# Health and Human Science Matters Season 2, Episode 3: Chris Melby

Chris Melby: One of my philosophies has always been, I want to do everything with a student. I don't want to just say, "Hey, you go collect the data." I've never liked that approach. And so, I try to show up in the laboratory, working with the students, sit in front of the computer, analyze our data together. Rather than having them do it, and then bring it to me, or me doing it and talk to them about it. We just try to do everything together. I like this principle, that I learned from a friend, it's called the With Me Principle, where you kind of live life with others, and you learn from each other. And of course, I feel like I've learned more from my colleagues, and from my students than I've ever given to them. And again, I'm quite fortunate to have these experiences.

Avery Martin: Welcome to Health and Human Science Matters, a podcast by Colorado State University's College of Health and Human Sciences. I'm your co-host and digital media strategist, Avery Martin.

Matt Hickey: And I'm Matt Hickey, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies. In our college, we make at our mission to optimize human health and wellbeing through discovery and innovation. Don't just take our word for it. Each episode, we sit down with people who fulfill that mission, our college faculty and staff.

And today we've got a special treat, because I've got a long-term friend, a singular friend, I would describe this man as. A collaborator in the lab, a teaching buddy in the classroom. We have shared the fellowship of the rope, outside, and so all kinds of fun stuff. So Chris Melby, from Food Science and Human Nutrition. Welcome my friend.

Avery Martin: Welcome.

Chris Melby: Well, I'm very happy to be here. This will be a fun conversation.

Avery Martin: We're looking forward to it.

Chris Melby: Looking forward to it myself.

Matt Hickey: Yes, indeed.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Matt Hickey: And of course, we were just joking before we got on the air, that you and I have had these conversations in many settings over the last 25 years. Our offices, walking around campus, camping out on a tent, on a glacier, on Rainier, and everywhere in between.

Chris Melby: We have spent a lot of time outside.

Matt Hickey: We have, yeah.

Chris Melby: As well as inside.

Matt Hickey: Well, we're looking forward to having some fun, Chris. And so, part again of our mission. Is to allow our listeners to get to know you as a scholar and get to know you as a person. A father, a grandfather, a friend, outdoor adventurer, all these things. And so I want to start with, when you think back over your career here at CSU, and you think about some of the big problems that you were pursuing as a scholar, I just would ask for your reflections on representative examples.

Chris Melby: I would say that probably I would capture best my goal in my research, to understand the interaction of exercise and nutrition, working together to influence various aspects of health. Risk for heart disease, risk for diabetes. These sorts of problems, I think, are quite prevalent in the United States. And now of course, globally. And I've been fascinated since I was quite young with exercise, and also with food. I'm not a foodie, though. A lot of people think, "Oh, here's a nutrition professor, he must really enjoy food."

And I eat, I do have some foods that I prefer, but I go to a meeting or I go to a new place, a new community. I typically go for a run, rather than looking for a restaurant. When I'm by myself, I typically have a pretty bland diet. Healthy, but that's not why I got into nutrition. I got into it because I was quite interested in health, rather than just the enjoyment of food. But of course, I still have some enjoyment of that.

Matt Hickey: And of course there are some desk secrets that Dr. Melby has, right?

Chris Melby: Oh no.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Matt Hickey: His secret weapon, this is a little known fact, but it's Peanut M&Ms, are sort of where it's at.

Chris Melby: But I can make a case, for Peanut M&Ms being awfully healthy. We got some phytonutrients, in both the peanuts and in the chocolate, and granted it's milked chocolate. But the peanuts, they're a good source of protein. They've got folate. Now, come on. We can have some, on occasion.

Avery Martin: That's a case.

Matt Hickey: One of many things I like about this guy is, he's light on his feet.

Avery Martin: Yes.

Matt Hickey: That's great stuff. So Chris, I want to push the research question just a little bit further. So one area that has informed your work, and I've been lucky enough to collaborate on some of this, is sort of the health equities, health disparity story. And I wonder if you might tell us a little bit more about that.

Chris Melby: When I was in graduate school, my advisor was an African American physician scholar, and he got me quite interested in looking at some of the health disparities that were present within the Black community. So when I got my first job as a professor, assistant professor, at Purdue University, I started looking at the potential for a plant-based diet to have a beneficial association with blood pressure, among African Americans. And found that among those that followed a plant-based diet, largely vegetarians, that these individuals had much lower blood pressure than those individuals that had an omnivorous diet.

And of course there are differences, people who choose to be a vegetarian can differ and their exercise patterns, and stress. And we tried to control for these things statistically, but nevertheless, in some ways it was always a nuisance for us, because we found that the vegetarians were always... They always weighed a lot less, and of course, lower weight then, associated with lower blood pressure. But even when we controlled for the body weight differences or the body composition differences, we found that those followed a plant-based diet had lower average systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

And that spawned some other things. We started looking at lipids, then we moved into looking at issues related to diabetes risk. And this was certainly with you...

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Chris Melby: ... looking at diabetes risk, diet and exercise, potential impacts in the Latinx population here in northern Colorado. And found some interesting things, as well. Again, I think the findings have not been sort of unexpected, because what we find, is that a healthy diet, regular physical activity are quite beneficial when it comes to risk for various chronic diseases. But we had a lot of fun over the years, I got to know a lot of great people, and certainly working with you, was a treat. Over the many years that we spent working in a clinical laboratory together.

Matt Hickey: And it's fun, because you bring to the table in terms of your career, both interesting experiences in the field, in urban settings. I can remember some of your stories, and maybe I'll get you to share one or two of those. But then, you and I have been in the lab on many occasions where we've got the white coats on, we've got sterile fields, and scalpel blades and everything in between. GC set up for our lipids, and all that stuff. But share some, maybe you have some particular moments that you find amusing, or where highlights that, and again, from your field work. Maybe from... Don't tell too many stories about things we did or didn't do together.

Chris Melby: Well, some of the earlier work that I did when I was at Purdue, before I came to CSU, was going into urban areas and collecting data in areas where there was a large population of African Americans. And we would set up in clinics, our clinic sort of, we would call it a clinic. But it was where we would measure blood pressure and we would get body composition measurements, and we would obtain blood samples for the cholesterol and triglycerides, and things like this. And we did this in churches, because we found that individuals in the churches were willing to participate, and they were interested in what we were doing.

And oftentimes, I mean, it was a great learning experience for me. I grew up in southwestern Colorado, small town, and we had a couple of Black families in our community, and that was all. So it was a tremendous opportunity for me to understand a different part of the population in the United States, and developed some great friendships. And I grew up in such a small town, Cortez, it had 6000 people, that going to these big cities... It was quite a different experience for me. But again, it was something that I treasure, it made my job feel like it was play, as much as work.

Matt Hickey: Oh, that's neat.

Avery Martin: Nice.

Matt Hickey: And I have to ask you again, you've got former students scattered to the four winds. And I just, again, wonder if you have particular memories of moments with trainees. There's some that come to mind for me. The Kris Osterbergs of the world, who immediately come to mind, I think of Richard Ho, and some of the lab banter and teasing that would go on as part of the training environment. So just again, any memories you might be [inaudible 00:08:39]...

Chris Melby: Well, the number of students that I can recall that I still have connections with, is pretty lengthy. Because I think one of the great joys of my career has been the opportunity to interact with students. And initially, when I started, I was almost the same edge as the students. So I felt like, "Well, I better keep my distance a little bit." But as I've gotten older, I realize, I developed really good friendships. And we do a lot of things outside of the laboratory environment, outside of the classroom. You know this. We've had students that we have climbed mountains with in South America, in the Andes. I, even this weekend, have arranged to climb up Horse Tooth Rock with a couple of students, in our department.

So it's been a really great experience working with so many different students. But there's a few that stand out. One of them you know well, that was Richard Ho.

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Chris Melby: Richard earned his PhD in our department, and he went on to work in a diabetes laboratory that was affiliated with Harvard as his postdoc. And now he's working for a large medical company in the San Francisco Bay area, and doing incredibly well. But Richard was involved in studies where we were doing muscle biopsies, if you recall. And of course you know, are the consummate person to do biopsies on this campus, I think you probably have done more than anybody. I bet if you put all the people together that have done muscle biopsies compared to you, you've done more than everybody else together.

Matt Hickey: I've done a couple of them.

Chris Melby: Don't you think that's true?

Matt Hickey: Well, certainly on this campus.

Chris Melby: Well, nevertheless, so here, but Dr. Ho, Richard we called him at the time, and now he's Dr. Ho. He was definitely afraid of biopsy. And I suppose we have to be little careful here, in our discussions.

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Chris Melby: But he was taking off, he was done with his PhD. So we had a party at our house to say goodbye to him, and Dr. Hickey brought, I think it was a screwdriver and a hammer, a mallet. And a bottle of rum or something, as sort of the anesthesia, to administer a muscle biopsy for Dr. Ho.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Chris Melby: And of course, it was all in good fun. This wasn't going to happen. But we just have had lots of good times. And one of the things that has occurred in our research together is, we often had to be in the laboratory or in the clinic really early. Five, six in the morning. Sometimes the person doesn't show up, and occasionally we'd flip a coin to see, "Well, who gets to take a nap? It's 5:30 in the morning, and we don't have a study participant. And there's a bed here. Who gets it?"

Matt Hickey: That's right.

Chris Melby: Before we end up doing our other things throughout the day. But again, just lots of great times with students, inside the laboratory and the research environment, and outside. And one of my philosophies has always been, I want to do everything with a student. I don't want to just say, "Hey, you go collect the data." I've never liked that approach. And so, I try to show up in the laboratory, working with the students, sit in front of the computer, analyze our data together. Rather than having them do it, and then bring it to me, or me doing it and talk to them about it. We just try to do everything together.

I like this principle that I learned from a friend, it's called the With Me Principle, where you kind live life with others and you learn from each other. And of course, I feel like I've learned more from my colleagues and from my students, than I've ever given to them. And again, I'm quite fortunate to have these experiences.

Matt Hickey: Now I have to ask you, because I think there are generations of inquiring minds that need a definitive answer to this. So, of all the students you've interacted with over the years, who gave you the toughest run on the basketball court?

Chris Melby: The toughest run on the basketball court?

Matt Hickey: I mean, they're all a distant second to you. But who was...

Chris Melby: Oh my, that's a tough one.

Matt Hickey: It is.

Chris Melby: Well, you and I know, that we have never lost.

Matt Hickey: We used to serve up some humble pie, you and I, two on two.

Chris Melby: We've never lost a driveway basketball game, two on two.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Chris Melby: So you and I play together.

Avery Martin: I see a nice duo, here. I see it.

Chris Melby: Well, we both could shoot fairly well, and Matt could rebound well, and I would say probably maybe Stacey Schmidt was one of our rougher opponents.

Matt Hickey: Yeah, she was. She was.

Chris Melby: Remember, she and Kyle would play against us.

Matt Hickey: Yes.

Chris Melby: And we weren't about to lose.

Matt Hickey: Exactly.

Chris Melby: But we...

Matt Hickey: Whatever it takes.

Chris Melby: Well, and I haven't experience, I participated in a medical mission clinic in Nicaragua, and I had a good friend who was a football coach here, Larry Kerr. And we had these young guys came by the clinic, and they had a basketball, and they wanted to know if somebody wanted to play with them. And they were pretty cocky. They felt like, "Hey, we can, you guys are Americans and you know basketball, but we are young and we're good." So Larry and I went and played a game of basketball, picked up a basketball with the two of them.

And they were young and they could jump, and they were quick, but they could not get around Larry Kerr's screens. He'd been a linebacker in college, and a coach. And we had a pick and roll, and we beat, they didn't score a basket. And we beat them, just so handily, and they were thoroughly embarrassed. And of course, we had good time with him afterward, and we weren't trying to show them up or anything, but it was kind of fun.

Matt Hickey: This is so neat, because it brings back shared memories. I can remember Baños, in Ecuador. Remember playing those kids down there? It was tooth and nail.

Chris Melby: This was after we had gone up a mountain, that I actually, that I failed on. It's a 19,300 foot peak, snow covered peak. And it was Matt, it was myself, my daughter. And we had a former student with us. And Matt and the former student summited. I got sick, and couldn't make it to the top. And that was an embarrassment for me, because I just knew I could do it. And my daughter had to help me get down on the same rope. But then, I think it was two days later, we got in a basketball game and I was still just pooped. And we all were, because we'd been up pretty high. But we got into our game, with some young folks.

Matt Hickey: Yes, indeed.

Chris Melby: And I think we did okay, though. I think we held our own.

Matt Hickey: We held our own. Of course, we had, our ace in the hole is Chris Osterberg, right? Because she played here, for CSU.

Chris Melby: Well, I think at one time she had the three point record before Becky Hammon.

Matt Hickey: Yeah.

Avery Martin: Wow.

Chris Melby: And played a lot of pickup games with Kris.

Matt Hickey: She was our ringer.

Avery Martin: For sure.

Matt Hickey: So Chris I'll nudge, just at least for a moment, off campus.

Chris Melby: Sure. I want go back to Cortez, and ask you to share a bit about your educational journey. So you don't just wake up when you're five years old and say, "I want to have a DRPH," or be a faculty member somewhere. So talk to us a little bit about that pathway.

In many ways, I feel like my career occurred almost a little bit accidentally, because I grew up down in the southwest part of Colorado, which I just loved. I had a great environment to grow up in. Spent so much time outdoors, I never wanted to have a desk job. I thought, "No way. I've got to be outdoors," because I spend so much time fishing and hunting and hiking and climbing, when I was younger. So I thought, "Well, I'll become a biology major," which I did initially. And then I thought, "Well, this isn't exactly what I want." So I became a forestry major. And then I decided, "Yeah, this isn't exactly what I want. I really love sports too much."

So it was not until the end of my sophomore year that I decided, "I think I want to teach and coach." And so I became a physical education major, and I finished up my degree, did my student teaching, got a job teaching at the secondary level. And I enjoyed it. But I also was teaching science, and I'd always had an interest in science. And so I was teaching, actually, eighth grade science. And I thought, "I love this." So I decided that I was going to go back to school. And so I did, I went back to school, actually had some experiences even prior to that. I taught science at the elementary level for two years, when I lived overseas, which was an adventure.

Matt Hickey: Can you tell us just a little bit more about that? I just sort of need to hear this.

Chris Melby: Yeah. I taught in an international school in the Middle East, and I really was, I didn't know much about the Middle East initially. I thought we'd probably head off to Africa. My wife and I were both looking for an adventure, and we ended up in the Middle East. And just, again, had an enjoyable experience. But it was a big city. And I started to realize, "I think I could probably be happy anywhere," even though I never thought that would be the case.

But when I came back, I had the opportunity to go to a university clinic in California. It was at Loma Linda University. And I had been looking to go to medical school potentially, or into a PhD program. And I'd already been accepted into a Big 10 school, and was kind of excited about that. But I went to Loma Linda and they had a program in preventive healthcare that I thought, "This is incredible." The first couple years are very similar to med school, with the bio chemistries and the physiologies and the anatomies, and even pharmacology. And then the next years are research, epidemiology and focus on nutrition and exercise. And I got a great education there. Even though I didn't know that much about the school I thought, "This is pretty special."

And as I was finishing up, I thought, "Well, I need to figure out what I'm going to do from here." And I honestly thought I might end up going back to the Middle East, but I thought, "Well, I don't know enough yet. I need to make sure that I have some additional experiences." And by then, I had two kids, and I saw that there were some job openings in universities. And I thought, "Well, if I teach and do some research, I'm going to learn more and I'll feel more comfortable."

So I ended up in Purdue University. And my first years there, I thought, "What? How did I ever end up here? I don't belong here. Everybody here is smarter than me. What am I doing?" But I grew to really enjoy the university, had some great colleagues. There was another individual that started at the same time I did in the department, by the name of Jerry Heiner. And we sort of helped each other navigate the tenure process, tenure promotion process, doing research together. And colleagues along the way have been instrumental in helping me navigate the various places that I've been. So I can look back and think, "Gosh, there's a lot of almost happenstance, maybe some divine intervention here that has enabled me to end up doing things that ultimately, I really enjoyed, even though I didn't necessarily intend to ever do what I'm doing."

Matt Hickey: It's kind of neat though, right?

Chris Melby: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Not all of us have this long term, 30 year planner. Isn't that right?

Chris Melby: No, I really thought I might be a teacher at the secondary level for my whole life. If I wasn't doing that, I originally thought I'd be some sort of forest ranger.

Matt Hickey: So I want to get back into this educational journey, and ask you to speak about mentors. And even as an early career faculty member, mentors that may have been here at CSU. But talk to us about folks whose fingerprints you still sort of bear, as you enter the classroom on a daily basis.

Chris Melby: Well, I mentioned the one, Dr. Richard Neal at Loma Linda, was really a special person in my life. African American physician, scientist, that I think was very nurturing and incredibly challenging. One of the best speakers, with a vocabulary that I couldn't begin to ever emulate. And he just challenged me in a lot of ways in terms of speaking, in terms of writing, in terms of thinking.

Had another faculty member there in epidemiology by the name of Jan Kuzma, who was a well funded NIH epidemiologist. And he got me interested in that sort of research. As an undergraduate here at CSU, in your department, which is where I graduated with my bachelor's degree. There was an individual by the name of Max Morton, and Max was a physical therapist. And I really enjoyed his perspective on how the body functions, and taking kinesiology classes from him. And I stayed in touch with Max Morton, with Dr. Morton, for years afterward. Even after he had gone on and had a different career from his time at CSU.

And then this good friend of mine at Purdue, Jerry Heiner, was very instrumental, I think, in helping me along the way as a colleague and as a mentor as well. And then of course, folks here at, and that includes you. My time with you, I always felt incredibly challenged because Matt and I would teach a class together. We would team teach, and oftentimes team teaching means that one person takes half the class the first half, first six, seven, eight weeks, and then the next person takes over. But we would come every day together. And so we would be able to play off each other. And I always felt like, "Man, I got to be prepared, because I'm going to be playing off the very highly regarded, highly esteemed Dr. Hickey. And it's going to be tough."

Matt Hickey: And the feelings are very much mutual.

Chris Melby: But I think, I learned a lot from you in those classes. And I think the students really had a great opportunity to hear us kind of play off each other, and get them involved in the play as well.

Matt Hickey: That dynamic was so much fun.

Chris Melby: And I frankly have missed that, because Dr. Hickey has gotten so busy with his administrative responsibilities...

Matt Hickey: My podcast.

Chris Melby: Podcast, doing this sort of thing. So the last few years, well probably the last eight years or so, I've been teaching it myself. And the students I think hear stories from other, previous students as well. "Gosh, I wish we had Dr. Hickey in here, too." And I always say, "I wish we did, too." So you've had a big impact on me as well. For sure.

Matt Hickey: And I have to say again, to have the good fortune to have a really close friend, often that might happen and nothing else. And we can collaborate on research together, go get grants together. And then to say, and we can teach together.

Chris Melby: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: I mean, that's pretty rare, actually.

Chris Melby: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: And I'm thankful for it.

Chris Melby: Well, and we have special memories here at CSU for sure, both teaching and research. But we got a lot of special memories outside, too. We've climbed many a mountain together, and slept in tents. And you know me, I'm claustrophobic, I think. Matt may have awakened before and seen me with my head outside the tent, because I get a little gun shy, a little nervous inside. But we've had some really special moments. And I think, to me, colleagues that you work with are great. Colleagues that you work with and also can live life together outside of the academy, are really kind of rare and pretty special.

Matt Hickey: It's pretty special.

Chris Melby: And for that, I feel incredibly blessed and fortunate to have enjoyed my professional time, and my friendship with you, as well as some others still within my department.

Matt Hickey: It's pretty neat when somebody still likes you, when they seen you at your utter... You're shattered after 15, 16, 17 hours on a mountain, or something like that. And they still want to put their arm around you and say, "Come on, let's do it again."

Avery Martin: That's how you know.

Matt Hickey: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. We've got some good memories. And one of my favorites was Kris, Kris and I, Kris Osterberg and Chris here, a number of years of doing this together, we came up with a no whining rule. But instantly, because we're all so light on our feet, we would still whine, but we would say, "I'm not whining. I'm just making an observation."

Avery Martin: That's very true. That's a great point.

Chris Melby: Well, because honestly, there are times people will often oftentimes say, "Oh, climbing those tall mountains, that must be so fun." My typical rejoinder is, "Well, it's really not fun until you've already done it, and you can look back on it. In the midst of it... " We call it Type 2 fun. It's really pretty miserable.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Chris Melby: But you know that eventually, you're going to be able to look back on it and say, "Wow, we were able to do that." And it's been incredibly challenging. We've been up 20,000 feet in the Andes together and it's... You feel like you're breathing out of a straw. We're pretty used to, I think, what we feel now with masks, with COVID.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Well said. Well said.

Chris Melby: Because we've been in situations where breathing has been pretty tough. But I think that when you face challenges that are difficult together, that you just sort of become lifelong friends. There's nothing that creates a friendship more than when you have faced a challenge together and you, you've helped each other through it.

Matt Hickey: That's it.

Chris Melby: And I think I like putting myself in adventurous situations, because you grow from them. I don't want to become sort of stagnant. My wife sometimes will, "Are you here going back to South America, to climb again?" I said, "Yeah, but it's so good for me." When you're not along, I get lonely. Sometimes I get fearful. It's difficult, but it makes me appreciate life. And for that reason, I'd like to continue doing it, even though I'm obviously getting pretty old now. But nevertheless.

Matt Hickey: You wouldn't know it.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Matt Hickey: So Chris, we, CSU, was lucky enough to get you here, and I want to talk a little bit about the move from Purdue to here, and then a microcosm of 30 years of teacher, mentor, this spirit of service that led you to twice now step into the role as department head. When I think, it's fair for me to say, that was not an aspiration of yours. You did it because it was a job that needed to be done, right? So talk a little bit about the CSU piece of this.

Chris Melby: Well, I really enjoyed my time at Purdue, but Purdue is Indiana without any mountains. And having grown up right near the San Juan Mountains in southwestern Colorado, I kept looking for opportunities to come back.

Matt Hickey: Sure.

Chris Melby: And I honestly thought I was in, actually a health and kinesiology department at Purdue, and I thought, "Probably, if I ever come back to Colorado as a professor, I'll end up," in the department that you're in, Health and Exercise Science, or some such department, maybe at a smaller school. But I saw there was an opening in the Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, and one of my graduate degrees is in nutrition. And so I applied for the position, and I got offered the job.

Matt Hickey: And when was this?

Chris Melby: This was 1989. And I accepted the job verbally, and then some things happened that caused me to have second thoughts, and I won't go into those. But I ended up declining the position. And it was painful to decline it because I thought, "I've just given up the opportunity to come back to," first of all, "my alma mater in Colorado." But then the next year they had another opening, and this opening was a little bit more in line with my expertise and my interest, my research interest. And so I thought, "I probably have burned a bridge here already, verbally accepting and then having to decline it."

But I sent in my letter again, and my CV, and I got another interview. And I interviewed this time, and this time the timing was right. And so I left Purdue, and came to CSU. But one of the first things I did was to go over to the Health and Exercise Science Department and find out, "Okay, are there some colleagues over here?" And you were not there at the time, but I made friends with some folks over there, with Loren Cordain, and some others.

Matt Hickey: Sure you did.

Chris Melby: And started doing some collaborative work with them, working with people in my department, Ken Allen and Mary Harris, and a variety of different students. And found it very enjoyable, and moved through the ranks. And let's see, it was probably about 2002. We had some unfortunate situations in our department with some retirements, and department heads leaving unexpectedly. The dean of our college at the time, Nancy Hartley, contacted me and she said, "We need somebody to be department head." And I said, "Well, Nancy, that's something I've never really aspired," as you indicated. "And I've never felt like I had any special gifts at all for administration." But I knew our department needed some leadership.

And so I said, "I'll do it." And I said, "I don't want to do it as an interim, or an acting department head. I want a five year status as a department head, because we need some continuity." And that turned into, from five into 10 years, and then I had an extra year when we had a failed search before Mike Pagliassotti took over. And then when Mike retired, Lisa...

Matt Hickey: Here comes another dean.

Chris Melby: ... our dean contacted me. And she said, "Chris, I got a favor to ask of you. Would you be willing to do it for another year?" And I said, "Yeah, yes, I will. I'll do it for another year." I actually thought I'd be retired by now. And it's been challenging, to be honest, with COVID and a lot of retirements in our department. And it certainly has been a challenge, being department head, but we have such great people that I work with. And I keep telling them, "It's really important what we do in our careers, but who we do it with, I think is just as important."

And I feel like I have really great colleagues in our department that have rallied, in times when we've needed, they've helped me. There's just a lot of trust that's been built over the years. And so sometimes I have to pinch myself thinking, "What am I doing in this role that I never, ever dreamed I'd have? As a professor, somebody who teaches, somebody that's had a fun research career, and has contributed I think some, to our discipline. And has had great colleagues along the way. So, no regrets.

Matt Hickey: No regrets. And I totally agree. I've been lucky enough to do things that cross over to nutrition, readily. And we had that funny experience for a while where I had a joint appointment, but then I could never sit as the outside member on graduate committee. It's kind of one of those things where you go, "No, that doesn't... " So we said, "Let's stop doing that, so I can be on the committees." But yeah, I agree. The department's been fantastic. It's been fun to be able to rub elbows with you, and others over there. It's a neat group of people.

This is a natural segue into a question about where we find ourselves as colleagues, in this College of Health and Human Sciences. And of course, you and I collectively now have some 50-plus years of experience in the college, and it hasn't always been called Health and Human Sciences. But talk to me about what you like most about working in the College of Health and Human Sciences.

Chris Melby: I would have to say again, that the emphasis on health, with so many of the different departments. We're a very eclectic college. But I think that we also work very well together, as colleagues. And there's good collaboration. I've been working with Lauren Shomaker and the Human Development and Family Studies. Obviously I've worked with you, and Chris Bell and other people, Karen Hamilton over in the Health and Exercise Science Department. There's been great collaborations I think, over the years, because the people that tend to be drawn to this, I think are quite altruistic and service oriented and really want to have an impact. It isn't just about building a CV, and how many publications can we get? It's really, how can we impact our communities and our students? And I think we've all realized that, over the years, that we can't do it alone. Team science is here to stay because the problems that we face as a society are going to be largely intractable, if we don't work together as collaborators, and as colleagues.

So I've enjoyed being in a land-grant university, because our department has extension. I've had opportunity to present at extension forums, some of the research that I've done. That can spread the information that we've learned in our research outside of the so-called ivory tower. And so it's been a pretty special place. And I've had the opportunity to work with different deans, but they've all been great, over the years. It's been pretty special, with Nancy Hartley and Jeff McCubbin, and April Mason. And now Lisa Youngblade. It's been pretty neat, to find the support from the deans for our department. And for me, when I was serving as department head... Being a department head, you kind of wonder, "Well, now who do I work for? Do I work for the dean, or do I work for our faculty within the department?" I've always said, "Well, I work for both, and we'll make our relationship succeed."

Matt Hickey: That's good advice, for sure. You've anticipated the land-grant question, but I wonder if I could just ask you to unpack that a little bit more, the unique perspective we get, and the opportunity we have to work at a land-grant institution.

Chris Melby: Yeah. I think the land-grant tradition is incredibly strong, and needs to be, because we view our classroom as not what is just here in Fort Collins or up at the Mountain Campus, or CSU Pueblo. But our campus is really the entire state. And we have the responsibility for, as the state university, the land-grant university, for ensuring that we have an educated population and providing resources that people throughout the state of Colorado need. I knew about CSU when I was living in Cortez, really not even sure I would necessarily go to college. I didn't know what I was going to do.

But I knew about CSU because I would drive by on the way to the mountains, I'd drive by a sign that said that there was an agriculture experiment station that belonged to CSU near Hesperus, between Cortez and Durango. So I wondered about that, and I found out about it. "Well, they provide agricultural information throughout the state of Colorado, and this unique area here. They can provide information to farmers, and it's an experiment station. They can test various soils and crops and things like this." And I thought, "That's pretty neat." And then Purdue was, strangely enough even though Purdue does not have a state name to the university, it's a land-grant university. It was the same sort of thing. The emphasis on ensuring that there are resources available, educational resources, especially for the entire state of Colorado, through the various counties.

And I realized in Cortez, we had extension specialists. Probably my third or fourth year, I went down to Cortez and gave a bunch of nutrition seminars and workshops, through extension. Which I loved. And so I think I sort of am an advocate, a strong advocate, for land-grant education because I think it's a real, first of all, it's first class. And secondly, it's real world. The faculty here, the agents that are outside in the communities, the extension specialists the liaison between the university and the agents out in the counties, do just a really great job. And in making sure that CSU is impactful in its research, and it doesn't just remain here in the ivory tower or in the journals we publish in, or in the conferences that we present our findings in.

Avery Martin: Right.

Matt Hickey: So Chris, I'm going to ask you one follow up question, but I want to predicate it. So as I've been listening for the last hour, and I think probably I anticipated this, given our friendship, it's particularly fun. If somebody were to ask me, how do you describe Chris Melby in one word? I've been thinking about this for a long time, and it's not easy to do, because there's a lot of gems that come to mind.

Chris Melby: In one word.

Matt Hickey: Yeah. I'm not asking you.

Chris Melby: Okay.

Matt Hickey: I'm going to describe you, and then I'm going to ask you a question. And again, we've had this special relationship, we've prayed together and we've wept together, and we have suffered together and shivered together. And laughed, and everything in between. And the gamut of, how do you describe Chris? I think, for me, it would boil down to integrity. That's the thing that comes to mind for me. So as a man of integrity, I would like you to give us some parting advice, to students or to early career faculty members about, how do you navigate this thing we call life?

Chris Melby: Boy, that's a loaded question. When I think about the term integrity, and I appreciate the comment, but at times I think we all have masks that we wear, at times. I think integrity, in my mind, is integrated. And so what you see on the outside, and what you see on the inside, they're the same. And yet I know that at times, we are pushed into wearing a mask. And especially I think when we get a lot of education, and there's expectations of us to be the purveyors of all of this knowledge, among our students. But I think that part of living a life of integrity is being honest with ourselves, recognizing our shortcomings, recognizing that we have flaws. Recognizing that, "I really do need other people. I can't do this alone," nor would I want to do it alone.

And I think, I have opportunity to mentor younger faculty in our department, and I typically encourage them to find things that they're passionate about. Stay true to themselves, in the sense of, don't get pushed into doing this because the expectation is, "Well, if you're a faculty member, then you have to do this." I think much of it is, find your passion in your research that you really will enjoy, and that you're not doing it just to gain a reputation. You're not doing it just to get a salary increase. You're not doing it just to get promoted, or tenured. You're doing it because you're going to be impactful, because it's going to be beneficial. And in the long run, the satisfaction, I think from living in that sort of manner is going to be so beneficial. To our mental health, our emotional health.

I guess that's what I would encourage. Be honest in your endeavors. Find the things that you're really passionate about that you can do, and rely on other people to help you along the way. And exhibit humility, recognizing that none of us know it all, and what a fun thing to do, to discover things that we didn't know before. Because I think having that sense of humility and awe about this universe that we live in, is really important as we navigate, and then as we have the opportunity to teach our students and learn together as a community.

Matt Hickey: Well said. Chris. Thanks a ton.

Chris Melby: Yeah, it was fun.

Avery Martin: Thank you both. This was just awesome to watch, such a beautiful conversation between friends, between colleagues. This was great.

Chris Melby: Well, like I said, I told you and I told Avery, I don't know why you're doing me. I thought you should feature younger folks. But I have to say, I enjoyed it.

Matt Hickey: Good. We did, too.

Chris Melby: So.

Matt Hickey: Good stuff.

Another great interview is in the books. Thank you for listening to this episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Avery Martin: Be sure to check out the rest of Season Two, as well as Season One. If you want to learn more about the college, go to www.chhs.colostate.edu.