

Sawbones 147: Aloe

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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]

Justin:

Hello everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a martial tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost Justin McElroy.

Sydnee:

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin:

Sydnee, it is so hot.

Sydnee:

It is very hot, Justin.

Justin:

It's really hot, Sydnee.

Sydnee:

Well, I mean, not in here.

Justin:

It is kind of hot in here, actually.

Sydnee:

Oh, I think it's—

Justin:

We don't have the AC on down here.

Sydnee:

—I think it's quite comfortable.

Justin:

Ugh, your body—

Sydnee:

I'm in sweatpants.

Justin:

—yeah, your body temperature is messed up. But, uh, that's...

Sydnee:

My body temperature is messed up. Medically, medical diagnosis from Justin McElroy.

Justin:

All right. Can I have a second egg? Um, uh, but no, we're good. It's been like super-duper hot here forever and it's so hot you can barely go outside.

Sydnee:

It is. It's very hot and it's very muggy, which I understand most humans don't enjoy.

Justin:

Yeah, but you're like deeply into it, huh?

Sydnee:

I really like humidity. I think it feels nice. I think it feels like you're in a bathtub, except you're not, you're outside and the air is like the water, except it's air and you can breathe it.

Justin:

Um. It's like wh—air you—it's like water you can breathe?

Sydnee:

You got it? Do you need me to explain that again?

Justin:

That's medically sound.

Sydnee:

Air.

Justin:

That's more medically sound.

Sydnee:

Air, water you can breathe.

Justin:

[laughs] Okay. Uh, humid air, right? Is water you can... it's like a big humidifier. God's just running his big old humidifier out there.

Sydnee:

It feels great.

Justin:

It doesn't, it feels terrible.

Sydnee:

I like when the air feels like the same as my skin.

Justin:

It's been good though 'cause, uh, we haven't had to wear a lot of sun coat 'cause we just don't go outside that much, 'cause it's so hot.

Sydnee:

No. It's just too hot to go outside.

Justin:

We're very diligent about sunburns here in the McElroy family, but it is not always that way. Sometimes you try your best and, um, and it just doesn't work out.

Sydnee:

We are both prone to burn.

Justin:

Yeah, prone to burn.

Sydnee:

And we have experienced that, unfortunately, in the past. Although we, uh, I do wanna make the point though, even though we have burnt before, we are huge advocates of sunscreen and not getting burnt.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And our daughter has never gotten a drop of sun.

Justin:

The sun hath never touched her skin.

Sydnee:

No. [laughs] Her skin is as pale as the day she was born. It has never been otherwise, because I hold her down and slather her head to toe in sunscreen every time she goes outside.

Justin:

It's a workout. It's tough.

Sydnee:

Dead of winter, she's wearing a snowsuit, there is no sun, she is slathered in sunscreen. That's an exaggeration, but...

Justin:

But, but when you do get burnt Syd, it's good 'cause we got a cure-all. I mean, we got a cure for it. It cures all sunburns.

Sydnee:

A cu—a cure-all for burns.

Justin:

A cure-all for burns. It's, uh, aloe.

Sydnee:

That's true. We do use a lot of aloe for that.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, we, and, and you don't even have to have an aloe plant anymore. You can just have like a bottle of that green goo.

Justin:

I remember getting burnt down in Florida once when I was a little kid, and, uh, my Nonnee had a, uh, had an aloe plant and I thought it was so amazing to watch her like break the leaf off. It was like, it was like something out of, uh, Krull or some other—

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Ladyhawke, some other, some other fancy property of the '80s. Um, to watch her like break a leaf in half and take the, the goo out and put it on my skin and it actually helped.

Sydnee:

It is, isn't it? I remember mom had one in the window when we were growing up and, and her breaking that open when we'd get burnt or something, and just thinking, "Wow."

Justin:

It's amazing.

Sydnee:

It's medicine right there.

Justin:

Why aren't there, why aren't there more thing like that? Like why don't we have more plants growing around to help us out?

Sydnee:

Well, I mean to be fair the, we, there are some that would argue we do.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

But we kinda do a podcast about how a lot of them don't work.

Justin:

Oh, ah yeah, that's a good, that's a good argument. But let's talk about aloe.

Sydnee:

Let's talk about aloe. First of all, thank you Leslie for recommending this topic. Um, aloe is probably the most commonly used medicinal plant. I think it's the one most people are familiar with. If you were to say like, "Name a plant that has a medicine?" It, most people would say, "I don't know, aloe?" I mean there are others, but most people would say that, I think.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Especially, specifically aloe vera.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Is what you're usually talking about. 'Cause there are aloe, there are different aloes. There are lots of aloes. Aloe is not one plant. There are many types of aloe.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Uh, they're part of the lily family.

Justin:

Oh, I didn't know that.

Sydnee:

Um, aloe vera, specifically what we're talking about, is native to northern Africa. The, and the one that you're thinking of that people will call the true aloe, the one, the one true aloe is, uh, aloe barbadensis miller.

Justin:

The true aloe. [laughs] That's, you know I, I went to school with an aloe barbadensis miller.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Actually, sweet girl. A little slow, but sweet.

Sydnee:

Now, [laughs] if you've seen the, the, you've probably seen the aloe plant. If you haven't, it's got these, uh, thick pointy kind of triangular-shaped sort of leaves. Is that fair to say?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, and they're, they're real thick, and they're kinda firm on the outside and the leaves have different parts. There's like the outer protective layer, like the rind of it. Um, if you break it open there's the sap, which is like this just really bitter fluid in it, that actually is specifically there so animals don't eat it.

Justin:

Oh, weird.

Sydnee:

It tastes bad.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

You know, it's an, uh, evolutionary kind of thing. It ada— it adapted to be bitter.

Justin:

That can't stop us, though.

Sydnee:

No. It doesn't stop us as I'll tell you about. [laughs] Nothings stops us.

Justin:

No. No, once we get our minds set on something we're pretty, pretty ...

Sydnee:

[laughs] Humans.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Nothing stops us. No matter how bad the idea, nothing stops us. Uh, there's the mucilage gel, which is the inner part of the leaf that you take out, that actually makes like what we think of as aloe.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Like the gooey, gel stuff.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Right, like there's the liquidy stuff and then there's like a gooey stuff. And then there's the actual like inner gel which is, that's the best part of the gel.

Justin:

That's the good, the real choice.

Sydnee:

The real good gel.

Justin:

The dank gel.

Sydnee:

That people will tell you has like, the essential amino acids that you need, people who, like say that aloe cures things other than well, you know, a burn.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

'Cause there are those.

Justin:

It's some foreshadowing I must admit.

Sydnee:

As we'll get into, as we'll get into. Um, but aloe goes back a really long time. We have been using aloe to cure various ailments since we were using anything to cure various ailments essentially. Um, it was one of our favorite plants to like eat and rub on ourselves. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

As we are, as we are want to do with plants. In Mesopotamia, um, aloe was eaten, because it works well as a laxative.

Justin:

Oh great. Man, what can't this plant do?

Sydnee:

I mean it, don't use it as a laxative.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

Um, it will give you severe abdominal cramps, but it will make you poop a lot. [laughs]

Justin:

Oh. You've got that going for you then.

Sydnee:

It, it does do that, there are just better ways of doing it. Uh, and it was kind of regarded as sacred, but, uh, it, that's largely because at the time disease was thought to be like a curse, like something evil.

Justin:

So it was like defacto, sacred.

Sydnee:

Exactly. Anything that, I don't know, It wou— it would have to be sacred to clean you out that efficiently. It must be the work of God.

Justin:

Ex-Lax, I mean put a little alter around that, or a temple for it.

Sydnee:

Uh, the Egyptians were fans of aloe. Um, it is, it is said that it was used in the beauty regiment of Cleopatra. I found that in multiple places, but I also found multiple sources that said this, 'cause, probably just a legend. I don't know.

Justin:

That sounds like something that would be on a beauty website.

Sydnee:

Doesn't it?

Justin:

Like, doesn't it? It's a little, a little questionable.

Sydnee:

Cleopatra's beauty secret.

Justin:

The secret of the Nile revealed, today.

Sydnee:

Um, I'm sure I've seen that commercial, now that you say that.

Justin:

Yeah, it sounds real, yeah.

Sydnee:

I feel like I definitely have. Uh, it, it, maybe even, so maybe Cleopatra did use it. It was used at the time, let me say that and it was used for a lot of skin issues. So the idea that it would've been rubbed on your face to keep your skin looking nice is not, is not that farfetched. Um, it had a lot of religious significance. For instance, you could hang it in a doorway to ward off evil.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, it was used to treat something that was probably tuberculosis, like if you read, I mean they weren't calling it that, but that's probably what we're talking about.

Justin:

Yeah. Ineffectively, I'm assuming?

Sydnee:

Yes. And, um, if you read the Ebers Papyrus, which we reference a lot, it advises many cures for many things, uh, including aloe for any kind of inflammation or pain.

Justin:

It's weird. I've, kind of feel bad, uh, we give Old Timey people, uh, a hard time on this show a lot. Um, but like, this is a tough one, because yeah, I see where you guys are going with this. Like I can see why you would think aloe would be good for all this stuff, because it is, I mean, fair dinkum, if you put it on your skin after you get sun burnt, it does feel better. Like, it feels nice.

Sydnee:

It feels nice. And it, it looks, I will say this, the aloe plant looks like it's some sort of secret medicine, because there are leaves and then you break them open and there's secret, secret medicine goo inside.

Justin:

Secret medicine inside.

Sydnee:

And that looks like something, I don't know, from like a video game or something. Like you don't expect that to happen and then it's there and so I, I understand that, understand that. It looks more magical than a lot of plants. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, aloe had, uh, a price associated with it, aloe was valuable. So for instance if you were going to attend a funeral of someone who was important, especially like, uh, you know, like a pharaoh or someone who was, you know, we— well regarded, well thought of, higher in the cast system, you would, uh, want, you would bring something to it.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

I, I don't want to say like a price, it wasn't like, uh, an admission price, but if you were going to show up you better bring something.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

And don't come empty handed.

Justin:

Like a potluck.

Sydnee:

Um, because, you know, people were buried with all of their worldly possessions and, and lot of things they didn't possess, they were kind of offered up with them.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, and a pound of aloe was a pretty well accepted, like this is something you could bring to a funeral and would make you look pretty good. Now, the more aloe you could bring the better. Um, the idea being that if aloe keeps us, um, it, it was supposed to give us longevity, keep us alive longer, um, keep us looking younger and that kind of thing. That it would also be good for a dead person like to spiritually, you know, provide them immortality.

Justin:

Sure. And they would just bury it. It would, and they would just bury it with them?

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

Wow. Hot tip for Sawbones listeners. If you don't all can get out there, there's some free aloe in the ground, just like sitting there. If you find an Old Timer Temple, it's just going to be full, chock full of free aloe.

Sydnee:

Are you telling them to rob graves for aloe?

Justin:

Rob graves for free aloe.

Sydnee:

I don't, I'm, I'm not going to tell our listeners to rob graves.

Justin:

No, but like also, like where you could, where you also could've gone with that is to tell me there's a plant and it's almost certainly dust right now.

Sydnee:

Free aloe.

Justin:

That's another angle you could take to thwart my plan if you just going to be antagonistic.

Sydnee:

Hey listen, I'm a doctor not a botanist, okay?

Justin:

Fair enough.

Sydnee:

Um, it was also used with Myrrh when you were prepping like bodies in clothes for burial, that kind of thing.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

You would ac— you know, we think about Myrrh a lot, but aloe is also part of that. You, you, that's actually mentioned biblically as well. Um, it was associated with youth and beauty and immortality. Um, there's a legend that the Knights of Templar made a drink out of aloe and palm wine and hemp and they called it the Elixir of Jerusalem and it was used to like make you live longer.

Justin:

Cool.

Sydnee:

Um, I didn't know the Knights of Templar were real, I thought that was something from the Da Vinci code or something. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Yeah, something like that. Apparently they're real, right?

Justin:

I don't, I can't help you with this one Syd, I'm sorry. You're out there on the wire by yourself.

Sydnee:

Am I being tricked? [laughs] Am I being checked? I thought, I, I don't know. Again, I'm a doctor I'm not a historian.

Justin:

Yeah. Okay. Well let's just hope the Knights of Templar are, are real.

Sydnee:

This episode is where I tell you all the things I, I am not an expert in.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Uh, there is an island of Socotra, which is near the horn of Africa and it is known for having lots of aloe. A lot of aloe plants grow there. Um, and there

is a legend and then this is known to be like, possibly not true, like this is a legend, you know? We don't know that this is necessarily the motivation, but Alexander the Great conquered this island. And one of the legends about why he did this was because Aristotle said, "Hey, they've got like a lot of aloe there."

Justin:

Nice.

Sydnee:

"You should conquer them."

Justin:

Yeah. And it's just there and they buried it those dummies, it's just waiting for you to scoop it up.

Sydnee:

And it's just all there so go get it. And it, he did, now it is known that Alexander the Great used aloe in, in his, um, soldier, like for his soldiers in battle. He would have carts with aloe plants, like live growing plants on them, carted alongside the soldiers on the battle field. So that if someone got wounded you would have like, instant aloe.

Justin:

"Aloe Boy, Aloe Boy, over here."

Sydnee:

Exactly, sort of like the Water Boy only like, yeah.

Justin:

After, after they won every fight they would dump a, a cask of aloe onto Alexander the Great's head.

Sydnee:

Wow.

Justin:

No, it'd be hugely unpleasant, for sure.

Sydnee:

Not just, you mean the actual plants.

Justin:

He actually like started trying to lose at some point, saying "Please, I can't go through it again."

Sydnee:

"Please stop throwing aloe plants at me."

Justin:

"Please, it's, they're so spiny."

Sydnee:

Um, so, so I mean maybe he did, he like aloe, he was a fan of it, he used it on wounds a lot, maybe he did. Um, in India, it was called the Silent Healer. As it spread throughout the world it got different names. In China, the Harmonic Remedy, in Russia the Elixia of Longevity. Um, it's also mentioned in Psalm of Solomon in the bible, which to my understanding is the, the racy part of the bible.

Justin:

The, the sexy part. Yeah, it's rea— it's a little racy.

Sydnee:

That's what Justin tells me.

Justin:

It's called, Bible after dark.

Sydnee:

Is that what you call it?

Justin:

That's what I, we call that one.

Sydnee:

Uh, you were, when you were a naughty kid in Sunday School, is that what you?

Justin:

Yeah, it's like, whoa.

Sydnee:

Whoa.

Justin:

This is racy stuff.

Sydnee:

Let's open the bible at the Psalm of Solomon?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Find out about life. Uh, it spread along trade routes, um, because it, like I said it had a va— it had value to it. It could be traded for other goods and products and things and so, um, its medical uses expanded from there. We see it advised by Dioscorides to be used for everything.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

This is when you really start to see aloe as, as kind of a panacea. So, boils, itchy skin, ulcerated genitals.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Which I mean, I imagine you're just going to try anything on at that point. Um, bruising, bleeding, your tonsils, gum or throat problems. It was good for sunburn.

Justin:

Hey.

Sydnee:

Yeah. Acne, hair loss as well as particularly good for soothing the foreskin.

Justin:

Um, just when it's had a rough day? [laughing]

Sydnee:

That was, okay, moving on.

Justin:

Sorry.

Sydnee:

Pliny agreed with actually a lot of, uh, Pliny, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Elder show, show friend, friend of the show.

Justin:

Friend of the show.

Sydnee:

Friend of the show, Pliny the Elder, uh, agreed with a lot of these uses. He actually checked out a lot of the ones Discorides had claimed and was like, "Uh, let me look into this. Well, you're right. Yes, I agree with all these things. Definitely."

Justin:

Yes, can I put this in my book too?

Sydnee:

Which is always what Pliny said about anything, "Yeah, that works. That works on that too."

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

"Sure, it probably works for that too."

Justin:

Who am I to sit here and judge?

Sydnee:

He, uh, he also added, by the way, because he had to put his own spin on, uh, spin on everything.

Justin:

Oh yeah, yeah. Got to remix everything.

Sydnee:

He added that it was also good for leprosy and that it could be used as an antiperspirant.

Justin:

Uh, sure.

Sydnee:

So, leprosy, sweating, you know? All things.

Justin:

Can we, can we establish something real quick and you probably will talk about this a little later maybe but like, it does relieve pain, right? That's not a hoax.

Sydnee:

Like if it's a sunburn or something?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It is soothing for sun burnt skin.

Justin:

Soothing.

Sydnee:

Yes.

Justin:

But does not, okay, so you're making a distinction between whether or not it blocks pain receptors in the brain as pain relief, right?

Sydnee:

Well, yeah. Well, yeah and I, I mean, there are other ways to soothe pain other than blocking pain reliever, receptors in the brain though.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

That is one method of pain relief.

Justin:

It doesn't numb the skin?

Sydnee:

Well, I would say this. If it soothes the skin and you get pain relief from it, then it just, it is relieving pain.

Justin:

All right, you're getting into semantics here.

Sydnee:

I am, I am, but this is just semantics. But yes, it does, people will use it on sunburn.

Justin:

There's a difference between though, that doesn't necessarily imply medicinal though. Like if you rub ice on it, that would, it doesn't make it medicine.

Sydnee:

No. Right.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

There you go.

Justin:

Okay. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Ding, ding, ding.

Justin:

All right.

Sydnee:

Ding, ding, ding.

Justin:

Keep going. Sorry

Sydnee:

Is the heating pad on your back when you're sore, a medicine?

Justin:

No, sweetie. You're a doctor, you should know this.

Sydnee:

No, I lis— okay. Proving my point, anyway. Uh, the Chinese Materia Medica in the 7th century talked about also using it for sinusitis as well as it can, skin condition, skin conditions are a common theme with all of this.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

A lot of people agree that if you have something wrong with your skin and you put aloe on it, it at least feels better even if it's not getting better.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Um, it was brought to the New World largely by the Jesuit priests of Spain, who, um, it was even said that it was like brought on ships, like the plants themselves were grown and like carried across the oceans and brought on ships. Um, it's mentioned that maybe even Christopher Columbus had this. Had aloe on his ships.

Justin:

Whoa, nice.

Sydnee:

Um, I'm not sure. And it was used for various healing purposes and then they also found, uh, other versions of aloe plants growing in the New World already. So, you know, we began to, to see that this was widespread which, which again kind of perpetuated this idea like, "Oh, this must like a magical healing plant, because it's everywhere."

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

Everywhere humans are found.

Justin:

Um, anybody else? Talk to us more.

Sydnee:

Well, I'm going to tell you about some more, but first why don't you come with me to the billing department.

Justin:

Let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Justin:

All right. So, you said that you had some other, uh, uh, uh, folks for me to, to hear about?

Sydnee:

Yeah, that's true. Uh, the really interesting thing as we go, go through the history of aloe is that, uh, every culture who, who came in contact with aloe was like immediately intrigued by its possible medicinal uses. Um, and part of that is through the, uh, where it came from, you know? If it was, like I said, like if the, uh, Jesuit priests were bringing it to the New World and saying, "Hey, look at this medicinal plant." Obviously you would assume it was.

But even other places where they didn't necessarily have that first contact, kind of assumed it had medicinal value. Um, there is a Swedish doctor Ernest, who devised a health tonic based mostly around aloe, it is the active ingredient, there are other ingredients, but it is considered the active ingredient. And it was, uh, Swedish Bitters.

Justin:

Hum.

Sydnee:

So, we've mentioned before, on the show, or you may already be familiar with the idea that, uh, there are a lot of alcoholic things, I don't know if it's, I don't want to call it a beverage, Bitters not really a beverage.

Justin:

No, I mean mixers, I guess.

Sydnee:

It's like a mixer, there, uh, a lot of things like mixers that were initially devised as sort of like, health tonics, where you could get like secret drinking in, especially during prohibition.

Justin:

Mixers isn't even right either, because mixers would to me, imply like, OJ or Ginger Ale, or something.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

I don't know, I don't know what you would say.

Sydnee:

[laughs]

Justin:

Two.

Sydnee:

Whatever you would want to call Bitters.

Justin:

Uh, uh, a dash of something cheerful.

Sydnee:

Uh, and, and it, initially it was something that didn't necessarily taste very good, but it, a lot of things like that were thought to be good for you.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

It was supposed to contain a lot of things that we— you know, were like health tonics, like good, good boosters to your health and that kind of thing. Um, and then the, the, uh, secret bonus is that it was also alcoholic.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

And so you could get like secret drinking in, even though the government wasn't letting you.

Justin:

And bitters, in case you've never tried 'em, aren't that bitter, you know?

Sydnee:

No, they're really not.

Justin:

Bitters aren't bi—uh, bitter, they're the pepper of the drink. So give bitters a try, it might taste better than you think. I just wrote that poem about Bitters.

Sydnee:

No, you didn't.

Justin:

I did. It just came up with it.

Sydnee:

You just wrote that poem?

Justin:

Yeah. Just wrote that poem about bitters.

Sydnee:

Really?

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Are you messing with me?

Justin:

No, I wrote it just now.

Sydnee:

Because it sounds like a jingle that you heard.

Justin:

It does, it does sound like a jingle, but I wrote it off the top of my head.

Sydnee:

TM.

Justin:

TM.

Sydnee:

Right now.

Justin:

Trademark it.

Sydnee:

Okay. Mail it to yourself later.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Mail, mail us this podcast later. [laughs]

Justin:

Yeah. I, uh, I, every, put this podcast in an envelope and, anyway.

Sydnee:

With one dollar and mail it to us. [laughs]

Justin:

No wait, no wait. This is turn a money laundering scam.

Sydnee:

All right, I was trying to run a scam.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Don't listen to me, I'll stop scamming you now. Um, so the health tonic Swedish Bitters, it was an ounce of aloe, a gross of zederwarry root, gentian root, the best of saffron, a gross of fine rhubarb root, a gross of large fungus, a gross of theriac venetian, all mixed with a pint of good quality brandy.

Justin:

Sure.

Sydnee:

Let brew for 10 days, then filter.

Justin:

That sounds great.

Sydnee:

There it is and, uh, and the doctor's prescription of this, so you have a big bottle of it now, right?

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

You've got a big bottle of it, so what you're going to do is take seven to eight drops every morning. And that's only seven to eight drops, that's kind of a bummer.

Justin:

Yeah, like too bad.

Sydnee:

Except, except you could, could dilute it in wine.

Justin:

Ah, perfect. Okay.

Sydnee:

So, seven to eight drops diluted in wine if you want to use tea or bouillon you can but, I mean, wine. And then, you know, you're going to live forever without needing to ever have bloodletting done.

Justin:

Perfect. Excellent.

Sydnee:

That was a specific thing it was remedied to fix. You won't need a doctor to cut you and bleed you.

Justin:

Is that, that alternative, a fun alternative?

Sydnee:

Which, what I love about that is, let's imagine that the doctor prescribing it to you is like also the doctor who would, you know, if you were sick, bleed you, for that illness.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

If you take this, I don't have to bleed you.

Justin:

Well, it's like.

Sydnee:

It's like a threat.

Justin:

Like, listen, I shouldn't even be telling you this, my manager is in the next room and if he heard me trying to cut us out of a bloodletting sale, he would just kill me. But really, if you pick up this bottle of Bitters, aren't, you're not going to need to get a bit of bloodletting. But don't se—seriously, you didn't hear that from me. [laughs]

Sydnee:

Also you get to drink it in wine.

Justin:

You get to drink it in whatever you want.

Sydnee:

Um, in Sanskrit it was known as, uh, Greta Kumari. Kumar means girl and it was believed that this plant has something to do with the energy of women, uh, specifically young women and like a rejuvenating, revitalizing effect on women and our female nature. And all of that is to say it was prescribed for your lady times.

Justin:

Oh great, okay.

Sydnee:

For your difficult monthly visitor, Aunt Flow.

Justin:

Got it. No, I, you don't need to lay it out for me anymore.

Sydnee:

When you're surfing the crimson wave. [laughs]

Justin:

Okay, I'm 35, like I get it. I know what's happening here.

Sydnee:

So, it was prescribed for periods. Um, to like, I don't know, chill women out.

Justin:

Chill, chill 'em out.

Sydnee:

Thank you. That's exactly what I want when I'm on my period. Hand me some aloe.

Justin:

Just chill.

Sydnee:

I'll throw that out and just take the wine, thank you very much. Um, around 1100 and through the Middle Ages, uh, there was Hildegard of, uh, Bingen, who was famous for using aloe. She was a Benedictine nun and she

recommended that you start using aloe for, uh, icterus, which means, uh, it, so it's related to jaundice.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, too much bilirubin.

Justin:

Got it.

Sydnee:

It's kind of where we're going over there. So, so basically some sort of liver problem. Um, any kind of infections of the stomach, headaches, dental caries, so, uh, cavities. That's a very, and that's actually something that persists to this day, this idea that aloe's good for cavities.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, and then any kind of ulcers as well. And so you start to see again more wound care, more and more wound care being done. Um, and, uh, throughout the ages a lot of these ideas about what aloe could be good for and what you can use it for, have kind of stuck. So, as we go around the world you've seen a lot of different cultures, aloe is still being used as kind of like a folk remedy or a, you know? And I don't mean like in their, like a doctor's prescribing aloe instead of some sort of medicine. I, I'm really talking about home remedies, folk medicine.

Justin:

Right.

Sydnee:

It's the same kind of stuff you find in the US, um, you know, especially in like rural places. Here we, I see a lot of this kind of thing, um, but in the Philippines, it's often used with milk, uh, and you drink it, uh, for like kidney infections.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Aloe and milk. Um, in Japan you can find a lot of yogurt flavored with aloe. I guess there are also aloe flavored beverages, which I've never had.

Justin:

Oh wow. Okay. I've never thought of aloe having a flavor but I'm sure, I mean I guess it does.

Sydnee:

I mean it must, yeah. Um, and then in, in India there's a region that uses it, uh, in its curry famously.

Justin:

Oh, okay.

Sydnee:

Um, nowadays it's used for mainly skin stuff, uh, specifically burns, right?

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

I think that's where we all kind of think of aloe being used, right?

Justin:

My first thought, yeah.

Sydnee:

You've got that, you can either get the plant itself, or like the green jelly stuff that comes in a bottle that you can slather all over yourself when you've got a sunburn. Um, it's tried for anything on skin, so you'll see, especially a lot of like, um, naturopaths, or herbal kind of herbalist kind of websites. Like you'll see it recommended for any kind of skin condition, like put it on your eczema, put it on your psoriasis.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

I think, I think aloe feels, I've put aloe on before and it feels good.

Justin:

Sure. It feels good.

Sydnee:

So I think if you have like an inflammatory skin condition that is uncomfortable it would, it would help in that regard. Now, is it fixing the problem? That's a whole other issue. Um, so there've been studies done to see, on burns. A lot of studies on, especially like minor little burns. Like not, not major hospitalized burns, but minor burns and sunburns. Um, does it actually heal the burn faster?

Justin:

I don't know.

Sydnee:

Some studies say yes, I mean like impressively so. Like I found studies that were like, it will reduce on average the days that it takes to heal something by nine days, which is like a crazy amount of time.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

That's a, I mean I'd say that would be huge if it really did that. Um, but then there are other studies that say there really is no difference whether you put aloe on it or not.

Justin:

Well what are we supposed to do now, science?

Sydnee:

It's not a big deal. Uh, and I mean all you'd have to do is go study by study and critique how many people are in it? What methods did they use? What kind of burns did they have? What were the differences between the people? Like were, were some of them sicker than others and so they would heal slower already?

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

What kind of aloe was used on everybody? Was it the exact same amount? I don't know, I didn't, I didn't read every single one of these studies so I'm not going to be able to tell you that. Everybody can agree though, that you shouldn't put it on open wounds and there was one, only one, the study that suggested maybe aloe made it, uh, made your healing time a little slower.

So, based on all of the other evidence, saying that it either helps or doesn't hurt, I would say that it probably at least, doesn't hurt. I think you can at least take that home. If I want to make something feel better and it's not an open wound, then it's not dangerous for you to put on it. Um, even if it's not necessarily making things heal faster.

Justin:

Okay.

Sydnee:

Uh, some people do drink, as I mention, the juice for a laxative.

Justin:

Don't do that.

Sydnee:

Don't do that.

Justin:

That will give you stomach cramps.

Sydnee:

Right, exactly.

Justin:

That's my official recommendation.

Sydnee:

Hey, that's, um, where did you learn that, Justin?

Justin:

This podcast. [laughs]

Sydnee:

The, which is true. I mean it will work as a laxative that is true, but do, do not use it.

Justin:

Not worth the price.

Sydnee:

There are many things that work as a laxative. We've covered many of them on this show. Um, there're, there're small trials that are checking it out for things like, um, inflammatory bowel disease, like ulcerative colitis and also for um, irritable bowel syndrome.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

Um, but a lot of this is early and inconclusive and small and, you know, I mean aloe is everywhere. A lot of people, like I said, have aloe plants in their windowsill. So as we've eluded to before, it's going to be hard to get like a big giant, well-funded, double blind study for a lot of this stuff.

Justin:

There's just not cash enough.

Sydnee:

Mm, no.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

Um, and I mean there's, uh, I don't have a strong suspicion that it's the secret cure to everything that we've been missing all along either.

Justin:

Mm-hmm.

Sydnee:

So that's the other thing, if you're going to put all the money behind something you better have a pretty darn good reason to think it's a secret remedy.

Justin:

But, but it is biggest secret of the Nile.

Sydnee:

It, is that, it is that. Um, it's been tried on, uh, diabetes as well. Like I mention like, like cavities, um, same thing. I, uh, I don't know that there's enough convincing evidence out there. Um, you will find it recommended on the internet for everything.

Justin:

Everything, I assume?

Sydnee:

Uh, yes. And, um, what I would say is that it, it does moisturize your skin and it soothes burns, it makes them feel better. I've used them on sun burns and it does in fact make them feel better and possibly, possibly makes you heal a little faster. Maybe it doesn't, maybe it does, I don't know. Um, uh, I see a lot of the reasoning, I thought this was interesting, over and over again the reason that people think that aloe works, do you know what it is?

Justin:

What?

Sydnee:

Because it's been around for a really long time and a lot of different people use it.

Justin:

And it's green.

Sydnee:

Well, I don't, I don't know.

Justin:

I seems helpful.

Sydnee:

It does, I mean it does, it doesn't look magical to me, but that green gel does look like something that would like do, like it looks like an active compound.

Justin:

Yeah.

Sydnee:

It actually looks like it might make you turn into a super hero.

Justin:

Yeah. It doesn't do that though. You're pretty sure no convincing double bond studies?

Sydnee:

Do you want to try it out?

Justin:

I'd rather not.

Sydnee:

That being said, there's one other better thing, I would say, than using aloe on a sunburn.

Justin:

What's that?

Sydnee:

Don't get burnt.

Justin:

Yes, yes.

Sydnee:

I think that's the most important thing. Yes, aloe will help with your sunburn. You'd be better off never having to use aloe on a sunburn, because you never got sunburned in the first place. Don't get sunburned.

Justin:

It's, it's damage every time folks.

Sydnee:

That's absolutely right. Wear sunscreen, use some common sense, reapply.

Justin:

Don't mess around with it. Uh, folks that's going to do it for us. Thank you so much for, um, listening to our program. Thanks to The Taxpayers for letting us use their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro to our program.

Uh, and, uh, thank you to the Maximum Fun network as have us as a part of their family. There's a lot of good shows you can listen to, they're like, Still Buffering, which Sydnee hosts with her sisters. Uh, it's about teen life yesterday and today. Uh, there's The Adventure Zone, which is a game where I play D&D with my brothers and another, uh, new, brand new, non Max Fun podcast we wanted to mention to you all.

Sydnee:

That's right. Um, you may remember my dad, uh, real country Tom, Tom Smirl from Still Buffering, or my Uncle Michael, Scampi Mike, uh, from Still Buffering. Uh, they have their new podcast, their own podcast, Court Appointed, which is, uh, the, the kind of the history of some crazy, interesting, funny laws and all the legal history behind different, um, issues. For instance, like their first episode was on, uh, Pokémon GO and all of the legal issues surrounding that. Um, Michael is a real lawyer, so he actually has expertise on these things and my dad makes a lot of dad jokes about it.

Justin:

Yeah, so it's, it's not, if you're a fan of this show, uh, it's, it's, it's not dis— completely dissimilar from this with kind of a, more legal take. But, uh, it's called Court Appointed and it's on iTunes and you can also find it on, on Facebook, they have a group there, but, uh, check it out.

Sydnee:

Yeah.

Justin:

I think you'll like it.

Sydnee:

It's good.

Justin:

And it's recorded right here in Sawbones Studio, here in West Virginia. [laughs] Uh, folks that's going to do it for us. Thank you so much for your time, uh, until next week. My name's 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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