's a tough question to answer, what do nurses do? What do nurses not do? Uh, because when we use the word nurse, we're probably referring to everyone within the field of nursing, and that's a lot of different levels of training, a lot of different degrees. We're talking about LPNs and we're talking about RNs, and then we can be talking about, like, nurse anesthetists, uh, people who are more specialized, who have just certain duties in patient care. Um, there's, you know, outpatient nursing is very



different from inpatient nursing, I mean you can hold the same degree and do both, but your day to day job and your duties would be extremely different. In general, you're taking care of patients, you're providing, um, a lot of different, you know, from taking their vitals to listening to their heart and lungs and assessing them, to doing neurological assessments, to, um, doing the more, like, hands on patient care stuff that as a doctor, I don't do a lot of. Like cleaning up your patients and bathing your patients and, you know, um, dressing their wounds. Man, wound care is something that doctors never know enough about and nurses know way more. And then, like, things like starting IVs and stuff in the hospital that we don't do and administering medications.

Um, but then— And you know, the nursing field has expanded to include, um, there are doctors of nursing.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And, uh, there are nurse practitioners, which I think fall in that group. There are nurse midwives. And I'm not gonna get into all these different kinds of classifications, I'm just broadly talking about the concept of nursing as, um, men and women who take care of sick people. And how that profession has kind of evolved, um, and some of our missteps along the way trying to develop just like with, uh, with physicians, we've had many missteps, as we have discussed in great depth on this show. Uh, just like that, with, uh, with nursing and the profession of nursing as well.

**Justin:**

I'm ready, Syd, take me back to the beginning.

**Sydnee:**

So, uh, first of all thank you to Amanda, Stephanie, Claire and Nicholas for all suggesting this topic. And I am sure that in the wake of the Joy Behar thing there were many more people who Tweeted at us about this. Um, but that is not as easy to search as emails. So...

**Justin:**

So yeah, you want your credit, just stick to the emails.

**Sydnee:**

Send me an email 'cause I can't search, or Facebook inbox, I apparently can't search that either. At least not in a way that I have figured out. Uh, so the roots of nursing are actually pretty closely tied to two things. One, to the church.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And then somewhat to the military as we move further in history. Um, when we talk about, like, who took care of sick people, especially, like, in ancient times, uh, usually it was family members. So if someone was ill, especially if we're talking about like before hospitals, the- you may have, uh, you know, a- a doctor or someone who was a physician, so to speak, who would come and like tell you what medicines to take or something, or what poultices to use. But the people who would actually, like, do the care for the patient would've been family members. Um... a lot of the time, that was left to women. So mothers and sisters and daughters. Uh, although, as we began to, like, see any kind of professional, like, people who were designated to do that, there is a large chunk of history where it was strictly a male profession.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, just because it was, you know, like, naked people.

**Justin:**

Oh, you know, well that makes sense. We had our hang-ups back then.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, so like naked people. And then also because, uh, the idea that, um, that anybody would have enough knowledge to take care of sick people, uh, in any capacity, only men would've been thought capable of doing that. Whether that been as a doctor or a nurse.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

So there were parts of, which is kind of interesting, because you see that shift throughout history like with nursing like where it's a mainly female profession and then a male-dominated profession and then for many years again a largely female profession and then now, whoever.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Whoever wants to be a nurse. Um, other than midwifery, which was always kind of generally the realm of women. Um... in ancient Egypt, uh, this was definitely true. Um, but nursing— So mainly men...

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... would've been taking care of patients. But, uh, nursing had been expanded to include women when we talk about, like, in Greek times, in Roman times. Um, on the battlefield, uh, you would've seen, like, soldiers acting as nurses for each other.

**Justin:**

Oh, interesting.

**Sydnee:**

Um, they were all, uh, skilled in kind of, like, basic first aid and basic nursing care to like care for one another in, like frontline, you know, medical situations. So some of these are like... more like EMT, medic type duties and then some of these are nursing duties as well. Um... but then, once the soldiers would've been brought back to like hospitals or, you know, places to receive further care, then they probably would've been taken over by women, primarily.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, in Roman times, you actually see nursing as a very desirable vocation for, um, for noble women.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So that would've been, uh, something that, like, you would've had the time to do, because you were a noble women, and so...

**Justin:**

So you had the free time to, well and the time for some training, too, I would imagine was a luxury that not everybody could afford, right?

**Sydnee:**

A lot of this, we're not— When we're talking about training, probably not. Probably apprenticeships. Um, and that would be pretty much it. You know, stuff you would maybe even pick up like handed down from your family, stuff you would observe. But not— As far as, like, formal training, like nursing school or anything, no. Nothing like that.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, definitely not. A lot... And I mean, to be fair, as far as medical school for doctors you wouldn't have seen a lot of that either. You know? We're talking about times where a lot of people just kind of apprenticed a physician.

**Justin:**

Yeah, well that makes sense.

**Sydnee:**

So same idea for nursing.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

You just kind of pick it up. Um...

**Justin:**

Learn as you go.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. The profession of nursing becomes more codified as you see Christianity become the predominant religion in Rome. Um, because you see, uh, this, like, this idea that more and more people are called to serve their fellow man or woman and care for the sick. Um, and so, as a result you see more people who are interested in taking care of people.

**Justin:**

Yeah, well yeah, I mean, that...

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, who are called to do that as a form of service.

**Justin:**

So yeah, like, take it up.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and we actually see a mention of that, there's a mention of a visiting nurse, Phoebe, in the Bible.

**Justin:**

I am not... I was not aware of Phoebe.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. I don't—

**Justin:**

Does not sound like a biblical name, but I'm gonna have to take your word for it.

**Sydnee:**

I don't think it's... I don't think she's like a huge figure?

**Justin:**

Uh, now did she call herself Phoebe of the Bible when she introduced herself to potential patients?

**Sydnee:**

This is in my notes.

**Justin:**

Hail. Hail and well met, stranger, I am Phoebe of the Bible, perhaps you've heard of me? I just invented home nursing.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. I just wanted to, um, differentiate her from, you know, like Phoebe of Central Park.

**Justin:**

Right, okay. Got it. There are two Phoebes, ever.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

Sorry Phoebe Gates.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. There's the one of the Bible and the one of Friends fame.

**Justin:**

Who is, uh, briefly mentioned in the bible, but they don't linger.

**Sydnee:**

It's only the part where she wrote smelly cat.

**Justin:**

Right, which was a miracle, as we all know.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, now at this time, churches become primarily responsible for, um, furnishing nurses for any kind of, uh, local villages, you know, to go out and, like, visit sick people in their homes. As we see the development of some what we would think of as hospitals, for caring for sick people in the hospitals. And again, there's no sort of training. It was as much your calling to do this, to take care of sick people, as it would've been your job. Um, and so a lot of these nurses at the time, what we would've called nurses, were really more of just like a comforting presence...

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... to sit with you while you died of, [laughs] now we understand, preventable diseases.

**Justin:**

I, um, grim. Uh, but...

**Sydnee:**

Sorry.

**Justin:**

... to try to brighten things up a little bit, um, you know what? I would bet, this is like completely seat of my pants, I would bet that for a good long period of time, you would want a nurse around more than a doctor. Because broadly speaking, a lot of the doctors we encounter are very interested in pushing medicine forward no matter who, sort of, like, gets burned for that. And I would think that like, if I had to pick between that or somebody who's just gonna like chill and be comforting, like I think that there's something instinctual about that or something, like, sort of, like, that we respond to that goes beyond, like, just medicine, um, about, you know, a human

presence and a human touch and a human compassion that I bet could have a much more profound effect, through a lot of history, than what we were thinking of as medicine.

**Sydnee:**

I think that's true, because you really do... I mean, and we'll talk about that later, but there really is a shift when you start to see, like, evidence-based medicine become a part of nursing care and, like, nursing education and formal training for nurses. Um, that really takes a while before you see, you know, that that is being applied rigorously. And as a result, I think you're right, that there's a lot of history where your doctor may have done something really painful or terrible to you in the pursuit of, like, learning from that experience, and your nurse had no, uh, that was not part of their job to do that. Your nurse would've just been there to help take care of you.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Probably would've made you feel a lot better. Um, most nursing was done by deaconesses.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and if you were someone who served as a nurse and you weren't a nun or a monk, then at the time you generally would've been thought of as someone of... Like a woman of ill repute, somebody who, you know? 'Cause mainly it would've been a woman, if you weren't a nun or a monk and you were taking care of sick people, um, you were probably female, you may have been doing this to make extra money on the side while your main profession of prostitution was how you mainly supported yourself. There were actually, there was a point in history where women were, uh, punished for prostitution or drunkenness or some sort of behavior like that, that was either inappropriate of women or illegal, by making them be nurses.

**Justin:**



There is a USA Up All Night movie in there somewhere folks, you just have to find a few re-writes and then you're right there.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. Uh you don't really see that change until the 1800s. And that's when we first start to see, in, like, in France and Germany are where we start to see some, um, some actual training start to happen for nurses. Uh, the protestant church in Germany, um, mainly again was, you know, nursing was like a religious vocation. You would do it, you know, if you were serving the church. Um, but they also started to develop some practical, like, training programs on that. So like, yes it's great, you wanna take care of people, but then let's talk about how we can do that well. Um, science was like in fashion.

**Justin:**

Oh, that's cool to...

**Sydnee:**

So cool time to be alive.

**Justin:**

... cool.

**Sydnee:**

Is science cool now? Is science back in fashion?

**Justin:**

Oh, yeah yeah yeah, sweetie, yeah. For sure.

**Sydnee:**

Hey...

**Justin:**

Way, way cool.

**Sydnee:**

I think it's in fashion again.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Neil deGrasse Tyson brought it back?

**Justin:**

Yeah he's back.

**Sydnee:**

Didn't he?

**Justin:**

He brought it back. Thanks, Neil.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. Um, so science was very cool at the time so the idea of formalized training was well received because everybody kind of wanted to get in on the science bandwagon. Um, this was greatly advanced by a couple women. Uh, one, Elizabeth Fry was a nurse who mainly worked for prison reform, um, but she also helped to like organize the deaconesses into training programs. She started the Institute of Nursing in England which, ultimately, I don't know that it was as successful as they wanted it to be, but just began this process. Um, and then of course Florence Nightingale.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Who I think we've all heard of.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Right?

**Justin:**

She was in Assassin's Creed Syndicate, I just finished.

**Sydnee:**

That's exactly why we've all heard of Florence Nightingale.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

That's it.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So, uh, Florence was an upper class woman who, uh, had time, had leisure time, and was called to make nursing, you know, how she spent her time. And so, uh, and this would've been pretty rare. Because as I mentioned, if you weren't in the church, to devote your time to nursing was seen as pretty unseemly for a finer lady.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Again, Florence Nightingale said herself, uh, at the time when she started, "Nursing was left to", and this is a quote from her, "those who were too old, too weak, too drunken, too dirty, too stupid, or too bad to do anything else."

**Justin:**

Kind of a little judge-y, Florence?

**Sydnee:**

A little judge-y.

**Justin:**

A little judge-y.

**Sydnee:**

She was— There was a hospital official actually at the same time who made the comment that, um, that at present, "Nursing is the last resource of female adversity. Slatternly widows, runaway wives, servants out of place, women bankrupt of fame or fortune from whatever cause, fall back on hospital nursing." So this was not a— This was, again, nursing was not seen as a great profession. And there was no, like, no formalized training, there was no, you know? So this is the world that Florence Nightingale's entering.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and she was one of the figures, and we're gonna talk about several more, who helped to change that. Uh, she did a lot to influence modern nursing. She underwent, uh, some formal training, some apprenticeship, um, and she believed really strongly in the idea of, like, public sanitation and clean water and access to clean food and, you know, good food and that kind of stuff. Um, and most famously, she tended to the soldiers in the Crimean War, helped to supply them with food and water and greatly reduced their mortality as a result.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Brought, like, a brave band of nurses with her to go help soldiers...

**Justin:**

Oh!

**Sydnee:**

... at the front.

**Justin:**

That's cool.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

They didn't cover that in Assassin's Creed.

**Sydnee:**

No, they probably covered that in history class, but you probably weren't paying attention because it was about a woman.

**Justin:**

Oh man! She got me again.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

Another of Sydnee's trademark barbs.

**Sydnee:**

Thank you, video games, for teaching my husband about women's history.

**Justin:**

Ah, and Sawbones. I listen to the show too.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

I listen to half of it.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, the... One interesting note about Florence Nightingale is that she did... a lot of her beliefs, a lot of what she did, was actually based on miasma theory which we've talked about before. She believed that, you know, disease permeated the air and like bad smells and stuff, and that's how you got sick. So a little misled...

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... in terms of why she did the things she did. But a lot of what she did was really practical, good advice and, like I said, we're moving into a time where now we see that nursing is a more noble pursuit for all women, not just slatternly widows, whatever that means.

**Justin:**

All people, I would say.

**Sydnee:**

Yes, all people. At the time this is still mainly a female profession...

**Justin:**

I understand.

**Sydnee:**

... but yeah.

**Justin:**

I understand, yes.

**Sydnee:**

All people. Um, and we're actually starting to, you know, formalize nursing education.

**Justin:**

So enough about these Brits, Syd. Tell me what's going on States-side with nurses.

**Sydnee:**

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

**Justin:**

Let's go! [theme song plays]

[ad break]

**Justin:** All right, Civil War. What do we got?

**Sydnee:**

So, if we take nursing States-side, 'cause we've mainly been focusing on Europe and the UK and that kind of history of nursing, um, the Civil War is really what brought nursing to the forefront. Uh, many, many women left their families to go volunteer on both sides of the war.

Um, and actually there was a huge contribution from, uh, women who were in slavery at the time, as well. Um, and again, and I say women because although on the battlefield you would've had men who were caring for each other, you know, in what could've been considered like a nursing capacity, um, largely the formalized nurses were women at the time.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, this is also where, have you heard of Clara Barton?

**Justin:**

Yes, actually I have. Clara Barton, where do I know that name?

**Sydnee:**

I mean, you could take a stab and say she was a nurse and you'd probably be right.

**Justin:**

Wasn't she a nurse? A famous nurse?

**Sydnee:**

She's a famous nurse.

**Justin:**

Do they talk about her in West Wing? I feel like they might've mentioned her in West Wing.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, great. Yes. I'm sure they mentioned her on West Wing.

**Justin:**

Or, uh, she wasn't in Assassin's Creed, so I'm not as familiar.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Well, maybe they'll make a video game about her someday and you'll know who she is. Uh, Clara Barton was an important figure during the Civil War, certainly caring for the wounded on the battlefield, caring for the sick, but as she herself admitted, she didn't do as much hands on. She, uh, made her mark by, uh, traveling to Europe and learning about the international Red Cross and then bringing that idea back to the US and starting the US branch of the Red Cross.

**Justin:**

Oh, right! That's where I know her from.

**Sydnee:**

Um, we also hear of, uh, Dorothea Dix at this time who was a nurse who...

**Justin:** [snorts] **Sydnee:** ... whose job it... Who made it her job, made it her business, to, um, organize all of the nurses in to more of a, uh, you know, a formalized group who could take care of patients, um, in hospitals and at the front. Uh, and this was a big deal. Any woman who was willing to do this would've been a really big deal at the time because, um, especially in the South, the idea of a finer lady with her, you know, her skirts and her flounces and ribbons and all that, of treading into a hospital...

**Justin:**

Curtsying.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. And her swooning, and her fanning...

**Justin:**

[laughs].

**Sydnee:**



... and her corseting.

**Justin:**

Her useless little umbrella.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. The idea of a woman doing that, uh, and going into a hospital where there are sick people and naked people and bleeding people and you know all kinds of bodily fluids and taking care of men, would not have been okay. And so the women who did this were really revolutionary. Um, during the war, it's funny, only what they called 'older women' were allowed to be nurses.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And older means 30 plus.

**Justin:**

Yeah, well comparatively speaking in those times, yes.

**Sydnee:**

Thanks. I'm an older woman.

**Justin:**

Me too.

**Sydnee:**

Uh [laughs]. So it actually led to a trend of many women trying to pretend to be older than they were...

**Justin:**

Oh, wow.

**Sydnee:**

... so that they could get into the nursing field 'cause they wanted to go take care of people too. But that was so that, uh, younger women weren't

exposed to the horrors of war and because they would also be, I don't know, tempting for men, or... I don't know.

**Justin:**

I don't know.

**Sydnee:**

Something sexist and awful, I'm sure. Uh, they were forced to, um, dress as kind of, um, I don't know, as, like, not distracted.

**Justin:**

Conservatively?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, conservatively would be a good word. Uh, so they had to remove the hoops from their skirts, they had to only wear brown or black.

**Justin:**

'Cause you know men can't pay attention if a lady's got some hoops.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. They also... It was very practical, the hallways in the, like, between the beds were very narrow and so the hoop skirts would get stuck on stuff. There was a story I read of, like, a hoop skirt getting stuck on a patient and ripping out a stitch and like they bled to death or something.

**Justin:**

[laughs].

**Sydnee:**

That can't... I can't imagine that's true.

**Justin:**

Man.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, thank you. Um, Mary Bickerdyke is another, uh, big figure at this time. She was a huge leader in the nursing field. Uh, she was, um one of... She

was the only woman that General Sherman allowed at the front with him.  
Uh...

**Justin:**

How'd she swing that?

**Sydnee:**

She was just that good.

**Justin:**

Nice.

**Sydnee:**

She had no commission, like Barton, and she said "I have received my authority from Lord God Almighty" and she charged to the front, she was the only nurse at the Battle of Lookout Mountain, uh, cared for 2000 men.

**Justin:**

That makes for a long day.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. And on the confederate side, you actually have a nurse, Phoebe Pember who, uh, at one point was caring for up to 15,000 patients at a time.

**Justin:**

[laughs]. Not well, one would assume.

**Sydnee:**

Well, she had a whole team...

**Justin:**

Okay, got it.

**Sydnee:**

... Justin.

**Justin:**

[laughs]. "How you? Good? Cool, next."

**Sydnee:**

You know what? Maybe she could've.

**Justin:**

Maybe. I guess.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, no...

**Justin:**

It's just a lot of people, like that's a group of people. Like, that's a lot. I'm all for impressive statistics too. That's an insane number of people.

**Sydnee:**

She had a whole team of nurses that were working with her.

**Justin:**

She's like working... That's like a Bon Jovi concert, on her own. That's insane. Even Bon Jovi has more nurses than that I bet.

**Sydnee:**

And there's actually— There's a lot that can be said. And I'm not— I'm giving you a very general overview of these time periods in history, but there's a lot that you can read and learn about the contributions, uh, during the Civil War of, um, African American women who worked as nurses and who contributed. Um, some who were in slavery and then some who weren't, uh, on both sides of the war who, um, huge numbers who took care of wounded men during the war. Uh, in the later 1800s and into the 20th century, we start to see, um, now that we kind of have organizations of nurses and it is now socially acceptable for you to be a nurse...

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm, right.

**Sydnee:**

... and not necessarily be a nun, we start to see, um, the expansion of, like, nursing school and, like, what are nursing duties? What does a nurse do? You know, how can they specialize? Um... but it's funny, you still see like the- the older underpinnings of this as like a church, you know, kind of profession. As this of, like, nuns, um, still persist. Um, in one way that nursing is largely a female occupation at this, uh, point in history, but we also see these weird guidelines for nurses, uh, that have nothing to do with their like duties or their profession.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So like, for instance, um, nurses were not allowed to marry in a lot of cases.

**Justin:**

Yikes, all right.

**Sydnee:**

They were kind of housed in these nurses' homes. Um, and, uh, I found this great— There's this list of duties of the floor nurse from 1887, uh, and these were some of their duties that were listed for them to take care of. So in addition to caring for your 50, five zero, patients...

**Justin:**

Or 15,000, if you're crushing it like Phoebe Pember. History's third great Phoebe.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. That's true.

**Justin:**

Yeah, she snuck in there.

**Sydnee:**

It's a very Phoebe-full episode. Um, so duties of the floor nurse. Uh, so there were a lot of menial tasks involved in nursing at the time. So like sweeping and mopping the floors and dusting the patient's furniture. Um, you have to

maintain the temperature in the ward, so like bring coal and, you know, like, to the fire.

**Justin:**

Invent air conditioning.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. Um you need to, um, fill all the kerosene lamps and clean the chimneys. Uh, you've got to keep all your nursing notes. You have to, um, whittle your nibs to your individual taste.

**Justin:**

What the... What's that mean?

**Sydnee:**

For your pens.

**Justin:**

What?

**Sydnee:**

For your pens, nibs.

**Justin:**

Oh, oh, oh. Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Um, you reported to...

**Justin:**

A little personality. A little bit of flair, how you whittle your nibs.

**Sydnee:**

That's exactly where you can exert you in your day. That's it though.

**Justin:**

"That's a great nib, Norris." "I know, isn't it nice? Got a little rounded edge on there don't I?"

**Sydnee:**

This would've been from the US, so...

**Justin:**

They immigrated, Sydnee. That was legal back then.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

Uh, uh, or is this not the great American melting pot?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

No, it is. I checked.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, your day would've started at 7:00 AM and it would've ended at 8:00 PM...

**Justin:**

I can't do a women's voice that doesn't— That isn't going to sound like I'm making fun of women. So, like, any voice that... It's like woman face, basically. And I can't do that. So I do a British woman so that way it doesn't sound like I'm doing a goofy woman's voice.

**Sydnee:**

Why don't you just talk like you?

**Justin:**

'Cause this is how I...

**Sydnee:**

And say "I am— In this example, I am being a woman."

**Justin:**

All great comedy setups begin with, "For the next 10 seconds I will be talking like... imagine I am talking like a woman."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. Except that there is no distinct way that women talk. I don't want you to think that I'm saying that there is.

**Justin:**

No, it's like...

**Sydnee:**

I just mean that in this moment...

**Justin:**

Right, I'm with you. Um...

**Sydnee:**

Because at the time, only women would've been allowed to be nurses.

**Justin:**

Got it, got it.

**Sydnee:**

But only then. Um, so you would've worked from 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM except on the sabbath day, uh, on which day they would give you off from noon to two, presumably to go to church.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Or something. Um, if you were a graduate nurse in good standing, you would've been given an evening off a week, but only if you go to church regularly. Uh, you were instructed to set aside a lot of your money to take care of you in your later years, like, as your own social security. So like, for



example, if you made 30 bucks a month, which would've been normal at the time, you should set aside 15 of it.

**Justin:**

Phew! Gonna be living high on the hog once you're in your old age, huh?

**Sydnee:**

Um, any nurse who smokes, uses liquor in any form, gets her hair done at a beauty shop, or frequents dance halls will give the director of nurses good reason to suspect her worth, intentions, and integrity.

**Justin:**

That's a nice backdoor to just like, if we think that you're out of line then we're gonna reign you back in.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and if you do all these things that we told you without fault for five years, we will give you an increase of five cents a day. Providing that you don't have any debts to the hospital.

**Justin:**

Whoa! I could buy a new dress for church.

**Sydnee:**

So, uh, the nurses would actually spend a lot of their time, I mean you can read these great excerpts from like nursing diaries from the time period, but they would spend, like, especially as they were, like, student nurses, they didn't get paid and they had to spend all their time, like, cleaning.

Um, really long, thankless hours to then graduate to long hours of just really demanding patient care, because, you know, we're talking about a time, we rely so much now on monitors and, like, labs and all kinds of studies that we can do in the hospital to tell us instantly if a patient needs our attention or if they're stable and they can sleep and we can sit down and have a cup of coffee. And the, uh, you know, they wouldn't have had any of this at the time.

**Justin:**

I never thought about that.

**Sydnee:**

And then the doctors would've just given them a list, like, "Change that patient's bandage every two hours," and "reapply that poultice every four hours," and...

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

..Go check, you know, go make sure Timmy's drinking his water." And like, and we'll just give you this list and then take off.

**Justin:**

Wave away the evil spirits with burning sage.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. Yeah, and make sure that you refill the, you know, the kerosene lamps while you're at it.

**Justin:**

I wonder if that's because... I wonder if there was a high demand to be in this field because there were so few socially acceptable career paths for women at the time? Like if you wanted to be a working woman, you didn't have a lot of options. So like... supply— Like they could afford to be like really demanding about— for their nurses.

**Sydnee:**

I think that was probably...

**Justin:**

I'm pulling that out of my caboose. I don't know.

**Sydnee:**

I think— I'd say that that was probably part of it at the time, based on the idea that as we move, um, into, like, through World War I and the definitely after World War II, we see lots of women who are interested in becoming nurses. We see that as, like, a booming profession and lots more people

entering that field. So I imagine that women who wanted to work at the time, yeah, for sure. It was a desirable job. But I mean I think part of it is still the relationship to the church and the, you know, the underlying theme of like, "This used to be a job you had if you were a nun. Now you're not a nun but you kind of live like a nun."

**Justin:**

It's still like more than a job. It's a...

**Sydnee:**

It's a calling.

**Justin:**

It's a calling, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and that's actually why nurses at the time would've been called sisters, and my understanding is that in the UK, some senior nurses are still referred to as sister.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So sister whoever, which is interesting. Um... and also the connection to the military is probably why we give orders, why I write orders.

**Justin:**

Oh, huh.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

That's interesting.

**Sydnee:**

Which is interesting. But, um... what really— One little tidbit that really brought nursing into its own that I thought was kind of cool is that as nursing schools developed, as we started to see, you know, more and more nurses would actually go through training before they would, uh, go through these rigorous kind of apprenticeships I just described, um, you would... The school you would graduate from had a specific cap, like a different, like, color on the cap that would indicate what school you graduated from. And you would wear it throughout your career.

**Justin:**

Oh, cool.

**Sydnee:**

So it became like a point of pride. You wanted a good reputation, you wanted your students to be well-trained and the nurses that you sent out into the world to be really good at what they did because they were wearing your colors all the time.

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

So nursing schools got better at, you know, as a way of making sure that they increase their reputation. And so that's when they really, you know, we start to see like evidence-based nursing and like what actually does better for patients? And let's apply, like, good medical theory to, you know, the care of our patients on all levels. Um, and I mean doctors are getting better at this point too, we're out of the heroic era of medicine and moving into, like, "No, let's actually do stuff that helps people and not just what we think, what wild idea floats into our brains."

Um... and then, like I said, after... Especially after World War II, uh, when we see, like, nursing is now this respectable profession and it is also something that is your patriotic duty, so we see tons of women and now men, um, signing up to go be nurses. That was like the hugest percentage of, like, what profession volunteered for the war, were nurses...

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... um, to go take care of- of our soldiers. And, uh, and they brought back with them all of this new, um, all these new skills and all of this training and all these things they learned, you know, at the front, um, and this greatly improved, like, modern hospitals and emergency rooms and like EMT care and ambulances, and all that kind of stuff. Like what we learned at the front.

**Justin:**

Oh war, what can't you do?

**Sydnee:**

That was not my plug for war.

**Justin:**

[laughs].

**Sydnee:**

That was not...

**Justin:**

Thanks, war. Thanks again, war!

**Sydnee:**

It's unfortunate, but you could make that case in general about times of war when, um, and what they do for women back at home who are all of a sudden allowed to take on all these roles that men stopped us from taking on before.

**Justin:**

War is good for two groups of people. Pushing forward the medical field and Rhett Butler. Those are the two people for whom war is good.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]. It has the— I won't say war. I will say the military has done huge things for the advancement of the medical field and also I would say women in the medical field, you know? In, uh... Especially in this case, we're talking about nurses. Um... but that could be a whole other show, so we're not

gonna get into that right now. Now, of course, like I said, nursing education is clearly formalized. You got to go to school to be a nurse, you can't just, like...

**Justin:**

Show up.

**Sydnee:**

... you know, call yourself sister and say you're a nurse. Um, there are all different kinds of specializations and different kinds of duties. Like I said, I don't think the— A good question is not what does a nurse do? It's what does a nurse not do?

Um, and uh, personally, I will say this, um, when I was first an intern, you know, after I finished medical school and I started my residency, that first day out, um, you know, it's really terrifying 'cause you're tasked with taking care of all these patients and you know, sort of, what you're doing. You know what you're doing, in theory. But in practice, you haven't done it yet. Right?

**Justin:**

This is our regular Sawbones reminder to not go to hospital in July.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs].

**Justin:**

July is when the new doctors start. Don't go in July.

**Sydnee:**

And nurses have to deal with this, um, especially in the hospital setting, uh, with, you know, calling and telling the doctor, "Hey, this thing is going on with this patient." And the nurse who's calling you already knows exactly what needs to happen and you don't. And so I always tell our interns, like, a great question is, "Hey, so what do we normally do in this situation?"

**Justin:**

[laughs].

**Sydnee:**

"What would you say we normally do?" And I mean, of course you wanna read and you wanna learn and you wanna know how to do things for yourself. Um, but the nurses are a huge resource and, um, I personally could not survive without, you know, the nurses that have helped train me and who work with me now. And, uh, I think, um...

**Justin:**

And your nurse Jacky.

**Sydnee:**

My nurse Jacky...

**Justin:**

Shout out to Jacky.

**Sydnee:**

My personal, yes, my personal nurse is Jacky and I could not survive without Jacky. But, uh, and I think it's important to know this, and this is my last thing I'll say. I think some people get the idea that there's like a hierarchy in medicine. Like that doctors—

First of all, you think doctors are at the top of that and that is crazy, no way. We are not at the top of any rung. Um, we just— We don't have that much power. Uh, but we're not. We're a team. We work with nurses, nurses don't work for us. I am not Jacky's boss. Jacky and I work together to take care of people. And I think that's really important for you to know, as patients interacting with us, is that we're a team. Um... and there are lots of stuff nurses can do that I can't. And thank God for them.

**Justin:**

Thanks so much to the Maximum Fun network for having us on. They got a ton of great shows. Um, one new one's called Can I Pet Your Dog? It's a show for dog lovers. Uh, my brother Travis, uh, produces that and occasionally, uh, talks on it. Um, and, uh, their first episode had our friend Lin-Manuel Miranda, uh, and talking about his dog and, uh, it's a fun show. If you like dogs especially I think you should check it out, you can get it on iTunes or at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

Uh, thanks to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song Medicines as the intro and outro of our program. Uh, if you search the Taxpayers on Twitter or, uh, you can buy their stuff, I think it's on Bandcamp, I think? Or SoundCloud. Just search for the Taxpayers and give them all of your money. Not all of it, come on, you got to pay rent fella. Uh, and then... I think that's gonna do it for us, Syd.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, we also got a great present.

**Justin:**

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we did. We got a...

**Sydnee:**

We got these three awesome books that I wanna say thank you for. Um, we got a Non-Euclidean Geometry for Babies and what were our other two ones?

**Justin:**

Um... I...

**Sydnee:**

A Quantum— Quantum Physics and...

**Justin:**

Quantum Physics for Babies.

**Sydnee:**

... Newtonian Physics for Babies.

**Justin:**

Yeah they were very...

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

... very cute, from Adrian. We really appreciate it.



**Sydnee:**

Yeah. And we love them. I actually, like, I got a little choked up. I don't know. There was something about it and, like, the idea of math out there waiting for Charlie in the future.

**Justin:**

Uh, so thanks.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know, anyway. I love them. Thank you.

**Justin:**

Adrian sent that to P.O. Box 54, Huntington, West Virginia, 25706. If you wanna send us something. Don't feel you have to. And especially don't feel like you have to spend money on us. But if you wanna send a postcard or a note or anything, feel free.

**Sydnee:**

Absolutely, 'cause I really do, I kind of get— I kind of cry.

**Justin:**

It's kind of sweet, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

It actually moved me.

**Justin:**

People knitted Charlie stuff, like, when she was first born. Anyhoo, we're, like, way off the topic and we're going way long. So, uh, oh! Oh, oh! Real quick. December 21st, 2015, Huntington, West Virginia, Candlesnights 2.

**Sydnee:**

Be there.

**Justin:**

2 is happening.

**Sydnee:**

Candlenights 2.

**Justin:**

It is a family podcast...

**Sydnee:**

Extravaganza [laughs].

**Justin:**

... well, we're actually calling it a hootenanny this year.

**Sydnee:**

Oh.

**Justin:**

It's a family comedy podcast hootenanny.

**Sydnee:**

I'm sorry I wasn't let in on this branding.

**Justin:**

Bring your family, bring your friends, bring everybody, it's a...

**Sydnee:**

Bring your enemies.

**Justin:**

Bring your enemies. It doesn't matter. Go to [bit.ly/candlenights2](https://bit.ly/candlenights2). December 21st, 8:00 PM, Huntington. Uh, it's at a new venue, if you saw us last year, we're at a new place so the sound issues will be fixed. Tickets are, like, 20 bucks, they're not bad at all. And, uh, we'd love to see ya. So [bit.ly/candlenights2](https://bit.ly/candlenights2). That's us and My Brother, My Brother and Me performing on one stage.

**Sydnee:**

A holiday hootenanny.

**Justin:**

A holiday hootenanny. Anyway, that's gonna do it for us folks. Thank you so much. Until the next time we get a chance to talk with you, I'm 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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