Heart Disease Hero: One Man's Journey From Heart Disease To Health Transcript

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Introduction and Guest Welcome

Well, good day, everybody Welcome to another absolutely amazing interview here at reverse heart disease naturally. Summit, This is Joel Kahn cardiologist, you know that and hopefully you have been excited by all the interviews were doing.

But today, hold on, buckle up, put your seatbelt on. It's a good one. You're gonna meet somebody that if you're in Detroit where I am, you know very well and if you're somewhere else in the world, you may not know until right now. So without further ado, my dear friend, fellow detroiter paul, Chaplin, Good day paul, Good morning, good morning to all. And hello, my dear friend Dr Joel Kahn, and I'll just point out people will be watching this in Singapore and Australia and it might be middle of the night for them.

But we'll say good day to all because the international reach that the idea of reversing heart disease naturally has its international science base and certainly it's unfortunately an international disease, heart disease. So you and I are approaching almost a decade of collegiality, friendship and uh working relationship, we'll talk about that that started early 2014. Why don't you tell us that story?

Let me just say as a disclaimer paul is amazing. You really want to watch every second of this interview, but there's no m d after his name, there's no PhD paul is the real deal paul is why we're having this summit and thousands and potentially millions of people like paul who have the courage to believe that you can stabilize and reverse heart disease naturally.

So paul called me in january 2014 and paul bring us up. What was your life like summer of 2013? And what started to happen?

Paul's Early Symptoms and Family History

Well I was, you know, waking up one day with severe chest pressure and it continued for about 23 months. It would happen in the morning uh during the day, not too often and come back at night and it just would continue and continue.

And then one day I was at a meeting uh and I left the meeting and I could not take seven steps without just stopping. And I was cold sweats and I knew right then I needed to go seek doctor. I should have done it months earlier.

But like most silly people like me, I thought it would just go away. I didn't know much about it back then and didn't go away, it actually got worse. So I finally decided to go to my general doctor and what he discovered was The heart murmur he had not heard before.

So about 53 53 54 and you had a doctor, but you also had a pretty scary family history of heart disease. You knew that this was out there in your genes, potentially your genes.

Yeah, my my dad and his three brothers all had bypass surgery in their fifties. Uh Two of them never made it off the table. One of them who was my absolute favorite was never the same mentally and my dad who did get through it uh was in pain for you know four or five days and saw him cry.

I've never seen him cry before. So that's the memory I have as a young man uh in my family and I don't want to go off on a tangent. But at age 53 54 you had a primary care doc. You had this fairly you know scary family history. You were aware if I recall your cholesterol was pretty darn high at that point. Well back then you had three basic medications, Oak or Lipitor and protestant. So I tried the but got the side effects of it literally couldn't walk one day.

So after a couple of days of being off it, everything was fine. They put me on Lipitor six months into Lipitor same situation. So they put me on 80 mg of pravastatin. And the best they could do is take my cholesterol from a number of 350 down to 2 80. But at that point back those years ago my doctor was like okay well that's about As good as we're gonna get.

And that's where I stood for the next 20 years or so. And I hate to say this we're going to have some other exciting summit interviews on the advanced ability to detect heart disease even when you're asymptomatic using CT scanning.

We're gonna be talking to dr Matthew booed off from U. C. L. A. And dr James min in new york. But you had not had a heart calcium ct scan when you turned 50.

It's just not part of the standard medical program. I'm not blaming your doctor but you have not had anything like that. No not at all. Could have detected a couple of years before this period of you know what as a cardiologist you're having is new onset angina pectoris.

Angina latin word for struggling or choking and petrus meaning of the chest. And no it's a pretty reliable symptom in a early fifties man with a high cholesterol and family history that your clogged up.

Diagnosis and Near-Bypass Decision

So what was the next step you knew you were in trouble? Your primary care doc saw you and you got referred to a cardiologist I imagine it wasn't me Right.

I was referred to his suggested cardiologist at the Beaumont Hospital and I did all the tests up to a heart Catherine Heart biopsy at the end of those tests.

He looked at me and he said Paul I've been doing this for 2030 years and I can only start to tell you you need a heart transplant or bypass surgery pretty quickly.

So he said but let's let's you and I schedule a heart catheter. So I scheduled it in the meantime on the way home that day. I finally decided I foolishly I had not told anybody in my family what my situation was hoping it would go away. I stopped my wife's office, brought her into the conference room and started describing the struggles I've had for the last 23 months. And uh you know when she started crying her actually her boss walked in and at that time he's like what's going on?

And we explained it to him what I was going through and he said hold on and it turned out a couple of months, a couple of years prior he had a procedure done at the Cleveland clinic and he happened to know some people. And he actually got me in for an appointment the day before I was going to get my heart catheter at Beaumont.

So that's where we did, we drove to the Cleveland clinic and I went through the same types of tests. But it also included a heart catheter And that there it was discovered that I did not need a heart transplant but rather immediate bypass surgery. My right artery was 100% blocked and my left arteries a couple of them were like in the 65 70% range.

So there I was uh all geared up ready to go uh for bypass surgery. And it turned out that the doctor that I was assigned, He his mentor was dr caldwell Esselstyn in medical school. So as I was heading to the operation surgery door, he stopped, he said would you consider a nutrition change and maybe we don't need to have the surgery today, Joel. I did not know what, what nutrition was 10 years ago. I knew it was like, hey, you know eat fruits and vegetables. I had no idea what it meant, but I was up to doing anything to not have the surgery because I saw how it affected my family.

So basically I said I'll do anything, yes, I'll try the nutrition lifestyle change. He picks up his phone, it's 9 30 at night. He dials Dr caldwell Esselstyn who I never met before, nor did I ever meet the doctor prior and he said, hey, I got somebody I want to talk to and that was the first time I heard of Dr Esselstyn and spoke to him and he said, why

don't you go on home and I'll give you a call and sure enough.

The next morning at eight o'clock he asked me to read his book, which I did end to end and the next day I got rid of all my meat, dairy and oil and went right to whole foods at the there.

I mean, you know, for everybody listening, you're, you're hours away from open heart bypass, saw the sternum open, maybe do some work on a heart valve.

But Cleveland clinic is famous for two things. It's famous for the largest volume of heart surgery in the United States. It may be the largest in the world.

I'm not sure 10 times the number of heart operations that they do at my local hospital, which is a big hospital and it's also famous for dr caldwell Esselstyn who I had probably met five years earlier than this portion of the story but not not 25 years ago.

And he wrote a book prevent and reverse heart disease that I have multiple copies in my office for patients to take home and read and study. About a third of the book are amazing recipes. 100 and 50 healthy recipes.

And two thirds of the book is the science of why regions in the world don't know what heart diseases but in the western countries in the United States it's the number one killer of men women. But here you are hours away and you get the other Cleveland clinic message that there's nutritional therapy.

And I mean how how difficult was it to get out of the Cleveland clinic? I mean you got a surgeon with your name on his schedule in the morning, you got nurses, you got anesthesiologist. Perhaps not too many people walk out of the Cleveland clinic 12 hours before open heart surgery.

I mean your own mental state and everybody around you, I bring this up because it's hard to be a maverick. It's hard to choose the other path. Even if science says there is another path because conventional medicine is going to push you towards surgery.

Angioplasty stenting valve replacement transplant. So how difficult was that whole process Even before you got on the phone with dr Esselstyn the next morning I was just on unchartered water.

I mean I didn't have a buddy taking you through this, I didn't have dr Joel Kahn, right by my side.

Starting the Plant-Based Lifestyle

I was just, you know, I went in with the idea that because I mean here I was, I remember like telling myself as they're wheeling me and just wake up from the bypass. That's what I was thinking, like just whatever you do, just wake up. That was my thoughts before as I was being wheeled in for what I thought was surgery. And then I kept saying, God, you know, like we do this in our lives, like God, if you get me out of this one, I'll owe you a big one.

And sure enough, within like two minutes, uh my doctor's looking at me going, well, I've only offered this to one other person in 20 years, would you consider a life style change? And I'm like, I'll do anything, I'll do whatever you want. So yeah, we're vulnerable, desperate, open point in your life.

And obviously uh dr Hannah at the Cleveland clinic is a respected and senior doctor. So you you weren't hearing this from a ragtag magazine that you could reverse your heart disease, You heard it from the man, wow. So you actually drove home that night?

Yeah, we we we finished the four hour rush Esther after the catheter And about 12 o'clock at night, my wife says either we get a hotel room or I'll just drive home and I really wanted to sleep in my own bed. So I was like let's go home.

So I got home by three o'clock and sure enough, the next morning Dr Esselstyn calls me at eight o'clock now we're

gonna hear and learn from the great dr Esselstyn during this reverse heart disease naturally Summit, very grateful for that for all of his work.

So we'll get the details of a whole food plant based, no oil, no added sugar, alcohol, caffeine, healthy healthy heart diet, let's emphasize the positive. There are some things to take away but there's lots of you probably weren't eating gigantic salads and steamed kale before the Cleveland clinic visit I imagine. Well I like salad but I would always have it with the dressings that you know, we're not good for me.

So so now it's you know, quite a change in my life. So your home, you have a phone call with Dr Esselstyn, you look at your pantry, you look at the refrigerator, your freezer and you've got his book to be a guide which is a wonderful book and at the time, you know one of them maybe three or four out there that really could guide patients and I mean what you do in your own home because people listening that are considering nutritional change for various reasons they have to do the same thing, what do you do? Well, I mean first, you know, my wife and I agree that, you know, like as much as I would have and would love to have her journey, it was truly just my journey and I'm thankful that we're still in love and we respect each other's space. So we kind of sectioned off half the pantry for me, half the pantry for her. And she was, she went with me to whole foods and we started a label reading because I just couldn't believe all the foods I was eating that I thought were healthy that had oil in it. So it was just like 66 weeks after this. What was your typical breakfast?

You already got a little experience doing this stuff. The pantry is different refrigerators, different. I mean, right, it's the same breakfast I have today.

It's you know, either it's going to be a steamed kale, swiss chard, you know, arugula. Uh it could be a fresh salad if I feel like it with balsamic or it could be oatmeal with some fruit and whatever.

I don't have in the morning. I usually have later in the, you know, late morning or early afternoon. And then what would feel would be a typical dinner? You again, I could go back to either one of those having a salad again. I try to now have, you know, 456 steam type lettuces a day. Um or salads.

Uh but I would also have whole wheat noodles or beans with vegetables. So you know joe you know from a person who grew up as a true foodie where everything was built around breakfast, lunch and dinner and the people I hung out with and the massive amounts of food I ate, part of that lifestyle changes really saying yourself you got to eat to survive but food can't be the highlight of your day any longer.

It's a therapy for you. It was a life altering life saving therapy. And you got real good at this. I mean you were you were really and still are legendary as a disciple of a very famous doctor and food therapy doctor, I reverse your heart disease. Doctors. So how many months did it take that you were back to either your baseline activity or actually starting to do more and noticing that you no longer had angina distress? How quickly was that President?

Well the angina actually went away in about two weeks but I also had an enlarged heart, leaky valves, scar, sarcoidosis, the right side of the aorta. Left bundle block heart murmur along with the full blockage of the right artery.

So they really had me under bed on bed rest for the 1st 60 days where they had me basically sleeping 16 hours a day to help shrink the heart and the valves would not have to be leaking is better. Would you know be you know, saying. So um it took me about 60 days to start feeling like a human, about 90 to kind of get to where I was before.

But during that period of time I probably dropped about 40 £50. So it was a different person.

Recovery, Exercise, and Giving Back

So about three months into this, you could walk stairs, do your work because you did, you know, you were employed, you had your own business and communications, and, and when did you actually add in riding a bike walking, doing some weights, which of course you've been very dedicated to now for, you know, the decade, but when we're able to actually up your game to maybe a higher level of fitness than before, um, well, you know, it was

a process, you know, I mean after about 90 days I started walking and, you know, every week I would walk a little further and then uh, kind of got into walking in and did yoga for a while and then I realized that I had a love affair of bike riding. So I incorporated that, always doing 34 workouts of light weight lifting, you know, throughout my life. Uh, so, you know, probably within, you know, 100 and 20 150 days, I started working my way up, but, you know, I just now, because I'm a little bit older, I don't, I'm not reaching any kind of great milestones with hundreds of miles of biking or running or walking, I just try to give myself a good hour every day of activity and you know, as we record this, thank God, let's shift from your own personal health to what you did with your passion for education and others in a minute.

But thank God, you know, you've still to this point, you've had no bypass, you've had no stent. Um you know, you are on as you honestly told us some medication for your cholesterol because there are genetic inputs that even steam kale and balsamic doesn't lower everybody's cholesterol to the point we need to lower it.

So you're on medication and uh you know, you've inspired many, but let's talk about that inspired what well what was the negotiation you had with your maker, your creator, your spiritual lead that you wanted to give back if you got through this and uh recovered which you have and And that led to our meeting in early 2014.

I mean, what was that mental mind frame? Well, it was, it was just the promise I made on the Gurney, which was you get me out of this situation. I'll give back. I didn't know what I was gonna do.

But here I was getting out of the situation and my first thing I realized was I couldn't cook. You know, like I was having to make all these changes with what I eat and I had no idea how to cook.

And I was just gonna cook. So I went to the wilsons cooking class, half day class back then it was like 6 $700. So I thought, well what I'll do is all expensive to blue cross blue shield and they will reimburse me because why would they want to pay me 700 bucks instead of 100 and 25,000 for the bypass surgery. And I got denied.

I said, oh, that's, that's what I'm, that's my gift back. I'm gonna work my way up the blue cross blue shield hierarchy and get somebody to give me a pay code so other people could, you know, go to a class of cooking class and get reimbursed.

So I, I took like about two months, got up to the highest level of blue cross blue shield, which they denied me and said the reason why that I have to work with the michigan legislature to get that approved and passed and I realized that is something I just did not want to do. So instead I took a $20 ad in the local paper just on a flyer and I said, hey, you know, I said I was scheduled for bypass surgery, I was able to stop hopefully someday reverse it.

And I did not have the surgery, but rather I'm feeling great and people want to understand a plant-based diet. The 1st 20 people I'm inviting you to my house was a real simple ad in the paper within two days I had 20 people signed up.

So I brought them over to my house. Never met these people in my life and each one of them had a heart disease issue. And you know me not being a doctor, but you know heaven starting to go deep read in a lot of these areas.

I just told my story. I gave some drops of knowledge, not much, but a little bit. I opened up my pantries and showed them the cooking stuff I'm using and say goodbye to him. But it was gnawing at me.

So I said well I'll do it one more time. So I did it again within a couple of days again. Another 20 people showed up and I thought wow, this is my gift back.

But I started realizing that these people are asking me a lot of science questions and I'm not a doctor. So I called the heads of three hospitals, local hospitals here in michigan and I said you have interventional interventional cardiologist.

You give me three names. Each one of them gave me three names but the one name that was repeated, it was dr Joel Kahn. Now I had never heard of dr khan nor have I ever had ever met dr khan. But I thought well since you're

repeating his name three times, I'm gonna introduce myself to him first.

So there I was I gave you a call, he said come on over. So I remember that day, like it was yesterday, you brought me into your house, your kitchen, I got to meet your family, we spent four hours talking and it was I walked out, I said I'm not calling anybody else, This is my guy, this is the guy, I want you know, and and Joel, you know, I could just say I'm just a personal level, you know, 10 years later I look at you, yes, you're my cardiologist, you know? Yes, you've been, you've never said no. What it had to do with the organization called the plant based nutrition support group. But you are my brother.

You've been there for me for 10 straight years. Thank you. Well and I will say and thank you for that. Of course your kindness is abundant. But you weren't actually coming to my house to interview me to be your cardiologist.

Founding PBNSG and Building Community

You were coming to my house to interview me to start up an organization to really educate on the power of Neutra in as a disease stabilization, disease reversal tool because there was no community were in Detroit area. But anybody listening anywhere, where's your meet up group to help support those that are taking heart disease reversal seriously and using nutrition as a platform. It's very rare to find one, there's a few more now than there were a decade ago, but in Detroit there were none essentially.

And you were the pioneer and you know, we did the same thing, we put a little ad we got a room at my hospital that held about 80 people and you know, the numbers weigh more than 80 showed up, right, okay.

And we did it again and and that was in the middle of a february snowstorm. It was a bad night. People showed up and we did it again the next month and there were more, you remember okay. And this was early 2014 and then the hospital called and the ha hospital called and said a hospital had been on staff at that 0.20 years and had brought in an unbelievable amount of business to the hospital.

Um, you know, we don't approve of what you're doing. They told us we were violating the fire code laws because we had more people in the room than the heart auditorium held. If you can imagine we were able to pack out the hard auditorium talking about steam kale. And they also wanted to be clear that they had not approved the nutritional program through their own dietetics division and it was some experimental program they needed to review. So by that point we had an organization and you named it plant based nutrition support group or we all say P B N S G dot org.

Everybody go to that you are L P B NSG dot org is a vibrant, vibrant, active up to date organization and website. And we moved to a high school auditorium and just give the audience for a couple of minutes.

You know, it's been now, you know, many years in the making and we've shifted to more virtual meetings because of just the way the world has gone. But you know what you built for an educational platform that did not exist and really has expanded worldwide but go for it, explain. Alright, so, so the funny part about that story was they called us to say that we couldn't go to the Beaumont Auditorium three days before our third meeting.

So I remember I was scrambling, I was calling churches, synagogues and it's a Birmingham school system that opened up both high schools for our activities and we've been loyal to them ever since and that continued on. So what we were doing as an organization.

Most importantly is it was a place for people with heart disease to come meet each other and listen to great speakers like yourself and others talk about heart health.

That was the beginning of the plant based nutrition support group. So each month we'd have an activity and then we started to expand and having culinary events And then we had a moment where we were deciding, or I was deciding, do I go into animal rights or the planet or may be expanded to diabetes, obesity, some other modalities and that's the direction we went into.

So we expanded maybe 34 years into it in that area. So today we have about 11,000 members worldwide, it's growing, we have a membership platform. Um back then we we would bring in a speaker event, a culinary event. And then I came up with the idea of what we called small groups and they were a little small community groups.

We had 54 at the peak that were in Michigan. We were starting to expand nationally where somebody in a given city could open up their doors in their heart to their neighbors that had health issues. And like I said, it was going great.

And then unfortunately we got covid as soon as Covid hit a few years ago, back in february because most of our members were probably 60 and older, we had to put a hard stop to the organization, do a complete turnaround.

And the question was, well, do we just stop it? Because everyone loved the live meetings? We have meetings that would have 500 to 1000 people at times depending on who was there.

We have culinary events in the hundreds. Um, or we had, we went virtual. So we made the decision to go virtual. And today we are a virtual organization which again, you can reach us at www dot p B N S G dot org. And today we offer the same types of events.

Multiple monthly speaker events, multiple culinary events. We have what they call specialized support groups. So if you have diabetes obesity, if you're an athlete, single parent, you know what, you know, we have a lot of different specialized groups that you could be with other like minded people and then we have ad hoc of a variety of different activities.

Plus we've just instituted health coaching. So that's who we are today. Uh and you know, it's it's growing. I mean the important thing is people know how to use the zoom and I think, you know, plant based nutrition, but the last two words support group because you know, there's a brother in law, there's an employer, there's a spouse, there's Children. Um, there's the medical community, probably the toughest deal is you make lifestyle change and you ask questions and your own doctor, uh you know, pushes back says you're making a mistake, suggest you add back lamb or fish and you've done the signs and you read the work.

So the support group aspect, you know, one of the pioneers that certainly and we're gonna have a wonderful interview with dr Dean Ornish MD, who way back in the eighties component of his heart disease reversal program was community and support.

And now with the Blue zones project will be having a wonderful session with dan Buttner and learning about the community aspects of longevity that he has studied and made so famous. But you know, you brought Detroit and now digitally you brought the world a community of support group.

So you don't have to walk alone, there is an african statement if you want to walk fast, walk alone if you want to walk far walk with somebody else because you know, this is a lifelong plan, we pride ourselves, I know you know that you know, we don't have many people dropping off and going back to paleolithic ketogenic meat heavy diet. They have been so impressed by your story, the weight loss stories, the diabetes reversal stories, the psoriasis stories, the just fulfillment of life. I mean it doesn't always have to be something you measure on the scale. It can just be that you're, you know, you're part of a movement that also happens to benefit the environment and is kind to animals and we've talked about all of that over the last decade of P.

B. N. S. G. S. So it's exciting and you know, you've sort of got a legacy. I mean there's there's not enough groups around the United States is a vibrant group in Rochester, There's a group in Chicago under different names.

Medical School Curriculum and Legacy

We've all heard now that the founder and ceo of whole foods john Mackey who I know is a close friend of yours and ally of mine, you know, is planning a national program that sort of is tangential to what you did a decade ago and I think you influenced so many people, I mean you get a lot of credit, not just your own personal health, but how you just showed people that you can, you can be, you know, you can go upstream and succeed against hospital

pressures and you know, and we pandemic pressures and a medical community that still doesn't celebrate plant based nutrition and teach it the way it should. But you know, maybe the last topic just tell us about the curriculum because we all know the future would be zip forward 20 years and doctors and nurses and physical therapists and Dennis and dietitians bring up plant based nutrition as the first tool in the toolbox and that's going to take education in the school. So tell us that's what you've done with the largest medical school in the United States, which is in Detroit Wayne State University.

Yeah, a long battle but share us with it. And the end of that story being a success. Right. Let me let me just add before I get and I will answer that. I think you're right, I've been able to help other cities start a group because I've got a manuscript that I wrote of how to get things started in your own community. You know, they they've done spinoffs of it in other cities. So I'm honored that they copied a lot of things that I developed early. One of the things uh that was interesting was we had all of our speakers that would come into town.

They all spoke at Wayne State Medical School and in the morning before they come out to PP NSG that evening and there became a nice group of young doctors, you know that we're committed to learning more about nutrition as it would affect people's health and their patients health. And Amanda martin was one of them was the first person I connected with and she was a very strong willed lady, a brilliant lady and you know, she worked with the people in the curriculum and then you know, as she, you know, this didn't happen overnight, just took years upon years.

We had Robin Ben Ami, we had other people kind of leading the charge and that continued for about 56 years. And finally lucky uh was my contact and he got them to approve a curriculum and it wasn't a curriculum basically what they said to us is you create an add on curriculum for us and we believe we can get it into our curriculum.

So we took medical school, formal medical school curriculum incorporating plant based disease reversal education, which is radical. Right? And and so we took 14 students from five different medical schools worked on it for 14 months, like every month we have an hour or two session PB NSG was sponsoring the whole all the activity when we initially presented it was, it was in curriculum form, they turned us down and then we had to break it up into the nine systems of the body, which we did and then they accepted.

So today, 1st and 2nd year medical students are learning six items of the 96 items of nutrition that go across the nine systems of the body for healing health.

And it goes with the idea that I've been saying for 10 years, it should always be nutrition bef four pills or procedures. And I hope the day comes where doctors look at that as you know, as the lead. And again, in one of my books, I have the quote by the famous physician, Rabbi Maimonides, No disease should be treated with medication before nutrition. And here we are, still struggling, you know, 1000 years later to make that a reality.

But you may have had the biggest impact, you know, on the largest medical school. And, you know, it will too, it's time we all wanted it to happen five years ago, eight years ago, I'm sure if you speak to dr Esselstyn dr Ornish, dr furman dr Bernard, they wanted to happen 25 years ago, but you're the man, you did it and I think the entire world thanks you for it.

So, we'll shut this down. And everybody, I just want to say again, you don't have to live in Detroit to use the resources to become a member of PB NSG dot org.

The recipe section, the education section, the video file, uh the and it's active. There's no events every month, so check that out and support it. Uh paul didn't ask me to say this, but one of you listening is just sitting on a big donor uh, fund and you want to fund a little bit of PB NSG dot org.

That's certainly been a struggle over the years and we would uh will rename the whole organization after you. We will, I'll right now we'll call it your name. But yeah, that is amazing with all the people we've touched, Joel.

I mean, and it's been tens of thousands, you know, I still, I'm just getting by month to month. I understand. And that's okay. I mean, the fact is we're still around when other organizations have failed. But boy, if I could ever get a

donation big enough, I could, oh my God, I can save a lot more lives.

That could help. We'll leave it there on that hope and aspiration and the fact you haven't lost any of your ability to dream big and wish you well and your contribution to this summit, because we're going to talk about the science of disease reversal. But this has been amazing and wonderful.

And thank you and we'll catch up soon. Thank you. Thank you very much everybody. Thank you