

Cameron Aunkst

Dr. Pastor

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### Everything Nature has to Offer: Ron Aunkst

The cool breeze blows through the trees in the spring, snakes slither, bears pick berries, rabbits bounce around, squirrels play together, and birds of all kinds build their nest high in the trees. This is the forest. A place where nature flourishes and animals go through their daily routines. Where young lives begin, and old lives fade away. Where the mother coyote teaches her young to hunt, while the mother deer teaches her young to survive. Where vines grow up trees to receive sunlight and seeds blow all around to create new life. Where rodents dig holes deep in the ground and birds soar high above searching for them. To many it may seem like just “the woods” or the “outdoors”, but to one specific individual it is much more than that.

This individual grew up hunting and fishing in the early hours of the day. Being out in nature brought him much more than just a new setting. It brought everything nature has to offer. The calming sounds of the wind, the sensational smell of the trees, being surrounded by the powerful energy of all living things, the forest is his home. Looking deeper and leaning into all that nature has to offer, Ron Aunkst believes that there is much more to the forest than it just being outdoors. To him it's a place of peace, a place he can go to relax and wind down from everything that is going on in the world. A place that saved his life, taught him many things, and inspired him to be who he is today.

Ron is a certified Forest Therapy Guide who leads others through meditation and hikes in the woods to experience everything nature has to offer. For Ron this started as therapy for him. His therapist knew he wanted something more and she knew that he enjoyed nature, so she recommended him to look into forest therapy. When Ron started this journey, he went on a guided walk known as “shinrin-yoku” which translates to forest bathing. “It reminded me of when I was young and went hunting and fishing. Early morning getting up, that ah feeling you have in the morning. It was very settling.” Ron stated. This led him to want to take this a step further.

Ron started working at White Deer Run Allenwood Addiction Treatment Center a few years ago. Ron shared, “I noticed these people going through stuff I was going through, and I’m like, ‘Why don’t we have these people in the woods?’ My supervisor said, ‘What would you do?’ I said, ‘Get them in the woods.’” Once Ron had experienced everything that nature had to offer, he was very driven to share it with others who were going through rough patches in their own lives. He went on to get his certification as a Forest Therapy Guide and now leads the Outdoor Recovery program out of the Activity Department at White Deer Run Allenwood. Within the Outdoor Recovery program, they go on hikes, hold times for mediation, and forest therapy. On top of all this there is one main factor that has made things much more achievable for Ron, technology.

While Ron works at the Addiction Treatment Center, he also runs his own business as a Forest Therapy Guide known as “Ron in the Forest”. Modern day technology has made it possible for him to become certified by taking classes on Zoom. It also plays a huge role in his ability to get his message out to others. “It’s a whole lot easier to do your own marketing. Using

technology, you can sit at your desk and create your own marketing plan with a little bit of research.” He also mentions how social media plays a role in reaching others. “You have Facebook, Instagram, all the social medias you can plug your information. So, there’s many ways technology is getting messages out.”

One of Ron’s most effective ways to share his message online is by capturing photos and videos of wildlife so he can share them with the world. Ron expands on this by stating, “You use technology to take that picture, and then do a voice over with a little bit of music and now it becomes very catchy. That inspires people that may not have the ability to go out.” He also states, “It was a defiantly a lot harder 20 years ago to start a business than it is today. Anybody can pick up a phone, pick up a cell phone and start a business. Everyone’s walking around with cell phones in their pocket. And if you don’t know how to start a business, all you need to do is pick up your cell phone and YouTube it.”

While getting out in the forest and going hiking may sound like an anti-technology movement, Ron assures us it is not that way. He says, “I’m not trying to get people away from technology, not at all. What I am trying to do is get you back to the basics and learn how to balance, cause everything is a balance.” Ron shows us that he believes technology is great and has helped humanity in so many ways, but if used in the wrong ways it can become unhealthy. “Where it gets to be a problem is when that’s all we do. When we get into that rabbit hole of the social medias, you get on and you can’t get away from them.” He goes on to say, “It’s like everything, it’s a double-edged sword. Technology is great, but it’s gotta be used in a positive manner.”

Ron's advice is, "Lay your cell phone down for 3 hours. Take a 3 hour walk in the woods. Absorb some phytoncides, get all the essentials out of the forest. It will boost your immune system, it will lower your anxiety, and then you move on throughout your day." As a man than has gone through many different stages of life and has countless stories to share, Ron has found the most effective way he can help others. By showing them everything nature has to offer and using technology to get that message out. Ron has changed and impacted the lives of many people who were once struggling but now are at peace through meditation and spending time in the forest.