Yolanda Haro:

We don't want to escape our feelings. We want to explore them. We want to be curious. We want to say, "Where is this coming from? Where is the fear coming from? Why am I so tired? What do I need right now to give to myself?"

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 4:

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 5:

She is a sociology major, and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona. Psychology major. English major.

Speaker 6:

From transforming part-time into full-time ...

Speaker 7:

I really like the time that we spend with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Speaker 8:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 9:

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance faculty and Professional Learning Academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

Hi, welcome back to the third and final episode of our summer mini series on nature. This week, we continue a conversation that we started last summer with Yolanda Haro. In today's episode, Yolanda shares how noticing, enjoying and caring for the natural world around us can be part of a repertoire of healthy and compassionate self-care practices. So, find a comfy spot. Take a deep calming breath, and let's get started.

Sun Ezzell:

Yolanda, welcome back to the podcast. It's nice to have you here. Last time we chatted for the podcast last summer, we sat under your favorite tree on the lawn on the South side of Building Six. We put our bare feet in the grass and watched the birds and squirrels and talked a little bit about nature and your experiences with nature and how we can use time and nature to allow ourselves to slow down and be more present. I was wondering if you would share with us a little bit about how you're maintaining your connection with nature and that beautiful ability to be really present in the moment, but first, I was wondering, while we're all working at home due to the coronavirus, are there any nature spaces on campus that you're missing?

Yolanda Haro:

I totally miss the tree right in front of Building Six, that whole lawn area. I miss it a lot. I miss the squirrels and I miss the koi pond. That's a really very quiet place on campus, so those are the places that I mostly would frequent when I was on campus, and I miss them dearly.

Sun Ezzell:

I'm missing those spaces too. How are you finding space to be in nature close to home?

Yolanda Haro:

So, I truly enjoy taking walks downtown because the houses are really nice. They have beautiful gardens. There's a lot of trees downtown, and I walk it all the way to the end, and so, I really enjoy looking at the flowers, the trees. There's peacocks also that are in a certain area of the street, so I feel like I'm at The Arboretum sometimes because at The Arboretum in Arcadia, there's a lot of peacocks, and that gives me a lot of pleasure just to see them, to see them, and to be around the trees and the flowers. I really take time to stare at them like I've never seen them before. I get a little bit of movement going downtown. That gives me serenity, and it helps me be present. It helps me to go outside and see other human beings walking around.

Sun Ezzell:

So, now that we're all working from home, are you noticing things in your neighborhood that you hadn't noticed before when we were all waking up early and commuting to campus and staying late and driving home in the dark?

Yolanda Haro:

Yeah. In my neighborhood, when I go for my walks, I started noticing the gardens in people's houses, and I noticed the variety of flowers and plants. Then, I also noticed some of the houses that don't have beautiful gardens. So, I noticed that I start taking pictures of certain arrangements or like landscaping that I really like. I think, "Oh, when I have a big house and a big yard, I'm going to do my garden like this." I literally started taking pictures of certain trees and certain arrangements of flowers on the ground. So, I do. I'm very much present to the plants as I walk.

Sun Ezzell:

It's been so nice to have more time at home and just be able to go out every evening and see the sunset or go out and check on the flowers in the yard and see how much they change day to day.

Yolanda Haro:

Yeah. One of the things that keep me really connected right now because we're not supposed to be out that much, so when I do take my walks, I go downtown. I also go to a track, a racing track, and that has a lot of trees all around the track. So, that really ... I like that too because I'm around so many trees, and I'm walking or running the track, but at home, I have a patio, and I have a number of flowers that I take care of. So, these are the flowers that I have in my patio. I have plumeria, I have roses, hydrangeas. I have a aloe vera plants that are very nice and juicy. I have foxglove, the Pink Panther version, and I have poinsettias. So, just in my little garden, my little patio, I get up in the morning, and I water them or in the evening when it's really, really hot, I go out there and water them.

Yolanda Haro:

Then, when I take my breaks, I make sure that I take lunch and I go out there even if it's really hot. I go outside, and I'd take half an hour. I eat or have a snack, and I'd just stare at my plants. That disconnects me from the computer, makes me take off my glasses and the phone. I don't take the phone with me, so really to give my eyes a break because my eyes get really dry and I find myself taking breaks to put the tear, like the liquid in my eyes to lubricate, and that helps too. So, I do try to go outside and stretch a little bit and be with the plants during the day because 10-hour days is a long day.

Sun Ezzell:

That's a lot more looking at the computer screen than we're used to.

Yolanda Haro:

Definitely. I really miss meeting with people face to face. Now that we can't see each other, I mean, I wish we could take a walk and have a meeting like a walking meeting on campus, and we can't even do that here. So, there's a sadness about that. There's a sadness about not seeing people that I really enjoy on campus, not having that human connection. I mean, we talk on the phone, and we talk on the computer, but it's just not the same.

Sun Ezzell:

I know exactly what you mean. I miss our walking meetings across campus.

Yolanda Haro:

Yeah. Also, on campus, there were so many trees and certain flowers. I love seeing the greenery, even though in the fall when the maple trees, all the leaves are falling, I really miss seeing that too, but thank God, I live in a neighborhood that has beautiful, beautiful greenery. Then, on Fridays, once in a while on the weekend if I'm able to or if the situation permits it, I have gone to the beach a couple of times and walked on the sand and just observed the waves coming in and out and the sunset. That fills my heart. That trip to the beach really regenerates me and it calms me down, so I realize how important nature is. Once I get off work, the last thing I want to see is a computer. The last thing I want to be is on the phone, looking at the news. So, I kind of disconnect for a while.

Sun Ezzell:

When you go to the beach, there's this beautiful, fresh ocean air that's always so rejuvenating.

Yolanda Haro:

Yes. Yes. In Southern California, the water is so cold at the beach, but I always go in it. I always go in it, and I get that shocking feeling at the beginning because it's like icy cold. Then, after a while, my body gets used to it, but I definitely dip myself into the ocean if not fully, at least up to my knees. So, that's a lot of fun.

Sun Ezzell:

I feel like I'm sort of calmer just hearing you describe your trips to the beach, so thank you for sharing. It sounds like you're creating such a beautiful space on your patio as well. How did you pick out what you wanted to grow?

Yolanda Haro:

So, my mom is a big motivator. She comes in here, and she starts poking around my patio. She did bring a couple of flowers into my space. Then, one day, I went with my son to an interview. He had an interview, and there was a Home Depot nearby. So, I said, "Well, while you're in your interview, I'm going to go to Home Depot, not really thinking about buying anything, but I started seeing all the flowers outside, and I thought, "Oh, my God, they're so beautiful." So, that's where I got the foxglove and then some roses. Then, my mom had brought some hydrangeas flowers to the house. Then, the poinsettia, I had it since Christmas, so it's a gift from Christmas from the office. So, little by little, I started creating my little patio. I've had the money tree for a while, so now, it's really big. I had it when it was really small.

Yolanda Haro:

So, little by little, I've been fertilizing and watering, making sure I water regularly because the heat, it dries them up pretty bad every day, and so I just ... I wish I could have more space for more flowers, but that's about all that I can handle right now. Then, the aloe vera plants, I had them really small, and I put them in a new pot. Now, they're really big. I mean, if I water them, they're really big, and they're very healthy. So, if you want some aloe vera, let me know. I have plenty of it.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you. Do you have any recommendations for our listeners who would like to be more connected with nature or would like to work on being more present maybe at one of those moments when we're feeling a little panicked or overwhelmed about the news? What's a good way to start?

Yolanda Haro:

Well, the first thing, for sure, to sort of decrease our anxiety and the fear is to get yourself in a space that is calming for you. If you want to go outside, if you have plants around, I think that's really good, or even in a very quiet space in your house, whether you're standing or sitting down, I think it's really key to just take moments to be quiet, close your eyes, and be really present with your body, with all your senses, and start breathing slowly. Be very present with the breathing, and then notice, where are the emotions in the body? Notice if it's in your chest or your diaphragm. Notice where you're tense. I get very tense around my shoulders. I think sometimes, if I'm really scared or worried, I start getting a pain in my lower abdomen.

Yolanda Haro:

So, I just kind of pay attention, and I acknowledge it, and I say, "Yes. Yes, there is a pain there. I feel you. I acknowledge you." Sometimes, I even put my hand there and I say, "I'm sending you love." By doing that, sometimes, the discomfort actually dissipates, or the tension sometimes, I become very aware of it, so I just start moving my shoulders and kind of start working through it. I do a lot of exercises with my neck, doing like a whole circle with my neck one way and then the other way. So, acknowledging the senses in the body helps us to become very present. By being present, I think that helps us to decrease the stress and the anxiety that's happening.

Yolanda Haro:

There are days when I feel depressed because I do. I acknowledge that I'm depressed, I'm kind of struggling through the day, and I will end my day by drinking a lot of water and then going for a walk. I make it 30 minutes to an hour. I go around the neighborhood. So, movement is really key to dealing with the emotions in the body. If you're able to do yoga at home or stretching is really key and then breathing exercises. I find that it kind of centers me with the breathing and helping the body to get new oxygen. So, that's really key, the inhale, the exhale, making the exhale longer each time and working with the movement of the body.

Yolanda Haro:

So, it's really helpful just to stretch especially our hands, our arms, stretch the back, lay on the floor and grab our feet, and push it towards our torso, towards our chest to stretch out the back because we sit so much. There's a lot of tension back there. So, anything that supports the stretching and the releasing of tension in the body is really key. This is like a daily event because we're sitting down a lot. Our eyes are tired. One of the things that I do often is once I eat, I'll lay down. I'll lay down and completely close my eyes and just elevate my feet, and let the body resettle down or regroup sort of, and just let it be still for like 15 minutes, 10, 15 minutes. Then, I get up. I drink water. So, I'm constantly drinking water all day. So, anyway, those are some of the things that I think are really helpful to help us deal with the emotional state that we find ourselves in on a daily basis.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you for sharing. I feel like so often, we're kind of in a hurry, and we're feeling anxious or stressed. It's so easy to kind of push those feelings away, but what you're describing is so compassionate toward the self. It's so beautiful and moving to think of treating your own self and your own feelings the way that you would treat a loved one.

Yolanda Haro:

I love that you said that, Sun, because compassion and love is what actually heals our bodies. So, when we are pushing the emotions away, we're kind of denying them, right? When we acknowledge it and we say yes, and we feel it, and we identify where it's at in our body, and we work with it, I think we're honoring the body. Then, the body also works with us to heal. So, whatever your holistic practices are for healing, try to really tap into that whether you get massages or you go to a chiropractor or you do acupuncture, or you do meditation, or you do prayer time, or just being quiet. I think the body heals in quiet moments. So, I try to do something like that every day.

Yolanda Haro:

My cats remind me to take a nap because they're always napping. Sometimes, they come in and touch my legs, so they give me love, and I give them love. So, if you have animals, connect with them. If you have children, connect with them. You need to call a friend. Call a friend because sometimes, it just feels like the room is coming in. It gets pretty claustrophobic sometimes. So, those are ... Just paying attention, paying attention to ourselves and being compassionate.

Yolanda Haro:

I also think asking for what we need, asking ourselves like, "What is it that you need right now?" asking that question, and then just paying attention to what the body tells you. Sometimes, it tells me, "Take a nap. Lay down. You are exhausted." Then, I obey it. I go take a nap.

Sun Ezzell:

I think my body is always telling me to go take a nap.

Yolanda Haro:

Oh, my God. I do ... In European countries, they take siestas. When I lived in Spain, I always took a siesta every day. I think I slept like an hour, and then I would get up and do my homework back when I was a student there. It really helps to rejuvenate the body, so I think we should take naps every day.

Sun Ezzell:

I vote yes, let's do it. I guess that's one positive to working at home, is we have a little bit different control over our schedules where maybe we don't have to wake up quite so early with the alarm, or we can give ourselves a chance to rest when we need to in a way we couldn't when we were working on campus.

Yolanda Haro:

Exactly. On campus, I often wanted to take a nap, but where am I going to take a nap? I mean, I think a couple of times, I actually went under the tree and took a blanket or one of my yoga mats, and I would lay down and just let my body be still, but it wasn't as often. Here at home, if I'm taking my lunch, I can lay down on the sofa or on the bed and just let the body rest. I went to the optometrist last week, and she told me, the doctor told me, "You need to take breaks regularly from the computer," because they're finding that a lot of people's prescription is changing because we're stuck to the computer. It's like looking at a light bulb for 10 hours.

Yolanda Haro:

I was like, "Oh, my God, that's a long time." So, she said, "Every 30 minutes, every 45 minutes, take a break. Go look at the lights of a room or go outside, and look at something else. Look far. Look near to give your eyes a break because the eyes are super tired." I think that's why we're getting headaches because eventually, it affects our brain and our head. It's a different environment, and we have to really honor what the body needs and the fact that it's so tired.

Sun Ezzell:

It's tiring to be as stressed, right?

Yolanda Haro:

Right. Another thing, I think, that we in the workplace, we really need to look at the fact that we're being asked to do the same amount of work or more during the pandemic when there is an invisible enemy out there infecting people, and people are dying. So, that level of consciousness, knowing that people are dying around us, knowing that the numbers are going up, it's an added stress level. Then, we have the stress of doing our work in the middle of all this. So, I think there's different levels of anxiety and stress on the body right now. If we don't acknowledge all that and if we don't take care of ourselves, I think it's very easy to get sick or to suffer from insomnia, anxiety, depression. Hopefully, we're using good methods to take care of that and not unhealthy ways to address our symptoms.

Sun Ezzell:

I'm glad that you said that because so many of us are working from home, and our families are home too. The kids need help with something or a significant other is trying to work from home too. Our folks are home alone. This is all a unique challenge that many of us have never experienced before.

Yolanda Haro:

Yeah, yeah. It really is a different environment. I mean, I have to ... I don't even know how to say it. I have to give kudos to those who are at home with children who are small. They need time. You can't just put them in front of a TV and say, "I'll see you in 10 hours," so it's like doing two jobs, taking care of the children and doing the job. How realistic is that to really do the same as we did back in the office? I mean, I think eventually, my concern is that eventually, people will get to a point of burnout. Once you get into a point of burnout, it takes a toll on the body and on the mind. So, we really have to take care of ourselves, so we don't get to that point. This time, I thought it would be two or three months, but it's been extended. What I'm learning is that taking care of ourselves is really, really key, both spiritually, emotionally, physically, and psychologically finding ways to nurture ourselves during this time.

Sun Ezzell:

A lot of what you shared Yolanda seems like it would be good to do with a family member, even pretty young kids, right? They might like to go for a walk or work on some gardening or learn to check in on how their body is feeling or do some gentle stretching.

Yolanda Haro:

Yeah. I think it's important to help the kids acknowledge their feelings. There are times when I see my son very irritable or angry or very short, and I say, "What's going on with you? Are you tired? Are you ..." He'll tell me, "I'm bored. I'm really bored." I always tell him, "What do you need? Do you need to take a shower? Do you need to go outside? Do you want to talk about it?" Oftentimes, I remind him to go to bed early because if you don't have anything to do in the morning, these kids, they want to stay up till 12:00, 1:00, 2:00 in the morning, and then they're sleeping till 3:00 the next day. So, I always tell him, "Your body is tired. You need to shut everything off and just give your mind a break and go to sleep." I notice that once I go to sleep earlier, I do notice that he turns off the TV eventually and then goes to sleep, and helping them to connect to like what's going on with them, their feelings, their body to identify it and to pay attention.

Sun Ezzell:

It seems like technology, Netflix, social media are sort of designed for us not to stop using it. So, that's really powerful to practice that choice of stopping and not getting sucked into that vortex of scrolling social media or watching one thing after another.

Yolanda Haro:

Yeah. They're good tools to have, everything. Everything is a good tool, but I think it's also used as a distraction, and we can use anything as an escape from ourselves. So, we can watch Netflix in five episodes in one night, or we could be on the Instagram and these social media for hours, and ignore ourselves. So, I'm very careful with myself to not do that because we can get carried away. So, we don't want to escape our feelings. We want to explore them. We want to be curious. We want to say, "Where is this coming from? Where is the fear coming from? Why am I so tired? What do I need right now to give to myself?" and to find ways to help ourselves because it's not an easy time right now, for sure.

Sun Ezzell:

If someone wanted to explore more about some of the things you've talked about today, compassion, being more present, being connected with nature, do you have any resources you'd like to share with them?

Yolanda Haro:

I can share ... On Google, you could go on Google and find things like mindful meditation. Deepak Chopra has many resources and books and audio that you can tap into. Eckhart Tolle is another great spiritual speaker and meditation teacher. There's a lot of yoga videos online that you can tap into just to do like 20 minutes of that. So, I would just say use the resources online. I know there's an app called Calm, C-A-L-M, Calm. That's a great meditation app to help people sleep. Using things like that, I think, are good resources.

Yolanda Haro:

If you're okay with going outside, just finding a friend or a family member that's willing to take walks with you, and that way, you're not doing it by yourself. So, I have my cousin. I always call her, and I'm like, "Is this a good day? Can we go for a walk?" We'll meet up in downtown, and we'll take a walk together. Then, we talk, and we check in with each other, and that's a really huge support. So, your family is a resource, your friends. Wear your mask. Do what you have to do to feel safe, or do things at home. So, those are some resources that I think would help.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you so much, Yolanda. I always feel so much calmer when we talk, and I want to thank you for sharing today with me and with the podcast listeners. Did you get to share everything you wanted to share?

Yolanda Haro:

One more thing, when there is a moment when the feelings are kind of coming in really strong like when I read the news and so many more cases and millions of people are affected or dying, there is a moment when I feel like, "Oh, my God, there's a sense of darkness that I feel," and so I always remember that the way to deal with darkness is with light. It comes from my spiritual learning and my spiritual teachings that I've been involved with.

Yolanda Haro:

So, when I'm working, I can't really go anywhere at that point. I get a candle, and I light it up. I put it next to my computer, and I put a visual of something that makes me feel calm, whatever that spiritual image is for you or picture or an image or a reading or something that makes you calm. I put the candle as a way to say that the light will cast out the darkness. It's just a simple symbol for me. I say my prayers, and then I continue with my day, but I have the light, the candle next to me throughout the day if I really need it that day. So, that's what I do to feed my spirit.

Sun Ezzell:

I'm glad you shared that because I think we've all had those moments where we just feel completely panicked and overwhelmed, and it's hard to know what to do when you're in that moment, so thank you for that.

Yolanda Haro:

Well, thank you so much, Sun, for reaching out to me, and I wish everyone well and sending love and kindness to everyone.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you for sharing your wisdom with us today, and I hope you can go out on your patio and spend some time enjoying your beautiful plants.

Yolanda Haro:

Thank you.

Sun Ezzell:

Take care. Bye-bye.

Christina Barsi:

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however you like to listen. Once you subscribe, we'd love to hear what you think by leaving us a review, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.