Riley Ginter
I began working at the San Jose Moscone Nature Center when I was in high school, and I would help rehabilitate North American wildlife like mule deer, mountain lions, birds of prey, raccoons and many more. And soon after that, I actually started volunteering at the Lost Bangla Zoo as a general volunteer and a dose and want to educate the public about exotic animals, including the baby.

Eileen Lamb
Welcome to Adulting on the Spectrum. In this podcast, we want to highlight the real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day to day life. Basically, we want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people. I am Eileen Lamb, an autistic author and photographer, and I co-hosted this podcast with Andrew Komarow.

Andrew Komarow
Andrew Komarow, autistic entrepreneur, software engineer, co-host of this podcast. And I have more chest hair and body hair than Eileen, which is quite an accomplishment given she is French. Today our guest is Riley. Riley currently works at the San Diego Safari Park as a animal specialist. He accompanies the guests to various enclosures around the Safari park and shares educational information about wild animals.

He also monitors the wildlife at the butterfly jungle. He is the creator of Riley's Zoo Ventura's Kids Club. Welcome. Thank you for joining.

Riley Ginter
Absolutely. You're welcome, guys. And thank you for having me join.

Eileen Lamb
You of course.

Riley Ginter
It's good to meet you guys.

Andrew Komarow
Yeah, good for you to be on. So if you've listened or podcast before or if you happen, we like to ask each guest how they prefer to identify. And we don't mean she heard them. Your pronouns,
although you're welcome to share those as well. We mean autistic on the spectrum. Asperger's. If you have a preference and you don't have to.

00:02:23:05 - 00:02:32:05
Andrew Komarow
Not having one is our most popular option. I shouldn't say that. I feel like ruins the credibility of the study. Anyway, if so, what is it?

00:02:32:20 - 00:02:45:08
Riley Ginter
You know what? All those words stick with me because I'm autistic. I say I'm on the spectrum. I say I have a disability. I have special needs. That's how I usually describe myself to people.

00:02:46:09 - 00:02:48:06
Eileen Lamb
So no preference?

00:02:48:06 - 00:02:50:20
Riley Ginter
There's no preference, really. There's no preference.

00:02:51:06 - 00:02:57:09
Eileen Lamb
Can you take us back in time and tell us about your autism diagnosis journey?

00:02:58:03 - 00:03:25:16
Riley Ginter
Yeah. So ever since I was like two and a half years old, the doctors had told my parents. The doctors had told my parents that I was diagnosed with high functioning autism and my parents had concerns over me. And when the word came out that I had autism, when I was two and a half years old, there were some people that there are some people my mom and dad came across who were concerned about me.

They might think they they might have thought I would never be able to graduate. They may never be able to have a job. They were kind of, you know, worried about me. I wouldn't be successful in life. But, um, you know, growing up when I went into like kindergarten or first grade, it took me time to understand how I was acting.

00:03:48:24 - 00:04:18:09
Riley Ginter
I did realize by like kindergarten or first grade that I was acting different than most children. I was talking different and I was acting different. And at the time I didn't even know what the word autism meant. But I did know that I was acting kind of, you know, strange compared to most
children. And so after like kindergarten and first grade, I was brought to this school in the Grove Center, Grove Center School in Covina.

And lots of the other children around me also had a high functioning autism. And so I guess it was because I thought that would be a great place for me so I can interact with other people who are on the spectrum or who have autism, not just other people who are, you know, normally functioning. You know what I mean?

Riley Ginter
And I eventually start to learn what the word autistic means. So autism is something that some people, not just me, are born with. And it kind of affects our mindset to our speech. It affects our mood. And those are one of the things I struggled with growing up. But I went through junior high and high school and I'm still learning about what autism means, but I feel like overall, I mean, I still have autism.

Riley Ginter
I feel like as I got older, I kind of recovered from kind of recovered from my unusual behavior or the way I talk. So I know it doesn't happen to everyone because not all people who have autism or recover from I mean, anyone who has autism, it stays in them for life like that goes for me too. But I understand that growing up I got a little better at communicating with other people, acting, you know, natural.

Andrew Komarow
So a lot of people would say that that might, again, you know, be because, you know, you're you're masking or you're holding it in. And some might even say that you shouldn't have to mask. Do you think it's a little bit of masking? Do you think it's a little bit of you just growing up, growing as a person, you're learning some skills, help you get by in the real world like everyone does.

Riley Ginter
So masking. I wouldn't so I wouldn't too much say I was masking it because I knew I had autism. And I just, you know, tell everyone else who's curious. I tell everyone that I have autism, but I'm just aware that despite my autism, I consider myself a person who is like, grown out of, you know, I've learned to communicate better.

Riley Ginter
I've learned to act more natural growing up, but I've never been afraid to inform people that I have autism. Like even throughout my childhood, I wasn't like, afraid to, you know, describe
myself who I am.

00:07:04:24 - 00:07:17:16
Eileen Lamb
So you said that you've improved in communication and other things. Did you have any specific like therapy that you went through as a kid? Speech therapy or. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:07:17:22 - 00:07:39:09
Riley Ginter
Like soon after I was diagnosed with the autism when I was two and a half years old, I had a therapist come over to my family's house and teach me therapy, and their therapy has helped me become a more of, um, better at communicating. I also took speech therapies at the schools that I went to preschool, kindergarten, first grade, second grade.

And that's really helped me with my communication skills. So I think if someone at least knows I'm diagnosed with autism, that it’d be important for me to accept people guidance in order to become better at communicating, you know, learning social skills.

00:07:58:05 - 00:07:59:21
Andrew Komarow
Okay, that makes sense.

00:08:00:16 - 00:08:01:16
Riley Ginter
Yeah. Thank you.

00:08:02:06 - 00:08:23:15
Andrew Komarow
And so you clearly have an interest in animals. Probably helped inspire your employment journey working. You know, there are lots of zoos that people know by name. You know, the San Diego Zoo is definitely iconic. And one of them tell us a little bit about that career story slash journey.

00:08:24:21 - 00:08:49:11
Riley Ginter
Okay. So where to begin? My passion for animals. I started liking animals back in kindergarten. And what started it? Well, I used to play these educational games, one of them being read a rabbit and they had talking animals in it. And that made me think, Oh, now I love animals. And that kind of led me to think they're well, they're important to us now who works with animals.

So as I went on, I played a lot of games that involve animals. I watched a lot of movies and videos that involve animals, and I visited zoos like the Los Angeles Zoo, the San Diego Zoo, the
Santa Ana Zoo. And after all those visits, I was like, you know what? I might as well work with animals someday because I have a passion for animals.

00:09:11:22 - 00:09:35:04
Riley Ginter
They're one of God's great creations, animals. And, you know, they're important to us and our ecosystems. I want to work with them. Not only do I have a passion for animals, but I've also been very creative on the whole animal world thing. For example, in my elementary, I imagined myself having a zoo of my own someday called the Riley Zoo.

And I also was creative on thinking of designing lunchboxes with animals on them, electronic lunchboxes that make sounds that have animals on the lunchbox and cups that have animals on them. Yeah. I also consider myself very creative on things, especially when it comes to animals. So now in regards to the career of working with animals. So when I went to Mount San Antonio College, I majored in animal science and got my associate's degree in it.

00:10:10:14 - 00:10:51:03
Riley Ginter
So I learned about both domesticated and exotic animals. It also involves taking conservation and for work experience. I began working at the San Dimas Canyon Nature Center when I was in high school, and I would help rehabilitate North American wildlife like mule deer, mountain lions, birds of prey, raccoons and many more. And soon after that, I actually started volunteering at the Los Angeles Zoo as a general volunteer and a docent, someone who educate the public about exotic animals.

And for the docent position, I'd have to go through a six month UCLA course, which, like teaches you all about wildlife, all the scientific names, all the instincts, all the habitat. And so I graduated that course at the Los Angeles Zoo. It was under UCLA. And while working at the Los Angeles Zoo, not only would I give educational tours for the public, but I would like work with and care for all the animals that the public interacts with.

00:11:23:17 - 00:11:56:22
Riley Ginter
So and right now at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, where I went to after I graduated Liberty University with my interdisciplinary studies, I currently and a camp aide, of course, but it also involves monitoring the wildlife such as butterflies and birds, making sure they're healthy and safe. It also involves giving people rides on cars and caravans and selling them the exotic animals.

The animal collection at the Safari park has amazing animals, and so I'm eventually trying to work my way up, particularly the safari park, to work with exotic animals. And that can be done through this cross training thing, which used to be called the Roar Corps, but now has a different name. But it helps people learn how to work with animals like an animal care specialist or
zookeeper, and you get a certificate at the end so that you may find a full time job, not just in the safari park, but anywhere with animals.

And yeah, that's pretty much what I am right now.

00:12:39:05 - 00:12:51:18
Eileen Lamb
That sounds awesome. I have you faced, like any obstacles in your employment journey? Like, was was it difficult getting a job? Because I know it can be really difficult for many autistic adults.

00:12:53:04 - 00:13:19:24
Riley Ginter
It hasn't been difficult for the jobs I've gotten for the San Dimas Canyon Nature Center, and that was pretty easy to get and to be a docent at the Los Angeles Zoo. Of course, I had to go through the class, the UCLA class. It was an obstacle, but it wasn't so hard. I really loved what I learned from that course and it helped me become a very effective docent.

And to get a job at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. It took some time because I did a few interviews trying to get into like any position at the Safari park. But I got into one and it really wasn't so hard. And once I got into this job position at this art park, it was pretty easy to adjust to.

Like, even though it's such a big place, I got used to knowing my way around, learning about how to, you know, take care of your to do your tasks properly and yeah.

00:14:01:15 - 00:14:10:20
Andrew Komarow
Can you say just one part about the zoo that you think if somebody is going there something they shouldn't miss, that maybe they they don't know.

00:14:12:13 - 00:14:14:15
Riley Ginter
The safari park or any zoo in general?

00:14:16:08 - 00:14:21:11
Andrew Komarow
Why don't you do the safari? Why don't you answer both questions?

00:14:21:24 - 00:14:52:06
Riley Ginter
Okay. So the safari park, a lot of people, when they come to any zoo, chances are they're going to think, oh, this is just for entertainment, this is just for our pleasure. But what I really don't want them to miss out is, you know, the true meaning for a zoo. Or are San Diego Zoo the safari park? The goal of the San Diego Zoo Safari Park is to commit the four things education,
recreation, conservation and scientific pursuit.

Those are the four main things. But our goal is to help different species of wildlife worldwide and to encourage other people to have a passion for animals as well. I definitely don't want people to miss that idea of the San Diego Zoo Safari Park or any other zoo. Now, when people draw a zoo, when kids draw a picture of a zoo or anyone in general, they're going to draw a picture of an animal behind bars.

What I don't want people to miss on that is understanding why animals are really there. We're doing conservation. We're helping the animals. We're giving them a good home with enrichments and proper diets to stay healthy and helping increase their population for future generations to come. So when everyone goes to a zoo, they should feel free to be entertained like, Oh, look, a zebra.

It's so beautiful. I want to see a zebra because a lot of animals come from places that people have never been to, like lions, zebras, giraffes from Africa, tigers, Asian elephants and bean sarongs are from Asia. And people in America have never seen those animals before. So they're impressed to see those animals. They're not going to miss that opportunity if they go there.

00:16:15:01 - 00:16:28:06
Riley Ginter
But what they could miss is understanding the goal of zoos to help protect the animals, help expand their populations for future generations because they have an important role in our ecosystem. Right.

00:16:28:06 - 00:16:48:12
Eileen Lamb
Well, thank you so much for sharing. I can hear the passion in the way you're you're speaking about this. I'm sure you're familiar with Temple Grandin. And now she has a very deep interest in animals, too. If you read any of her books, do you find, like her research interesting?

00:16:48:12 - 00:17:09:02
Riley Ginter
Temple Grandin You know what? I feel like I've heard that name, but I don't think I've learned a lot about Temple Grandin. In fact, I don't think I've ever learned anything about Temple Grandin. But I would certainly like to look into that and learn more and learn more about what she has to say about her passion for animals and what she does.
And yeah, that'd be great to love.

00:17:11:19 - 00:17:21:21
Eileen Lamb
Yeah. I mean, and she wrote so many books and she's done it yet and you should definitely look to look into her because I'm sure you'll love to watch what she has to say.
Andrew Komarow
And I know I would. Well, thank you. So thank you so much for sharing about Temple Grandin.

Andrew Komarow
You have a mission. Can you share what that is and how that inspires you?

Riley Ginter
Okay, so I have a few pieces of my mission. Of course, I want to help different species of wildlife worldwide so that there's more in our on our planet for future generations. I want to inspire other people who are interested in having a passion for animals. I want to inspire people who have a passion for animals to learn more about them.

I also want my knowledge and passion for animals to become known to others, like the person you might say. There's also people like the Crocodile Hunter or the Crab Brothers or Jeff Corwin or Jack Hanna, who I think recently retired. But those kinds of people are famous for their passion and knowledge for animals. And I want to be like those people someday, too, but not just in regards to animals.

But I also want to inspire people, like basically on the autism spectrum. I want to inspire people that they're not alone, that some people are just born with autism, but they should still value themselves. They're still they still have a place in this world. They're special people. And there's lots of great things that all people, including people with autism, can be able to accomplish.

Riley Ginter
So I want to inspire people, especially autistic people, to, you know, move forward in life to like to experience the things that you will that you might and probably will accomplish. And just because you're autistic doesn't mean you're different. You're just like everyone else. In fact, you're valuable in this world. You're very special. And I want people to, you know, value themselves and, you know, take pride in their hard work.

Riley Ginter
And yeah, I not only do I value myself, I have to own, but I do great work sometimes. But I like to value other people. I like to value their hard work and you know just who they are.

Eileen Lamb
I want to ask you, so who inspires you? Because we mentioned Temple Grandin, and that's not
Temple Grandin. So are there any people who inspire you and does it you know, a lot of.

00:19:52:13 - 00:20:27:10
Riley Ginter
People who there are lots of people who inspire me, one being Jack Hanna, because he was a zookeeper and I watched his videos growing up. The brothers from the TV shows, the boom of food and wild crabs, The Crocodile Hunter, he was so interesting because he was from Australia. He had a passion, particularly towards Crocodile, Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter, and I watched a lot of his video growing up and all those who are famous for their knowledge and passion for animals have inspired me.

And those are some of the people who have inspired me to, you know, have a passion for animals and to work with them someday. Now, there are some people with autism who inspire me, like there's someone named Cody Lee. He was on some talent show, some famous talent show, and he sings, he plays the piano and sings, inspires me because people shouldn't think, Oh, he's autistic.

00:20:53:08 - 00:21:22:18
Riley Ginter
He can he can do anything he can. And he's he has a very good singing voice. He plays the piano very well. He has a good heart. And, you know, he's an inspiration and not just to me, but to the world. Other autistic people. Like I don't know if you've heard of the show The Swell Life, there's a family called the Pasch with and they do this thing called Surfer's Healing, which I've done myself a long time ago.

00:21:22:18 - 00:21:47:06
Riley Ginter
But Surfer's Healing teaches autistic children to surf. And there's this kid who has autism and he learned to surf and he's surfed pretty darn well. So it's impressive to see that all kinds of people, including those with a disability, have different talents. They can do some things that a lot of people might think, oh, wow, could I really do that?

Yeah. And yeah, I've met quite a few people who have a passion for animals, people who work with animals and people who have autism. And they all inspire me. They have big hearts, big dreams, lots of great talents, and. And they have a good heart, too. It's the other thing. And they're also really, really smart. Like, I learn everything from all these people and that's the part of life learning like, okay, there might be some stuff you already know, but you'll know more when you learn more, especially from lots of other people, including people with autism, including people who love animals.

00:22:30:22 - 00:22:35:16
Riley Ginter
The life of learning.
Eileen Lamb
But I need to ask you, that's been burning my tongue, as they say of you watched Tiger King.

Riley Ginter
I have watched Tiger King with Joe Exotic. Now he's interesting. But the thing about Joe Exotic, I feel a little bit like is he really taking his job seriously because he's working with he.

Andrew Komarow
Is not I don't think he takes anything seriously.

Riley Ginter
Right. He works with Apex Predators, but he's treating them like he's his pet bunny rabbit. No, Tigers, lions, jaguars, leopards, the Panther genus. What? That's what it's called. You know, tigers are carnivores and predators and all he has to do is treat them as such, treat them like wild animals. I mean, they're just acting like the predators. They naturally are, but they need respect.

But, Joe, exotic. He's treating them like a pet dog or a pet cat or like a pet animal, not a wild animal. Unlike any zookeeper or animal care specialist I've seen. So of course, I'm glad that Joe Exotic cares about animals and apex predators are one of my favorite animals on the planet. The rhino is my first favorite, but I also like apex predators, particularly lions.

But I can't take him seriously if he's not taking his animals seriously. I also heard more about him, like his storyline. I've forgotten some of it, but he has kind of a bad rap, seemingly like he has a negative reputation. But I do like watching his show on Netflix. Joe Exotic, The Tiger King. It was so interesting.

Andrew Komarow
I remember him from prior to Netflix because he was running for either libertarian presidential candidate and the Libertarians were getting made fun of more or less rightfully so because of that. So do you what? I mean, obviously, you know, you have a great special interest. You turned it into a career. You know, I like to say that, you know, what better job for somebody who's autistic than them getting paid to talk about what they love to talk about the most, which is what you get paid to do.

Oh, work. But other than that, if there is anything that's okay. If there is it, can you share anything more about other things you like? Is there anything other than apex predators and
Okay, so Apex predators, you guys heard what Apex means. So Apex means that they're at the top of the food chain, right? So the lions and tigers and bears. Oh, my. Our apex predator, also a leopard or a jaguar counts as an apex predator. The large, powerful predators who don't really have a lot of or any natural enemies.

So they're interesting because they have different colors. They look very majestic. They're really cool animals and other things about zoos. Well, I learned that they're all kinds of zoos throughout our world. And I've been to one in Sweden called Cool Marten. It's a really neat place because not only does it have animals, but it also has rides, a dolphin, show, presentations.

A lot of people would be like, Wow, unbelievable. Or you could just go to Sweden and visit a safari park with an interesting name and see all that there. And I've been there and I was like, Wow, this place is amazing. And the rest of Sweden is also pretty good too. Yeah. I still want to visit some other zoos around the world that I haven't like.

In Florida, there's Disney's Animal Kingdom. I want to look at that. There's the Cincinnati Zoo. There's the Omaha really famous one, the Australia Zoo, where Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter, worked, and lots of other zoos in Europe, in different countries throughout Europe that I've heard of, but I've never been to. But it'd be interesting to visit these places and learn about them.

Now, other things that I like, aside from animals I might have said before, but I also like being creative whenever I share my creativity with, you know, my family and friends, they're like, Wow, Riley, you have such a great imagination. You're very creative. And I feel like other people are creative too, including people with autism.

Yeah, you're right. That's a that's a misconception that people with autism are not creative. I mean, I'm pretty creative myself and is not. But, you know.

I am very creative when it comes to ideas that make money or should never be said. Usually it's one of the two or both. We agree. I mean.
Eileen Lamb
Yeah, we all have our own creativity, which makes sense. You know, different people. So what caused you to start Riley's Zoo Ventures Kid Club? What was that like?

Riley Ginter
Yeah. So I started it because I want to, like, share my knowledge and passion for animals with other people, particularly children. Heads to the kids club because I'm pretty sure they would really love to learn about animals that I can inspire them to have a passion for animals because a lot of kids are like, Oh, look at the animal.

Riley Ginter
It's so interesting and wouldn't it be cool to learn about it? And so I decided to start filming at different zoos or in a studio and talking about animals. So I came up with the animal facts and the creativity, and some people who work with me are good at like the filming the camera, and some people are good at like the graphics of how the filming goes.

Riley Ginter
But of course I don't want to just be educational talking about fact or fact after fact. I want to make it entertaining. I want to like have a sense of humor. I want to like, be engaging with the people. I want to, you know, encourage, like keep people encouraged to watch the video, because those are the two things that will inspire people to do it.

Riley Ginter
And so I'm also trying to use this to help me earn more because we pay money to do it. And there are some people who can, you know, pay to watch some content, some of the content, and you have to pay to watch, but only if you are interested. Only those who want to be, you know, inspired by my passion and enthusiasm and knowledge for animals.

Eileen Lamb
And that's great. That's a great thing you're doing there. I'm sure kids love it. Okay. So now I'm going to ask you some quickfire questions. You just tell me the first first answer that comes to your mind, okay?

Riley Ginter
Yeah.

00:30:08:23 - 00:30:11:04  
**Eileen Lamb**  
Favorite domestic animal.

00:30:12:12 - 00:30:18:22  
Speaker 1  
Horses are my favorite domestic animal. One reason is because they're related to my favorite animal, the rhinoceros.

00:30:19:22 - 00:30:30:04  
**Eileen Lamb**  
They're also asked what your favorite wild animal would then be. The rhinoceros. The rhinoceros favorite apex predator.

00:30:30:18 - 00:30:33:16  
**Riley Ginter**  
The lion.

00:30:33:16 - 00:30:36:03  
**Eileen Lamb**  
Do you have a favorite natural TV show?

00:30:37:11 - 00:31:02:13  
**Riley Ginter**  
My favorite nature TV show. There's so many. But I really like the boomer who I guess it kind of counts as a nature show. You know, it's a boomer who is so the Crab Brothers who are famous for animals and conservation. They host this show with a talking Safaga fucker named Subhuman, who the Fox is a lemur species.

00:31:03:03 - 00:31:27:21  
**Riley Ginter**  
And they talk about dinosaurs who roamed in the past. Reptiles, amphibians, mammals, birth fish, all all of it in the animal kingdom. And that's been my favorite nature show. Like, I watched it when I was little. I watched it growing up. I remember it. I look back at it, I'd say that's probably the best one, because not only is it educational, but it's kind of cute and funny.

There's like a talking lemur and he, I imagine talking animals. Yeah, It's good to be educational and funny at the same time.

00:31:38:12 - 00:31:46:07  
**Eileen Lamb**
Yeah, it's a good combination. So if you could be any animal, what would it be and why?

Riley Ginter

I'd probably be a rhinoceros, not only because it's my favorite animal, but I'd have a thick skin, a horned, a muscular bodybuilder. The only problem is I would have poor eyesight. Except I can smell and hear extremely well. I'd only be able to see ten feet if that's all I would need. But, you know, honestly, that's actually a good question because there's so many animals that I could be.

It's just I love the rhino so much because it's very cool looking. It has an interesting instinct and.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, I didn't know how aggressive they were until I saw a documentary in their first two and did just like some like.

Riley Ginter

30 miles per hour, some 40 miles per hour.

Andrew Komarow

And have you ever seen Waterworld?

Eileen Lamb

No.

Andrew Komarow

It is. It's one of those movies I think they had like a SeaWorld or they had something for it. It's one of those movies like, have you seen Con Air?

Riley Ginter

Con Air? I've heard of it. I was like a from the.

Andrew Komarow

Movie that's like so bad. It's good. It's called Waterworld. Oh, it's like one of the worst movies of all time. But it's like anywhere I would say it has Kevin Costner in it.
Riley Ginter
And really?

Andrew Komarow
Yeah.

Eileen Lamb
It's just Waterworld.

Andrew Komarow
It's a horrible movie. It's amazing.

Eileen Lamb
6.3 out of ten on IMDB is actually not that bad because that's.

Andrew Komarow
But again, like a cult like following because it's so you know what I'm saying?

Eileen Lamb
Like in So-bad-it's-good, you know and.

Andrew Komarow
That is pretty bad for MTV. I think.

Riley Ginter
So. Well, that's interesting. I've heard that thing before. So bad that it's good.

Andrew Komarow
Yeah.

Eileen Lamb
I you have a lot of things to to look up after Temple Grandin. Waterworld.
Riley Ginter
Yeah. I see. Again, I have a lot to learn. You guys teach me something new.

Eileen Lamb
And to me to look at just mistaking a hippopotamus and a rhinoceros. Where can people sign you on social media?

Riley Ginter
Writing on social media, they can find me on Instagram. They can find me on TikTok for Rileys Zoo Ventures. Um, YouTube on Instagram. There's two different links. I meant to say one is just right. Riley Ginter That's my normal one and the other is Riley Zoo Ventures. That's like the real animal world, education and entertainment, one.

Eileen Lamb
That sounds pretty fun, but yeah, thank you for sharing about your passion for animals today. We appreciate it.

Riley Ginter
You're welcome any time and thank you to.