

Shelby Stanger: How we feed ourselves for our adventures is so important and how we feed our souls even more important. Today I'm speaking with a woman who's made it her life's work to help people with their health, wellness and overall wellbeing for the last decade. Melissa Hartwig Urban is the founder of the Whole30 program as well as an author, a speaker, a mom, podcaster, and fellow adventurer. She's someone totally unafraid and unapologetic about being 100% herself and has helped so many people in her own journey. I'm Shelby Stanger and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living.

Shelby Stanger: The Whole30 program is a self experiment. The goal is to help you learn more about your personal relationships to different foods and what works best for your body. For 30 days you eat only whole unprocessed foods and you eliminate things like gluten, alcohol, and dairy - things a lot of people are often sensitive to. After 30 days you slowly reintroduce certain foods and beverages one by one and you learn what does and doesn't work for you so you can best design your own custom diet.

Shelby Stanger: The objective isn't necessarily to lose weight even though a lot of people do, but merely to feel better and learn more about your body and the choices you make to fuel it. Whole30 has amassed millions of followers and it's become a bonafide health and wellness empire with books, trainings and brand collaborations. When it comes to speaking her truth and living well, its founder, Melissa Hartwig Urban, she walks the talk. Today we're not only diving into her journey into Whole30 and how we fuel our bodies, but we also talk about how we fuel our minds and our souls. We get into everything from tips on parenting to sleep, the outdoors and of course how to navigate the holiday season.

Shelby Stanger: Maybe you could tell us a little about your background and how you focused your energy on health and wellness. I just think that's the most amazing goal of all.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah, thank you. I did not come to it through a traditional route. I came to it actually through a background of drug addiction. I experienced some sexual trauma at 16 and for about five years following dove heavily into drug use as a way to escape and numb from that trauma. So I obviously was not healthy. I was not exercising, I wasn't eating well. I wasn't taking very good care of myself as a means to escape. And it wasn't until I went to rehabilitation for the second time and finally entered into my recovery, which was just over 19 years ago, that I began kind of changing every single aspect of my life. I knew if I wanted to stay in recovery, that I had to adopt a growth mindset, that I had to become this healthy person with healthy habits that I so aspire to be. And so I started exercising. I met a group of women that I started running with and doing triathlons. I found CrossFit, I started eating better and paying attention through various dietary practices, mostly centered around eating whole real food and learning how to cook for myself. And that was really where my journey began and that's what led me to the Whole30, creating the Whole30 in 2009.

Shelby Stanger: Wow. Thank you for sharing that story and congrats on your sobriety. My mom works in the recovery field and that's a really hard thing to do, no matter what you're struggling with, to go get help.

Melissa Hartwig: It is really hard and I'm very, very lucky in that I had a really supportive family. I was highly functional even as an addict, so I had a job to go back to. I had a ton of support, which was really, really helpful, but still nobody can do it for you but you.

Shelby Stanger: Thank you for sharing all of that. You know, the Whole30 is one of the biggest things you're known for and it's one of the most popular experiments out there and I love that you say it's not a diet, it's a 30 day experiment to reset your relationship with food and learn some things about yourself. Can you tell me just a little bit about this?

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah, that's exactly right. The Whole30 is not a weight loss protocol. It's not a diet. It's not even prescriptive in that we're not saying here's how you should eat forever. Every registered dietician and health expert out there says there is no one size fits all. You have to figure out what works for you in terms of a healthy diet. And everybody's like, okay, cool. I buy into that. That makes so much sense. How do I figure out what works for me? And the Whole30 is how. It's a 30 day structured self experiment where you pull a bunch of things out of your diet that are really commonly problematic to varying degrees across a large population of people. And at the end of those 30 days, you then add those foods back in very carefully and systematically one at a time, just like a scientific experiment and compare your experience. So it teaches you how food works for you in your individual context. And then you get to create the perfect diet for you based on what you've learned.

Shelby Stanger: So full disclosure, I eat mostly plant-based. I've never done the Whole30 before, but it is mostly how I used to eat. I have friends who love it, who blog about it, who swear by it. And I like it mostly just because I love your thoughts on having a healthy relationship with food and doing some things so we understand how we sometimes use food the way it wasn't intended. Like I eat a lot when I'm bored and on deadline and when I don't want to deal with something I'll go snack. So I was hoping you could just share a little bit about how we can just be better at picking better choices, not just to look good, but mostly just to feel better and to fuel our adventures. Not only our adventures in the outside, but just our adventure of life.

Melissa Hartwig: Absolutely. That was what my first Whole30 in 2009 showed me. This self experiment really helped to highlight the ways that I was using food the way I used to use drugs, as punishment, as reward, to numb, to self-soothe, to create comfort. And I think in large part, it's not our fault. It is the way that these foods and beverages have been marketed to us and scientifically designed, right. You have a fight with your significant other, go grab a pint of ice cream. You want to celebrate with your girlfriends, you do it with a bottle of rose. We haven't been taught, nor have we had any impetus to find other coping strategies, other ways

of connecting with people in our lives, other ways to self-soothe or to sit in our feelings and because these foods are so hyper-palatable and so crave-worthy as designed, we fall into this cycle of craving and over-consumption and then the guilt and then the shame that that brings. And then the stress and the more cravings and like the cycle between food and drugs are really not that different from a psychological perspective. So through the Whole30 and what we try to do by focusing on habits and your emotional relationship with food isn't to take delicious food out of the equation. I want you to be able to celebrate with your mom's favorite chocolate chip cookies or over a bottle of your favorite wine. I just don't want that to be the only coping strategy you have. And so through the program we teach people other ways to do all of those like emotional self care items that don't involve a food or a drink that ultimately may make you feel better in the moment, but longterm just makes you feel worse.

Shelby Stanger: What are some of those ways we can have a healthier relationship with food by engaging in other activities?

Melissa Hartwig: I always say most of the time you're not craving a cookie, you're craving a connection. We feel so isolated, although we're more connected than ever with social media and text and DM, but in our real lives, I think we're craving true, authentic, intimate connection and we very often kind of stuff that down by self-soothing with food or drink. Honestly, I think the best thing you can do is connect with another person and share how you're feeling, express your thoughts, allow yourself to get support and then my bonus is to do it outside in nature.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah. My kind of girl. I just want to give you a hug right now for that and if you're listening like feel the hug Melissa and I are giving you right now wherever you are.

Shelby Stanger: How do you take a personal experiment and turn it into a movement that's helped millions of people? Melissa scaled Whole30 in amazing ways, including writing books and forming partnerships with food brands you know and have heard of. Healthy food can be expensive and it's not always easy to get healthy food everywhere you go. One of the missions Melissa has, making it accessible to anyone who wants to be part of the Whole30 community.

Shelby Stanger: You've created a huge business out of Whole30 and it couldn't have been easy. Tell me a little about how you built this empire.

Melissa Hartwig: Oh boy. The Whole30 started off as a two person self experiment. It grew via word of mouth because I shared about it on my blog. I was very heavily connected to the CrossFit community at the time. CrossFitters started sharing about it and implementing it in their gyms, but the way that I've grown the program unintentionally is always by servicing the community first. Every good idea I've ever had has been because somebody in the community has asked me for it. It's been a pain point that I've been able to solve, a resource I've been able to create, or even just listening to kind of the rumblings. I'm very closely

connected to the community on social media and my coaches and just listening to some of the discussions they're having, I've been able to say, okay, I'm seeing this as a need. I'm seeing this as a service we haven't yet provided. And then I create it and everything we do has the community in mind. And through that, the program has just grown very organically.

Shelby Stanger: So really quickly though, this empire you've created, it's big. I mean, you have coaches and a staff, it's taken a little bit to grow it, but it's grown pretty fast. Any tools or tactics you can share on how you've grown it and managed such a great team? I mean, I love number one that it's your mission to listen to your community. I mean, that's how you've grown, but just in terms of how you've managed your own team.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. You know, we've stayed very, very small and nimble on purpose. We've done a lot of hiring this past year, but you know, we've been running on a team of like 10 full time people, including me for many years now, sometimes less than. But because we're small and because we have a relatively loose organizational structure, we've been able to stay very, very nimble. So when the community asks for something or we see an opportunity, there isn't a lot of red tape or consensus. We can just like implement and build on it right away. I've also been incredibly strategic with the way I've chosen partners and keeping things like accessibility in mind, making sure that our strategic partners are just as invested in our community as we are with theirs. I must turn down 9 out of every 10 requests to become a Whole30 approved partner or do some sort of work with us. But again, if it's not serving the community or if it feels gross in any way, I just don't do it.

Shelby Stanger: Okay. Real quick. You talked about accessibility, and I wasn't going to talk about this, but eating organic fruits and vegetables can be a lot more expensive than going to a fast food restaurant.

Melissa Hartwig: Yes, and I think that's one of the ways that we've changed. In 2009, 2010 I was very heavily beating the drum of make sure you're sourcing grass-fed and finished meat because it's better for the environment and better for the animals. Make sure your foods, at least your vegetables on the top 10 dirty list from the Environmental Working Group are organic. And I've morphed a lot into if I truly want to accomplish our mission, which is every single person in the world who wants to experience the benefits of the Whole30 can, then we need to make the program accessible to all. And that's not by insisting that people only shop at Whole Foods. It's not only providing resources that are focused on convenience. We're now swinging into Whole30 on a budget, Whole30 on food stamps and WIC, Whole30 at Walmart and Aldi because there's an immense amount of privilege that assumes that somebody even has access to a health food store, that somebody has the time or energy or finances to be able to afford food like that.

Melissa Hartwig: So yeah, accessibility is a huge focus of ours right now and we're working with our coaches and with our community and with our partners to make sure that if you want to do a Whole30 we are making it as accessible as possible.

Shelby Stanger: You have a son, right?

Melissa Hartwig: Mm-hmm. I do. He's six.

Shelby Stanger: He's six. Oh.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah.

Shelby Stanger: Fun age. So how have you taught your son how to have a healthy relationship with food?

Melissa Hartwig: Well, in the beginning it was a lot easier because everything he ate came directly from us. So he didn't have a piece of cake until he was like four years old. And he still doesn't know what McDonald's is. We've been able to control most of his food, but now that he's in school, it's a little bit more difficult and that he wants to eat what the kids eat. So we just make a lot of correlations between the way he eats and the outcome for him. So for example, Oh remember you know grandpa let you have that ice cream and then boy your skin, your eczema kind of flared up. I think dairy's not good for your eczema. And if your eczema gets too bad, you can't go swimming in the pool. And so I make that connection for him. We make behavioral connections a lot. Oh we let you have this like treat at the farmer's market and then you had that meltdown and you had to go into timeout. I know that sugar doesn't make you behave as well as you could and he now makes that connection for himself. But I'm also not really stringent about it because he doesn't have a true allergy and it's not like a life threatening situation. So if he's with his friends and wants to make a choice to eat a doughnut or the birthday cake, I allow him to make that choice and just point out the consequences.

Shelby Stanger: That's great advice for parents out there. So if you're a parent and you have a kid and you want them to eat healthier, any other tips that you use? I understand there's like the relationship between teaching your kids about how food affects them and affects their performance. But any other tricks like making food look pretty or I've heard parents-

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. It's hard. I have less street cred in this area because I didn't have to transition my kid from Mac and Cheese and diet soda to a healthier whole food diet. He's eaten like that since the beginning, but it's really important to take your kid's temperament into account. So for some kids, an all or nothing approach where like all the food comes out of the pantry and only good stuff goes in and they can choose anything they want because everything available is a choice you approve of is a great way to do it. Other kids who are perhaps more stubborn or more rebellious, you're going to have to kind of ease them

into it a little bit at a time. There's some science behind kids specifically right around age two they become kind of neophobic. They don't really love new foods. So as much as you can introduce early, you have to introduce a food often. I think it's like eight exposures sometimes before a toddler will finally accept a food, having a lot of colors, having things that you can dip it in. My kid will eat anything if you put a toothpick in it. So I think it's a lot about being creative as a parent but also about being patient.

Shelby Stanger: Patience. That's a good one and something that is needed when you're a parent or an aunt. I have a bunch of nephews and I just had to practice my patience with them this weekend, but they were pretty fun.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah.

Shelby Stanger: So, I mean, you've changed so many lives through the Whole30 and just through your programs. One of the books you wrote about was just about having a healthier relationship with food. What kind of feedback do you get and what does that feel like?

Melissa Hartwig: Oh my gosh, the feedback I get, I mean, the only reason I do what I do is so that I can hear from the community how the program has impacted every area of their life. And what I figured out early on through my own personal experience is that the Whole30 has the potential to spill over into every single area. Once you feel like you are nourishing yourself in the best way possible, once your food feels like a form of self care, it will empower you and give you capacity to roll that good feeling and inertia over into every area of your life. So I hear from people who are like, "I finally quit the job I hated. I dumped the toxic significant other. I went back to school. I'm exercising for the very first time. I climbed a mountain that I never thought I'd be able to do." Or goodness gracious, I heard from someone the other day who was like, "I hiked for the first time by myself." There is no story that makes my heart happier than hearing, "I felt empowered to go on a hike by myself."

Shelby Stanger: It's so true that the positive feeling you get from eating healthier well that can enrich every area of your life. I know I feel more myself and more ready to tackle life's next challenges when I'm taking care of myself and treating my body to delicious nutritious food as well as doing things like getting enough sleep and filling my brain with kind, positive thoughts. When we return, we'll talk more with Melissa about her daily routines, sleep and tips on how to build more confidence and practice self care.

Shelby Stanger: Big news. REI is rolling out their new used gear site and it's really good used gear. It doesn't even look used. We know buying used is good for the planet and now affording that jacket or those cool snowboard pants you were saving up for, well that's no longer a problem. The program is called Good and Used and it's such good gear. You can learn all about it and shop it at rei.com/used but I'm calling dibs on that orange jacket. Go to rei.com/used.

Shelby Stanger: Being more conscious about what you physically put into your mouth is one way to get healthier. But I wanted to ask Melissa what else she's learned about how we should not only fuel our bodies, but how we fuel our minds and our soul.

Shelby Stanger: So we feed ourselves not only with food but also with our thoughts. And you have your own podcast and I recently listened to one, it's going to be a couple months back now when people hear this episode, but it was on foolproofing your self confidence. So you just talked about all this amazing feedback you get from the Whole30 and I'm guessing it's 99% positive, but I'm sure there's always haters in the world. There's probably a little negative feedback, so you get feedback a lot from probably all sides. I love this podcast. Can you just share some tips on fueling your thoughts so that you can foolproof your confidence?

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. I used to live and die by the opinions of others. I really sought validation from other people to pump up my self worth. I didn't have any idea of my worth or value outside of what other people thought of me. And then when you throw me into this world of social media and accolades and being on television and doing all these interviews for the Whole30, that was a recipe for disaster because if you accept other people's praise as true in an effort to fill you up, the flip side of that coin is you also need to accept their criticism as true and the longer I stayed stuck in that cycle ... I know. I know, right? You can't have one without the other.

Shelby Stanger: I'm in it. I'm one of those people that has put myself on a bigger playing field and now I get it from both sides a lot. I'm just an approval seeker. I've always been and I try to get rid of it, but it's still always there.

Melissa Hartwig: It's hard. And the problem is that the longer you spend in this cycle, the less the praise fills you up and the more the criticism destroys you. Like this cycle, the wheel just starts falling off the bus really, really fast. And so what I realized through the help of my therapist a bunch of years ago when I was kind of dealing with my trauma and working on my personal growth post-rehab, is that you have to get really clear on what you think about you. That's it. The Work of Byron Katie has been very helpful here in terms of accepting what is, but I do this process that I call this self review on a bunch of different areas of my life, how good a writer I am, how good I am at podcasting, how attractive I am, how athletically inclined I am. And I get really into my feelings on this and I decide how I feel about me such that the other people's opinions don't really have much sway.

Melissa Hartwig: So if I look at this sweatshirt I'm wearing and I really like this sweatshirt. When someone else says I love that sweatshirt, I'm like, "Cool. I like it too. I'm glad you're experiencing it as pleasant." But when someone says that's the ugliest sweatshirt in the world, I can just dismiss that as, "Well, I'm sorry you're not loving it, but man, I really do." And I go about my day. That's a really easy example. Now imagine applying that to something, how attractive you are or how talented you are, how good you are as a mom. That's where the real power lies.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah. I just started using that in my life. So you also gave the example of your podcast, like how good am I at the podcast? And when you started it, you're like, "Hey, I'm new at this. I may be not that good." And so when people gave you criticism, you're like, "Well, that's okay. I have room to improve." But I love the example of your sweatshirt.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. And I'm teaching that to my son right now too. You know, he really likes his colorful nails. He likes painting his nails and his toenails and he loves how bright and colorful it is. And he's run into some feedback from other kids who kind of make fun of him or ask why his nails look like a girl. And so he and I did this self review process on his nails where I was like, "Do you like it? Why do you like it? What do you like about it? How does it feel?" And I've seen him now engage in the world in a very different way around the subject of his nails.

Shelby Stanger: That's so beautiful. What does he say to kids now?

Melissa Hartwig: Sometimes he'll say ... His favorite is like, "It's just paint, dude." Like totally dismissing. Other times someone will say like, "Your nails are weird." And he'll go, "I know. Aren't they?" Like owning it. Claiming it. Because there's really not much that you can say if you're agreeing with them.

Shelby Stanger: This kid is amazing.

Melissa Hartwig: We got a couple strategies. Yeah, I'm pretty proud of him.

Shelby Stanger: So as a mom, having a kid, you're busy, you've got a huge empire that you run. So many people must email you every day. Sleep. I'd love to talk ... So we have thoughts. Thoughts are a way we fuel ourselves and you can foolproof your own self confidence by being really honest with yourself and not letting the opinions of others affect you. But sleep's a big one and I'm just really curious about, I've seen you post on sleep hygiene and some of the tactics you use to have a better sleep routine. Can you share some of this?

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. I'm pretty rabid about my sleep because I've come to realize that if my sleep goes, the rest of my healthy habits kind of fall off pretty quickly. If I'm under slept that promotes like a significant amount of stress in my life. So at least two nights a week I go to bed, what I call toddler early, where I put my kid to bed and then I just go to bed myself and I leave the dishes and I leave the laundry and I put my phone in another room and I'll read a book until I fall asleep. So that feels really good. I go to bed at a pretty consistent time every night. I wake up at like 6:30 without an alarm. My room is pitch black. I have blackout curtains. I don't have electronics in my room. I have this really cool like water cooled mattress pad called a chiliPAD.

Shelby Stanger: Oh, you have the chiliPAD.

Melissa Hartwig: I'm recently obsessed with. Yes, it keeps me nice and cool at night and it saves my air conditioner bill. I also sleep with a gravity blanket so one of those like 10 pound blankets over me and my kid has one as well. A 10 pound one which is like a fourth of his body weight. From what I understand, it basically comes from the field of autism research. When you have a child who is struggling with sensory issues, they can feel very comforted by feeling the weight of other people on them, whether it's enveloping them in a very, very tight hug or getting into like a closed kind of quiet space. I have a friend who's on the spectrum who always jokes about like wanting to hide under the grill cover when he feels like he needs a little space and energy. And the idea of a weighted blanket is just to provide like this sensation or this weight of feeling sort of hugged or this weight on you. And I find it very reassuring when I sleep. It's not overly hot, but it is heavy and I definitely enjoy the sensation.

Shelby Stanger: I love that. I'm going to go get one right now.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. Yeah.

Shelby Stanger: So no phones by the bed. No phones in the room.

Melissa Hartwig: That's a recent experiment of mine after doing a podcast episode with my friend Dr. Ellen Vora, who's a holistic psychiatrist, she was like, "Get your phone out of your bedroom." And I was like, game on. So I did. And the first like two nights I had weird anxiety. Like what do I do if I need something from Amazon at 10:00 PM, which is of course ridiculous. And now I love it. I find it so freeing. I have so much more time for reading, which is a huge passion of mine. I mean it was always on airplane mode when I slept anyway, so it wasn't like I was getting notifications, but just getting it out of the bedroom has been really freeing. I enjoy reclaiming that space for my own.

Shelby Stanger: You're going to think this is pretty crazy, but we just turn wifi off every day at nine o'clock and it doesn't go back on until morning routine is done.

Melissa Hartwig: Uh-huh (affirmative). Genius. I love that.

Shelby Stanger: It's hard though because sometimes you just want to like meet a friend to go running at 6:30, but luckily text works still.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. Yeah.

Shelby Stanger: So if you need to get up early and you're meeting someone, it still works. But I found that to be a game changer and I'm like totally freaked out about wifi, so ...

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I've heard of that and I think I can do that through my wireless provider app, so that might be a great thing. I never look at my phone in the morning before I go to the gym. It is part of my very longstanding morning

routine is that I move before I do anything else in the morning, including emails or DMs or text messages.

Shelby Stanger: So in the morning you go to the gym. Tell me a little bit about your morning routine. I'm curious.

Melissa Hartwig: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I wake up, I make my bed immediately, every single morning. I either spend time with my son if I have him or if I don't, I go straight to the gym and I'm out the door by like 20 minutes and it's either the gym or a yoga class or a hike. But I move and meditate first thing in the morning before I do any work whatsoever.

Shelby Stanger: So I heard that you will meditate in the middle of the gym.

Melissa Hartwig: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I do, yep. Every time I work out, I end my workout with a four-part meditation that my friend Todd taught me about a year ago. And I sit and I'm not like in the middle of the gym, meaning someone's like dead lifting around me. But like I'm also not sticking myself in a corner. I think I have a video on my Instagram feed of what it looks like on a busy Saturday and I'm in the middle of the turf and people are working around me and carrying big heavy sleds and having conversations and I sit and I meditate there. Yeah.

Shelby Stanger: Mm. What's the four part meditation? Can you share it?

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. In the first part you think about things you're grateful for. In the second part, you lift someone up. So it could be yourself or a family member or a stranger, but you're kind of sending light to someone or a group of people. In the third part I think about what my intention is for the day. So that's kind of where I set my intention and think about what I need in that moment. And then in the fourth part, I'm just listening to the sounds of the gym and I stay in each part as long as I need. I don't time it or limit it. And when I'm ready to come out, I come out and I come out a brand new person.

Shelby Stanger: Melissa's a frequent gym goer, but recently outdoor pursuits, especially hiking has become a much bigger part of her life. I asked Melissa a little about what she gets from being outside. She shares great tips for people who want to experience more outdoor activities but aren't sure where to start.

Shelby Stanger: So you were always a gym person, but lately you've been gravitating towards the outdoors. So what in the outdoors do you do?

Melissa Hartwig: I've been a really avid hiker since I moved to Utah about nine years ago. So I did some outdoor stuff when I lived in New Hampshire, but coming here where the mountains are so much bigger and so much more accessible and also kind of going through some personal transitions in my relationship and having a child, I'm outside hiking year-round. I snowshoe in the winter, I'll throw spikes on and then I hike all spring, summer and fall. Every vacation I think I've taken in the

last five years has been to hike. I take one big solo trip every year where I hike. I just got back from Glacier. Outdoors is absolutely my church. That's what I call it.

Shelby Stanger: So some of the hikes I saw you do were like no joke hikes and you're doing them on your own. You know, as a woman hiking alone, it can sometimes be daunting. Any advice you have, and especially in bear country?

Melissa Hartwig: I love hiking alone. I would not recommend a 14 mile Highline trail in bear country and in Glacier as your first go. I think if you're a little bit nervous about hiking or nervous about hiking alone, then I love the AllTrails app. That's where I find hiking trails in a new area or in my area. Find a hike that's relatively popular so that you can be alone, but you've got plenty of other people near you. Do your homework. Always let someone know where you're going. Make sure you've got plenty of supplies. Download the trail app and record as you go. So if you happen to find yourself off trail, you can get back on. I take a lot, a lot of safety precautions before I set foot on a long trail by myself. But I do think that hiking by yourself is incredibly rewarding. It can be very grounding. It can feel very empowering and there are certainly ways to ease into it.

Shelby Stanger: Tell me what you get from the outside that you don't get when you're in the gym.

Melissa Hartwig: Oh my goodness. What don't I get? My head chatter shuts up at about a half an hour in. I am experiencing the sunshine and the oxygen. I'm touching leaves as I go and like really getting myself into my environment. I feel grounded. I feel centered. I'm not hiking with music or listening to anything. So it's just me and my thoughts and I feel like that's where I'm really closely connected to God and the universe and I have lots of good conversations and receive a lot of wonderful messages that way. And then I also get to experience that this is such a beautiful, vast world. You know, being out on a summit all by myself at 11,000 feet, not seeing another single person makes me feel very small, but also very powerful at the same time. It's a really lovely reminder.

Shelby Stanger: You know, we did a bunch of podcast episodes about the science of nature and there's a woman named Florence Williams who wrote *The Nature Fix* and she proves being in nature not only makes you healthier, but it allows you to make these better decisions. And I think you get this, you do, you get this spiritual connection and these answers that you can't get on a pro con list.

Melissa Hartwig: Oh my goodness. Again, Dr. Ellen Vora talks about depression being in part a nature deficiency. There's so much that being outdoors in green spaces brings us. Everything from mental health to our immune system to reducing stress levels and like measurable in the body. So yeah, and I do think it's just this wonderful reminder that away from the hustle and bustle and the ping of our cell phone and the lure of Netflix or stuff in our pantry, it can just be like a really nice centering grounding experience. Yeah. I want nature to be accessible to everyone too.

Shelby Stanger: So how much have you been involving your kid outside? Your six year old?

Melissa Hartwig: Oh. Oh my gosh. Since birth. He hiked in packs with me when he was small and couldn't walk. He did Angel's Landing in Zion with his dad when he was like four. So that's like a bucket list hike for an adult and he rocked it. He's done some five, six mile hikes with me. No problem. We take trips to national parks every year. He's into fishing. He's in a nature camp every summer, like he is outside.

Shelby Stanger: That's so good for him and so great for you, I'm sure.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. And we notice a marked improvement in his behavior, in his centering, in his grounding, in his temperament the more time he spends outside. Yeah, for sure.

Shelby Stanger: Any gear that you love to take with you on a hike?

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah, so first of all, I adore REI. REI has been my local go-to for gear and for information. So when I took up skate skiing and wasn't really sure where to start, I went to REI when I had questions about which poles to get. I went to REI. They had me at their opt out Black Friday campaign many, many years ago. So I'm a huge REI fan. I love the idea of hiking with poles. I don't do it that often, but only because I'm very comfortable on rough terrain and I have very good ankle strength and mobility and knee strength and mobility. But for a new hiker, I love hiking with poles. It gives you a sense of security and stability and it may make some trails like water trails or steeper trails more accessible. So I love the idea of hiking with poles. Get a really good water bladder. I happen to use one that you can kind of flip inside out, which makes it really easy to clean and keep clean, but you don't want to be like taking your backpack on and off and reaching for your water every two seconds. So I think that's a really fantastic way. And then just get a good pair of hiking shoes. I'm not a huge fan of hiking boots because I love the fact that uneven terrain helps you build those stabilization muscles and help you build the strength necessary, but hiking shoes are incredibly personal. So go to REI, try on a bunch of different pairs of hiking shoes, test them out on the little like slopes that they've got in their shoe section. But make sure you've got shoes appropriate for the terrain. I see people out hiking in Chuck Taylors-

Shelby Stanger: I was just going to say, Converse and Vans.

Melissa Hartwig: Just because you can ... I know. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. I want you to be safe out there as well.

Shelby Stanger: I see so many people eat it in their Vans and Chucks and I love them and I'm like just go get some ultra running shoes. Like just some trail shoes, a little bit of tread, you're good to go or some Keens or Tevas or whoever makes anything good at REI, go get some of those.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. And it will make you feel more comfortable on the trail as well. You know, you don't need to spend thousands of dollars to like be up in all the latest and greatest, most expensive gear, but there are a couple things that will make your hiking experience a lot more pleasant.

Shelby Stanger: This time of year with the holidays it can be challenging for us to keep up with our A game when feeling like our healthiest selves. With all the family gatherings, the office parties, the gift exchanges, it's not always easy to stick to healthy choices. Lucky for us, Melissa just came out with a new book that can help take the pressure off. So you just came out with a book that's out on the market now and we're gearing up for holidays, so I think this is a great time for this book. Tell us about the book, what it's called, what it's about.

Melissa Hartwig: Yes. Again, the idea for this book came from my community, it's not mine. It's called Whole30 Friends and Family. So what we came to realize was that socialization was still really challenging for people who are trying to change their habits. Whether you are doing a Whole30 or just maybe you've realized that gluten is not your friend and you're on a gluten free diet or you're trying to eat low sugar or no added sugar, it can be very difficult to honor your health commitments and still stay social.

Shelby Stanger: Do you talk about not having alcohol because there's this big movement right now towards being sober, even if you've never struggled with addiction. You know, I don't really like what drinking feels like the day after and so I don't drink. But socially it's a little weird sometimes.

Melissa Hartwig: You took the words out of my mouth. Alcohol is huge right now. Yeah. You don't have to identify as an alcoholic to realize that there may be areas of your life in which alcohol is not serving you, and there's a huge sober-curious movement right now. I'm actually participating where I'm not saying I'm never going to drink again, but I've been taking a lot of time off from alcohol lately. And the more time I take off, the more I realize I don't miss it at all, but it can make socialization more challenging. So what we've done in this book is we've created more than 20 menus for everyday social occasions. Things like kid's birthday parties, meet the parent dinners, overnight house guests, camping, church picnics, backyard barbecues in a way that allows you to be social, enjoy delicious, hearty, satisfying, creative food and still honor your health commitment.

Shelby Stanger: Sounds like a great book. I'm going to have to get it. It came out in October?

Melissa Hartwig: October 15th, Whole30 Friends and Family. That's right. And again, you don't have to be on a Whole30 to want to eat a whole food diet and remain social, so we've kind of built the menu with everyone in mind.

Shelby Stanger: Love it. So we're going into the holiday and holidays are just tricky times for people in staying healthy. So just advice for people going into this holiday

season and the new year on staying healthy, but also on setting good intentions for wellbeing.

Melissa Hartwig: Yeah. You know, I think a lot of us go into holidays with this idea of like, well, you know, YOLO, I'm just going to do whatever I want and not pay attention to what I eat and January is going to save me. Whatever my diet is in January, it's going to save me.

Melissa Hartwig: And I think that yo-yo approach is really, really damaging. Instead, I encourage people to go into the holidays with a mindset of conscientiousness. So the red and green M&Ms on your break room counter are not special. You are a grownup with car keys and a credit card and you can go buy M&Ms anytime you want. So thinking consciously and deliberately, is this special in this moment? Is it worth it? Is it going to make me feel like junk afterward? Do I even like it enough to eat it? Do I even want it right now? And approaching those decisions from a very conscientious place of self care, not just, well, I'm not going to worry about it because it's the holidays, I think can really serve you. It will allow you to eat the things that are truly special, truly delicious, but pass on the things that you know 10 minutes after you put it in your mouth, you're going to regret. It's not a treat if it makes you feel like crap.

Shelby Stanger: I love this idea that we can resist temptation while still being kind to ourselves. Kindness for me is huge. This holiday season when you're celebrating with your family and friends, don't forget to celebrate your body and your mind as well. I love that Melissa said, "It's not a treat if it makes you feel like crap." I also love that she says, "Once you feel like you're nourishing yourself in the best way possible, it'll empower you and give you capacity to roll that feeling over into every area of your life." What a great way to approach the holidays. I hope you can all fuel your body, your mind, and your souls with great, healthy choices and have some fun this holiday season.

Shelby Stanger: Thank you so much to Melissa Hartwig Urban for sharing your own adventure with us as well as helping us think critically about what we put into our bodies and our minds. Also for teaching me how to meditate at the gym. Yes, I am that girl at my gym now and I love it. I can now meditate anywhere and it's awesome. You can check out Melissa's podcast, Do The Thing at whole30.com/podcasts. I don't listen to a ton of other podcasts, but I love this show and listen to it a lot. Melissa, when you're in San Diego, I'd love to take you paddle boarding. And to Pattie Gonia, thank you so much for recommending I interview Melissa. You're a gem of a human with a ton of great ideas.

Shelby Stanger: This podcast is produced by REI with help from Annie Fassler and Chelsea Davis. Tune in next week as I remember some of the lessons I learned from this year's guests and what I hope to carry with me into 2020. As always, I appreciate when you subscribe, rate, and review the show wherever you listen and remember some of the best adventures often happen when you follow your wildest ideas.

