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Horizons
Spring 2019

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OUR SHARED STEPS

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

We’ve been exposed to this famous quotation, I’m sure, thousands of times over the course of our travels. Perhaps we saw it embroidered on a home keepsake somewhere or it was shared with us by a good friend or maybe we heard it in a Willie Nelson song (“There Is No Easy Way (But There Is a Way),” Island in the Sea, 1987).

The quote is attributed to the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, and it has certainly withstood the test of time and is just as applicable now as it was in 500 B.C. And when you talk about what happens here at Crotched Mountain School on a daily basis, it is difficult for me to conjure a more apt characterization.

The success our students achieve here are indeed measured in steps. From the outside these steps may appear small in nature, innocuous and inconsequential. But trust me, when one student overcomes his anxiety and collects eggs from the chicken coop for the first time or one of our “Littles” writes his name, independently on the whiteboard or Mason, who you’ll read about in this issue, sits with his classmates to eat the potato chips they just made in cooking class, these are tremendous achievements, celebrated near and far.

And the reason for this adulation is simple: there are more steps to come. And when these successes are strung together, before you know it, you’ve got a full-scale journey—and the student’s life has forever been changed. As well as mine. And yours.

Because, together we all can share in these journeys. And though we may not travel these paths as closely as our teachers and paraeducators and student support professionals and clinicians, we can offer our support in different ways—through our gifts, our volunteerism, our encouragement, or even through the telling of these stories of adventures undertaken and peaks surmounted to the people close to us. Every action counts, no matter the size.

Which brings to mind another Lao Tzu quote: *Great acts are made up of small deeds.*

Thank you for your deeds and thank you for being part of the Crotched Mountain journey.

Michael Coughlin
President and CEO of Crotched Mountain
The newest and youngest residents of Crotched Mountain carry with them burdens known and unknown—and dreams of a renewed life.

April 7, 2019
2:00 pm

I’m standing in the middle of the Crotched Mountain School gymnasium, which has temporarily transformed into a miniature Big Top. There’s a huge curtain, a large foam pad on the floor, and a towering apparatus strewn with ribbons, rings, and swings. The Flying Gravity Circus was in town.

For the third year, the Wilton-based performance troupe—comprised of teenagers from across New England—had taken over the gym, promising an afternoon of acrobatics, juggling, and a multitude of feats of derring-do. I brought my two children, who are always up for the circus.

After about fifteen minutes, the gym fills up. Students and their staff occupy most of the seats. As the performers prepare to do their thing, the sound of the usual Crotched Mountain School ambience fills the air—an impromptu shout or two, some pacing around the back, a huge, hearty laugh out of nowhere.
Up front, criss-cross applesauce on some special reserved floor seats, sit the youngest of Crotched Mountain School’s student body. These young children, residents of our new Mellon’s Program, come to Greenfield from the New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), as a result of major home disruptions. Some have solid family supports. Many do not. A few will arrive with only the clothes they are wearing. Maybe a bag filled with toys and socks.

Here, on the mountain, they have found respite, restoration, and, perhaps, reunification.

**2:45 pm**

It’s intermission.

The Flying Gravity Circus have been putting on a barn-burner of a show. Boisterous, driving music has been the backdrop to the high-energy activity of these troupers. A glance around the assembly reveals a landscape of grins.

But no one has had more of a blast than our “Littles.” These kids, man. I make a point of wandering over during the performance to spy on their reactions. They were transfixed. Eyes as big as flying saucers. Toothy smiles stretched from ear to ear.

“J,” the youngest of our crew, a tiny boy with an autism diagnosis and severely limited verbal skills, has not stopped laughing from the moment the circus started.

**4:15 pm**

I had promised my kids we’d get ice cream and hit the playground if they did a good job at the circus. They had. We make a quick stop at the Harvester Market for a dose of some exotic blue cookie crunch type of melange that my daughter declared to be “The best ice cream I ever had,” we pile into the car.
Now suitably hopped up on fat and sugar we make our way to Oak Park in Greenfield to burn off some of that energy on the playground. It’s cool out, but just warm enough to ensure small children could swing on monkey bars without their hands going numb leading to nosedives into semi-thawed wood chips.

Moments later, an instantly recognizable gray Dodge Caravan pulls up. “Crotch Mountain School” is emblazoned on the side of the van. The doors open and our “Littles” spill out, running with abandon to the playground, their staff in tow.

I had expected a laid-back wrap to the afternoon, reading my John Sandford novel at the picnic table, paying just enough attention to my children to ensure I didn’t come home to have an awkward conversation with my wife about my son’s unfortunate encounter with a squirrel with a crazy look in its eyes.

That plan went out the window as soon as I watch my kids start playing with the Littles. My daughter instantly pairs off with a young girl who shares my daughter’s competing loves of trying to swing into the stratosphere and hanging precariously off of outcroppings. My son starts to play tag with the little girl who barely speaks.

I put my book down and watch. And consider. Children from vastly different walks of life, playing together like... children. Children whose only care at this precise moment was eluding the designation of being “It.” They were enjoying the simple pleasures of climbing and running and digging in the pine needles. Living on a mountain in Greenfield may be unorthodox for a child, but going to the circus and playing tag is not.

The merry-go-round was the big hit of the park (second only to “dirt”). The kids would load up and the staff would spin that sucker like it was the Wheel of Fortune. Yelps of excitement follow. Some jump off. Some jump on. But that wheel kept spinning.
Back up the hill, just a mile or two away, at Crotched Mountain, some little bedrooms would soon be filled with their occupants, no doubt wiped out from a full day of circus fun and playground shenanigans. They would—fingers crossed—conk out quickly and sleep deeply, soundly, and safely.

Then another day at Crotched Mountain School would follow. And another. And some day, hopefully soon, they would return to their old home—or a new home—and leave the mountain.

But as I have come to know since being part of the Crotched Mountain universe, the demand will not subside. There will always be little ones in need of those bedrooms, and, especially, the simple joys of juggling, jungle gyms, and playing with new friends on a semi-cold spring day.

Some will jump off. Others will jump on. And the wheel will spin.
Xavier’s journey is measured in inches and feet, the steady accumulation of which led to his ultimate goal—the freedom to move about the campus.

You can hear the sound ripple from across the Crotched Mountain School ball-field. It’s almost like someone is trying to kickstart a small-engine scooter, but the engine refuses to fire

EMMMMM EMMMMMMM EMMMMMM EMMMMMMM

You bend your ear a bit further and realize that it’s a human making that sound—a boy, specifically. In the distance you see him. He’s standing still, just in front of the Hayden building. His staff waits for him patiently, about 15 yards away.

It’s Xavier, and for a stretch last year, when he first arrived at Crotched Mountain, he and his trademark vocalizations were a fixture around the school—but rarely in the school.

He brought with him a significant autism diagnosis, a touch of OCD, and extremely limited communication skills. In Tom Newbury’s class, this mixture of challenges were not new; his students all had autism and communication challenges as well as a bevy of secondary diagnoses. It was Xavier’s impediments to actually making it into Tom’s class that made him such a recognizable figure on campus.

The X-Man—as he’s known around these parts—would consistently get hung up in his travels, impeded by the various diagnoses that have acted as a barrier for so much of his life.

Those first few months were exercises in patience and fortitude. From the time he departed for school to when Xavier would finally arrive at Tom’s class, you were looking at a solid two or three hours. The best case scenario was a 10:30 am arrival, far past Tom’s Morning Meeting kickoff time of 9:00 am, when his class gathered together to begin the day. Sometimes he wouldn’t even make it to class at all.

This was expected. This was Xavier after all. Right?

Not so fast.

A LONG WAY

When Xavier first began in Tom’s class a list of “can’ts and won’ts” accompanied him, the things that Xavier just wasn’t going to be able to pull off—“The desk has to be positioned just this way or Xavier won’t sit” or “His food can’t touch the sides of his plates or Xavier won’t eat.” Tom immediately filed the list away.

“My goal for the boys in my class is turn them into young men and to have them be as socially involved as possible,” Tom says. “They may not end up managing the Red Sox, but that doesn’t mean they can’t go to a ballgame and grab lunch on the way.”

For Xavier the first goal was pretty straightforward: help him get to school. Specifically, support Xavier in getting himself “unstuck” and making it to class four out of five days a week in time for morning meeting.

“We were going to treat this boy like we treat the rest of our kids,” Tom says. “What is our expectation of him as part of our class? It was simple: you’ll get to school.”

The strategy? Patience and persistence. Allow Xavier the space to get himself unstuck, and move forward. Staff would not repeat instructions over and over—a recipe for wheel-spinning—but rather offer guidance once and set out for school, almost like a pace car, and Xavier would follow.
“We wanted to give Xavier the space to make his own decisions and go at his own speed,” said Alyse Fusco, Xavier’s Residential Program Manager.

And, as is the case here on The Mountain, the wins came slowly—but surely. The stuck stretches reduced, staff who worked with him throughout the year like James and Ibrahim and Nick and Cici and Ahley and Krissie and Amanda and Bre and Si and Ntsinzi kept him moving, and, just ahead, on the horizon, his ultimate goal was within grasp: punctuality.

“We wanted him to be on time to school for five consecutive days,” Tom says. “And he did that. He exceeded our expectations. He’s come a long way.”

In fact, at the annual Crotched Mountain School Awards Show on June 5, Xavier was awarded a certificate for Transitioning Between Classes During the School Day.

It was well-earned.

PROM NIGHT
Friday, May 17

The party soon got into full swing and the dance floor was electric. Students and staff and family members let it rip while the music blasted.

Your attention wanders to the double doors at the entrance to Carter Hall. Xavier is standing there. He’s stuck and repeating his mantra to himself. Claude, his staff, and Alyse are just a few steps away smiling and encouraging, beckoning him onward.

A few minutes pass. You look back and notice that the X-Man has made it through the first set of doors and is now in a holding pattern at the next set. Another ten minutes or so zip by and you see that Xavier has officially entered the building.

He continues to slowly make his way to the dance floor. Alyse is a few steps ahead, cheering him on. He walks to the floor and stops and Alyse stretches out her hands. Xavier taps them, then pulls his fingers back. He taps them again and pulls them back again. Then his hands rest on her hands for a little longer and they stay there. And then he starts to move to the music, swaying back and forth, hands still coupled, and then they’re dancing and an hour passes and then he’s still dancing and then it’s finally time to go and in a fluid motion Xavier lets go, departs the dance floor, strides through the double-doors, and, side by side with Claude, walks out of the parking lot and up the road, heading home, melting into the twilight.
Amidst the bedlam Mason took in the game—and this was no small feat. A young man with limited communication and an autism diagnosis, Mason is not a fan of sensory overload. In class, where Travis is his teacher, he likes to keep to himself, occupying the dedicated “Mason nook,” where he works on his academic work and watches his favorite videos on his tablet.

This sojourn to the baseball stadium was a first for Mason as a student at Crotched Mountain School; in fact, it would have been unheard of a few years ago. Before, when Mason would feel overwhelmed by his surroundings, he might run away or pinch his staff as a means of communicating his unease.

Not today. No pinching, no taking off, just two guys munching on ballpark franks, watching the Fisher Cats try to dig out of a 5-0 hole they made it interesting but fell 7-5).
But Mason’s biggest and most exciting adventure will be coming in a couple of short months—when he departs Crotched Mountain School and goes back to his local school district.

And nothing even comes close.

THE PEOPLE PERSON

Mason arrived at Crotched Mountain School in 2014 for the same reason all students come to Greenfield—their local school is just unable to provide the needed resources to properly serve them. For Mason, challenging behaviors were what prompted his transition to day schooling at Crotched Mountain and his initial time in his new environment was marked with several aggressions a day.

Over time, however, Mason settled into his new school and his new schedule, which stabilized his surroundings and allowed him to move past his behaviors and showcase an entirely new side of physical interaction with his staff and teachers—namely, hugging.

Mason loves to hug. He loves giving high-fives. Basically, he just loves people.

“He has grown to be a completely different kid than the one we saw when he first got here,” says Meagan, his Student Services Coordinator. “He’s always laughing, always in a good mood, and just super-affectionate.”

As Mason’s team began to lay the groundwork for his move back to his home school they helped him focus primarily on his socialization skills, particularly working in a group setting with his peers.

This meant an increased focus on the big table in the middle of the class where the students could come together to do their school assignments (versus at their own desks) and work on collaborative tasks like art projects.

Over time Mason’s socialization grew. Sensitive to noise and too much activity, he was never a big fan of music class but has since come to enjoy it, especially when the day calls for dancing. Vocational experiences have recently been introduced, which allows him to make a little money to buy lollipops (his favorite).

A few Fridays ago, Travis led the weekly cooking class with his students. Mason, a picky eater, had never joined in with his peers to eat the result of their culinary efforts (not even when they made yogurt parfaits or smoothies or English muffin pizzas!). So Travis brought in the heavy artillery: his fryer from home. The project? Homemade potato chips. The boys cleaned and helped peel the potatoes and Travis cut them up and dropped them in the fryer. A little while later, the chips were done, warm and golden brown, and the class sat together to partake and Mason, for the first time, joined his peers and ate.

“He ate potato chips with us and that felt like the biggest win of the year,” Travis says.

THE RETURN

Mason’s departure from Crotched Mountain School was initiated in November. Following observations and evaluations, the teams from Crotched Mountain and Mason’s local school district recognized that he was ready to take the next big step—a step back home to his own school.

“Mason deserves to have that education experience in his home community,” says Meagan. “He came to Crotched Mountain for a reason, and now it’s time for him to go back. He’s going to do great there. I know it. He’s going to be amazing. I’m so excited for him.”

To make the transition as smooth as possible, Mason’s new school support staff have trained with the Crotched Mountain staff. Mason has a membership at his local Y to help him stay active. He’s gone to tour his new school, went in for lunch, even attended a school assembly. And when the new school year begins, Mason’s Crotched Mountain journey will be complete.

“And that’s the goal of special education,” Meagan says. “We are trying to get these kids to the least restrictive environment possible. And if that’s not here anymore, that’s fine. We’ve helped with the behaviors and worked on his academic and his therapeutic goals. Now we’re going to give him a hug and let him go.”
**The Face of Philanthropy**

**Make a Big Difference in Some Little Lives**

The first building campaign in almost two decades will create four urgently-needed classrooms for the youngest residents of Crotched Mountain School.

Thank you to all of you who are stepping up to support the building of four classrooms for the young children—our “Littles”—coming to Greenfield from the New Hampshire Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). To date, Crotched Mountain has completed new living and play spaces in the newly established Mellon Program and now our youngest residents need spaces to learn.

There continues to be a significant increase in children arriving at Crotched Mountain through the DCYF. Some are as young as three. Many come from unsafe home situations. Others have stable, supportive families. A number of these children have been impacted by the scourge of the opioid epidemic and many have endured significant traumas and exhibit developmental delays, communication challenges, and attachment disorders. They all have unique needs that require action, including the construction of expanded, specially designed classrooms.

So, the word was put out and caring, big-hearted people like you have been giving to the Littles Campaign to build these classrooms. Crotched Mountain’s campaign goal is $558,000 and the initial response from the community of supporters has been inspiring. Everyone wants in.

Every gift matters, from $50 to $50,000. It takes all of us banding together to make a real impact that will change the direction of these young lives.

Help us build these classrooms and donate what you can. These little ones deserve our very best. Please visit crotchedmountain.org/littles to learn more.

Kevin Harte  
VP, Advancement  
Crotched Mountain Foundation

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**Did You Know?**

- If you are 65 or older, one type of charitable gift can provide income to you and your spouse for life.
- If you are 70.5 years old or older, a gift to charity from your retirement account is a way to reduce taxable income.
- Designating a beneficiary on a checking, savings, or retirement account protects your assets and can reduce taxes.

Please contact Doreen Baker, Donor Services Manager, at 603-547-1482 or Doreen.Baker@CrotchedMountain.org to learn more about planned giving.

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Ross Heald, pictured with Doreen Baker, has been supporting Crotched Mountain since 1981. Ross’s father, Philip, helped Harry A. Gregg raise funds in the 1940s to build Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center. Thank you, Heald family.
Held on June 1, the Second Annual Winnipesaukee Volleyball Classic, organized by Kurt and Sarah Mailloux at the Akwa Marina Yacht Club in Laconia, raised over $26,000 to support scholarships for children with autism enrolled in Crotched Mountain’s Ready Set Connect autism centers. Ready Set Connect has locations in Concord, Manchester, with a new location in Tilton serving the Lakes Region opening in August.

“Our thanks to the entire Mailloux family as well as our generous sponsors and the participating volleyball players for helping put together an incredible event,” said Kevin Harte, Vice President of Advancement for Crotched Mountain Foundation. “Their generosity is going to make a difference in the lives of families of children with autism.”

Read more at cmf.org/volleyball2019
At the annual Crotched Mountain School Science Fair, held on May 17, Judy Beckman’s classroom emerged as the first-place winner with their dual projects: a plant growing test and make-your-own motor boats. “All my students have some form of sensory impairment,” Beckman (right) said. “So when we do our science projects it is important that they are hands-on and provide a science experience that my students can touch or see or hear.”

On June 6, Crotched Mountain School descended upon Northeast Delta Dental Stadium in Manchester to take in the game between the New Hampshire Fisher Cats and the Bowie Baysox. It was one of the largest school field trips in quite some time with over 30 students making the trip for a fun dose of America’s pastime. Jon, one of our students, had an especially good time.
The Mellon Program at Crotched Mountain School

The Mellon Program at Crotched Mountain School is an intensive residential placement and treatment program designed to promote safety, security, and the well-being of children referred by the state child protective agencies. Our goal: to help children find stability and build healthy, productive, meaningful relationships.

We will work to help children in the Mellon program find a safe and appropriate return to the community. Crotched Mountain School’s clinical and residential team will collaborate with state agencies to provide the necessary planning and supports to ensure that the transition process is successful.

- Beautiful, newly-renovated residential space
- Education at Crotched Mountain School or in nearby public schools
- Comprehensive clinical and therapeutic supports
- A variety of rich amenities and activities

Learn more at cmf.org/mellon