

Sawbones 476: The Intimate Side of a Woman's Life

Published on October 31, 2023
Listen here on themcelroy.family

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'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: Sydnee, I'm surprised by your lack of a computer, because usually that is an iconic image for me, personally, is sitting across from the table, and you've got the computer up, and you're ready to just podcast your butt off.

Sydnee: I know, and I just have all my stickers on it. I feel like that's, like, I have all my statements right there.

Justin: Got it all...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. No, I, well, we're doing something a little different. I mean, not really that different. It's the same old, like, I'm talking about old medicine stuff. But, as I've talked about on the show before, our listeners are very kind to send me books occasionally.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Especially old medical books, which I really love, because one, they make great material for research and everything for the show we do, but two, sometimes it's so of a time...

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: ... That what is in it tells you more about—

Justin: The time.

Sydnee: You know what I mean?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... Than the information itself. We received this book recently from one of our listeners, Olivia. Thank you, Olivia.

Justin: Thank you, Olivia.

Sydnee: I was very excited to review *The Intimate Side of a Woman's Life*, by Leona W. Chalmers. This is an older medical text? [higher in pitch] Medical?

Justin: [high pitched] Yeah?

Sydnee: [high pitched] Medical?

Justin: Medicine—medical, yeah.

Sydnee: It is—it was first printed in 1937.

Justin: Okay, so...

Sydnee: Last printed in 1942. So...

Justin: And just dried up after that, presumably.

Sydnee: Well, what I think that it represents—okay, this is, I want to go through some of the greatest hits from this book.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Because I think it's an interesting intersection of, like, it's kind of feminist for the time.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: In the sense that there's very much a message from this author, Leona, that we don't teach women about sex. They don't know enough about their bodies, they don't know enough about, like, what might be expected of them. And I mean this is very much framed as, like, first of all, when she says women, Leona means cis women. That is who she's aiming this book at.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And secondly, she is writing to them in anticipation of what they may go through once they're married to a cis man, and what those marital relations were—so this is all very much through a...

Justin: It is of a time.

Sydnee: Yes. Right. Like, all these words that—it is a very heteronormative kind of experience that Leona is assuming for women. And she is informing them, "Here is what you will expect, because your moms might not tell you."

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Which is...

Justin: Or they may just, they may just slide this book to you across the table, and then sprint out of the room.

Sydnee: It's, you know, it's trying to avoid a Bridgerton situation.

Justin: Hey y'all. The best comedy of that year was that one episode of Bridgerton where the lady didn't realize how it all works.

Sydnee: [laughs] I know. Well...

Justin: If only Sawbones had been there.

Sydnee: But see, that's—it's, like, sad because, I mean, we have to assume that for some period of time that was true, that people were not properly informed.

Justin: Not privy to the secret of the ooze, if you will

Sydnee: [a little disgusted] No... Okay. Okay. Anyway, Leona does not want that to happen.

Justin: Good for her. I bet.

Sydnee: She wants—[laughs] I mean, she starts off saying, like, "Ignorance isn't bliss. You need to know about this stuff, and, like, dudes know. Why don't you?" Now, the problem, though, is that, like, as much as I appreciate that message. It is very much filtered through a lens of the 1930s.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: So, one: some of the medical advice is...

Sydnee and Justin: [in unison] Questionable.

Sydnee: At best.

Justin: But we didn't understand a lot of it, then. So you can't really blame us for that.

Sydnee: I have little tabs that I have—I read through the whole book and I made myself little notes on different pages.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like with—I didn't write in the book. It's too nice.

Justin: Too good?

Sydnee: It's too good. I didn't write in the book. I tore off little sheets of paper and wrote notes on them to tell me what each section was. This first one I have just says, "Yikes."

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So... What I appreciated—so we're getting just into the introduction. And let me give you some idea of what this book is about. Like, I told you it's about the intimate side of a woman's life.

Justin: But that could be anything.

Sydnee: And we go through—our sections are on female pelvic organs, displacement of the pelvic organs, constipation, menstrual pains, leucorrhoea, vaginal hygiene, women's problems, general body hygiene, and conclusion.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, there you go. There's all our kind of things. And we have some illustrations in here, which I will get into. Some of these are medical, like here's a microscopic drawing of trichomoniasis.

Justin: How do you—how do you see it?

Sydnee: Well, it's just a drawing.

Justin: So it's not a microscopic—

Sydnee: Somebody looked under—

Justin: So it's not a microscopic drawing, right?

Sydnee: Well, it's not—somebody looked under a microscope and drew a picture of what they saw, hon.

Justin: Ah, I got you now. I understand.

Sydnee: So it's like a circle with little squiggles in it, is what it is.

Justin: Ah, beautiful. That makes so much more sense.

Sydnee: See? There you go. See?

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: It's a circle. It's got squiggles.

Justin: Okay, I see what you're saying now.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's a petri dish. And then there are also some diagrams of some positions that women can be in for certain things.

Justin: Uh-oh.

Sydnee: Not sex.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: Not sex.

Justin: Euchre? Bridge? [laughs] First chair? Second chair violin?

Sydnee: [laughing] So, in the introduction, she launches right into—this is why I'm telling you, this is a little bit subversive. I think there is a subversive streak that is hidden underneath a lot of, kind of...

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: You know, like, very binary, like, [in a deep, condescending voice] "This is what a woman is and this is what she must do with her life," kind of, like, of the time period.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Because in the very beginning, she says, "A famous actress once said, 'Vitality is personality.'" And then she's like, "Stop to consider the source of vitality. Where do we get vitality? Where is it from? Sex energy."

Justin: Sex energy?

Sydnee: The most powerful force in life, really, it might be said to be the controlling principle of life. Sex energy.

Justin: Sex energy.

Sydnee: So, Leona comes out and she's like, "Hey ladies, this book is about sex energy. And a woman who possesses abundant sex energy is usually ambitious, vivacious, intellectual, and magnetic."

Justin: [slyly] Oh... [laughs]

Sydnee: So, I mean, I do think there's already an aspect where, like, you read that and you're like, "Oh, well. I want to—I want to be those things. How can I get my sex energy up?"

Justin: There must be ways of increasing it artificially, right?

Sydnee: But I think the—well, artificially, it's more like maintenance. It's more like care and maintenance. Is what she—yeah...

Justin: Care and maintenance of your sex energy!

Sydnee: That's exactly what she's about to get into because what she says is, basically, you could have more sex energy. Except we have done a bad job of impressing upon women the fact that cleanliness is the fundamental law of health.

Justin: Oh. We've done a bad job of—we need to let them...

Sydnee: "The main canals of the female body..." [chuckles] "The vagina and the rectum are the two contaminating sources from which spring most of the troubles and diseases known to womankind."

Justin: Whoa.

Sydnee: So it's like a—it's a quick turn she takes. She's like, "Hey ladies, do you want to get your sex energy up?"

Justin: Yeah...

Sydnee: "Clean your canals!"

Justin: [bursts into laughter]

Sydnee: "Clean your canals, ladies!"

Justin: [laughing]

Sydnee: So that's—

Justin: Now there's a t-shirt. "Clean your canals."

Sydnee: So that's what the premise of this book is, is like, you could have great sex energy, which would make you like—people would like you more...

Justin: Friends...

Sydnee: It would make you more successful...

Justin: Better at poker.

Sydnee: Like, everything would be better in your life.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But, you've got—

Justin: This is the one-size fits all solution, but you got to clean them canals.

Sydnee: And she says things like, "Sex energy," I mean this is like in italics, "It may be the energy that rules the world." But then also in italics, "Woman's body is constructed to make her a breeder of disease."

Justin: Ew...

Sydnee: So you've got to stop that.

Justin: You've got to stop that by cleaning your canals.

Sydnee: So, we get into some, like, diagrams of the—of a vagina, and a uterus, and fallopian tubes, and ovaries. Which, again, handing this book out to people in the 1930s would probably be pretty radical.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, look, there's a diagram of what's all in there.

Justin: You can just get that—

Sydnee: Nothing graphic.

Justin: You can just get that from the parlor.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: And read it.

Sydnee: And, I mean, again, this would be very helpful if you had never—I mean, most laypeople probably wouldn't know this stuff, right?

Justin: That's true.

Sydnee: So you kind of know what's up in there.

Justin: This certainly was not being taught in school.

Sydnee: No. No. Now, I will say, from the jump, as we're looking at this diagram of a vagina and a uterus, a lot of what it's being couched in is, "You need to know this for douching." This is a theme through the whole book. Douching is kind of like, that's where we're going. That's the climax of this, is, "We're going to douche."

Justin: On *Amazing Discoveries*, when they set up the eggs always stick to the pan, the douching is the special pan that eggs never stick to, that you've been looking for.

Sydnee: That's the one. That's the one. We're going to get to the douche, and we're going to be very excited, and we have an extensive explanation of douching. And I will say, and I'll probably say this several more times, please don't douche. We don't, generally speaking—generally speaking, the idea, unless you have been specially instructed to—

Justin: Certain people have been taught to—told to by a physician.

Sydnee: Yes. By a physician. Unless you are in a specific situation where a physician has instructed you to do a certain type of vaginal cleansing routine, generally speaking, the vagina is a self-cleaning organism...

Justin: Yes, just don't do it.

Sydnee: Organism... organ. [Laughs]

Justin: Organism.

Sydnee: Not organism. Organ. Gosh, it's the book. The book is throwing me.

Justin: It's smart! It's too dang smart!

Sydnee: Did you say the D-word?

Justin: Dang.

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Justin: [giggles] Yeah, I self-censored, just for the people.

Sydnee: I like that—I highlighted this part because they talk about your balloon vagina.

Justin: Sorry?

Sydnee: So, there is a lot made in this book of the fact that the walls of the vagina are extremely elastic, and descends or dilates easily. I mean, that makes sense. It has to dilate to make way if you decide to have a kid, like a kid comes through there, so it makes sense.

And I just, like, it is readily understood, then why this organ, when not dilated or "ballooned" forms a mass of soft tiny folds and crevices. These crevices are very important to Leona, because all of these crevices within the walls of the vagina create a veritable breeding place for germs.

Justin: That's your problem, right there.

Sydnee: So there's your figure of your vagina with all the crevices.

Justin: The crevices—you can see here, the crevices. That's going to be your problem.

Sydnee: You can see the crevices. And the crevices come up a lot, again, since we're heading towards douching keeping the crevices clean. And understand that, because it distends, because it balloons, if you will, it's referred to as a balloon, multiple times, the vagina. You have to distend it when you're douching.

Justin: Mm...

Sydnee: To get into all the crevices. If you don't apply enough pressure, you know, you won't get those hard to reach places. [Laughs]

Justin: I like the way it's teasing it. It's like, "If only there was some sort of flowery liquid you can shove up there to get all the crevices. Oh well, nothing like that exists. Read on! You never know what twists I might have in store."

Sydnee: And what's interesting is, in the middle of this, like, this is just an intro to the pelvic organs still, we're still just in a place where they're like, "This is what's up in there." That's all Leona's telling us. She throws in this story, and she's like, "Here's an interesting little tale."

It's of a woman who, at 54, she went through, they called it a "change of life" or "aggravated climacteric phenomena," they mean menopause. [laughing]

They mean menopause. And she was a singer, a famous singer. And she lost her voice and lost her vision...

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: ... As a result of menopause, is what this claims. And that to treat her, they took a donor ovary and transplanted it under her abdominal wall.

Justin: Whoa.

Sydnee: And then her voice came back and her sight returned.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: And now she's doing great.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: And has absolutely no symptoms of the, what did I call it, the aggravated climacteric phenomena, whatsoever. So, it's wild because this is just kind of thrown in here and they're like, "So anyway, we implanted an ovary under the abdominal wall of this person and it all went fine."

Justin: No big deal.

Sydnee: There's no way that this is... There's no way this is the whole story. There's no way—you can't just randomly take organs from one person and put them in another and it works out fine without testing and matching, right? Like, we don't—we don't do that.

Justin: Eh, a broken clock's right twice a day, Syd, you know. [laughs]

Sydnee: But it's just thrown in there. She's like, "By the way, here's a little tale. Back to your balloon vagina."

Justin: Check this out!

Sydnee: So we've got some information on constipation. There's a whole chapter on constipation.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: Which, like, you know, this is all couched in like, "This is just for women. Just for the ladies."

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But like, it just continues. Humans have always been endlessly obsessed with...

Justin: B.M.s

Sydnee: Pooping. Yeah. With, like, pooping more, pooping better...

Justin: Pooping less.

Sydnee: Pooping less. Whatever.

Justin: Poop different! That's the American dream. [Sydnee laughs] Just to poop different than you do.

Sydnee: And we come out strong by quoting John Harvey Kellogg.

Justin: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, right up in the front of this, "Constipation has been called the curse of the American nation and it's perhaps responsible—"

Justin: "By me, John Harvey Kellogg, cereal pervert."

Sydnee: [laughs] "Perhaps responsible for more human misery and mental and moral disease than any other single cause." It causes more moral disease, is a...

Justin: Well, that makes perfect sense to me. You're constipated and you need a distraction. What do you do? You play the ponies and drink a little

rye. You know what I mean? That's the path to that sort of thing, is laced with constipation.

Sydnee: This is very much—and we've talked about this on the show before, because we've talked about Kellogg, and we've talked about pooping a lot on the show.

Justin: No argument here. We did.

Sydnee: [laughs] There was a time period—and this persists today. We've talked about this in some modern pseudoscience, that if you're not going regularly, and so your waste materials is sitting in your colon, the idea is that—and Leona likens it to, like, she says, "If your colon is the garbage can of the human body, imagine if garbage is left to collect in hot weather."

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: So, like, if you leave your trash cans out in the heat long enough, it's going to be funky, and so that's basically what she's saying is, like, if you're not pooping regularly and it's just sitting in your colon, it's going to create problems for you. It's going to make your whole body funky.

Justin: Funky.

Sydnee: But not just like, odor-wise. This isn't like an aesthetic problem, like it's going to make everything—your brain's going to be funky, your moral's going to be funky.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Everything about you will kind of...

Justin: It all goes through that system.

Sydnee: ... Turn into hot garbage. [laughing]

Justin: [wheezing] These ladies are playing a dangerous game.

Sydnee: And, like, what I kind of like is right from the beginning, she's like, "Now listen, primitive and semi-civilized man evacuates in a squatting position, as does the peasantry of civilized countries. These people are not troubled with constipation."

Justin: So she's coming hard for the Squatty Potty right out the gate.

Sydnee: She's coming—I mean, she's coming so hard for the Squatty Potty that... Here, Justin, is a diagram.

Justin: Oh my god. That's a Squatty Potty!

Sydnee and Justin: [in unison] It's a diagram...

Justin: ... Of the Squatty Potty.

Sydnee: Yeah. Right?

Justin: If you've never seen a Squatty Potty, it's a footstool that goes in front of your toilet. You're supposed to put your feet on it to get yourself in a squatting position. It's supposed to be biologically advantageous for evacuating your bowels.

Sydnee: Now, I would like you to, Justin, contemplate—this is a diagram of a woman, sitting on a toilet.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And she's got a little stool.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So that she can press her thighs up against her abdomen. That's what they keep saying: "Press your thighs to your abdomen."

Justin: Does hers have a little red light on it so you don't fall in the bathroom at night?

Sydnee: I don't think it had...

Justin: Because that is quite a feature of the Squatty Potty.

Sydnee: I don't think it had evolved to that point yet.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But what I think is interesting, and I'm going to show you some other diagrams from this book. This is why I think this is secretly subversive. First of all, it's a woman sitting on a toilet pooping.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: That is what we are ostensibly saying.

Justin: You could look right at it.

Sydnee: Also, she appears to be naked.

Justin: Yeah, it's scandalous. Now, she doesn't have eyes.

Sydnee: And she doesn't have eyes. But she is naked.

Justin: It's light on the features, I'll say.

Sydnee: I'm saying, this is a very specific taste, here, Leona.

Justin: Oh, you're saying this is like...

Sydnee: There's some other diagrams I'm going to show you.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I'm just—I'm suggesting...

Justin: Are they her diagrams?

Sydnee: I don't—You know what, I don't know who did the drawings, actually. No, that's a great question.

Oh no, wait. Netter? Hold on. Not the Netter. These cannot be from the Netter. Not this diagram—surely just the medical diagrams are from Netter. Anybody—okay, we all had a Netter anatomy...

Justin: We all did growing up. We remember.

Sydnee: But then, that was all the diagrams that I looked at to study anatomy in medical school, was the Netter. That's who drew it.

Justin: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: Surely, Netter didn't draw this person pooping.

Justin: Certainly not.

Sydnee: Oh my goodness, this may be—Okay, we're going to have to take a quick break, so I can figure out if Netter just drew the internal organ diagrams, or also drew pictures of people pooping.

Justin: Are you actually going to make me take a quick break?

Sydnee: Yeah, we got to go to the billing department.

Justin: Okay. Let's go. [wheezes]

[theme music]

[ad break]

Justin: Okay, any luck, Syd? Did you crack the case?

Sydnee: As far as—there is no one else credited with any of these diagrams, so I am here to report that yes, there are some anatomical diagrams that you would expect of Frank Netter.

Justin: Right

Sydnee: Like, that makes sense. Those are pictures similar to the ones in your anatomy textbook, if you had a Netter. But, I think that these diagrams of people pooping are also...

Justin: Amazing. Amazing. What a gift.

Sydnee: This book is just incredible. And she goes on to talk about, like, enemas. You know, this was a time period where enemas were so huge.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Right? How enemas are important, and of course eating vegetables, and all that good stuff that people loved at the time to make you poop. But I think the diagram of a woman defecating was probably pretty big for the 1930s.

Justin: Yes, that's true, it's very progressive.

Sydnee: There's an entire chapter on something called leukorrhea, and what they're talking about is discharge from the vagina. Now, nowadays, we don't really use that as a blanket term, because we'd like to break down why. Why—

Justin: What is the discharge?

Sydnee: What is the discharge? Is it pathologic, meaning there's something wrong, there's a disease process, there's something that needs treated? Or is it physiological discharge, which means there's just discharge there.

Justin: Yep.

Sydnee: Yeah. You know, there are mucous membranes, like the vagina is supposed to be lubricated sometimes. Not necessarily always. But there are times where it is, so discharge results. The mucous that comes from our cervix can be thicker or thinner, and so it can come out sometimes.

Anyway, this can all be normal, and we've talked about this on this show too, that it's really important to impress upon people with vaginas that discharge is part of having a vagina. And here's what normal discharge looks like, and here's what not-normal discharge looks like, so you know when to go say, like, "Hey, I think something's wrong." Or don't freak out or feel insecure. Right?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: That's important. Now, that is not how Leona feels. Because she titles this chapter "Leukorrhea, The Thief of Womanly Charm."

Justin: Whoa. That's intense.

Sydnee: She says, "It is a symptom, not a disease." Yes. "But it is always, always abnormal."

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: There is no such thing as natural discharge in Leona's world. That vagina should be bone dry. [Laughs]

Justin: Bone dry!

Sydnee: Except for very specific times. And this is gathered—I like this—she says that, and she's said, "This is gathered from America's leading authorities on vaginas."

Justin: Men.

Sydnee: Men. She definitely means men.

Justin: [laughs] We want this thing to be like a PBS pledge break during a telethon. Just dry. Dry, as Griffin says, dry as a popcorn fart. Just dry as it could be.

Sydnee: I'm assuming that she got information from Ben Shapiro on the vagina's supposed to...

Justin: [cackles]

Sydnee: Through time, time travel, to find out how dry should the vagina be.

Justin: Man, I don't think Ben Shapiro is listed, but I bet starting about 90 seconds ago, Ben Shapiro, if he was listening, was like, "Aw man, they're about to rag on me, aren't they? I thought this was a safe place." [Wheezes] "Aw, beans."

Sydnee: If Ben Shapiro—

Justin: [as Ben Shapiro] "Aw, shucks. They're raggin' on me again!"

Sydnee: If Ben Shapiro thought my podcast was a safe place for him. [laughs]

Justin: [laughs] A safe spaceship.

Sydnee: [laughs] If he thought that this was a safe spaceship. No, no. Then you have not been listening. He's not listening, it's fine.

Anyway, so, she goes on to describe that, like any kind—like, there is a kind of discharge that can happen with sexual excitement. And she clarifies this. Yes, you can have—

Justin: To be avoided at all costs.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, a lot of it gets blamed on overstimulation.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: So this is where, again, we're couched in a time where it's like, what does she say, "Oversexual excitement without gratification is the most common cause of leukorrhea."

Justin: Gettin' too worked up.

Sydnee: When you're not supposed to be. Now when are you supposed to be, Justin?

Justin: When a man's around.

Sydnee: Not when a man is around.

Justin: When your husband...

Sydnee: When you're in your marital—your sacred marital bed.

Justin: Bed.

Sydnee: With your husband.

Justin: Not the bathroom, and not the living room.

Sydnee: Mm-mm.

Justin: Just because the mood strikes you.

Sydnee: And not the backseat of his car.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: No. And so, it's very clearly tied to that, like, that's a big thing. She's like—so what we're saying—it's interesting because on one hand, the idea that occasionally, you know, there's some vaginal discharge that could be associated with sexual excitement. That's true.

Justin: Mm-hmm

Sydnee: Like, it's just—we're seeing it through the lens of a different social more. Nowadays, we say that's normal.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: In the 1930s, that meant you needed to be aroused less.

Justin: [scoffs]

Sydnee: [laughs] But then, you know, it's tough because I can criticize that, but on the other hand, then she's like, "Hey, but here's what you do need to know. There are things like gonorrhea and chlamydia that can be really dangerous if you don't get them treated."

Justin: Yes. Yes.

Sydnee: "Because they can cause permanent damage to your internal organs." And these are true statements that she goes on to describe. So she's trying to empower young people, and specifically young women, with this kind of, like, "Yes, it can be scary and maybe you did do something that I would recommend you not do."

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "You had sex. And you shouldn't have..."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: ". . . In my moral opinion, but if you see these things, go get help, because they could permanently harm you and make you very sick." You know, so I think that, like, that's very helpful. But then you get right back into, so like, you're like, "Oh, okay, that's good information. I'm all for sex ed."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And then she's like, "Girls and women who are compelled to stand on their feet for long periods at a time without rest often become fatigued mentally and physically, and almost before they realize it, there appears the telltale sign of weakened body resistance: vaginal discharge."

So what she's saying is if you stand up too long...

Justin: Well. Gravity.

Sydnee: Your—well, it's—your strength, your vitality, your, what does she say, your fervor, and vivacity will discharge through your vagina.

Justin: Okay. Good to know. That was not something I was aware of.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, that doesn't happen. You don't—you don't lose your sex energy through your vagina if you stand up too long.

Justin: Okay, that—okay.

Sydnee: Now, would that be a useful thing for me to say, like, "Hey boss, I've got to sit down because I'm losing all my sex energy through my vagina."

Justin: Is this you talking to me?

Sydnee: No.

Justin: Like the house, like we're—

Sydnee: You're not my boss.

Justin: Like we're cleaning up and you're like, "Oh, boss, I got to sit down."

Sydnee: I love this as an excuse to like, "Oh, I got to sit down, save that sex energy." I like that.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Is it true? No. As we get into vaginal hygiene, again, there are so many—like, it is in italics so many times, innumerable overlapping folds and crevices. Innumerable.

Justin: Innumerable.

Sydnee: Inside the vaginal walls. And that is why, when we get into like, how do we clean out the vagina, which you generally speaking, do not need to do. It's all about the douche. And they talk about—[laughs]

Justin: [as a shock jock] "Tuesdays on WKRX, it's all about the douche!"

Sydnee: Basically, if you can't get a guy, if your husband's unhappy, if he's stepping out on you, any of this, it's because you're not douching.

Justin: This is—if in 2023 this exact book would be part of an MLM. It would be like, "Welcome to Douchely, the new subscription service that your friends sell you. All the different fun, funky varieties of douche. Seasonal douche..."

Sydnee: And it would be natural and...

Justin: "Pumpkin spice..."

Sydnee: ... Promote wellness and...

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... Something. They would tell you they were pre- or pro- some sort of biotic.

Justin: It's both.

Sydnee: Maybe anti. We don't know.

Justin: All the biotics.

Sydnee: All the biotics. All biotics are in here.

Justin: All different kinds of biotics you want.

Sydnee: And they say, like, "It's so important that countless numbers of the fairer sex having little of what is commonly called," quote, "'Beauty.' Have attained their," quote, "'Place in the sun.' Because they possess that certain something called magnetism." And then she says, "And that's because they douche." They maintain the state of glandular health.

Basically, if you douche regularly, you will glow from within.

Justin: Yes...

Sydnee: And draw men to you.

Justin: That's beau—wow, I had no idea about any of this stuff.

Sydnee: So, she goes on to like, "Don't use poisonous chemicals and astringents." That's actually pretty, you know, progressive for the time. And then she's like, "Here's some techniques that I would recommend." And douching—and these are more diagrams.

And this is where I'm saying, I think that this is also somewhat subversive. Look at those pictures.

Justin: Hmm... Yeah.

Sydnee: Those are sensual images...

Justin: They—uh, yeah.

Sydnee: ... Of the human body.

Justin: Yeah...

Sydnee: In compromising positions, completely naked. And you don't see the douche.

Justin: But there's arms missing. It's like—it's kind of, I don't think that—you think they were trying to make it...

Sydnee: I'm not saying—I don't think it's intentional, necessarily.

Justin: You think they're just bad at making these science-y?

Sydnee: There's a person laying on their stomach, completely naked, with their knees kind of bent, so they can access that area. And there's...

Justin: Hey honey, hey honey.

Sydnee: Huh?

Justin: Can we take a quick pause? You're a scientist. If the person wasn't naked, that would be a very wild image. I don't know what they're planning on doing up there with the cargo shorts on, I don't know how they're going to get the douche in.

Sydnee: And look at that person laying in her bathtub.

Justin: Yeah, they made like a cross-section of the bathtub. They removed the arms, 'cause that's really the height of the sexual...

Sydnee: Well, then you wouldn't see what was happening.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: But like, the way the—

Justin: But we need to see what's happening. Don't we want to know what's happening?

Sydnee: The upper arm is there, and it's extended towards...

Justin: You get it. Wink.

Sydnee: ... The genitals.

Justin: Yeah. You get the idea.

Sydnee: I'm just saying, if you looked at these, you would think, "Well, okay, I could douche in that position. But what else could you do in those positions?" I'm just saying...

Justin: Just saying...

Sydnee: It's a little subversive, I think, Leona.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I think Leona's obsession with sex energy comes through...

Justin: That, or she could only find a dude to do the drawings. We're unclear.

Sydnee: This one, of somebody bent over, doubled over on the toilet is less attractive.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: But, I—well, to me. To me. To me. That is not a judgment. This might be someone else's thing.

Justin: You can't see the image so, suffice it to say, it looks like she lost her keys up there.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: So she's just having a look around.

Sydnee: So, there's a lot of stuff about ballooning and dilating. That's the big take home. And then we've got some diagrams of actual douching.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Like, some very technical drawings.

Justin: That looks like a toothbrush. Is that, what is that?

Sydnee: ... Of douching. No, these are just like squeezey bottles full of liquid that you squirt up there.

Justin: Got it.

Sydnee: Yeah. Just various squeezey bottles. So that was like the big climax of the book. I wanted to—a few other things they throw in at the end, they have a whole thing on vaginal hygiene. Which, again, we've mainly talked about, I mean, it's just douching, douching, douching.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: They have, like, some information on the menstrual cup, which is nice to know.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Yeah, that was useful then, useful now. In all caps, under, like, muscles of the vagina, they want to let you know that we've recently the vagina has muscles.

Justin: Oh yeah.

Sydnee: This is in 1937. We've recently discovered the vagina has muscles, and you can do things with them. You can use them, you can access them. It's like learning to wiggle your ears.

Justin: Lift weights. Crush cans.

Sydnee: So, in all caps: "Few women know that there are any muscles in the vagina, much less that they may be controlled, or made to obey the will of the individual."

Justin: [like Zardoz] Bend the muscles of the vagina to your will!

Sydnee: I am saying, Leona knows what's up.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: Hey guess what, you can do things with those.

Justin: [clicks tongue like he's doing finger guns] Boink.

Sydnee: And then there's a whole section on sex, and when I say there's a whole section on sex, it's under—[laughing] By the way, it's under the category "Women's Problems."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: That's the chapter. "Women's Problems." And basically, what they're saying is, if you don't have sex with your husband, he'll leave you.

That's kind of the—[laughs nervously] That's the main point of this chapter, is that sex and marriage is normal and healthy. Okay, there's something there, maybe. But that also, like, you can't let that part, like, your marriage will be on the rocks, and he's going to start looking for gratification elsewhere, and it's really your fault. And specifically while you're pregnant is a great time to have sex, they say.

Justin: Oh!

Sydnee: Because you can't get pregnant.

Justin: Yeah...

Sydnee: Because you're pregnant.

Justin: Yeah... Good point. Yes.

Sydnee: So you don't have to be afraid.

Justin: No, that's true. That's true, and I'm glad—thank you, book. I appreciate that.

Sydnee: But again, like, it's tough. I don't want to—I don't want to knock Leona too much, because like, yes, obviously that's a terrible to send. Like, you have to have sex with your spouse so they don't leave you. That's not healthy.

Justin: Right

Sydnee: Or positive, or safe, or true. But then, like, in that same chapter, she has statistics on how many people have gonorrhoea.

Justin: I mean, there's...

Sydnee: So, like, I do feel like this is... This is couched in a lot of, you know, dangerous, sexist, misogynist rhetoric of the time, of course. Leona lived when she lived and worked when she worked. But there's also a lot of what would have been groundbreaking, helpful sex information, and body and anatomy information in this book. Along with stuff that's absolutely wrong.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Vaginal discharge can be completely normal. If you're worried, please go get it checked out. But it can be completely normal. And you shouldn't douche, generally speaking.

The last thing I did want to note quickly before we go, is there is a chapter at the end on general body hygiene and exercises, where we expand from the vagina. As ballooned... [laughs] As ballooned as the vagina can get, we're going to expand even further and talk about things like bad breath, and the scalp, and the feet. And then there's a section on molding the breasts?

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: "A word about the breasts. Everyone knows that in France, a Frenchman does not consider a woman lovely unless she has beautifully molded breasts. French women know this and strive to keep the chest and upper arm muscles strong and elastic." And then they proceed to give you some exercises you can do.

Justin: To mold your chest.

Sydnee: Like, we must, we must, we must increase our bust. You remember these exercises.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like that. But I just love the idea that, like, everybody knows that in France, a Frenchman... [laughs]

Justin: A Frenchman.

Sydnee: A Frenchman.

Justin: As he is wont to do.

Sydnee: Will only like women with perfectly molded breasts. So there's some exercises you can use to increase the side of your breasts. And then some—a few helpful do's and don'ts at the end. "And please be reminded," in all caps, "of the danger lurking in neglect of the generative organs."

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: Retain your spark of vitality and your sex energy.

Justin: What is that author's name again?

Sydnee: That author is Leona W. Chalmers.

Justin: And this book is called?

Sydnee: The Intimate Side of a Woman's Life. Thank you again, Olivia, for sending us this book. It was absolutely delightful. It made me laugh out loud several times.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Which, Justin can tell you, is a rare...

Justin: Yeah, it's rare.

Sydnee: I don't laugh out loud much—

Justin: Unless I'm really on a tear, and like you're busting up. Like, laughing all the time, because I'm really on a tear.

Sydnee: You know what really did it for me?

Justin: What? Some joke I did?

Sydnee: Well, it was a joke you did that I was remembering as I was reading the part about how, if you stand up too long, your sex energy will start leaking out through your vagina. That was the moment that did it for me. [Laughs] That was it.

Justin: Thank you so much for listening to our podcast. If you like the intro music of our podcast, it's by a band. They're called the Taxpayers. They made it. It's called Medicines. You can find that track and get some—you can get that song on vinyl. There's a bunch of different versions of it. It's great. Find them on Bandcamp.

Thanks to Maximum Fun Network for having us as a part of their extended podcasting family.

And thanks to you for listening. We very much appreciate it. But that is going to do it for us. Until next time. So, until then, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[theme music plays]

Maximum Fun.

A work-owned network...

Of artists-owned shows...

Supported directly by you.