Lance Heard: For how many years did I wander slowly through the forest? What wonder and glory I would have missed had I ever been in a hurry? Beauty can both shout and whisper, and still it explains nothing. The point is you are you, and that's for keeps.

Announcer: Welcome to the Magic Mountie podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mt. San Antonio College. But everyone's welcome.

Sun Ezzell: Hi. It's Sun Ezzell with the Magic Mountie podcast, and we have another mini series for you inspired by Lance Heard's previous episode, How To Walk It Off With Nature: An Introduction To Forest Therapy. We decided to explore a few colleagues' favorite nature spots across campus as well as how they make the time to connect with nature and its impact on their work with students. In upcoming episodes, we'll take a birdwatching walk with Jared from the library, and we'll sit under a favorite tree with our toes in the grass with Yolanda from POD.

Sun Ezzell: But on this hot summer day, I was able to sit with Lance Heard by one of his favorite spots, the koi pond, located north of the Mt. SAC farm. Being there felt cool and relaxing despite the heat, like being transported to another world. Here's Lance.

Lance Heard: I believe that we can actually be grounded in place right here on campus and have a special connection to the places here on campus, and I think just being here and spending time here has more meaning to us. It's not the idea of I drive to my parking space, I go to work, I finish work, I return to my car, and I go on with the rest of my life that a very significant part of our lives is spent here and just being here in the places that we're at have meaning to us, and there are special places where we can feel that way such as here at the koi pond, which I'm attracted to the nature, the beautiful lily pads, the koi fish, the amazing sounds.

Lance Heard: We can hear the birds in the background. The water that's bubbling up. I would call it a tropical oasis. So, it almost transplants. Many of our spots on campus are very bright and sunny. We have some nice lawns, and we have a lot of buildings and lanes and pathways. It looks like a traditional college campus, but this transplants us. There are palm trees. There are beautiful stone surrounding the pond. Numerous Koi fish, several waterfalls. It's a very tranquil setting. It's a very garden-like setting. Butterflies moving back and forth. I feel very grounded in this place, and I feel very connected.

Lance Heard: I realize that the college where we work is more than just an interaction between educators and students, but it's a place where life happens. Not just our lives, but the nature around us. So, if a person is thinking of, "I've been so intensely involved in this work on campus, and I really need to get away from it for a while to refresh," this location will really transplant you. You'll feel like you're not on campus anymore because it doesn't look like any other part of campus. It looks like you're in a tropical rain forest garden.

Lance Heard: What I like about coming and sitting and spending time here, even if I'm... Let's say I'm working on something, or I'm grading papers for my students, what being grounded is it allows me to take what's called a natural rest break. In other words, we often silo, "Work is work and play is play, and work may not be enjoyable, and play has to be enjoyable," and we miss out when we do that. When we can create a work environment that is pleasurable at the same time, then we can have the best of both. I can feel like I'm accomplishing things for my students. I'd much rather be grading a paper here in this pleasant area, so that the comments I make to my students might be more positive and more constructive as opposed to...

Lance Heard: My office is I'm sure like many offices, and I do grade papers there, but there are no windows in my office. There's no scenes of nature. There are no trees to look out at to keep me just on an even pleasant temperament, and I think being grounded does that to us. It allows us to enjoy the work that we do and understand that we're making a contribution. So, I really encourage that the more time you can do that. Let's say I've just finished grading a paper. Before I pick up the next paper, I can take a look around and really reward myself with the pleasures of what's present before me.

Lance Heard: I think that's a very grounding, very balancing thing that let's say I've graded half the papers today, and I've got a whole set to grade tomorrow. I can look forward to that because I can come back here and do something like that as opposed to, "Oh no. I have this many more papers to grade." I think it's a whole attitude shift when we're really grounded in place. We enjoy being here. We enjoy spending the time here whether we're doing it just relaxing, enjoying a lunch or a snack, or we're actually doing work we're proud of.

Lance Heard: I still have fond memories of growing up in Alaska as a child, and whenever I tell people that, the reaction they give because of what people think about Alaska, and they're correct. Alaska is like the last wilderness in the United States, and there's so much nature there that as a child you can't help but be exposed to it. A year round whether it's ice skating on a frozen lake in the winter or chasing streams in the spring when the ice is melting. It brings back amazing memories.

Lance Heard: So, I believe ever since then, ever since childhood, I've been trying to reconnect with that and find that in different places. I like being able to be reminded of that, and I hope others will too because I think that's a good thing when you can do that. If you haven't been, one of my concerns is that if you've only grown up in cities, and you haven't really spent a lot of time connecting to nature, do you realize what you might be missing? So, I really hope that more people decide to take the time because if they haven't grown up that way as some of us have, there's a whole new opportunity for them to really experience some of the things that I was able to do.

Lance Heard: I like this space, and even our campus is so unique. We have so many diverse spaces on our campus. One of the things that I think people think about even less is we're known for our track and field and our cross country, and I will go out on the loops up above Hil-Mar Lodge, and I used to run, so I've run there. I've done the 10K run there. But just to go for a walk there because it isn't just walking around and showing the spectacular views when you walk up there, but the animal life there, and not just our farm animal life there, but there's a lot of wildlife. You'll run across rabbits. You'll run across squirrels.

Lance Heard: You'll run across a variety of creatures out there that'll just for many people, what opportunity do you have to do that? You can find that right here on campus, and it's just a short distance from here. So that's also one of my favorite places. And sure, you can make it exercise if you want to walk up and down the hills, but you can just do a leisurely stroll and find that just as rewarding because it's what I call a nature break right here on campus.

Lance Heard: What really has reawakened the Wildlife Sanctuary as one of my favorite spaces is because doing the forest therapy is an opportunity to go back into the Wildlife Sanctuary and appreciate the amazing diversity of life that there is over there, and just to take a peaceful walk and listen to the birds and connect with the frogs or just look at the beautiful blooming plants that are over there and just wonder about the possibilities. So, wonder is one of the things that happens during forest therapy.

Lance Heard: We get a chance to just be awed by nature. There's research that has shown that when we are awed, it has such a positive emotional effect on us that we realize we're part of an amazing world, and we become hopeful about the possibilities for the future. So, just a way of encouraging us about where we fit in. Go to a place that is awe-inspiring. That's where I believe that term came from. Awe-inspiring, and all it takes is spending time in a place like the Wildlife Sanctuary and just being amazed at all the life that's teeming around us.

Lance Heard: So that's one really special part of it that I hope to reintroduce to people who participate in the forest therapy walks that we're going to be doing starting in August in the Wildlife Sanctuary, and hopefully, it becomes a regular practice. But people spending time in their favorite places, for example, like the Wildlife Sanctuary and just reaping the benefits, whether it's physical benefit of stress management or psychological benefits of getting relaxation and having feelings of wellbeing.

Lance Heard: Research has also shown that it's actually invigorating spending time in nature. So, those of us who are feeling that caffeine, the caffeine, a way of getting energy, we've reached our limit at that. There's a natural way to get re-energized and that's just by spending time in places like the Wildlife Sanctuary. There are many little benefits that I'm hoping that people have aha moments and will become aware of just by spending a few hours with us during a forest therapy walk in the Wildlife Sanctuary.

Sun Ezzell: You have tiny little blue dragon flies right over there.

Lance Heard: Awesome. Look at that.

Sun Ezzell: How do you think giving yourself time to be grounded in nature impacts your work with students?

Lance Heard: A lot of times when I think of students, we have an interesting relationship. We have a instructor relationship where we're imparting important information and knowledge to them. But I think we also have a role model relationship with them because of the lives we've led and the experiences that they're going to go through, and we have an opportunity to share with them about making life decisions and to give them an opportunity to decide what they want to spend their time on, and that phrase, taking time out to smell the roses. I think we owe it to them to really share what that means for us and how we do that, so that they can plan that in.

Lance Heard: I recently had a talk with a student who she basically said, "Well, with us, I believe 20 hours a day. That's more work I accomplish, the more joy that I can get." I really had an interesting conversation about, "Is that really the source of joy, what you do?" Perhaps more of it's just being alive. Just being alive, you can get joy out of. Just appreciating what's around you like nature, so that at the end of putting all that work in and all that investment, and if it isn't harmful to your health, it isn't also the source of your satisfaction because that can be disappointing if you reached that point and it doesn't happen.

Lance Heard: So I love having those conversations with students because it's just a matter of awareness. Provide them the information and then let them make a choice that's best for them. I love having those conversations about what it means to be grounded, what it means to get joy from place as opposed to purpose or accomplishment or job description and to decide what quality of life means to them.

Lance Heard: One of the stories we tell ourselves is that we get our self-esteem from what we accomplish. Then when we get a job that we've really inspired to have like being on the faculty. For example, at Mt. San Antonio College, we see other colleagues who are doing similar things, are accomplishing so many things. We tell ourselves that that's the right story, and we should continue down that trend. Then four years go by, five years go by, and we're still trying to accomplish more, and we're forgetting why we got started on that trend because it becomes this idea of "never being satisfied until I accomplish something new."

Lance Heard: So, you want to take care of that because that's the idea that we could really get into about stopping to smell the roses is that we never really stop to appreciate what we have accomplished and why we've accomplished it, so that we can benefit. Those we work with can benefit. Our students can benefit, and how do we benefit? We stop and celebrate. This is what I call stopping and celebrating, enjoying where we're at. Appreciate that we have accomplished things, but the reason why is so we can just enjoy who we are and that we're alive in this time, and we get to experience all of this.

Lance Heard: When we don't smell those roses, we don't take the time, we've missed out on all of that because we'd been allowing only one story to drive what we do. You don't need a lot of nature to really experience the pleasures and the benefits. I would really use the rose gardens example for anybody thinking about this. When you see that one tree or that one set of flower plants, don't disregard that as a spot to connect. Even if it's right outside your building, wherever that is, find a comfortable place to sit. Take time to immerse yourself in the life that's there, and don't be surprised if you find it a very pleasant experience.

Announcer: Hey. Thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments, so please engage with our community. Download from wherever you love to get your podcasts: iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor. We're there, and we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mt. San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.