

## **Sawbones 125: The King of Quacks**

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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 everyone and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost Justin McElroy.

### **Sydnee:**

And I'm Sydnee McElroy. Justin, I'm kind of upset. I'm kind of in a bad mood.

### **Justin:**

Yeah? Why?

### **Sydnee:**

I don't— I just... I'm really disappointed in myself.

### **Justin:**

Aw, sweetheart. Why?

### **Sydnee:**

Yeah. Because, I mean, you know, I like to get things right.

### **Justin:**

Yep.

**Sydnee:**

I don't like to— One quality about me is that I don't like to do things that I can't kind of be the best at...

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

...or you know, do perfectly, sort of.

**Justin:**

Sure, yes, yes.

**Sydnee:**

And it has been brought to my attention that, you know we did that series on patent medicines.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Right.

**Sydnee:**

Do you remember?

**Justin:**

It was a three part-er when we were on tour.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. It was our live shows. We covered all of the patent medicine men and women, mostly men but also women, who tried to sell people fake medicine before, you know, we had laws to prevent you from...

**Justin:**

Not do that.

**Sydnee:**

...just like lying rampantly about anything you wanted to about medicine, uh, and when you actually had to start telling people what was in it. We apparently left somebody out.

**Justin:**

Uh, well, was it a bit one, or?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, uh, I think you could say it was a big one, since this was a guy who was, uh, known as the king of quacks by the AMA, the American Medical Association. And he also referred to himself as the last of the old time medicine men.

**Justin:**

Yeah, it seems like a notable omission from our repertoire.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, I'm really— I don't know how I missed this guy?

**Justin:**

Um, well, I—

**Sydnee:**

But I did. And I'm just really disappointing in myself because now I think all of our listeners' knowledge of old timey patent medicine salesmen is incomplete.

**Justin:**

I would tend to blame Sam Becket. Usually if I make a mistake like that, I tend to think that he changed something in history that had a reverberating effect down through the years to this guy.

So this guy maybe was just a schlep before Sam Becket inhabited his body or his dad's body or his dad's dad's body or his mom's dad's body, and uh, changed history somehow, and now he's a big deal and he wasn't when we did the shows initially.

**Sydnee:**

Why do you think there's not a show about that? Like...

**Justin:**

About Sam Becket...

**Sydnee:**

About quantum leap loops?

**Justin:**

...quantum leaping and messing up history for everybody? There is. It's called Quantum Leap.

**Sydnee:**

No, no, I mean like the oops, like quantum leap, oops!

**Justin:**

Oops, all— Oops all leaps?

**Sydnee:**

Oops, like, all the stuff that happens after he leaps. Like the oops.

**Justin:**

The oops. That was...

**Sydnee:**

That looked good, but guess what else! Here's the rest of the story.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Its a pretty good sitcom in there, but, um...

**Sydnee:**

Isn't that— No, that's the butterfly effect, I guess.

**Justin:**

Why don't we try to clean up our oops first and then we can worry about the rest of Sam Becket's.

**Sydnee:**

All right, well I want to tell you about Curtis Howe Springer.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. And thank you to Bryson for calling my attention to this terrible oversight on my part.

**Justin:**

And this terrible person, I guess, right?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. I, you know, I try not to, to pass, I mean—

**Justin:**

That's my job.

**Sydnee:**

I think of questionable ethics, you could say. Mr. Springer, Dr. Springer, if you feel like it, I guess, was born in Birmingham in 1896. We know that he attended high school for some period of less than two years.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And that he did, uh, complete one year of bible school.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

As far as we know, that's pretty much it for any sort of education or training in any sort of trade.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, he was married a couple times, he had a few kids. If you asked him, he would tell you that before he got into his big job, the job that we're going to talk about, that he was known for as a medicine man, he allegedly served in the US army as a private and taught boxing?

**Justin:**

Yeah, you know any time it takes uh, us, 30 seconds or less to recap someone's medical credentials, um, it probably is not— Does not bode well for them.

**Sydnee:**

No. No. I— And that's— There's a similar air of, uh, I don't know if any of this other stuff I'm telling you is really true [laughs].

**Justin:**

Oh, okay.

**Sydnee:**

In terms of the rest of his life—

**Justin:**

Enjoy your history podcast, everybody.

**Sydnee:**

Well, no, I mean, he's told people that he taught boxing in the army. I don't think we ever had any evidence that he was in the army or taught boxing.

**Justin:**

To the best of our knowledge. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know if he did that. He did work at, we think, selling sheet music for a while, and then at some point he may have worked at an automotive and technical school that closed down at some point after that, so that's unclear as well.

**Justin:**

Okay, I would buy, to me, my barometer, my truthiness barometer is, uh, probably wouldn't make up story about selling sheet music.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Might make up story about teaching punching to the fight men. Like, that sounds like something you might cook up.

**Sydnee:**

That's fair, that's not— It might not be as impressive to say...

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

"...And I..."

**Justin:**

"And also!"

**Sydnee:**

"I sold sheet music for a long time."

**Justin:**

"Sold you a pen!"

**Sydnee:**

He moved around a while, uh Florida, Chicago, different places, and it's not until the 1930s when things start to get weird.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

When we start to— When Mr. Springer, Curtis, can we call him Curtis? Starts to kind of make his mark on human history. He starts touring the Midwest at this point and he's giving lectures at different places, and he's— When he gives the lecture, obviously, he has to give them some sort of credentials. Like, why would we allow you to lecture...

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

...at our university or, you know, whatever association, organization?

**Justin:**

[crosstalk] And who are you exactly?

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. And he said, sometimes, that he was the dean of Greer College, which had been a college. It was closed by the time he was claiming to be dean of it. He would sometimes refer to himself as a representative of one of several different schools, the National Academy. [pause] Just that.

**Justin:**

Just that.

**Sydnee:**

Just National Academy.

**Justin:**

Yes. Yeah. Sure.



**Sydnee:**

The Springer School of Humanism - note, does have his last name in the title.

**Justin:**

Does, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

The American College of Doctors and Surgeons and the West Lake West Virginia College.

**Justin:**

Oh! Well I'm familiar with that one.

**Sydnee:**

You are?

**Justin:**

No, I just thought it would be weird if it was in West Virginia and I wasn't.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, well, I mean they're fake. Like, he made up all these places.

**Justin:**

Nice. Nice.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and...

**Justin:**

I'm sorry I lied.

**Sydnee:**

There were also two nonexistent osteopathy schools that he made up. One in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey, uh, that he also claimed to be a representative from. Which I feel like if you're going to just say you're a—

Like, if you're already going to make up the school, just go for it. Just say like you're dean or chair of some department or whatever, like, if you're just going to make up the school.

**Justin:**

Uh well, maybe he— They were worried they'd introduce him to somebody else who had the same job title and he would have to like, talk shop with them. Be like, "ugh, dean-ing. Can you believe it?"

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

"What's your least favorite part about it? Like, oh man, the, that one form, you know, the one we all hate and joke about."

**Sydnee:**

The dean form.

**Justin:**

That one dean form that we all can't stand. You know it.

**Sydnee:**

I hate foot rub day, when we all have to go around and give foot rubs to the chairs of different departments.

**Justin:**

Why did they even come up with the rule of foot rub day? It's demoralizing.

**Sydnee:**

I could really trap somebody in a game like that, I bet.

**Justin:**

Why?

**Sydnee:**

I don't know I just feel like I'd be clever enough [laughs].

**Justin:**

Think you'd be good at, at uh...

**Sydnee:**

Think I'd be good at that. And making something up—

**Justin:**

Fake the dean?

**Sydnee:**

That sounds plausible for a dean to do, but isn't true?

**Justin:**

If you need to fool a dean, there's only one name you turn to. Sydnee. Dean Sydnee McElroy. She's not a dean, but we bet you were fooled.

**Sydnee:**

Because we called her one.

**Justin:**

Sydnee McElroy's the way to go, call 3465990.

**Sydnee:**

Don't call that number.

**Justin:**

It's a law firm.

**Sydnee:**

That's a lawyer. Don't call that. Please don't call that law firm that Justin just gave you the number for!

**Justin:—**

That's a law firm here in Huntington, where they, like, they wrote a jingle once, and then they added more people in the firm and they keep jamming more names in! It used to be pretty good. "Danny Cline is the way to go." And now they've got like, a bunch of dude's names like, "Farmer, Cline and Campbell, also, Peterson, and also, Richards, and also... way to go!"

**Sydnee:**

The good jingle though because obviously Justin...

**Justin:**

It's worked on me. If I ever need the law I'm calling Danny Cline. First thing.

**Sydnee:**

You're just going to call that number. "I don't know who works here now—"

**Justin:**

"Hello, is this lawyer?"

**Sydnee:**

"But I need you!"

**Justin:**

"I did a bad! Help!"

**Sydnee:**

"I need law!"

**Justin:**

"I need law, please!"

**Sydnee:**

So, uh, along with claiming that he was a representative of these different fake places, he also started claiming various degrees. Sometimes he was an MD, sometimes he was a DO, sometimes he was a PhD. Uh, although he would have these lectures and you could attend them for free. So he wouldn't charge you to come listen to his, whatever he was making up, he

would, uh, do one of two things to help make money. He would pass around a hat and get donations, which wasn't hard to do, you know, once you already showed up and you're listening to this guy...

**Justin:**

And you—

**Sydnee:**

...talk and everything, and then you feel bad, and he's, like, and please leave me some money so I can keep spreading the word.

**Justin:**

I thought you were saying it wasn't hard for him to pass his hat around. It's, like, well, yes, Sydnee, you just need to turn it upside down and then get to town!

**Sydnee:**

Well, I suppose it wasn't physically hard for him to do that either. Uh, he would also upsell you—

**Justin:**

"What're you doing? Rebecca? What's he doing? Have you ever seen anything like this?"

**Sydnee:**

"This hat's upside down!"

**Justin:**

"This hat's upside down! It doesn't go that way—"

**Sydnee:**

"It won't fit on his head that way!"

**Justin:**

"Doesn't go that way! People are putting money in it! Rebecca!"

**Sydnee:**

He would also upsell you on personal lectures, uh, that he could give you in psychoanalysis, one of his specialties. Not. But, one of the things he claimed to be a specialist in, and if you bought into his lecture there's no reason to think he might not. Pay the 25 bucks and get the special set of private lessons.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, in addition, at some point in this time period he started calling himself a Methodist minister as well.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, lectures, so some of the lectures, and also the books and pamphlets that he would hand out at these lectures, just to give you kind of an idea as to what he was talking about, uh, the titles varied. So there was one lecture called "Picking a Husband for Keeps." Uh, I guess as opposed to for not keeps?

**Justin:**

Yep.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, "Character Analysis," "Success Through Self Mastery..."

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

"Foods a Healthy Body Requires," and the "Layman's Handbook of Life."

**Justin:**

I like that one. I'd read that.

**Sydnee:**

I like it. He sounds like he was, like, nowadays, this guy probably could've just been a life coach.

**Justin:**

Yeah, like, a self help kind of guru.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, I mean, that's— I think he was just a life coach before we had those. So he had to make up a bunch of other stuff that he wrote.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, in 1934 he applied for air time in Chicago. He wanted to start broadcasting what now had become a mixture of both evangelizing and then, like, healthy lifestyle tips and medical help and psychoanalysis and just anything.

**Justin:**

Kind of a one stop shop.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. And he wanted to start broadcasting that to everybody so he went and applied for air time. So, one station turned him down because he at this point was already being investigated by the American Medical Association.

**Justin:**

Not great.

**Sydnee:**

And the better business bureau. Uh, but WCFL gave him two slots a day.

**Justin:**

Ah!

**Sydnee:**

And he took advantage of that and he started using that time to evangelize. Again, to talk about, even things, like, politics. He was a big supporter of FDR and the New Deal and he talked about that quite a bit, and then sometimes he would just sing gospel songs, and other times, he would sell fake medicine.

**Justin:**

Sure!

**Sydnee:**

This is more or less why we're talking about him.

**Justin:**

My dad is living proof they'll let anybody on the radio. Its not that surprising.

**Sydnee:**

And this guy, by all accounts, was a fairly good singer, so for nothing else, you know.

**Justin:**

See, that's what people, DJs, is they lack. They're not like, full service entertainment hubs. You know what I mean?

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

They have to play records. This was before other songs were invented, so the DJs had to sing and make up commercials on the spot. It was exhausting.

**Sydnee:**



Which is, see, it wasn't his fault that he was selling all this fake medicine. He had to make up commercials for something and he would...

**Justin:**

He didn't, yeah he would say, like, and let's go to commercial! And there'd just be dead air. And he'd be, like, "Oh my God, I have to sell something."

**Sydnee:**

"I have to make up a medicine."

**Justin:**

"I have to make up a medicine."

**Sydnee:**

"I pretended to have those medical degrees—" See, he didn't have a medical degree for real, so its not like he really knew. Well, what else was he going to do?

**Justin:**

Yeah!

**Sydnee:**

So he made some stuff up. First of all—

**Justin:**

Four hour shift is a lot of time to fill.

**Sydnee:**

First of all, he made up something called Re-Hib, which was an antacid that was mainly just sodium bicarbonate. There's also some peppermint oil in there.

**Justin:**

Eh, so Tums.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Well. There you go. Well, no...

**Justin:**

Not that crazy?

**Sydnee:**

Not even Tums, no.

**Justin:**

No?

**Sydnee:**

Calcium.

**Justin:**

Oh, right, right, right. Sodium bicarb is baking soda, right?

**Sydnee:**

Yep.

**Justin:**

Okay. Not. Not, uh—

**Sydnee:**

Not your best—

**Justin:**

I'm sorry.

**Sydnee:**

Not your best bet for an antacid.

**Justin:**

No.

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

No.

**Sydnee:**

Not Tums.

**Justin:**

Especially not if you drank vinegar earlier, because that's not going to go great.

**Sydnee:**

He— [laughs] You have, like, a volcano in your stomach now?

**Justin:**

People who would be doing that would definitely, definitely be drinking vinegar beforehand. You know that happened to somebody.

**Sydnee:**

You're a science project.

**Justin:**

"There's a guy, he's got the rabies! Put him down! Look, he's foaming at the mouth!"

**Sydnee:**

Or dress him up like a volcano, take him to the science fair, win a blue ribbon.

**Justin:**

A plus. Or whatever they had for A pluses back then.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, you— There was also another medicine that was fairly popular. It was the antediluvian tea. I like that name. Antediluvian.

**Justin:**

Yeah. That's a nice one.

**Sydnee:**

It was really just a, uh, a botanical laxative tea bag.

**Justin:**

Great.

**Sydnee:**

So it was, like, it was, it looked like a tea bag, except for it was full of laxatives so then you would make tea out of it and, well...

**Justin:**

Well.

**Sydnee:**

You can probably figure out the rest.

**Justin:**

Get busy.

**Sydnee:**

You got, I mean, you knew it worked!

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

He— One of his most popular items was the do it yourself home hemorrhoid kit.

**Justin:**

Sounds like he already sold that. Sounds like the prior item, maybe repackaged. Rebranded.

**Sydnee:**

No... you don't want— You don't want that business happening if you've got hemorrhoids.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Irritates that.

**Justin:**

Well, to give yourself hemorrhoids, is that the kit?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Do it yourself, give yourself hemorrhoids kit.

**Justin:**

That's what I mean, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, there was something he sold called mana. Delicious mana, I should say, which was just some sort of...

**Justin:**

[laughs] Not enough people do that.

**Sydnee:**

What, just call it, like, delicious?

**Justin:**

Just call [crosstalk] delicious. And they have to, and you legally have to say it's delicious.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, it was actually just a vegetarian food supplement and he had a lot of food supplements. This was a big thing for him. It would just, they would be

labeled like, this is a vegetarian one, this is a protein one, uh, this one has iodine in it, um, just different things and they were just, I don't know, just some sort of pill or package of powder or something that supposedly had— It probably just had either, like, a bunch of dehydrated ingredients in it or it would actually just be some mixture of juices.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And that was pretty much it. Um, but he sold a lot of stuff in that line. There was nerve cell food, Anthron. I like Yuth, because it's supposed to sound like the word "youth" but its Y-U-T-H.

**Justin:**

Nice.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, there was something called the Hollywood Pep Cocktail?

**Justin:**

I want it. I would take two of those, please.

**Sydnee:**

I know you would. I know he would sell you on that right away.

**Justin:**

Some of them vigor. Just like my heroes, Clark Gable. I'd love that.

**Sydnee:**

So, there were lots of different ones. I wrote them all down just because I really appreciate some of them. I like Neptune, I like Tropicos, I think people would buy that. There was FWO, which was foods for women, is what it was told, like this is food for women, it's FWO. Uh, Norm?

**Justin:**

Norm!

**Sydnee:**

Norm, that was the name of one of these.

**Justin:**

Norm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, Zimod? Uh, he had special foot crystals, which I'll tell you more about in a little bit. There was one called Mo-Hair. I bet you could guess what that did.

**Justin:**

Uh, it helped you grow your hair?

**Sydnee:**

It gave you mo' hair.

**Justin:**

Gave you mo' hair. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Alloroids, imbroids, imperials, organic return, dango, shangralae, it just was endless.

**Justin:**

These are excellent.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. They were creative and none of them did anything and he sold them with great enthusiasm and, uh, sometimes he'd send them to you for free if you just felt moved by the spirit to send him a donation in return, he'd greatly appreciate it.

**Justin:**

Wow. It's great because it's a great deal. You get both great ends of that deal. You get to give money to God and you get free stuff. Man, what a deal. Uh, what was next for this guy, Sydnee? I'm assuming he didn't stay shackled to this small potatoes biz.

**Sydnee:**

No, no, no. There's much more in store, but before we got there, why don't you head with me to the billing department.

**Justin:**

Let's go!

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Justin:**

Okay, Syd. I am, uh, I've— We've caught up on the medicines with this cat. What's his name again?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, this is Curtis Howe Springer.

**Justin:**

Curtis Howe... Curtis?

**Sydnee:**

Curtis.

**Justin:**

Howe.

**Sydnee:**

Howe.

**Justin:**



Springer.

**Sydnee:**

Springer.

**Justin:**

Got to name check him. I forgot it.

**Sydnee:**

Mr. Springer, fake Dr. Springer.

**Justin:**

[crosstalk] ...nasty. Yes.

**Sydnee:**

If you feel like calling him Dr. Springer, just for the—

**Justin:**

If you're nastier, Dr. Springer. Uh, what was next for him?

**Sydnee:**

So, uh, because he was having so much success in the fake medicine arena, he started opening a series of health spas. First there was Haven of Rest in Pennsylvania, which got closed because he wasn't paying any taxes on it.

**Justin:**

Cool.

**Sydnee:**

Um, he tried some others in Pennsylvania and moved onto Maryland, moved to Iowa. All of them were either briefly operational before he got closed down again for not paying taxes, or he could never even get them up and running. He was starting to get quite a reputation, as you can imagine. So, in 1944, uh, he had actually— He had married a new lady and she helped him in this pursuit. They filed a mining claim on some land in the Mojave desert.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Now—

**Justin:**

Sounds like he's finally going legit.

**Sydnee:**

The thing about a mining claim, and I have to read a little bit about this to understand what happens for this gentleman, is that you have to— Like, you can file the claim, and it's federal land, right, that he's filing this claim on, so he gets to go try to uncover what he believes, or what he claims, are some precious minerals that you can't necessarily get somewhere else, right? And that have some sort of benefit or value.

So, that is the— That's kind of the spirit in which you would file such a claim. Well, instead he starts turning it into his dream spa. Uh, there was already an abandoned army post and an old railroad station there and he kind of used that, plus created a whole new infrastructure for the spa.

He also named it. He named the town and the spa itself, and the name of this town and spa, which is still there today— Well, the town is, the buildings, you can go and see it, is Zzyzx.

**Justin:**

Great. Great name.

**Sydnee:**

That is Z-Z-Y-Z-X.

**Justin:**

Easy to remember, easier to spell.

**Sydnee:**

Zzyzx. Why did he call it Zzyzx?

**Justin:**

I don't know. I have, I was hoping you knew.

**Sydnee:**

Because if you can imagine where this would be listed, in some sort of phone book or directory?

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

It was the last word in health.

**Justin:**

[laughs]. That's good.

**Sydnee:**

So. So Zzyzx.

**Justin:**

That's really good.

**Sydnee:**

It's in— It's still in, uh, San Bernardino County. It's at the end of a country road named Zzyzx Road. Initially, it was just a bunch of tents, but then he obviously needed to build some buildings so he went down to Skid Row in LA and hired, uh, as many homeless people as he could find. He would actually continue to recruit homeless people as he grew his infrastructure there throughout this time period. Um, he built a road that he called the Boulevard of Dreams...

**Justin:**

Perfect.

**Sydnee:**

...and the people that he employed, he would offer them free room and board for their services. So he wouldn't actually pay them, he would just say hey, come and build these, all these concrete structures that he built, and if you do that then I'll, you know, you can stay here for free. And somehow he manipulated that into making his spa taxes tax exempt as well.

**Justin:**

Sounds like this guy's crushing it. Yeah, a lot of good work. He's helping a lot of people, getting a new spa out there, everybody appreciates that.

**Sydnee:**

So, this grew from just some concrete buildings to include a fake hot spring. It's fake because he said it was a hot spring, but it was really just a bunch of pools that he had boilers under.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Excellent.

**Sydnee:**

So, they weren't hot springs but he said they were. Uh, a 60-room hotel, like I said, there was the spa, there was a big church, uh, there was a radio station, uh... I think the church itself, part of it was shaped like a giant cross, too, so it was, like, visually impressive, as well. There was an air strip there he called "Zzy-port." He had a castle built on the property. There was...

**Justin:**

Wow!

**Sydnee:**

...a manmade lake, there was a food processing plant for all of his weird food supplements, and there was a printing plant as well.

**Justin:**

Sounds like he's really making something of himself.

**Sydnee:**

And all the while he, from his, now, his own radio studio he has on site, he is now broadcasting a syndicated program to 221 US stations and 102 stations abroad, selling both prepackaged, the word of God, and some fake patent medicines all in one. Um...

**Justin:**

This guy is awesome.

**Sydnee:**

He claimed cures for everything with these medicines. Everything. Anything you came up with, he could fix for you. And he was happy to send you the cures for whatever ailed you, whether it be heartburn or, you know, diarrhea, or acne or allergies or cancer. That too. Anything you had, he could send you a cure for free because he was doing God's work, but if you didn't mind, a little donation to help continue the good work that he's doing...

**Justin:**

This is awesome.

**Sydnee:**

...would be nice.

**Justin:**

This guy is doing such a good job.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and he would, of course, send you a donation form to fill out and send back with the free product that he gave you.

**Justin:**

Right. There's a— And then he'd send back a, well, let's not call it a receipt, it's like a donation, it's like a thank you note.

**Sydnee:**

Its just a donation form.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

It also had a space on it for your favorite radio station. Um, he also would obviously allow people to come stay—

**Justin:**

"What radio station just stole half of your money and gave you a fake cure for cancer?"

"WZZX. It's my favorite!"

**Sydnee:**

He had everything but a T-shirt cannon, really.

**Justin:**

Yeah, really.

**Sydnee:**

So the— If you wanted to come stay at his spa there was some extra stuff, in addition to the cures that he would give you over the radio, there was some extra stuff you'd get. There were a couple rules you had to follow. No alcohol, no arguing.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

You could smoke, though, certain places, while you were there.

**Justin:**

All right!

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and you would get the special cures, you would get a lot of extra fruit and vegetable juice mixes, um, a lot of really expensive laxatives were thrown your way, some goat milk, hemorrhoid creams, uh, twice a day, he

would project a sermon over the loud speakers. One of his most popular treatments that you would receive while you were at the spa was just a mixture of carrots, celery, turnips, parsley, and brown sugar.

**Justin:**

Sounds delicious.

**Sydnee:**

Does it?

**Justin:**

Uh, back in those days that was, like, the most decadent dessert possible.

**Sydnee:**

Is that dessert?

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Celery with brown sugar?

**Justin:**

I've read some stuff about, like, Victory Gardens and the kind of things that they treated like deserts. I think that's pretty good.

**Sydnee:**

You'd get lots of, uh, lots of treatment from the local— The minerals and whatever that they said they were unearthing. You know, to kind of help support their mining claim. You would get mud packs from the local mud and, like, the special clay that they told you had, you know, things in it that weren't found anywhere else in the world, and these crystal rubs with these salt crystals from the local minerals that would float to the top of these pools and they would go sift off the crystals and that they contained things that, that no other mineral crystals on earth could contain.

He sold these too. Zzyzx foot crystals, were sold all over, too. There was also something that they would have you do there, where there was a product called Zzy Pack. And you would buy the Zzy Pack and then the treatment that they would have you go through is to put it on your scalp and then bend over until you feel flushed, because then you know the Zzy Pack's working.

**Justin:**

I would, yeah, I'll take two.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, you could lay in the sun, you could soak in the mineral spring. Uh, the most common foods you were served were rabbit, and fruit, and homemade ice cream.

**Justin:**

Sounds great! That's really nice.

**Sydnee:**

So he had a pretty good deal going for quite a while.

**Justin:**

Yeah, no kidding.

**Sydnee:**

This guy had this place going for something like 30 years.

**Justin:**

How did anybody bring him down? This is awesome.

**Sydnee:**

So what finally ended the madness is the fact that quite simply you can only schnooker the federal government for so long.

**Justin:**

Yeah. They want their... a taste. They got to get their beak wet.



**Sydnee:**

Eventually, they got wise to the idea that this guy was not only, um, you know, he had filed this mining claim, taken this federal land, built a health spa from which he was making money, but then he also started selling, or leasing out parts of the land to other people...

**Justin:**

It's, like, subletting the stuff that he stole.

**Sydnee:**

Yes, like subletting the land...

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

...to people who were his followers, kind of like people who just really wanted to live close to him because...

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

...they believed so deeply in what he did. So he would let them come live on his land and then pay him to build houses and live there and that's finally when the government went, "Whoa, whoa, whoa..."

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

"What is happening? What have we— What is this place? We let him call it what? Zzyz? Who? Who was in charge of this? Larry!?"

**Justin:**

We're just letting everybody...

**Sydnee:**

"Was this you, Larry?"

**Justin:**

Larry!

**Sydnee:**

What were you doing out there?

**Justin:**

"Well, he said he'd name it after me. Larry Zzyzx."

**Sydnee:**

Um, so at that point, uh, like I said, the feds got wise. They started investigating the mining claim and basically he had never turned up any minerals that really justified the claim, so you can't just keep the land for free at that point, and he was taken to court.

Uh the great thing is that because he was taken to court and because the, the crux of it was that he was claiming that there were special minerals there, that weren't really there, uh, the way that he proved it was by presenting all of his fake products...

**Justin:**

Uh huh. Right.

**Sydnee:**

...for them to check out and test and analyze. So I found the court documents with, like, the analysis of all these different products, and the feds breaking them down with their chemist until basically they're like, "These aren't special mineral crystals! It's, like, salt."

**Justin:**

Salt and dirt.

**Sydnee:**

"And this isn't special clay, this is just plain old clay that you'd get anywhere." It's funny because they, they investigated all this stuff he was selling and said none of this is special, none of this, you know, justifies the mining claim that you have on this land. You're not mining, you have a health spa, we're onto you now.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

There was one place where he actually— They did actually find some gold on his land.

**Justin:**

Oh!

**Sydnee:**

But he had never claimed, like he— That wasn't part of his argument in the lawsuit.

**Justin:**

So, they had some gold there for a rainy day.

**Sydnee:**

There was just some, yeah. Well, I mean he— It's, like, he never investigated, he never explored that.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

So there may have been, I don't know. But it doesn't matter. The point is he was lying, it was to build a health spa and sell fake medicines, and they got onto him.

**Justin:**

Did he do time?

**Sydnee:**

So... Well, he was, in addition to losing his land and the government seized all of the buildings and everything that he had constructed, he was also convicted of false advertising because of this analysis...

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

...of all of his products that was done. He got a 60 day sentence and he served 49 days of it.

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

That was it.

**Justin:**

Not bad.

**Sydnee:**

That was it. Uh, on the bright side, uh, a kind of a consortium of local universities took over the land and the buildings?

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

They turned it into the Desert Studies Center.

**Justin:**

Uh-huh.

**Sydnee:**

Which still stands and is still used to study the unique environment of the Mojave desert to this day.

**Justin:**

Well! So he was— So I guess what you're saying is he was right all along.

**Sydnee:**

No. No. I am, I am not—

**Justin:**

Folks, that's going to do it for us here on Sawbones...

**Sydnee:**

No, I am not saying that, no!

**Justin:**

Thank you again to Me Undies who are dedicated in providing the world's most comfortable underwear. Go to [meundies.com/sawbones](http://meundies.com/sawbones) for free shipping and 20% off your first order. Thanks to the Taxpayers for letting us use their song Medicines as the introduction of our program. We sure appreciate it. Uh, Syd, do you have anything you'd like to plug?

**Sydnee:**

No, I just want to say he wasn't right.

**Justin:**

Okay. Uh, so...

**Sydnee:**

He was absolutely wrong. It was just—

**Justin:**

That's all the time we have.

**Sydnee:**

Thanks for the buildings, man.

**Justin:**

My hard drive here is full. Uh, go listen to Sydnee's show Still Buffering with her sister Rileigh. Uh, the new episode is about sex education and it is awesome. Uh, you can find that on iTunes or at teengoogle.com. Thanks to the Maximum Fun Network for letting us be a part of their extended podcast family. They've got a lot of great shows. You can find them all at maximumfun.org. Folks that's going to do it for us until the next time we have something to talk with you about. 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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