

## Sawbones 13: Birth Control

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

### **Sydnee:**

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

### **Justin:**

Dr. Sydnee Mc— You know, this is one key area where you and I differ. I think if I earned my medical degree, I would never refer to myself as anything other than Dr. Justin McElroy.

### **Sydnee:**

Well, I guess that's just where the two of us are different.

### **Justin:**

Uh...

### **Sydnee:**

I'm a little more humble.

### **Justin:**

A little more humble. You don't have to be humble, you worked for it. I mean, there's— You should be— When I sign us into guestbooks— Have we

ever talked about this before? I don't think we have. Uh. Whenever I sign us into guestbooks at, uh, weddings—

**Sydnee:**

Oh, yeah. This is true.

**Justin:**

Or, less frequently, funerals—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

I always—

**Sydnee:**

Thankfully.

**Justin:**

Uh... [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

I always sign it Drs. Justin and Sydnee McElroy, because I figure you round up.

**Sydnee:**

No. I mean, that's not how that works.

**Justin:**

Yeah, I figure you round up.

**Sydnee:**

I just think it creates an artificial wall between you and somebody else if you insist on introducing yourself as Dr. It also, like, sets a lot of expectations that I don't know if I'm ready to live up to or not.

**Justin:**

That's fair.

**Sydnee:**

Dr. Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

Sydnee, I—

**Sydnee:**

It's a lot of baggage.

**Justin:**

I can't deal with these babies. They're overrunning the house.

**Sydnee:**

I'm sorry, Justin, we just—

**Justin:**

Dylan! Neveah, get down from there!

**Sydnee:**

I really wish we hadn't named so many Neveah.

**Justin:**

There's, uh, literally 30 babies in this room alone.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, there's, there's—

**Justin:**

I cannot... They're underfoot.

**Sydnee:**

At least 85 in the room next door. Um—

**Justin:**

The— Our home is overrun with babies. None of which are ours.

**Sydnee:**

Babies everywhere. No, they're crawling all over the furniture. They're pooping places.

**Justin:**

Ah. One bit me.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

I got—

**Sydnee:**

I hate when they bite you with their— With those baby teeth that they have, 'cause babies have teeth.

**Justin:**

I know. Baby small teeth.

**Sydnee:**

The tiny—

**Justin:**

They're more, it's more of a proboscis.

**Sydnee:**

That's not [laughs] what ...

**Justin:**

Proboscis.

**Sydnee:**

Babies don't have that at all.

**Justin:**

Babies have probisci.

**Sydnee:**

Babies don't at all. No.

**Justin:**

Sydnee, I love all of these children.

**Sydnee:**

Nope, not a thing.

**Justin:**

None of which are ours. Uh, but I love them, uh, but if we have a single more baby, one more baby this house will implode, from the just adorability if nothing else.

**Sydnee:**

I think you're right. We've got [laughs] Neveahs and Aidens and Bradens and Jadens and Kadens.

**Justin:**

They're everywhere.

**Sydnee:**

And they're just, they're hanging from every— The top of every bookshelf, which is dangerous, why are they up there?

**Justin:**

Babies, get down!

**Sydnee:**

Uh, get down from there! Noah, let us get you down from there.

**Justin:**

Yeah. You're—

**Sydnee:**

Um, they're crawling all over the floor, you can hardly walk in this house anymore.

**Justin:**

They're all—

**Sydnee:**

The cats are terrified.

**Justin:**

Their object permanence is terrible.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] They constantly forget that Justin is here. And then he's terrified of them all over again.

**Justin:**

Right, because they're just sitting there. What are they doing? Uh, so I don't—

**Sydnee:**

I think we should feed them.

**Justin:**

We can't have a single— None of these babies are ours, but I can't have another baby in the house.

**Sydnee:**

Right. 50,000 babies is enough. 50,000 is enough, the hit movie. The hit film. [laughs]

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

With—

**Justin:**

It's the futuristic sequel to—

**Sydnee:**

With—

**Justin:**

Eight is Enough.

**Sydnee:**

With 10 you get egg rolls, is that what that's called?

**Justin:**

Dick Van Patten lives in a cyber tenement with, uh, 50,000 children of his own creation.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] The Brady Bunch, and everybody else.

**Justin:**

In Huntington. Uh, but I want to keep from having babies, Syd. Um, I know that there is no solution to this problem, currently. Uh—

**Sydnee:**

That's right. [laughs] There is absolutely no way to stop you from... Wait. Hold on.

**Justin:**

Uh, so what I want to do is, I want to go back through the years, through history. Through the annals of time. And, and talk about how other people have done it. Maybe I can find something that I can try.

**Sydnee:**

Well, okay, if we're going to do this, I think we should go way, way back. Let's get in the way back machine.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Let's go way, way back.

**Justin:**

Somebody accused us of stealing the way back from— machine from Stuff You Should Know, uh, Rocky and Bullwinkle, my friends.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Like, take it—

**Sydnee:**

Oh, I didn't— Yeah, no I was stealing that totally from Rocky and Bullwinkle. The way back machine.

**Justin:**

The way back machine, guys.

**Sydnee:**

Right.

**Justin:**

Peabody? Anybody? All right.

**Sydnee:**

I didn't mean to steal from anybody else.

**Justin:**

No, me neither.

**Sydnee:**

Although, I'm honored for the caparison.



**Justin:**

Thank you so much.

**Sydnee:**

To Stuff You Should Know. Thank you.

**Justin:**

Listen to Stuff You Should Know.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, it's awesome. So, as far back as like, if you would ... Justin do you have any Egyptian papyruses? Papyree? Papyrus?

**Justin:**

Um, yeah. Yeah, here's one.

**Sydnee:**

Excellent. I'm so glad you had that in your bookshelf of video game books.

**Justin:**

People laughed at me.

**Sydnee:**

So, if you would look through there, if you'd scroll down, you may find...  
[laughs]

**Justin:**

Ba-dum-bum. Scroll down. Scroll down the papyrus?

**Sydnee:**

Oh, god. That is not what I meant.

**Justin:**

Happily.

**Sydnee:**

You may find that, uh, as far back as, you know, Ancient Egypt, uh, women were trying to figure out, how can I bone down without getting preggers? This has kind of been a, like, a human quest. And at the time, they didn't have any good ideas. So, they thought—

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] You know what? I know that something happens after intercourse, and then I get pregnant. So maybe, if I just like, put something inside my vagina that will block everything, like...

And what have I got? I've got some honey, I've got some acacia leaves. I've got some lint, just kind of make a big, like, mass out of that, and you know, put it up there.

**Justin:**

Uh—

**Sydnee:**

That was the first idea.

**Justin:**

In case you haven't gathered—

**Sydnee:**

Not a great one.

**Justin:**

We will be talking about human genitalia pretty thoroughly, and if you'll pardon the pun, in depth. So, uh, if you're sensitive to that, or you have little ones, you know, I really don't think you should be hiding this from them. But what am I— I'm going to tell you how to parent. Come on.

**Sydnee:**

If you hadn't gathered that we'd be talking about this, we did mention that it was a contraception episode, so come on, people. Really?

**Justin:**

Back off. Okay. So, I put papyrus up there. So, basically like a dam, sort of, basically.

**Sydnee:**

Yes, I think a dam is a fair way to [laughs] ...

**Justin:**

A dam against the river sperm.

**Sydnee:**

That's right. And I mean, you could also kind of create like, a pessary, like, something that you would permanently insert inside your vagina that could be made of acacia gum, um, or you could just, like, block what... They knew there was an opening to the womb up there, somewhere.

And so, you could, like, they would mix together this paste of honey and sodium bicarb and, like, apply it up there. And those were kind of the nicer things that they actually advocated. Um, the worst thing I came across is that you could make one of these devices out of crocodile dung.

**Justin:**

"Uh, look, Daryl, it's me, it's Melissa, I'm sorry to bother you at work. Listen, I'm really worried about Darlene. Uh, I just checked in your drawer, and all of our crocodile dung has somehow gone missing."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

"So, maybe she has a perfectly good use for it. I don't know. But I think you need to talk to your daughter."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] I didn't know where you were going with that, I was really concerned.

**Justin:**

Don't worry, baby, you're on the SS Jokes. I'm going to pile this into calm waters.

**Sydnee:**

There was so— That was a weird metaphor with—

**Justin:**

Nah, nah, nah.

**Sydnee:**

It was mixed. It was mixed.

**Justin:**

It was mixed?

**Sydnee:**

It was a mixed metaphor.

**Justin:**

It was a mixed metaphor? Crocodile dung, huh?

**Sydnee:**

Uh-huh. I suppose. It's thick. Pasty. I don't, this is gross. I don't know. I don't know what crocodile dung is like. I've never encountered it myself.

**Justin:**

Actually, as I discovered in, uh, middle school, another great contraception is watching Crocodile Dundee, uh, that never worked for me, uh, with the ladies. So you can try that, too maybe.

**Sydnee:**

That really foiled your efforts to reproduce when you were in middle school?

**Justin:**

Yeah. Not, did not set the vibe.

**Sydnee:**

'Cause you were really ready to become a dad.

**Justin:**

That's not a ... Never mind.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Uh, [laughs] so—

**Sydnee:**

Or, you know, they did know, I will give them some credit before we talk about some more weird stuff, 'cause you know that's what we're going to do.

Um, I will give them credit for the fact that they recognized, even that far back that if you were breastfeeding, uh, your previous baby that you could avoid becoming pregnant longer. And because of the kind of hormonal, uh, milieu that, you know, is invoked by breast feeding—

**Justin:**

Now, that's fascinating to me, because they would have no, I mean, no frame of reference for that at all, right?

**Sydnee:**

I think it's observation.

**Justin:**

Just sort of—

**Sydnee:**

Mm-hmm.

**Justin:**

It, seeing that applied in the wild, that women breastfeeding tended not to get pregnant?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So, so I mean, women would breastfeed for, for years and years to try to avoid ... And, and that's not 100%. I'm not saying that it is. But they did notice that you were less likely to become pregnant while you were breastfeeding.

**Justin:**

Uh, what's next?

**Sydnee:**

So, uh, the first condoms were created in 3000 BC. Uh, they were made from everything from fish bladders, to—

**Justin:**

Nope.

**Sydnee:**

Animal intestines.

**Justin:**

Nope.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, linen sheets.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Doesn't seem effective.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and, and at the time, I mean, they understood, even before we really knew about sperm or eggs, we understood the idea that something in the sex act led to babies. And so, maybe if we can block the stuff that comes out of the guy, maybe we could prevent pregnancy.

I mean, again, a lot of this, it's kind of impressive that we ever came up with the idea of condoms, because we really didn't understand the idea of procreation.

**Justin:**

Sure. Yeah. I mean, absolutely.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, if you look back, biblically, it was advised to, uh, use the pullout method.

**Justin:**

The old pull and pray, as they say, as they call it.

**Sydnee:**

Did you call it that?

**Justin:**

No. And I—

**Sydnee:**

I never called it that.

**Justin:**

I hope they didn't call it that in the bible, either. 'Cause that would be messed up.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Pull— It's the old pull—

**Sydnee:**

Pull and pray to the guy in that other chapter.

**Justin:**

Yeah. It's the pull and call me. Call me God. That's what I would suggest.

**Sydnee:**

It's funny because it's actually referenced in... when Onan is having sex with his brother's wife, Tamar. So, like, that's a good time to use the old pullout method, I suppose.

**Justin:**

I mean... Yeah. It—

**Sydnee:**

For sure.

**Justin:**

Pull out and just stay out, ideally, if you would not mind doing that.

**Sydnee:**

That's what I would advise.

**Justin:**

Yeah. I'm no Bible, but that seems like the way I would go.

**Sydnee:**

You know what, that is definitely true, Justin. You're no Bible. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Hey, come on now.

**Sydnee:**

Could you add that to your Twitter profile?

**Justin:**

Hey, I'm no Bible.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, in Ancient Greece, they started to uh, get into the idea that maybe there were things you could, like, take into your body like medicines that you could use to prevent pregnancy. And um, they uh, discovered a plant called silphium, which actually no longer exists, Justin.

**Justin:**



Ah, so that's out.

**Sydnee:**

So, you have to imagine that some, like, uh, archeology botanist, or botany archeologist? What do you think? It's got to be one of the two.

**Justin:**

Botyologist.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] I don't think that's what they're called.

**Justin:**

Bocheologist.

**Sydnee:**

Nope, not that either.

**Justin:**

A barkeologist. It's a dog.

**Sydnee:**

Something like that, discovered this plant, uh, which was used, it obviously is not around any longer. It's kind of like a giant fennel plant.

**Justin:**

Delicious.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] But, um, it was used for contraception. Uh, they observed that women who ate this, or you know, took like, compounds of this plant were less likely to become pregnant. And it actually became, it was only in a tiny part of Crete, and it became, like, so popular and was harvested so extensively that it became extinct.

**Justin:**

Ugh.

**Sydnee:**

It was, actually, at one point they quoted that it was worth its weight in silver.

**Justin:**

Wow.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, because so many people, and they tried to cultivate it other places, and it wouldn't grow anywhere else. And eventually it was extinct, but uh, that's how badly people didn't want to get pregnant. They made a plant extinct. So there you go, humans.

**Justin:**

I think it's interesting, Syd, and obviously we have a lot more things to go through, uh, here. But just this early, it's interesting that we are actually finding things that it... As opposed to a lot of the topics we cover where we come up with a cure that is really not based in anything except witchcraft, you know.

Uh, superstition, anything like that. It seems like in birth control, we've got methods that, while maybe not 100% effective, were in some way— I mean, it seems like with a concrete outcome, like pregnancy, we were maybe a little better about coming up with real, actual solutions. And maybe less willing to leave this one to the gods, as it were.

**Sydnee:**

I think you're right. I think that you hit on— I think there are two aspects to that. One, exactly what you said, it's a very concrete outcome. Either you got pregnant or you didn't. So, you couldn't argue that it did work if you did get pregnant. I think the other part of that, though, is sample size.

**Justin:**

Hm. How do you mean?

**Sydnee:**

Well, I mean, if we're dealing with the plague, or you know, cholera or whatever disease throughout time, um, you know, only so many people are going to get it. If you're talking about pregnancy, I mean, throughout history, everybody's having sex.

**Justin:**

Hm.

**Sydnee:**

Everybody's—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Either getting, or trying not to get pregnant. So, uh, you're dealing with a much larger group of people who are trying things and so therefore, your sample of people who are trying any one thing is— It's bigger.

And it makes your data more, uh, more real. So, if something works, more people are likely to try it because there are a lot more people who would be trying anything.

**Justin:**

Well, we used up all the silphium. What, what are we resorting to?

**Sydnee:**

There are a lot of other plants at that time that we began to use. Uh, things like a relative of silphium that didn't work quite as well called asephateta. There was Queen Ann's lace, which we've heard of. Uh, willow, date palm, pomegranate, penny royal, artemesia, rue, myrrh. Um, Queen Ann's lace is actually still used to this day in India. Um—

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

'Cause it does work, to some degree. And I mean, I'm not saying that any of these things necessarily worked as well as modern birth control methods, but they did, uh, recognize that it worked.

They also came up with the idea of a sponge that you could insert into the vagina of wool or cotton, um, that would absorb some of the, you know, some of the sperm. And, and that actually is not a bad idea as a barrier method.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

Um—

**Justin:**

Good job, humanity.

**Sydnee:**

In, uh, in seventh century BC, China, they came up with ways to just, um, just prevent the whole thing, if you didn't want to use something externally for birth control, you could practice coitus reservatus. Or coitus obstructus.

**Justin:**

Okay, I'll bite. What—

**Sydnee:**

Uh—

**Justin:**

What... I can kind of guess. But, uh, what are they?

**Sydnee:**

Well, basically you have sex and don't ejaculate.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, it worked for two things. Um, one you didn't get pregnant, obviously. And two, you could preserve your yang.

**Justin:**

My yang.

**Sydnee:**

Your yang. Aren't you worried about preserving your yang?

**Justin:**

I have been running a little low in the yang department.

**Sydnee:**

Well, this is a way you could preserve it.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

I wouldn't think it would be that easy for men.

**Justin:**

Uh...

**Sydnee:**

You just reach that plateau phase, and just stay there, and then you're done.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Not, well, not so much difficult as impossible. Uh—

**Sydnee:**

This is a great period in history for women. [laughs] Not so great for men.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Not an ideal solution for the fellas.

**Sydnee:**

They also did advocate that there was something called the thousand of gold contraceptive. Um, which was—

**Justin:**

What could that be?

**Sydnee:**

It was a mixture of oil and quicksilver. All right Justin, go to the head of the class, do you remember what quicksilver is?

**Justin:**

Well, my dear wife, that is mercury.

**Sydnee:**

Very good. You could heat that, take it orally once, and induce sterility.

[laughs]

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

If that's what you desire. 'Cause it's mercury.

**Justin:**

Kind of an extreme solution.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, over in India they came up with their own ideas. So you could make a potion of palm leaf and chalk, or uh— Palm leaf and chalk and you could take that orally, or you could, again, back to the honey; honey was a good idea. I think people knew, it was thick, it was viscous. Stuff couldn't get through it.

So you could make kind of a mixture of honey, rock salt and gee, and then place that in the vagina. And either way, that was a good idea. They actually

wrote a, you know, in India they wrote a lot of text devoted to the art of sex. The Kamasutra, you may have heard.

**Justin:**

You can't see it, but I'm raising my eyebrows at that.

**Sydnee:**

He is. It's very disturbing.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

I'm glad you can't see it actually. I'm glad that you're spared this today. Uh, they, they also wrote other texts. The, uh, [sounding it out] ratir... aha yasa. Aha saya? [Ratirahasya] Can you say that better, Justin?

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Ratira haysaya.

**Justin:**

I could, but— I don't want to embarrass you.

**Sydnee:**

Anyway, it was, again, devoted to sex. And uh, I thought this was great to mention. They— It included the idea of contraception and noted some of the ideas we've mentioned. As well as many, many others. Um, but it also, um, made sure that you knew there were four types of women. I didn't know this, so I thought I would include this.

**Justin:**

Hit me.

**Sydnee:**

So, this is my question.

**Justin:**

There's literally, I was going to make a comical guess—

**Sydnee:**

I'm going to tell you the four types—

**Justin:**

I was going to make a hilarious, comical guess, but there's literally nothing I could say that would not get me in trouble.

**Sydnee:**

No, yeah, you're going to get in trouble anyway. Because, I'm going to tell you the four types of women, and you're going to tell me which one I am.

**Justin:**

Ah ...

**Sydnee:**

Okay. So there are lotus women, elephant women, art women, and conch women.

**Justin:**

Well, I—

**Sydnee:**

Which one am I? Justin.

**Justin:**

[stuttering] Art?

**Sydnee:**

Really?

**Justin:**

Darn it. Really? Choked?

**Sydnee:**



I can't believe you said that.

**Justin:**

It— Well okay, okay let me—

**Sydnee:**

We're just going to have to talk about this later.

**Justin:**

Process of elimination. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

We're just going to have to talk about it later.

**Justin:**

Not elephant. Is that, I mean, can I just say not elephant?

**Sydnee:**

You know what, it's too embarrassing to do this in front of everyone, so never mind.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Never mind.

**Justin:**

What next?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, in uh— So I think it's interesting because if you look at birth control efforts in, like, the 1300s, uh, the well kind of runs dry because the plague—

**Justin:**

Oh, okay.

**Sydnee:**

As we know, decimated large, um, sections of the population throughout Europe. And you see this, um, this push to repopulate the planet. So, people definitely aren't looking for birth control methods.

And it actually may have been the impetus of some witch hunts, because uh, midwives were often the target of witch hunts. And midwives, in addition to knowing how to deliver babies, often knew contraceptive methods, and even ways to, uh, induce abortion.

**Justin:**

Hm.

**Sydnee:**

This was a time when we needed more people. And so, efforts to stop the birth of more people were seen as evil.

**Justin:**

Hm.

**Sydnee:**

So, not all of the witch hunts, but some could have, could have been related to this. Um, and this led to in, in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII—

**Justin:**

You know what—

**Sydnee:**

Released.

**Justin:**

I— You pick that name for yourself, and I'm immediately suspicious. Me? Oh, I'm Pope Innocent.

**Sydnee:**

I'm Pope Innocent. I don't know what you're talking about.

**Justin:**

That's like Pope— That's like calling yourself Pope Cool. All right.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

All right, Pope Cool. Who are you fooling?

**Sydnee:**

I know you're wearing those shades, but still.

**Justin:**

Uh, so, so what's, what's up with Pope Innocent VIII?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, he— So he released all these statements against witches. And in that context he began to rail against the idea of contraception and abortion, which is, obviously, a common Catholic position now, against abortion, and contraception for that matter. Um—

**Justin:**

Hm.

**Sydnee:**

But this was, uh, some of the early origins of that kind of vocal, you know— I'm not to say that the Catholic Church didn't always feel this way, but this is when they began to advocate for it.

**Justin:**

I wonder if that's a holdover. I mean, if we're continually— If we're still as, uh, you know, as militant about ... Not we, if you, you people, are still as militant about it as an offshoot of this.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, everything comes from somewhere. And there certainly are places ... I mean, you know, you know the origin of, uh, the idea that priests can't get married.

**Justin:**

What's that?

**Sydnee:**

Um, it was to prevent some kind of like, um, genetic, um, monarchy within the Vatican. So that it wouldn't be handed down from generation to generation. You are the Pope, and then your son's the Pope. And then his son's the Pope. So, if you prevent priests from getting married, you can avoid that.

**Justin:**

Hm.

**Sydnee:**

So, it's interesting. Interesting, uh—

**Justin:**

Or you could just not ...

**Sydnee:**

Origins.

**Justin:**

Just have a baby that's not Catholic. [laughs] Can you do that?

**Sydnee:**

I mean, not then ... Not back then you—

**Justin:**

I'm going to raise you—

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

I'm going to raise you to be a ...

**Sydnee:**

In the 1400s, no you couldn't. [laughs]

**Justin:**

I'm going to raise you to be... What if you promised to raise him Episcopalian?

**Sydnee:**

No. Sorry.

**Justin:**

Okay. I mean, I'm just trying to help the pope out. No big deal.

**Sydnee:**

In the, so in the 1500s, um, it should be noted that spermicide came into being. And this was— We already had this idea of some condoms, some, like, crude condoms, and uh, we soaked them in random chemicals in hopes that they would kill sperm. We knew there was sperm, or something.

**Justin:**

Something in there. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Something.

**Justin:**

Something's up. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

We were going to kill them with chemicals. Um, nothing really defined, per se. Um, in the 17th and 18th century, though, birth control, uh, began to be restricted. Um, because we started having lots of wars. And so, we needed armies, and we needed men to run countries and businesses and wars. And so—

**Justin:**

God, that is, that is so forward thinking. In 18 years, you're going to be, we're going to ... We might need you to, you know, stab somebody for us.

**Sydnee:**

So when we're talking about, like, the, you know, imperial kind of, like, Europe, the European idea that we're going to go over and conquer other nations, um, we need people to do that.

So that's when we, uh, that's when we stopped letting people use birth control. And so, we built countries and armies, and nobody was, uh, using birth control, except of course, they were.

**Justin:**

Oh, sure.

**Sydnee:**

And that's the secret, the secret history of birth control, right? Is that no matter what we say against it, people are always trying something. Um, which led to, in that same era, Casanova, who you may have heard of.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Who invented the first lambskin condom.

**Justin:**

Wow. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Do you know what he called it?

**Justin:**

What?

**Sydnee:**

An assurance cap.

**Justin:**

Sure. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

You need your assurance cap on today. Are you wearing— [laughs] "Are you wearing your thinking cap?"

"No, I'm wearing my assurance cap."

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

"Don't you worry."

**Justin:**

This is my— It's all cool toboggan. You just slide it on your wing wong, and then you can just chill.

**Sydnee:**

He also advocated using half a lemon to cap the cervix.

**Justin:**

Okay, not as great of an idea. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

No. I don't think that's ... That wouldn't be my idea of an assurance cap. But, sure.

**Justin:**

Are... Syd, are people still using lambskin?

**Sydnee:**

There are lambskin condoms in existence.

**Justin:**

Sounds luxurious. Seems like a luxurious option.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] I don't know that they're as great as, you know—

**Justin:**

Seems luxurious.

**Sydnee:**

Though, they may be. I don't know. I wouldn't— Anyway.

**Justin:**

Don't email us, you weirdos.

**Sydnee:**

I know, somebody's going to be like, "Lambskin condoms are great."

**Justin:**

They're great.

**Sydnee:**

"I'm allergic to latex."

**Justin:**

Stop it. I'll block you.

**Sydnee:**

"And this is what I have to use." I'm sure they're fine. I have no problem with anything.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Just, use something. Use protection, unless you want to have a baby, then go for it.

**Justin:**

What's next, Syd?



**Sydnee:**

Um, in 1900, um, and as we enter into the 1900s, I should say, women began publishing their own accounts of, you know, this is what works for birth control. There are condoms. Diaphragms were made.

We had rubber at this point. Vulcanized rubber was invented. So, um, we had good strong condoms that worked. The idea of womb veils, as they were called.

**Justin:**

Womb— Sorry, womb veils?

**Sydnee:**

Womb veils. [laughs] Or diaphragms were introduced. Uh, there were, uh, some different devices made of rubber for douching, and there were some intrauterine devices, not— Some crude ideas of what they should look like, introduced at that time.

That was really when women began to say, "Hey, other women, I have some ways that you might not get pregnant." There was a book at the time called The Fruits of Philosophy. Uh, this was basically a birth control manual. And it was written by Charles Knowlton, but uh, Charles Bradlaugh, and Annie Besant republished it at the time, and uh, and were brought on trial for it.

**Justin:**

That's a sneaky name. The Fruits of Philosophy.

**Sydnee:**

The Fruits of Philosophy.

**Justin:**

I would never guess.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. And it had a lot of different birth control methods. And women were certainly using them whether or not it was legal, or frowned upon, or whatever. Um, this stopped in the US with the Comstock law. Are you familiar with the Comstock Law, Justin?

**Justin:**

Uh, yes. I actually am familiar with that. Uh—

**Sydnee:**

Go for it.

**Justin:**

It's the one about— It's the one about dirty, dirty books and dirty pictures, right?

**Sydnee:**

Right. You couldn't, what could— What could you not do with dirty books and dirty pictures?

**Justin:**

Distribute them.

**Sydnee:**

That's right. That included birth control and literature about birth control.

**Justin:**

Good work, humans. Really threw the baby out with the— Threw the literal baby out with the bath water on that one. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

But you know, the thing is, uh, information just keeps spreading. And people can try to censor it, and they can try to stop it, but they're not going to succeed, because throughout the 20th century—

**Justin:**

'Cause people got—

**Sydnee:**

Condoms—

**Justin:**

People gots to get down.

**Sydnee:**

They got to get down. And condoms began to be mass-produced. Um, I think this is kind of a great little, uh, anecdote, in 1906, an important, um, point in this, in the history of birth control is that Cyrus McCormick, who was the inventor of—

**Justin:**

Author of The Road.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] No.

**Justin:**

No. Incorrect.

**Sydnee:**

That's somebody else.

**Justin:**

That's, that's Ca— ... You know, somebody else.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know who that is.

**Justin:**

Cormack. Cormack.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. He, uh, Cyrus McCormick was the inventor of the mechanical harvester, and he was very, very rich. Well, in 1906, do you know what important thing happened?

**Justin:**

Uh, Cyrus McCormick invented the mechanical harvester? I don't know.  
[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

No, he had already done that. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Why does this matter to this talk?

**Justin:**

Why would you think I know when a dude is diagnosed with schizophrenia?

**Sydnee:**

I'm going to tell you why this matters.

**Justin:**

I don't know when my dad got diabetes. Why would I know why Cyrus McCormick got schizophrenia?

**Sydnee:**

Your dad listens to this show and he's going to be heartbroken that you just said this.

**Justin:**

Dad, stop eating sweet stuff. Please. And stop eating popcorn, you have diverticulitis.

**Sydnee:**

That's a myth, but we'll cover that some other time.

**Justin:**

Go on.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, his wife, in response to his diagnosis with Schizophrenia decided to start funding birth control efforts. And they were rich, so they had the means to do so, because she wanted to know how she could prevent passing along illnesses to her children.

This is important because her efforts to fund, um, birth control probably helped, um, the invention of the oral contraceptive pill many, many years later.

**Justin:**

Fantastic.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. So, throughout this time period, um, the first, uh, silken IUD, it was made of silk, was invented.

**Justin:**

Luxurious.

**Sydnee:**

Um, in 1916, Margaret Sanger opened her first birth control clinic. It was closed 10 days later.

**Justin:**

Ah, good shot, Margaret.

**Sydnee:**

But she reopened it.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And in 1921, she founded the American Birth Control League, which is now known as Planned Parenthood.

**Justin:**

Wow.

**Sydnee:**

And this is trumping efforts at the time, like, throughout World War I, where they were just saying, "Well, just don't have sex. Hey, GIs abroad, just don't have sex. Don't do it. Abstinence is the way to go."

**Justin:**

That's worked, ever.

**Sydnee:**

That, yes, that's the best... That's the best method— No it's not. It's terrible.  
I should also note—

**Justin:**

I mean, it is the best.

**Sydnee:**

Well, okay. It is the best. It just— Nobody's doing it.

**Justin:**

Yeah, right.

**Sydnee:**

And I should note that at the same time, 1921 was a big year. Sanger founded the American Birth Control League, and Marie Stokes in the UK opened, uh, the UK's first birth control clinic that actually was allowed to stay open and function, and help many women.

And this is the time when the whole idea of birth control became a movement. Um, previously to this, it had been known as either family limitation, which is basically, you have as many kids as you want, and then you and your husband decide that one of you is going to become sterile in some way.

**Justin:**

You flip a coin. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

I don't know. I don't know how you decide that. [laughs] But it's a joint effort, and somebody's going to become sterile. So it's not birth control, you're not, it's not a temporary thing. It's a permanent removal of the ability to have a kid. Or, uh, the other idea that was popular was voluntary motherhood.

**Justin:**

What, now, what's that?

**Sydnee:**

So, the idea was that previously you could only be an involuntary mother. You were kind of at the mercy of your body. So, to give women back ownership of their bodies, uh, they were told to only have sex when you want kids.

**Justin:**

Well ... Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So, basically the way you were a voluntary mother was, just don't have sex until you want to have kids, and once you're done having kids, don't have any more sex.

**Justin:**

That seems like a pretty good way to have a lot of kids. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Well, exactly. And that's what's so revolutionary about the idea of—

**Justin:**

"Gosh, you know, you know Debra, I'm looking around, I know we have seven. I know each one of them eats a single potato every night for dinner."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

"I really think, uh..."

**Sydnee:**

They're eating too many carbs. [laughs]

**Justin:**

"They're too many carbs. Uh, need to lean them up a little bit. What better way than with another delightful mouth to feed. Come here, you handsome woman."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] 'Cause all women then were handsome.

**Justin:**

Yeah, right.

**Sydnee:**

No, that's what's so revolutionary about the idea of birth control, even that term is that we were saying, women have control over their bodies. Over their ability to reproduce, and at the same time, we were separating sex from procreation, which as you can imagine, ruffled many feathers.

**Justin:**

Uh, yes. I would imagine so.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

'Cause it acknowledges sex for pleasure, and ...

**Sydnee:**

Right, and at the time, the—

**Justin:**

Seems sinful to me.

**Sydnee:**

The only things that were acceptable were either abstinence as I mentioned, or the rhythm method. Um, which was not well understood then. It's much better understood now. Um, but wasn't then. Um, and then the only other alternative you had was, uh, Lysol disinfectant.

**Justin:**

No.

**Sydnee:**



Which was hugely popular in the 1930s. Um, it doesn't work. It's not a good idea. I guess you'll smell like Lysol afterwards.

**Justin:**

I'm assuming that's an off label use of Lysol.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, I wouldn't use Lysol for that.

**Justin:**

Alright, Syd, uh, real quick, take me on a whirlwind tour of the last 50 years or so in birth control.

**Sydnee:**

Well, things really started getting good in the last 50 years. [laughs] So, in the 1950s, John Rock and Gregory Pincus, with the funding from Cyrus McCormick's wife, uh, Ms. McCormick, I don't know her first name. Uh, invented oral contraceptive pills.

Um, in the 70s, the pill was having a lot of side effects, so they kinda reformulated it. A lower dose version was introduced, and it was much better for women. Um, also, in the 60s and 70s, laws all over the world began expanding birth control to everybody.

So, in the US, the landmark case is Griswold vs. Connecticut, where they said, "You can have birth control. You can't ban it. It's a marital right. If you want to do it, it's your business, it's private. You know, take your pill."

**Justin:**

And you know, that's fascinating. Something that we take for granted so much like that, is so recently a right like that.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, Justin if we, we could do a whole show about the way that you men have tried to legislate my body throughout history.

**Justin:**

I can't— I don't make any— I didn't do anything.

**Sydnee:**

You men. Uh, IUDs were introduced in that same time period. After that in the 80s and 90s we saw the invention of the, uh, estrogen patch. The NuvaRing. Maybe you want an implantable birth control device. An injection like the, you know, depo provera, or perhaps you want to take a lower dose estrogen pill so you don't have side effects.

In 1998, we saw Plan B, and emergency contraception was first introduced. And then in the 2000s the female condom. And now, we have studies as recently as 2010 that say the pill may actually lead to living longer because of, uh, avoidance of some other diseases while you're on the pill. And uh, 100 million women around the world are using it, at least. If not more.

**Justin:**

Oh, humanity, I'm glad we got this all sorted out. I feel pretty good about us.

**Sydnee:**

It's really an interesting history because women knew they wanted control over their bodies for, you know, thousands of years. How can I engage in this activity which I enjoy, and which my husband or lover, or whatever friend enjoys as well, but you know, have kids when I want to have kids? It's an incredible fight and we've come a long way.

**Justin:**

Congratulations, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:**

Baby.

**Justin:**

Congratulations, women.

**Sydnee:**

Thank you. And I'd like to mention that September 26th, do you know what that is, Justin?

**Justin:**

No idea.

**Sydnee:**

World Contraceptive Day.

**Justin:**

So take some pills.

**Sydnee:**

So on— no, wait.

**Justin:**

Take a pill.

**Sydnee:**

Don't— [laughs] Don't— Well, I mean—

**Justin:**

Men, women, whatever.

**Sydnee:**

Now, hold on.

**Justin:**

Try the pill that day.

**Sydnee:**

No. No. Don't—

**Justin:**

Pop one.

**Sydnee:**

No, on September 26th—

**Justin:**

World Con— September 26th is World Contraceptive Day. Pop one.

**Sydnee:**

If you're on the pill, certainly continue if you wish to take it. But in general, on September 26th, why don't we all take a moment.

**Justin:**

Pop one.

**Sydnee:**

Lower our heads, close our eyes, and s...

**Justin:**

Swallow our pills.

**Sydnee:**

...say thank you to all those who came before us with their crocodile dung and their assurance caps.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

And their honey. And their acacia, and taught us how to not have babies until we were ready.

**Justin:**

We appreciate, uh, them so much. And of course, we appreciate you, at home. Our friends who, uh, continue to listen to the show, support it, share with friends. You can use the, uh, the Sawbones hashtag, uh, on... Sorry, not a hashtag but just an @, you know, the @ reply on Twitter.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, forget hashtags, they're so last week.

**Justin:**

Yeah, now that we're @Sawbones, by the way, we are @Sawbones. Uh, now that we're @Sawbones, you can just tweet using that.

**Sydnee:**

Tweet @Sawbones. Tweet @JustinMcElroy.

**Justin:**

And she's @SydneeMcElroy, S-Y-D-N-E-E. Syd, Tell me about some of the people who have, uh, reviewed our show on iTunes.

**Sydnee:**

So we've got uh, ScorpioJAJS, uh, Searib, Cosyosy? Elf L. Pift, uh, Jdphoto1, zombiebunny, hgruber, cyphare, I think. Thank you. Uh—

**Justin:**

Cipher, I think.

**Sydnee:**

Cipher?

**Justin:**

It's Mike Neglee.

**Sydnee:**

Cyphare? Oh.

**Justin:**

It's Mike Neglee. Hi, Mike.

**Sydnee:**

Thank you, Mike Neglee. Uh, G138, adunt, SarahPeep, DylanTDwarte, TacoAnthony. [laughs]

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Vexanudo, vicerabbits, brentalfloss.

**Justin:**

Thank you everyone, uh, Zoey Beck, everybody, thank you so much, for reviewing the show. That really helps us out a lot, and helps—

**Sydnee:**

And I read every single one.

**Justin:**

And me—

**Sydnee:**

And I love you all.

**Justin:**

And yeah, please, it means the world to us. Uh, I was going to thank, uh, the listener that suggested this show to us, but it was my brother, Travis McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

But thank you, Travis, we appreciate it.

**Justin:**

Travis and I, along with our youngest brother, Griffin make a show called My Brother, My Brother and Me, it's one of the many shows on Maximum Fun.

**Sydnee:**

And I love it.

**Justin:**

Thanks, Syd. Uh, uh, Judge John Hodgeman, Jordan, Jesse, Go!, Bullseye, uh, One Bad Mother. I could go on.

**Sydnee:**

Throwing Shade.

**Justin:**

Throwing Shade, oh, Throwing Shade. Fantastic stuff. It's all waiting for you at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org). You can also find our forums there we can, uh, discuss our latest show. Uh—

**Sydnee:**

We also have a Facebook page.

**Justin:**

We do, Facebook.com/SawbonesShow, you can go there.

**Sydnee:**

If any of you kids are still on Facebook these days.

**Justin:**

If you're on the book, you can go like us there. Uh, want to say thank you to, uh, metro, the UK publication. They uh, they gave us a, uh, a very kind, uh, recommendation in their podcasting, uh, section.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, that was super nice.

**Justin:**

By Rahul Vermoth. So thank you so much for that.

**Sydnee:**

And really made our day.

**Justin:**

Um, yeah that was a delight. And uh, thank you to you. You at home, listening. Make sure you join us again next Friday for Sawbones. 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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