

## Sawbones 71: Aromatherapy

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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 host, Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

And I'm Sydnee McElroy. Hey, Justin.

**Justin:**

Yes, dear?

**Sydnee:**

What do you got... What's this, uh, what's this box you got goin' over here, this—

**Justin:**

That's, well, that's there every week.

**Sydnee:**

... thing that's...

**Justin:**

It's there every week, sweetie. It's my, uh, my doTERRA.

**Sydnee:**

Well, you got a lot of stuff on your desk.

**Justin:**

I do.

**Sydnee:**

So I don't, you know, I can't keep track.

**Justin:**

It's hard to parse it all.

**Sydnee:**

You buy a lot of things, so it's hard for me to know all the new things that buy.

**Justin:**

It's my doTERRA.

**Sydnee:**

What is your... Now, what is this—

**Justin:**

Aromatherapy—

**Sydnee:**

Ah.

**Justin:**

Atomizer... thingamajig.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Now, what—

**Justin:**

I put... What?

**Sydnee:**

What do you do with it?

**Justin:**

Well, I put... I mean, I'll load it up with water and then we just put, basically put some oils in there to try and set the mood and get a little nice little fog goin', a sweet-smellin' fog. If you can tell today, I got, mm, sandalwood. That's definitely sandalwood I got in there.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

So, uh, that's, that's definitely, uh—

**Sydnee:**

And you're, you're—

**Justin:**

You know, it's really nice recording environment.

**Sydnee:**

Okay, so you're hopin' it, it does what exactly for you?

**Justin:**

Just kinda calms us and just really makes it, like, really open, accepting, peaceful, uh, just, just really tranquil recording experience.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. How, how exactly do you think that works?

**Justin:**

Well, uh, I, I... Again, uh, just to take it back to the top, I put water in the thingamajig.

**Sydnee:**

No, I mean do you think you just smell it and, like, you—

**Justin:**

It—

**Sydnee:**

... you get better? Is that what you think? It's—

**Justin:**

You smell it and your brain thinks like, "This is a chill place to be." And then it chills you out.

**Sydnee:**

Okay.

**Justin:**

Soothing.

**Sydnee:**

So you're just... you're just using it to chill out.

**Justin:**

Just use it to chill out.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. You, you know there are—

**Justin:**

It works like a dream by the way.

**Sydnee:**

Does it?

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Okay.

**Justin:**

I haven't experienced stress since I purchased it.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, I would say that's not true.

**Justin:**

That's inaccurate.

**Sydnee:**

That's a lie.

**Justin:**

It's inaccurate.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, you know that a lot of people go in for this aromatherapy thing, only they, they would say that it has a lot more benefits than maybe just chilling you out.

**Justin:**

Uh, you know, it's funny. I heard some of that kinda thing when I was researching the perfect, uh, essential oil atomizer to purchase.

**Sydnee:**

You researched the... Of course you did. I'm... That, I'm not surprised with that whatsoever. Uh, well maybe, maybe you wanna learn a little bit more about essential oils and aromatherapy?

**Justin:**

I'm gonna keep inhaling them. And I am. I guess I should at least know what I'm dealing with. Apparently, they have a lot of untapped potential that I'm not really—

**Sydnee:**

Meh. Well, let's talk about 'em because I'll be honest. This is probably the, recently the most requested topic that we've had. Uh, some of the most recent people who've asked us to do this, Jill, Stephanie, Laura, Tamara, Chance. Thank you all. I'm sure there are more people who suggested this. Um, I think it's because it's really popular right now.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

The idea of essential oils. It's an old, old, old idea, as we'll talk about. Um, but as old ideas often do, it's trendy.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

It's come around and it's trendy again. And, um, people are using it for a lot more than just chilling out. So, so let's talk about it. First of all, do you know when I say essential oils what I mean?

**Justin:**

Uh, I think. And I don't actually know, but I think it's like by essential, we're talking about something boiled down to, like, its very core. So you just get, you know, the, the, like, the squished down essence.

**Sydnee:**

The essence.

**Justin:**

That's the essential.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, there you go. That's exactly right actually. So essential comes from the—these are the essence of the plant—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... this oil. Not because they are essential in any way. I think that's an important—

**Justin:**

To me—

**Sydnee:**

... point to make.

**Justin:**

To my just general headspace, I would argue they are indeed essential.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. Well, we'll get back to that.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So they can come from any plant or herb, and there's different ways to remove them. Largely, they're distilled, uh, but you can also, like, use solvents to kind of break down plant. And it could be leaves, roots, flowers, whatever. Um, or there's ways to press it. You can either take it through inhalation, like you're talking about. So, like, putting it in something that turns it into, like, a fragrant steam.

**Justin:**

I love that.

**Sydnee:**

Or just sniffing it. Uh, some people use it topically, so just massaging the oil into your skin. Or you can, uh, even take it orally. Some people do that. Not many, not many.

**Justin:**

I don't buy... I don't go down for that.

**Sydnee:**

And the idea is that this helps with not just, uh, like... it doesn't just have psychological effects, kinda like you're mentioning chilling you out, but that it also has physical effects on your body.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

So the ancient Egyptians used essential oils. We have a lot of evidence, um, mainly from, like, you know, they had all those jars in their tombs where they... all the stuff they were taking with them to the afterlife.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And a lot of those jars had, uh, m— like, residues of essential oils in them. So clearly, they were important. Uh, what were they used for though? Like, a lot of things. So embalming, so loo— You know, the mummies would... that we found were coated in these oils, but a lot of it was for embalming and, like, cleansing the body at death.

**Justin:**

This is a good-smelling mummy.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Well, thank you. I rubbed it down with sandalwood and essence of lavender.

**Sydnee:**

Really like sandalwood, don't you?

**Justin:**

Well, it's just the funniest one that springs to mind, I guess. Essence of lavender's okay, but...

**Sydnee:**

They're both really popular.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

You've named two really popular ones.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, it was also used at religious ceremonies. They used a lot of sandalwood. They used a lot of frankincense and myrrh.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

As you may have heard.

**Justin:**

Baby Jesus was way into aromatherapy. Did you know that?

**Sydnee:**

That's exactly right. And you, and you... This is one of the things when you—

**Justin:**

That's exactly right?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, I mean—



**Justin:**

Exac— it was exactly right that Jesus—

**Sydnee:**

Okay.

**Justin:**

... was into aromatherapy?

**Sydnee:**

Okay, well no. That wasn't—

**Justin:**

Exactly?

**Sydnee:**

That wasn't exactly right, but... [laughs]

**Justin:**

That's what exactly means.

**Sydnee:**

Well, maybe... I don't know. Maybe he was really into aromatherapy.

**Justin:**

There's no way of knowing this.

**Sydnee:**

There, there is a lot of... Uh, a lot of people reference that it's mentioned, you know, in many different biblical religious, and various religious texts the use of essential oils for different things as a justification for using it now.

**Justin:**

That never holds up. Almost never holds up by the way.

**Sydnee:**

But it is.

**Justin:**

But it is.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, they actually had a lot of compounds. One example was something called cyphi, and it was basically like an amalgam of a bunch of different oils and herbs and all kinds of stuff that smelled really nice. And you could use it for incense or perfume or medicine.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm. Uh, I, now I have a question about this, uh, this topic. Uh, is this separate, a whole separate, like, department from incense? Are we, like, completely in—

**Sydnee:**

Mm.

**Justin:**

... completely separate regions here?

**Sydnee:**

Not really. The two things were very closely linked initially, uh, because it... You know, the whole, the whole thing comes from the idea of, like, even perfume, meaning from smoke, that people would accidentally burn things that smelled really good. So, you know, for warmth you were burning trees and, and leaves and plants. And then all of a sudden, this wonderful—smelling smoke would be all around you and you'd go, "Holy crap, what is that great thing we just set on fire? We've gotta remember that."

**Justin:**

We gotta find that tree again.

**Sydnee:**

We gotta figure out what we—

**Justin:**

And burn it.

**Sydnee:**

... just burned.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

And we gotta keep burning it 'cause it smells so good. And then, you know, because it would smell good... And smells do elicit emotional responses. We know that. You know, the, the center of your brain that smell, the... you know, has... your scent center, your scent center. You get what I'm sayin' there? Scent—

**Justin:**

Center.

**Sydnee:**

Scent. Yeah.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

It is connected to, like, your memories, and so you... You know, there are certain feelings and, and memories that are brought by different smells. So people really liked it, so they would use it for religious purposes. And like incense, uh, they would use it for perfumes because, you know, you wanted to elicit that kind of emotional response in a, in a lover or a potential lover.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And then it, it was thought, you know, if this stuff makes us feel good, maybe it makes us feel good, like, health—wise. Maybe it would make us healthier. So maybe we should use essential oils in different ways if you're sick. Smell this good stuff. Rub this good stuff in your skin.

**Justin:**

This is a, this is... gets complicated for me because I have a feeling there's not gonna be whole lot of, like, specific medical, uh, evidence—

**Sydnee:**

Nope.

**Justin:**

... for aromatherapy.

**Sydnee:**

Nope.

**Justin:**

Not to skip ahead of you, but I feel like there's not going to be... But I do think that there is, like, I think that there's a value to, like, the changes you can make in, like, in the brain, right? Like, therapeutically speaking, I do find, and there... I think there's probably evidence for the stress reduction powers of certain scents, right?

**Sydnee:**

There is.

**Justin:**

Certain scents relax you.

**Sydnee:**

There is. That's one of the things we'll talk about there is evidence for.

**Justin:**

That is a huge health issue, right? I mean, like, stress is, uh, incredibly unhealthy.

**Sydnee:**

Yes. Well, yes. I mean, are, are you referencing more anxiety?

**Justin:**

Yeah, and, I mean, most kinds of stress, I would say—

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

... are unhealthy.

**Sydnee:**

No, I, I think that's true. I think that, um—

**Justin:**

Physically speaking, I mean.

**Sydnee:**

And, I mean, I think this gets into a larger conversation about, like, the idea that all stress is necessarily bad, which it's not. And I think I would argue that some stress is necessary. But certainly, there is the whole idea that too much stress on your body, too much cortisol release, you know, it does all kinds of bad things for your heart rate, your blood pressure and, and that kinda stuff. So I see where your goin'.

**Justin:**

Much like Matthew McConaughey, Matthew McConaughey and myself believe in the limitless power of the mind to heal the body.

**Sydnee:**

You and Matthew McConaughey?

**Justin:**

Me and Matthew McConaughey.

**Sydnee:**

Huntington's own Matthew McConaughey.

**Justin:**

Huntington's own Matthew McConaughey.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, We Are Marshall.

**Justin:**

We are.

**Sydnee:**

Marshall. JKL.

**Justin:**

JKL.

**Sydnee:**

Okay, so aromatherapy. Um, eventually, because of this connection that we've been talking about between the religious and the, and the medical, i— it got to a point where you would only use essential oils if a priest told you to because, you know, you needed that kinda spiritual conduit—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... because they were so connected to the gods. But you were still using them for, like, medical reasons for whatever... You know, you're hurting or you're sick, whatever. You're gonna take the essential oil, which is really interesting.

**Justin:**

Yeah, there used to be a lot more overlap, um, uh, between priesthood and, and medicine. Like, a good—

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

... example, I think, is, uh... I think about Friar Lawrence in Romeo and Juliet, for example.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

He, he is very into, like, tinctures and salves and things like that.

**Sydnee:**

And he probably would've re—been really into essential oils.

**Justin:**

I'm sure.

**Sydnee:**

In all honesty.

**Justin:**

I'm sure.

**Sydnee:**

Um—

**Justin:**

Did you know that Romeo, uh, the poison he drinks is, is actually, uh, sandalwood and essence of lavender?

**Sydnee:**

I don't think that's true.

**Justin:**

That is actually documented. He put it in the director's cut.

**Sydnee:**

I don't think that's right.

**Justin:**

Shakespeare put it in the director's cut.

**Sydnee:**

No. Well, what's the poison that, what—

**Justin:**

In the deleted scenes. Get the Blu-Ray, get the Blu-Ray.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Check out his deleted scenes. You will see.

**Sydnee:**

Does—

**Justin:**

He mentions it.

**Sydnee:**

... does it have more of Juliet's boobs?

**Justin:**

Oh, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Okay, good.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

You know, they had to put those on two DVDs. Uh, two Blu-Rays actually.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

There's so many extra scenes of Juliet's boobs.

**Sydnee:**

The, the Greeks were into essential oils as well. They also used them for religious reasons, but also for, like, cosmetics, perfumes, cleansing. And then they thought they had a lot of healing properties. For instance, they would actually send soldiers into battle with myrrh, uh, to use to fight infection. So if they got a wound, put this myrrh on it.

Now, they didn't really know what they were treating, per se. You know, we didn't understand microbes. But something happens bad to wounds, so put this myrrh on it and it won't happen.

**Justin:**

But it will.

**Sydnee:**

But it will.

**Justin:**

It will. It will, but later.

**Sydnee:**

Probably.

**Justin:**

I don't know.



**Sydnee:**

Um, and there are... And we'll... I'll kinda talk about this. There, there is a little bit evidence for that but... Obviously, people were dying of battlefield infections. Uh, Hippocrates actually wrote that a perfumed bath and a scented massage every day is the way to good health.

**Justin:**

Oh, me and you Hippocrates.

**Sydnee:**

I have very little problem with that statement. [laughs] I mean, sure. Yeah, I would love that. Could I have that?

**Justin:**

That sounds great.

**Sydnee:**

Can you manage that for me, please?

**Justin:**

No problem. No problem at all.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, the Romans were way into oils, um, which makes sense, I think. I always think of, like, the Romans as having, like, I don't know, just big naked bathhouse parties and, like, orgies and, like—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Just eating food and they're probably all oily all the time.

**Justin:**

Eh. I mean, it wasn't all oil and rub downs. They had to do their taxes and walk the dog just like anybody else.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Build the aqueducts. [laughs]

**Justin:**

They put their toga on one... Well, I mean they put their toga on one arm at a time just like—

**Sydnee:**

Just one.

**Justin:**

... you and I.

**Sydnee:**

Well, just one arm.

**Justin:**

Just the one arm, and then they kinda let it dangle.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

A sexy little jaunty angle there.

**Sydnee:**

Um, they, they would use the oils in the bathhouse, like, to create, you know, fragrant steam. Um, actually the, the Romans were so into oils that at one point, one of the emperors actually prohibited them, put prohibition on oils, because he thought it was just a silly excess.

**Justin:**

Uh-huh.

**Sydnee:**

Because they were, they were spending so much money trading to get more oils so that people could smell nice.

**Justin:**

But you could still get underground oils. You just had to go to your local smell-easy.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

And you get s—

**Sydnee:**

Are you, are you proud of that one?

**Justin:**

Mm, I am, I think. I had to think—

**Sydnee:**

You're gonna— Okay.

**Justin:**

... about it first, I think. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, Cleopatra actually had slaves fan smoke from burning incense into the sails of her ship.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

As she arrived to help woo Mark Antony.

**Justin:**

Not a bad gig as far as slave gigs went.

**Sydnee:**

In all this time, we're still trying to figure out, you know—

**Justin:**

They were all bad. I was just kidding. Sorry.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, no. Well.

**Justin:**

You have to stop me when I say—

**Sydnee:**

That goes with—... I'm sorry. Okay.

**Justin:**

It's kind of a back and forth. I say something dumb and you kinda say like, "Don't say that."

**Sydnee:**

I think—

**Justin:**

You say it was whack.

**Sydnee:**

I'm just immune to it. I don't know.

**Justin:**

Oh, that's fine.

**Sydnee:**

I'm sorry. It just rolls.

**Justin:**

Uh, finally you've become immune to my charms.

**Sydnee:**

I'm, I'm coated in essential oils that allow your—

**Justin:**

I put too much sandalwood.

**Sydnee:**

... the water of your quips to roll down my back.

**Justin:**

Six drops instead of five. That's on me. Sorry.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, at this point, we still hadn't really nailed down how to distill essential oils. And Avicenna, who I'd mentioned before, he was a Persian doctor, uh, kinda nailed down how we, we could distill them in about the year 1,000. And so from then on, we were much better at making essential oils.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, which came into big play with the plague. So first of all, you know, the plague, we've talked about the plague before. The bubonic plague. And it ravished Europe for a long time. You know, there were different waves of it, but pretty much for, for, you know, a lot of the... When we go into, like, the 1300s, the 1400s, the 1500, we're still dealing with plague—

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

... on and off. Um, in the 14th century, they would burn frankincense and pine in the streets, hoping that the fumes from these, uh, oils would, would, uh, fight off the plague.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

And then the next century, when we move forward, 1413 there was a band of four thieves who were captured in Marseille. This is a really interesting story. So they had been robbing plague victims, mainly dead bodies, but all people who were dying of plague.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So they would wait till somebody couldn't defend themselves. The four thieves would go in and they would steal a bunch of stuff from them and take off. So they were arrested for the thievery, but then the court said, the magistrate, "How in the world do you not have the plague?"

**Justin:**

Right. You were down in, down there in it.

**Sydnee:**

Exactly. I mean, they're, they are touching plague victims, and none of them are ill. Um, and the, the... We have credited this, history has credited this to them using essential oils. Now, the question is, 'cause I've heard—... I read

different versions of this, why were these men covered in essential oils? I'm assuming they're men. I don't know what they were, but I'm assuming they're men. One, one theory I read is that one of them was related to an apothecary who told them, "Hey, if you're gonna... All right, boys, you scamps. If you're gonna go out and rob dead people—"

**Justin:**

At least be safe about it.

**Sydnee:**

"... at least cover yourself in essential oils so you won't get the plague from them." Uh, the other theory is that in addition to stealing things from dead bodies, they also would steal oils and spices, um because... And I hadn't mentioned this so far. All throughout history, you know, we think about, like, things that were precious, things that people would kill for. Um, spices and essential oils, herbs, good scents and stuff that would make your food taste better?

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

People were, you know, murdered for left and right. There were wars about it. You know, everybody was all about spices and oil, so, you know, there was a lot of money to be made if you stole them and, and sold them. So the other theory is that they had, they had stolen that stuff so they were kinda covered in that anyway. Their clothes and their hands and stuff were also coated with essential oils.

**Justin:**

They were bad at, like, carrying the oversized—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Spillin'. Whoaaa!

**Justin:**

Whoaaa! Oh, no. Not again.

**Sydnee:**

Either way, the court offered them a lax sentence if they would reveal how did you not get the plague. And so they said, "We, either we know or we think or something it's all this oil all over us." And they were like, "Excellent.

Now, we know this information. We're gonna murder you now." There... So they killed 'em.

**Justin:**

Whoa!

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

Sike!

**Sydnee:**

They killed 'em anyway. Um, but from this story... And who knows if this is true? Who knows if... This may be apocryphal. But from this story, one—

**Justin:**

It's kind of a weird stor—... Gotta say. If you're—

**Sydnee:**

It's kinda crazy.

**Justin:**

... if you're gonna create apocrypha, you could probably create something that made a bit more sense than this.

**Sydnee:**

It probably is based in some sort of truth. But one, one thing that comes from this is that there is a brand of essential oils called Thieves, and that's why.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Two, there is, there... The four thieves or the thieves, uh, formula or recipe, this is... You'll, you'll read all about this, right? If you start reading about essential oils and aromatherapy, you'll read this term a lot, um, and what they're talking about is a, is a blend, and you'll find different versions of this, of essential oils that is specifically to be used to ward off disease.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So if you were surrounded by an epidemic, it's flu season, whatever, and you want to prevent yourself from getting it, you need to use a four thieves blend. Um, and there are parties, four thieves parties, where you'll get together and you'll mix up a bunch of this specific blend and everybody'll use it. And then hopefully, you won't get, you know, norovirus or whatever's—

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

... goin' around. Uh, the recipe, as far as I can tell, generally has clove, lemon, cinnamon, eucalyptus and rosemary in different proportions. Um, but y—... but again, I don't know that it—

**Justin:**

Not a lot of hard and fast rules as far as this stuff goes.

**Sydnee:**

Right. Exactly. And I, I don't know how much it would help, but there are plenty of people on the internet who will swear that it kept them from getting a cold.

**Justin:**

Or the plague.

**Sydnee:**

Or the plague. They didn't get the plague.

**Justin:**

I use aromatherapy—

**Sydnee:**

There you go.

**Justin:**

... and I have never had the plague.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]



**Justin:**

Period. The end.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, do you know even Nostradamus was into aromatherapy?

**Justin:**

So he couldn't see too far into the future.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] He, um—

**Justin:**

Evidently.

**Sydnee:**

He gave people rose petal pills to protect them against the plague.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, what I think is great, though, is that we assume that was because he believed in aromatherapy. It may also have been because he owned a perfume manufacturing company.

**Justin:**

Oh, I like that.

**Sydnee:**

So yeah, this works against the plague. Sure.

**Justin:**

Sure. Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Whatever.

**Justin:**

I can... I looked into your future and you don't have the plague. And also, you smell great. Buy this.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Eight dollars.

**Sydnee:**

I can see... [laughs]

**Justin:**

It's eight US dollars.

**Sydnee:**

I can see into the future, and I know it will be eight US dollars.

**Justin:**

I know what the US dollars are gonna be worth, and that's how much it is in case you're curious.

**Sydnee:**

Um, we continued to do research on essential oils once we understood how to do research better. Um, and in the 1800s, people were trying to figure out what are the properties of these oils and, and what, what can they actually do. Uh, there were some studies done that showed that if you looked at the districts of Southern Flance, that... Southern France.

**Justin:**

Southern Flance.

**Sydnee:**

Or Southern France, wherever, that grew flowers—

**Justin:**

[in an exaggerated French accent] In France, we pronounce it—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

[in an exaggerated French accent] ... Flance. Here in Paris, we pronounce it Flance.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

[in an exaggerated French accent] You Americans, in your mouth—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

[in an exaggerated French accent] ... it sounds like France. I cannot even say it. Flance.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

[in an exaggerated French accent] You say it like a native.

**Sydnee:**

You ju—you [laughs] you just insulted 70 French people.

**Justin:**

I... Maybe you did by calling it—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] It's flowers and France and it—

**Justin:**

Got it.

**Sydnee:**

... became Flance.

**Justin:**

Flowers, frowers and Flance.

**Sydnee:**

Frowers and... Anyway. The places there with flowers had less TB, and the theory was that it was all the flowers. [laughs]

**Justin:**

Excellent. The—

**Sydnee:**

Uh, there were also, um, in vitro studies that showed that, meaning in-the-lab studies, that oregano could kill yellow fever. I don't know.

**Justin:**

All right, let's, uh, let's jump forward again. How, uh... Bring me a little closer to today.

**Sydnee:**

Okay. I wanna do that, Justin, but before I do, why don't you take a trip with me down to the billing department.

**Justin:**

Let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

**Sydnee:**

All right, well we're still—

**Justin:**

We're not in the future or the past.

**Sydnee:**

We're still in the past, but—

**Justin:**

Future past.

**Sydnee:**

We're in the, we're in the kind of the birth of the modern concept of aromatherapy, and that really starts in the 1900s with French chemist René-Maurice Gattefossé? I'm... See? I'm—

**Justin:**

Pronounced Flance.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] René-Maurice Flance. Gattefossé? I don't know. I didn't take French.

**Justin:**

Gattefossé.

**Sydnee:**

There you go. Thank you. Sure.

Uh, he established what we know know as the modern concept aro—, of aromatherapy. So he had a small explosion in his lab.

**Justin:**

He blew up all of his sandalwood and essence of lavender.

**Sydnee:**

He was, he was, like, a perfume chemist, so... Of course. What a romantic place France is. They have perfume chemists.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

Um, so he had a, he had an explosion. His hand caught on fire. And hopefully, actually, I'm assuming—

**Justin:**

Sounds like the original story of a really lame superhero.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] Lavender Man?

**Justin:**

Lavender Man.

**Sydnee:**

And—

**Justin:**

Let me freshen things up in here, Dr. Stinko.

**Sydnee:**

Why is that the sound he—

**Justin:**

Lavender beam.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, okay.

**Justin:**

The lavender beam makes that sound. You wouldn't expect it.

**Sydnee:**

I know. That sounds like a bad noise.

**Justin:**

No, it's not.

**Sydnee:**

Like, a bad smell noise.

**Justin:**

That's the lavender beam noise. I don't know. I didn't create it.

**Sydnee:**

So his hand caught on fire. I'm assuming it went out before he did this next thing 'cause otherwise, it would be, it'd be stupid. But he plunged his hand into a pan of liquid that turned out to be lavender oil.

**Justin:**

[laughs] That's lucky.

**Sydnee:**

I'm, I'm assuming the fire was out. Otherwise, that would have been a bad choice.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

As oil is flammable. Um.

**Justin:**

Are you certain lavender oil is flammable?

**Sydnee:**

I am certain that many essential oils are flammable.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

All right, fair enough.

**Sydnee:**

So as far as I know, lavender is one of them.

**Justin:**

Let's go with that.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. It's an oil.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Oil is flammable.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Anyway.

**Justin:**

Are you su—I mean, you're not a chemist. You're, you're—

**Sydnee:**

I'm not.

**Justin:**

You're a biologist.

**Sydnee:**

But I do know that many of the... That's one of my points later, is that many of them are flammable.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

I have it in... further down in the outline if you had looked.

**Justin:**

I'm not allowed to look and you let me.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] You always mess it up when you do.

**Justin:**

Sorry.

**Sydnee:**

Anyway, so he stuck his hand in lavender oil and the burn healed really well. And it didn't scar. And he thought, "Huh, maybe I'm on to something." Now, again this story is not ex—is probably not exactly true either.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, I read a different account which is probably the truth 'cause it, it was s— supposedly based on what he said, which is that he was already tinkering with the idea that maybe these essential oils would help with, with, you know, wounds and stuff. And he... There was an explosion in his lab. In order to to put himself out, he actually rolled around on the grass.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**



Um, and one of his hands became severely infected with... which... what sounds like gas gangrene from the description. And he began to put lavender oil on it intentionally to try to cure it, and it worked.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

So that's probably what happened. But, uh, this kinda led to the idea that different oils could be used to cure things. Um, it really inspired, uh, Dr. Jean Valnet who, um, used it on soldiers in World War I, used different oils, sp— specifically lavender but any dif—, you know, many different oils, uh, to treat different wounds. Um, it also was used by a lot of hospital personnel during the Spanish flu epidemic.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

When it, when it, uh, happened in France, um, in order to keep them from getting sick. So the, you know, doctors and nurses would use it. And they claim that no hospital personnel got sick.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know if that's true. Um, so Dr. Jean Valnet's really who came up with all the dosing from then on, um, and spread the practice far and wide. Uh, now just so you know, there are no, like, boards of aromatherapy. There's no, like, license or certification in aromatherapy that you can get.

**Justin:**

Imagine my surprise.

**Sydnee:**

No, you just... There are professional organizations and you can go to training and things and you can say that you attended, but, um, most people kinda use it as part of another treatment. Like, you do massage and you also do aromatherapy, or you do, um... I don't know, reflexology and you do aromatherapy or—

**Justin:**

Right. Something soothing.

**Sydnee:**

... something. You're an herbalist and you also do aromatherapy.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, some examples of some things that were... that came out of this time period. So for instance, coriander, and these are all oils, can be used as an aphrodisiac. Marjoram could be used as a sedative.

**Justin:**

Can it really?

**Sydnee:**

Uh, no. These are just, uh, things that they were claimed to be good for.

**Justin:**

That would... seems to be a quick one though. Like, it seems like we could sort that out pretty fast.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. I think you use that in some recipes.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

I mean, I don't use a lot of marjoram, but you do. You can. Uh, rose can be used as an antidepressant or a liver stimulant. That's not a thing.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah. Uh, jasmine is a general body tonic. That's never a good sign.

**Justin:**

That doesn't even make sense.

**Sydnee:**

Cinnamon reduces drowsiness. I would say that is not true.

**Justin:**

Somebody's never been to Cinnabon.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

Apparently.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, birch can be used for muscle aches, among... Uh, pretty much any essential oil will say that it works for, like, aches and pains. I... That is not, that is not, like... I don't know that every single one does, but from my reading, almost everyone says that.

**Justin:**

Ditto—

**Sydnee:**

Also, you could use it for pain.

**Justin:**

Ditto with stress. There's a, th—

**Sydnee:**

Yes.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Stress and pain.

**Justin:**

Yeah.

**Sydnee:**

Um, patchouli is an antifungal.

**Justin:**

Okay.

**Sydnee:**

I don't know about that.

**Justin:**

I think, I think Woodstock '94 all taught us that that is inaccurate.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs] There's a lot of athlete's foot coming out of that, I bet.

**Justin:**

Lot, a lot of amputations.

**Sydnee:**

I don't think that's true. [laughs] Well, eh... Uh, so how is this supposed to work? I mentioned that it's not just as simple as smelling something nice, right?

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

They're supposed to have active compounds that can stimulate different parts of your brain and, like I said, actually cause physical changes. There's also some thought that it might stimulate hormones and enzymes in your bloodstream. I don't, uh, I don't really have evidence for any of this. This is just the theory behind it. People are trying to prove this, but as you can imagine, there aren't, like, big giant studies on essential oils.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

Um, like I said, you can inhale it. You can use it with massage. That's the way most people... Uh, and if you're gonna think about taking essential oils orally, well first of all, don't.

**Justin:**

Yeah?

**Sydnee:**

And secondly, even people who are, uh, advocates of aromatherapy will tell you that you need to talk to somebody who is trained specifically in their use as oral agents. I would just say don't ever.

**Justin:**

Just don't. Like—

**Sydnee:**

Just don't.

**Justin:**

Just don't. We just talked about—

**Sydnee:**

Just don't, don't drink them.

**Justin:**

... how there's not a horde of people that say that that's okay.

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

So don't do that.

**Sydnee:**

No. And the, and the reason that that's important is that it's not regimented. Like, you don't know from aromatherapist to aromatherapist if you're getting the same advice.

**Justin:**

Or the same—

**Sydnee:**

'Cause there's no way to know.

**Justin:**

... concentration. Like, it's—

**Sydnee:**

No.

**Justin:**

It's crazy.

**Sydnee:**

No. Or, or even the same treatment for the same disease.

**Justin:**

Right.

**Sydnee:**

It's not, you know, standardized.

**Justin:**

Don't do that.

**Sydnee:**

Uh, so please don't take them orally. Um, why, why is it... why would this be bad? Why am I being cautious? Because they can cause, among other things, rashes, allergic responses. They can be triggers for asthma. If you have asthma, you're actually recommended to stay away from aromatherapy unless you talk to a doctor first.

**Justin:**

Hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Just stay away from it. Uh, liver damage; nerve damage; harm to a fetus if you're pregnant, so stay away from 'em if you're pregnant; interaction with other medications, seizures, death.

**Justin:**

Death? Come one, Sydnee.

**Sydnee:**

If you drink them.

**Justin:**

Well, if you dri—is this just for drinking?

**Sydnee:**

No. This can also be... I mean, think about it. If you have really bad asthma and you, you inhale the wrong aromatherapy—

**Justin:**

Okay, fine.

**Sydnee:**

... that could be deadly.

**Justin:**

Fine.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah.

**Justin:**

I think you're being a little overzealous, but whatever.

**Sydnee:**

I'm just saying that they're, you know, they're potent. Be careful. Also, as I mentioned before, they tend to be flammable.

**Justin:**

Potent?

**Sydnee:**

So if you're gonna have 'em in your house.

**Justin:**

Potent, you say? So they do work.

**Sydnee:**

No. If you're allergic to them or if they irritate your airways and you have asthma, it could be bad.

**Justin:**

Fair enough.

**Sydnee:**

It's what I said. So now, so now because it's a big thing now, what are they marketed for now? Well, lemme give you some examples, if you read the, uh, uh, various sites on the internet that sell essential oils, what you could use them for. Depression; sleep; anxiety; allergies; pain; aging; infections; thyroid problems; immune system boosting, whatever that means; cholesterol; acne; asthma; burns; Alzheimer's or low libido; MS; autoimmune disease or ring worm and constipation or blackheads; bug bites and cancer.

**Justin:**

Yeah, I saw that comin'.

**Sydnee:**

Cancer. So this sounds suspiciously, to me, like a cure-all.

**Justin:**

Yeah. And what have we learned, folks? Cure-alls cure nothing.

**Sydnee:**

Cure-alls cure nothing. Uh, what has been shown, um, they maybe do help with some stress and anxiety and depression, especially when they're administered with a massage. So if you give somebody a nice massage with an essential oil, that can help, which I just think makes sense.

**Justin:**

I mean, yeah.

**Sydnee:**

That's common sense. Yeah.

**Justin:**

That seems a little obvious.

**Sydnee:**

You know, a relaxing scent and a nice massage? Of course that's gonna help with your stress. Um, there are also some small studies that show that they can help with pain sometimes, especially when used with massage. Insomnia, itching maybe, maybe alopecia, hair loss. Uh, but these are all



very small. Um, and again, you're not gonna see big giant studies, so that's just the way it's gonna be.

**Justin:**

Which usually, the reason for that is there's no money to be made. That's not the case with essential oils. Those things are crazy expensive.

**Sydnee:**

They are.

**Justin:**

Like, really, really expensive.

**Sydnee:**

They are. Um, peppermint oil can be used, in one study, to help with nausea and vomiting during labor. But again, if you're pregnant I would not use essential oils without talking to a doctor. Uh, neroli oil can be used to help pre-colonoscopy anxiety.

**Justin:**

[laughs]

**Sydnee:**

So, so there you go if you wanna do that.

**Justin:**

Aren't most of us in some stage of—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... pre-colonoscopy anxiety?

**Sydnee:**

And then, uh, there are several things that have estrogen—like compounds, fennel, anise seeds, sage, and so it's thought that they can help with PMS and menopause. But we've never done human studies, so eh.

**Justin:**

Eh.

**Sydnee:**

Yeah, I don't know. Um, in vitro, meaning in the lab, there are lot of oils that do kill bacteria. I've mentioned that they were used as an antiseptic, so that, that has been shown in a lab but not in humans yet. Like, that, that you can use that to cure disease or, you know, infection. Um, and in all these studies, they make the point that your belief in the therapy will really influence whether or not you respond to it.

**Justin:**

Mm-hmm.

**Sydnee:**

Um, so...

**Justin:**

Always a good sign of a, of a real—

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

... real sherbet medically.

**Sydnee:**

So, um, feel free to inhale them, for the most part, unless you have, like I said, allergies or asthma or if you're pregnant. Uh, I... All those things, I'd talk to a doctor first. If you wanna use 'em with massage, I think that's probably fine. If it irritates your skin, you can mix it with, like, a just, like, a base oil, like vegetable oil or olive oil and it won't do so badly. Um, don't eat them or drink them. Um, and I think there's something called ylang ylang that you could use for self-love and patience. I'm not sure I'm cool with that.

Uh, you should never use 'em in place of other medical treatment. If you have a problem, see a doctor. That's really important. And I think they actually violate one of my two, two rules.

**Justin:**

Which are?

**Sydnee:**

So I have two rules when it comes to stuff that there's no evidence for. Mm, this is when we get into, like, essential oils and herbs and things like that. One, they, they can't harm you. And for the most part, they don't, I think. With the exceptions of who... the groups I've mentioned, I don't think they harm you. But the second rule is that they can't be super expensive, 'cause then I'm worried that you're wasting your money and that somebody's scammin' you. And so—

**Justin:**

They can be really expensive. I mean, they last. Listen, they're concen—

**Sydnee:**

So... Well, that's my point, is that these are, so that violates my rule.

**Justin:**

Well, okay. But they're concentrated. I mean, they're expensive but, like, you can wheeze off a single bottle for weeks just 'cause you only need a few drops, uh, diffused in water to, to get the the—

**Sydnee:**

And—

**Justin:**

... the "effects," quote, unquote.

**Sydnee:**

And, and you know what? I think if you wanna treat yourself and you wanna hang out in a warm bath or you want your lover to rub you down with some sandalwood, I think that's fine and I think it would probably make you feel better. But if you're sick, go see a doctor.

**Justin:**

We're part of the Maximum Fun Network here at Sawbones if you didn't know. Uh, it is a family of podcasts, uh, uh, that are, um, fun m—to the max.

**Sydnee:**

[laughs]

**Justin:**

I gue—

**Sydnee:**

That was great, Justin. That was—

**Justin:**

Thank you, dear.

**Sydnee:**

You're really creative tonight.

**Justin:**

Uh, yeah. I'm, I'm doin' my best. Uh, so, uh, we got a ton a shows on the network. Um, Destination DIY, Baby Geniuses, Stop Podcasting Yourself featuring two of the funniest Canadians I've ever had the pleasure to meet. Uh, Bullseye is a great pop culture show. There's a new one called, uh, Pop Rocket. It's sort of a pop culture chat show that's very funny, and that's brand new. You can check it totally, totally out.

**Sydnee:**

There's also My Brother, My Brother and Me.

**Justin:**

Oh, thank you, dear. That's a show I do with my brothers. So you can listen to that one as well.

**Sydnee:**

Or you could just listen to our show. I don't care.

**Justin:**

Over and over and over again. Hey, listen. Got some, uh, got some fun news for you. Uh, Sawbones is goin' on the road. If you are in Milwaukee or Chicago or Minnesota, we're comin' to your town with My Brother, My Brother and Me in April. First week of April, I think.

**Sydnee:**

So better not be cold anymore.

**Justin:**

Don't be cold anymore 'cause we're gonna be there with the baby and, uh, uh, we're, we're gonna be doing some live shows out there. Um, tickets are, I think, very reasonable. Uh, rather than go through all the venues and what have you, uh, just go to, um, just go to [twitter.com/sawbones](https://twitter.com/sawbones). That's our

Twitter account. Uh, we're also gonna be puttin' it up in our Facebook group. You can find us. Just search, search Sawbones. We'll put up the links that you need in both of those locations, and they'll probably be up on maximumfun.org, too, so you can find 'em there.

But those tickets go on sale this Friday, so make sure that you are ready and waitin' to buy tickets 'cause My Brother, My Brother and Me tickets, uh, traditionally sold pretty quickly. So, uh, that's, that... We're hopefu—... Uh, don't shake your head at me. I'm just sayin'.

**Sydnee:**

Oh, because my tickets sell so quickly.

**Justin:**

Okay. Well, fine. Uh, [laughs] but, uh, you, you should come out and see us and hang out and give us a high five or what have you.

Thanks to Taxpayers for lettin' us use their song Medicines in our show. Thanks to Maximum Fun. Thank you to you, Sydnee, for joining me and staying married to me for lo these many years.

**Sydnee:**

You're welcome.

**Justin:**

And, uh, be sure to join us again next Tuesday for another episode of Sawbones. Until then, I'm Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:**

I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:**

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

[theme music plays]

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