# Health and Human Science Matters Season 3, Episode 7: Lise Youngblade and Nicole Ehrhart

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: I'm Matt Hickey, associate Dean for Research and Graduate studies. In our college, we make it 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.

Avery Martin: This is a very special two-part episode in collaboration with the Living Healthy Longer podcast, produced by the Columbine Health Systems Center for Healthy Aging and their communications and outreach coordinator, Hannah Halusker.

Matt Hickey: We've got a special treat today, two special treats actually, we're looking forward to this. And it's an opportunity for two podcasts, right? One from the Center for Healthy Aging and one from the College of Health and Human Sciences to collaborate and to talk to two of my favorite people on campus, two people that I look up to and I aspire to be like. And we'll learn more about them in the next couple of minutes. My name's Matt Hickey, of course, my partner, Avery and I have been doing this in Health and Human sciences for a while. We've got Hannah here as well.

Hannah Halusker: Yes.

Matt Hickey: Right. So we've doing some teamwork and today we're going to talk to Dr. Nicole Ehrhart and Dr. Lise Youngblade, two leaders on campus. There's a Women in Science feature to this, but I'm going to insert some opportunities for men to learn from you as well. And I hope that that's okay, because that's a sincere platform in terms of mentoring. And so we're just going to dive right in. We're going to have some fun today. We're going to try to follow a little bit of the script that we've used in our Health and Human Sciences podcast and then flip the script to the Center for Healthy Aging and do a little bit of both. And we really look forward to these conversations.

 And so Nicole, we're going to start with you. And one of the themes we've tried to develop in our own podcast in the college is to get to know colleagues, both as individuals, as people, and as scholars. And so we're going to ask you to weave a tail for us. Tell us a little bit about who you are. We want to know more about your pathway. There's the obvious question of how did you get to where you are, but we've really enjoyed hearing that mental tape rollback to the early days. We've had stories others have shared about second grade teachers who had influences on them, those sorts of things.

 But for all of us, I think the pathways are informative, they can be exemplars for others who didn't think that they could do the things that you're now doing. So we'll let you start to tell your tale, and we might just, again, improvise and ask for some other questions as you tell us a little bit about who you are, where you come from, and how did you get to the positions plural that you now hold here at CSU.

Nicole Ehrhart Well, thank you. Yeah, it's a pleasure to be here. I'm really excited to be doing this in partnership with my wonderful colleague and friend, Dr. Youngblade and yeah, to tell you a little bit about my story, as a child, the first thing I can actually remember wanting to do was being a veterinarian. And I always gravitated toward all animals, everything from insects to cats, dogs, horses, cows, et cetera. And so throughout my younger years, I spent a lot of time cultivating the idea of what would it take to get into veterinary school, talking to guidance counselors in high school, et cetera. And even then, the field was still very male dominated, but very few women in the profession. But it was growing. And so there were opportunities I could see where there were other people like me that were doing veterinary medicine.

 And so as time went on, I went to college at Rutgers University, got a BS in animal science, and then got into veterinary school at the University of Pennsylvania. And throughout my veterinary experience, I was in school thinking about surgery. I was really fascinated by the idea that you could open up an animal and do something inside and close them up and fix them somehow. And that was really satisfying to me. And so that was really a passion. And I would say from there, a lot of my leaps in terms of going forward or changing tracks came from opportunities where in a single moment my vision was expanded where I could actually see a different focus or an expanded impact of what I was doing. And I can think of two very pivotal moments.

 So the first was, I was in my surgical residency. So finished veterinary school, was accepted into an internship and then into a residency position in surgery at Colorado State University, which is a highly competitive program. And in that program, I was also asked during one of my rotations to participate as a lifeguard in a camp for children with cancer. And this was one of my bosses that said, "You're going to go and be this lifeguard." And I said, "Sure, I'll go do that."

 So I showed up at this summer cancer camp, and met this little girl and her name was Jenny and she had just had an amputation. She had bone cancer. So her limb had been removed to treat her cancer, and she was on chemotherapy and she was losing her hair and trying to get around on crutches, et cetera. And at the same time in my veterinary world, I had been learning about osteosarcoma bone cancer in dogs. And it turns out that osteosarcoma in dogs is identical to osteosarcoma in children. And yet in dogs, what we were learning about was this opportunity to salvage a limb or do limb salvage surgery or we can actually replace removed bone and tissue in order to prevent amputation in dogs. And here I am looking at an eight year old girl with an amputated limb.

Matt Hickey: Wow.

Nicole Ehrhart And it was those, that first pivotal moment where I realized these are the same diseases and perhaps veterinary medicine could have an impact that might influence the ability for kids to be able to keep their limbs. And so that launched a research career where I started looking into regenerative medicine and tissue regeneration and how we can replace or regrow musculoskeletal tissue in large defects, whether that's from trauma or tumor surgery or in some cases, infection.

 So fast forward about 10 years of doing this work in stem cells and other types of regeneration, trying to figure out how to do this in these large defects that people and animals would have and learning about how the connection between human medicine and veterinary medicine was so, the veil between them was so thin and that there was really a one medicine that encompassed all creatures, and that there was this concept that what we were doing really had an impact.

 I continue, by the way, to go to that cancer camp every single year, and I bring my graduate students now so that they can see how impactful the work that we did and do still are and why we do what we do. And that's really an important piece of what I want to teach and pay forward to other generations. But now into the career, still making some really cool breakthroughs and still continuing to do this work in kids' cancer and other areas of cancer research. And then suddenly realizing that a lot of the regeneration work I was doing where we were trying to solve the problem of large defects in tissues, we were actually just trying to restart the regenerative and repair and rejuvenation process of a tissue.

 And I suddenly, again, vision got expanded all of a sudden where I thought, "Wait a minute, this is actually the same thing that happens when we age." When we age, we lose muscle tissue, we lose bone mass, et cetera. It just happens on a really slow basis, not like all of a sudden like a trauma or a tumor surgery or whatever. And could we then apply some of the things and strategies that we've been successful with in masculoskeletal tissue regeneration to aging? And then I went on to do a sabbatical at the Steadman Philippon Research Institute where I had some opportunities to work with a master athletes and stem cells and muscle work. And from there really started thinking about, "This is another opportunity where just by expanding the focus, we could have a much bigger impact." Not everybody has tumors, not everybody has trauma, but everybody ages, right?

 And so the fact that we could apply these things on a more general basis and solve a bigger problem was fascinating and exciting to me. And then the opportunity came to lead this center, which really, again, was another expansion of vision, which is not just within the area of expertise that I have, but to catalyze cross-disciplinary work across all colleges, all departments with a focus on aging to address a single common challenge. And that was the next level. And so here I am, and that's been my story.

Matt Hickey: And we're going to loop back, but I want to take the long and winding road if I can and then we'll come back to center leadership. So did you grow up in a rural setting where you had a opportunity to spend time with animals?

Nicole Ehrhart I did. I grew up in a suburban area in a mountainous town in New Jersey. Yes, there are mountains in New Jersey, and it was very rural. We didn't even have our own post office, went to a regional high school, but a lot of my animal experience came from summer experiences up in Vermont. So I worked up in Vermont at a horse farm. And so I enjoyed horses my whole life, but also all creatures great and small. And so that was really a lot of my experience in terms of pre-professional priming for the work that I do. And did in veterinary medicine.

Matt Hickey: And can I ask a little bit about family influence as well, parents, siblings, et cetera, that might have been part of the jet propulsion for your journey here?

Nicole Ehrhart Yeah. My dad is an engineer and my mom was in medicine, although she worked as a radiology technician. So I had exposure to the sciences and it was, I think something that we as a family really enjoyed a lot of science projects and little experiments. And I remember many times hanging out with my dad in the garage and building things and looking at prisms and creating solar panels and just little things like that that really had me fascinated. And I felt like the sky was the limit in science. And so that was always intriguing to me.

Matt Hickey: One thing I'm struck by, and I'm interested if you've had this experience as well, H how many people over the 25 years I've been on campus who have told stories similar to yours where they had an early interest in veterinary medicine and it never wavered. Do you find that to be as common as it seems to be to me?

Nicole Ehrhart It seems that in the veterinary field, that is a more common story than it is in most fields. And it takes a lot of dedication and intention to get in a veterinary school because as you know, it's actually more difficult to get accepted into veterinary school than it is to get into medical school simply because there aren't as many veterinary programs in the US. And so I think to compete on that level, it can take some pretty good intention from childhood. But I think that it's really inspired by passion and people become passionate about that at a very early age.

Matt Hickey: The Council of Research Associate Deans met yesterday and Mark Zabel hosted over at the TMI and was sharing some statistics about the vet program here at CSU and remarked that last year they had over 4,000 applicants to the vet program, which I found astonishing, to be honest with you. So the competitive nature of veterinary training is very much a real thing, isn't it?

Nicole Ehrhart Yeah. And the world needs more veterinarians to be frank. We have a dearth of people that are in practice that can handle the needs of veterinary patient population.

Matt Hickey: So I want to loop us back to the Center for Healthy Aging for just a few minutes. And as somebody who was rooting in the background about, I hope we get good leadership for this program, right? When your name emerged, I think there were a number of people on campus that were hopeful. We had our fingers crossed. And so can you share a little bit about what appealed to you about that position and maybe cast a little bit of a vision? Again, it's a really neat interdisciplinary opportunity and I think the sky's the limit. I'm interested in hearing what you have to think about it.

Nicole Ehrhart Well, I've been always very passionate about cross-disciplinary collaboration. And so clearly, a lot of my early experience was between veterinary and human medicine and then basic science. But you know what, I've also recognized that as the problems and the grand challenges that we as humanity face become more and more complex, that the traditional mode of most discovery is to really drill down very deeply within your discipline. And while that's extremely necessary and is really the seeds to which we can attribute the apples that we're now picking from our apple orchard, the big discoveries and the things that have helped humanity grow in so many ways, they by themselves are not really the answer to the most complex questions.

 And I think the only way we can really make a lot of inroads into the big challenges that we face global aging as a population is one of them, other things like climate change, et cetera, is really to think of them as transdisciplinary issues. And that the greatest answers to some of those grand challenges will come at the intersections between disciplines rather than within a single discipline. And it will take the lens of all disciplines to really address and move the needle.

 And so when this position came up, I saw this as an opportunity to really bring together and catalyze so many different aspects and quite frankly, aspects of aging that I knew very little about. And yet I was eager to learn and I was very excited to understand fresh perspectives, to even inspire my own vision about what this might look like in the future. And it's just become its own animal. It's gotten a life of it's own as a result of that. And really it's the talent of the faculty and the willingness of faculty to think outside the box and to really brainstorm as a group is an interdisciplinary group that has led to the success that I think we have today.

Matt Hickey: Wow. We're lucky to have your leadership. So on behalf of the whole crew, you say thanks very much.

Nicole Ehrhart Thank you.

Matt Hickey: I have a couple more questions if I may. So the first one is this endowed chair that you hold. And for many of our listeners, of course, they won't know exactly what endowed chairs are, but they are quite a distinction. And so tell us a little bit about your endowed chair role.

Nicole Ehrhart Well, it's one of the greatest honors of my career to hold this chair position. This chair is named after one of my mentors, his name is Ross Wilkins, and he is still a mentor still among us. And he was really working with Steve Withrow, another one of my member, my mentors, who was active here in the College of Vet Med for many years. And they really set an example of this concept of how medicine is a two-way street between veterinary medicine and human medicine and how by working together that we can really make bigger impacts. They exemplified that in my early career.

 And so the chair as it is now, is to honor that relationship, especially Ross Wilkins and his vision to work with veterinarians and how veterinary medicine would be so impactful in the human medicine world. He championed that for so many years. And so this is really to honor his legacy, but it is in musculoskeletal oncology and biology. So it is essentially a way for that program to exist into perpetuity that there will always be someone sitting in this position that will dedicate their career toward this musculoskeletal biology and oncology field. And really in this idea that we can prevent amputation from tumor trauma or infection and continue to help people and animals lead whole lives. So that's the concept.

Matt Hickey: Well, congratulations.

Nicole Ehrhart Thank you.

Matt Hickey: Another theme that we've tried to emphasize in our College of Health and Human Sciences podcast is that we're not merely scholars. We're human beings. We have lives off campus. And so tell us a little bit about Nicole when she's not pursuing these scholarly endeavors on campus. What are some things that interest you?

Nicole Ehrhart Well, I am a big proponent of the "work hard, play hard" ethos. And so I really try to have an integrated life where a lot of my work is, I'm very focused on, but I also focus hard on play. So the things that I like to do to play are mostly things that are outdoors. And I would say the top three are sailing, scuba diving and skiing.

Matt Hickey: The three Ss?

Nicole Ehrhart Yes. And so we'll throw in hiking and drinking fine wine and other things, good food and yes, good coffee, all those things. So it's really, I think about creating a depth of richness in your life, both in your work life and your personal life that makes you feel like you are, I don't know, enriched in a way that integrates those things in both places.

Matt Hickey: And if I may, in part because of the timing, you just got back from a bit of an adventure, would you tell us just a snippet about your sailing experience?

Nicole Ehrhart You bet. Yeah. So I've actually been sailing since I was young, but it never really learned how to sail specifically or learned how to skipper a boat. So earlier this year, my husband and I went down to the British Virgin Islands and went to sailing school and we actually got our skipper certification in order to sail bigger yachts, so like 50, 60 foot yachts. And we just did our first Bareboat experience where it was he and I, because skippering our first large sailing yacht in the British Virgin Islands. And we were there for a week and we had all kinds of adventure and mishaps, but lots of learning experiences and really had a ball and just can't wait to do it again.

Matt Hickey: That's so great.

Avery Martin: That's amazing.

Hannah Halusker: I should add that I've known Nicole for two and a half years now, and when I talked to other people about her for that entirety of that time, I told them that she was a pilot as well and only recently found out that she does not actually have a pilot's license. So I don't know where that legend originated, but there's a lot of people here who think you're a superwoman.

Matt Hickey: There's always time.

Nicole Ehrhart I know. You never know.

Avery Martin: She can do it all.

Matt Hickey: Who knows what might be next. Well great, thanks so much.

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Nicole Ehrhart Thanks.

Matt Hickey: We're going to turn our attention to Dr. Youngblade and of course, Lise, you were our inaugural guest when we started this. And so we want to say welcome back of course. And we have a different setting today and we're interested in hearing some of the similar stories of course about your journey, your pathway. But perhaps upon reflection you've got a few gems that you didn't share last time as well.

 So we're keen to learn more about how Lise Youngblood got into the leadership position that she's in now. And you predicate this by saying when Lise came into the dean's role a couple of years ago, number one, again, very much the same story, there were hundreds of us on campus burning incense and praying and whatever it took, let's hope they're smart enough to offer it to her and that we might be lucky enough to have her as a leader. And so we're delighted. And then I've, I've been really fortunate and I did not see this coming to have a front row seat and learn from you in a bit more proximity. So thanks for taking a flyer on me as well. I really do appreciate that.

Lise Youngblade It's my pleasure. You're amazing.

Matt Hickey: Likewise. So welcome. Tell us about Lise.

Lise Youngblade Thank you. And I just also want to say what an honor it is to be here with Nicole Ehrhart, also a friend and a colleague and actually was reflecting on two things that she said repeatedly and didn't want to interrupt. So thank you Hannah, for doing that, breaking the ice here a little bit. But that concept of intersections and inflection points and my story is nowhere near as linear as Nicole's is, but I think that same point of coming to an intersection, seeing something bigger or something different, following Yogi Berra, seeing a fork and taking it and just doing something, maybe that's not what you anticipated at the beginning, but turns out to be the right decision. So I appreciate that.

 One of the first lessons my graduate school mentor gave me was, Lise, the big ideas are at intersections and I have seen that personally, professionally, repeatedly in myself and students and in colleagues. So anyway, it was delightful hearing your story Nicole, and also reflecting on how excited we were when you were interested in the director of the Columbine Health Systems Center for Healthy Aging. Definitely is a game changer for all of us on campus.

 Okay, so my story is a little different. I was born in Brooklyn, to parents who, dad never went beyond high school. He's a optician by trade and apprenticeship but not educational background. And my mom was an LPN, a licensed practical nurse, and she worked in public health. She didn't work much after having kids, but a little bit. So I had some exposure to what she did. And the exposure I had though was not so much on the medicine or nursing part, but the dire straits that folks were in. And so I remember her cooking food often to bring on her home visits and talking about the opportunity to give to people that didn't have the same things that you did.

 And at that point, my life did not realize, we also didn't have a lot, but it felt like we had a lot. My parents died when I was young. My dad died when was 10. Right after that we moved to Oregon. So we went from this environment of really not ever thinking about school except for up to high school, maybe. We never talked about college, we never talked about anything beyond high school except maybe getting married, maybe being a stewardess. I remember at some point really being fascinated by the idea of teaching. And so I would set my dolls up and they would be the students and I would be the teacher, probably similar to many other children, but I never really thought about college as a thing and I don't think I could even name one probably growing up, my kids could from an early age. So it was really different.

 And then moved in with my aunt and uncle and shortly after that, my mom died. My uncle, her brother had gone on to get his PhD, his wife had a PhD. And so all of a sudden went into this household where it was an expectation that all the children would go to college. It wasn't up for discussion, it was an expectation and a lot of discussion about why. So, why it's important to get your education, why it's important to have options, why it's important to get an education, not just so that you make more money, but that you have the opportunity to give back. So it was give back in a really, really different way. So he talked, he's an economist, my aunt was a sociologist. A lot of conversation about unfair and inequitable systems that harm people, and the only way you can change that is through education and really trying to disrupt systems. So very early introduction to disruption and thinking about that.

 So again, went to college, decided disruption was probably not the route. I didn't like my economics classes or sociology classes. And so I went back to the idea of maybe I'll be a teacher. So I liked history, loved my history classes. History's fascinating because it's just stories. You sit and listen to stories of things that happened, you try and analyze them and then make some adjustment going forward that you learn from history. So I would be a social studies teacher and this was brilliant. And then I realized that maybe that wasn't quite right and decided to take a break in my undergraduate education and moved to Alaska for a year. Worked on fishing boats, worked in canneries, had a very, very different exposure to work. And decided at the end of that, I really wanted to go back to college and finish my education and do something other than flipping fish.

 And I came back. And so I was like, "Okay, fine, I will be a high school teacher, this will be a great career." And had to take an elective class. And so I chose to take developmental psychology from a professor, Dr. Beverly Fagot at the University of Oregon. That's where I went. And within 10 minutes of her talking had completely changed my whole career plan, what I wanted to do. I have never heard anybody as engaging speak about children and the way they think, the way they grow. And again, a storyteller, but from the science of a person's development and went up to her after it and I remember shaking, "How do I do what you want to do?" And so she became an incredible mentor, not just through the end of my undergraduate career, but all through graduate school.

 I went somewhere else, Penn State for graduate school, and until her death, was somebody I would routinely call and ask for career advice, personal advice, we'd have far ranging conversations about random music and movies and books, but was just this powerhouse of a woman who was probably one of the most interesting, creative, innovative, brilliant minds I've ever had the opportunity to work with. So that was what happened in 10 minutes, changed my major to developmental psychology and decided I was going to devote my life to studying children. And then went to Penn State, got a master's and PhD there. The program I went into though was not developmental psychology, it was human development and family studies. So this for me was a giant intersection point. I think there were probably ones before that, obviously I told you a big one of changing my major.

 But from thinking about it from a career professional theoretical science lens, you didn't really understand what interdisciplinary science was or interdisciplinary thinking. But human development and family studies is an intentional intersection between developmental psychology and family sociology. So it started in the 1970s. The first scholars started talking then and made some really innovative observations about development being in context. And really my development's different than every one of yours around this table. Not just in the obvious choices we make, but actually in the way our bodies respond, our minds respond, our emotions respond, physiology, all of that. And that it's lifespan at that point you hit 20 and it's all down downhill from there. We know that that's not true anymore.

 So anyway, that was I eye-opening to me, worked with it's some amazing professors and met my husband there. And so again, another inflection point for us is what to do with two careers in the same field, graduating at the same time, would've been very easy to do a postdoc, do the traditional route, but we were a little bit off sync. And so I went and started a faculty position. He finished up a year after me, couldn't find a job in the city in which I was located. So then what do you do? Another inflection point. How do you balance family and professional life? And backtrack this, oh gosh, I'm going to say it like three decades and dating myself here. But the opportunities for women. There weren't discussions about spousal hires, there weren't offices that helped you negotiate this. There weren't department heads that would go out and say, "Yeah, I'm going to create a second position because I want to get both of you."

 So moved to where he was, did a postdoc, he was doing a postdoc at SUNY Albany. So time limited. We moved to Michigan because at that time the job market was very challenging. Again, did postdocs had the opportunity for me to work with another powerhouse woman, Lois Hoffman, who was at the forefront of women careers, work-life balance, maternal employment, all of these things was the late 80s or early 90s was such a controversy in the field for women going to work and leaving their children in daycare or this guilt shaming of moms and women. And she was on the opposite side of that argument, showing the benefits to children with incredibly elegant science. Not just saying it, not just doing sound bites, but doing this wonderful rich science about this. I had the opportunity to work with her. And so how great was that? Again, years before would never have thought this would be my pathway.

 So anyway, a number of different pathways there. And eventually we ended up at the University of Florida. They recruited my husband to their Institute on Aging and I was a trailing spouse there. So got a job in the College of Medicine in an institute for Child health policy and very quickly had the opportunity to jump into administration and building and decided I really loved it. I loved the idea of thinking about really big ideas and helping to pull people together to execute the ideas, to think interdisciplinary. What if you address this grand challenge as you talked about Nicole, from multiple perspectives, not just what I was thinking, oh this great interdisciplinary training I had was this small, right? The world of possibilities is this big. So what happens if you bring those folks together?

 So fascinating journey for me there, great learning experience. And then had the opportunity to come to CSU, 2006 as a department head of human development and family studies, fell in love actually before I interviewed just with the job announcement and then came and interviewed, loved it. And we've been here since and have had the opportunity to just work in a lot of different capacities with a lot of wonderful people and very blessed now to be the dean.

Matt Hickey: As is the college. So tell us a little bit about your husband. Is he a university distinguished professor?

Lise Youngblade He is Dr. Manfred Diehl, also trained in human development and family studies with very interesting interdisciplinary but also fascinating story in his own right. He's a German citizen, didn't actually move to the US till he was in his later twenties. Again, not this linear path. He grew up in a very working class family and education, well valued was not something that was expected or certainly not beyond a trade or a specific set of professional skills. He wanted to go to school to learn and he did. So yes, he does aging research thinking about negative perceptions, self-perceptions of aging and how they actually hurt our health. And they are modifiable partners here with the Center for Healthy Aging is also a wonderful colleague and thinks is just really excited about the work that you're doing is director.

Hannah Halusker: As we are his. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: And so when Lise is not in the dean's chair on campus, what occupies you in terms of fun and ways to maintain that balance?

Lise Youngblade So recently I've become really fond of naps. I never was a napper, but recently I was like, "Oh my gosh, these are awesome." And so I don't take them everyday clearly-

Matt Hickey: Where have you been all my life?

Avery Martin: Yeah.

Lise Youngblade ... but when I do get them, I fully enjoy them. I love being outside. So in recent years I have taken up gardening. I don't know that I'm very good at it and thankfully we don't have to survive on what I garden, but I love it. I love being outside and hiking. I love traveling. COVID was really challenging in that way-

Matt Hickey: Indeed.

Lise Youngblade ... to not be able to go anywhere. I don't sail. I love disaster movies though. And this worries me about your sailing thing. So we got to write a really good script for you not to be in one of those movies. But yeah, so I like to read. That's the other thing.

Matt Hickey: And may I press you on the music as well?

Lise Youngblade Yeah, I do love music. I love listening to music, I love concerts and I love playing it and I know what you're asking about. So in the gap year I took in high school, one of my jobs was in a bluegrass band. And so I have had that experience too. And I love it.

Matt Hickey: Isn't that great?

Avery Martin: Yeah. This is so awesome.

Matt Hickey: We never tire of hearing about that. And of course there's a shared interest there because Manfred has quite a collection of vinyl at the house.

Lise Youngblade He does. I have to say, we mostly agree on music. Anything in the rock folk, classical area, but jazz, we diverge in a big way.

Matt Hickey: Indeed.

Lise Youngblade He's a big jazz fan. Some of it feels like fingernails on a chalkboard to me.

Avery Martin: That's where I have to disagree. He and I bonded on that.

Lise Youngblade I know he talks to you.

Avery Martin: I still need to come by and see the collection. So-

Lise Youngblade It's impressive and it's good and I appreciate that it's good. It's just not my genre.

Avery Martin: That's okay.

Lise Youngblade He hates bluegrass for what it's worth.

Avery Martin: Yeah, so you both have the things that-

Lise Youngblade We have our own independent likes.

Avery Martin: That's good. What's awesome and fascinating to me that I hear in both of your journeys, whether linear or non-linear, the one thing that was non-linear for both of you was leadership. So how exactly did you come into the confidence, the realization that, "You know what, I want to lead?" And what I love most about both of you is that neither of you said, "I want to lead because I want to lead people, I want people to follow my direction." It comes from a place of gratitude and service. So talk a little bit about both your pass to leadership.

Nicole Ehrhart Yeah, I think that leadership happened in the tailwind of what was happening in my life. And that was one of those realizations where you're like, "I guess I am a leader." And now as I reflect back on a lot of my career, and I share this with people that are coming up behind me, that you are always a leader. You're a leader in your sphere of influence in whatever that sphere is. Some of us have bigger ones, some of us have smaller ones, but we're all influencers and you need to wield that influence with a lot of respect and humility. And so I think just that perspective of the humility piece in that, they're so, if I'm having a bad day, I could affect people pretty negatively and they might take it personally, but I'm just having a bad day and it has nothing to do with them type of thing.

 So I think just understanding the influence and the responsibility that comes with that was the foundation. And then really saying, "Okay, from there, how do I intentionally become a good leader? What does that look like? How do I vision cast for people? How can I create a vision that people can get behind?" And then it's about creating teams of people that share that vision and just letting them do their best. Because when you have people that are in your sphere that are talented and passionate, it happens naturally and all you're doing is you're in the front of the parade waving the flag saying, "Look at these guys."

 And so I think, honestly, that I have certainly done a lot of intentional leadership training to make sure that I'm not failing in certain areas. And I know that I still have much to learn and will continue to evolve as a leader. But I really think it starts with that vision and humility and respect for the people that you work with to allow them to excel and to point in their direction as much as you can at what they're doing. That is excellent.

Avery Martin: Very excellent. That's awesome.

Lise Youngblade Yeah. I could not agree more with what you have said, Nicole. I think, actually, this is a story about how children humble you all the time, but my younger son was in third grade, he had to do a career day and come to work. And so he wanted to come and see what a department head did. And I remember just being so proud that he gets to say his mom is a department head and he's going to come and do a great report on it or whatever. And so the sum total of his report is that my job entails sitting at desk, talking on the phone and talking to people. He could not say anything really interesting about what I did, even though I gave him all this great stuff. But that's what he observed. I know, right? I still have this little picture of me sitting there with the phone glued to my ear.

 But I think it's that commitment to really others, right? It's not about what you are doing. And I think those are the leaders I've least admired most where they start with their CV or their title or their accomplishments first. The leaders that have inspired me and that I try to emulate are the ones that truly are servant leaders. You have the ethos that we are better as a team, that their success is my success, their research is my, and I often say that, what's your research? And I was like, "Whatever the college is doing is my research right now." And I believe that wholeheartedly. And I also just consider myself incredibly fortunate and grateful to have the opportunity to work with great people.

 I think generally, the way I approach things, and I just to echo what you've said, Nicole, is a strength-based approach and then you surround yourself with great people and then just get out of their way because they're really going to do it.

Nicole Ehrhart Yeah.

Lise Youngblade Yeah.

Matt Hickey: There's something really appealing to me here and it's, for the listeners, I would say what you've just heard is manifested in everything I've seen both of you do over the years. This combination of servant leadership and humility, where it's not you that blots out the sun and everybody else is in your shadow. It's an opportunity, in fact, again, to look for people who have strengths that you don't have, right?

Lise Youngblade Exactly.

Matt Hickey: As opposed to clones of your style or your pathways. Those things are really cool. I've seen it in Lise for many years. I don't know Nicole as well, but we got a chance to interact in the crucible of COVID-19. And there was a call that extended well beyond the state of Colorado, obviously, but the narrow service call was to do work for at-risk human beings here in the state of Colorado. That was well beyond your research portfolio. It would've been easy to say, "No, no, no, I'm just going to stick to what I'm doing in the lab and somebody else can figure that out." But there was a square wave of trying to ramp up and meet the needs at-risk individuals. But again, done with dame's that same sense of service and humility that I have long admired in both of you. So I find myself inclined to say thanks again and again. But it's sincere. I really do appreciate it.

Lise Youngblade Thank you. Yeah.

Matt Hickey: I want to shift the story a little bit. We have a prompt in here and I'm going to tweak it just a little bit. Both of you have pointed to people, and named names of individuals who were significant in your pathway or in your journey. So instead of talking about people as mentors, I'm interested in hearing you talk about the idea of mentorship. What has it meant to you and what do you hope to do as mentors as you look forward to the next several years, right? People that you can have an influence on. We've often used the metaphor of individuals whose fingerprints we still carry with us, right, in our personal lives and in our professional lives. And so instead of naming names, I'm interested in your philosophy of mentoring and aspirations you have as mentors.

Nicole Ehrhart It's a great question. Well, I think that the core of mentorship for me is it's a paying forward aspect, but also it's about enabling people to do bigger and better things than you could ever do. If I can see that in the people that I mentor, that they go on to do bigger and better than I could have even imagined, I would count myself as successful. So for me, mentorship is about helping people believe in themselves, being brave enough to reinvent yourself and think outside the box and take a leap of faith and trusting that you're going to land okay and that you have the skills and applying skills that you might not have thought applied in a broader sense. And just helping them see that.

 If it weren't for those times where that broader perspective was suddenly that image or that vision of broader perspective, bigger impact didn't happen, I don't know that I would've taken those leaps, but all of a sudden when they were before me, there was something that called to me to walk through them. And I think if I could instill that passion in people coming up behind me, I would find that that would maybe make me feel like I was successful in mentoring. So yeah.

Matt Hickey: You're here.

Lise Youngblade Yeah. I think another way I think about mentoring, and I think this is from the perspective of having been a department head and a dean where you're responsible not only for people that you mentor, I think about that in one way and then also think about it from a systemic perspective and what does a culture of mentoring look like where we do expect people to show up towards the betterment of other people, right? And so I remember institutionalizing this in our department as part of annual evaluations that you would be held accountable to mentorship, not in a prescribed way, I don't prescribed mentoring. I don't like statements, like, "Here's your mentoring team." Unless it's a genuine organic relationship that's actually going to be helpful to the person, that can be quite harmful I think.

 I also don't mentoring as much towards a specific goal. An example would be, "We're going to mentor you to tenure." Because that becomes an end point, it's not the journey of your career. I think if we're mentoring somebody towards a wonderful, impactful, significant career, they're going to get tenure, they're going to get promoted. That's not the focus. It's the focus on the impact of what they're doing.

 So I've tried to frame what a culture of mentorship and then apply this to myself as well, looks like in being open always to, you never know who's going to ask you a question that's going to lead to an opportunity for mentorship or vice versa. I never know who I might ask a question to, or I'm going to learn from. So try and think about that all the time, but also set, I don't know, a cultural expectation like, "This is how we interact with each other and this is how we support each other, not just as faculty, but also then how we engage our students." Because then I think it sets up modeling that culture that hopefully they take to their next things and you start to see ripple effects. So critically important to think about mentoring. Yeah.

Avery Martin: So let's talk a little bit about the trajectory that you are both on or have been on and where you are now. Imagine someone who's listening who has the passion for science or has a passion for leadership, but just doesn't know or had the confidence to jump into that field. Minoritized individuals, women in STEM, speak a little bit to those individuals who want to jump in, go on the path that you are, but don't exactly know where to start.

Nicole Ehrhart Yeah, my first comment is that if you have a passion for it, another word for a passion could be calling and there's a purpose that you have something to contribute. If you're already passionate about it, I would encourage you to look into what it is that you specifically are most interested in and then just start talking to people in those fields and trying to figure out what are the open doors? You already have something to contribute. I guarantee you, if you're interested and passionate, there is a role for you and there is a place for you in the STEM world. And then it's just a matter of finding folks to talk to. And you can start right here. Lise and I have done a lot of these conversations or others like us where find someone approachable that you can talk about and then just start exploring. But don't ever sell yourself short because the passion's there for a reason.

Lise Youngblade Yeah. I think to try and think about this from years of teaching and anybody that teaches or mentor students or mentors others, you'll know, some people are more verbal than others, some people are more comfortable starting those conversations. So I think looking back over those three decades, some of the more amazing conversations or things I felt really great about is talking to somebody who's maybe sitting in the back row and just starting a conversation. It might not have ended that they want to work with me or do anything really related to me, but just trying to provoke some ideas or solutions, or not even solutions really, pathways, have you thought about talking to this person or an introduction? And so I think there's some element of that too, of just trying to instigate something that somebody might be just not comfortable taking that leap-

Nicole Ehrhart Agreed, yeah.

Lise Youngblade ... themselves.

Avery Martin: That's great.

Lise Youngblade Yeah.

Matt Hickey: Something as simple as I see you, right?

Hannah Halusker: Yeah.

Lise Youngblade Yeah, exactly.

Matt Hickey: It can be the start to, you never would've guessed in a million years, but it was that active.

Lise Youngblade Yep. And what are you thinking? And I hear you. Yeah.

Nicole Ehrhart Exactly.

Hannah Halusker: It's a good point.

Lise Youngblade Yep.

Avery Martin: Do y'all have any stories of students that, or individuals that you spoke to and that blossomed into a mentor-mentee relationship?

Lise Youngblade I will say it was interesting after I interviewed for dean at the end of you, do an open forum and talk about your vision and et cetera. And somebody came up to me after that and said, "I want to do what you're doing. Can you show me how to do it?" And actually we work together today, you know her, Michelle Foster.

Avery Martin: Wow. That's awesome.

Lise Youngblade And started this incredible relationship and she's got so many skills and just needed a little bit of a door opened to, how do I start? And yeah.

Avery Martin: Yeah. Now she's the assistant dean of-

Lise Youngblade She's the assistant dean in our college.

Avery Martin: ... diversity, equity, inclusion and justice, which is amazing. A future guest as well of-

Matt Hickey: Absolutely.

Avery Martin: ... Health and Human Science Matters. What about you?

Nicole Ehrhart I think we all have so many stories of surprising contact from students many years in the future that come back to say, "Maybe you don't remember me, but this is how you influenced me." And one I can think of in particular as a brand new faculty member at my first faculty job at the University of Illinois, that's where I was first before I came back here as a faculty. And there was a program for undergraduate students that for first generation college students or minorities or marginalized people groups. And they were basically creating fellowships for students in those particular areas to come and work beside other scientists. And this woman that came to our program worked with me on the clinic floor and we did a clinical study where she actually got authorship on a paper and it was on heart-based tumors. And so we did a bunch of record reviews and stuff and wrote this paper and she was an author and she went on to finish her college degree. And then I lost touch with her.

 She actually contacted me by Facebook, found me on Facebook, and now we're talking like 25 years later, she became a physician, she is now a faculty member at Harvard.

Avery Martin: Wow.

Nicole Ehrhart I know.

Matt Hickey: Wow.

Nicole Ehrhart And I didn't know any of this. And she said, "That was my foray into the impact that clinical medicine can have and research. And I just want to thank you." And I had no idea. So you think about those kinds of stories and I'm sure we probably could count many of those, but I guess that's the point about you're always an influencer. You never realize what ripples, just that conversation with the person in the back row or just that listening and asking, "What are you really interested in? Tell me more about you and what your passion is." And it leads to places you'd never expect.

 So I don't say that at all to toot my own horn because I think we all have those stories, but it is just something important to remember about your ripples continue a lot further than you think. And I can certainly say that is the case for the people that mentored me as well.

Lise Youngblade And I think about that all the time in the context of a land-grant university where there are a lot of students like me who are first gen students and don't even know how to frame a question maybe or have a framework for what a career could look like. And so I love being at CSU and have generally always been that land-grants.

Avery Martin: Yeah. That is so awesome.

Hannah Halusker: Yeah. I've got a question. When we talk about women as leaders in science, Lise, going back to what you were saying in your story, how back in the late 80s, early 90s, it was not a conversation of spousal hires and those kinds of things, women in science. I wonder, how do you see both of you, how has that changed in your leadership roles when you see female students, women in science coming up now and the world that they're entering for work, how is it different?

Lise Youngblade So I have a lot of thoughts about this because I think about it A, first, the world has evolved. And so I think we are much better at it. I don't think we're perfect, but I do think we're much better. And I think about what does it mean to be a woman in science? And let me explain that for a minute. So I think when we think about science, we think about hard science, we think about STEM, we think about bench science. I come from a social science, behavioral science background. And guess what? There are tons of women in my field. So if you tell me, "How do I get women in science?" I'm like, "They're already here." But the interesting part about it is because that's a softer science, we don't actually count it as science. And so these amazing women who are leaders are making incredibly influential scientific discoveries using incredibly rigorous scientific methods, somehow are not getting credit for it.

 So I think about it really different. We have plenty of women, it's how do we elevate what we're doing to be seen as science? And this has become incredibly more important to me over the past, I don't know, decade when I started thinking about this from a leadership perspective of how do we build the street cred of what we're doing? And it's fascinating. Last two years ago, I think we celebrated our 150th anniversary here at CSU. And one of our proud roots is home economics. I know when I say that, everybody's thinking about cooking classes, sewing classes, etiquette classes, whatever it might be. And if you look at the origins of things like food science, the top science in our field was by women at CSU.

 The early experiments on high altitude baking, the incredible rigor in thinking about the science of cooking and nutrition and under varying conditions was done here by women. And yet we think about home ec in a very, very different way. So I think the challenge for me is really continuing to attract women and men and whoever are interested in these really important gnarly problems that affect people, but elevating the reputation and the regard of what is truly science.

Nicole Ehrhart Yeah. So surgery, whether it's human based or veterinary based is still a fairly male dominated profession. And so most of the conferences I went to early in my career, there were very short lines at the lady's room, that was nice back then. But the truth is that this is becoming more and more popular among women, surgery in general. But I also think there's this element of those of us who have been doing this since the days when they were really short lines at the lady's room are now at a place in our lives, in our careers where we're senior enough to be able to take leadership positions.

 And I think the more often that we step into the arena and accept those roles, the more we can first of all imitate or provide a model for those who are coming up behind us, but also we can begin to influence the way the fields are going, whether that's in academia or in specific fields of medicine or science from the perspective of women. And just continue to help people understand that there's this element that had been somewhat missing from conversations before, that now people are much more aware of. And it's that whole unconscious bias that we all have. We don't always really even realize that that's all going on even among our own people.

 And so I think as long as we are conscious of that and continue to elevate those conversations, I think that's progress and it will continue to need time to catch up and certainly more time for other people groups as well. And so yeah, I think those are the big keys and the big difference. And certainly we're evolving and it's changing and I think it's happening, but it does take people stepping into those roles and accepting that responsibility when maybe that's not very comfortable for all of us and it is not always comfortable.

Hannah Halusker: Yeah, I think the point you were making, Lise, about hard versus soft science, all of this that we're talking about with interdisciplinary research these days is the key I feel like, to making that more holistic view of science as both parts. Because I feel like if you stay in your one discipline that you've only ever studied and you don't get to see the hard or the soft side, the other side of science, you don't have that appreciation for it. But now we're opening these doors and we're having more of these collaborative conversations, and I at least see from my perspective that shifting the way that you're describing.

Lise Youngblade Yeah. And I think students are approaching it differently too, right? So they're expecting that broader view. They're asking, they're actually demanding it. They get that the world is complex and isn't just solved in a particular way. And so I think that gives me great hope too, right, that that's going to continue to help us evolve.

 And they also, I say this, having been a student in, well, in the 80s and the early 90s, and expectations for graduate students, as a female, I always volunteered to do every bit of whatever needed to be done. I was first in line because I felt like I had to continually prove myself. And so to get attention, I killed myself. I don't know that students do that now, nor should they. I think they're more confident in expecting an equal education and equal opportunity. Again, not perfect, but it's different in a good way.

Hannah Halusker: Yeah. I would agree with that. Having finished my graduate school education just a few years ago. I definitely walked into it with that equal opportunity approach and wanting to get the same experiences as my male counterparts or whoever. So it's beautiful to see that shift happening.

Lise Youngblade Yes, it is.

Matt Hickey: You're here. And that's the show. Thank you for listening to another episode of Health and Human Science Matters.

Avery Martin: Now it's time to go check out part two of this episode on the Living Healthy Longer podcast, where we'll hear more from Doctors Ehrhart and Youngblade about their research in healthy aging. Find the link in this episode's description.