Star Podcaster And Athlete Talks Lifestyle Change Transcript

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Introduction and Rich Rollu2019s Background

– Alright everybody, thank you for being back. But this is a big one, this is the one you've been waiting for when you've been hearing about an amazing interview for reversing heart disease naturally summit with the one the only the former detroiter people don't know that, but that is his roots and of course I am a Detroiter rich roll rich, thank you for being here. – So happy to see you talk to you, Joel, honored to participate and thank you for having me.

– Well you've been a man that has changed so many lives through your, you know, your own actions, your books, your website, your podcast, your wife's work and and we're just trying to do the same and obviously having you on board is a tremendous excitement and energy and we've had all the greats and you can't have all the greats and not have rich role. So let me do you the justice and make you blush a little bit, but I want to go through it. But you did indeed grow up in the wonderful community of Grosse pointe Michigan, but then moved on Stanford University swim team.

Epic stories of course everybody needs to read finding ultra, your smash it. First book Cornell law school, I don't know that you've ever gone deep on your crazy life as an entertainment attorney, but maybe we'll go there. Maybe not, but you know it didn't end happily for you but Resilience, we actually have a wonderful conversation on this summit expert in Los Angeles introduce you to on resilience and you know the ability to bounce back and we'll get there, but you know, you bounce back around age 40 in terms of your own personal diet, you had already conquered addictions.

And then you found maybe law wasn't your calling, Maybe it was ultra distance, athletic work and working in conjunction with your incredible wife Julie on educating so many people leading to what are we in now? The 10th year of the rich Roll podcast?

– Yeah, we just celebrated a decade of doing the podcast. – So I thought in 10 years since finding ultra hit the bookstores, so a lot of great things happening. A great decade for you.

But I'm really more touched a great decade in what you've done for other people and how you've helped them so so much. So I mean if if somebody by any chance hasn't read Finding Ultra and the revised and updated edition, it's it's mandatory Rich.

I'll tell you, it sits on my desk in my office right there next to Dr. Esselstyn, I mean next to Dr. Ornish and do it next to Dr. Furhman um eat to live.

Health Scare and Plant-Based Transformation

I mean it's it's such a fantastic book, but uh and I hope you're blushing a little because there's so many people excited to hear you talk, but let's let's if you don't mind, let's go back and maybe tell the story a little bit about age 37,38,39 you know that fateful night up the stairs and then how would happen for you that here, uh you know a couple of decades later, you know, you have uh committed so completely to you know healthy diet and you've taught so many people about healthy diet with the plant powered way.

But tell us a little bit about that episode. – Yeah, sure. So I think, and I think it's a pretty relatable story. I mean in my mid to late thirties I was on the kind of corporate ladder uh you know, working really hard in a law firm and striving to make that, you know, partnership tier and you know, doing what you do when you're you know ambitious and and you know, have a little bit of a workaholic streak inside of you.

So I was probably, you know, burning it at both ends pretty hard. Uh you know, trying to be this, you know, professional in the world and and like a lot of people wasn't taking great care of myself. I've been an athlete in college but I really kind of lost touch with uh that side of what makes me who I am and you know, never really

learned how to eat healthy beyond just like, oh, fruits and vegetables and whatever, but when you're working 60 to 80 hours a week and you're ordering take out food in the, you know, at the at the workplace like you start, you know developing some not so great habits and mind certainly were, you know not winning any shining stars, so a lot of, you know, drive throughs on the way home, a lot of Chinese take out and just oily greasy food and um cheeseburgers French fries and and and really was medicating my emotional state through food. It wasn't until many years later that I really understood that um and when, you know, when you're in your twenties, maybe you can you think you're getting away with this stuff, this stuff starts to catch up with you in your late thirties and it certainly did in my case, so On the precipice of my 40th birthday, it kind of all, you know, came to the surface, I had a bit of a health scare and had to pause walking up a simple flight of stairs, winded and out of breath and tightness in my chest and at the same time having this kind of existential crisis, about you know this career choice that was making me very unhappy and that was sort of this stew that um you know, created a moment in time in which I became highly motivated to actually changed my lifestyle habits, you know, it wasn't just and I think that's an important point, like we all kind of walk around, like I could eat better, I could take care of myself better, but it's not until you have like a moment of willingness to actually make some changes and jumping on that and taking, you know, some prompt action that things actually start to change.

And and I had that moment and I recognized it, I jumped on it and I got to work, you know, kind of exploring healthier ways of eating and living and it wasn't overnight, but ultimately I found my way towards the plant based diet and kind of begrudgingly took it on as an experiment, you know, basically expecting it to be miserable and to fail.

And was quite surprised that within 7 to 10 days of really removing all animal products from my plate and processed foods, that I had this incredible resurgence in vitality and this boost in energy um that I hadn't experienced since, maybe I was a teenager and how I felt, and it was a really, you know, impactful moment for me.

And I knew that I had found something really special and, you know, in the sort of months and years that that were to follow, I just became obsessed with perfecting it and learning more and educating myself and, you know, this enhanced vitality ultimately led me into this world of ultra endurance and kind of, I ended up distinguishing myself in these races and that led to a book deal and all this stuff kind of happened as a result of making this lifestyle shift and, you know, the profundity of it in my life has really been the animating factor in, you know, what I've decided to do professionally, which has tried to share things that I've learned for the benefit of other people and you know, it impacted my life and benefited my life so dramatically.

I feel a responsibility to help others experience their version of what I was lucky to experience. – Well that is a lot, you know, literally it's like your second life, another chapter, maybe your third chapter, but you know, you don't always get that opportunity now in your late 30s.

The precipice of your 40th birthday, Julie was your wife. So we should interview her and ask her the question, how did you have such an excellent lifestyle and you tolerated that fast food, eating hard driving lawyer?

How did you keep the faith to stick with him? Because that is one of the challenges. People listening now might be in the opposite shoe, they're listening to you and they want to upgrade their diet, but their spouse or significant other their partner, other family members, co workers don't want it. So Julie gets a lot of credit.

I mean, she was hanging onto you not following her healthier lifestyle for a number of years, right? – Yeah. I mean, there's a lot of truth in that, I mean, she was always eating healthier than I, so it wasn't like she would eat like me to, you know, to ameliorate to like placate me or anything like that.

Making Change Sustainable

But yes, I recognize that, you know, she had always been somebody who is taking very good care of herself and I was not in that period of time and that is a difficult dynamic, like how do you stay, you know, how do you stay in an intimate relationship with somebody who's you know whose lifestyle habits start to diverge from yours either for the better or for the worse, right? Like I'm sure there's people watching and listening to this who you know, they're excited about their new, their new found whole food plant based diet, but their their spouse or their partner isn't or

they're having trouble getting their kids on board and that can be really tricky.

I had a lot of support but these things aren't perfect and I think it's important, you know, if you are trying to take that healthy step for yourself and you're not feeling the support to not be deterred, like you can't be deterred by doing what it's in your own best interest because somebody else isn't quite on board and through communication.

Hopefully you can find a way to you know make it work for, you know, the kind of family unit as a whole and I mean Joel, you must come up against this every single day in your practice.

– Yeah. You know, you can choose to follow the excuses or you can choose to toughen up and do it alone and hopefully set the example, but I hope once in a while she wears a T shirt that said I told you so – She yeah doesn't have to say that it's understood. – I just want to make sure we give enough shout out to your amazing partner in life and and wonderful lady that she is.

So I mean you said something that's really not been emphasized on interviews here. I mean people are listening and maybe they're got their foot in the toe, the plant based world and maybe they have heart disease and they know they've heard on the summit Dr. Esselstyn, Dr. Ornish the Pritikin Center, Dr. Furhman on and on Giuliana however, and so many greats and now you're throwing your experience and but you know, is it going to take years to see a benefit you if you think about the human body you experience some upgrade in your perception of health in 10 days, 10 days. I mean who wouldn't give 10 days to say I want to feel better? I mean, what do you do?

I think I've read about green gigantic green smoothies, I think there's still a part of your routine but I mean you took bad stuff out and what did you put in in those early days?

I know it's a little while ago but it's a it's fundamental that our body will have a completely different biochemistry in 10 days if you just feel it different?

– Yeah, I mean, I I don't know that I could speak to what was going on inside my you know cardiac arteries, but I can tell you my lived experience was as I mentioned this, you know, just resurgence and energy and vitality and improvement in cognition, you know, improvement in my sleep quality and I think, you know, it's it's it's it's it's part of it is what I was removing from my plate, you know, a lot of processed foods, a lot of refined flours and things like that that tend to, you know, create these insulin spikes and kind of rubber banding in your energy levels and all of that, you know, sugar and chips and lots of greasy foods and salty foods and things like that. So there's getting in the animal products of course, and then what are you replacing that with and you know, replacing it with like whole foods close to their natural state, which is kind of radical for me at the time, like what does it taste like to just eat, you know, a broccoli or spinach and potato and you know, eat a salad without, you know, dousing it in some insane amounts of like ranch dressing or something like that and acclimating to, you know what it's like to eat real food and realizing how little of my diet had been composed of actual food and when you give the body, you know what it's designed what it's designed to digest and utilize um the body will respond in kind and the body is an unbelievably resilient machine as you know, you know, as well as anybody Joel uh and the fact that you know, you could abuse it for so long and in a very short period of time by changing some pretty basic simple lifestyle habits. It can bounce back that quickly.

Is really, you know, an extraordinary thing and should give anybody who's you know, pondering these lifestyle changes or in the early stages of trying to you know, make these changes in your life like that should be very encouraging and make you feel very optimistic. – Yeah, I mean I wish we did understand, you know, and we don't have to go deep on this like at a mitochondrial level.

There have been studies take bad diet out and put good diet in for two weeks and do the opposite and it has been analyzed. I mean how quickly your microbiome fancy word.

I know but your gut changes in your mitochondria changes just you know, you were such an amazing test case that you can actually perceive it. You know, you might think I ate well for 10 days and I got gas, thank God you got energy and you know, it kept you going.

I love some of the things you know that you've said in the past. I don't overthink it just begin. Uh And and another one. I love a lot and I use a lot in my own life mood follows action. So tell us a little bit about what those things mean to you for the person again. that's struggling.

Like, can I do it all perfect and do it all right?

Family, Kids, and Food Education

And I got to do it by next Saturday in accordance with the books we've been talking about on this uh summit, or can you be great? Can you have some peace on yourself?

– Yeah, sure. I mean, you know, perfectionism is the enemy, you know, of good. And I think, you know, when you're contemplating, you know what to, most people would seem like a radical change, like, oh my God, I'm gonna, like, take all these things off my plate and I'm gonna do, how am I going to do it? Um, You know, people set themselves up for failure because they imagine a degree of the, that that seems almost impossible to achieve.

And and when sure enough, you know, weeks or days or months later they fail to achieve that. Bar they lose, they lose enthusiasm. They say, well, this is too difficult and they give up. And, you know, I'm always encouraging people to just make, you know, make tiny little changes and celebrate those wins and, you know, always think about what the next right best choice is.

So when you make a mistake or fail or have a moment of weakness and revert back to an old bad habit rather than flogging yourself for that, just be like, that's interesting. Maybe do a forensic analysis of what led you to make that choice, but don't judge yourself and just say, well, what's the next best right thing that I can do and just get back on board and I think assembling tiny little actions over, you know, an extended period of time performed consistently. That's how real change occurs.

It doesn't occur because of grand proclamations and um, you know, audacious goals as much as it is the tiny little things that you do anonymously every single day. And I think when you're rooted in those, you're setting yourself up for, you know, a better chance of victory and I think kind of depressurizing it, um, not making it such a big deal treating it more like a fun adventure rather than a burden or, you know, feeling like you're a martyr because you can't eat the food.

You used to enjoy looking at it like grand exploration, like a travel log, like you're gonna try these new things and what would it be like to eat this and just keeping it light and fun. I think, um, you know, takes all the intensity out of it that ultimately leads people to, you know, kind of burn out or, you know, lose their perspective.

– Has it been, you know, you've traveled a lot. I would imagine you'd probably come back a little bit the last three years in the pandemic, but I mean, has it been a challenge on the road or you've figured out how to maintain that well fueled body on the road. – It's, it's not that hard.

I mean it's not always ideal and I think being okay with it, things not always being ideal as part of like holding it loosely because you're in it for the long run, right? And it's not, the world is not gonna always, you know, orient itself in accordance with your preferences.

Like the world doesn't work that way and if you're holding on too tightly to that, you're gonna be an unhappy person. So you do have to have some level of flexibility. But I've just, you know, people say to me all the time you travel, all these places must be really hard, how do you like prepare for that? Do you bring your own food?

And and I've just learned over the years not to get uh to like every time I've traveled somewhere I've always worked in about, it's and like worrying about it ahead of time, it's just never been worth it. Like, you know, it's, it's never been a situation where, you know, I couldn't get like a good plant based meal with a little bit of creativity and that doesn't mean it's not, you know, it's always going to be the way exactly.

I would like it, but you know, it's not as hard. I guess the point I'm trying to make is that We overcomplicate it in our

minds, we think it's going to be this very difficult trying thing that's going to occupy a ton of our time and require all sorts of forethought and planning and, and you know, somebody has been doing this since uh, I mean it's been, I'm like my 16th year, like I just, it's second nature to me now.

I don't really think about it that much and it doesn't occupy the amount of time that I think people presume it does. – I mean they moved the crossroads right by your home just to celebrate commitment.

Anybody doesn't know what I'm talking about. One of the world's most prominent vegan restaurants has now got a few different locations, Vegas, but uh, location that opened pretty close to where rich and Julie was – The most exciting thing to happen in Calabasas in a long time. – I am sure I made the news everywhere, even though I'm on the other side of the country.

So I mean 16 years ago, you have four Children and we were chatting, the youngest is 15, that means, you know, your transition was also involved with raising Children and it's another roadblock for a lot of people.

You know, my health needs me to make these changes. Uh, and I want to do it and all, but you know, what do I do with the kids and let alone the spouse. So how did you integrate that?

You know what, we're kind of the rules of the role house as your kids were growing up with a dad that was, you know, kind of finding his own way in the health and food world.

– Yeah, I mean, you know each kid is different and at a different age uh you know the boys who are now my step sons that are now 27 26 um they had, you know, they had already kind of established certain eating habits so they were like, you know in their in their teens at the time, whereas the the younger ones were still quite young, so you know, the only way I can explain it is that you know, we we tried to lead by example and lead by education uh and you know, as any parent knows, you only can exert so much control over your kids habits and preferences especially as they start to you know, differentiate and gain independence.

So the best you can do is like use food as as a tableau for educating people about nutrition when you go to the grocery store, here's why we're choosing this and we're not choosing this in terms of rules like we never have animal products in our in our house and all our meals are prepared, plant based.

Protein, Training, and Performance

And that's how the kids were, you know, raised and then they have to decide for themselves as they get older and move out of the house and start, you know spending more time away from the home than in the home, you know what they want for themselves and I think a lot of kids need to go out and you know, stretch and figure out like, you know, by doing the opposite of what their parents want them to do to see if that's who they are or not. And our experiences that ultimately, you know, kids do that and then they come back and you know, they have to make the decision for themselves how they want to eat.

And so, you know, our kids kind of run the spectrum, but they don't eat meat, but you know, they're not always perfect vegans either and being okay with that and not vibing them or judging them is kind of the way that we've handled it because to judge them will only push them further in the other direction.

And you know, we still only have plant based foods in the house and that's the only food that we prepare or serve in our house and thank God julie is an amazing cook and the kids love and prefer her food. And that's kind of the way that it's, that has been, yeah, – You know, um, to get it 27 26 you think about what you were doing at that age, not in any negative way, but you know, you got to give them a little space for probably being, you know around a very healthy family and uh, gotta, so the way I've got three Children and uh, one is that one that, you know, always had a push to find his own place and he's sort of settled in the paleo world to be honest. But he's an extremely healthy kid.

He's, my son is actually an attorney. He'd relate to what you started out at the beginning with working 60 to 80 hour weeks. But you know we love and uh feed them broccoli when he comes over our house, he does fine, but you

know, you gotta have a lot of room. I mean did you incorporate the kids?

Because I mean people are looking for, what do you do with these families? Did you incorporate kids into the kitchen? Did you make that the central point?

I've been in your kitchen and I can vividly remember colors and smells and it was an incredible, beautiful place. But did they spend a lot of time, they're kind of get your blind during your vita mix?

– Yeah, yeah Julie was really great about that. I mean you know, I think involving the kids in every aspect of how food plays into your life is really important because it allows them to develop an emotional connection to it.

So that's why you know, bringing your kids to the grocery store, to the market, to the farmers market is important because every the thing that you put in your bin is an opportunity to have a conversation about the why's and the why nots and all that kind of stuff that I referred to earlier and then you know when they get home or in the meal preparation, like teaching kids at a very early age, like how to cook or you know, helping them learn how to cook their favorite thing.

There's a real kind of like self f see self esteem thing that happens um you know, in a young child when they learn these sorts of skills that they can carry on throughout the rest of their life. So if you have a healthy recipe and your kid has shown some interest, you know, likes that recipe, teaching them how to make it is like a really great way of making sure that you're that you're empowering that you know, habit that that habit becomes like, you know, solidified, so that's really key and uh you know, I I just think like food is food recipes, what you know how we're nourishing ourselves, these are, you know when their kids like these are habits that they're forming, that they're gonna carry throughout their whole life.

So it's less about, you know, what did the kid, what did my kids eat when he went to the birthday party? Um did he have a cupcake or not? And it's more about like how are they gonna be eating when they're 30 When they're 35 when they live alone when they have their own partners, like are they going to remember, you know these principles, these tenants, these these skills, you know that we taught them when they were a young person and I thinking long term and like not being so much about like rigorous about the day to day, but more about the broader principles is a better way to go and important.

– So I mean, I want to shift gears a little and I agree entirely, just incorporate them in and uh let them get their hands dirty and mess up a little bit, have some fun with food. It'll probably stick you, you did an amazing job. It's easily seven years ago before Garth Davis wrote protein a aholic, you wrote a blog that I recall slaying the protein dragon and you know, you really took on the issue because it's coming back right now.

I mean the carnivore movement's been around awhile. It's strange, keto has been around obviously paleo, but now it's sort of, we've been relabeled muscle centric, muscle centric physiology, muscle centric medicine and yeah, the only way to feed muscles of the proponents summer doctors, phds is obviously meat based uh, supportive muscles.

I mean, you took that on, in a sense under different labels, slaying the protein dragon. So in your own life and your own training, what have you learned and share about those that are concerned?

I'm not going to get enough protein. Yeah, I mean, I just think that there's a lot of misplaced uh, worry concern and and and confusion around this subject matter, um throughout my forties from age 42-47.

I was pushing my body incredibly hard training, you know, adhering to a training schedule that would bury most people 20-25 hours a week of of really rigorous endurance challenges. Um that required my body to bounce back day in and day out and and you know, me really pushing the envelope of what I was physically capable of. And throughout that period of time I was able to continue to make progressive gains in strength, speed, agility, and endurance, doing it all on a plant based diet and not really overly concerning myself with protein intake. Like I would meet my daily requirement and maybe, you know, I'm training 2020 maybe a little bit more.

I think it's like 20200.7 g per kilogram is kind of the, you know, the recommended daily amount of protein. I was probably a little bit above that, but not much um and not really using uh you know, protein supplements, powders and things like that.

And just by dent of grazing on a wide variety of plant foods. Found that, you know, I was having no issues building lean muscle mass, recovering, you know, expeditiously between these workouts and and making, you know dramatic gains and not for nothing. Being a guy in my middle age forties doing it.

And now in 56 going to the gym, I'm able to make gains and progress in the gym without much concern about protein. So look, we need protein in our diet, proteins, important macronutrients. But you know, all plants have protein in them. Protein is made up of amino acids.

The nine essential amino acids are the ones that you know, we need to get in our food because our bodies can't synthesize them themselves. And and if you're eating like a robust, diverse plant based diet, you're gonna have no problem meeting your, you know, in taking enough of those amino acids to assemble those proteins and keep your body exactly where it needs to be.

Current Projects and Closing Remarks

And you know, the fact that people are obsessed about protein is it's just you know, that energy could be spent worrying about something else. Like how much fiber are you getting your diet etcetera and you know this as well as anyone else. And so I'm just, I'm not a scientist, I'm not a doctor, I only have my own personal experience and end of one.

Um but I can tell you that uh you know, from my experience, um I just haven't, I've never had an issue with this and I really don't spend any time thinking about it.

– So a ritual at 56 shocks. A lot of people because you look a decade younger than that and it seems like you deserve to be eternally young and you're doing a great job on that. What's got you fired up.

We're gonna be listening to this in early 2023 uh gonna get back on the road of doing retreats in Italy with Julie or other parts of the world if the world permits.

– Yeah, we were uh I think we're gonna be doing our retreat in Italy this may, we're just trying to work out the details. We haven't done it since the beginning of Covid.

So that's sort of exciting. And beyond that, just I have some creative media projects that I'm working on. I'm trying to, you know, crack a new writing project and, you know, honestly Joel just really fulfilled doing what, what I do every day with the podcast. It's, it's a gift that I get to talk to all these amazing people and share these conversations with the world.

And, you know, I just want to stay enthusiastic and engaged with it. And, you know, it's been a real blessing. And uh and it's a responsibility that I take seriously. So, you know, that's really the focus.

Just keep keep doing that knocking out great episodes every week. – And in case anybody doesn't know Rich and Julie have a book called Plant powered Italia.

It's sitting on the coffee table in my office and it's probably the one that people reach more more than any other, including my own books that are on the same coffee table.

They like to pick it up and look at the beautiful photography and the beautiful recipes and just the grace that that book offers to people. So it follows the other book, Plant powered way correct.

And that's not spelled W H E Y. That's W A Y. There's no away from dairy in the first one. Which is just another great, great resource for people starting down this path.

Looking for some tips and recipes and just beautiful photography on top of that. So, I don't know. This has been just practical stuff. I mean, you know, you're well known human being, you've made the transition, you've raised a family, your teach and inspire so many.

And the reality is it's just small steps and the fact that you do it and talk about it makes it seem reachable for everybody else. So I just want to thank you so much for taking the time. And uh, I didn't mean to dig into a little bit about how wonderful your wife is, but she deserves it.

– So she's wonderful. Yeah. Yeah. She's great. She deserves all the credit. Let's just give it to her now. – Yeah. – Thank you for having me, Joel. It's great to see you. Great to talk to you.

Great to share with you. – All right, God bless peace and plants. Alright. Somebody might say that. – That was good