

Sawbones 546: The Heartmobile

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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... Columbus... and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it!

[theme music plays]

[audience cheers]

Justin: Hello everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine! I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

[audience cheers louder]

Justin: Oh, man.

Sydnee: Thank you. Thank you.

Justin: It is really, really interesting that you guys cheered so loud for Sydnee.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Just interesting. Go ahead.

Sydnee: Sorry.

[audience cheers loudly]

Sydnee: That's for you.

Justin: No, no, no.

Sydnee: That's for you.

Justin: Somebody just—who was just walking in the back just rose their fist like it was for them, though. Cheers to you, whoever just did that. It was a good silhouette. I got a good laugh out of that. Thank you.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Cheers to all of us. We're here, back in the home of COSI.

Justin: Yeah.

[audience cheers]

Justin: That's intere—COSI is such an interesting place, Sydnee. And you know what's really interesting? That you mentioned COSI—god, it's like every word you're saying tonight is so interesting to me. And I... I think I know—Paul, can you just show—that's right. That's the—that's the new Huntington quarterly issue of the most interesting people. And who is that? Yes.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Okay. Yeah, thank you.

[cheering continues]

Justin: I wanted to save time, 'cause I was showing it to everybody backstage individually, and I thought, "Here, let me save some time. I'll just show it to everybody at the same time." I'm very proud.

So, uh, there. That's a—I just wanted to show you that 'cause I'm proud of Sydnee. That's all.

[audience cheers]

Justin: I just think it's a shame they wasted pages on other people. You know what I mean? Just, like, one big Sydnee issue. That's what I demand.

Sydnee: No. I appreciate that. Thank you, honey. Thank you. I will say—and I love Huntington. We were born in Huntington, I grew up in Huntington, I still live in Huntington, so clearly I love Huntington. I am just one of the most interesting people *in Huntington*. So, like, that...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: It's good to keep yourself humble, you know? In Huntington.

Justin: You know, I know some other people who live in Huntington.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They also do it every year, so like, there's a whole new crop of people every year.

Justin: I haven't been... on it, I don't think, though. And I am Huntington, too, if you think about it. It's like...

Sydnee: And also, to be fair, that's Huntington Quarterly is that magazine, and your dad writes an article every issue in that.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Yeah. I didn't take a picture of Dad's, like, closing article.

[crosstalk]

Sydnee: Every issue.

Justin: It's actually even more embarrassing that I haven't been in it now!

[audience laughs]

Justin: [wheeze-laughs] Kind of a little bit shameful now that I think about it. But hey—but you know what? We are thrilled to be here. We're Huntingtonians at heart and always will be, but if you want to see a concert, you're going to Columbus. That's the Huntington motto.

Sydnee: That's right. You want to see a concert, you want to go to a beer hotel, you're going to Columbus.

Justin: Columbus. You want to go to a children's science museum? Closest one's in Columbus. You know what? It's funny, COSI was actually part of the reason we wanted to found the Huntington Children's Museum, just 'cause I love COSI so much, 'cause it's the best.

Sydnee: It's the best.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: And we checked out Other World today, which was incredible.

Justin: We went to Other World. That was cool.

Sydnee: Incredible. Yeah, incredible.

[audience cheers]

Justin: Great place.

Sydnee: Um, so whenever we tour—we haven't toured in a long time, Sawbones. You have, but Sawbones hasn't. And whenever we do, we like to

try to find something related to the area to talk about. And my first thought, which was not my best thought, uh, was, "Isn't Wendy's from Columbus?"

[mixed cheers and groans from audience]

Justin: It is.

Sydnee: I love Wendy's. It's my favorite fast food restaurant. The Junior Bacon Cheeseburger is—

[scattered cheers from audience]

Sydnee: Yeah. Nothing beats it. It is the perfect—it is what—that's what you need. If you need a fast food hamburger, you need a Junior Bacon Cheeseburger, in my opinion.

Justin: Yeah. Did you all tear down the first Wendy's, or is it still up?

Audience: [unintelligible]

Justin: It's gone. It used to be near the old COSI, right? The old COSI spot is where the first Wendy's was. Hmm.

Sydnee: This is how we—

Justin: I don't have a, uh, joke.

Sydnee: This is very—

[audience laughs]

Justin: Just something I remember 'cause I'm old. That's all.

Sydnee: This is very Huntington talk, though. Like, "Ah, yeah. That's where the old COSI—that's the old... "

Justin: "Yeah, it used to be something."

Sydnee: "It used to be the Mac and Dave's. I remember that place."

No. And so I was gonna talk about—I was like, "I should talk about Wendy's."

I'm not gonna talk about Wendy's, so let me just get that out there. Because I was like "Oh, what could I talk about? Medical history plus fast food restaurant? That's not gonna be pleasant."

[audience laughs]

Justin: No, thanks.

Sydnee: You're not gonna want to hear about that. Because immediately I was like, "Didn't they have an E. coli thing?" I think they had—like, every fast food restaurant has had, like, an E. coli thing.

Justin: It's almost weirder if you haven't had one. It's like, what are you hiding? You know what I mean?

Sydnee: Right?

Justin: At this point.

Sydnee: And then I had this thought, like, well, that's not a fun... that's not fun, of a live episode. And then what if—and I don't know, you all can tell me this if you're from Columbus. Do you regard Wendy's the way that, like—when we think of our, like, beloved local eateries. Like, the local spots that, like, if you know you know. Is Wendy's that in Columbus?

Audience: No!

Sydnee: Okay. Well, never mind, then!

Justin: That was the—that was the—guys?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: I've been asking audiences questions for a long time. That is the most united I have ever heard.

[audience laughs]

Justin: And y'all, y'all, I have asked people in Michigan how they feel about Ohio. And that is still the most unified I have ever heard an audience in a sentiment.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: Is there Wendy's resentment? That's what I feel like! You're like, "No."

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay, maybe!

Justin: Let's leave this here. This is fascinating.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Well, maybe I should've talked about E. coli at Wendy's. I was pitching this idea to Justin. I was like, "We could talk about this one major E. coli outbreak tied to a Wendy's. It was, like, in their Romaine lettuce there. And, I mean, it's great because nobody died, so it's good one to talk about."

Justin: Fun.

Sydnee: And I feel like if that's your number one, like, sales pitch is like, "Nobody died!"

Justin: Nobody dies in this one.

Sydnee: "So it's a good one." So that wasn't good. So... so we're not gonna talk about that. So as I was, like, going through, what are the things about Columbus? I mean, you've got a lot of, like, great medical institutions here, and universities, and a lot of, you know, academia that we could dig into. You've got ten sister cities. Did you know that? Columbus has ten sister cities? I read every article.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I know so much about Columbus. But then I found something that hit close to home, and it's called the Heartmobile. So I want to talk about, if you haven't heard about it, Columbus's Heartmobile. And I'm excited, 'cause nobody's cheering, so it makes me think you haven't!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: You haven't heard of the Heartmobile.

Justin: [simultaneously] That's better! 'Cause they're gonna learn something, just like me.

Sydnee: This was close to home for me, because very recently Justin and I made a purchase.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: Do you want to talk about what we bought?

Justin: Uh, it's a—it's still very ill-advised, but Sydnee has had it in her head that she's gonna branch out from the, uh, population of people experiencing homelessness in Huntington and start spreading out to other counties, so she found—

[scattered cheers and whistles from audience]

Justin: —a bus. She found a bus on...

[audience cheers]

Justin: ... Facebook.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: She found a bus on Facebook Marketplace that we went and bought in Hurricane. And so—

Sydnee: Naw, it was in—no, it was in Salt Rock.

Justin: Salt Rock, right.

Sydnee: You know Salt Rock. You go out past the last Billy Bob's that still exists.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: You don't want to get to Hurricane. You know, you know, Salt Rock. That's where it was.

Justin: It's spelled "Hurricane" but pronounced "Hurrican."

Sydnee: Hurricane. And so we bought—it's like—it's one of the shorter school buses that had been already converted into a camper by these guys, and it's painted kinda purple. And I'm gonna do medical outreach in it.

Justin: Yeah, so we're trying to figure that out.

[audience cheers and applauds]

Justin: That—hey. You should know that that sounds very nice, but you are not the person whose house it is parked outside.

[audience laughs]

Justin: And has been for several weeks.

Sydnee: My mom called it Grimace, once...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And now it's Grimace. Now it's Grimace, my medical bus.

Justin: I'm gonna text Paul a picture so they can see your bus.

Sydnee: Okay. So, I'm gonna tell you about the Heartmobile, your very own Columbus Grimace. It's not purple, though. That's okay. That's okay. We will forgive that.

So, we have done a whole Sawbones before on the history of ambulances. That's a very specific idea, right? Like, people are sick somewhere. We need to get them to the place where the medical care, the doctors and everything are. How do we transport them?

And a lot of the origins of that, as we've talked about before, came from, like, war time. How do we get people from the battlefield to somewhere where they can get to medical care?

And specifically, like, is there stuff that we could do in the field? And that was really the origin of the idea of an ambulance. Like, instead of just picking somebody up, throwing them in a car, and driving them to medical care, is there more that we could do out in the field?

And a lot of the original care came from firefighters, from fire departments, because they would send people to the scene of a fire, and either the firefighters or the civilians would need care during the fire.

Justin: Oh, there's Sydnee's bus, in case anyone would like to see it.

Sydnee: Well, there's my school bus.

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: I didn't expect Grimace to be part of it.

Justin: No, but, well, Grimace— [crosstalk]

Sydnee: There's a futon in it, and I gotta get the futon out before I can take care of people.

Justin: [laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: If you go into a place to get a shot and you see a futon, leave!

[audience laughs]

Justin: Don't stay there! Go somewhere else to get the shot.

Sydnee: Right? Yeah. Like, I can't say, like, "Come into my school bus. I have a futon."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I couldn't—

Justin: Yeah, the bunk beds cover the emergency exit. We're working on it.
[wheezes]

Sydnee: Yeah, it's a work in progress.

[theme music plays]

[ad break]

Sydnee: So, let's go back. We're talking about ambulances. And specifically in Columbus. In 1931, in—we're talking about the Columbus Fire Department. They added something called a Lyons pulmotor, which was like a resuscitator, an early days sort of, like, um, respiration—like, ventilator kind of device. They added something like that to a vehicle that they could take out into the field. And those were—that was the first attempt to, if somebody is injured, severely injured out in the field, instead of just, like, throwing them in somewhere and taking them somewhere, let's do something about it, right?

And this was very exciting. And so they put this in there, and they started using it out in the field. They got a report—and, I mean, almost immediately afterwards—of somebody who had been electrocuted out in the field.

So they took it out to the field. Sadly, it didn't necessarily work, but we're not gonna dwell on that. But...

Justin: Hey, good instincts, hun!

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But it made a lot of headlines. People all heard about this. "Did you hear they took this fancy machine way out in a car? They drove it to somebody. They took it out in the field and they tried to make him better out in the field. You know, the next time I'm hurt, or sick, or injured, I think I'm gonna call the fire department."

And so this really promoted this idea that, you know, when you need somebody, when you're sick, you should call the fire department. That was where—those were the origins of that idea, where they will bring care to you instead of just taking you to the hospital.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And that was really exciting. So, like, Columbus was sort of leading the way. And there were other cities that were also starting to do this, but Columbus was already leading the way in, like, out-of-hospital emergency care as a way to improve outcomes.

'Cause that was the big thing, is that if somebody's severely injured, you know, there's a time factor. The faster you can get care to them, the faster you can, you know, ensure they're stable, and maybe save their life.

And so Columbus was kind of leading the way. Uh, it wasn't until the 60s, though, that we really started to get this attention nationally on, what could we do with emergency medical services? And a lot of this came with the idea that heart attacks were the leading cause of death.

So we started thinking about, like, heart disease, and cardiovascular events, and isn't there more that we could be doing before somebody gets to the hospital?

Um, wouldn't we improve outcomes if those kinds of things happen?

And at the time, a lot of our ambulances—so, there were fire departments who had vehicles that could come. That wasn't standardized, though. You wouldn't necessarily call the fire department no matter where you were.

In a lot of cities, what you would call was a hearse.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs quietly] A funeral home. I mean, and I don't mean that facetiously. They were the ambulances.

Justin: I mean, you can fit a laying-down person in there. Why have two different laying-down cars, right?

Sydnee: No, literally! That was your ambulance! You called the funeral home and they drove you to the hospital! I don't—I mean, this isn't—I'm not—I feel like this is, like, dark humor.

Justin: I bet you have to do—

Sydnee: No, this isn't dark humor! You would call the funeral home and they would send the hearse, and they would take you to the hospital.

Justin: They probably have a bit of a preamble, though, right? Like, "Listen. I'm sure this is freaking you out a little bit. You gotta understand, you won't *definitely* die."

[audience laughs]

Justin: "Definitely."

Sydnee: No, I mean, I'm not saying they wouldn't wait outside.

[audience laughs]

Justin: They're already there. Like, it's wild to go back—It's actually bad for the planet to go back to the funeral home and go back to the hospital. Think about it.

Sydnee: But, I mean, yeah.

Justin: Or somebody else. They're not picky. Like, any...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: But no, that really was, in a lot of communities, that was the best you could hope for if you, you know, somebody... I don't know, gets hit by a car, falls out of a tree, whatever, you would call the funeral home. And they would drive your—

Justin: Your cat got stuck in a tree, you would call the funeral home.

Sydnee: No, I don't—[laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: It's true.

Sydnee: I mean, I don't know. They may have. But—so, they were—there really was this need. We know that heart disease is this big problem. We think that if we could do things out in the field—the hearses are not gonna be the ticket. These are not people equipped.

Justin: Depressing everyone.

Sydnee: Yes. Firefighters seem to have an idea, but we don't really have something. What is the missing piece? What is the vehicle? What is the thing that we're missing? And what really inspired people at that point was a project that started in Belfast in Northern Ireland, where they started creating these mobile heart—coronary care, mobile heart care units.

Um, and they were basically like these—they would call them flying squads that would come to the site of some sort of, you know, you think somebody's having a heart attack, they're having chest pain, whatever. And they would actually give them some sort of care. Whether it was resuscitating them with, you know, chest compressions, or some kind of medication, or whatever they had available at the time, they were gonna give them, right there, in a vehicle, at the site, instead of waiting till they got to the hospital.

And this was really inspirational. And some of the doctors who got on board with this really quickly were, again, right here in Columbus. There were two

doctors, Dr. James Warren and Dr. Richard Lewis, who were of Ohio State University hospitals, were watching what was happening in Belfast.

Justin: Are they... are they... here?

[audience laughs]

Justin: Would've been something, though, huh? Okay, sorry.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Probably not.

Justin: I said it would've been something! I mean...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So they had this idea. We need a vehicle. We need something. If we're going to go out into the community and provide care it can't just be, like, us in our... Neon. I don't know. Whatever car.

[audience laughs]

Justin: You think they had neon?

Sydnee: [laughs] No, that was my first car, so that's always what I think of. You know, a Dodge Neon. That's probably what they had, right?

Justin: Oh, like the car, the Neon. Okay, sorry. I thought you meant, like, their clothing. Okay.

Sydnee: No, like—[laughs]

[audience laughs]

Justin: Their Dodge Neon that they arrive—

Sydnee: [simultaneously] Us in our Corola. Like...

Justin: Okay, gotcha.

Sydnee: Coming up with, like, pulling some paddles out of the back. Like, "Hold on, let me get this out of the trunk."

Like, we need something.

Justin: Something.

Sydnee: Right. We need a vehicle! And—

Justin: What's hard is that they already had the hearse, and if they just put the lights on the hearse, we're at Ecto-1. Like, we're there.

[audience laughs]

Justin: You know what I mean? Like, we were so close!

Sydnee: Well, they wanted something bigger. And they really were thinking big. They were thinking, like, a big enough vehicle that we could have essentially a whole coronary care unit in the back. Like a huge exam table, like, operating table is what you would think of, the thing that they put in there. And all of the equipment that you would need to resuscitate somebody, almost like in an ER, right there in the back of this mobile unit.

And so they actually got a grant from the Federal Highway Commission, and a couple different cities got it. Columbus was just the first to jump on this and create something that they called the Heartmobile. It was the first mobile coronary care unit in the United States. It was created right here in Columbus. And it—

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: —Yeah! And the whole idea is that they would staff it with one of the cardiologists from Ohio State University, and then they would also have firefighters on board, and then together they would go to the site, if they were called. I mean, these are—essentially we're seeing the beginning of paramedics. We're seeing the beginning of an ambulance with paramedics in it.

They did have a doctor initially that would help out, and the idea was "We're gonna pilot this for a couple years." And it was a study. "We're gonna see if the outcomes of the people that we go take care of out in the field improve if we take care to them before we get them to the hospital, instead of waiting till they get to the hospital."

Um, and obviously it was a rousing success. Like, it was just—it was amazing. So...

Justin: 'Cause you're doing it earlier.

[pause]

Sydnee: Yeah, Justin.

Justin: Before they're sicker.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: 'Cause you're doing it earlier.

Justin: That's huge.

Sydnee: Um, and it was really easy. You would call the fire department if there was—you know, somebody says "I'm having chest pain." You call the fire department, which a lot of people were already sort of, you know, predisposed to do because of this history in Columbus.

I think that's why this caught on here so quickly, is because the fire department had already been kind of unofficially providing this care out in

the community, and so people were sort of already programmed to do that. So they knew to call. Call the fire department. The Heartmobile, um, which actually we have a picture of the Heartmobile. Paul, will you show our first—this is what the Heartmobile looked like.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I know, right? It's really cool.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] So...

Justin: Really cool.

Sydnee: I mean, can you imagine this rolling up outside your house? I'd be so excited.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Except for the fact that you or your loved was experiencing a severe cardiac event.

Sydnee: Well, there is that.

Justin: Which you probably are pretty excited about, just not the kind of excited you mean.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So this was the Heartmobile, as they created it. If—it was housed in a building right next, uh, to the hospital emergency room. This is called the heart shack.

[audience laughs loudly]

Justin: Tin roof!

[audience laughs loudly]

Justin: Rusted!

Sydnee: So what you would do is you would have somebody on call in the hospital, one of the doctors' job that evening was to be on the Heartmobile, if it was called. Which, again—

Justin: I'm assuming they, like, spilled something earlier that day or, like, missed a shift or something, and they had to go stay in the heart shack as punishment.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: And if you—if there was a call, then they would call the emergency room and say, like, "Paging the Heartmobile doctor. Get to the heart shack. It's time to go."

I assume... you know what? In my fiction, the doctor's driving. Probably not. They wouldn't let us drive. The doctor's probably in the back. But somebody would drive the Heartmobile to the site of the emergency. And again—so they did this for a couple years, and then they published. This was very much supposed to be a study, so, "Will this work"

So they published all their results after two years. And it—again, the results were so compelling to the rest of the nation that this is a way to save lives. This is a way to improve outcomes if we bring care to people. That it fundamentally changed the way we think about emergency medical services, and ambulances, and paramedics, forever.

The only changes are pretty quickly they realized that there were things—we don't necessarily need all these things. The Heartmobile would go through several different iterations. And they also figured out pretty quickly that they don't need doctors.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: I always tell the kids this. If we, like, drive past the site of an accident or something, if an ambulance is already there the girls'll ask me, like, "Do you need to stop, Mommy?"

And I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no. The experts are there. They do not need a doctor. [laughs] The people who they need are already there."

And they realized that pretty quickly, is you really don't need a doctor on there. And this was great, because that was—that was a barrier, right? There are only so many physicians. There are only so many cardiologists. I mean, initially they were only sending out cardiologists. So that would be a big barrier to a smaller community hospital setting up a program like this.

Well, now they're like, "No, no, no. We can train firefighters. We can train EMTs. We can train people to do the care that's needed out in the community, and we don't need a cardiologist to do that."

Justin: Mm-hmm. It lowers the cost, too, overall, if you don't have to staff with a physician all the time.

Sydnee: That's true, Justin. I like that you're always cost-conscious with these sorts of endeavors.

[audience laughs]

Justin: All dollars and cents with me. You know what's interesting? I was thinking about you when we were talking about how these would get out, I was wondering about, like, dispatching. Like, how would you get those calls out? And it occurred to me, like, that whole system kind of has to rise with this. You know what I mean? Like, we have to build those sort of systems too. They aren't in place yet. So, like, calling this would have to be a pretty, like, specific local thing, when it's just, like, a test program like that.

Sydnee: Yeah. And it was. But they published the results, and it was really compelling. So compelling that they immediately began improving upon it.

And the Heartmobile in that original iteration was retired after really, like, two years, because they just got better ambulances. Things that looked more like what you would think of as an ambulance today. And we continued to modify that into the ambulance that would arrive if you—I hope you don't—if you unfortunately had an emergency.

Um, but what happened? This is the question to me. What happened to the Heartmobile? 'Cause here's this cool thing. It's this amazing little quirky piece of medical history. And then it kind of became vestigial really quickly.

So... initially there was some talk, like, "This is a great thing that we've created. We know we don't need it anymore, but we should save it." But, eh, there really wasn't a big movement for that. People were like, "I don't know. It's this big, giant van. We should probably use it for something."

Um, so they retired it from emergency response in 1972. They took all of the EMS equipment out of it pretty quickly, and they actually changed it into, like, a recruiting station for the fire department. So, they repainted the entire thing, and they took it out into communities and tried to recruit people to be firefighters with it for a while, so it served as that for several years.

Um, after that was done they started—the Columbus Fire Honor Guard started using it as a transport vehicle for a while, so it had kind of a third life as that. And then eventually it was given to the training division, where it was used to transport recruits back and forth, 'cause it's a big van. You could put a lot of seats, you could put a lot of people in it.

And then around 1985, they said, "I don't know what we're gonna do with this big van anymore." [laughs quietly] "We don't need to take it out anymore. We don't need to move anybody anywhere."

Justin: The fate of all big vans eventually. Ah, you hate to think about it. There's so many Pixar movies about it, but eventually... every big van has to die.

[audience laughs]

Justin: Go ahead, Sydnee.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, it's true. It was in terrible shape. It had rusted. The paint had faded. The lights were hanging off of it. It was in bad shape.

Justin: Goodbye, buddy. Goodbye.

Sydnee: They just kind of let it...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They let it fall apart. And a lot of people didn't remember it. I mean, 'cause it really—it didn't serve for very long, right? The chances that you had encountered the Heartmobile in its heyday were pretty slim. It was, like, two years.

Justin: [through laughter] The chances that you'd see the next day are even slimmer.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Oh, that's... I mean, that's true.

Justin: No disrespect to the great cardiologists of Columbus. I hope you all appreciate a good ribbing.

Sydnee: I'm usually the bummer in these episodes. [laughs] So, anyway. So, here we have this big van that's this piece of medical history that is just sort of falling apart. And they finally decide, like, "Ah, there's nothing to—" There were some people with the fire department who wanted to preserve it, but nobody had the money or the power to do. And so they were—

Justin: You gotta start selling little chunks of it in necklaces. That's what I...

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They were gonna put it up at a surplus auction. So then who knows what it was gonna become, right?

Justin: A sur-bus auction.

Sydnee: Yeah.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: This is a true story. I read this, uh, and I... if I—if I had the time to just go find the people involved with this story and do a deep dive—I am not a journalist. I wish I was, because this is a fantastic story.

So, a few weeks before they were gonna put this van up for auction, [holding back laughter] an anonymous tip was received at the Columbus Fire Department, at Station 2. And the department historian received this call, so that's lucky. That would be Robert Throckmorton. And—

Justin: Is he here?

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: He was told—he was told, "If you want to save the Heartmobile..."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "... now would be the time." And that a gate, quote, "may be unlocked."

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: "If you want to get the Heartmobile out of there."

[audience laughs]

Justin: Columbus! Nice!

[audience cheers and applause]

Sydnee: And that is exactly what happened. After hours, two firefighters drove to the station. They found a gate unlocked.

Justin: They—they—I'll say it—stole it, right?

[audience laughs and cheers]

Sydnee: They had to—they had to get a mechanic to jump start the Heartmobile and they stole it!

[audience cheers and applause]

Justin: Okay. Here's what I'm thinking. Tom Hardy is both of the firefighters, and also the voice of the bus. Now, hear me out.

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: So, this is a great heist. And I want to know all the people involved. I wish I could do just a history of interviewing everybody involved. So they stole the Heartmobile. Or appropriated it, is how they keep wording it in the history. They appropriated—

Justin: "We thought we saw fire! I don't know what to tell you! Eyes are playing tricks, but we thought it was a fire, so legally we had jurisdiction."

Sydnee: They moved it around to different fire stations around Columbus!

[audience laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: To keep people guessing until, like, the 80s. They just kept moving it around. And then finally it landed at Station 28, and there were some people there who were like, "We're really interested in trying to rebuild this thing."

So they started working on rebuilding the engine. And I'm talking about, like, just people who know stuff about rebuilding fire trucks, who start—er, fire—well, fire trucks, and then obviously these kinds of vehicles—started rebuilding this in their free time. Like, guys would just meet after work and get together and work on this Heartmobile, because they really believed it should be preserved, and they really loved it.

And so you can see—Paul, we have another picture of... in-process.

[audience cheers and applauds]

Justin: Yeah!

Sydnee: They were restoring it. It took a lot of fundraising and cooperation. It took some detective work. They had to, like, track down where the different components, if they could find them, that had been inside the Heartmobile, ended up. And there were, like—they found, um, the original EKG machine was owned by a local physician who was using it as a coffee table.

Justin: The noise I just...

[audience laughs]

Justin: The noise I heard you nerds make when she was like, "The EKG machine," was like, "Ooh! Ahh!"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: They got the original clock. And then there were a lot of things that they just had to kind of find, like, this would be appropriate for the time period. Paul, will you show the next—yeah, and you can see, this is what the

inside of it looks like now. They had to rebuild that exam table. That's an original from the time period. And that is exactly what it would've looked like if it showed up.

I mean, you can see, this is pretty state of the art for—I mean, an ambulance usually doesn't have all of this space to do all of this. It was huge.

Justin: It looks—you know what's funny? It looks—and the time period kind of lines up. It looks like how airplanes used to look. Like, when we think about, "We need this much space to do this. Like, you gotta be able to walk around. You gotta have room for a piano. Otherwise, what are you doing?"

[audience laughs]

Sydnee: You can see there's the original clock. There's the original EKG and defibrillator. All of this was right there in the wall, so if they pulled up, they could go ahead and do an EKG. They could do defibrillation if your heart stopped. What's our next... there you go. There's oxygen masks and regulators.

I mean, a really well-equipped vehicle, especially for the time. Um, and I think I've got one more. And there's the—

Justin: [simultaneously] It's looks like the machines in Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.

Sydnee: I love this. There's the tape recorder for our EK—we don't usually do this now. There's your tape recorder for your EKG transmission so you can bring that to the hospital and have people read that.

So, all of that was inside the Heartmobile, and now it is restored. And what's really cool is if you want to see this, if you want to see the Heartmobile, you can visit it now at the Central Ohio Fire Museum. Which is, like... .3 miles from here? It's, like, down the street?

[audience cheers]

Sydnee: There it is.

Justin: So you can send us—send us your pictures of you with the Heartmobile.

Sydnee: I know! So you can visit it. It's super close. Um, I couldn't convince the girls to do that over Other World today. [laughs] I was like, "Can we come see this heart—this big van that has old medical equipment in it please?"

Justin: Nah. No dice. Uh, hey, Columbus, thank you so much for, uh, being here with us.

[audience cheers and applauds]

Justin: Thanks for rebuilding that cool bus. Thanks for being so kind to us. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program, and thanks to you for listening. That's gonna do it for us. Until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

[audience cheers and applauds]

[theme music plays]

[chord]

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