

## Sawbones 47: Breastfeeding

Published on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014

[Listen on TheMcElroy.family](#)

**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 marital tour of misguided medicine. I am your cohost, Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

I'm trying to sound—

**Sydnee:**

Is that—

**Justin:**

... make myself sound like a bigger deal.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, okay. I—

**Justin:**

Here he is, Justin... MmmcElroy.

**Sydnee:**

I don't think you're allowed to do that about yourself though. You're—

**Justin:**

If I don't, who will? Syd—

**Sydnee:**

I mean, uh, do you need me to? Is it... I mean, if this is something you need—

**Justin:**

That's not fair. That's not fair.

**Sydnee:**

... like for your, you know, for your self-esteem or—

**Justin:**

No. That's not fair. I would never—

**Sydnee:**

... for the way you feel about yourself?

**Justin:**

... I would never ask that of you. Sydnee, I've been thinking a lot about our, uh, human that we're making. And one of my—

**Sydnee:**

I would hope so.

**Justin:**

One of my things is, I, uh, want her to get a head start. I think that's natural. I think any parent wants that for their child, you know?

**Sydnee:**

Sure.

**Justin:**

Head of the class, as it... as it were.

**Sydnee:**

Right. Well, I've been, like, read calculus textbooks to my abdomen. Like—

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Uh, that is one way. I have an alternate, uh, suggestion. How about this. From the first day that she is alive, we give her to drink, exclusively—

**Sydnee:**

Oh—

**Justin:**

Red Bull.

**Sydnee:**

You... wait. Like—

**Justin:**

Red Bull.

**Sydnee:**

Like, the energy drink, Red Bull?

**Justin:**

Exactly. You hit on the key, core principle here. Red Bull energy drink. Here's my theory. We know it takes kids a year to develop many skills, like walking and talking and reading and, and, um, baseball throwing, a—

**Sydnee:**

They're usually not reading at a year, just to give you a heads up there.

**Justin:**

Okay, well, just to ju—let's just generalize.

**Sydnee:**

Maybe, you know I mean, who knows? And why not pie in the sky there, but sure.

**Justin:**

People think that that's because of development. Here's what I think, maybe they're just too tired to work on those. They don't have the energy to, uh, "Hey, baby. It's time to learn walking."  
"Ugh, can't. Tired. Poop. Uh, don't have any get up and go."

**Sydnee:**

Right. I mean, they sleep a lot in the beginning.

**Justin:**

Exactly. The... why? Because they're so tired and aren't amped up with the, the power that Red Bull, uh, energy drinks will give you.

**Sydnee:**

Oh. So you think this is just... that it's not normal. Like, it's a problem, but it's so widespread—

**Justin:**

I think we're—

**Sydnee:**

... that we have mistaken it—

**Justin:**

Let me ask you this. If somebody wanted you to go about your day with your, um, caffeine, how would that go?

**Sydnee:**

Well, it would go really badly.

**Justin:**

It would go really badly.

**Sydnee:**

I had, uh—

**Justin:**

We are handicapping our children by not giving them, uh, uh, energy drinks, specifically Red Bull brand energy drinks. And, uh, I think we c— need to step it up with our baby.

**Sydnee:**

I, I don't, um, I don't know that that is the healthiest thing.

**Justin:**

This is like Jacob's Ladder, right? But for energy.

**Sydnee:**

I... yeah, but I mean—

**Justin:**

No, wait. Lorenzo's Oil. [laughing] Sorry.

**Sydnee:**

J— wha— [laughing] Ju— I, I thought you meant—

**Justin:**

I messed that up pretty bad.

**Sydnee:**

... maybe the, like, the game. The string game.

**Justin:**

No, uh, the—

**Sydnee:**

The Jacob's Ladder, the—

**Justin:**

I wanna cure our child of her, uh, uh, sloth by giving her Red Bull energy drinks exclusively.

**Sydnee:**

Um, I think that there's like, I mean, there's a lot of caffeine in there, which isn't great for kids.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, there's probably a lot of sugar.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And then like, a lot of... I don't know. I mean, it's Red Bull. I don't think that's a good idea.

**Justin:**

Yeah. It's all... it's full of that stuff. Well, you better have a better suggestion, but I started there. That's my, you know, first thing on the whiteboard. What do you got?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, I mean... I mean, there's, there's really one right answer, is for like, the best thing.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Not the only thing. But the best thing you could give your kid and like—

**Justin:**

Okay. I know where you're going with this. I know where you're g—

**Sydnee:**

... especially the first six month of their life.

**Justin:**

Uh, yes. Yes. Okay. I know where you're going with this. I know Monster energy drinks have their fan base. Uh, I don't think they pack a punch that a Red Bull does. But we can talk about this. There's room.

**Sydnee:**

No, I, uh, really not an energy drink.

**Justin:**

I want this to be a partnership.

**Sydnee:**

Not an energy drink, in the traditional sense, anyway.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

I was thinking maybe more like, like, breast milk?

**Justin:**

Hmm. Okay. Well, that has, I mean, it's cheap. I think that... [laughing]

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. See, it's cheap. I... like, I make it.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Free.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, not yet.

**Justin:**

No. But you will, and it'll be free.

**Sydnee:**

But I will. Uh, I should. I mean, I'm assuming.

**Justin:**

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

**Sydnee:**

I, I... we have a lot. You know, we got a lot more evidence that that helps than we do energy drinks, at this point.

**Justin:**

Uh—

**Sydnee:**

Now I will say that their... that the use of Mountain Dew is widespread among my patient population. [laughing] So, I probably could do a study, but—

**Justin:**

Put it in the... put it in the bottle for bubby. And, and let bubby get his get up and go juice.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] But I, I think Toddlers in Tiaras could probably do a study on this.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

But I think breast milk—

**Justin:**

Okay. Well, you've seen—

**Sydnee:**

... is probably where we have the most, you know, information right now.

**Justin:**

And you, you seem to know so much about breast milk. You say there's so much information. Why don't you hit me with some of it?

**Sydnee:**

Well, Justin, breastfeeding has been around as long as we have been mammals. [laughing] Which is—

**Justin:**

A whi— I mean, what? Eight, 900 years? Easy.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, like... uh, a little longer than that.

**Justin:**

All right.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, it's as long as we... our species has existed.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, that's what, "Hey—"

**Justin:**

Larry King's not a mammal. He's the last one.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

Everybody post Larry King.



**Sydnee:**

What, uh, he's not a mammal? What is he?

**Justin:**

He was our... he... what?

**Sydnee:**

Is he a reptile?

**Justin:**

He's a... yes, he is. He is that.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

He's like a reptile man, like in the Super Mario Brothers movie. He's a highly evolved reptile.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] Um, obviously, it is, you know, uh, just as a little FYI, that is what boobs are for.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So, everyone get on board with that right now.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Then you can continue listing.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Um, obviously, in ancient cultures, Egyptian, Greeks, Roman, they all breastfed their, their kids. That was the—

**Justin:**

I would imagine that goes back like, as far as... okay.

**Sydnee:**

Tribal populations.

**Justin:**

Everybody.

**Sydnee:**

The very early humans. Yes. Well, that's where... I mean, it made sense. All mammals breastfeed their kids.

**Justin:**

It's kind of crazy that we even have— that it... this even has to be a thing.  
[laughing]

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] But it is a thing. Um, and largely because, uh, in the beginning, you know, just like today, not every single woman could breastfeed.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

While the majority of women did and had no trouble, there have always been some women, for whatever reason, you know, genetically, medically, could not breastfeed. Or in those... in those early pre-doctor years, who, unfortunately, maybe died in childbirth.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So, as long as we have been feeding children, we have been trying to figure out other ways, in addition to breastfeeding, to feed them as well.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, the... actually, if we got back to the Ebers Papyrus, which we've referenced before, which is kind of like the oldest medical textbook—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... um, they have a prescription for moms who are having trouble breastfeeding. So, and I kind of like the, the, this idea. So, if you... to get a supply of milk in a woman's breast, you just warm the bones of a swordfish in oil, and then rub her back with it.

**Justin:**

[laughing]

**Sydnee:**

Or, alternatively [laughing], you could let her sit cross legged, eating fragrant bread of soust dura... dura fruit? And then, um, rub the parts with the poppy plant. I'm assuming the part references, you know, the, the nipple parts.

**Justin:**

Yeah. They just were trying to be discreet.

**Sydnee:**

With poppies. Right. "Rub the parts with poppy plants."

**Justin:**

Uh, uh, presumably she has passed the kid off at this point, because otherwise, she's gonna need three hands.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] Right, well I think maybe like, y— you could hold the baby while I sit cross legged, eat some dura, and rub my nipples with poppies.

**Justin:**

I would rather feed you the bread and hold the kid in the other hand. And let you just focus on the poppies.

**Sydnee:**

Just focus. [laughing]

**Justin:**

You just get, get serious—

**Sydnee:**

Is this a fantasy of yours we're getting into now?

**Justin:**

Is this a... this is probably a private space type of activity, right? I would imagine.

**Sydnee:**

Well, I'm assuming. Yeah. I'm assuming this is kind of something you'd wanna do at home.

**Justin:**

What... warm the bones of a swordfish in oil and rub her back with it.

**Sydnee:**

I think that's just a great excuse for a back massage.

**Justin:**

"Oh, you know what would help, hun? You know what would be great for me? What would really get the milk flowing? Uh, a back massage. Wait no, I mean—"

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

"Do we have any swordfish bones? Perfect. What's, what's over there in that corner? What do we have for dinner? Ah, swordfish? Yeah, that's perfect. That's what I need."

**Sydnee:**

I think that's where that came from.

**Justin:**

Exactly.

**Sydnee:**

I think the first woman to... it was just that's what they cooked that night.

**Justin:**

Yeah, she just happened to have swordfish lying around.

**Sydnee:**

It's a fancy household.

**Justin:**

It is nice.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know that you're supposed to eat a lot of swordfish when you're pregnant though.

**Justin:**

Yeah, like that—

**Sydnee:**

Well, but I guess you've already delivered at this point.

**Justin:**

So, this is a world that you've imagined, where we think rubbing swordfish oil on your back will help with lactation.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

But we also are like, super keen on mercury levels and their effect on lactating women. Is that... is that what... where we're at?

**Sydnee:**

I guess at that point, you're right. We don't have to worry so much. She's not pregnant anymore. So.

**Justin:**

We're lucky women back then couldn't eat cigarettes. Because that's what they would be eating exclusively. They wouldn't know anything.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] The, the Greeks also believed in supplementing, uh, breastfeeding with, uh, wine and honey.

**Justin:**

Sounds nice.

**Sydnee:**

You know, just, uh, if your baby wasn't gaining enough weight, or just for fun.

**Justin:**

Now, honey's really bad for babies though, right?

**Sydnee:**

Yes. You're not supposed to give them honey because of botulism.

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

So, under a year.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

The possibility. Not that all honey has botulism, necessarily, but...

**Justin:**

Except surprise, it does.

**Sydnee:**

No. [laughing] We just—

**Justin:**

Terror in the cupboard.

**Sydnee:**

Here, here we have talked up honey for so long, and now we just destroyed it just like that.

**Justin:**

What sweetener in your cupboard is trying to kill you? More at 11:00.

**Sydnee:**

Um—

**Justin:**

It's honey, Syd. I didn't want you to have to wait.

**Sydnee:**

The... [laughing] Uh, the thing is, that as long as we have been breastfeeding our own children, you know, there have been, like I said, women who've had trouble with this. So, we've had to ask for help from other women.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

To breastfeed our children. Uh, so wet nurses, who are, you know, women whose job it is, you hire them to, you know, breastfeed your child if you can't, have been around since like, 2,000 BC.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and those were, again, mainly not for convenience, but for women who couldn't breastfeed or for families who, you know, the mother died in childbirth and so they would hire somebody to breastfeed the baby.

**Justin:**

Wh— uh, can I ask a stupid question about this?

**Sydnee:**

Sure.

**Justin:**

How do you keep like, that going?

**Sydnee:**

These are women who recently had children of their own.

**Justin:**

Okay. So, it's not a long-term career?

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

This is real—this is really contract work.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, if you keep... you can keep the milk going once you've had a baby and you start lactating, you can keep it going for quite a long time.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Which is why some moms breastfeed for years.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, but no. It's not like you had your kid eight years ago and you can become a wet nurse today.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

No. Um, you know, there, there were also alternatives for bottle feeding that far back. Uh, for... if let's say that the mom passed away and you couldn't afford maybe a wet nurse, because you did have to pay them, unless you had slaves, which, you know, you probably had to be rich to have slaves too. Uh, you could use terracotta pots that they used, kind... they looked kind of like coffee or tea pots.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And just kind of dump stuff in the baby's mouth.



**Justin:**

Now, let me ask another dumb question, if you'll permit it. I imagine that this time period, it was a... it was a pretty savage time, pretty— fairly mercenary, I think.

**Sydnee:**

Mm-hmm.

**Justin:**

I don't think you had a lot of like, super engaged single dads. Like, who is making sure these babies got fed?

**Sydnee:**

Well, I mean, in some cases, you know, you're hoping in, in like, um, tribal scenarios, you know, in close-knit, small communities, than it would be the whole village's kind of job—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... to feed the baby. Um, in larger societies, the Romans used to do this. Actually, uh, they would... Roman royalty would find abandoned children. So, exactly what you're saying. The single dad or whoever was left and the family may not have cared enough to bother once the mom passed away. Um, but they would—

**Justin:**

Let's be honest, though. Knowing dads, he probably just forget him.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

The went to the park and—

**Sydnee:**

They sp— [laughing] They specifically said that these were babies found in rubbish piles, in what I read.

**Justin:**

Where else were they supposed to take the kids to play, Sydnee?

**Sydnee:**

I don't—

**Justin:**

They didn't have anything back then. They didn't have jungle gyms.

**Sydnee:**

I think it... I think it's weird that you don't care enough about your kid that you're not gonna raise them, you're gonna abandon them, but you do wanna make sure and abandon them in the appropriate place.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

But the... but Roman royalty would go—

**Justin:**

Maybe they'd start off they were taking an ironic Instagram. "Ah, taking out the trash," get it? And then they forgot the kid was there. Maybe?

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] I don't... maybe.

**Justin:**

It's possible.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, Instagram is very popular.

**Justin:**

Back then.

**Sydnee:**

Um, but usually this was just to increase their pool of slaves. So, the royalty would go collect this abandoned children.

**Justin:**

Cool.

**Sydnee:**

Which sounds like a really swell thing for them to do, but it was really just they would force their already enslaved wet nurses to feed these babies so that then they could increase their slave numbers.

**Justin:**

Wonderful. Okay. Great.

**Sydnee:**

Um, there... because the use of wet nurses was known, even though it was not necessarily popular, you know, most women still fed their own children, uh, Serranus, who we've referenced before, in Roman times, actually wrote about a way to check for the quality of breast milk. So, if you, you know, you want a wet nurse, but you wanna hire the very best, you're gonna check out—

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

... the product first.

**Justin:**

Oh, yeah. You should be able to stand a spoon up in it. That's what they say.

**Sydnee:**

N—no. That would not be breast milk. [laughing]

**Justin:**

That would be... I'm sorry. That's the best milkshake.

**Sydnee:**

No, what you're supposed to do is you take a drop of breast milk and you put it on your fingernail.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And if you move your finger around a little bit, it... the breast milk should not be so thin as to spread over the entire nail.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Because that's too thin. On the flip side, if you turn your finger over, it should not be so thick that it just clings to the nail.

**Justin:**

That's how you could tell.

**Sydnee:**

So, somewhere in between that. [laughing]

**Justin:**

Just the right viscosity.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. They used this test for 1,500 years.

**Justin:**

Holy crap. At no point do they just switch to the taste test? Mouth feel?

**Sydnee:**

Uh—

**Justin:**

Thirst quenachability? Nothing?

**Sydnee:**

You know, I'm sure there was somebody who tried to do that.

**Justin:**

Had to be some weird beard trying to get that going.

**Sydnee:**

They also had—

**Justin:**

"I have a new system."

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

"Let me get a taste."

"What?"

"That's the whole system. Let me get a taste."

**Sydnee:**

That's like, some weird fetish.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Or just thirsty. I don't know. What'd they have to drink back then? They were tired of water and wine.

**Sydnee:**

You're tired of wine so you turn to breast milk?

**Justin:**

Or breast milk mixed with wine?

**Sydnee:**

I'm not... I mean, I'm not arguing the nutritional properties, but.

**Justin:**

Breast milk mixed with wine is how Bartles & Jaymes was invented.

[laughing]

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

Did you know that? That's true.

**Sydnee:**

And sugar.

**Justin:**

And sugar.

**Sydnee:**

And all the sugar.

**Justin:**

And all the sugar.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, the, the Romans also believed that you need to keep your wet nurses working. Um, if you me— I mean, if you're gonna hire them to feed babies, like they, they're not gonna spend all their time feeding babies. So, you, you're gonna do something else with them.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

They just wanna get their money's worth.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

So, they should engage in like, upper body labor [laughing] Because it... their excuse was, "Well, it will really keep the milk flowing if you're like, moving those arms," I guess using them like, kind of like a pump. [laughing]

**Justin:**

Sure. Yeah, that's how humans work.

**Sydnee:**

So, so you would—

**Justin:**

That, that, that portrays a, a good, good substantive, uh, understanding of our various systems. "We're like a pump."

**Sydnee:**

Like a pump to do some grinding and some weaving. And then—

**Justin:**

Crank us up.

**Sydnee:**

Um, in the Middle Ages, of course, because everything was messed up, we thought that, um, mother's milk had magical properties.

**Justin:**

Oh, naturally.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, we thought it could pass along wisdom.

**Justin:**

Middle Ages is when everybody got dumber for a little while.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] There was a mythical being named Philosophia-Sapientia—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... who passed on wisdom to philosophers by nursing them at her wise teats.  
[laughing]

**Justin:**

I mean, that... okay.

**Sydnee:**

No, there wasn't. But this was a commonly held—

**Justin:**

That's what they told their wives.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

"Me? I was, um, oh, would you believe..."

**Sydnee:**

It was... it was also at this time that they started thinking that, uh, there was a lot more passed on to the child other than just milk when you breastfed. That, uh, the child could actually take on some of the characteristics of whoever was breastfeeding them. So, you really had to be careful about your wet nurses.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and this actually led a lot more women to try to feed their own children and move away from wet nurses if possible, uh, because you know, you didn't know—

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

... uh, what kind of, I mean, attitude, temperament, how smart this woman was, what kind of physical imperfections she might have.

**Justin:**

What if she— what if she really liked James Taylor? Now you have to live with that. Enjoy your child.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] Now your baby loves James Taylor forever.

**Justin:**

Now your baby loves James Taylor forever and that's on you.

**Sydnee:**

No. And Justin can't stand you.

**Justin:**

Ugh.

**Sydnee:**

What is your hate on for James Taylor?



**Justin:**

I don't wanna talk about James Taylor on my podcast. This is my podcast.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

I don't wanna have to give him any space. He's already, uh, infiltrated the entire popular conscious of an entire Baby Boomer generation. He doesn't get to hold sway here, too.

**Sydnee:**

I know he tainted Carol King for you.

**Justin:**

He tainted everything he touches. He's the anti-Midas.

**Sydnee:**

All right, well this podcast will be a James Taylor-less universe just for you.

**Justin:**

Okay. Thank you.

**Sydnee:**

Um, the one particular idea that persisted was that women with red hair should not be chosen to breastfeed your baby. [laughing] I guess if you have red hair, you should breastfeed your kid because it's, I don't know, maybe they will too. But if you're picking a... if you're picking a wet nurse, don't pick a redhead. Because redheads were thought to have hot temperaments.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And you don't wanna pass that on to your child. Um, if babies did bottle feed in this era, which was rare, but if they did, they used a perforated cow's horn.

**Justin:**

How odd. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Sure, yeah not.

**Sydnee:**

Hmm, that's... yeah.

**Justin:**

I don't know. Cows have milk. Makes sense.

**Sydnee:**

You can kind of picture that. You can look up pictures of these online if you want to. But it, it is. It's just a big giant cow's horn with like a, a little like, plu— uh, well, it's not plastic. But a little spout type thing, or rag tied to the end of it that the baby can suck on.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Huh.

**Sydnee:**

And, um, in the 18th century, there was more and more of a move towards women nursing their own children. And you see this wax and wane throughout time.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

That there are time periods where it is very fashionable to nurse your own children, and then there are time periods where there are... where it's kind of like a backlash. Like, "Ugh, I'm too important. I'm too rich. Whatever. I don't have time for that. Somebody else nurse my kid." Um, they... in the 18th century, they believed that infant mortality was linked to the use of wet nurses.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and so they began to... and, uh, you know, it's, it's possible, depending on what diseases and things were rampant that maybe that was contributing at times. But I don't think widespread. Um, Linnaeus even wrote about, uh, wet nurses very negatively, saying that they, "Ate too much fat, they drank too much alcohol, and they all had VD." So [laughing]

**Justin:**

That's a very broad brush, Linnaeus. I have to say.

**Sydnee:**

I think so.

**Justin:**

I'm sure there were a lot of very decent wet nurses.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, there certainly were. But this did lead to... there were some laws passed in different parts of Europe that actually forced women to breastfeed their own children.

**Justin:**

See, that is... I don't like that either. That seems like an—

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

... overstep of the government's power.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing] I agree completely. I am all for breastfeeding. But I, I don't wanna do it because the government makes me.

**Justin:**

There's nothing that makes milk taste sweeter than when it's court-mandated. [laughing]

**Sydnee:**

Why, why, Justin, can you explain to me, why do men get off on writing laws about my private parts?

**Justin:**

Justin stood, silent, staring in the distance. Knowing that if he waited long enough and was quiet, the moment would pass and Sydnee would continue with the podcast.

**Sydnee:**

All right, fine. Let's talk about the bubby pot.

**Justin:**

I like that.

**Sydnee:**

This was about the same time that Hugh Smith in London, invented the pewter bubby pot.

**Justin:**

I should clarify, earlier, the reason I didn't answer was out of fear. Just to be clear.

**Sydnee:**

Right.

**Justin:**

Because there's really no—

**Sydnee:**

I know you agree with me.

**Justin:**

Thanks, okay. I didn't k— I just wanted to make that clear. I didn't want an— to think, "Oh, there she is again." Because that's not my—

**Sydnee:**

Stop legislating my mammary glands.

**Justin:**

Mine too.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so the bu— [laughing] The bubby pot. Nobody's legislating your mammary glands. What?

**Justin:**

Sorry, bubbly pot? Sorry, you're saying bubbly pot?

**Sydnee:**

So, okay. It was kind of like a coffee pot, um, except for over the spout, at the end, is like a little knob. Like, a heart-shaped knob.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And it has holes in it. And that's what the baby kind of sucks on. But you wanna put like, a rag over that first. Because you can imagine that's kind of uncomfortable.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

And you could fill it with whatever, whatever you were feeding your baby. And all through this time period I should mention, I don't think I've said this. Um, animal milk was an alternative if you had it.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, but you di— you couldn't refrigerate things. So, you didn't always have a fresh supply of animal milk available. Especially if you lived in an urban area. So—

**Justin:**

Or your cow had just had a baby. Didn't have enough to go around.

**Sydnee:**

Although you probably would preferentially feed your child over the baby cow.

**Justin:**

Maybe.

**Sydnee:**

Maybe. I don't know. I don't know. Those were weird times.

**Justin:**

It's kind of like robbing Peter and pay Paul, though. Because then your baby doesn't have steak later. So, I don't know.

**Sydnee:**

You [laughing], you could also feed your baby, at the time it was popular, um, pap.

**Justin:**

Paps?

**Sydnee:**

Pap.

**Justin:**

Pabst?

**Sydnee:**

Not Pabst. Pap.

**Justin:**

What's pap?

**Sydnee:**

You don't have a hipster baby.

**Justin:**

Yet.

**Sydnee:**

No, this, uh, pap was a mixture of... it was like, bread that you soaked in water or milk until it got really like, you know, mushy.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So, you could feed them that.

**Justin:**

Pap is also, uh, that makes sense actually, because I know pot... pap as a... as a slang term for something that's just kind of like—

**Sydnee:**

Filler.

**Justin:**

... filler, milquetoast—

**Sydnee:**

No. Yeah, nothing—

**Justin:**

Yeah. Yeah. Has no real substance—

**Sydnee:**

Substance or value. Yep. Yep.

**Justin:**

... or value, yeah, right.

**Sydnee:**

And that's probably where that comes from.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

There was also panada. Which was, um, a term for cereal that was cooked in broth.

**Justin:**

Ugh, God.

**Sydnee:**

There were all kinds of weird mixtures during this time period of milk and beef broth and melted butter that you could feed your baby, um, if you thought that they weren't getting enough milk, or if there was a problem with breastfeeding, or you didn't have a wet nurse, or whatever. Um, they had another thing to feed your baby with called a pap boat.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and you can find there's some vessels where you just kind of pour the pap into the baby's mouth. But a lot of them would come with a spoon with a hollow stem. And you would get some of the pap in the spoon and then blow through the stem to kind of like, shoot the pap straight down your baby's throat.

**Justin:**

Nice.

**Sydnee:**

Does not seem like a good plan to me.

**Justin:**

No, "Come and drink from the fire hose, baby."

**Sydnee:**

And see—

**Justin:**

Oh, PS, I got a little something special in there for you. They're called germs. I don't know what those are yet, they haven't been invited. But trust me, they're in there."

**Sydnee:**

"I'm gonna... [laughing] I'm gonna shotgun with pap down your throat, baby."

**Justin:**

"Hey, baby."

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

"Hey, baby. Come slam this. Baby, come slam with grain and broth. Come on, we're gonna... me and Skylar are gonna come crush it. Baby!"

**Sydnee:**



[laughing] Um, as you... as you already kind of hinted at, the one thing that the pap boat and the, the bubby pot and all of these invents were really great for was growing bacteria.

**Justin:**

Yeah, right.

**Sydnee:**

And they were very difficult to clean. So, as you can imagine, this was really bad for baby.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And it was seen as, you know, the last kind of ditch alternative. These were not preferred—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... in any... by any stretch. Um, and as I said, animal milk was still an alternative if you lived in more of a rural area. And if you maybe couldn't store it or you didn't have some sort of device to feed it to your baby, you could just let the baby get it straight from the source.

**Justin:**

From the goat source.

**Sydnee:**

From the goat source.

**Justin:**

Oh, no. Oh, baby. How did your head get kicked, baby? What were you doing in there?

**Sydnee:**

This became very popular in France with goats, um, when the syphilis epidemic hit, because all the wet nurses had syphilis, so you didn't want them feeding your baby while they had syphilis, so—

**Justin:**

Sounds like the—

**Sydnee:**

... let them go nurse on the goat.

**Justin:**

Sounds like the open scenes of like, the weirdest Disney movie ever.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

Like, the child gets very attached to it and then it gets killed by a hunter. And it's sort of like Tarzan, but with goats instead of monkeys. Hey, Syd—

**Sydnee:**

I think that should be the next... the next big Disney movie. They've caused enough of an uproar with Frozen. Let's just keep on this.

**Justin:**

Just, yeah, keep on trucking. Syd, that should cover the 18th century I guess. Uh, why don't you hit me with that 19th century.

**Sydnee:**

Well, Justin, I would love to do that for you, but unfortunately, you're behind again on your payments.

**Justin:**

Ugh, okay. Well, let's head to the billing department.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Justin:**

Okay. 19th century. Hit me.

**Sydnee:**

All right, so in 19th century, um, that's when we start to see, uh, more and more of the upper classes in Europe and throughout the US starting to utilize

a wet nurse, even when they don't have to. Um, a lot of royal families did this, because they were expected to have so many children.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And, uh, just it's, it's harder to get pregnant when you're breastfeeding. It is a myth that you can't get pregnant when you're breastfeeding. You can. But it's harder. And so, it was easier for these—

**Justin:**

Really?

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

So it was easier for these royal women to have their baby, pass it off to their wet nurse and kind of get started on making the next one ASAP.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Um, this became popular among other rich people, thinking like, "Well, I'm too good to nurse my baby too." Um—

**Justin:**

Then it becomes fashionable, and then everybody's trying to.

**Sydnee:**

Right.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Then everybody wants to pass their baby off to a wet nurse. Uh, formula was still seen as a last resort. And it was considered possibly dangerous. And this was largely, again, because of just refrigeration and, you know—

**Justin:**

I'm surprised they even had formula. It just seems like it would be like, dust mixed with water. Because they were all idiots.

**Sydnee:**

Well, and I should say that we, we do say during this century, the introduction of something that was actually called formula and was a mixture of things other than just milk. Um, but a lot of what we're referring to as formula is milk with all that stuff, I mean, that I mentioned before that was still popular, like melted butter.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Although we say that, but like, I have patients who feed their babies gravy, so I don't know that I can say much.

**Justin:**

In the bottle?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, I'm—

**Justin:**

Probably not.

**Sydnee:**

I think they just use like, a spoon or a cup.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

That's too bad. I'd love a bottle of gravy.

**Sydnee:**

Um, but in this century, we find the introduction of better bottles. Uh, rubber nipples were invented in India.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and that made it much, much easier to feed your baby. And—

**Justin:**

Shout out.

**Sydnee:**

... and these were also products that were easier to clean. That was a big thing. Um, improved formula. So, we started to actually see, actually, things like powder formulas and stuff were introduced.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And then finally, refrigeration was a big... was a big part of that. That's actually, if you've ever heard the myth that you're not supposed to wean your baby in the summer, that's where this comes from.

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

Because, uh, you couldn't, you know, reliably refrigerate stuff in the summer before then. So, you wouldn't wanna take your baby off the breast in summer, because then whatever you fed it could be spoiled.

**Justin:**

Oh. Gosh.

**Sydnee:**

Um, but as, as formula became safer, the perspective on breastfeeding actually became more and more negative.

**Justin:**

I wonder why that... just... is it just because it... is it sort of like hardwood floors got for a while? It just... it, it's natural and sort of untooled with? Un—un-shaped by man? And as such it's, it is, uh, inferior.

**Sydnee:**

That's, that's actually pretty close to what it was. It was very much a time when science and innovation was being prized. And as we moved into like, the 1900s, you know, we're, we're talking about people who wanted the latest, the newest, the best, um, stuff that was manufactured in a lab and not stuff that you could get at home.

Um, and so, as a result, everybody was switching to formula, everybody was switching to bottle-feeding. Um, what this was coupled with, uh, this time period, especially in the early 1900s when it was thought that you could easily over-coddle your infant. And so, the... all that bonding that you do when you breastfeed was actually seen as a negative thing.

**Justin:**

Oh, because they get to reliant. Can cut the apron strings, as it were.

**Sydnee:**

Right. You'll make your... you'll make weak children.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and Freud made it a lot worse when he told everybody, "You know, I think babies get sexual pleasure from breastfeeding."

**Justin:**

Oh, good job, Freud. What can't you ruin?

**Sydnee:**

So, [laughing] a lot of women got pretty freaked out. Thought that maybe they were hurting their infants, or at the very least, it was kind of gross.

**Justin:**

Well, yeah, because it like... Freud turned like, everybody's baby into like, weird sexual perverts latched onto their nipples. You creep.

**Sydnee:**

And, uh, and as you can see, this, you know, throughout this time period, breastfeeding just fell to, to very little. I mean, it was something that you were... you were supposed to do if you couldn't afford anything else. So, it was seen as something that you only did if you were poor, or if you were just uneducated and didn't know that you should either go get a wet nurse or even safer, go get formula.

**Justin:**

Huh.

**Sydnee:**

This actually peaked in the 1950s. That's how... that's how late we're talking.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, that this attitude where, where less than half of the population was breastfeeding and, um, and it was very much frowned upon. A lot of women thought it was gross.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, this changed again as, as I said. There are waves of this throughout history. This changed again in the '60s, we began to see. And I think it probably makes sense to a lot of people. Kind of that return to the earth, natural lifestyle kind of thing.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Sure, sure, sure. Free spirits. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. And so you begin to see breastfeeding come back. Um, it was difficult and still is to this day, and I thought this was really interesting. Um, part of the... part of the barriers to women breastfeeding today is that a lot of the... our previous generations didn't.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So, it can be hard for you to look to your moms or grandmas to give you advice, because so many of them didn't.

**Justin:**

We... so we lost a lot of sort of institutional knowledge.

**Sydnee:**

Right. I mean, breastfeeding was really something that, um, all of the kind of trials and tribulations of it were things that women just passed down to each other through the generations. Except for then it fell off for so long, we lost a lot of that knowledge. Um, and then, uh, one big thing that they're still fighting is direct to consumer advertising of formula. Began in the 80s and it led a lot of people to believe that that was better. That formula was better than breast milk.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, this actually had a big impact not just in the US, but in developing countries, where it can be deadly for a woman to think breastfeeding is bad. Because formula's in short supply.

**Justin:**

Oh, wow.

**Sydnee:**

So, so the, uh, there are things that are helping now. Of course, breastfeeding is again on the rise.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, more and more women are doing it. There's more education. There are things like baby-friendly hospitals and La Leche League. And there's tons of



resources if you wanna know about breastfeeding and why you should, because you should. Breast is best.

**Justin:**

Breast is best. So, Syd, uh, rapid fire. I know you got some myths. Why don't you hit me with them?

**Sydnee:**

So, just like good info was passed down from mothers to daughters for generations about breastfeeding, there are also a lot of wacky ideas that have persisted.

**Justin:**

Hit me. Ready.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. So, one, drinking cow's milk will help you make human milk.

**Justin:**

Incorrect.

**Sydnee:**

No. Absolutely not. Uh, dark beer will help you make milk.

**Justin:**

Oh yeah?

**Sydnee:**

Unfortunately, no. [laughing]

**Justin:**

No. Sadly not. [laughing]

**Sydnee:**

Uh, some things to eat. Peanuts, oatmeal, and fried pies.

**Justin:**

That... but that does not—

**Sydnee:**

No. I mean, if you want to—

**Justin:**

Sure, go nuts.

**Sydnee:**

... but it does not make breast milk. Uh, things not to eat. Onions, cabbage, spicy foods, and fruit juice. No. Eat those if you want to. Doesn't matter. It's not gonna make your baby gassy. There you go. A lot of people still think that. Eating gassy... eating foods that make you gassy does not make your baby gassy.

**Justin:**

Interesting.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, chocolate has been co— uh, has been known to cause either constipation or diarrhea, depending on whose mom you ask.

**Justin:**

In the baby?

**Sydnee:**

In the baby.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And that is not true.

**Justin:**

But no. Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, there are a lot of, um, kind of myths that surround around treating the woman like a cow.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

If it makes a cow produce milk, then it probably will make a woman. So, have her eat alfalfa. Only if she wants to. [laughing] And don't let her eat apples, because those are notorious for, I guess, making cows not produce milk.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

This is all a myth.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, don't breastfeed after you have seen a death.

**Justin:**

[laughing]

**Sydnee:**

You could probably figure out that that's not true. [laughing]

**Justin:**

Spooked. Too spooked to lactate.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, don't rock the baby while you are breastfeeding, because you'll shake up your milk. [laughing]

**Justin:**

Okay, come on.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, seriously. These are... these are—

**Justin:**

Come on, old-timey people.

**Sydnee:**

... things that people tell you. Uh, don't touch cold things, it'll make your milk too cold.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Like frozen meat. Don't handle frozen... nope, that's not true.

**Justin:**

Maybe baby likes that from time to time. Mix it up a little bit. "Oh, Mom. Chilly. Nice."

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

"Very refreshing."

**Sydnee:**

Uh, don't get scared, nervous, angry, or sexually aroused, or your milk will sour.

**Justin:**

How am I supposed to not be scared? Freud just told me there's a... there's a weird little peeping Tom latched onto my breast.

**Sydnee:**

No, it's cool. You can get scared or sexually aroused, or both if that's your thing.

**Justin:**

Excellent.

**Sydnee:**

It will not sour your milk

**Justin:**

Excellent.

**Sydnee:**

And there, depending on who you ask, after one month, three months, six months, one year, there's a myth that your milk will turn to water.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

This is not true.

**Justin:**

It seems easy to troubleshoot that one, honestly, old-timey people.

**Sydnee:**

Again, there's ton of information on breastfeeding. Um, you should do it, uh, if you can. Obviously, there are women who can't and there is, uh, there are lots of, thankfully, now, healthy, safe alternatives in formula products, um, that if you have to use, you can. And you shouldn't feel bad about it if you do. Because there's a lot of guilt associated with that, and moms shouldn't feel bad about it. Um, but if you can breastfeed, breast is breas— breast, breast is—

**Justin:**

Breast is breast.

**Sydnee:**

... bre— breast is... breast is breast. [laughing] From a doctor, breast is best.

**Justin:**

Take it. Uh, thank you so much for listening to our program. Sydnee, I see you got a pile of stuff over there. What do you... what do you got?

**Sydnee:**

Well, we got a few people to thank this week, Justin.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, who sent us some lovely little presents. Uh, first of all, Joshua, Danielle, and Coraline. And we have an adorable little picture here of Coraline.

**Justin:**

She is a cutie.

**Sydnee:**

Um, they sent us a whole list of things they have learned. They were quick to say, this is not advice. These are just things they have learned from having a baby. And also sent us a really cool book called Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs, that I've already read and laughed at.

**Justin:**

Yeah, it was very funny.

**Sydnee:**

So, thank you, guys. And Coraline, you're adorable. We also got, from Amanda and Kyra, Amanda is also known as Captain Crochet.

**Justin:**

Give me that twitter handle, Syd. Spell it for me.

**Sydnee:**

Which I appreciate. Let's see. Here let me hand it to you.

**Justin:**

Uh, wow. You can... wow. Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Which one is the Twitter one?

**Justin:**

[laughing] C-A-P-P-N-C-R-O-C-H-E-T.

**Sydnee:**

So [laughing]—

**Justin:**

Capp'n Crochet.

**Sydnee:**

There's a lot of information. I couldn't... I couldn't figure it out fast enough.

**Justin:**

It's all right, Syd.

**Sydnee:**

Um—

**Justin:**

I just thought you couldn't read it. I was getting so sad.

**Sydnee:**

No. I wasn't.

**Justin:**

Baby's drinking your eyeballs.

**Sydnee:**

I couldn't tell. I was looking at it. There was a Tumblr, and there was a Twitter and a Facebook.

**Justin:**

Robbing your eyesight.

**Sydnee:**

And I was looking at... I got overwhelmed.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

Anyway, I was... I was also overwhelmed at the beautiful present she sent us.

**Justin:**

Yeah, it's beaut— it's a cross—

**Sydnee:**

Which is a—

**Justin:**

It's a... not cross-stitch. It's—

**Sydnee:**

... a crocheted blanket.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And an adorable little crocheted frog.

**Justin:**

We may have been using the blanket. I may have accidentally fallen asleep downstairs. So, thank you for that.

**Sydnee:**

It made me feel very safe and loved. Thank you.

**Justin:**

Yes. It's wonderful.

**Sydnee:**

Thank you. Um, and last but not least, I wanna thank, uh, Susanna Roundtree, who sent, um... I mean, they're for me, but you can share them if you want to, who sent me a whole bunch of Archie comic books. And, uh—

**Justin:**

She works for Archie. For Archie Co, right?

**Sydnee:**

Yes. She worked for Archie Comics. And I love Archie comics. And she sent me a whole bunch of them, including Archie Meets Kiss, which I've always wanted to read and never have gotten to. So, thank you so much.

**Justin:**

Thank you, Archies. Thank you, everybody. If you wanna send us something, I mean, don't feel like you have to.

**Sydnee:**

[laughing]

**Justin:**

If you wanna send us something it's, uh, Sawbones PO Box 54, Huntington, West Virginia, 25706. Don't feel like you have to. It's just very... it's very nice when you do. It's very sweet of you. Thank you.

**Sydnee:**

It made me... it made me feel really good today.



**Justin:**

Thank you for The Taxpayers for little us their song Medicines, for our intro and outro. Thank you to the Maximum Fun Network for having us on, uh, as always. There's tons of great programs for you to listen to. Jordan, Jesse, Go!, Stop Podcasting Yourself, Judge John Hodgeman... Uh, uh, uh, The Goose Down. Lady the Lady. Oh No, Ross and Carrie!

**Sydnee:**

My Brother, My Brother, and Me.

**Justin:**

Thank you so much. I could go on. There's, there's a ton of great shows. Maximumfun.org.

And hey, if you, uh, don't have plans this July, uh, go to [boatparty.biz](http://boatparty.biz) and take the cruise of your life. Max Fun is putting on, uh, an amazing music and comedy cruise. The Atlantic Ocean Comedy and Music Festival. Um, and they've got rooms available and it's gonna be an amazing time. And you should definitely get there. They've got a ton of great talent and, uh, musicians and fun and friendship. And it... seriously, it'll be the best time of your life, with some surprisingly affordable cabins.

So, go to [boatparty.biz](http://boatparty.biz). Uh, do that. Uh, go to [simple.com/sawbones](http://simple.com/sawbones). Uh, share the show with somebody you love. [Sawbonesshow.com](http://Sawbonesshow.com) is our web address. And you can share, uh, rate us on iTunes and review us there. That means the world to us. And—

**Sydnee:**

And suggest topics to us anytime on Twitter.

**Justin:**

Yeah. And you can email us. [Sawbones@maximumfun.org](mailto:Sawbones@maximumfun.org). And that's gonna do it for us, uh, until next Tuesday. I'm Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org.  
Comedy and culture.  
Artist owned.  
Audience supported.