



**POSITIVELY
PRODUCED
FOUNDATION
PUBLICATION**

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POSITIVELY PRODUCED PUBLICATION

This is the fourth issue of our publication. It will receive an official title after input from our community including a poll. The magazine is owned and run by the Positively Produced Foundation, a nonprofit working to assist adults with autism achieve full community inclusion, in particular employability.

We hope that through their articles, they can lead more independent and fulfilling lives by connecting to the community as a whole. This connection will include greater understanding of the gifts and talents of said individuals and lead to opportunities within the business community for competitive employment.

The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the nonprofit or those collectively involved in the publication.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:
www.positivelyproducedfoundation.com
Mailing address: 7 Widgeon Drive
Denver, PA 17517
Art Director – Alice River



Cover by Pamela Fernuik
Self-portrait as a cat
20"x20" Acrylic, oil pastels on canvas

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AFTER 9 MONTHS: HIRING ON THE SPECTRUM

BY FRED SHEELER

Berks County PA Recorder of Deeds

For some background information on the experience of hiring a person with Autism I want to explain what sort of office Michael, who has Autism, works in. My name is Fred Sheeler; I am the Recorder of Deeds of Berks County and I have administered the office for thirteen years. Over that time we have made great improvements in automation and efficiency of our workflow utilizing a very sophisticated software system. Our office is responsible for recording land records and making them available to the public in an organized easily retrievable system and maintain them forever. It is a two stage process where a group of employees process the new documents and enter a great deal of data into our computer system. Much of that data allows for the public searching of documents by property identifiers and owners names. The second stage of that process is verifying or proofreading all of that data to ensure there are no misspellings of names, that all names were entered and that the property was sufficiently identified. Michael's job is the verifying and proofreading process.

For many years we had two or three people do the verification process, we needed that number to enable us to complete that process quickly so that all documents recorded in one day were also verified the next day by mid

morning. Over time with advancements in systems we were able to reduce the number of people doing the verification process to two.

Early in 2024 one of the verifiers retired so we hired Michael. Shortly after Michael started with us the second Verifier had to retire due to health reasons. I fully anticipated we would still need to fill that second position, but I soon realized Michael was keeping up with the verifying himself. In fact he almost always verifies the documents received by the end of the same day where previously it would take into the next morning to finish those documents.

Michael can stay laser focused on his work, he has a sharp eye for errors or things he thinks are out of the norm in the documents he verifies. He has been a tremendous asset to our staff, because he can find errors that in the past were commonly missed. He easily learned how to make the necessary corrections and when to ask for guidance on issues that are out of the ordinary. The time it took to train Michael in his job duties was significantly less than most prior holders of his position.

I should point out that Michael did not interview very well, he exhibited some of the traits many of us see in people with Autism such as trouble

with eye contact, very short answers to questions and a lack of social interaction skills. I was prepared for that, as anyone interviewing a person with Autism should be. The interviewer should carefully read the candidates resume to obtain an understanding of the candidate's knowledge, their educational background and special interests, and conduct the interview in a way to include those things in your questions. Michael's interactions with his fellow employees are different than you would see with a person without Autism, however he gets along wonderfully with everyone, and the rest of the staff accepts his differences because they know he has many good abilities that help them get their jobs done. I think it is important to be open and upfront with your other employees, let them know that a new employee has Autism and talk to them about what that means, try to help your other employees be understanding, accepting, and well educated about Autism.

I believe Michael will be working in the Recorder's office for many years, probably long after I have retired. I think he has found his place in his work and it is a pleasure to see him grow socially in his interactions with his coworkers and Michael is very much appreciated for his work ethic and his sense of humor. ∞

SOFT ROOM

BY GG PATTERNS



A moment of silence fell between the two, though the café bubbled around regardless; soft conversations ebbed, flowed, and mixed with the scents of overpriced coffee, decadent pastries, and dessert-flavored e-cigarettes. There came the occasional laugh, the tinkling of spoon against ceramic, the scoot of a chair.

Outside, the rain had found a quicker pace, forcing new business into the café. The doorframe bell jingled and introduced the sounds of rainfall, a few drenched faces, then bade the drizzling streets a swift farewell with another ring.

The Date made to speak, opened their mouth, but flinched at a nearby shoe-squeak. From door to counter the Date watched a rain-caught customer go. ‘Might as well get something while I’m here.’ they probably thought.

“So,” began the Date, eyes still following the new patron, “who even are these people? The ones who built your room?”

A few more drops than a quarter left; the Painter, gently rocking their cup, watched as the dark liquid vortexed around the base. “Not entirely sure.” they said. “I didn’t think it was really that important.”

“For all you knew they could have been criminals: some sort of killers.” the Date gave a soft scoff, non-derisive.

The Painter nodded. “I suppose.”

True, at a glance the room makers

could have seemed like some shadowy cabal, eager to pray upon the eccentric and abnormal thinkers. The Painter had chosen, however, to see them as a group of investors; several someones who wanted to see art unleashed, to be conceived in a vacuum, raw and true to form, and then let free.

Another wordless beat, a few more bell rings, a lull in the café’s buzz. The Painter’s cup teetered now on empty, the final dregs gone cold. To drink or not to drink: to complete the process and end on a note of acrid unfresh, or to let the last few drops lie still, awaiting the drain.

The Date then found something amusing, a thought, but was unable to unknit their brow. Eyes up to the painter, polishing their own cup, the Date asked, “Did you have coffee in the room?”

The two shared in the calm and light-hearted, with the Painter eventually shaking their head. “No – no coffee. Just bottled water and simple food.”

“But how did you get the food?”

“Chutes.” Stated simply the Painter. “There were three chutes: one for things the investors would give me – change of clothes, food, and the like; a chute for trash – bottles or wrappers; and one for laundry.”

“Quite the system.” mused the Date.

“They were very accommodating.”

Again, the Painter found themselves back in the room, darkness all around, soft

under foot, dim lights seeming so far away, gentle music playing through speakers in the walls. Then came a soft and metallic clatter, a thunk, crinkle of wrapper, the taste of a bland, meal-like substance. The food had been nutritious, just as requested: dense, dry, and mostly flavorless – just enough to keep the body going. Some postmodern facsimile of pemmican.

Quietly, the Painter clicked their tongue, then emptied the last, bitter drops from the cup. It was only a small sip of the stale coffee, yet it managed to entirely coat the Painter’s tongue with cold acid.

All of it, the room and its sundries, just as instructed: the dimness, the plush surfaces, the simple washroom, the secret door to be led through blindfolded so as not to be tempted by the thought of leaving prematurely.

‘Best not to mention the blindfold.’ thought the Painter. ‘And best not to mention the forty-five nanograms of lysergic acid diethylamide provided every other day.’ Where the Investors were quick to oblige and spared no expense, the Painter knew that everyone else – those who had not seen the room, lived in, or needed the room, would not understand. Eccentric would be a soft judgement.

Slowly, feeling the conversation drift and dip, the Date mustered another question. “So,” they began, absently



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thumbing a smudge on the table, “you did all this to help with painting, but if it was dark, how could you?”

The Painter smiled, a distant shine in their eyes as they nodded, raising the memory. With something near to excitement, the Painter brought up their hands and fingers in pantomime, replying, “They gave me these glasses which let me see a canvas, virtually, and I could paint on it with simple hand-strokes.” The Painter then lowered their hands and stared off, as if inspecting their own work. “When I eventually left the room and got back home, I simply remade the painting with real materials.”

The Date smiled, too, glad to see their mother finally show a return to life, slight as it may be – a bit of that spark lost some time ago. “Sounds futuristic.” said the Date through a smile.

“It was.”

The moment was then more gentle between them, something the Date had feared, dreaded, could have been lost

in the room. Their brow relaxed, illuminating their smile. A soft breath in, a glad sigh out, “Will I get to see the painting?”

The Painter thought for a moment, drawn back to the room and the glasses and the digital acrylics; It was a masterpiece, a true work of creativity and unbridled imagination, everything the Painter had so longed for but struggled to realize. Away from the distractions of clutter and talking and worrying and all the thinking, it had been finished: an artwork worthy of all the worried days and sleepless nights from before.

“Of course,” said the Painter. “Of course.”

The two sat back in their chairs, now fully immersed in mere company, equally yet differently grateful for the Painter’s rejuvenation.

Three cups sat atop three saucers, the glossy white stained sparsely by coffee-overflow, adjacent to some crumpled napkins and strewn frosted-croissant crumbs; As their table settled into

finality, the rain outside came to a slow, catching again the Painter’s wayward attention.

How long had they been sitting there, all cozy and quiet and together in the café?

And then there were those eyes again, peering back from the window-pane, so familiar and yet so... different.

“Do you miss it?” offered the Date with soft tones, leaning slightly across the table. They watched as the Painter hazily inspected the window, simply thinking and thinking.

“Hmm?” the Painter eventually muttered, eyes yet glued firm to those in the reflection. “I’m sorry – what did you say?”

The Date allowed a laugh, soft and short. “I said, ‘Do you miss it?’ The room, I mean.”

There was a sigh, a blink, and then the Painter peeled their gaze from the glass, looked across the table, and gave a smile. “No. Not a bit.” ∞

DISCOVER WHO YOUR CHARACTER IS WITH THIS QUIRKY WRITING PROMPT

BY PAMELA FERNUIK



There are several ways to reveal who your character is in a story: through how they dress, their posture, and through what they value. But the best way to determine who your character is is through their actions. And a fun way to observe their actions is through a writing prompt.

In a writing workshop I teach on the first Sunday of the month, I gave everyone in the class a writing prompt: put the character from their stories through The Starbucks Character Test to see how they would respond.

Your protagonist might weigh three hundred pounds, dress in black leather, and ride a Harley Davidson motorcycle; however, that just shows their exterior character. Maybe they are timid and hide behind the leather and facade of being tough. Maybe they avoid conflict and won't say anything in The Starbucks Character Test.

Think about the protagonist in

your story, imagine what they are wearing, where they are going, what kind of car or vehicle they drive, and put them in line at Starbucks or another busy coffee shop.

Writing Prompt: The Starbucks Character Test

Your character, perhaps the protagonist in your story, is in line at Starbucks or another coffee shop. Just as they approach the counter to order their drink, another customer cuts in front of them and starts to order.

How will your character respond? Will they push the intruding customer aside and insist that they are next? Will they be passive and let the rude customer order before them? Will they scratch out the eyes of the person cutting in line? Will the story play out like a horror story or like a romance novel?

Discover Your Character's Values

When I placed the protagonist in my story in line at Starbucks, I realized I didn't know her very well. I wasn't sure how she would respond.

Thinking about how my character would respond to a rude customer helped me clarify her values. In the beginning of my story she would be passive and not say anything, but by the end of my story, as she changes through a personal crisis, she would respond differently, and she would have pushed the rude customer aside.

Character is revealed by action.

How would your protagonist respond in The Starbucks Character Test?

What actions have characters taken in your stories that reveal who they are? ∞

MY EXPERIENCE AS A DUNGEON MASTER

BY M.M.



Running Dungeons and Dragons, as the Dungeon Master, (DM) as well as other role playing games, has been one of the most rewarding and frustrating experiences of my life. When it's going good it's like watching your homemade flying machine soar through the sky, but when it goes bad it's like watching it crash. Not a glorious fireball of failure either. Just dropping out of the sky and hitting the dirt.

This is not about me and my campaigns, however. This is my advice for would-be DMs, or "GMs" as they're called in other games. I hope to share what insight I've learned from reading and playing and maybe make someone else's game a little bit better. The most important word of advice is to know your system. Learn how it works before you begin because learning as you go isn't going to work. Your players are going to look to you for advice and will react to you not knowing the system as well as them, discover-

ing the pilot only took a correspondence course on flying.



You should listen to your players, but only so much and, like a magician, never reveal your tricks. They don't want to know that certain monsters they fought were just reskinned ogres or that you improvised that encounter. No one wants to watch It's a Small World or the Electric Light Parade being fixed; they came here for the show.

As for "only so much" players are like any other audience except they're not just the audience: they're the stars of the show and the writer of one character. The point of the game is for you, as the DM, and all your players to tell a story together. ∞

Are you an adult with autism?

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BURNOUT VS PERSEVERANCE

BY R.E.



In the beginning, when I got my first computers in my life, I gained a lot of exposure to some games and other cool stuff I could use them for. It would be all fun and games for the most part, where tons of ideas would be used for so much time I had in my hands. I had the feeling that with great power of using technology came great responsibility, even though I knew that there was a bunch of room to channel off burnouts via a routine I had with me. There was simplicity to keep that routine, right?

Unfortunately, as an adult seeking an Information Technology job from the education I was purely interested in at the time, there is no such thing as a simple way to stay interested in what I like without getting burnt out from doing the same stuff repeatedly. One may wonder why I say that because I have interests such as playing video games, looking at some videos, hiking, and even making videos about certain characters and voices mainly playing some games, as well as going on adventures. The cherry on top of that is that I have a massive concept of a universe that pertains to one of the games I play, yet it has an engaging storyline based on structures and landmarks built, plot

points, villains, and the like. I had an excellent time executing the ideas I had in mind for the story.

However, as much as I wish to say that I can do this a lot of the time, I am more than aware of the reality it can drag me into, which is burning out from it. After I first felt some burnout episodes coming through, I felt occasionally that there was no reason for me to continue what I loved doing, when that would drag me further from the truth. What this means to voice in is that while it is important to do my IT job search, it does not need to be an all-or-nothing approach when burnt out from the activities I love participating in. I was told that I would need to take a break from those said activities and find something else to do, but unfortunately for the past few weeks I kept jumping back into it without considering the repercussions it would cause to my mental state.

Do I know the trick to standing tall despite that? There are some parts I know about combating burnout and persevering along in doing so, as well as parts that I never truly realized until now.

For examples of some burnout facts

that I never realized: Perseverance is necessary to combat burnout. Changing the routine of what to do in free time is also imperative.

Mingling with others who might also be experiencing similar challenges is beneficial. When I am doing that, I usually get inspiration to try and continue what I do via ideas, though the execution part is the hardest.

Winter is more common for burnouts, according to research that I did on the Internet, and therefore would require extra changing to routines and a few breaks in between to overcome that challenge.

It is okay to be burnt out from various things, especially activities related to games, videos, and even technology.

Simply put in these examples, there is so much to learn, yet so much I may know at the same time when it comes to burnout. Creative and mental fortitude and energy are a must when it comes to addressing burnout in general, not just the burnout in the workplace or in any creative hobbies. In the end, everyone needs to figure out what works best for them in order to combat the burnout and persevere. ∞

WRITING ARTICLES FOR THIS MAGAZINE

BY M.M.



Writing articles for this magazine is harder than you may think. I know reading through this you may think that it's easy and anyone can do it but there are three challenges.

The first difficulty is deciding upon a topic. I can't discuss anything controversial so politics and discourse on my religious faith are out. This is read by an all-age audience and so I cannot discuss my love of terrible horror novels or my frustration that the words "mature" or "adult" have come to mean a work that is obscene. Our diverse and varied audience would be bored by some of my nerdier interests and complaints. The articles are published anonymously and so I cannot get too personal or specific. What I am left with is what I have to overcome the next hurdle: actually writing the articles.

I work full-time and have an attention-seeking dog, and so finding time to sit down and write articles is a hassle. When I do find the time, the craft of writing itself is strenuous. Every word and sentence must be plucked from the ether and placed upon the page. Word by word the essay is knitted together for you to enjoy, or at least consume.



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The third and greatest task is to make it interesting. I have halfway completed multiple essays before discarding them for being dull, or deleted them and started again. If I'm bored, then the reader will be bored, but I may be interested and still bore the reader, for boredom is in the eye of the reader.

Boring people often lead interesting lives; Interesting to them. Who amongst us has not been tormented with dull vacation stories or photographs of tedious grandchildren? The writer's goal should always be to engage, for a bored audience is liable to go and do something else. ∞

RUSTIC BIRDSBORO TRAVEL

BY MICHAEL Malfaro

I discovered Rustic Park quite by accident. My companion, who wishes to remain anonymous, and I had gone out to Birdsboro for a Christmas event in the park. Being unfamiliar with the area, we followed the GPS. I have since learned that global positioning systems are not reliable in Birdsboro, for reasons unknown. That was mistake number one.

Once we reached the park, it was quite obvious that this was the wrong park. For one, the park was not large enough for it, and the gravel parking lot didn't have enough cars (These events tend to attract a large crowd.) The park was quite small from what I could see, a strip of land between the highway and the river, featuring a picnic grove, a swingset, and grass fields. We got out anyway. That was mistake number two. My companion left her keys in the car and locked the door. That was mistake number three.

It was an unusually warm winter's day, so the cold was not a problem. Still, we were trapped here without a ride. She called her parents, Uber, roadside assistance, 911, and everyone else she could think of, to no avail. I, having nothing better to do, began exploring. There was a swing set and picnic pavilion to the right of the parking lot, but to the left was what really drew my attention. Running across the river was a sort of tightrope bridge, with a wire for the feet below and a wire to grasp above, that I had not seen from the car. I crossed this wire, leaving my companion with the car, still frantically dialing for help. On the other side of

the river was a sort of fire pit, an abandoned house, and a crumbling asphalt road leading further into the woods. My rational mind said that it was getting dark, and my companion would be concerned if I should wander too far. My overactive imagination, already in a strange place due to the twilight and the unseasonal weather, said that there was something sinister in those woods, whether it be aliens, ghosts, cursed Indian burial grounds, or simply the edge of the world. You may not believe such ridiculous things in the safe, sane daylight, but your nerves might in the dark. I forwent further exploration, and crossed back over the rope bridge.

What happened next would be called a *deus ex machina* if it occurred in fiction. Our salvation proved to be four-legged, yellow, and 80 pounds soaking wet, which he was. It had gotten completely dark by this point, but people were still filtering back from that strange place on the other side of the bridge. Two men and a pair of children were crossing the bridge, one by one, while their Golden Retriever watched from the water. I slid the plastic grip across for them, and tried to be helpful, mainly because I wanted to pet the dog. When they were all across, I asked the dog's name, and where the old road led. He explained that there was a quarry back there, and one of the best rock-climbing spots in Berks county. The conversation meandered, as they are wont to do. He told me his wife was independently wealthy, but he had his own locksmithing business. Unbelievably,

he had the equipment to open a locked car door. The device was a small bag that you slid into the crack between the door and main body of the car, and then inflated. Using an extendable bit of metal, you then hit the unlock button. We were soon safely home.

That strange park stuck in my mind, however. When I needed a new place to explore, somewhere I had never been, that old road on that strawberry spring day came back to me. Rustic Park awaited.

It was a beautiful Saturday in April, not too hot and not too cold. The GPS, for once, proved itself faithful. We soon found ourselves back in the same gravel parking lot.

The quarry company had blown up the bridge years ago, leaving the road a dead end. There were other ways, of course. Many of the fishermen I saw that day just waded through the river, and anyone on horseback or bicycle could ride their way across, the river being quite shallow at many places. Lacking both waterproof boots or bicycles, the only way for my companion and I to cross was the tightrope.

Crossing the bridge is both easier and harder than it might seem. I'm heavy and have poor balance, so the rope shakes like Jell-O when I cross. The trick, for me at least, was to hold on tight, and to just endure the discomfort of having to walk sideways.

The old house was still there, white where the local idiots had not marred it with spray paint. No trespassing signs were posted everywhere on the building. The only possible entryway for an



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intruder was through an open window on the front, which was barred by two metal poles with a gap large enough to slip through. Having no intention of trespassing, but still being curious, I peered through this window. Inside was a lawnmower and surprisingly little water damage, almost like someone was occasionally cleaning the place out. Graffiti littered the walls in some places, proving that not everyone shared my reluctance to trespass.

Graffiti also litters the old road. It's mostly the standard scribbles of sub-standard scribes, but, among the poorly drawn genitalia, the names of idiots who sign their vandalism, teenage trailer-trash Satanism, and general obscenity were some genuinely interesting designs and works of art.

It proved impossible to get a good look at the quarry without trespassing. We passed within a hundred yards of

it, but our view was blocked by a line of hopper cars. Anyway, anyone who has seen Doctor Who Anyway, anyone who has seen Doctor Who or Star Trek already knows what a quarry looks like.

The path meandered on for quite a while, at one point turning into a gravel path before the road resumed. We encountered a friendly Jack Russell and a shy Tree Walker hound, but little of note occurred before we reached the second tightrope.

The second tightrope was a good five or six feet off the ground, longer, and had no plastic grip. It almost seemed like whoever set these up was setting challenges to weed out those deemed unworthy. You had to clamber up a lump of cement just to get onto it. It was at this point my companion mentioned she should have worn sneakers. I looked down and remarked she was

wearing Sunday shoes. She said they were flatbottoms and she wore them every day. As I neared the end of the rope, I looked down, and noticed that someone had discarded an even less sensible pair of shoes. Laying on the ground were a pair of sandals, with the strap on one of them broken. I pointed this out to my companion, but she failed to find either humor or irony in this.

At the top of that hill was a strange cement building covered with graffiti. It appeared to be both decaying, but at the same time still very solid, unlike the old house. Outside of it, I found a nerf dart, a few beer bottles and many discarded spray cans. The place was two-stories high, with the remains of a wooden roof still visible on top. What was the purpose of this building?

Going inside the building shed no further light on these mysteries. If any-

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thing, exploring the hall brought more questions than answers. Inside, the floor was covered with detritus, almost entirely consisting of spray-paint cans. Was this place a mecca or holy site for taggers and graffiti artists? Were they just instinctively drawn towards any place where they would not be interrupted by concerned citizens or the authorities? Many of the more elaborate drawings showed actual artistic talent. What drives someone to put time and effort into something for which they will receive no reward or thanks? Was it just the artistic drive, the urge to create, the need to alter the world around us?

The second floor had a bolted door painted white, and no other entrance. Peering within, I saw a lawnmower and an outdoor camping chair. I realized the township or county must use this building for storage, and just let the vandals and mad artists have the lower, unsealable floor.

It shames me to admit I didn't realize what this was when I first looked at it. I had assumed it was some manner of machinery related to rock climbing, but, on the way back, I realized it was a donation box for the upkeep of the bolts the climbers attached their ropes to. Are new bolts drilled into the cliff as the old ones are gradually worn away? Are the bolts reinforced with cement and special adhesives? Was this not a fund for upkeep, but one for putting up new bolts? There was no one around who would know the answer to these questions

Past the Bolt Fund was the first of the rock climbing walls. I was reminded of my own experience with rock climbing as a child. I had reached the top and had begun bawling, begging to be let back down. I have always had a deep and abiding fear of heights.

I had plenty of time to experience that fear as we followed the path. There was nothing separating us from the edge most of the time, and the path

got uncomfortably narrow at some points, at least to someone who wants to keep a good ten feet from the edge.

We eventually came to what a park bench claimed was the main wall. There were hooks all over the wall, presumably to hang climbing equipment off of. The area was shockingly clean, considering the filth of the nearby graffiti castle. Did the rock climbers clean up after themselves?



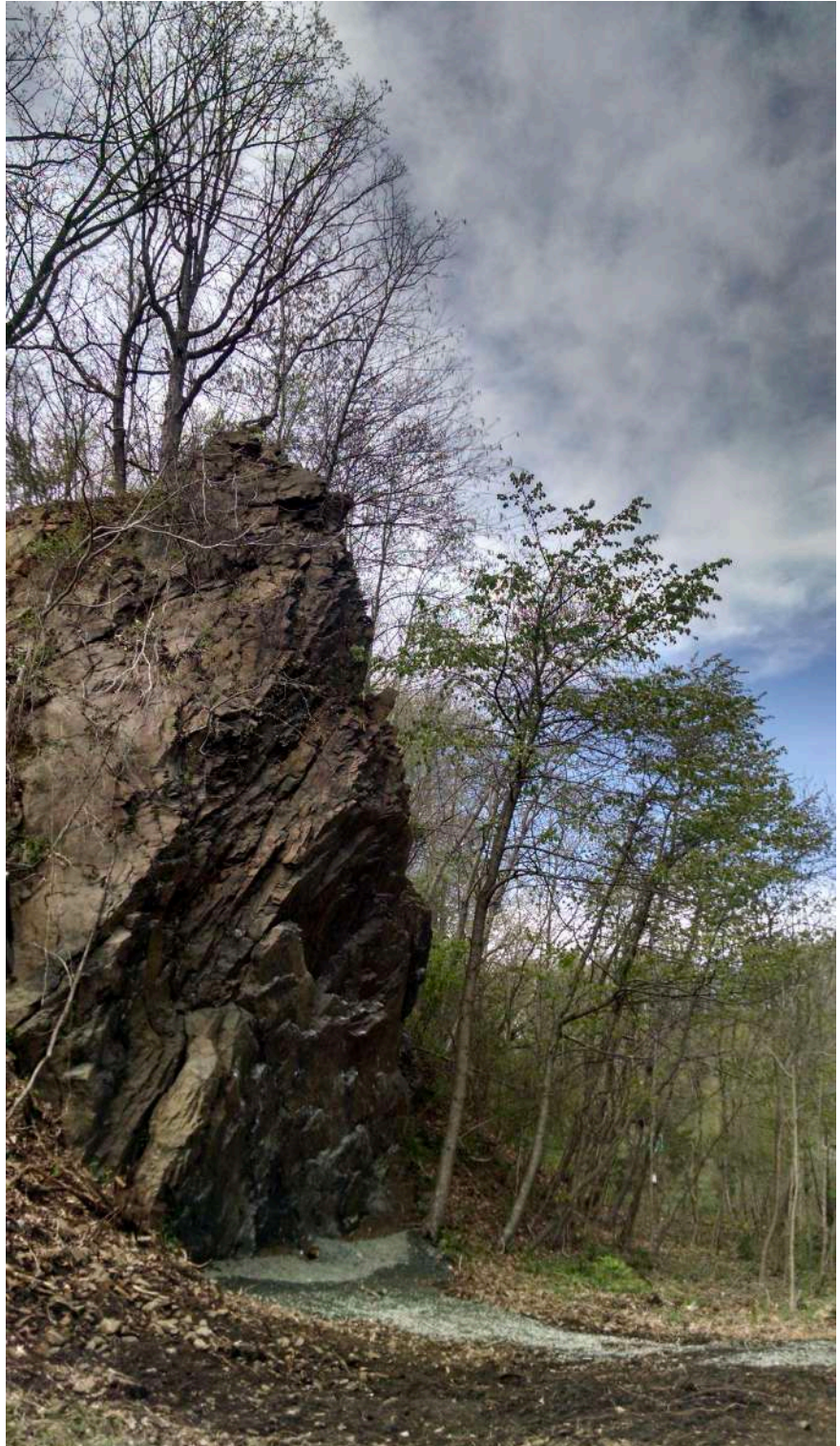
Eventually, the path opened up, and we came to a delightful sign. *Do not throw rocks at mountain climbers.*

Are there people with enough patience, pettiness, and psychosis to walk all the way out here just to throw rocks at mountain climbers, and is a sign really going to stop them from throwing rocks? Past this perplexing post was a gorgeous view of a blue lake that seemed to spring out of nowhere. The lake was protected by signs forbidding fishing or swimming, the cliffs and steep climb downwards, and a chain link fence on the bottom. There was no possible way to reach it without rock climbing equipment.

The path continued onwards into an area inexplicably covered with sand. It wasn't just a little sand either. Someone had apparently felt the need to sculpt a miniature desert on the path. The weirdest part was that the sand was only in that area and nowhere else. It wasn't to cushion a landing for rock climbing, because there were no bolts or hooks to attach equipment to. They even put up a little mortar and stone wall to keep the sand from going off the edge.

The lake was something of a puzzle. No pipes or rivers fed it, and it was far too large to just be an overgrown puddle. A little further past the land of sand we found the answer.

Water came down the Cliffside, not as a waterfall or as a river, but simply as a steady, unending stream of drops. Was this just the remnants of a river destroyed by man or nature, or was this some sort of man-made phenomena? I have lived on mountains my entire life, and I have seen this effect in fountains, both monumental and tablesized, but had never before encountered it in the natural world. I watched for a good minute or so to see if the constant trickling would let up. It didn't. Even such a strange and novel phenomena gets boring after such a time, and so we moved on.




Finally, we came to the end of the path, and the oddest thing yet. A small memorial had been set up “In Memory of Mitchal Miller Loving Husband Brother Father and Friend”. Two stones with a large flat one placed ver-

tically between them created a sort of four person seat, and the plaque was placed on a mortared wall. The strangest thing, however, was finding, in the gravel area surrounding the chair, a steel shell casing, still glittering in the



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casing. Up to now, I had found no evidence of gunplay or sports shooting in Rustic Park, and, if this was a crime scene, the police would have taken it for evidence. Was it let off as some sort of memorial at the dedication?

I found a map for this area online later on a website called mountainproject.com. The map reveals that this was an old quarry, sadly clearing up many of the mysteries of this park. With a new quarry built nearby, the old road was unneeded, and thus sealed off to discourage visitors. The old crumbling cement building was probably a refinery or rock mill of some sort. The old “house” may have actually been offices or a worker’s break room of some

kind. Once this one fact was known, all the mystery of this strange place disappeared. It just becomes an odd park.

Still, it was a lovely park, and many interesting people were out enjoying the good weather. Two gentlemen on the rope bridge agreed to pose for me, and, afterwards, we ran into two ladies on horseback. My immediate question was “can I pet them?” They said yes.

They were both mix-stock draft horses. The smaller of the two, the one with the heart shape on his forehead, would not stop nibbling my fingers. His rider said that it was the salt he liked. He was the more restless of the two as well. I asked if we could photograph them. She said yes, and my compan-

ion took the picture. They then asked if I would photograph them with her phone. I said yes, having felt the shutterbug urge all day. I took at least eight shots, as the little horse would not stop squirming, and kept ruining the picture.

On the drive home we stopped at a house that had what appeared to be sticks sticking out of the fence, and anarchy symbols on the fence. I had dubbed the place “fortress of anarchy” in my head. It turns out I was wrong on several counts. They were not sticks. They were sculptures, and the place already had a name: Fort Apache.

I was wrong about Rustic Park. This place keeps getting stranger and stranger. ∞

MARCHING INTO MARCH

BY CLAIRE MALFARO



The grayness and cold of winter often become tedious for people as winter holds on long into March. Snowstorms in April feel disappointing and almost like a trick – just when you thought you had escaped the grip of Jack Frost, his bony icy fingers grab you once more. One antidote is to hold on to the hope of the coming Spring.

This is the mindset we hold also in our beloved nonprofit, Positively Produced Foundation, hope for things to come. Hope for the future.

In April, my husband and I will travel to San Mauro Marchesato in the Calabria region of Italy. It is the hometown of my great grandfather, Rosario Mal-

fara, and where he married his wife, Maria Caligiuri in 1885 before they emigrated to Philadelphia. This region of Italy was poor, people gambled with their lives to travel to what they saw as the land of opportunity – the United States of America.

Sadly, Rosario, who could not read and had few resources, died at the age of 55 and was buried in a pauper's grave outside of Philadelphia. I imagine he and Maria must have had little hope as these events transpired. His dream, though not realized in his lifetime, was passed down to the next generations. His son, Amadeo, my grandfather, was a man of great hope. He

lived well into his 90's and I remember him as a jovial person who loved lemon Tastykake pies.

My grandmother died young and although I knew he forever grieved her loss, he remained positive and forward thinking, carrying around his hard backed black and white notebook keeping track of the stock market. He loved Victor Hugo, told his children the story of John Valjean. Valjean, the paragon of hope - the reinvented thief given a reprieve by a kindly bishop. This act inspired in Valjean hope for the future.

My grandfather had also faced great challenges - horror in the trenches of France where he was wounded. Al-

though he shared factual information, like the three types of grenades that were used, I never saw despair regarding what he must have seen. The research on POW's reveals it is hope for a future – transcendence created by a visual imagining of a time and place beyond the walls of their prison – that helps them to survive in mind and body.

My grandfather modeled this reality to me. He transcended the trauma of war and founded the fire company in Sicklerville, NJ, where he had settled. He opened a grocery store where he afforded credit to people who needed it. He who himself had only a sixth-grade education, sent my father to Villanova University for a degree in Engineering. This legacy was also passed to my brother, Bill and

two of my children, who also graduated from Villanova. A far distance from the mountains of Calabria traversed by a man who gambled, and it appeared initially lost, buried in a place for those who seemingly have no hope.

Appearances can be deceiving, however. The hope of his dreams for a better life flowed down the generations of my family – Rosario, Amadeo, my father, Louis, to me. And I to my children, including Michael who has level 1 autism and has faced great challenges. Michael held on hope for a future after he graduated from college with honors and could not get competitive employment due to the difficulties associated with his condition. Michael, who like his grandfather and great grandfather, has a brilliant mind yet struggled to find his place in this world.

Positively Produced Foundation's appeal to companies is not a plea for one sided charity - the untapped potential and skills of people with level 1 autism are well documented . The equation is give a chance to people who are intelligent but struggle with soft skills of socialization and deficits in communication and you will reap the benefits of their talents.

Accommodate for these minor issues and you will find employees who according to Harvard Business Review are more productive than their peers . Our candidates are hard working , detail oriented and productive . They will be an asset to your company . We will keep plugging away with the hope that our mission will be heard and heeded . Join us and become a part of this possibility of hope, benefitting the community as a whole. ∞



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We as a community can implement changes to better the world in which we live. We are called to be our brother's keeper. The marginalized in our society are a fragile part of our world. We are connected to them in intricate ways and if we allow, we can join in their vulnerabilities and create stronger communities together.

Positively Produced Foundation is a nonprofit serving adults with autism with an aim of overall societal inclusion, especially gainful employment opportunities.

Positively Produced will help businesses understand the benefits of employing adults with autism and assist in the recruitment, hiring and onboarding process. Additional support will be available as needed. Interested in partnering your company in this exciting venture?

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BRANCH MANAGER
NMLS# 1972953
3630 Rothsville Road
Ephrata, PA 17522
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MISSION STATEMENT

The Positively Produced Foundation's mission is to assist in the employment of adults with autism, helping them lead productive lives by improving social language communication skills, community interaction, and employment preparedness.

VISION STATEMENT

To create a safe environment where adults with autism can thrive in the world, including full community engagement. Our aim is to educate employees and business leaders regarding the benefits of hiring a neuro-diverse workforce as a greater goal of full community understanding.

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