



The Valley Views

A Newsletter of the Ohio Valley Residential Services, Inc.

"Grace, the State of Kindness and Favor Towards Someone..."

by Michael DeFrancesco

I met **Michelle Grace**, a person who works part time with OVRs, but whose personality and influence among many of the individuals within OVRs transcends those few hours, and offers a personality of inspiration.

I called Michelle to talk about her well-known local activity junkets. She called me right back and said, "Hey, I'm at Eden Park with Virginia right now, why don't you come over?" I did.

"Eden Park on a sunny day is quiet, and whoever accompanies me, loves feeding the ducks. It's very calming," remarked Michelle.

"So, tell me about the personal adventures you introduce to individuals," I asked her.

"I like to go to places with one or two people, and where there are no groups of individuals, like bowling on Saturday at Brentwood. I'll take a couple of people to a different bowling alley."

Michelle exudes an infectious energy and smile. Before she asks individuals to accompany her on an adventure, she asks them if you could do something they've always wanted to do—what would it be?

Some of the experiences she has taken individuals have been riding the duck boat across the Ohio River; visiting a jazz and comedy club; and taking men to play pool, shoot hoops, and play tennis.

Michelle recounts the time she took **Kenny** to a go-cart track. He really wanted to go, but when it was his turn to climb into the car, he became afraid and started to cry. Then he saw a little girl jump ahead of him get in her cart and go. He looked at Michelle and said I can do that—and he did.

One of her random acts of kindness involved professional sports. Michelle knew a couple of Bronco football players and she was able to get additional tickets for a couple of the men to attend a game with her. On another experience, she took **Larry**, who is severely physically impaired and loves amusement parks, to ride big roller coasters. She has taken a couple of people to Parky's Farm so they could experience milking a goat.

Michelle can be very persuasive. One gentleman, who doesn't like to go anywhere, relented when Michelle suggested that the two of them go to an Indiana casino. On his return, he told Michelle that he had a ball. She has taken a couple of people to the Cadillac Ranch to just sit on the riding bull—while the bull was not moving. But perhaps her boldest effort was when she took three men to a strip club one afternoon. The women gave them great attention and the guys loved it.

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A Gentle Teacher Bespeaks a Gentle Man

I had the privilege of attending a **John McGee** seminar at the Hamilton County Board Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) a couple of weeks ago. McGee has a world-wide reputation for the concept called "Gentle Teaching." He is an unpretentious man with a radiant smile and a teller of wonderful stories—of children, adolescents, adults who live with the pain of being untouched, broken, and ostracized because of their aberrant ways. He comes this way not as a psychologist or psychiatrist or masters of social work. He studied philosophy and metaphysics. He seems not to lose focus on the essence of being human—both for the broken person and crucially for the care giver of that person. From his writings he addresses the "carer."

According to McGee, Gentle Teaching "has four initial teaching purposes—to teach others to feel safe, loved, loving, and engaged. These do not just happen. They are taught through repeated acts of love. Gentle caregivers learn to use their presence, hands, words, and eyes as their primary teaching tools to uplift and honor others."

Care giving can become overpowering. The strong are sometimes bent on controlling the weak. Obedience and compliance too frequently take the place of companionship. Independence holds more sway than interdependence. None of these priorities come out of any intentional

meanness. They are part of our culture. They are how we are schooled to deal with others. A solitary neutral gaze, a demanding word, or a cold touch can shout out to the already suspicious person that we are nothing more than oppressors, even when our intention is to value.

Our interactions need to start with love, including the manner in which we physically and emotionally approach, look at, reach out to, and speak to the person. Every move, step, and expression has to summon up a strong feeling of genuine warmth and exude unconditional love. They need to center on it. Nothing is more important than giving value. Whatever else happens, this focus has to transcend everything else.

Unlike other consultants who lecture about behavior, John McGee demonstrates how to use gentle teaching. He shows videos of himself working with "difficult" individuals and breaking through seemingly impermeable walls of fear and protection.

He made a comment on quality—that ever-elusive concept in human services: "You can measure the quality of an organization by how the most challenging and difficult person in that group is treated."

OVRs is committed to the principles of Gentle Teaching. John McGee offers a powerful message and OVRs aspires to heed it and to put it into practice.

Making Healthy Choices Pay Off



Jeff is smiling and he should be. He has worked hard in the past year or so to lose almost 100 pounds. He has been successful through making healthy food choices, getting more exercise, and working closely with staff on his daily food plan.

Jeff's transformation includes practically giving up salt and sugar. He is not eating any bread; his pasta servings are tiny; he's developed his palate for brown rice cakes; and his desserts must be sugarless. He does eat some snacks: unsalted cashews and unsalted almond butter. Jeff is drinking and liking Sparkling Ice with zero calories—instead of soda.

Trey Hoover and the staff at Charlemar get a bouquet for the attentiveness to meal planning. And, a secondary benefit of Jeff's diet has been that his housemates—having tasted Jeff's menu—are liking the choices and eating it, too.

And, perhaps above all, Jeff quit smoking.

A Mother Who Took the Long View

It was perhaps three years ago that one of the mothers, who has a son living in an OVRS-licensed home with three other housemates, contacted me about her wanting to act on a long standing interest—having her son, Gary, live in a ranch home where he could live on one floor along with his friends. Gary has lived for many years in a nicely situated home, but on the second floor.



OVRS found this four-bedroom house for sale on Craig's List this spring.



Everyone will enjoy the covered porch during the summer and fall.

Working with the mother and her niece, we spent many days looking on the MLS, working with a realtor, and checking on Craig's List for the right home. We visited many ranch homes.

Unfortunately, four-bedroom ranch homes are as rare in Cincinnati as moon rocks. Many are in the newer communities north of the city or east, *e.g.*, Anderson Township, and with price tags well beyond the reach of Mom's savings, and even there, many have swimming pools. Pools are a problematic liability.

This spring a house turned up on Craig's List—a spacious four-bedroom ranch with a finished basement in the area of White Oak. After several visits, including with families, we made the purchase.

There was a bit of a stir among the neighbors—four individuals with autism were going to change the ambience, let alone the values, of the neighborhood. A meeting among the Colerain township trustees seemed to have helped alleviate lots of misinformation.

It will be for OVRS to dispel all fears by the way we introduce the men into the neighborhood and the way we carry out the agency's mission, which looks to the interests of the neighbors as well as the men who will live in their new home.



George Timberlake views a car race looking down at it.

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