Native Americans have long known the benefits of the natural environment and its ability to contribute to one’s well-being. This connection was critical to their survival for thousands of years, long before Europeans arrived in the Americas. Several years ago, I began an emotionally rewarding journey that both physically and mentally healed my mind and allowed me to embrace the great expanse of the American West. I discovered that my physical and mental well-being exceeded any time I immersed myself in the woods, mountains and rivers. The connection I made with the natural environment is difficult to describe with words, but there was no doubt that each of these adventures permanently changed my perspective and outlook on life.

I found this remarkable.

There are a number of recent scientific studies that point to a “Lack of Outdoor” activities (or as Richard Louv describes “Nature-Deficit Disorder”) that contribute to the high levels of depression, anxiety and stress in our society… in particular, with young people. As a designer and educator in higher education, perhaps the recorded experiences presented in this exhibition can speak directly to this audience.

To be well, we must invest ourselves into the journey. I am deeply grateful to The School of Arts and Sciences at Otterbein University and their support that allowed me and my son to explore some 24,000 miles of roads, trails, rivers and coastlines in South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington from the end of May to the end of December, 2017. That distance is just shy of circumnavigating the Earth at the Equator. Much of our time was spent in the presence of mountains, forests and rivers, where we were often the only humans set against the backdrop of a place remembered. The solitude has allowed me to experience a special part of the planet during all four seasons. We came away from this adventure forever changed.

This exhibition will hopefully inspire you to go out into the natural environment and explore its beauty and discover its secrets. Knowing, too, will bring much closer our planet, and perhaps, learn even more about ourselves. It should be noted that all of the images presented in this exhibition were taken with a iPhone 7+. One does not necessarily need to be outfitted with extensive equipment to record moments that have a tremendous impact on your well-being. The Earth is made of oceans and mountains, where we are often the only humans set against the backdrop of a place remembered. This sabbatical leave allowed me to experience a special part of the planet during all four seasons.

Trees convert the air we exhale back into pure oxygen. Rivers reflect our existence and purify the Earth and our souls. Oceans are the origin of all life. Deserts and Mountains put into perspective our place on the planet. When you make a connection with Nature, you are in tune with the Universe.

After spending a year in Outer Space aboard the International Space Station, Astronaut Scott Kelly remarked, “I’ve learned that grass smells great and wind feels amazing and rain is a wonder. I still try to remember how magical these things are for the rest of my life. I’ve learned that following the sun from space can make a day seem like a great adventure. When I come back to Earth, I will be spending the environmental responsibilities created by humans in a more meaningful way. I’ve also learned that our planet is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen and that it’s always worth coming back to.”

The exploration of places Out Here led me to discover peace within ourselves... a peace that is called wellness.