

Paleo Solution - 290

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Robb Wolf:

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Hi folks. Robb Wolf here, another edition of the PaleoSolution podcast, very happy to have today's guest on. CJ Hunt is a very good friend of mine. CJ is an investigative reporter. He has the website CJHuntReports and he is also the producer, one-man show of In Search of the Perfect Human Diet. Quite an epic story which if you've not seen that film, it's fantastic. They probably should have had a little bit better quality control. They had some shifty guy on there that wrote a book The PaleoSolution. In that movie they clearly could have done better than that. But CJ, how are you doing?

CJ Hunt:

I'm doing well. Thank you so much Robb and thank you for that nice intro.

Robb Wolf:

Very excited to chat with you today. CJ is one of the folks that I text with and email with quite a bit. We shared pretty remarkable history I guess in that you know, you really were plugged into this paleo ancestral health scene right at its inception.

CJ Hunt:

Well yeah it's kind of interesting. It's you know, a decade or so ago I was working on a book project which ended up being called Diet Evolution. At that time I actually interviewed Loren Cordain and Mike Eaves and it was way before Loren's book ever came out. It was actually because in Mike Eaves' book Protein Power, he had had a very small paragraph talking about the Paleolithic period and that this, the things that he was talking about in the low carb world came out of the Paleolithic diet. That's what peaked my curiosity to want to dig deeper and learn more about that meant I mean particularly talked about a Hunin dig in Pennsylvania where the preagricultural group was you know, big, strong and healthy. The normal agricultural fine. I'm sorry the anthropological fine, you know, what they dig of the bones.

But that very same group 300 years later as agriculturalists got hell in a hand basket. So that made it particular interesting because these were the same people in the same spot on the planet and reflecting this dietary shift. So anyway, that's what got my curiosity and got me digging into it until later when I finally decided to get off my tush and go out there. Because no one had investigated this or tried to tell this story on film.

As you know, I went back to school to learn how to do this and as an adult student which my teachers loved of course because I did my homework.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

CJ Hunt:

You know, and then it ramped up and actually turned into this shoot which on we met so. Just as a quick aside, just so you know the film has taken on a life of its own that I had never expected not only hitting number 1 thanks people to like you and Mark Sisson and whatnot helping spread the word when it first came out in January of 2013. But it's now been subtitled in 12 languages and it's worldwide including China and Thailand and Thailand.

[0:05:15]

Robb Wolf:

Wow, awesome.

CJ Hunt: Yes, I just learned some of that myself. You know, the digital distributors say hey, there's another subtitle there. You know, I eventually learned because I have to pay for those.

Robb Wolf: Right, right. [Laughs]

CJ Hunt: So alright, well I'm getting off on the sidebar here but --

Robb Wolf: No, no, no. I think that's great. You know I mean this paleo ancestral health scene has exploded so much and it's easy to kind of lose the historical perspective of where this whole thing has come from and, you know, how that set up the vector that it's on right now and you actually played a significant role in kind of the formation and vector that was set with all this. I think you interviewing Loren really kind of goosed him in many ways to engage more, do more, you know, outside of just his academic scene. So you're a really important feature in this. There are many people like Staffan Lindeberg, Linda Frassetto that have played really significant roles within this ancestral health scene but because they're not super prominent on social media and whatnot they just get lost to history. You know, these are voices and names that just get lost to history and although you have this medium of both your blog and the movie out there, I don't think folks fully appreciate how important you are in kind of gluing this movement together, particularly in the early years.

CJ Hunt: well thanks so much Robb. Yeah, it's true because when the film came out, I expected it to be a standalone thing. I was a reporter. I was putting it out there and I kind of went back to puttering around. Then when it took off, and actually as you know now there's a companion book to the film that's coming out, it's because people kept writing me. You know, I thought I would go off and do whatever the next project was and people would write and they had more questions and they wanted to know what I did.

I started meeting people at some of the screenings saying, you know, I just want to feel better and this gives me hope. That was really moving so it kind of actually pulled me back in. that's why the CJM Reports and the new blog and all of that has come to be because you know, I really think it's important to become more actively involved and be an advocate and not just a reporter.

At the same time I think you're quite right that it's important to understand where this all came from and understand the full human story in order to you know, really grasp what paleo is and what paleo

isn't and how understanding the human story and how we became human should inform our could inform the decisions we have for the health and life we serve, you know?

Robb Wolf: Yeah. You and I have had many off social media discussions around and I definitely want to dig into that. There have been some really great news pieces recently like paleo porridge and some things like that that I have been meaning to dig into and you have great perspectives on that. But before we get into that, CJ tell folks about your own personal health history that was almost a health catastrophe and --

CJ Hunt: Oh.

Robb Wolf: --bring them from that point kind of forward to where we are now.

CJ Hunt: Well I was sort of in the motorcycle version of Brazilian jujitsu in a sport called motocross.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Which is an off-road steeple chase on motorcycles and so I was like a lot of the early paleo adopters very much into what would be an extreme sport. Then I went out one day and hurt myself and six months later I was jogging to get back to shape and drop dead of a cardiac arrest. Luckily enough, I was doing that at a high school track even though it was a holiday and there was an anesthesiologist that showed up took to jogging the same day. He kept me going until the paramedics got there and they jump started me and took me to UCLA Medical Center where I spent ten days in intensive care.

The long story short is they found out I have a heart birth defect but it really stirred up in me at 24 years old, you know, this... First off you find out you're vulnerable. You're not invincible.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: And then it's what can I do to maintain my health or be healthier or try to avoid these kinds of circumstances, you know, just like you, I had a really dramatic health history that then stimulated my curiosity and that eventually led to making some changes that have helped us both out tremendously. So did I get that? [Laughs]

[0:10:10]

Robb Wolf: Absolutely, yeah, yeah. You pegged that yeah.

CJ Hunt: Did I set that up right? So I get a lot of these story sidebars that I can't – you know, it's like did I answer the question, you know? [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: You did, you did and you know let folks know again how – so how did that initial work with Mike Eaves and whatnot, how did you get involved with that? Like just some general interest or what was the process getting involved with that that book that led you to Mike Eaves talking about the agriculturalist versus hunter/gatherer group and then eventually working with Loren and that piece of the story?

CJ Hunt: Sure. Sure. At the time, you know, I was becoming a reporter and I thought that no one had really dug into this and at the time nobody really had in any kind of a public way. I actually contacted Mike in the hopes of starting up a nonprofit research group that would try to test out all of the –like Gary Tobbs has talked about what they've done with newsie. Test out these things that the low carb world believed at the time and also looked deeper into the historical reasons for it.

So that's how we first got in touch and that didn't take off even though we both tried. [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know, and even the beef people back then it was so funny. They were totally anti-higher protein diets. And the people that were making their decisions believed in the food pyramid. So yeah we couldn't get that rolling.

But nevertheless, is you know, I thought well I wanted to start writing about it and that eventually morphed into a book which became Diet Evolution. Because it was a change because before that I had been a raw food vegan.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Which seems to serve me okay for the first five years or so and then as I tell in the film that my mom was killed by a drunk driver and then she was my best friend really and that emotional impact then revealed the chinks in the armor from not having full nutritional support that I needed, you know, the kind that I needed.

Robb Wolf: Um-hum.

CJ Hunt: So anyway Mike was great. He always very affable and as you probably know when you speak to him off camera, he's even funnier.

Robb Wolf: Right, right he's a character yeah.

CJ Hunt: Oh he is a total character and he was kind enough to write the intro for the book you know, and that just as an aside is getting the word out is before the internet and everything else. Because I was a reporter and not a doctor or a registered dietician I couldn't get any attention. So you just kind of floated out there. But that was a decade before Loren's book so.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: So but it was also based on interviewing them. Similarly it was because I was a reporter and I was trying to learn something new.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know..

Robb Wolf: You know, this maybe gets a little bit off topic but so it will tie in also with discussing like the paleo porridge stuff and whatnot. But the media is just so damn frustrating when it comes to this kind of ancestral health topic. It seems like what passes for good reporting is they grab somebody from two opposite ends of the spectrum and they interview them. Somehow they're supposed to be balance that comes out of that. You know, it's challenging because topics are complex. Like if you want to talk about cold fusion or paleo diets or you know whatever like you need a little steeping in the topic, possibly a significant stepping.

Then once you get steeped in it, I know from a journalistic standpoint you're supposed to be impartial but it's interesting. It seems like if you actually have an impartial individual then they are so ignorant of the topic that they can't ask good questions and all that they end up doing is basically like you know, so is animal protein deleterious to health. So they interview somebody who's kind of a paleo Atkin's person then they interview Atkile and Campbell Vegan person and that's it. Then if there's actually some work that's done to educate one's self about that topic then you become partial.

[0:15:02]

So what are your thoughts on that with like journalistic integrity versus actually becoming knowledgeable on a topic and then you've got a bias then?

CJ Hunt: Well yeah. When it comes to the media and it comes to television I don't think people can rely on that to give them good information. It's for a number of production reasons that a lot of folks might not know about just through. It's the daily grind of being a news reporter or being on one of these shows and that producers you know, just need to slam something out that doesn't take out more than three to five minutes and all they can do and they want eyeballs.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: So they're going to make it as controversial and divisive as they possibly can in most instances. You know, particularly in the morning news shows and things like that and then they'll bring in their doctor who has their own bias. Most often towards the food pyramid that then says, "Oh yeah, eating whole foods is good, oh yeah, eating real foods is good but oh they all died when they were children."

Robb Wolf: Right, right, right.

CJ Hunt: Which of course isn't true. But none of the reporters know enough to challenge that and then ask a good follow-up question and half the time they're distracted looking to the side and looking at the floor. You know, the floor manager telling them to move on to the next story you know, so.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Yeah. So it is, it's very frustrating in that regard and then when you have even folks like Dr. Oz when they had Dr. Cordain on and Prof. Cordain rather and those folks is they still are playing to I mean in that case they're primarily female audience, primarily interested in weight loss couching everything in those kinds of terms. And most often avoiding the science or the history or the things you and I know are really important to understand if you want to incorporate this into your lifestyle because they think it's boring. They think their audience wants those--you know, the main thing excuse me for stuttering it's the main thing they want is to, the most popular thing is diet and weight loss. I mean --

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: -Jesus if you look at that. Years ago, Bob Arnett who was the main medical guy on ABC I believe probably when you were a zygote and that's...[Laughs] You know, it was probably black and white television.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: But he wrote a book on health and he said, "Darn it all that you can't get people interested in that. What they really want is to know how to be beautiful."

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: It was aesthetics. So that's what really sold. But I think if the most people to help the most people, we eventually have to get off this whole just the physical side and understand that there's a different way to learn things and if you want permanent change, you need to understand why it is you're doing what you're doing. So then you can make your own good decisions. But otherwise you're following some guru and that doesn't last trying to find somebody's prescription. You're not going to weigh and measure everything every meal.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know, that quickly wanes if you don't have a solid knowledge yourself of why it is you're doing what you're doing.

Robb Wolf: Right. You know, Art Devani particularly in the early, early years like '93, '95, a long time ago really I think did some amazing work talking about that aesthetic drive and then couching it in an evolutionary biology format. You know, it's important because if you looked good, it kind of sent these signals of reproductive health and being a formidable adversary and you know, all these types of things.

So it's a curious- I think that that is a piece of human nature that is really baked in the cake and it's trying to figure out how to cater to that aesthetics piece but then also get in enough foundational elements so that people don't get swept up in the next fad. So they kind of stick with basics sleep, kind of paleo type food, exercise, gut biome, all that type of stuff and really stick with that. But it's interesting, I do think though that there's a big argument for figuring out how to integrate that aesthetics piece into it but I think it also – what you're dealing almost purely with the emotive emotional part of folk's brain and that can be very willy-nilly. So it's funny, it's the thing that may hook them in the quickest but may hook them the least long.

[0:20:00]

CJ Hunt: Well yeah and with early adopters I mean like I told you a little earlier, you know, I'm going on 62 so I have all the time. I say it like my dad now. When I went into the first Paleo FX it was like I was in super jock heaven.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: There were no “normal people” anywhere to be seen. That I think when you are younger and when you are in your 20s to 40s and you’re in your prime hormonal years, that the aesthetic drive, the wanting to look good, wanting to the sex drive, finding the right mate or partner all that stuff heavily influences and of course it’s got to come out of the evolutionary mold and our deepest hard wiring of once again if my guess is and it’s no offense to the ladies in the audience is that if they looked at a stone age guy than the Paleolithic and they were beefy, it probably had some kind of signal well yeah stick close to this guy.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: You know, he can at least stop that next sabre tooth maybe.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Keep me from being lunged or something else.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: So I think yeah and so with a lot of folks and I know when I was younger that aesthetic drive is really strong and it can be a gateway thing but again if you want it to last, it ultimately requires getting some other understanding I think going with it too.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: And then if someone happens to not be well, whether it’s because of their birth defect like for me or poor lifestyle choices, or injury or those kinds of things, they too can benefit but of course then the motivations I think have to become more that understanding side, more the intellectual side.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Than the hardwiring.

Robb Wolf: CJ, so we’ve got this kind of media goofery that goes on. I think that cat’s kind of out of the bag on this evolutionary medicine story. When you look at Google trends, this thing just keeps growing and growing and we get more and more academic research that’s happening. So I don’t think that

any amount of trying to beat on this thing is going to stop it. You know I think that the better technologies will win out eventually. Max Planck said, "Science progresses one funeral at a time." so you know --

CJ Hunt: Exactly.

Robb Wolf: --it's just kind of a war of attrition in some ways at this point. But the prickliness from academia has been fascinating to me and this kind of interfaces both with academia and media. This paleo diet concept is oftentimes portrayed like somebody just made it up out of nowhere. You know, --

CJ Hunt: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: --like Loren Cordain just like one day made this stuff up. I'm trying not to ask too leading of a question here but --

CJ Hunt: [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: -where did this idea come from?

CJ Hunt: Oh the Paleolithic diet?

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

CJ Hunt: Well when I spoke with these different world class experts that are in the anthropology, this was not a secret.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know, this is part of their basic training and understanding and fieldwork and all of that that breaks often to different interest groups. You know, whether that's digging the bones or testing the bones or all the different lines of study.

Robb Wolf: And currently living hunter/gatherers. Yeah.

CJ Hunt: Yeah right exactly, exactly and comparing them to what we can find out from the past. But in health and nutrition, the only time I've ever heard. I mean there were some other writers that would even predate me. [Laughs] Once again without the internet admirably, they should never heard this stuff.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: Never. It's really been the popularity of the internet that I think has made it more wildly available to even start to ask the question you're asking. I think eventually it had to come out of the gross failure of the approaches that the modern doctors and scientists were taking to weight loss and health and you know, cardiovascular disease and whatnot. It's an old story in your audience now about Ansell Keys and how we really got off track politically and then the media follows suit.

[0:25:03]

Robb Wolf: Right, right. You fell into my trap perfectly which I'm excited about. I didn't ask too leading of a question but I managed to offer enough to get the answer I wanted. But this paleo diet concept came out of the anthropologists and archeologists that looked at both human and prehuman remains and also the folks who study these preagricultural societies. I've been able to track stuff back to the 1940s. I'm actually working on a pretty comprehensive piece. I'm trying to find the first like documented literature piece where somebody observed hey these people who don't have any medicine, any modern sanitation yeah they had some infectious disease, yes infant mortality rate is reasonably high but these people are really damn healthy and they don't have any of the degenerative diseases that we seem to see in modern humans.

I guess I had just been really wanting to throw this out there because more and more seems to be portrayed that this idea of a paleo diet evolutionary medicine has just been made up out of the ether but this was just for Boyd Eaton and for Loren these guys went in and looked at the work of people like Leslie Ayelo and other anthropologists who had just kind of observed and then never thought about a practical application. They're like wow, these people are incredibly robust and healthy and in a transition to an agricultural life way. They got shorter and more dental caries and higher infant mortality rate. So they just kind of observed it, didn't really judge it one way or the other. Certainly didn't think about a practical application of this observation.

CJ Hunt: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: And --

CJ Hunt: yeah, yeah you're absolutely right. Excuse me for interrupting.

Robb Wolf: Yeah and I just think that that's such an important thing that we can't lose in this but what's really so I think that's important to remember. I think something that's fascinating you have some folks like Christiana Warner who's an anthropology researcher. She did a piece Debunking the

Paleo Diet which I actually did a response to that. It was fascinating to me because it was largely making fun of this concept of really taking a lot of seemingly it was done as if they have never read any of Loren's foundational papers about we're not recommending that this is a singular diet or a singular macronutrient ratio. Here are some general broad concepts and here's our reasoning behind this might be beneficial. You know, glycemic load and anti-nutrient exposure and you know, all this type of stuff.

What was really fascinating to me about that Christiana Warner piece is when she got to the end of it, she ended up basically validating. You know, she started talking about like the Luther Burbane King of fruits and vegetables and how they're huge and sugary and tasty and that that didn't represent Paleolithic fruits and vegetables at all. And then if you take one further step from that and look at the data of how big and robust people were and how much calories they needed to live, then you're kind of like –you know, at the beginning of her talk she was saying they didn't eat a lot of animal protein but then at the end of it, there was virtually no plant material to be eaten but yet these people were big, strong, robust, and active so what the hell did they eat, you know? [Laughs]

CJ Hunt: [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: Which you did a lot of interviewing with folks at the Max Planck Institute of Evolutionary Genetics. Talk about some of what they came out of with that with regards to the stable isotopic you know, findings of what humans and other animals ate and how they're able to figure out what that story is.

CJ Hunt: Well yeah and that's what was fascinating. I think on the practical side, folks that I spoke with even by phone before I went out with the cameras to a person you know, giving dietary recommendations is not what they do. You know, they're just interested in expanding the base of knowledge that's available within their field of study. They didn't go out there looking to write a diet book.

So in fact they are it took a lot and a lot of long conversation in many instances with the different experts in these fields to get them to even talk about diet in relationship to health except for those that that was their particular vein of study which with the Max Planck Institute had done. They had actually just before it went out they created this human evolutionary nutrition department to shush out these questions of what humans ate and didn't eat and they also had brand-new technology

where things that were unknowable when for example when he read these first early papers become more and more knowable.

[0:30:13]

What they told me and what they shared with me was really revelatory. In fact until I went back and looked at the material, you know, in the editing room, some of it didn't really strike me. Because you know you would engage in the conversation like you and I are having right now and you go, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah and then later you go wow, something really holy smokes.

Robb Wolf:

Yeah.

CJ Hunt:

There's something really important here. And what it is is the proof of the authentic human diet because there's so much fussing about what it was and what it wasn't. If I might do as an aside, this is part of the problem with the word paleo is that the Paleolithic covered two and a half million years. But humans were not –our species didn't show up until the end. [Laughs] The things that we were eating during this arc changed and what they showed me at the Max Plonck and you know I show more in the companion book because I'm able to give people the full interviews is what they did in studying this arc of the human story of the becoming human story is that I think we've missed the point. I think the point is that we were becoming more and more meat eaters.

Robb Wolf:

Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt:

And less plant eaters and that eventually because we ate enough meat and you know, cholesterol and essential fatty acids, somewhere for some reason popped our version of the species came along. When we came along, and we were eating we were eating more like Neanderthals. We were top level carnivores and this is what I think most people kind of go oh yeah, you know, we're omnivores. No, no, no, we're not. we're carnivores but we can be omnivorous I think is one of the misunderstandings. I know I'm getting up on my soapbox.

Robb Wolf:

No, no, no please do. Please do. This is going to be a very contentious topic in paleo land and it's something that I've tried to put out brushfires and you know straddle multiple fences and all that type of stuff. But it's a really interesting topic. So CJ, do you remember when they were talking about this? Now were they talking specifically about humans in northern Europe or did this extend all the way to the beginnings of our species in Africa? Like were we functioning as top level carnivores?

So sorry I'm thinking different things --

CJ Hunt: No.

Robb Wolf: --and I want to ask you a hundred different things but when they looked at the --

CJ Hunt: Sure.

Robb Wolf: --stable isotopic remains in bones and connective tissue they're able to figure out like what type of protein sources folks eat. Like if they eat a marine source of protein then they see certain types of nitrogen and carbon ratios. If they eat fruits versus grasses, they see different types of carbon ratios in these remains and what they kind of shushed out of this is that humans, Neanderthals in particular northern European ancestors were as or more carnivorous than the arctic fox. Like pretty damn carnivorous.

CJ Hunt: We land in the same food web they called it as bears and wolves.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: So in northern Europe. You're right a lot of this evidence that when I interviewed them it was focused on primarily northern Europe because that's where Mike was studying. That was his area of focus. But I've followed up before doing the companion book and whatnot. I wrote Shannon McLaren who you might recall from the Dig Site at --

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: He did a lot, tell the different dig sites. I asked him well are the results any different somewhere else? Have you learned anything new? He says no the things that we're finding are the same and they're the same worldwide. I think this is another one of the things that you need to understand is that or to our advantage to understand is that when we talk about modern humans, our species, these things apply. If we go back to homo erectus it's not exactly the same.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: You know, that when we're standing at the 2M year mark. We're on the football field at the goal line and we're talking about homo erectus the ones that had the body like ours but the head still looked more like they were a morph between a chimp and a human.

[0:35:02]

We were starting to eat more and more animal foods but we still ate a lot of plant foods. You know, no doubt about it. And then as our brains grew, later more than a million years later, there was another huge pop in our evolution that brought out some of the other you know, ancestors of ours that became more and more human. But then by the time we showed up we –the things we were eating were primarily animal foods. You could illustrate that very clearly in northern Europe and very little plant foods as Mike said. They're in the lab.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

CJ Hunt:

You know, and I think that's one of the things. People like to fight for the things that they want or like in their current diet, in our current world and look for anything that might justify it. All I was interested in was saying well what do we know? [Laughs]

Robb Wolf:

Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt:

You know, what is the authentic human diet? You know, and that's what it was preagriculture. And then when agriculture came along of course we started taking a big hit. Now you know, that's one of the things that I think we missed is that when we look at the arc of the Paleolithic, our story of becoming human and I know I'm being redundant but to make that point is that's a story of becoming more and more mediators and fewer and fewer plants. That's what grew our brain and that's what made us smart and that's what made us human. Eventually, also what allowed us to adapt our survival strategies and do other things when we needed to.

Robb Wolf:

Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt:

You know, and then expand our diet more in order to survive. And as you know there's a difference between surviving and thriving.

Robb Wolf:

Right, right, right. You know, and maybe another piece to this, so we have this stable isotopic evidence that suggests that humans became more and more carnivorous and then we also had this pretty interesting phenomenon of a global mega fauna die off where humans everywhere they went they killed everything.

CJ Hunt:

[Laughs]

Robb Wolf: I mean we just killed everything. I mean anything that was reasonably large you know, like the Americas trees lost and bison and different types of elephants and camels and we killed damn near everything.

CJ Hunt: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: There were very few animals that we didn't kill and my kind of my own internalization of this story arc is that you know, maybe the transition from homo erectus to early archaic homo sapiens was a development of fire, so increased cooking of some foods, increased social complexity that allowed for better hunting and better sharing of food within a group to ensure the group survival more culturally. We started seeing significantly longer life spans actually so the grandmother factor where you had longer cultural transmission and whatnot.

Then we became so damn good at killing things that we really expanded very rapidly globally, killed everything that was reasonably to kill and then we needed to start diversifying our food intake which was where more shellfish, plants, roots, tubers started replacing more of that dietary role that maybe meat had historically played and that that eventually led into an agricultural development. Do you feel like that kind of squares the data reasonably well?

CJ Hunt: Well let me add something to those thoughts. Based on my discussions with you know, the Max Planck people and whatnot. It's that yeah we were really good at killing things. You know, for god's sake there used to be rhinoceros in England.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: And that along with the temperature shifts you know, because we were coming out of an ice age. We're still in the same warming period that has allowed the development of agriculture. You know, which is why none of us will be around but it's liable to get cold again.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: That's what's one of the things that's interesting about domestication of animals. It's that and the tuber thing I will come back to. But well let me just do it this way first. In none of these discussions did any of the experts emphasize that we humans until agriculture were major plant eaters of any kind. And that it was seasonal and that you're coming out of an ice age and if you had leafy greens and some berries and nuts, those were

the things that were mentioned to me at the America Museum of Natural History and things like that.

[0:40:16]

Nobody said anything about tubers. The first time I ever heard anything about tubers was the cativa study and so we could really get conversant with this. I don't have the exact quote anymore but I think one of the things –never mind that will --

Robb Wolf: No, no go down, go down. Go down there.

CJ Hunt: Go down that rabbit hole?

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

CJ Hunt: IS that go back to the ancestral health, first ancestral health meeting. Watch Staffan Linderberg's speech. Somewhere around minute 13 or 14 he says and this is not the exact quote. See this is the thing about being a journalist is that when you come back to talk to me about this study a little bit later about you know, paleo forage I want to point out something to out about journalists. Is that and maybe some people notice things that other people don't notice.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: What I heard was him say that this was not the study they wanted to do. And it was not a perfect study but essentially that's all the money they could get. And it was the only thing that they could do at the time. I mean that's how I'm extrapolating.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: But the point is that it wasn't a perfect study and it didn't reflect everything all the knowledge and then I step back and I go wait a second of course that makes sense on cativa because it's evolutionary biology in action. It's the people that are there are the people that could survive on that and their descendants. It doesn't mean that a cross fitter in Chicago can then eat tubers over meal because the cativans did.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: I'm in trouble now.

Robb Wolf: No, no, no.

- CJ Hunt: I'm so in trouble now.
- Robb Wolf: This would be a good one. This is going to be a spicy episode.
- CJ Hunt: Yeah.
- Robb Wolf: For sure.
- CJ Hunt: Well you know, if I'm going to go this way I might as well go...
- Robb Wolf: So go down swinging, go down swinging.
- CJ Hunt: So yes the thing is that I love Staffan's work but the point is it's not –it's only an inkling of something that could be researched more. But it's not an excuse to rewrite paleo right? You know? See that's – once again let me just say there is this three stages of paleo which is why paleo is a bad word in my estimation I think. Because it should be the period of the Paleolithic that applies to our species.
- See that's the bottom line when it comes to us looking at what makes us healthy or not. As a journalist when I look at that horizon.
- Robb Wolf: Right.
- CJ Hunt: You know, and now going off on the cativa thing I forgot what we were talking about before.
- Robb Wolf: No, I mean I was just kind of building a little bit of a story arc of maybe how we transition from homo erectus towards homo sapiens became super good hunters, maybe hunted ourselves of the relatively easy hunting which enforced some adaptation.
- You know, I gave a presentation for the chief of state anthropology depth and I had made a point to them that this thing seemed to track kind of a fractal pattern wherever humans ended up upon first arrival, they decimated the mega fauna and then they started making more use of the aquatic protein sources and then more use of plant sources and then typically eventually some sort of agriculture developed.
- CJ Hunt: Right, right, right.
- Robb Wolf: Right.
- CJ Hunt: And as the Neolithic took root, forgive the pun.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know, everywhere once it took root things started to change but even that has an interesting twist which okay let me be horribly self-promoting which I revealed in the book, so in the companion one. Because I didn't notice it until I went back to listen to everything again.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: You know, I didn't realize this either but even at least in northern Europe like you can demonstrate it in the UK is that even when agriculture and the Neolithic started to take hold they were not interested in plant foods. They were interested and they still wanted protein. They were interested in the animals and we think milk or chasse you know, now. That's what they wanted. They wanted to go to their backyard now instead of hunting the fauna you know and have these at the time they were quite large but it had to be fascinating to not have to go out and hunt these things and have these things end up in your backyard.

[0:45:04]

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: It was like oh my god easy pickin's but that's what they were still really interested in. And it was only later that with an additional wave of at least in the UK of the agricultural revolution that the grain started being integrated more. But mind you, I mean one of the questions I have to ask is that well yeah they did that but there was a price.

Robb Wolf: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CJ Hunt: You know, and the thing is that now that we know that there was a price from doing that what can we do with that information to help ourselves right? Because when the world was perfect, if when agriculture was perfect the more we integrate and it's like following the course of a viral spread. If you go from the middle east everywhere that agriculture went that once it took root and it became the mainstay of those people's diets their health went to hell in a hand basket.

Robb Wolf: This is hopefully I can pull this one off but I – when people talk about grain consumption being beneficial to the degree that I've seen it work it's always with essentially animal products acting like a condom protecting you from STD.

CJ Hunt: [Laughs] It's funny.

Robb Wolf:

So if you have enough protein, either from meat sources or dairy sources then it seems to override, you're able to mitigate the deleterious effects to some degree of the grain consumption. I was actually listening to a kind of an economic podcast called a world affairs deal. it's out of northern California and it was a gal talking about – they were talking about you know, looking at addressing food scarcity going into the future and India has shifted towards a much higher – as they've grown over time, as the population has grown, the population has consumed more and more starchy carbohydrate.

But India is in this really fascinating position in that it is on the one hand being crushed with type 2 diabetes which we can argue is a glucose dysregulation and probably over consumption of calories in general. But at the same time they are also massively impacted by micronutrient deficiencies. It's only been those areas where they have been able to establish longstanding meat and dairy production that you are able to offset essentially this kind of type 2 diabetic cascade. It was really interesting because this woman was basically saying the solution for micronutrient deficiency and type 2 diabetes was buffering this starch rich diet with animal products. I was floored because these are people talking

CJ Hunt:

Yeah.

Robb Wolf:

--about a sustainability track. You know, so that was kind of a fascinating piece but CJ what about some of the work that like Chris Master John has mentioned and amylase gene frequency in humans being so much larger than in say chimpanzees? Like he used that to make a reasonably robust argument that you know, starch consumption became kind of an important feature in humans. Richard Wrangham makes a case in his book Catching Fire that we –it's maybe both the ability to cook and open skulls and long bones and eating starchy tubers that provided essential fast for the brain but then also a rich consistent glucose source to fuel the hungry brain and then also allowed for the shrinking of the gut because we had more processed foods. Like what are your thoughts on that amylase gene frequency and? I think we'll probably go back and say well we just don't see it in those stable isotopic studies.

CJ Hunt:

Well you know you don't because this is based on collagen and nitrogen and what were the protein sources primarily. The adaptation with the amylase gene is it's interesting to me. To me if I was going to ask me questions which is what I'm about right? You know, I'm always curious.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: I would say well okay some of us had this adaptation that shows up in this gene but what does it really mean? What's the significance? Are we using it to make a hypothesis we have sound dominant not just potentially legitimate but because of this therefore we ought to then dismiss the other information which is sort of what these things come off as. Because everyone wants to make their mark you know, and this is their area. Is it looking, is it like the person who – like the old story of the four or five blind people touching the different parts of the elephant.

[0:50:46]

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: The one who touches the trunk thinks that an elephant is like a snake right? I don't know the real story so I can't give you the best analogy.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: But it's that was never mentioned as the significant global influence of what humans reading. I think it may just kind of like well look those that were in an area that starting consuming a lot of things had this kind of adaptation so they could break it down better or whatnot. but it doesn't mean that oh therefore it means that this should be the source of nutrition. I mean that's are the kind of questions that I would ask.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know, and then what was the other element of it outside of Chris but it was --

Robb Wolf: You know, that amylase gene frequency and --

CJ Hunt: Yeah.

Robb Wolf: -- the you know, what does that mean? You know it's been put forward as a kind of a recommendation that we have evolved favorably to consume more dense carbohydrate sources. I guess I'm bouncing that off of you to get your thoughts on it.

CJ Hunt: Well you know, it's if we step back a little bit we go well okay every, an optimal human diet should always contain some animal foods and animal fats. Can carbohydrates be a healthy replacement for these animal foods? Well it's – I would be interested in seeing the evidence of that. [Laughs]

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: It's like well okay because the truth is that none of the humans that are on the planet today reflect us at our peak. The humans that Weston Price went around and saw were post agricultural humans. None of these were the ones that Leslie Ayelo talked about to me at the Wintergreen Foundation that in fact she said that one of her professors said when looking back at the modern human species in Europe and around the world preagriculture that that was the peak and it's been downhill ever since.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum. Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: So it feels to me like we're all kind of searching around. It was well how can we make the best of it now because we were effectively born as an old Italian automobile with tires from a Ford and the crank shaft from you know, a Benz. We've got all these parts that have been wakened or changed over time because of the changes in the way we take care of ourselves.

When I look at the media and I've only had a cursory look at Chris' work. You know, most of the based on when you discussed it and whatnot is that when we're looking at one of the very small pieces of a much bigger picture and that we shouldn't throw away the big picture because now we go oh look there's a gene there that says I can eat toast. You know? Therefore we have adapted far enough to all be really healthy on toast. Well clearly --

Robb Wolf: Not necessary the case. Yes.

CJ Hunt: Not necessary the case.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Well there's all this fight for individuality within all different health, dietary health disciplines. Oh well very individual everyone has got to find their own path which ultimately is true just by default. But that doesn't mean that there aren't core basic things that apply to everyone. And that those core basic things are the things that are you know, affect our health in a larger scope.

[0:55:18]

For example with Dr. Sebring's practice longest "pale practicing physician in the United States more than 15 years. Nobody started before he did to our knowledge in the US?

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Right? So the question comes up about dairy just like it does about grains. Well somebody has got to you know somebody has got a digestive enzyme so that means we can all eat a ton of dairy. Well he said there were two things. He says vegetarians are his sickest patients when he comes to fix them. So when he comes to just living on vegetable matter. He said dairy? He says people in his practice struggle with dairy. He says but to a person, to N1 when they eventually stopped eating dairy, they did better.

So to me as a practical experiment and it's not just an N1 it's with a patient population of over 15 years you're here we've got a guy who says well you know, they don't eat it, they feel better. You know, they get healthier.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: So --

Robb Wolf: And the Weston A Price people are pissed at you and yeah. Yeah.

CJ Hunt: Well yeah. Or now they just kind of settled down if it's raw dairy or if it came from a grass fed cow I mean even Dr. Sebring will say well his one exception to the dairy rule is grass fed butter.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: He says it's not a human food but it seems to be okay and doesn't have negative effects. So you know, because we are in our modern world of course and he wants to make it workable for his patients just like you try to do for your audience. You know? What's going to make it workable? Does that sort of address some of that?

Robb Wolf: Yes, yes. Yes.

CJ Hunt: I think those are interesting. I think if anything like the china study for god's sake.

Robb Wolf: [Laughs]

CJ Hunt: It shouldn't be a source of inspiration for further inquiry and not the last you know, crossing the T and dotting the I.

Robb Wolf: Right. Well you know, even on the amylase gene frequency deal I pulled up a paper that I've looked at maybe a couple of months ago and even within a small group of northern Europeans who come from a well-known and established – one of the areas of the longest established agricultural areas in northern Europe they found a fivefold difference within a small town population in amylase gene frequency and you know, the more amylase gene that you have you digest carbohydrate better but you also have better insulin response to that. And again I fully embrace your point that that's still maybe suboptimum across the board but if we're thinking about well what can people at least get away with and maybe not suffer metabolic catastrophe within a very otherwise genetically culturally homogeneous group of people you are at a five times variation in insulin response and gene frequency which led into insulin responses for the same aliquot of starch based food.

And so it really does then beg the question of you know, I think you are endeavoring to find kind of some big picture heuristics like what is the true human diet and this kind of meat oriented Max Planck validated kind of orientation is there. But then people raise these questions about the amylase gene. I think it's an interesting question but at the same time there is massive variation even within a small otherwise genetically homogenized group of people.

CJ Hunt: Yeah, yeah exactly and so you know, people want to experiment with that they certainly can. It's – if it doesn't seem to have any adverse immediate effect on your health. I mean but that's the question isn't it? Is that what we're doing now is we're basically coming to a time where people do a lot of this and want to experimenting but the source information is evolution.

When we look at the evolutionary track or selection you know, natural selection, we don't – we don't see that anymore. You know, we can actually bypass evolution with medicine.

[1:00:06]

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.

CJ Hunt: You know, where there are a lot of people that would get selected out including myself you know, because of my heart defect that would not have survived without medicine. So there is all that variation just as you say and once again I think that it's just more complex for us so to simplify

it you know I think if we hit these core elements like the things that you did when you got well and then after that if you feel like you need to you know, for some other reason you want to experiment with other foods sources because you want that kind of variety that we have in our modern world, you can do that but hey I would say just pay attention.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: You know, try to get some benchmarks. You know? Take it from there. I know for myself it's just easier to keep it simple. I'm not in sports anymore like you so I'm not – I don't have the Brazilian jiu-jitsu temptation.

Robb Wolf: Right, right.

CJ Hunt: Try to make my body work for that. I think just when it comes to general health simple is good.

Robb Wolf: Uh-hum. Uh-hum. Absolutely. Well CJ, this is definitely going to be a spicy edition of podcast. There will be gnashing of teeth by quite a few people so it will be interesting to see how the comments play out on this but left folks know about your upcoming book and where they can track that down.

CJ Hunt: Oh great. Well you know, they can order it from their local bookstore.

Robb Wolf: Great.

CJ Hunt: Which I'm told is the politically correct way to do this.

Robb Wolf: Right.

CJ Hunt: Or they can go on to Amazon and it was on preorder but it looks like they're actually starting to shift a few days early.

Robb Wolf: Okay.

CJ Hunt: So they can get the book on Amazon as well.

Robb Wolf: Awesome.

CJ Hunt: You know, where Barnes and Noble or any of those kinds of things.

Robb Wolf: And remind folks about the title.

CJ Hunt: It's called The Perfect Human Diet, just like the film, and it goes much deeper into the interviews with the top 5 subject matter experts in the film. It has a how-to based on Dr. Sebring's work, the 15 years in his private practice and you know, a lot more of my own controversial thoughts in the beginning that will probably light a few more fires as well. We may have more to talk about before it's all over.

Robb Wolf: Awesome. Well it's good. I'm embracing controversy a bit more these days. You know, it's definitely how things move forward. So I'm excited for that, really great to finally connect with you. We've been threatening to do this podcast for quite a while and then our worlds finally are Venn diagrams overlapped enough so we can pull it off so it's been great catching up with you.

CJ Hunt: Well thank you so much Robb. I really appreciate it and --

Robb Wolf: Awesome, CJ. Will talk to you soon.

CJ Hunt: Thank you so much.

Robb Wolf: Okay, take care. Bye-bye.

CJ Hunt: Bye.

[1:03:04] End of Audio