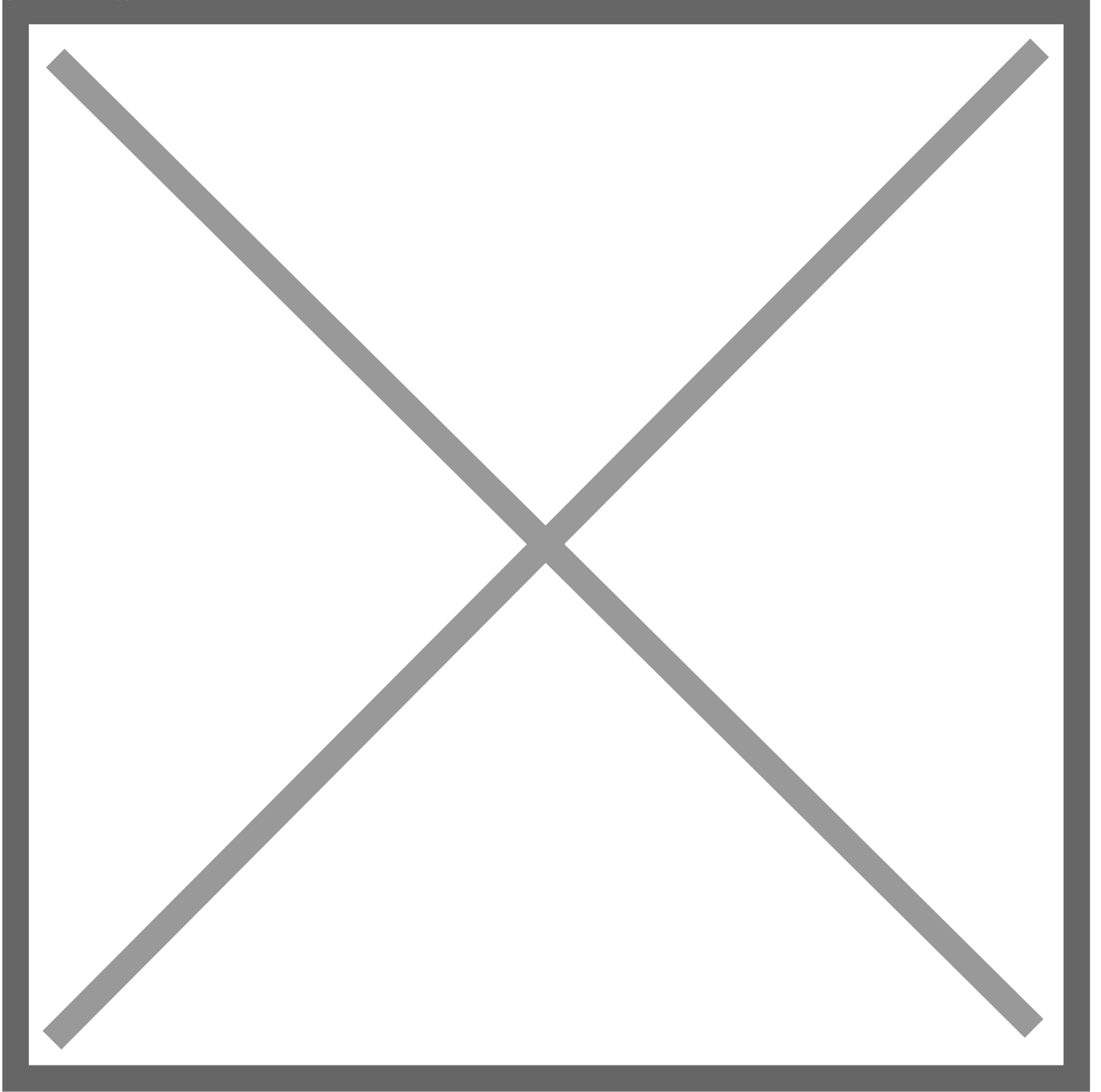


33: Toyota In the Wild

April 14, 2021

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Outdoor enthusiasts around the world depend on Toyota to get them to new and exciting places — and, even more importantly, to get them back.

Pack your positive attitude for this adventurous episode of Toyota Untold. We talk accessibility, capability, and, yes, philosophic outlook with champion angler Gerald Swindle, outdoors YouTuber Mike Pfeiffer, and adventure photographer Dan Krauss.

With experience all over the map — off-roading, overlanding, climbing, photography, biking, two Bassmaster Angler of the Year titles, and well over half a million social media followers — this group delivers on advice and relatability, empowering anyone with an adventurous itch to scratch it and watch the magic happen.

Kelsey Soule: [00:00:00] Hey, everyone. We just need to read you a couple disclaimers. I know, I know, but believe me, they're for your own good. So, modifications on cars may void warranty, impact performance and safety, and may not be street legal. Off-roading is inherently dangerous. Abusive use may result in bodily harm or vehicle damage. Wear your seatbelt at all times and do not allow passengers in the cargo area. Okay. So, now that we got through the heavy stuff, let's have some fun.

Intro: [00:00:30] [Intro]

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:00:57] The great outdoors is an American staple with all the wide-open land we have here in the United States, and Toyota is well known for vehicles that help you get out there, and more importantly, help you make it back. On the podcast today, we have an eclectic group of adventure seekers all infatuated with exploring nature and all with ties back to great Toyota vehicles.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:18] Gerald Swindle, Mike Pfeiffer, and Dan Krauss all have unique backgrounds that have led them into different outdoor lifestyles, be it adventure photography, overlanding, or even professional angling. Yeah, that's fishing. Mike Pfeiffer, better known by his YouTube channel and Instagram handle, Last Line of Defense, is a content creator who is enthusiastic about off-roading, overlanding, and general adventuring in the great outdoors.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:01:51] Scrolling through overlanding videos on YouTube has a tendency to give people the impression that it's out of reach, that these off-roading experts with tens of thousands of dollars of gear probably know something you don't and have gear that you'll never have. But tuning into Mike's content, you get the sense that it's attainable. This is actually possible. You can throw a tent in the back of your Tacoma and just get out of the city, no strings attached. Mike gladly shares his advice for getting into overlanding, but first, we ask how he got the bug for the outdoor lifestyle.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:02:23] I went to high school in Hawaii. And so, we went out on the beaches, and some dirt roads, and didn't do a whole lot, did like a little bit of camping. But really, ever since I could drive, I've kind of been into off-road vehicles, and then kind of continued the trend. I went to college in Chico, Chico State, so that's just the neighboring town of Paradise and a bunch of my college buddies grew up in Paradise. And that whole town is big into Toyotas, and wheeling up in the mountains and everything. So, that's really where I got tied into kind of the Toyota community and heritage.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:02:56] And there's a bunch of FJ40s up there and old pre-Tacomas, just the Toyota pickups and stuff like that. And that's kind of where I got exposed to just how big kind of Toyotas were in the off-roading community. And yeah, kind of just been into off-roading the outdoors ever since. I moved out to Colorado a decade or so ago, and done a fair bit of backpacking, and hiking, and camping, and fly-fishing, and stuff like that, and then kind of just naturally evolved towards taking my truck out and doing some camping out in the mountains out of the vehicle. And I loved it. And the rest is kind of history, as they say.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:03:34] The first element of overlanding is obviously your vehicle. For most folks, a 4Runner, Tacoma, Tundra, or in my case, my Lexus GX. And you might be surprised just how much your vehicle can do right off the showroom floor. In prepping to go off-road for the first time, many people think you

need thousands of dollars of modifications, lift kits, winches, bumper, but Mike explains how capable a stock Toyota can actually be off-road.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:04:00] And it is. It's really just doing it. It's taking the first step, I guess. If you've never taken your truck off-road and camped out of it, it seems probably pretty intimidating. And that's a question I get asked a lot, is like, could a stock Tacoma make it there? And usually, the answer is yes. I remember when I first got into it, I was like, there's no way I could drive over that, and it just goes right up and over it. So, probably, when you're starting at your vehicle, it's more capable than you are, which is kind of good, because you don't want to go too crazy, or break things, or flip, or anything.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:04:35] If you have a stock Toyota or a stock 4Runner, chances are you can get to 90% of these places that I'm going and taking these pictures in. And I mean, somebody, a skilled driver in a bone stock 4Runner will be able to get to more places than somebody that has no idea what they're doing with the big lift, and big tires, and stuff like that. Granted, the real combo, the winning combo is having both. I do hope that I inspire people to get out there and I'm not necessarily inspiring people to build a crazy rig.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:05:12] There's one basic upgrade that makes a huge difference, though. If you plan on leaving the dealership and heading straight out into the wild, be sure to stop and swap out your tires for something more off-road-worthy.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:05:25] Typically, vehicles are sold from the dealership with tires that perform well on the road. And if you're going to do a lot of time off-road, then you want to get a tire, probably, that is going to do better off-road. So, an all-terrain tire is a good place to go. I use BFG KO2s, which are kind of a tried-and-true tire that does pretty good on the road, but also is really capable off-road as well. And really, that's going to be your best upgrade as far as being able to get you from point A to point B, is just getting a set of tires that is a little more designed to go off-road. You don't need to do anything crazy like mud terrain or anything like that.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:06:04] Mike's advice for gear, very much echoing the idea of taking a stock vehicle out into nature is simple. Don't let a lack of gear prevent you from going. The best way to start is bring what you already have, do a short trip, gauge what you were lacking that could have made the trip more enjoyable, and plan to bring it next time. If you're not going to extreme locations, it's really that simple.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:06:27] I talk a lot about gear and preparations, and how to do this, and how to do that, but it's really pretty easy just to get out there. I always try to tell people like don't get too caught up in the gear, especially if you're just starting out. Like you're a bone stock Tacoma, or a bone stock 4Runner, or a GX, can get you to a lot of places, and you just go buy a cheap tent at Walmart or something, and go set it up, and see if you like it first.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:06:55] And you go out a couple of times, and see what you're missing or what you might want to add gear-wise, and just slowly kind of add what makes sense and what works for you, because the setup that I have, yeah, it's kind of extreme, and definitely, not everybody needs it. And I think if you go even just one time, you'll say, that was great, I realized I should have brought another blanket.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:07:18] And the next time you bring another blanket, and then really, it's much better, where you're like, oh, maybe instead of trying to prepare a five-course meal, I should have just brought some hot dogs, which is another thing I kind of get made fun of, because I just do like easy meals a lot. And then, I would say, the next thing would be just knowing your vehicle, and the limitations, and the capabilities of your vehicle. So, it's not really something you would add on to it necessarily, but just go out.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:07:46] And typically, it would be great to go out with other people, potentially some people that are more experienced, so they could spot you, they could tell you what you could go over and what you

can't go over. But there are classes and there are big events like Overland Expo is a big one, where you can go to this event and you can actually sign up for classes. So, it will have like a winch class, or a beginner off-road class, or recovery gear class, or whatever. So, you can pick some of these classes, and then there's actual instructors. So, if you're just getting into it and you're more of the formal education kind of person, there are courses and classes.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:08:22] So, you've got your 4Runner or your Tacoma and you've got your first batch of camping gear, a cooler, some food, the last vital pieces, where are you going to sleep? Do you bring a tent or fold down your 4Runner seats and cozy up inside?

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:08:35] As I got older and started getting just more into the outdoors in general via backpacking or whatever, then I was like, okay, yeah, let's take this vehicle and let's use it for some camping, so I slept in the bed of the truck. I think the first couple of times, I used to do backpacking, and I just would bring a backpacking tent, and camp on the ground as usual. And then, I got, I think they're just called like a truck tent or something.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:09:02] Yeah. Let's throw a tent into the truck, and take it out, and kind of like camp close to the truck versus throwing a backpack in camp 20 miles from the truck or something. It kind of just like Velcros into the bed of your truck, and you just set it up, and it's just like a tent that you set up in the bed of your truck. And I use that for a little bit. And then, I was like, I really want a rooftop tent, so I got a rooftop tent and tried that.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:09:25] The rooftop tent seems to kind of be a rite of passage for overlanding. Once you put that home away from home on your roof rack, you've crossed the threshold from interest to obsession.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:09:34] Probably, what put me firmly into the "overland" world was, hey, I want to throw a rooftop tent on the top of my Tacoma. And then, once I did that, I guess, I don't know, there's no turning back at that point, where it kind of unlocked the next phase of vehicle modifications and stuff for me, I guess, on the Tacoma. If you have a tent that's just like strapped to your truck all the time and you have some gear, in some cases, whenever I want to go, it just takes me five minutes to get ready, I just drive the truck.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:10:08] And when I find a place that I want to camp, I just pop the tent up in 60 seconds and I'm ready to go. So, for me, it's less about creating a luxurious environment or glamping, it's more just making it easy and attainable, because a lot of my stuff is just, I go out on the weekends or whatever, maybe leave on a Friday night and come back on a Saturday, just like a quick trip. So, the amount of time I can shave off with packing, and set up, and tear down, and coming back, it all kind of adds up if I'm just getting out for a night.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:10:38] So, the rooftop tent aspect for me anyways is really just ease. It makes it easier for me to camp. And yeah, safety is kind of a secondary benefit. And then, yeah, this will sound kind of more glampy, but it's a little cleaner. You throw a tent on the ground when it's raining or a snow is melting off, there's mud, and there's rocks, and dirt, and this, and that. And so, when your tent is just on the roof of your car, it keeps it cleaner as well. So, I mean, there's really a ton of benefits to it.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:11:06] And it represents much more than convenience and efficiency. Mike shared a bit about where the rooftop tent craze originated and how it can keep you safe.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:11:15] Yeah. And that's kind of is popularized, yeah, maybe in South Africa, and Australia, and stuff, where I think that rooftop tents kind of originated. I don't know which one of those. But yeah, over there, there's a lot of animals that can kill you, less so here in America. But if I was in a place where—I mean, maybe Florida or something. If I was in a place where there were animals that I was worried about like crawling around on the ground and getting to me, then the rooftop tents would certainly add a sense of security. But if a

grizzly bear really wanted to get up there, they could. But it does keep you away from the bugs, and the snakes, and the scorpions, and all of those kinds of critters that could definitely get you. So, there's definitely a safety aspect.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:12:03] So, with all that in mind, we had to hear about Mike's Tacoma. Although he wouldn't want gear or mods to prevent anyone from getting their adventure fix, he hasn't shied away from decking out has to commit to something truly aspirational in the overlanding community. And with that, this is a reminder that modifying your vehicle with non-genuine parts can negatively affect your warranty, safety performance, and straight legality.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:12:28] Yeah, I don't know. People have told me that I have the most famous Tacoma. It's just parked in my garage like any other Tacoma. But yeah, it's pretty recognizable, I guess. I have a third-gen Tacoma, so 2016 when I bought a new vehicle, and I've had a couple of trucks in the past, and SUVs, and everything like that before, so the Tacoma wasn't my first truck. But the Tacoma was my first brand-new truck. So, when I went to buy my first brand-new truck, I was like, I'm going to buy a truck and I'm going to keep this for a long time.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:13:01] So, what truck kind of fits my lifestyle that will be a good fit for a long time, will be nimble enough and fit everything I need? So, I did a lot of thinking and landed on the third-gen Tacoma, because I like the styling and everything, and I know they've always been off-road capable. And I got the TRD off-road, so it has the locker and some of the other traction-control-type features. It's probably my most iconic vehicle. It's the one I kind of use the most, looks kind of crazy, and has been great.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:13:32] I bought that one brand new and it's wrapped right now. It's like a black camo, MultiCam black wrap. And under that is the Quicksand color. I was like, oh, that Quicksand color is so cool and it's just tactical, and it's unique—I mean, not really unique, because Toyota has done some of those colors in the past, but I really wanted it. So, I got on like the list and got kind of one of the first ones that was out. They're everywhere now, which is cool. It's not necessarily a con, but when I first got it, I was like, this is so cool. Like there's nobody with this kind of truck, and yada, yada, yada.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:14:03] And so, that was kind of my pride and joy for a while. I bought it just bone stock from a dealership, and then kind of slowly added to it. It wasn't like an overnight transformation or anything, it's over the course of a couple of years. And it was really an intentional build. I use it, and I go, and I wheel, and I camp, and I go out. And so, it was a process of kind of figuring out what I wanted to add, and then adding that. It wasn't just like I bought it, and designed to build, and shipped it off to a shop, and had it done. I do most of the stuff just out of my own garage. And yeah, it's just a slow evolutionary process. So, it's been a wild ride and a lot of fun.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:14:44] Nature photography is truly aspirational. The things you see when you're scrolling on Instagram can get you amped up to get out there. Our next guest, Dan Krauss, is the guy responsible for many of those photos. He's a thrill seeker who's turned his love of the outdoors into a full-fledged career of adventure photography, working with top brands like Red Bull, YETI Coolers, and Patagonia.

Dan Krauss: [00:15:07] So, my day-to-day work, at least now at this point in my life, I do a lot of commercial campaigns for outdoor brands with people like YETI Coolers, and Marmot Mountain Gear, Patagonia, a bunch of different companies. Really, the exciting thing is showcasing the magic of the outdoors and how people interact with their environments. Once I got into rock climbing, I got into photography around the same time and I actually went to college for photojournalism.

Dan Krauss: [00:15:37] So, I got a degree thinking being a photojournalist was like the actual way you could make money as a photographer. And I mean, it is for some people, but I was living in LA when I started my

career and just started freelancing. Like I just moved straight there from Ohio, and just started freelancing, refused to get another job, and here I am, just a kid out of college trying to figure out how to build a business.

Dan Krauss: [00:16:04] So, I did that for about four or five years. So, I was like, well, if I'm going to be broke, I may as well shoot what I really like shooting, so I started putting more of an effort into documenting like climbing trips I would go on, and then kind of going into different fields of sports where I'd follow athletes. And that brought me into skiing. That brought me into mountain biking, trail running.

Dan Krauss: [00:16:28] Really, everything I've gotten into with all my personal interests has kind of come from wanting to photograph at first or it's just something that I've been interested in and just thought like, oh, this makes sense, I'll photograph this, and you'll figure after a couple of years of that and actually making an effort to do more adventure work, it actually started paying way better than photojournalism did.

Dan Krauss: [00:16:51] And yeah, kind of completely did a 180 in the dream job that it wasn't really a realistic goal when I got into photography. Like ironically, that ended up being what made me the most money and made me the happiest. Yeah, super weird. I guess it's just a lesson that you really got to go with your gut, and shoot what you want to shoot or do whatever you want to do, and the rest will kind of follow, because if you've got that passion, and energy, and joy from what you're doing, you're going to put all of your effort you can into it.

Tyler Lichenberger: [00:17:22] Dan has been perfectly located in the southwest, moving from Ohio to Los Angeles, and then to Salt Lake City. And so, some of the United States' most beautiful natural areas have been right at his fingertips. Leaving the city and ending up in the remote desert in a matter of hours is a perfect scenario for a photographer like Dan. That kind of life requires a certain type of gear, and not just camera equipment, but the right vehicle, too. Dan shares how smaller cars just weren't the right fit for his working environment and how he fell in love with his 4Runner.

Dan Krauss: [00:17:56] So, I had moved to Utah, and I was driving the Highlander, and I was down in southern Utah, and I was out by the old Red Bull Rampage like mountain biking courses, and it had rained a ton. So, exiting that, I was off-roading and I get to this really steep section of highway that had a hard left turn and a river below, like no barrier at all. And it's the kind of mud that it just turns to clay and everything just slides. And after that, I was like, okay, I need a real SUV with real off-road tires.

Dan Krauss: [00:18:33] Like I can't just keep doing this. So, I sold that pretty quickly, and got a 4Runner, and then lifted that, threw a mattress in it, and I would drive that thing all around the country, and live out of it for like two or three weeks at a time, climbing, biking, and sleeping in there. And it was the most comfortable car I've ever been able to sleep in. You can sleep two people and a dog in there like no problem and you can drive it anywhere. So, you can get to all of these places where you won't see other people or other cars, because most of them can't make it.

Dan Krauss: [00:19:08] And I really like that privacy in the outdoors where you're not surrounded by people. Otherwise, I feel like it drives as well as any sedan I've driven, but then I can go off-road it. And even off-roading, it feels like a Cadillac, which I thought they've done a really good job with the TRD, the trail of the SR5, and then the Limited. And I like the SR5, because it gives you the option to make a lot of your off-road modifications by yourself how you like to do it. Like my buddy with his TRD, it's got a great suspension system in it and he can do a ton of off-roading.

Tyler Lichenberger: [00:19:45] An SUV makes it possible not only to get to a location, but also to act as a pseudo-production assistant for Dan on his shoots. When he's not sleeping in the back of the 4Runner, he has it loaded up with gear, luggage, rigging, and more.

Dan Krauss: [00:20:00] So, it's kind of one of those things where I don't necessarily plan it around the car, but the cars never inhibit me from getting there. Like I know pretty much anything I throw at a 4Runner, I can get through it. So, the main thing that keeps me with 4Runners is the reliability, but really, like I need to pack that car full of so much different gear. I'll go on a trip where I've got to bring a mountain bike, I've got to bring climbing gear, multiple ropes, because it's not just me going climbing.

Dan Krauss: [00:20:31] I've got to bring ropes for me to rig, and then rappel down and ascend up, so I can shoot climbers on the wall. Not only that, but a lot of times, if I'm doing like a big campaign shoot with a clothing brand, I've got like four duffel bags, five duffel bags of clothes just to shoot, like not including my camera gear, or outdoor gear, technical gear, or any of that.

Dan Krauss: [00:20:53] So, on this last one I did a couple of weeks ago, it was the first one I took my new car on, and luckily, I put a roof rack on it, but this thing was so loaded that I probably had a thousand pounds of gear between me, and my girlfriend, and all of the gear. And yeah, I had to drive that down all these crazy off-road roads, and yeah, I had to take it across a river at one point. And we're driving for like five hours, we're at the last five miles to get to our location, and we get to this river crossing, where the road literally just goes into the river and we're like looking around to see where the other side is. It was out in Capitol Reef area.

Dan Krauss: [00:21:37] And like the road just kind of continues, I don't know, 200 feet down the river, and then it just starts again. So, I had to kind of go like way to cross it to see how deep it was. So, you don't want to go faster without having a snorkel, because then you're pushing more water in front of the car, but they actually keep water from getting into your intake. And yeah, like you can trash a car by just getting water in the engine.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:22:04] So, some snorkels are just for vanity for the way that you want your car to look, some actually serve a purpose, like if you're using it and you're not going into water, you use it as a desert air intake manifold, which is what you call it when you're using it in your own sand, because you definitely don't want sand going into your engine. So, what exactly is the purpose of a snorkel off-road?

Dan Krauss: [00:22:29] No, they actually work. Me and my buddy with the GX had a conversation about, oh, man, it might be snorkel time. So, if you're going too fast, you're pushing more water at a greater mass in front of the hood, so it actually makes it deeper for the car. So, you really want to go kind of slow without stirring up too much water and you don't want it splashing around where it actually gets higher. So, you just kind of wade through, and go slow, and hope you got the clearance you need. And like some cars are built for going through that kind of stuff. And yes, some have like actual ratings on the car when you buy it like how deep of water you can take it through.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:23:07] Snorkels, lifts, tires, that's all great, but any 4Runner owner knows the real best feature, it's the rear gate window.

Dan Krauss: [00:23:16] I've got a little 20 pound, he's a Pomsy, so a Pomeranian-Husky. Looks like a little Arctic fox. A lot of times, if I'm going to do something where I'm on a weekend trip with my dog, but there's some times where it's a little too technical, and there's more climbing involved, and it just becomes more of a pain in the ass. So, yeah, but I really like the rear slide-down window. It's just nice. I'll open that up when we're driving, and he'll just go pop his head out, rest his head on it. I loved being able to put the window down, especially if the car is all load it up, and I've got a mountain bike on the back on a rack, and I can actually like lift the tailgate up, I could just roll that down, grab something from the cooler.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:24:00] Dan has had some Land Cruisers come into play during shoots as well. This off-road legend has been holding strong generation after generation, testing its worth in the world's toughest remote locations like the Australian Outback. Turns out it's not too shabby as a production vehicle either.

Dan Krauss: [00:24:17] I spent three weeks traveling through Bolivia, and we were in this group, like our guides had like four old Land Cruisers with like 400,000 miles apiece on them and we're literally just driving like six, seven hours through open desert at like 15,000 feet of elevation. And we don't see anything or anyone for, sometimes, days. And then, like the salt flats out there, the biggest in the world, driving across those is nuts.

Dan Krauss: [00:24:45] But yeah, seeing the capability of those cars and knowing that they're driving it across the salt flats all the time, they're not washing these things regularly, at one point, we actually like got in an accident with our caravan. I was in the car that rear-ended another one, and the guys, just like at our next stop, we were in this place called Sajama, which is, I don't know, probably five to seven hours from La Paz, which is the big city out there, and they just took hammers, and just like bashed that car into like a new car.

Dan Krauss: [00:25:17] You could not have told that it was in an accident three days before. And they just fixed it with whatever parts they had on them or they could find around this little village. Yeah, it's amazing what people can do on the side of a trail with Toyotas and like getting them running again or just even getting them out. Like my last 4Runner, it never died anywhere that like put me in a sticky situation.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:25:42] You don't need a gig with Red Bull to get outside of your ZIP code and experience our great national parks or public use land. We asked Dan if he had any advice for someone wanting to go off-road for the first time.

Dan Krauss: [00:25:54] Just start small. I felt that same anxiety for years, mainly because I knew the significant impacts of driving in a car your car is not ready for. And I have really slowly built my confidence up with what my cars can do, but that was all through trial and error. And you can just take it on like a little foyer road or a dirt road, and get the feel for how it handles, how fast you can drive it, work your way up to a washboard road.

Dan Krauss: [00:26:22] That's when over time with like desert roads, they kind of just make these ridges in the road, so when you're driving over it, it's just like doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo. It's just millions of speed bumps. And then, from there, you can start going up steeper hills or do some light rock crawling. It also helps to go with someone else that can tow you out if you get into a sticky situation. But yeah. These cars are built, even stock, to handle more than anyone is really going to drive them.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:26:54] Sounds similar to what Mike had to say earlier on. I think we're noticing a trend here. Getting out in the wild and disconnecting is much more accessible and possible than most of us tend to think. Before we got online to interview our next guests, I had actually been chatting with Allyn Pierce, who was on Episodes 2 and 19 of the podcast, and he saved me from something really embarrassing.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:27:17] I kept calling Gerald Swindle a fisherman, and Allyn just laughed, straight up laughed at me before correcting me and telling me that Gerald is actually an angler. The difference is a point of contention in the community, almost like calling a professional cyclist a biker by mistake. Wondering what fishing has to do with Toyota? Let's hear from Team Toyota athlete, Gerald Swindle, professional bass angler, and two-time Bassmaster Angler of the Year.

Gerald Swindle: [00:27:46] I was always competitive, and when I got a school fishing discount, I started to fill that void of wanting to do something to still keep competing at some level. And I speak a lot, and I do motivational speaking, and I speak to colleges and high school kids, and they're like, man, how did you get started? And I'm like, I think if you sit down, and wrote a roadmap, and said, hey, how do you get started? I probably went every way wrong. I just knew I wanted to do something in life better than framing houses.

Gerald Swindle: [00:28:12] And that's what I was doing. And I got to compete in my teenage years. And I started winning money. And I can remember driving back home from the lake when I would fish, I go four-hour tournament, we won like 300 bucks, and I'm like, the fact that I make money doing this, it's going to be hard to

get me to go to work. I'm going to tell you right now, I'm going to fish. So, I just kind of took it as just something that is a passion at first.

Gerald Swindle: [00:28:35] I can never say at 20 years old, I sit down, looked in the mirror, and said, I want to go fish the professional tour, be one of the top names in the sport, I just wanted to make more money than I did framing houses and it was just a passion. And I don't know, the road map was bumpy, but I did it. My father fished. He would fish in tournaments. My oldest brother's passed away. He was my fishing partner. My middle brother fished. My whole family has fished at some level and they hunted.

Gerald Swindle: [00:29:03] They were all always outdoors and play sports. So, kind of growing up, I had competed in a regional level. It was a pretty good size. I started local, then I got the regional. And I won a little bit of money, and I started trying to put money forward, and try to fish bigger events and bigger events. And in 1998, I had won a few boats. I had one an Angler of the Year in a smaller level tournament in FLW, and was released that they were going to have a whole \$150,000 cash prize tournament, I'm like, sign me up.

Gerald Swindle: [00:29:32] Well, I got put on the waiting list, I didn't get in, so they called me three days before the tournament, saying, if you drive to Beaver, Arkansas, Beaver, which is like 10 hours from my house, you can get in. At that time, it was unheard of. It was like a 3,000-dollar entry fee, and I'm like, I went, and with a short practice, and I won. I won \$150,000 and that was like the turning point in my career.

Gerald Swindle: [00:29:53] I can remember driving home, we still laugh about it, because I drove home, and went to the bank, and put the check in there, and I told the girl, the driver. I said, I want my soccer, I've been coming in here for five years now, putting stuff in the bank, I want my soccer, it's the biggest check I've got to deposit. But I can remember going back out at the job site, because at that time, I would still work in between tournaments. I would come home and jump on a framing crew.

Gerald Swindle: [00:30:14] We just go over to the restaurant or the cafe and I would—where I was from, everybody's framing houses, so if somebody needed help for the day, I was just a free agent. I would just go. I can remember coming home, and I was talking to my uncle, my brother, and I took my saw out of the truck, was getting ready, and I cut the handle out of my hammer. I had a wooden hammer, I just cut it off, and it was that part, I said, I will never be back. I will never, ever be back. And still to this day, I had never went back. I waited a long time, because of that hammer.

Gerald Swindle: [00:30:39] I like got up to go to work. I'm like, I'm getting up at 5:30, because I'm going over to tell them, I am never coming back. That's how bad you hate something. When people say, what makes you fish so hard? I hated framing houses. That's really where it comes from. I didn't have an open check, but my father didn't have an American Express. We were not financially like that at all. He said, if you want to do this, you're going to figure out on your own how to do it, because I can't afford to do it for you. So, being outside is all I ever remember as a kid.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:31:10] The way Gerald grew up being outdoors was just part of the equation, whether it was hunting, fishing, school sports, or helping his dad working around the house.

Gerald Swindle: [00:31:19] And one thing he instilled in me is you work, you work, you work. And once you don't have a knowledge at work, you outwork people. So, still to this day, I give my dad credit, this is work ethic. He was that guy. My dad was like a man's man. He's still alive today, he'll be like, he could outwork 10 people. He did never say no to nothing. If I said, you need to dig a ditch, he would get a shovel and start digging. And I'm like, that work ethic, I tell kids these days, I say, I don't mind if you want to fish, you want to play football, or you want to play basketball, you got to work.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:31:50] Hard work is different than natural talent. It's something you can apply intentionally to give yourself an advantage. When you're striving towards something that you believe in, never underestimate the value of hard work.

Gerald Swindle: [00:32:02] Sometimes, when people watching, it's easy to work. It's easy to go fishing when you're on Instagram, you're trying to make it look real cool, but you got to go fishing when it's raining and it's cold, and nobody's watching us. So, when I played sports, I never worried about somebody who ran fastest when the coach was watching, I worried about the guy who turned the lights on at the weight room every morning before anybody got there and worked out. I worried about the guy who shot three pointers when nobody's looking.

Gerald Swindle: [00:32:25] And I said, that's what fishing is all about, because a lot of times, it's not all about it, you're just outworking, and you have to have that mindset that I can do this, I can grind through it. I've seen guys that I compete against come out as rookies and just really suck for the first year or two, and I'm thinking, this guy can't find the boat ramp. He's clueless. And then, in two years, they've taught themselves at the highest level and became some of the top stakes out here.

Gerald Swindle: [00:32:50] And simply, it wasn't natural to them at first, they had to work at it, but they learned how to do it. And I mean, that's a cool concept. When you watch them like this guy came from learning every little bit, because a lot of people, like my dad fished, but a lot of guys that fish were living out of their parents, their mom, they come from single homes. Their parents didn't fish, so they have to really go out and teach themselves how to do it.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:33:13] Angling certainly has some similarities with other sports, persistence, dedication, but it has its own nuances and style that makes it unique. We asked Gerald how anglers go about practicing for tournaments.

Gerald Swindle: [00:33:26] There is a lot of strategy. We try to cover water. I have five electronic units on my boat that can read side to side. I'm reading out like 120 feet side to side. I'm reading in front of me and down under me. I'm studying the bottom layout out of the lake due to the time of year and I'm like covered in water. So, what I try to do is find an area of the lake that has either the most bait that the fish are following or the most fish in it.

Gerald Swindle: [00:33:48] And then, that's where you try to spend your tournament time, like it takes days to navigate around, and it's all stem and in timber. So, practice fishing, you're actually just learning how to navigate without running over something, where the fish or the most fish are, so you can go back. Just like if they're running practice laps at NASCAR, that's basically all you're doing here. You're trying to figure out how to get to a certain area and back without tearing nothing up, get a few bites in that area, and then leave.

Gerald Swindle: [00:34:13] So, we try to cover as much of the lake as we can, rule out everything, and then say, okay, this is my game plan and I'm going to do it on tournament day. It's a lot of like a psychological game. It's a lot like poker, reading personalities, reading body posture, how somebody stand, and are they confident in their boat? Just like a football game, where people talking smack, people can—I've had tournaments where I went and caught really, really giant weight in the first hour, and then spend the rest of the day riding around.

Gerald Swindle: [00:34:39] I was just fishing by random people just so you could make them think I was somewhere else. Spend the whole day just riding around, going yeah. Many people come in, they're like, well, he was here? No, he was over there. He was way down there. So, a lot of defense goes on in this. And you're betting on the river card a lot here, because like my strategy tomorrow, the area that I'm going to go start, we're fishing for 100 grand, and the classics on the line, which is our Super Bowl of ice fishing, we're all trying to make it in that, I'm going to an area where I think the fish have moved to.

Gerald Swindle: [00:35:07] I'm like guessing their next move. And they swim and they didn't read the book, but you're simply just guessing. It's like betting on the river card. And if I bet right and those fishes are headed to that current break, I'll be fine. It's a gut feeling. And I can't tell you how much money I've won and seeing other anglers win just on a gut feeling, because they'll say, what made you go to that particular area? I don't know. I just had a gut feeling. And that's no different than playing poker or a quarterback that makes a pass when people say there's no way that guy's supposed to be open.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:35:37] Hard work wasn't the only thing Gerald inherited from his childhood experiences. His background in archery and hunting has helped him prepare for tournaments and made him a better angler.

Gerald Swindle: [00:35:48] I think it does. I think they've been in the outdoors is the key, because certain weather patterns, and certain cold fronts, and certain type of day, animals move better, so you see more squirrels, more deer, everything moves. And then, there are some days when the weather's not right, and you don't see anything, and you kind of note that as a fisherman, you're like, some days, the big fish really do bite, and in some days, they don't.

Gerald Swindle: [00:36:12] So, I think me just simply being outdoors always kind of keeps me in tune with watching Mother Nature, because if I'm fishing down the bank or fishing out in an area, and I don't hear any birds, there's no squirrels, there's no activity, the dogs aren't barking, it's usually a low-pressure situation, and the animals, it's like everything's slow. But if you go outside in the morning before daylight, I'm sure you've seen this, you go outside sometimes before daylight, and every bird is singing, and everything, you're driving to the ramp, you're seeing rabbits on the road everywhere, that usually means the fish are going to bite.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:36:43] If your gut feeling can play into angling, we wondered, is there anything superstitious about getting out on the water and casting a line?

Gerald Swindle: [00:36:52] I don't like any bananas in the boat. That's a super bad luck deal. And I don't pump gas on tournament morning and I don't normally ever wear red underwear on tournament day. Every time I wore red underwear, I suck. So, if I were to get out there and have red underwear on, I'm going to take them off. I'm not fishing with them on. But I'm not really crazy superstitious like my roommate and one of my really good friends, he's a guy, if he catches really good on day one, he eats the same food the rest of the week. Like he didn't break any tradition. But some guys are very superstitious and some are not.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:37:24] We mentioned earlier that Gerald is a two-time Bassmaster Angler of the Year, hearing those titles in 2004, and again, in 2016, so we asked him how scoring in tournaments work and how we won his titles.

Gerald Swindle: [00:37:36] There are 84 contestants in each of these events. There's the Bassmaster Elite Series, some of the top 84 anglers in the country in bass. You can only bring in five and you try to get your biggest five. So, once you get your sixth one, you can put the smallest one back, you continue to do that. So, what it is, it'll be your 20 fishes over four days if you caught five a day, the total weight, and whoever does that wins 100,000. And I mean, I have lost 100 grand by one ounce and I've actually won by one ounce.

Gerald Swindle: [00:38:05] So, when we say ounces, like it's crucial. We have 100 points possible per event. And back then, we had 100 anglers per event. So, if you finish in first, you're getting 100 points. If you're finishing last, you get one point. So, over 10 tournaments is the highest accumulated points, just like NASCAR. So, you would have to stay like you really got to catch them. You can't have one bad day out of—so it would be 40-something tournament days, you can't have like any bad days. It's all on points, one point per place. Usually, have one event at the end of the year, which is called AOY Fishoff.

Gerald Swindle: [00:38:41] In the last event, they'll have it cut down to like 50 guys instead of 100, and then they'll face one particular event and see who takes the crown from there. But ours is so scattered out in the way we do it, it's usually just that one tournament, but what we've learned is even when you get inside that tournament, you can't move, there are 50 guys there, there's still 100 points, you just get two for first—I mean, you get 100 for first and two for last. So, it's really hard to move, because it feels so small. So, once you get in, it's just like if there were just 10 cars on the track, there's really nowhere they can go.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:39:13] Gerald may not be carrying cameras or dogs like Mike or Dan, but he does need to get his fishing gear and boats to and from the water, and for that, he relies on his Toyota Tundra.

Gerald Swindle: [00:39:25] Right now, I've got a 2019, and so that's not lifted as much. It is actually the crew cab, but it's usually around like a six or eight-inch lift. We like to jack everything up, big tires, big wheels. I tell you, everything we have is lifted. That's about what I'm running right now. I'm hearing through the grapevine, we're coming out with a new truck, so I didn't want to go crazy on this truck built, because I want to buy one of the new Tundras, that I want to supercharge it to run it on a drag strip.

Gerald Swindle: [00:39:54] I'm really in old muscle cars and racing, and I've got a guy to do it, and I think I'm going to buy a new Tundra, supercharge it there at the rear, and drive it on the straight, on the line, but you lost your mind. I'm like, it would be kind of cool. I think I'm going to do it. I love drag racing. I love to go watch. So, I thought I will just build me a Toyota.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:40:11] Sounds like we may need to link up Gerald with the Toyota Motor Sports team in the future. Alright. So, the Tundra is already in the mix as a durable, reliable vehicle for fishing, but we wanted to know how Gerald's Toyota sponsorship came about.

Gerald Swindle: [00:40:26] Toyota came about for me, I've worked with a guy named Lance Peck, who started Dynamic Sponsorships, which is now based out of Oklahoma, which is the liaison between Saatchi, and Toyota, and the fishing team. And this guy was always in the outdoor industry, had this vision to start this. I worked with him at CITGO when I was with the gas company. And now, it's just like as soon as he landed a deal, he come to me, and he said, hey, I've always worked with you, I think this is a fit.

Gerald Swindle: [00:40:52] And I can remember when we first started running the trucks, there just weren't many of them out here, and I tell everybody, I said, we were the guys that run Toyotas at the boat ramp when it wasn't cool, when we were some of the first ones out here. And now, it's so funny, because when I pull up the boat ramps, they're just lined up. And I see them jacked up, big lift, gear's lowered down, I'm like, I believe we won this battle. It just kept growing and growing. I mean, I tell my wife every year, we're so thankful to have them. They work us, but we've had a lot of great opportunities to them, and we got to see a lot of cool things, and meet a lot of neat people.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:41:22] Gerald's talked about hard work, dedication, and experience. All these things have led him to win championships and earn sponsorships in angling, but there's one more thing that's vital and keeps Gerald successful day after day, and not just in fishing, but also in life.

Gerald Swindle: [00:41:39] I think there's something that I started—actually, I started that for my life, and then it bled over into my fishing. I was fishing, and I was like, it's so easy to get negative, and this has been many, many years ago. And I would be around people that were negative, and I noticed if you're around negativity, it kind of draws you to it. So, I started really paying attention to it. I'm like, no, I'm going to keep a positive mental attitude and I just started saying it over and over.

Gerald Swindle: [00:42:04] I just want to stay positive. No matter what the situation, try to remain positive. And really, when I started it, it was to be a better father, to be a better husband, to be a better son. I just wanted

to be more positive. I didn't want negativity to control me or change how I feel about everything. And in life, as humans, we're bad about going with whatever. It's either really good or it really sucks. And I was like, I have to figure out a way to stay positive even when there were tough times.

Gerald Swindle: [00:42:32] And I started doing it fishing, and I started talking about it, and now, it just kind of blows up, and I go speak about it. I would get these numerous emails and messages about people that said, my views, some of my strategies of positive mental attitude and how it's changed me as a person. I think if you want to, you could find something bad in everything. I truly do. I think if you really want to, you can also find something good in the worst things in the world.

Gerald Swindle: [00:42:59] And I think by being positive, you create a better—I don't know. It's like a sense of calm. I talk to guys, and they're like, man, I want to fish. I want to get in the zone out there. I want to just be just in the zone. And I'm like, you don't go on the water and get in the zone, you create and live in your own zone. If you're a positive person, and you think positive, and you do everything you can to be a better person, then when you get on the water, guess what, well, hell, you're in the zone.

Gerald Swindle: [00:43:30] But you can't be a asshole all the way to the ramp, and then get in a boat, go, hey, I'm obviously in a really good mood, and fish, you've got a bite, just kind of go my way. No, it's not. It's still going to suck. That is so cliché what people say, they'll say, the power of the mind is so strong. And then, I can go to anything you want to do. If you're positive and you believe in it enough, you'll find a way and things will happen your way. But if you get negative, it can control everything you do.

Gerald Swindle: [00:43:55] It's really funny. I started doing some stories. I started going back during the pandemic, because we weren't on tour, and I started reflecting back on some things over the last 10 or 15 years that happened that the people have come in here to give me a testimonial or something really strong happened about someone had listened to my positive mental attitude speech, he comes up, and told me a story.

Gerald Swindle: [00:44:15] And I thought about a gentleman who handed me a bullet at one time, and as the more I talked to him, he started to cry, and he's like, I was going to kill myself. And I'm like, what? He said, that's the bullet. He said, I started watching your video and I didn't do it. He said, I brought you the bullet. And I'm like, then you realize that a simple YouTube video about telling people, hey, just be positive, don't let little things get you down.

Gerald Swindle: [00:44:38] So, during the pandemic, I was able to do more of those, and take time, and watch more, and get more messages from people talking about, keep us positive, keep talking about it, make sure everybody stays on it, because I've had so many great things. I had a lady at a Toyota event come up. She said, I watched your positive attitude video from California you did at Anglers Marine, and she said, I'm here today to tell you, I'm two years clean of heroin. She said, I tried like everything I could and never beat it.

Gerald Swindle: [00:45:07] So, to me, when I see or hear people come up and talk to you about that, you start realizing, it's bigger than fishing, the frame of mind, and the positivity, and what you can do. So, now, even myself sometimes because it's real easy to get—I've had a great practice, it's really easy to be a asshole. You're at the gas station, and you're mad, you're tired. It would be really easy when people come out, so I tell myself to hold yourself accountable, because you never know at what point in life you're going to impact somebody.

Gerald Swindle: [00:45:40] You just never know when you've got to make a different impression on somebody. So, I kind of tell everybody, my fans, I'll say, let's all hold ourselves accountable just to be better people. You just never know when you've got to make a different impression on somebody. So, I kind of tell everybody and my fans, I'll say, let's all hold ourselves accountable just to be better people, just to smile more.

Gerald Swindle: [00:45:59] That was one of the things that really pissed me off about corona is everybody wears mask and you can't see people smile. And smile is what brings happiness. And my wife said, well, it's—I said, I know it's what we need to do, but I said, people smiles, I said, you know how joyful it is when you see a 70-year-old woman in a grocery store smile, or you see a young lady, or somebody smiling and laughing, I say, it's very contagious. With a mask on, we don't know if you're mad or smiling, we don't know if you got—I don't know. I'm like, I want to see people smile. It's good for us.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:46:30] No matter your flavor of outdoor activity, there's one thing that all of our guests have agreed on. Nature makes you happier. Getting out into the wild, exploring the world around you, and finding ways to disconnect can have a real impact on your happiness and your mental health. And especially in these times of COVID, a relationship with the outdoors is more important than it's ever been.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:46:54] We may not be able to congregate the same way that we used to, but that doesn't mean we're relegated to a life in front of the computer screen or streaming something on the TV. Overlanding, angling, or just plain old hiking can help us cope right now, regardless of our situation. So, start up your 4Runner, hop on your mountain bike, or just grab your backpack and get out there.

Dan Krauss: [00:47:15] I've always been kind of amazed at what people can do just by being human, whether it's jumping off of cliffs on skis, climbing cliffs, mountain biking, really, anything that gets people outside and interacting with their environment in a positive, exciting way. I really like being around people that finds that much joy and happiness in the outdoors.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:47:44] Mostly for me, it's just the beauty. You get on some of these roads, these trails, these old mining trails and stuff, and the views you get from there, and the camp spots you can set up are just really legendary. So, the trips that I like going on a lot of times are where I'm hanging out with a bunch of other friends, and we get to talk shop, and talk trucks, and hang out, and cook food.

Mike Pfeiffer: [00:48:06] But then, when you go out, you're just almost forced to just relax. There's none of the distractions at home. So, we always say that we never regret going out. So, sometimes, it's hard to do, just like, oh, I'd rather just stay at home, watch some TV, relax, kick my feet up, and do nothing, and I've regretted doing that a lot of times, but I've never regretted saying, you know what, let's just pack up some food and go camping.

Gerald Swindle: [00:48:35] And I would encourage everybody to do that, try to find a way to be positive, try to hold the door for someone. I try to make myself do something every day to make a point to go do something nice for somebody unexpected. And it's simplest, holding the door or picking up something. Just do some form or something to make yourself better every day.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:48:54] So, whether you're experiencing the outdoors, picking up a new competitive sport, or just going through an average day, never underestimate the power of a nice gesture and a positive attitude. Thanks for listening to Toyota Untold. This is Tyler.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:49:12] A reminder that modifying your vehicles with non-genuine Toyota parts can negatively affect your warranty, safety performance, and street legality. Other trademarks and trade names appearing on the vehicles are those of their respective owners.

Kelsey Soule: [00:49:25] Off-roading is inherently dangerous. Abusive use may result in bodily harm or vehicle damage. Wear your seatbelt at all times and do not allow passengers in the cargo area.

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