

## Sawbones 50: Birth

Published on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014

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**Clint:** Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

**Justin:**

Hello everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

And I'm still Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

Sydney, I'm tired of being pregnant.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, I'm sorry. You're tired?

**Justin:**

I'm tired being pregnant as a couple. I'm trying to share in your burden.

**Sydnee:**

Which part of pregnancy has been hardest on your body?

**Justin:**

Can't—

**Sydnee:**

Would you say? Which—

**Justin:**

Can't. I can't ever leave the house. Too tired. Can't do that.

**Sydnee:**

You can't ever leave the house because you're too tired?

**Justin:**

Every time I drink I feel guilty.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Oh gosh, that must be so hard for you.

**Justin:**

You don't know what it's like, Syd.

**Sydnee:**

No, I don't know what it's like to drink anymore. I don't remember. I don't remember what it's like to do anything other than sit and [laughs] be tired.

**Justin:**

Our listeners are tired of it. They're tired of hearing about pregnancy. Uh—

**Sydnee:**

I know.

**Justin:**

They're tired of hearing about it. Everybody's tired of it. We just want the stupid baby.

**Sydnee:**

Aww, she won't be a stupid baby. She will be—

**Justin:**

At first, she will be a stupid baby.

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

There's literally no other kind of baby. And I've seen Baby Geniuses, trust me. That's fake.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Uh, so, uh, I guess we're almost out of... We kinda thought the baby would be here be now. Maybe there's just like wishful thinking on our part. But, like, we've doing... been doing a lot of shows about pregnancy just like we'll figure let's... It's on our mind, so let's cover all the pregnancy topics.

**Sydnee:**

Well, and, uh, I was kinda hoping maybe if we just kept on that train, you know?

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Kept talking about, um, births and pregnancy.

**Justin:**

Power of positive thinking kind of?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Maybe it would be like eating pineapple or—

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

... you know, walking around the neighborhood or having sex.

**Justin:**

Those are all things that are supposed to trigger labor, yes.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So maybe talking about birth will trigger labor. What do you think?

**Justin:**

Okay. Let's talk about birth. I think we're out of pregnancy topics after this, so I really hope the kid comes this week.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, I could keep going.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Oh, yeah? You got more?

**Sydnee:**

No, but I think that it... that I would start to get bitter after a while. Let me tell you some more about being pregnant.

**Justin:**

Now listen, here's the scoop. Here. This will be—

**Sydnee:**

And—

**Justin:**

... for our child. I hope—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

I hope she'll be able to dip back in the archives and see what a huge inconvenience she was.

**Sydnee:**

And I have to say, it makes me feel a little guilty to feel that way 'cause I've had women tell me that they just love... that they wish they could be pregnant all the time.

**Justin:**

Oh.

**Sydnee:**

But they loved the pregnant stage. Not having kids, but the—

**Justin:**

Just being pregnant?

**Sydnee:**

... being pregnant.

**Justin:**

All right, listen—

**Sydnee:**

And I—

**Justin:**

... I'm only half pregnant as, as a partnership here. I'm only half pregnant and then all these has worn off.

**Sydnee:**

Well, I mean, I kinda get what it's all about now.

**Justin:**

[laughs] Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Like, I understand the gist of it. And I'm excited th—you know, to be having a child, but I'm kinda read for, like, okay—

**Justin:**

Okay, so—

**Sydnee:**

... let's have the child.

**Justin:**

So having a child. Let's have the child. Birth, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:**

And this topic—

**Justin:**

Birth.

**Sydnee:**

... has been suggested to us by so many people so many times. I didn't list them all.

**Justin:**

Okay. A lot of people suggesting this.

**Sydnee:**

People are constantly suggesting this. A lot of people, yes. Thank you, all of you, who wanted us to talk about birth. And so, take that everybody who doesn't. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so, you know, initially our ancient ancestors going way back—

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... before the Greeks. We're going back before the Romans.

**Justin:**

Way back.

**Sydnee:**

Way back.

**Justin:**

Homo, homo erectus.

**Sydnee:**

You, you know... Women gave birth the way that most, um, mammals give birth—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... which is just like they, you know, find a safe, comfortable spot out under a tree somewhere and just give birth—

**Justin:**

Just do it.

**Sydnee:**

... alone.

**Justin:**

Just do it.

**Sydnee:**

You know? And come back carrying their baby in their mouth or whatever.

**Justin:**

I got this baby. I went to the baby tree and I got it.

**Sydnee:**

Um, obviously, we are not able to do that now, which look, which—

**Justin:**

Wha—I—

**Sydnee:**

... seems appealing to me [laughs] in some ways. I like the idea of having complete control over all of the process.

**Justin:**

Right. It's a little unnerving, but I see where you're getting that.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. No, I'm not saying that it's safe or a good idea. I'm not in any way endorsing it. And actually, what I'm about to say is, is the reason. This is why I am not endorsing it. Um, we don't do this anymore for a lot of reasons. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, safety being number one. But also, because of the shape of our pelvises.

**Justin:**

Oh, really? How so?

**Sydnee:**

Well, the shape of the female pelvis evolved over time so that the baby usually, not, not all the time, but for the most part, is supposed to come out facing down.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And because of the, the position of the neck and the way the shoulders have to be, you know, have to come out it's, it's a very difficult, uh, delivery for a woman to do on our own. It's not impossible. And I'm not saying that every baby comes out the way you plan, but it would be very difficult to, unaided, deliver your baby.

**Justin:**

Just because of the, the—

**Sydnee:**

The positioning and the—

**Justin:**

... just the orientation.

**Sydnee:**

... way you'd have to bend. And, you know, I kinda have this big belly in my way right now and—

**Justin:**

Not all mammals have this issue, right?

**Sydnee:**

No. No. And our, and our ancestors didn't. The pelvis initially was wide enough that the baby could come out facing up, could come out facing sideways, could come out in a lot of different directions that would be easier for you to deliver your own baby. But homo sapien pelvis is not like that.

**Justin:**

Do you think it's a societal evolution like forcing us to live in societies?

**Sydnee:**

Well, I thought about that. I also thought maybe the evolutionary pressure was actually exerted in the direction of partner birth, of having a partner for



the birthing process because if you think about it, it was probably always safer to have somebody around to help, to help out if there was a crisis—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

You know? Just because it's easier if you have an extra pair of hands. So maybe the pressure was women who had a partner to help them give birth, maybe because they were having difficulty, were more likely to survive and their offspring were more likely to survive, so their pelvis shape was more likely to—

**Justin:**

So how—

**Sydnee:**

... prosper.

**Justin:**

So what's our next step after evolution said we couldn't do that anymore 'cause it's a spoilsport?

**Sydnee:**

Right. At that point... I mean, basically, the rest of the history of birth is trying to figure out who should be there and where we could do it. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Which tree?

**Sydnee:**

Huh?

**Justin:**

Which tree is the nicest.

**Sydnee:**

Which tree is the nicest. And, like, you know, do you... Do we want to try a delivery in our hut or maybe in the big health hut down the—

**Justin:**

The health, the—

**Sydnee:**

The, the health [laughs]... Do we wanna give birth in the primordial ooze or do we wanna give birth on land?

**Justin:**

Um, I vote for the health hut that we just did mention.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Oh, I... I'm assuming villages have—

**Justin:**

We have a large unoccupied hut. We can either use it—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... for health or pizza. Let's take a village vote.

**Sydnee:**

I'm at the point where I vote pizza.

**Justin:**

Yeah. [laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Is it thin crust?

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Um, initially birth was very much the domain of women. Uh, midwives usually aided in deliveries or just, you know, women in your family—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... women family members. I mean, that's midwife. And I think I may have mentioned this in a previous episode. I don't know. Comes from, uh, with women mid, with, with women.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So, um, it would've been very unseemingly initially for a man ever to be involved in the birth process.

**Justin:**

Hmm, just not dignified like a dude in the ladies' room kind of thing.

**Sydnee:**

Well, yeah. I mean, not... Uh, do you mean on the man, on the man's part or on the—

**Justin:**

Yeah. It'd just be inappropriate.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

That's a... Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, women were very much clothed in multiple layers of clothing.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And for a man to see her naked would have been, you know, a big faux pas.

**Justin:**

Very stressful.

**Sydnee:**

Very stressful for everyone.

**Justin:**

Right. Everyone would be stressed out.

**Sydnee:**

And, and it was just seen as kind of a thing that women knew about. Like, well, we guys don't really know much about that and it seems pretty icky.

**Justin:**

We got to know way more now who we are way smart about it.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, yeah. Some of them. Some of them are. Um, and, and not only was this the norm that you would only have women involved, but it was, it was not okay. It wasn't like men had the, um, ability, if they wanted to say, "Oh, I do wanna be in on a delivery."

**Justin:**

Just no?

**Sydnee:**

No. They would discouraged, I would say, very strongly.

**Justin:**

How strongly?

**Sydnee:**

Well, in 1522 Dr. Wert of Hamburg, Germany decided he really wanted to see what this whole birth business was all about. Um, he was a doctor. He was, he was... I mean, let's give him the benefit of the doubt. Purely academic interest.

**Justin:**

Yeah, right.

**Sydnee:**

And so, he snuck into a delivery room.

**Justin:**

And listen, I'm going on a limb for you here, Dr. Wert, so you better not make me a liar. Let's just pretend you are an on the level dude just wanting to get some science done.

**Sydnee:**

Just wanted to know about, hey, what is this whole birth thing that women do—

**Justin:**

I will meet you halfway—

**Sydnee:**

... that women watch that we know nothing about.

**Justin:**

... on this thing.

**Sydnee:**

Um, but he was caught and he was burned at the stake.

**Justin:**

Wow.

**Sydnee:**

So it was more than, I would say, just, um, taboo.

**Justin:**

Right. Yeah. It was like a big, a big issue. Now was it his... Was it his baby?

**Sydnee:**

No, I think he was just going into a—

**Justin:**

All right.

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

Just, you know, couldn't help himself. That was before they invented binoculars, I'm assuming—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... or webcams.

**Sydnee:**

Definitely before webcams. I don't actually know what year binoculars were invented, but I feel like we're gonna find out now.

**Justin:**

Yeah. We'll definitely get some emails about that.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] So I hope they weren't windows open that you could look through with binoculars.

**Justin:**

They didn't even have window technology.

**Sydnee:**

Now that, that I think is debatable, but—

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, it goes without saying that childbirth was not a safe practice throughout... Well, it's not 100% safe ever. I don't know what is, but... Um, for... And this period of time we're kind of in the Middle Ages.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm. Oh, God. Here we go again, Middle Ages.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, women—

**Justin:**

It's probably the unsafest, like, worst thing, worst time ever 'cause Middle Ages were the absolutely pits for everybody.

**Sydnee:**

Well, it was just accepted at the time that some women would not be able to go through with childbirth. Um, that they... You know, if the pelvis could not

accommodate the baby that maybe they would die in the process, um, because C-sections were not, you know... We have talked about this in the past. C-sections were not readily available. Um, that someone would get infections and there weren't antibiotics and we didn't know what infections were because we didn't know what bacteria was so those ones would die.

**Justin:**

Everybody was an idiot in the Middle Ages?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, some women would... Um, postpartum hemorrhage or bleeding after birth was a big deal. So there were lots of reasons why birth was, you know, uh, and, uh, of course women were excited to have children. But at the same time, it was common practice that when you found out you were pregnant you would make out your will.

**Justin:**

This is why the Middle Ages were the worst. Hey, um, I'm gonna go spend the whole year trying to figure out how to turn lead into gold with alchemy. Also, ladies, if you could just sign this will that I fashioned 'cause I can't do anything for you.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, so you're first? Congratulations. Now, have you thought about who's gonna get, like, your bed and your kitchen table and—

**Justin:**

Darla, ask her about the lead too 'cause I'm gonna figure out—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... how to turn it all into gold.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

So I definitely wanna have a lockdown on that. I want all their lead.

**Sydnee:**

Now you've got three goats, right?

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Three? Okay. Aren't we cousins?

**Justin:**

Distant?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Distant cousins?

**Sydnee:**

Um—

**Justin:**

Are those goat shoes—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... made of lead? Are those lead goat shoes? 'Cause if so, I'm gonna need those too.

**Sydnee:**

What do... What do they have to do with lead?

**Justin:**

'Cause I'm working on a—

**Sydnee:**

'Cause you're trying to turn it into gold?

**Justin:**

I'm turning it to gold. Yeah.



**Sydnee:**

Okay. All right.

**Justin:**

I need it for either experimentation or riches—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... depending on how fast things go. I imagine a lot of lead will be destroyed in the process of this discovery.

**Sydnee:**

It's interesting because you, you would think that in, um, [laughs] in... throughout history that royalty would have it easier in a lot of these kinds of situations. That they had money and power and prestige, so they would have access to whatever the best thing of the day or have the best odds—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... of surviving anything. Um, in the case of childbearing... So obviously, they didn't have birth control—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... so women just got pregnant when they got pregnant.

**Justin:**

Um-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, breast feeding was a form of, of natural birth control. And we talked about this before that breastfeeding does not 100% prevent pregnancy. It's still possible.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

But it makes it much less likely that you'll become pregnant so it naturally spaces birth. If you breastfeed your child for a year, it is unlikely you'll get pregnant for that year. And it's safer for mom to space out her children. Um, it's just safer for her body and for the recovery of her, of her uterine muscle and all of that.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, royalty often, um, you know, handed their children over to wet nurses for breastfeeding.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

As a result, they got pregnant a lot faster—

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... which was a lot more dangerous for them.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so this was a... This was a place where their money and their power kinda worked against them.

**Justin:**

'Cause they were... had... Were tasked with churning out babies so quickly?

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. And that... And that was... And it was in part, um, intentional because, you know for—

**Justin:**

Trying build regime?

**Sydnee:**

... for one... Exactly.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

You wanted a lot of children in your line. Of course, you wanted to make sure you produced male children. Um, but, but also because it was undignified to breastfeed your own children—

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... at this period of time. But that's another show. Um, men eventually got sick of being excluded from the birthing process.

**Justin:**

We hate that.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

We like to have our fingers in everything.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Was that a... Was that a—

**Justin:**

No, it wasn't. Get your head out of the gutter.

**Sydnee:**

So male physicians really, you know, they wanted to understand the birthing process better. They wanted to have more involvement in it. And as science was trying to take over everything, they thought, well, you know—

**Justin:**

We should... We should have a slice of this too.

**Sydnee:**

We should have a slice of this whole birth thing. Um, and they started trying to encourage women to have their babies in hospitals. Now at this point in time, this idea does not take hold. For the most part, if a doctor is involved in your delivery, they're probably involved at your house.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

That's where you're having your kid. Um, if women were deciding to go to hospitals, very few were. And that trend ended pretty quickly because of what was called either childbed or puerperal fever.

**Justin:**

I've never heard of it.

**Sydnee:**

So this was basically... Uh, so it was women would get really sick after delivery, get horrible fevers—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... get incredibly sick, and then die after delivery. And this happened a lot in hospitals. Less likely to happen outside of hospitals.

**Justin:**

Why was that?

**Sydnee:**

Well, the reason is that doctors, who were delivering babies in the hospitals... Because if we're in a hospital, we're talking about a doctor at this point. Midwives were not welcomed there. Doctors—

**Justin:**

It wasn't like the health hut days.

**Sydnee:**

No, not like the health hut [laughs] where you head on down to the health hut with your midwife.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

No. Uh, in the hospital, a doctor was obviously performing all kinds of services, not just delivering babies. So let's say, you know, I'm a doctor and I'm doing some of my doctorly duties. Maybe I'm, you know, taking care of patients, you know, doing procedures on them or listening to their hearts and lungs. And then, hey, probably doing an autopsy because that was well within the realm of all doctors did that.

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

And then, I get called to a delivery. So I go rushing over to labor and delivery and get in there and do that delivery. At no point in time did I ever wash my hands.

**Justin:**

'Cause you didn't know it. You didn't know anything about that.

**Sydnee:**

I didn't know I was supposed to. And at the time—

**Justin:**

Wouldn't you just want to?

**Sydnee:**

You would think.

**Justin:**

This is why this breaks down for me. Like, wouldn't you just like... Doesn't feel icky or is that just like in us now? Do we just like have that in our imprinting or something?

**Sydnee:**

Well, it's... I mean, we talked about this before though. There was a time period where you would drink blood from person in pursuit of health.

**Justin:**

Mm, yeah, well, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

So our idea that blood is something to... that you don't want someone else's blood on you is kind of a... I don't want to say a new idea, but is a more modern concept. And it is probably because of our understanding that diseases can be in blood. Uh, but it was also—

**Justin:**

I don't... I don't agree.

**Sydnee:**

You don't think so?

**Justin:**

No. I don't agree.

**Sydnee:**

Why?

**Justin:**

I never read it in a book that's bad if someone pees, uh, pee pees on me. But if someone started pee peeing on me, I'm like, "Oh, get away. Stop it." Like, you don't need a book to tell you like, "Oh, you're bleeding. It's gross. Stop it." You... No one's gonna be like, "Mm, blood, gimme, gimme."

**Sydnee:**

But people used to drink it.

**Justin:**

Okay. Like, that's a different... If there's like dudes in robes, I mean, like handing you a goblet, that's one thing. But nobody's like—

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

... "Mm, finger licking good dead person blood all over my hands. Own it."

**Sydnee:**

Don't you remember the people standing at the, at, at the hangman's noose and that were—

**Justin:**

That was like... That was like people collecting it to sell it—

**Sydnee:**

Or when they would cut people's—

**Justin:**

... in prepacked bottles with labels.

**Sydnee:**

No, they would catch it in cups or they would stand there with their mouths open and hope to get—

**Justin:**

Those were weird beards.

**Sydnee:**

... drops in their mouth.

**Justin:**

It's not physicians.

**Sydnee:**

They weren't.

**Justin:**

They're sickos.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

They're broken people deep down inside. I refuse to believe it. I'm sorry, old scientists. I'm calling you out. I don't—

**Sydnee:**

And—

**Justin:**

... believe it.

**Sydnee:**

And you know what supports this is that at this time period part of the problem is that doctors were seen as more, uh—

**Justin:**

Vampires.

**Sydnee:**

No. As more heroic or, uh, better at their job the dirtier their lab coats were. So they would walk around hospitals caked in blood as a marker of their, you know... It was like a badge of honor. Like, look at how many patients I've been inside today.

**Justin:**

Ugh, that's gross.

**Sydnee:**

So anyway, they weren't washing their hands and they were performing deliveries. And so, they were delivering all kinds of nasty little microbes into the woman's uterus, which resulted in an infection, which resulted in women, unfortunately, dying after childbirth. So hospitals were not places you wanted to go if you were pregnant.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

It was scary. Until, uh, first of all, we learned about the germ theory of disease. We've talked about this before with Pasteur. We've talked about the idea of, you know, germs cause disease. And then, in 1840, there was a guy, Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis, who invented—

**Justin:**

Hero.

**Sydnee:**

... who invented hand washing, [laughs] hand washing and basically saved millions and millions and billions of people. He was the first guy to say, "Hey,



I think if we wash our hands in between I think we'll probably stop passing whatever these new... these brand-new bugs that we just learned about are... onto other people."

**Justin:**

Everybody was excited about it.

**Sydnee:**

No, everybody was furious.

**Justin:**

Excellent job, medical community.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

I'm proud of you.

**Sydnee:**

No. They were... They thought it was insulting to doctors because it put the blame on doctors—

**Justin:**

Sure.

**Sydnee:**

... and that wasn't right. And they thought it was stupid. But he started doing it in his own obstetrical wards. Um, the mortality rate dropped dramatically—

**Justin:**

There you go.

**Sydnee:**

... so it caught on.

**Justin:**

Semmelweis, hero.

**Sydnee:**

Uh—

**Justin:**

Hand washing hero.

**Sydnee:**

So at this point, we're moving more and more towards doctors are getting involved in delivery. Uh, midwives are still doing the majority of deliveries, I should note. And there's still... Most women are still delivering at home at this point. But we're starting to see some, you know, scientific meddling in the process.

**Justin:**

[laughs] That's exactly... That is exactly the right word for it too.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, in the 1850s, another big step forward was when Queen Victoria, having her eighth child asked the doctor, "Could I have some chloroform [laughs] perhaps?"

**Justin:**

The novelty has worn off.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Could I have just a little bit of chloroform and see what happens? And since she was a queen, they gave it to her.

**Justin:**

Well, so they have no other choice.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] And, uh, it went swimmingly 'cause she felt great afterwards.

**Justin:**

Awesome.

**Sydnee:**

And—

**Justin:**

Awesome, baby. My best baby ever. Totally rad. Thank you.

**Sydnee:**

And she told everybody, "Hey, that was great, you know, ladies. You should start asking your doctors for chloroform."

**Justin:**

I just had the most delightful birthing experience. Highly recommended.

**Sydnee:**

And this started the trend of, of women starting to seek some sort of pain relief in labor. Up until then, this was not done at all. Um, there were a lot of reasons for this. Uh, using any, uh, any kind of substances like this was seen as immoral, even if it was for pain relief. So you certainly wouldn't want to give it to a woman in labor. Um, and there was also fear of the effects on the baby. What would happen, you know? Some of them real. Would you overdose the baby? And some of the imagined. Would the baby be, I don't know, angry a lot when it was older and weird things like that.

**Justin:**

Read a lot of bad poetry.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Um, there was also... I think the worst reason, I would say, was there was a lot of religious objection over giving women pain medication during delivery because it's God's punishment to us for Eve and the whole apple and all that.

**Justin:**

Cool job, religion. [singing] Good job, religion. So proud.

**Sydnee:**

So obviously—

**Justin:**

You did it again.

**Sydnee:**

We can't save women from all that pain because they're still paying for, you know...

**Justin:**

I do wanna mention though on the—

**Sydnee:**

... Eve eating a piece of fruit.

**Justin:**

Uh, on the subject of religion, uh—

**Sydnee:**

Uh oh.

**Justin:**

Well, no. Um, I wanted to issue a correction.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, yeah.

**Justin:**

From... Remember? 'Cause it, it just reminded me of it.

**Sydnee:**

From my C-section episode.

**Justin:**

From her C-section episode. We... What was it specifically? You'll, you'll remember the—

**Sydnee:**

Uh, specifically, I found referenced that in, um... I was talking about different religious attitudes toward C-sections—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... and in Islam, uh, it was thought previously, not currently, that a child born of C-section was evil.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm. Was evil. That is actual apocryphal we discovered with the help of—

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

... of a delightful listener. And actually, uh, some of the first people to, uh, successfully perform C-sections were in fact Muslim, so there you go.

**Sydnee:**

So thank you—

**Justin:**

History—

**Sydnee:**

... for that correction.

**Justin:**

History got that one wrong and, by extension, so did we, so there you go. Muslims, they love C-sections. I don't know if they love C-sections or not—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... but they certainly don't think they're of the devil.

**Sydnee:**

I wouldn't make statements like that.

**Justin:**

There you go.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Um, so anyway, women won out over, you know, doctors' reluctance to give them pain medication and over the churches' reluctance to allow women to not be in pain.

**Justin:**

Yeah. Ugh. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And doctors started trying all kinds of things. Um, gas was tried. Like, uh, ether and, and... Or ether and gas was tried. And then, there was chloroform, of course. And there were different, like, opiates, you know—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... were starting to be used. Just pain relief and all kinds of different things started to enter the labor and delivery realm.

**Justin:**

Okay. So we got to be about to the 1900s now. What, uh, what happened next?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, well, I'm gonna have to stop you there, Justin.

**Justin:**

Oh, no.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. It's that... It's that time of the month again. Not that time of the month, but the time of the month where you go visit the billing department.

**Justin:**

Let's go.

[theme music plays]

**Justin:**

1900s, Sydnee. Take me there.

**Sydnee:**

So, as I mentioned, we're... Uh, more and more labor and deliveries becoming the realm of, of doctors. So they're coming up with all new kinds of rules. You know, women have been doing this for years. I bet men could do it better. [laughs] Right?

**Justin:**

Sorry. I'm sorry. It wasn't me.

**Sydnee:**

Well, let's get in on it.

**Justin:**

It wasn't me.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and I should be... Let me, let me just preface with this. Some of these ideas are good and necessary. Not any of the ones I'm gonna talk about 'cause they're not funny. But there were definitely good and necessary ideas that came out of this time period.

**Justin:**

You're welcome, ladies.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] I mean, obviously, it's safer to give birth now than it was 100 years ago. I don't think there's any argument about that.

**Justin:**

You're all very welcome.

**Sydnee:**

No, but it wasn't because of men.

**Justin:**

That and the United States Transportation System, ladies, enjoy. And also NASA, for a long time. You're welcome, ladies. And we've been getting a lot of guff lately, us, fellas. We did some things, okay?

**Sydnee:**

That's great for you. Can I have my birth control back or?

**Justin:**

No.

**Sydnee:**

No?

**Justin:**

No. I don't know those guys, but I know other guys I can talk to about it, but—

**Sydnee:**

Okay, thanks. Um, so, uh, more and more women are, are listening to doctors. They're starting to think about having their babies in hospitals. And you see this trend all through the 1900s. It goes from in the early 1900s it's like five percent of births are taking place in hospitals to by the 1950s we're in like the 70, 80% range. I mean, it's crazy.

**Justin:**

Now, to be clear, we are talking about the US, right? Because this is one—

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

... of those areas where we're on a very different trajectory, right?

**Sydnee:**

That's true, Justin. Um, while in the US, we just steadily moved more and more towards hospital birth and that has been a, a trend that has stayed constant. Other countries, we're not necessarily on the same trajectory. In Holland, for instance, um, they have, I think still, as far as I know, the highest home birth rate in the Western world.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, like 30% of births are at home.

**Justin:**

Wow.

**Sydnee:**

Um, and in the UK, while still most births take care... take place in the hospital, there's certainly a lot more midwife deliveries than we have here.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So I'm talking mainly about the US at this point. Uh, as I said, doctors had advice on everything and rules for everything, so I'm gonna reference a little bit as we're moving into the 1900s from a book that I have that was written



in 1915 that is a real gem if you're pregnant. What [laughs]... Forget What To Expect When You're Expecting.

**Justin:**

No, no, no, this is the, this is the real stuff.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] No, go out and purchase EB Lowry's Your Baby.

**Justin:**

It's aged like a fine wine.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, so here's some things you might want to keep in mind. Before you deliver, um, you want to make sure and stay away from anything that is scary or upsetting. A book, a, a movie, I guess. He didn't say a movie 'cause they didn't exist, like, yet, but movies, TV shows. You know, don't, don't go watching True Blood with all those scary vampires.

**Justin:**

Listen, if you can figure out a way to watch True Blood in 1915, hats off to you.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] But your baby might have a, a bad countenance if you do.

**Justin:**

Watch scary stuff?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Uh, it also advises some, some good stuff. Plenty of sunlight and drink your milk and eat your vegetables. You should also exercise regularly when you're pregnant.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Um, but there's only certain exercises that are safe. 'Cause you don't wanna be sedentary, but you also don't want too strenuous stuff.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

So the ideal balance is, obviously housework.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

So—

**Justin:**

Oh, man.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

Awesome.

**Sydnee:**

So sweeping the floors, dusting, cooking, washing the dishes.

**Justin:**

It's just the right balance.

**Sydnee:**

It... Uh, yeah, and it just... I mean, isn't it weird that it works out that way?

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

It's like nature intended.

**Justin:**

Just like nature intended.

**Sydnee:**

Now as for the delivery itself in the 1900s—

**Justin:**

If you guys hadn't eaten that apple. That's all... That's the only thing.

**Sydnee:**

We wouldn't have to cook and clean when we're pregnant and then go through all the pain of delivery.

**Justin:**

Listen, I don't make the rules.

**Sydnee:**

I know.

**Justin:**

It's in a little book I'd call the Bible.

**Sydnee:**

Thank you, men, for giving us all these rules to make it easier.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

So how about some advice for the delivery from Dr. Lowry.

**Justin:**

I'm ready.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, okay, so when you notice labor, when you first think you may be in labor, what is the first thing you do?

**Justin:**

Call the doctor.

**Sydnee:**

That's right. Why do you call the doctor?

**Justin:**

I actually don't know what the next step is. I assume he'll tell me to come to the hospital.

**Sydnee:**

Well, but the, but the reason you really wanna call the doctor is because he's really busy. And he's gonna have to arrange his schedule around you now. So try to be considerate.

**Justin:**

Okay. Will do.

**Sydnee:**

So stop what you're doing, call your doctor, and let him know so he can figure out when it's gonna be most convenient for him.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. I'm only using male pronouns because we're in the early 1900s.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, now, second step now that you're in labor, go put on a nightgown—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm

**Sydnee:**

... and a kimono.

**Justin:**

Done.

**Sydnee:**

And some stockings.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And then, part your hair down the center and put it in two braids.

**Justin:**

Perfect. Uh, am I in labor still?

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Oh, yeah, you're in labor.

**Justin:**

Okay. Great. Just wanna...

**Sydnee:**

This is your labor outfit.

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

It also makes it—

**Justin:**

My labor 'do.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] This is your labor 'do. It makes it easier because you're gonna be in bed for quite a while. And you wanna make sure your hair is easy to take care of from... you know, by your assistants who are gonna brush it for you and re-braid it periodically.

**Justin:**

Perfect. Okay, I got my hair braided.

**Sydnee:**

Okay, so now you're gonna go to a hospital because that's what a doctor would have been urging you to do. Come on, we're safe. We wash our hands now. Please come to the hospital.

**Justin:**

Got it. I'm going to the hospital. What hospital will I go to?

**Sydnee:**

Well, the best advice is to, uh, pick a hospital that's close to where your doctor lives because it's convenient for him.

**Justin:**

This book was written by a doctor, I assume.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. That's the most important thing.

**Justin:**

I'm gonna get there about 4:00. I'm tired of getting into my buggy driving down the [Saint Parsonals].

**Sydnee:**

If you're driving past two hospitals that's okay as long as you're getting to the one that's closest to your doctor, which also make sure, make sure you know your doctor's address, I guess. [laughs] Not something I typically give out.

**Justin:**

It's a little personal, I think.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, now make sure that you're bringing everything you might need.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

And that's a lot of stuff. In addition to what you may expect, you know, like some clothes for you and some clothes for the baby, um, and not a car seat 'cause it's, you know, this is 1915. Uh, bring your own bed linens.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Bring some blankets—

**Justin:**

Check.

**Sydnee:**

... towels—

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

... wash clothes.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Maybe some bandages.

**Justin:**

Perfect.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, and you can do that just by tearing strips of flannel. Bring lots of torn strips of flannel.

**Justin:**

Okay, got it.

**Sydnee:**

Do not hem them. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Got it. I... Uh, maybe they'll have that in the gift shop.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, abdominal binders.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Breast binders.

**Justin:**

What?

**Sydnee:**

Breast binders.

**Justin:**

Why?

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Just some... Like strips of, again, f— I think flannel is recommended. Lots of strips of flannel just to tie around your boobs 'cause they're gonna be engorged and sore and so just—

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

... you know? Uh, but they do have ways of tying them around you so that your nipples are still exposed.

**Justin:**

Perfect. I love that.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, boric acid crystals.

**Justin:**

Sounds like my regular Saturday night ensemble, basically, so I'll... Like, I'm... I can just bring my own.

**Sydnee:**

Do you have your own boric acid crystals?

**Justin:**

No, those I do not have.

**Sydnee:**

You—

**Justin:**

That I cannot help with.

**Sydnee:**

See, we're gonna need those.

**Justin:**



For what?

**Sydnee:**

The baby's mouth and eyes.

**Justin:**

Oh, welcome to the world, baby.

**Sydnee:**

Here's some boric acid in your eyes.

**Justin:**

You may... You just made the biggest mistake in your life, dummy. You should've stayed in there forever. Boric acid.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Psst. Ahh, why?!

**Sydnee:**

Also, uh, for your... Also, for your nipples, mom.

**Justin:**

Hey, moms.

**Sydnee:**

Sorry, moms.

**Justin:**

Get some boric acid on there.

**Sydnee:**

Rub some boric acid on your nipples. And anything else you can think of. You probably—

**Justin:**

That'd be—

**Sydnee:**

... should just bring—

**Justin:**

That'd be a nice surprise. That'd be a fun surprise for the kid, huh? Hey, come, come enjoy my, my perfect life-giving nipples. I taste like boric acid.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

How are you liking life so far, baby, 'cause—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Those are—

**Justin:**

... it might seem kind of bad.

**Sydnee:**

The, the baby's mouth already tastes like boric acid 'cause you put some crystals in there, so—

**Justin:**

All I know is boric acid. I'm 35 years old. The only taste that makes me feel comfortable is boric acid.

**Sydnee:**

That's how you encourage breast feeding 'cause after that you will definitely like breast milk.

**Justin:**

Bet Freud read about that and he's like, "Sweet, I'm set for life."

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Nobody's gonna recover from this.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Perfect.

**Sydnee:**

Um, also, you need to make sure that you, um, bring your own Lysol.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So that you can be scrubbed down, like all of your, you know, your lady parts.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Inside and out.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Mm-hmm. Can be completely scrubbed down with Lysol, uh, and then everything is gonna be shaved.

**Justin:**

Wow. For dudes that, like, didn't believe in germs a little bit ago, you guys are getting super protective about it, huh?

**Sydnee:**

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Justin:**

Like these are way into not having germs around.

**Sydnee:**

Yup. Now you're getting a Lysol douche.

**Justin:**

Yeah. [laughs] How's that going?

**Sydnee:**

Oh, and an enema.

**Justin:**

Oh, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And then they're gonna rub everything down with lard.

**Justin:**

For what? Are they gonna fry me?

**Sydnee:**

No. Grease the way. It's like a Slip 'N Slide. Sounds like some sort of bizarre, like adult double dare [laughs]—

**Justin:**

One last—

**Sydnee:**

... physical challenge.

**Justin:**

One last fun activity for the baby before it... we dip it in boric acid.

**Sydnee:**

Now after delivery, I mentioned you're gonna be in bed for a while.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Don't move, don't talk for the first few days.

**Justin:**

What?

**Sydnee:**

Women were instructed not to talk. You need to let yourself recover. This has been very hard on you and you're very delicate. So just lay there, please.

**Justin:**

How long?

**Sydnee:**

About six weeks total.

**Justin:**

Oh, right.

**Sydnee:**

Um—

**Justin:**

All right.

**Sydnee:**

Now, I should mention that by week three or four, you're allowed to get out of bed some.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

But for about six weeks, you should just lay around.

**Justin:**

Tell me we got better than this, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so before we actually got better at this there's... there was one more detour.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And that was called twilight sleep.

**Justin:**

Hit me.

**Sydnee:**

So twilight sleep was a method of pain control developed in Germany in about like 1914. Um, the whole... The idea was that we're doing okay with some these medications we're giving women—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... but we could, we could do better. Women are just too delicate to go through this process, so pain control was start— started to become not only like an option, but, like, maybe it's necessary because these poor little ladies just can't go through this.

**Justin:**

Okay, so what we do? What was the... What was the plan?

**Sydnee:**

So we gave them a mixture of scopolamine and morphine. Now you know what morphine is. It's a pain medicine.

**Justin:**

Right. It's a opiate.

**Sydnee:**

Right. Scopolamine is what we call an amnestic so you'll forget things.

**Justin:**

Is that, uh, thing we watched that VICE documentary about.

**Sydnee:**

It is. The world's most dangerous drug.

**Justin:**

Where, like, it can just, like... It was like brainwash you with the... with a powder?

**Sydnee:**

Sorta, yeah. If... So if you give somebody too much scopolamine they'll die.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

But if you give them a little bit of scopolamine they're still awake. It's not like knocking them out. But they won't remember anything that happens. Um, as a result between that and the morphine and then the pain that they were still experiencing, women became pretty wild during twilight sleep. So they would become combative, they would hallucinate, they might yell or flail or kick or punch.

**Justin:**

Ooh.

**Sydnee:**

So it became necessary to blindfold them, uh, tie their arms down, tie their legs down. There's some really disturbing pictures of women in twilight sleep online if you're ever—

**Justin:**

I... You know, I'm good.

**Sydnee:**

... interested.

**Justin:**

Thanks.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so you would basically fall asleep when you first went into labor and wake up with a baby in your arms. And have no memory of this horrible ordeal you've been through. Uh—

**Justin:**

This is sorta like the furthest we go for, uh, treating this as a disease, right? For treating pregnancy as a disease... Like, this is our apex of like, there we fixed it.

**Sydnee:**

There you go.

**Justin:**

Now you never have to think about it again.

**Sydnee:**

I—

**Justin:**

We sol— we cured pregnancy.

**Sydnee:**

I think this really was when we, we saw pregnancy as a pathologic state. Um, this kinda peaked, uh, late actually, 1950s.

**Justin:**

Wow.

**Sydnee:**

Because if you, uh, if you remember, Justin, the, um, episode of Mad Men. Betty Draper has a baby—

**Justin:**

Right. Right, right, right.

**Sydnee:**

... using twilight sleep. And that... If you ever want a great example of what it is, I think they depict it really well. Um, obviously we moved away from that because it's bad for a number of reasons. It's probably pretty psychologically damaging for women, I would say.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And it was dangerous for babies. Um, now we do use pain control, but it's mainly epidurals, if you so choose. Obviously, doctors wash their hands. Birth in the US is largely in hospitals and mainly done by physicians, um, although, uh, midwifery is on the rise. There are more and more women opting for midwife deliveries, which is, as you mentioned, way more common in the UK. And their outcomes are just as good.

So don't let anybody tell you differently, you know? It's all up to what you prefer and what you're comfortable with, but, uh, but midwife delivery is a totally viable option. Um, if you have some in your area you should talk to them. We did.



**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, home births are becoming more popular, but still a very small minority in the US. As I mentioned, more common in other places and becoming safer as they become more popular. Um, and then, clearly, we try to stay away from boric acid and Lysol.

**Justin:**

We got that at least.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. And unfortunately, now they allow us to work full—time right up until we deliver. Yay!

**Justin:**

Yay!

**Sydnee:**

Women's rights. [laughs]

**Justin:**

[laughs] Oh, no!

**Sydnee:**

Can I lay in bed for six weeks now?

**Justin:**

Please?

**Sydnee:**

Please? [laughs] I'm sorry. I don't want to cook or clean either.

**Justin:**

No. No, you—

**Sydnee:**

I won't do any of it. [laughs]

**Justin:**

... so you—

**Sydnee:**

Can I just lay down?

**Justin:**

Um, I, I, uh... Again, as I have said many times before, on behalf of dudes, um, I'm sorry. I'm real sorry.

**Sydnee:**

There's a lot more if you're ever interested to this topic that you can... I mean, that you can discover. Birth is wide-ranging and something that happens and is a physiologic normal state that is totally natural. Obviously, as humans, we have to mess with as much as humanly possible—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... throughout history, so... But I think these are the highlights.

**Justin:**

Well, uh, thank you so much, Sydnee for educating me about this. We certainly appreciate all of you, uh, listening to the program. It means the world to us. Um, we, uh, are every Tuesday. That's the... That's the plan at least. Uh, when our baby gets here. I don't know. Well, well, we definitely have one live show in the cannon and, so we'll be able to deploy that and hopefully it will... we won't have to take too many weeks off after that.

**Sydnee:**

We'll, we'll do our best. But, um, Archie, I guess, is gonna die this week, so I may have to take a grieving hiatus first.

**Justin:**

That makes sense. Uh, thank you to people tweeting about the show with the @Sawbones handle. Eric Tichman, Dylan Weidlick, Melissa Danielson, JRP, Adam D, Bethany Dybass, Kado Katonian, Venetia, Sabrina, Daniel, Merev, Maureen, Kevin, so many others. You're all very kind. Thank you for helping us to spread the word about our program. Uh, it really helps us out.

**Sydnee:**

And spread the word about vaccines.

**Justin:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

A lot of you were, were sharing our vaccine episode and, and helping to spread the word there, so that's awesome too. I hope, I hope we, uh... I hope that you changed a mind or at least reinforced your own, uh, absolutely well-founded beliefs. Uh—

**Sydnee:**

Facts.

**Justin:**

Facts.

**Sydnee:**

It's science.

**Justin:**

They're facts.

**Sydnee:**

It's science.

**Justin:**

It's science. Um, thank you to the Taxpayers for letting us use their, uh, song, Medicines, for our intro and outro. And thank you to the Maximum Fun Network for having us as a part of, uh, their, well, network. Uh, there's a lot of other great programs to be listened to there at [maximumfun.org](http://maximumfun.org), including Jordan Jesse Go!, Judge John Hodgman, The Goosedown, Lady to Lady, Oh No! Ross and Carrie. Uh, Stop Podcasting Yourself, um—

**Sydnee:**

My Brother, My Brother and Me.

**Justin:**

Thank you, dear. I do appreciate that. Bullseye. So many others. Uh, go to [maximumfun.org](http://maximumfun.org) and check them all out. And that's gonna do it for us this

week. Thank you, again. A million thank yous. Uh, make sure you share the show. You can just give people sawboneshow.com. It's a link to our website. And, uh, that is it for us. Sydnee, thank you so much for joining me here today.

**Sydnee:**

No problem, J Man.

**Justin:**

Until next Tuesday, I'm Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

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

[theme music plays]

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