

Newsletter of the Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society

April 1st, 2022 (no foolin')

Page 1

My turn.....

Henry Winokur, Editor, (editor@patacs.org)



April 1st is approaching. Where is the time going? And the good news? Spring is officially here, or it was until winter showed up these past few days (3/31)!

It would be really great if more of you showed your faces—at least momentarily—for any of our meetings. Did you know that currently there are four public meetings a month? One is the Board of Directors (BoD) meeting and I really don't expect anyone—other than the BoD—to attend those meetings, but the other three should present something of interest to you.

I went to the Tidal Basin on 3/23, where I met 2 friends to photograph the cherry blossoms *at dawn*. By 0630 the nearby parking lots were filling fast and the weather was OK: temperatures in the low 50s and a mostly cloud-free sky.

Here's a panoramic image I created from 6 images, which I took from the Tidal Basin side of the Jefferson Memorial, looking north across the Tidal Basin.



The blossoms to the left look somewhat yellow as they are lit by the early morning sun. The ones from the middle to the right, are still in shade and because of that, they are somewhat bluish. All normal because of the lighting conditions.

Member extraordinaire John Krout is a source of many articles and presentations on all kinds of technology. I have a bunch of his articles in my “file cabinet”. This issue has two long, but not the longest, of his submissions. The third article is also by one of our locals, Gabe Goldberg.

Next printed issue: mid-May, 2022

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@AOL.com and @Verizon.net Email Access via AOL Apps

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (www.patacs.org)

AOL is rolling out email access changes that will affect you, or maybe have already. Learn how to recognize and resolve the problem(s).

INTRODUCTION

AOL made changes to its email services in 2021 and is rolling out those changes slowly for *@aol.com* and *@verizon.net* email users as of the end of calendar 2021. If you have such an email account and use a smartphone app other than AOL's, or a computer email application other than a web browser to access your email, then your access to email will fail when the changes are applied to your account.

The changes were applied to my *@verizon.net* account in mid-January 2022. The first symptom I saw was this: my smartphone email app for *@verizon.net* was **unable to sync** with the email servers.

Email is perhaps the most widely used example of **client-server computing** in the world. That phrase simply means that the work being accomplished is split between the email application or Web browser you use and the servers to which the email application or Web browser is connected. The email application or web browser is an example of a **client**. Likewise, a smartphone or tablet email app is a **client**.

An important implication of client-server computing is this: when either the server behavior or the client behavior changes, the other must change also and in the same way, or the client-server work cannot be accomplished any longer.

THE @VERIZON.NET EMAIL SAGA

Here is the sequence of developments, including how AOL came to host the @verizon.net email.

First, Verizon bought AOL in 2015 and **second**, in 2017, Verizon decided to transfer all @verizon.net email accounts to its subsidiary AOL.

When Verizon announced that change to customers, I had to reconfigure my smartphone email app to access my @verizon.net account via AOL email servers, instead of @verizon.net servers. Also, on my personal computers, I had to access the @verizon.net account using the **mail.aol.com** website, instead of a @verizon.net website.

Third, in 2021, Verizon divested AOL. All @verizon.net accounts remained on AOL servers after Verizon parted ways with AOL.

Although many email users access their accounts via web browsers, not everyone uses the web to access email on a personal computer. There are computer email applications such as Outlook and Thunderbird for that purpose. Many years ago I used the Eudora email application to access my @verizon.net account on my Windows computer. Eudora is now freely available as an open-source application.

Either way, application or web browser, the Windows application used is still acting as an email client.

Fourth, sometime in 2021, AOL began deploying configuration changes that prevented some users from accessing email using a phone app or computer email application.

A few days after I resolved the problem caused by those configuration changes, I found an online discussion forum in which a user reported an email app failure to access an @AOL.com email account in February 2021. The solution posted there is identical to the one I found.

Sometime near the end of 2021, Paul Howard, the president of PATACS and another long-time Verizon FiOS customer, found that his Thunderbird email application on his personal computer could no longer access his @verizon.net account on AOL email servers. He mentioned that problem to me.

Since I too have a @verizon.net email account, that made me curious. I watched for a problem using my email app to access my @verizon.net email account on my smartphone.

THE PROBLEM AFFECTS ME

In mid-January 2022, my smartphone email app displayed a notification that the app was no longer able to "sync", meaning connect to AOL email servers. The app said my most recent email arrived on January 13.

When I saw that sync failure on my smartphone, I used the **mail.aol.com** website on my Windows computer to access my **@verizon.net** email account. I confirmed that at least one email had been sent to my **@verizon.net** email account after January 13. I was seeing that one new email for the first time via that website.

So I wondered: what changed? It is important to investigate both the client-side and the server-side. I looked at the most recent update date of the email app: November 2021. Email in that email app worked fine for me from that date to January 13. The time sequence means the app update itself was not responsible for the problem, so I thought AOL must have made a change.

It took me a couple of hours of phrasing and rephrasing questions for Google to find an answer. The answer was provided by AOL via one of the AOL help web pages.

TWO CHANGES MADE BY AOL

AOL has altered its login requirements for use of any *third-party email app*, meaning any app not published by AOL.

Change 1: AOL imposed a new default email configuration, which AOL calls two-step authentication.

Change 2: For users of that new default configuration, including every **@aol.com** and **@verizon.net** email account, AOL requires all email clients, other than the AOL app and web browsers, to use an **AOL-generated password**, rather than the current password.

I found an AOL help web page explaining that for AOL users who have activated AOL two-step authentication, third-party email apps can no longer access their email accounts on AOL with the user's current email password in those third-party apps. This includes **@verizon.net** account holders.

My current **@verizon.net** email password still works when accessing **@verizon.net** email using the **mail.aol.com** website. **Apparently, web browsers are exempt from the AOL changes.**

The same AOL help page explains that AOL provides a login solution for those, like me, who use a third-party email app: an **AOL-generated password**, which is specifically tied to the name of the third-party app as well as the app user's @aol.com or @verizon.net email account name.

For me, the AOL help page was clear and helpful. The URL for the AOL help page appears **below**, and a QR code containing that URL is to the **right** in **Illustration 1**. You can scan that QR code using the Android 11 or 12 camera app or the iOS 15 camera app. No need to tap the shutter button; point the camera app at the QR code, and the camera app will give you an option to open the web page using your phone's web browser app.



Illustration 1

<https://help.aol.com/articles/Create-and-manage-app-password>

I know I did **not** activate AOL's two-step authentication. Nonetheless, I found that AOL's configuration for my email account said that election of two-step authentication was done. **I suspect two-step authentication is a new default established by AOL**. Maybe AOL applied it to my @verizon.net account shortly after January 13.

Given the earlier impact on other users, I guess that AOL is rolling out the new default slowly. Your @aol.com or @verizon.net email account may have already been affected, or may be affected in the future.

TWO POSSIBLE FIXES

That key phrase **activated AOL two-step authentication**, suggests that one possible cure for these email woes would be to **de-activate** AOL's two-step authentication. That appears to be possible, using the AOL Account security help page that gives access to the AOL password generation capability.

It is also possible to install and use the AOL app on your smartphone or tablet. You can continue to use your current email password in that app since that app is published by AOL. I decided not to do that because the Android version of the app is not highly rated, and includes a number of features I don't want.

A PROVEN FIX

I tried using an AOL-generated password in my smartphone email app.

Step 1 of the password generation steps in the AOL help page is a link to your personal AOL Account Security web page. That page initially requires you to log in to your account on AOL. For logging in, use your *@aol.com* or *@verizon.net* email address and current password. Once you are logged in, the page will show your Account Security settings and options.

Find this link on the Account Security page: **Generate and manage app passwords**. A click on that link will open the popups for AOL password generation.

The AOL password generation process does **not** change your current email password. You can continue to use your current password on **mail.aol.com**.

Step 2 of the password generation steps in the AOL help page requires entry of the name of the third-party email app you use to access *@aol.com* or *@verizon.net* email.

The password generated for me by AOL included 16 alphabetic characters in four 4-character groups, separated by spaces; ignore the spaces; the true and complete password is the sixteen alphabetic characters with no spaces. If you copy the password, then you will see no spaces when you paste the password.

USING THE GENERATED PASSWORD IN AN APP

The email app I use on my phone is one of literally scores of email apps that can be downloaded for free from the Google Play Store (Android) or the Apple App Store. I suspect the info about updating a password in the app I use is relevant to only a few readers of the newsletters published by APCUG affiliated user groups.

I am forced to give to you, the reader, an educational exercise to determine how your app reports it cannot sync incoming emails, and how to replace your current password with an AOL-generated password in the email app.

For updating the password in *your* email app, the most useful general advice I can provide is to go to Help in the email app you use and use the search button to search for the phrase **update password**. I used that approach in three email apps I use. In one, the word **Support** is used instead of **Help**.

After I replaced my current @verizon.net email password with the AOL-generated password in the email app I use, I found the new email I saw on the **mail.aol.com** web page also showed up in my app's Inbox screen. That confirmed that the configuration using the AOL-generated password worked.

COMPUTER EMAIL APPLICATIONS ARE ALSO "APPS" TO AOL

I installed the Mozilla Thunderbird email application on my Windows 10 computer. I configured it for accessing my @verizon.net email account using my current password. The application could not connect to the incoming email server **imap.aol.com** using my current password.

I used the AOL.com password generation process outlined above to obtain an AOL-generated password for Thunderbird. I configured Thunderbird to use that AOL-generated password instead of my normal password. That worked! Thunderbird promptly loaded my massive @verizon.net email Inbox.

KEEP A RECORD OF EACH GENERATED PASSWORD

While the AOL Account Security page says you can generate *and manage* passwords using that page, the only management option provided by AOL on that page is to **delete** a generated password. The AOL Account Security page does not allow you to see a generated password at any later point.

If you forget the generated password, your only option on the AOL Account Security help page is to delete the forgotten existing password for an app, generate a new one for the same app, and then make a permanent record of that new generated password.

Now we know what we must do to get our computer email applications and phone apps re-connected to our @aol.com and @verizon.net email accounts. This is once again an example of the value of a user group. Each of us has some strengths and weaknesses. Sharing our strengths helps all of us.

#

Make A Wi-Fi QR Code Using Android

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (www.patacs.org)

Instead of forcing family, friends, and user group members to type a long, convoluted password to access Wi-Fi, use your Android phone to make a QR code including the password, enabling all to connect by scanning the QR code.

INTRODUCTION

The basic purpose of QR codes is to convey useful information in a form that can be read by a smartphone, tablet, or computer. Any situation where info has to be hand-keyed can be improved by offering a QR code containing the same info. Recent models of Android and Apple phones and tablets have the ability to read and apply the info contained in QR codes.

The second advantage of QR codes is to avoid the hassle of *typos*. That hassle factor increases as the length of the hand-keyed info increases, making a QR code even more attractive.

QR codes contain various types of data. Some of the data types are URL (web page address), vCard (street address and phone numbers), and email (including recipient email address, subject line, and even the message text).

A Wi-Fi **QR code** typically contains three data elements: the Wi-Fi network name, also known as SSID, the password, and the type of encryption used by the Wi-Fi network. Devices that scan a Wi-Fi QR Code can connect to the Wi-Fi network if it is in range.

In this article, you will learn how to use your smartphone or tablet running the Android 10, 11, or Android 12 operating system to create a Wi-Fi QR code and store it as an image, just like a photo.

You will learn how to test the QR code to make sure it works. Then you can display it, enabling anybody nearby to scan it and connect to the Wi-Fi network, and you can print it, so it can be posted for others to scan even if you are not present at the time.

LOG INTO THE WI-FI NETWORK MANUALLY

Initially, you use your Android device to log into the Wi-Fi network using the normal method, including typing the password manually. If you use the Wi-Fi network frequently, then your Android device may connect to the network automatically.

At that point, your Android device has all the info required to create a QR code. It has the network name, the password, and the network encryption type.

This article was prepared, and screens were captured, using Android 12.

GENERATE A WI-FI QR CODE

The Settings app that enables you to connect to the Wi-Fi network and type the password also has can create a Wi-Fi QR code for logging in to the network.

Open the Android 10/11/12 Settings app, and tap **Connections**. You should see a screen like that depicted in



Illustration 1

Illustration 1, with the Wi-Fi network SSID at the top. Tap the SSID, which is circled in the illustration. You should see a screen like the one depicted in **Illustration 2**. The SSID appears under the heading **Current network**. Tap the **gear icon** to the right of the SSID, which is circled in **Illustration 2**.

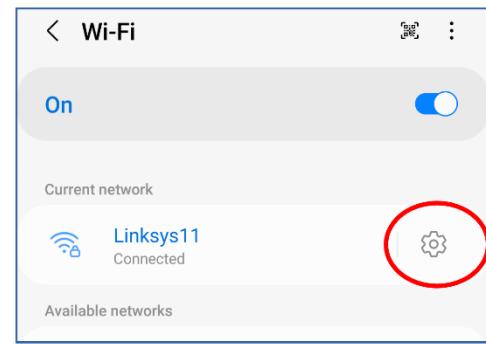


Illustration 2

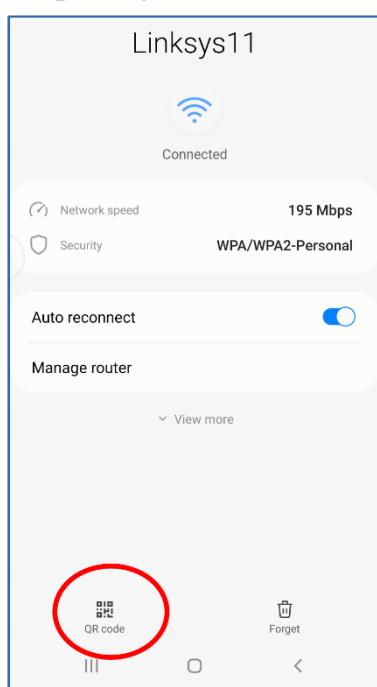


Illustration 3

You should see a screen like the one depicted in **Illustration 3**. At the bottom left, tap the button labeled **QR code**, which is circled in the illustration.

You should see a generated QR code, like that depicted in **Illustration 4**. I blocked out part of the code for security purposes; anyone with the full QR code could log into the network.

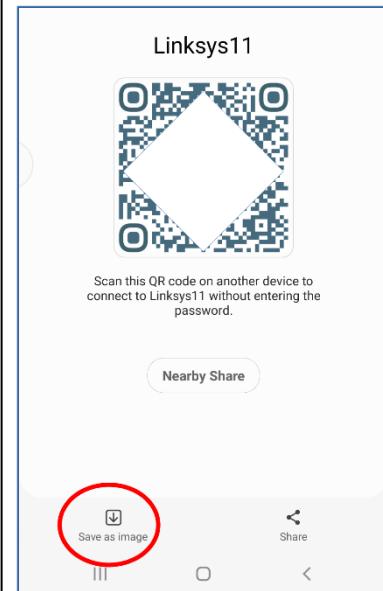


Illustration 4

Tap the button in the lower-left corner, labeled **Save As Image**, (**Illustration 4**) to save the QR code image on your device.

On my device, within the DCIM folder, the QR code was saved in the internal storage folder named **Pictures**.

TEST THE WI-FI QR CODE

Before you make the Wi-Fi QR code available to anyone else, it is a very good idea to test the QR code.

The test consists of these steps:

1. Get in range of the Wi-Fi network.
2. Force the Android device to forget the Wi-Fi network
3. Scan the Wi-Fi QR Code image stored on the device.

HOW TO FORGET THE WI-FI NETWORK

For an Android 11/12 device, the sequence of taps to forget the current Wi-Fi network is:

Settings→**Connections**→**Wi-Fi**→**SSID Gear icon**→**Forget** (trash button in the lower right corner in **Illustration 3**). There is no request from the phone to confirm that you really want the device to forget. It immediately deletes its record for the current Wi-Fi network.

HOW TO TEST THE WI-FI QR CODE IMAGE FILE

Then tell your
Android device to
scan the very same
QR code that is
saved in the device.

Pull down the Shade
menu from the top
of the Android
screen.

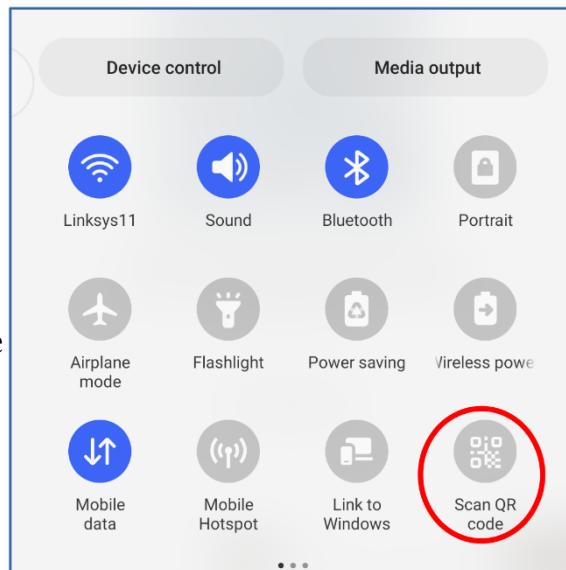


Illustration 5

On my Android phone, the
Shade menu pulls down halfway. A second downward swipe pulls it all
the way down, revealing the Scan QR code button circled in **Illustration 5**. Tap that button.



Illustration 6

A camera window opens, displaying the legend **Find A QR Code**, as shown in **Illustration 6**. That screen includes a button to scan a photo file instead of a displayed or printed QR code. That button is circled in the illustration. Tap that button.

A screen appears showing photos. At the bottom left of the screen, there is a **Pictures button**. Tap the **Pictures button**. When photos in the Pictures folder appear, find and select the stored Wi-Fi QR code image.

In my case, after scanning the selected Wi-Fi QR code image in Screenshots, the Settings app connected to the Wi-Fi Network immediately. I confirmed that by switching to the Settings app and checking for a connected Wi-Fi network.

OLDER VERSIONS OF THE ANDROID OS

I tested it using my Samsung Galaxy S10 smartphone running Android 12.

The Settings app on my Galaxy Tab S5 running Android 11 displays the same user interfaces in a column instead of displaying an entire screen, but the steps for the creation of a Wi-Fi QR code and testing it are identical.



Illustration 7

Google said that the Wi-Fi QR code creation capability was introduced in Android 10 and that the ability to scan a QR code was introduced in Android 8. Older versions of the Android OS can install a free app such as **QRbot** that will scan QR codes and make appropriate use of the info provided by the QR code, such as logging into a Wi-Fi network.

Illustration 7 (left) shows the icon of the **QRbot** app.

Although the **QRbot** app can make Wi-Fi QR codes, those codes lack a mandatory data element that is included by the Android 12 Settings app. Wi-Fi QR codes produced by **QRbot** will not work on most consumer-grade Wi-Fi routers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s. He is a now-retired software engineer for the federal government. Now he writes about the creative uses of smartphones, tablets, and digital cameras. He lives in Arlington VA.



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Adventures with Apple and AppleCare Support

By Gabe Goldberg, Director, Potomac Area Computer and Technology Society

Having collected several Apple devices—my and wife's iPhones/iPads, my Apple Watch, three HomePod Minis—plus six outlets controlled by the Home app—I've also collected a (very) few gripes, frustrations, irritations, and wishes:

After the most recent Watch/iPhone software updates, a very simple automation stopped working. Grouped notifications no longer indicate how many are stacked. The Zoom app didn't update on iPad with other apps, and had to be done manually. Siri Intercom messages only play on HomePods, not on iOS/iPadOS devices as I'd expected.

I finally called Apple to address at least the most annoying first two, especially the failed automation.

After negotiating the obligatory (but not ghastly) phone robot, I reached a very pleasant woman who quite thoroughly researched the automation problem—putting me on hold for a bit, returning and apologizing for the hold, researching more. She finally said she'd have to escalate to Level 2.

In the process of doing that, I was disconnected. I sighed, not really wanting to repeat the entire process. Then my phone rang and I was called back and connected to the same person. That's NEVER happened when talking to customer support and disconnected—it's ALWAYS involved calling again and starting from scratch.

I was then connected to John, "Senior Advisor" or some such title. He was great; he understood the problem and reviewed steps I'd taken to research/resolve it and said I needn't repeat them (again, contrasted with most customer support which follows rigid scripts and insists that steps be followed for them even if they've already been done).

When I mentioned that a local Apple employee had replicated the problem (likely with a newer iPhone than mine), he agreed that probably meant the problem wasn't specific to my hardware/software. He spent quite a while documenting the problem, during which he put me on hold and apologized for the wait; I joked that he might be writing a book about the problem and said I was keeping busy on my computer while waiting. I said that I hoped he wouldn't hold against me the fact that I was using a Windows PC; he laughed and said he had one too.

When he finished, he sent me an email giving his contact information and a link to upload a screenshot of the failure message on my Watch. He said he'd take ownership of the problem and made an appointment to call back with updates from engineering.

He in fact called back on the designated day, and apologized for being nearly an hour late. I laughed and said that he was so far ahead of support from that other technology company (whose name starts with "M") that I hadn't noticed. He said the problem was understood and would be fixed in an upcoming operating system update—either the next or the one after that. It wasn't fixed in one just installed—there likely wasn't time for it to get in that one—so I assume it will be along shortly.

So that's more strong contrasts with other tech support experiences—individual problem ownership, contact information provided without being requested, and definite checkpoint provided.

The Zoom app now appears to be updating normally, with other apps (and it's not clear where that problem was); not displaying the number of stacked notifications seems to have been a deliberate (though puzzling) decision; and I'm still researching the Intercom issue.

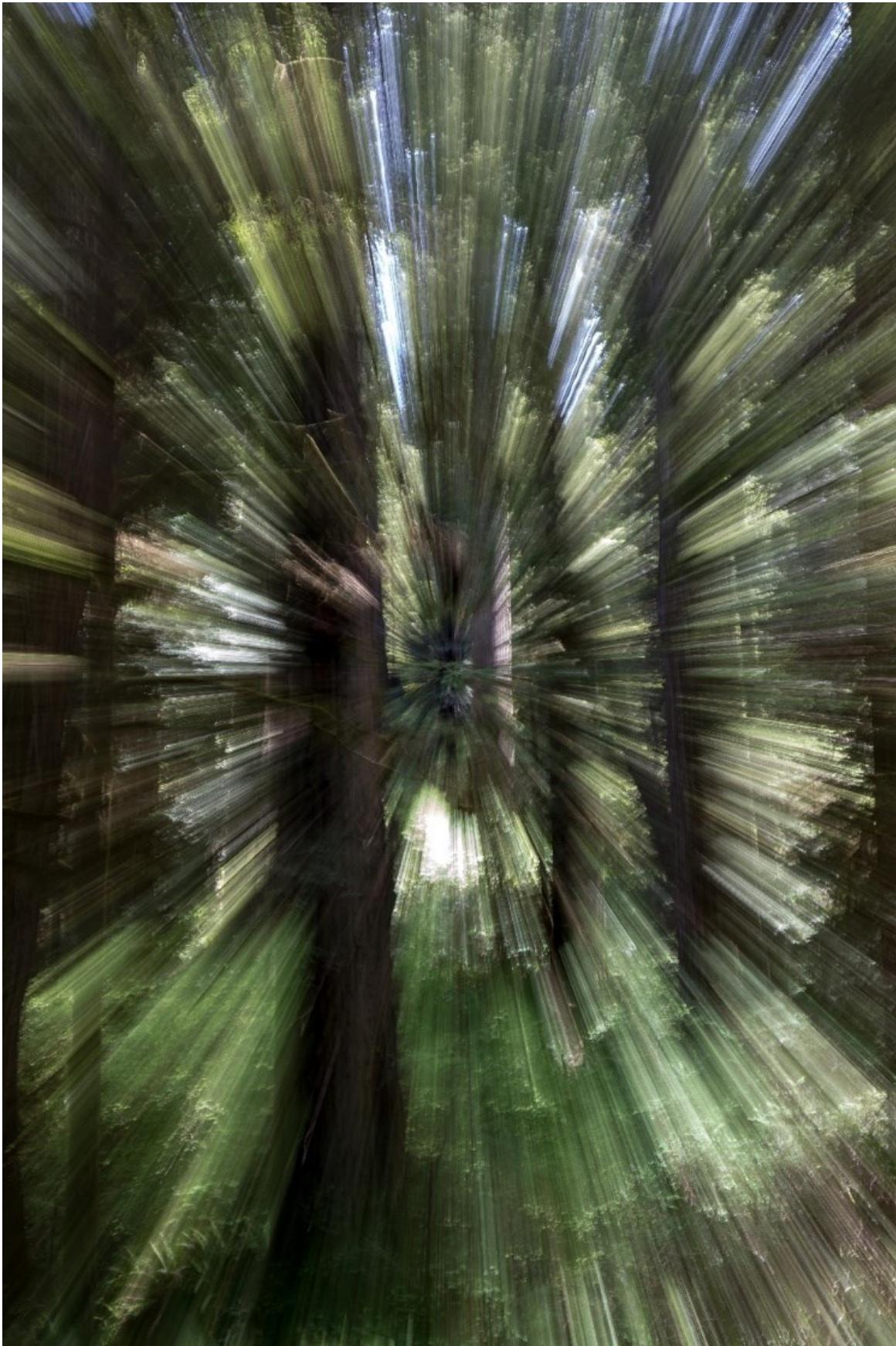
Apple provided complimentary phone support despite my product(s) being out of warranty coverage. This support is apparently available for questions and product problems after the warranty and AppleCare (if purchased) have expired.

Image from your editor's library for your enjoyment

The abstract image below was taken in one of the many northern California redwood forests, near the town of Bertsch-Oceanview in 2018.

The reason it looks like it does is because during the somewhat longer exposure (.8") the zoom on the lens was moved (racked).

For you photography nerds (like me 😊) the other exposure info: camera, a **Canon EOS 5d Mark 4**, .8s, f/11, ISO 50; and the lens: a **Canon EF 16-35mm f/4 IS USM**, focal length: varied.



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First Class

AFFIX
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TEMP-RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Meeting schedule (Zoom=Online Only, Hybrid=Online/In-person)

1 st Wednesday	7:00 - 9 PM	Arlington General Meeting	Hybrid
3 rd Monday	7:00 - 9 PM	Board of Directors Meeting	Zoom
3 rd Saturday	12:45 - 3:30 PM	Fairfax General Meeting	Hybrid
4 th Wednesday	7:00 - 9 PM	Technology & PC Help Desk	Hybrid

Meetings are Hybrid or Zoom (as above)

To attend in person you must meet requirements. See patacs.org.

Online Meeting Access Will Be Sent Via Email

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Messages may be left at 703-370-7649
Website: <https://www.patacs.org>

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