

**Podcast Series: Holistic Nature of Us**

**Episode # 67: Meet: Woodrow Nelson**

**<https://www.judithdreyer.com>**

Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series "The Holistic Nature of Us".

I invite you to journey with me into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties us directly to the natural world around us. My intention is to be your guide for this half hour as we begin seeing our world with fresh eyes, gaining more understanding and learning how can connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us.

I feature a broad range of guests deeply concerned about the environmental issues of our time and more, authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth and for all species helps us create sustainable bridges of understanding. These folks are innovators, action oriented, creating solutions in a variety of ways that honor us and the planet's holistic nature. I am honored to share their stories, their projects, and their passion with all of you.

And today I'm delighted to introduce you to Woodrow Nelson who is a life-long tree planter. While growing up in several mid west states through a business career in California and Ohio, before moving to Lincoln Nebraska to join the Executive Management team of the nonprofit Arbor Day Foundation in 2006. He is inspired by hundreds of thousands of Arbor Day Foundation members, engaging them in the conservation work of the foundation with impact in neighborhoods, communities and forests across the globe. Woody and his wife Joyce enjoy time together with their children and grandchildren.

Welcome Woody, it's a pleasure to have you here today!

WOODY: I'm pleased to be with you too Judith, thank you.

JUDITH: Woody is here to tell us a lot about trees. There's a relatively new program called *Time for Trees* and that's how I was able to get in touch with Woody. I'd love him to tell us not only about that program, but I'd like him to start with the value of trees in our landscape.

WOODY: Judith we all know that from a very early age that trees soak up carbon dioxide and emit oxygen in return. It's really life's necessity. It's clean air to breathe. But beyond that it's just become more critical than ever that humankind's ability to thrive and survive is at risk right now. Air and water pollution is rampant, temperatures are rising at alarming levels. The entire globe is battling poor health for a number of different reasons and society as a whole is becoming more and more fractured. The weight of these issues is indelibly altering the human condition and scientists, healthcare professionals, environmentalists, humanitarians and organizations both public and private alike are working feverishly to slow and even reverse the damage.

The Arbor Day Foundation is committed to moving this work forward. The Arbor Day Foundation was founded in 1972, so for 47 years we've been inspiring people to plant, nurture and celebrate trees and we firmly believe, we know, that trees are an important part of the solution to many of those critical issues that I just mentioned. They filter pollutants from the air and water, they protect us from dangerous heat and flooding. They lower urban temperatures. They save energy. They sequester carbon to slow the rate of climate change. Resources from forests help keep people out of extreme poverty. Green environments encourage physical activity. They improve cognitive ability. They reduce stress and trees; we know trees bring communities together. They're kind of unassailable and even in this fractured society we know that trees can be a unifier. People can agree on trees as a solution. So, I think that that's just so many compound benefits to planting trees and that's why the ARBOR DAY FOUNDATION is so committed. The *Time for Trees* initiative that you mentioned is we're going big and we're going big because we have to. The initiative plans to plant 100 million trees and inspire five million tree planters by the Summer of 2022. So, we have a few years to go. We're well on our way there and it's really pretty exciting.

JUDITH: It sounds it. Which is why I wanted to invite you here today. I don't think we can say enough about the importance of trees. And we know here, I'm in the Northeast, that a couple of our trees are suffering from the

Emerald Ash borer. We have the woolly adelgid infestation here on our Eastern Hemlocks. We see a lot of trees destroyed for logging, irresponsible logging I might add, and we see trees destroyed because of weather conditions. We're a very compact state, so you can't really get lost in the State of Connecticut. You know there's always a road somewhere and you constantly see the utility companies out there cutting down trees. I understand the reasons why they do that, but I would like to see more public awareness of what these utility companies are doing to replace and replant the trees.

WOODY: Well I agree with you that the public awareness of what they're doing is important. I think that the reason why utility companies in particular have to do it is largely because of safety and also just being able to deliver the electricity that they're served to deliver. But that means it needs to be responsible. It needs to be: plant two for every one you have to cut down.

We have a program called *Tree Line USA* that recognizes utility companies across the country for best practices in pruning. I mean you can often manage trees in such a way that they coexist beautifully with power line, for example. And I think the same thing with forestry. There's irresponsible forestry or just cutting down trees and then there's responsible forestry and in New England there are some wonderful examples of forest managers or property owners who know how to selectively harvest several trees for their benefit. They know how to replace those with the right kind. You mentioned the hemlock devastation and the Emerald Ash Borer hitting ash trees so hard. Responsible forestry means sometimes you have to remove trees, but you also have to replace them. And sometimes you have to replace them with a little bit of diversity. You know here in the Mid West we're seeing a lot of the ash trees being intentionally saved through arborist activities, but many are, the expanse is so great they have to come down and we're seeing them replaced with beautiful trees like Linden, Kentucky Coffee tree, oaks, maples. So, it's just a matter of getting the right trees in the right place and in a way we're kind of helping Mother Nature just with the infestations that our trees are being faced with, often invasive infestation, you know we have to help out.

JUDITH: Tell us something then, how does your *Time for Trees* help? Is *Time for Trees* program to get education and trees into the environment or do they do a lot of education on other levels as well when communities decide to put trees up?

WOODY: Yeah, *Time for Trees* is really a comprehensive initiative again to get 100 million trees planted across the globe and to inspire five million tree planters in order to make that happen. And it's truly an initiative to get trees planted. There's several ways that we're doing that and several ways that we're measuring that.

First and foremost is reforestation and here in America our National Forests are being devastated by fires and insects and disease and worldwide it's also the case. I mean worldwide we lost the equivalent of forests, trees to cover a forest the size of New Zealand last year and that's just...we have to get busy to replace those. We have to replant those. So, we've got huge reforestation programs here in the United States. We work with the National Association of State Foresters. We work with the U.S. Forest Service. We work with private landowners in California right now who just need help replacing the trees that were lost. And we've got amazing reforestation work going on in Madagascar, in Indonesia, in Peru and it's really important projects that are just restoring so many of the forests that were lost.

At a community level too, we have a program that's become very important for us called Community Tree Recovery and when a community or an area is hit by a tornado, by a hurricanes, by wildfires or other natural disasters, in the wake of that disaster we've got citizens, people who are just hurting. And while insurance may cover the buildings, gray infrastructure, you know what about the trees that were lost? So we have program where we go into a community, let's say Pensacola Florida this year that was hit so hard by Hurricane Michael last fall and giving away to residents free trees just to give them some hope and some restoration to try to bring back some of the life that was lost in the way of the green infrastructure and that happens...we're doing that in Texas. We're doing that in California, much like we did with Hurricane Sandy all along New Jersey coastline. That program is really widely favored. People love it. I mean people cry when they show up and they say, "You mean this tree is free?" and yes, it's free. It's yours. Please plant it. They're just so overjoyed and that's really moving and that's the impact that we want to see. Yes, we get to count the trees towards our *Time for Trees* initiative but we're also recruiting a new tree planter, somebody who's now inspired to plant a tree. And more than anything it's just bringing open healing back to a community. So those are a few examples of what we're doing.

JUDITH: Those are wonderful examples because many years ago there was a community in Connecticut that was devastated by a hurricane. It was a typical New England town where you have these beautiful, I believe some of them were elms, oaks and maples lining the town street. It was a small town here in New England and the hurricane came in like somebody was bowling and just knocked down all the trees on this beautiful boulevard that was the Main Street of town. It created a feeling of such devastation. To just have your organization come in and offer trees, when you're already facing the paperwork with insurance companies, the loss of perhaps your pets and part of your structure of your home has to be very fulfilling for you to see that across the country.

WOODY: Yeah it is. It's, that's why I love coming to work every day. I mean we're giving back. We're putting all of our effort into making our world at a neighborhood level, at a community level, at a statewide level and a global level just greener and healthier for this and future generations. The only hard part about this work that I can quickly go over is that trees take awhile to grow and so we're doing this work for posterity, if you will, so that...we're planting all these trees for future generations.

JUDITH: Yes, that's true because 25 years later this community now has their street built back up. People have trees in their neighborhood and in their yard, so you have to be patient, as you mentioned, with trees. Obviously, there are a few under story trees we could plant in the meantime that might give us a little punch for our dollar but it's still a work in progress. And I like what you said about leaving a community better after devastation for the future generations because that's really one of the themes of this podcast. How can we understand sustainability? And sustainability means not just leaving something for somebody but leaving it better for somebody down the road. And I'm talking about generations down the road. I don't want my grandkids or their grandkids to have a devastated planet, you know? So, these kinds of projects contribute to that. I just read an article today. I don't know if you know anything about it, but folks in India recently just planted millions of trees in this one district.

WOODY: Yes. It's amazing. In India, in particular in India and Pakistan, in China and in Australia has another huge initiative going on where people get it. Not enough people unfortunately, but that's why we're here. But it's so important. And again, trees are a unifier but if we can get this movement

rolling where millions of trees can get planted, it's going to make a difference and we have to do it. That's why we're doing it.

JUDITH: Right. Well I think one of the key components of trees that a lot of folks don't understand is the carbon sequestration that occurs and how they deflect the rain runoff at such a capacity that it doesn't end up in our storm drains so they're two different issues, I realize that, but the storm drain issue alone is huge in cities because it captures all the garbage and who knows what else goes down the storm drain and then that ends up in our river ways and ends up in our streets. It ends up down in the ocean and trees mitigate that. They help prevent some of that huge amount of water from being washed away.

WOODY: Yes, so I'll give you a little fun fact Judith. These 100 million trees that we're set out to plant in the next three years, those trees will cause 7.1 billion cubic meters of avoided water runoff absorbed. And just to put that in context, that's enough water to give every person on earth a bottle of water every day for 5 years. So, trees are just a magnificent resource for water. They soak it up before that storm water runoff can wash oil and other pollutants off into our sewers and water systems. You know another interesting story, New York City back about 15 years ago, the city government really balked at a six billion dollar water treatment plan. Instead they decided to invest in easements to keep and maintain beautiful riparian forests up in the Delaware watershed up in the Catskills. And today New York City has some of the purest drinking water in the world and it's because they know trees can do the job. And we try to make sure people can always understand that.

JUDITH: I didn't know that about New York City. I have read, I'm going to say maybe 10 years ago, about Bette Midler's initiative for the NYC of planting 3,000 trees along one of the major waterways. I don't know if that's come about but that was certainly an ambitious project.

WOODY: Yeah, the New York Restoration Project was a wonderful example of a local non-profit. We work with them and as with many of our non-profits across the country to make sure that everybody is working in the same direction and the same page, but it's a great organization that Bette Midler has.

JUDITH: Now let me ask you this, this is a very practical question. That's a lot of trees you're trying to plant, 100 million trees. Where do you get them?

WOODY: Great question. Well as we work with, let's say the U.S. Forest Service for example they have nurseries set-up on Forest Service lands across the country. They collect seeds from pinecones. Those seeds are germinated, and they're grown in nurseries and then when the time comes, say usually about 18 months later the trees are big enough and hardy enough where they're ready to get transplanted back. Planting crews gather up all those trees or take the truck loads of those trees and climb the mountainsides to get them planted. The same is true with state forest. They often have their own state nursery where those trees are grown. And I mentioned Madagascar. This is a wonderful story where there's a local...there's an organization called the Madagascar Biodiversity Project and they have twenty-one nurseries, tree nurseries, where they collect seeds. They grow them and then they employ impoverished Madagascar citizens. They pay them. They get a wonderful working wage so they can afford to send their children to school but they've planted in the last, since 2002, we've helped them plant 2.6 million trees to restore deforestation and provide habitat for endangered wildlife while employing impoverished people. So, it's just...again, where do the trees come from? They're grown from native seed in a tree nursery and that's the trees that are getting planted in forests.

JUDITH: Can private citizens contribute to that to?

WOODY: In terms of donations or funding or ...

JUDITH: In terms of growing some trees for the forestry services?

WOODY: You know I don't know. I really don't know. I have not heard of that actually. I know that there are foresters, private foresters, who do grow seeds, who have nurseries where they grow seed stock for replanting in their own area, but I don't know, I have not heard of people donating seedlings to the U.S. Forest Service.

JUDITH: Hmm, I'll have to look into that in my neck of the woods and see what's going on there because that's a lot of trees Woody.

WOODY: Lot of trees but it's not enough though. We set our sight on 100 million because we think, we're pretty confident that we can accomplish that in three years' time. I mean we're already a third of the way there Judith.

JUDITH: Wow.

WOODY: So, I'm so excited that we seem to be having some help. This *Time for Trees Initiative* is, well it got your attention. I'm so happy for that and it's getting the attention of some Fortune 500 companies that are really stepping up and doing their part. Some of those companies you know are voluntarily off-setting their carbon footprint through trees. They're giving enough of a donation where we can plant enough trees that will create a carbon off-set for them and that's really exciting too when corporations voluntarily want to do that. There's no law that says they have to. There's no carbon tax. There's no price of carbon but they're just doing it because it's the right thing to do.

JUDITH: Right. And you know on that level I had a chance to be a part of developing the superintendent of school's building in a town in Virginia and it was I don't know how many acres. I want to say 10-20 acres of land. It was a square brick building set-off the land, and we were asked as Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists for Wildlife to plan out the grounds of this building. They divided us up into five groups and we each had a section to sort of plan out. And without talking to each other, we all created a walking trail that would have health and fitness markers as well as wildlife markers around this building, not to mention the trees and the plants etc. And the difficulty was is that there were no funds for the town to do this. And it was such an exciting project to be a part of but there were no funds for them to see it through at that time. So, I would love to see corporations not only give money towards these projects but to look at their space and to relandscape their space so that it's more diverse.

WOODY: Yep, I agree. And many do. It's unfortunate that, especially school districts, seem like they're forever not having enough funding to do the right thing. But there are many corporations who do take great pride in their campus and really want to make sure that they're planting trees for water and for air quality and for saving energy because of the shading effect but also just the restorative value that it has on people, you know reducing stress or providing healing or improving cognitive ability, improving memory. Green spaces, not just trees but green spaces, the walking trail you

mentioned, shrubs, flowers in combination with trees is just so therapeutic and so...I mean it just builds for human well being. I think a lot of companies are getting behind that, just knowing the value of what it takes to have a person restored over the lunch hour because they're getting to eat their lunch out at a picnic table in the shade, they've got better productivity for the rest of the day than somebody who's cooped up.

JUDITH: Right and if we look at our bottom line that's always an incentive, so more productivity, happier people produce better. The creative juices flow. It's a win/win for everyone in that situation, so I think those are good points.

Woody do you have three tips that we can give our listeners today that they can apply, very practical tips that they could apply in their daily life.

WOODY: Very practical tips, okay. I'm going to give an easy one, I think and that is water is a precious commodity. It's a precious resource. Water is a necessity of life. It's something that we depend on every day. We can't make up something else, create something else to take its place, but we can plant trees. And I think **just for the sake of water alone, if you can find a place to plant a tree, do it. It's...and there's always room for another tree.** If you go to a local nursery and find a redbud or a Japanese maple there's always room for another tree, even if it's a small under story ornamental. They do just as much good.

I think the second tip would be **encourage your community to get behind the trees.** We have a program called *Tree City U.S.A.* that's been going on for 45 years. You probably have driven through it, driven up to a town where a *Tree City U.S.A.* sign is out there welcoming visitors to their town. That's intentional. That community has a tree board or a tree ordinance. They've got an advocate within the city government who is advocating to make sure that they've got funding for their community forest, and that's so important. And if you are in a *Tree City U.S.A.* be proud of it and acknowledge your city counsel person. That's a wonderful thing. And if you're not a *Tree City U.S.A.* I would encourage you to get a hold of a council person or get a hold of the local parks and rec director, whoever it might be, and say hey, how come Bedford over there is doing it and we're not? This is silly. So number two is **encourage urban forestry management.**

JUDITH: Thank you. That's a good one.

WOODY: And then finally, I guess the third one would be **help spread the word**. Help this movement work. If you'd like to, if I can give you some on-line resources where people can go to so that they can be equipped to help spread the word. So that in itself is just a huge benefit to the world and hopefully doesn't take a lot of effort.

JUDITH: I would love you to do that. Can you give us a couple of those resources now? We also do a transcript for every podcast so that information will be listed there and on my website.

WOODY: Okay.

JUDITH: But if you could give us a heads up today that would be wonderful.

WOODY: Very simply one website is [www.ArborDay.org](http://www.ArborDay.org) that is the Arbor Day Foundation's website. They're you're just going to find just all kinds of information on the best ways to plant trees, the best way to care for trees. You can learn how to join and become a member of the Arbor Day Foundation and for \$15 we'll send you 10 free trees. You can buy trees from our on-line nursery. And just all kinds of great educational material too for ordinary lay people to even Master Gardeners and especially we've got great information for city management professionals. The other website is [www.timefortrees.org](http://www.timefortrees.org) and Time for Trees.org lays out some of the details of what we're doing, how we're restoring forests. We're building vibrant communities and we're recruiting tree planters in our effort to accomplish our goals and there's a lot of good information there. There's a tool kit where you can find access to some interesting facts and there's a great way to donate. There's a great way to give us an e-mail address and we'll keep you informed. Again, [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org) and [www.timefortrees.org](http://www.timefortrees.org)

JUDITH: That is wonderful. I know that's how I found you and I'm so grateful for our discussion today. As I said in the beginning, I don't think we can say enough about the value of trees in our landscape and you've really highlighted some really important key points. And it's heartening to know that there are a lot of folks out there who are planting trees today.

WOODY: Well there are. Judith it's been a pleasure to share and I'm so pleased to meet you, who I feel is a kindred spirit in making our world greener and healthier.

JUDITH: Well thank you Woody. I appreciate that.

So, I want to thank everyone for joining us at The Holistic Nature of Us. And I hope you do feel as inspired by Woody's talk. His tips and the information he shared with us today. I know I certainly do and I'm grateful.

This is Judith Dreyer. I'm the author of "At the Garden's Gate", book and blog. My book is available through my website [www.judithdreyer.com](http://www.judithdreyer.com) as well as several distribution arms such as Amazon, Nook, Goodreads and more. And again, I'd like to remind all of you that a transcript is available for each podcast. And please like and share them. Let's support each other and get the word out.

And remember, **now** is the time for practical action and profound inner change so we value our world again.

Enjoy your day.