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Sharing life's stories brings hope, Cornell Woodson says



Growing up in Camden, New Jersey – a city with the worst educational system and the most murders per capita in the U.S. – as the son of parents who made less than \$25,000 a year, Cornell Woodson was bullied in school, taunted and tormented because his classmates thought he was gay.

Currently associate director for diversity and inclusion in the ILR School's student services office, Woodson shared those memories and how they shaped his thinking and his career at Soup and Hope Feb. 4 in Sage Chapel.

Woodson's classmates happened to be right, but "back then, I didn't even understand what that meant. For the life of me, I could not fathom what my peers saw that made them target me," Woodson said. "I have been jumped by groups of people more times than I can remember. I've had my locker slammed into the side of my head. My peers would chase me home while throwing rocks at me."

Though the bullying stopped in middle school when he fought back, by then he had internalized the thoughts and opinions of his peers that he didn't belong, was not good enough and did not deserve to exist, Woodson said. "For as long as I can remember, I have suffered from what many scholars call imposter syndrome: the idea that I am a fraud and don't deserve any of the success I have." He diminished his achievements to being lucky—simply being in the right place at the right time. "Even to this day, I still find myself unworthy of what I have. I'm still asking: 'how did I get here?'"

But having had those experiences and feelings helped Woodson relate to the ninth-12th graders he taught with Teach for America after graduating from Ithaca College in 2009. He had 180 students in Atlanta: "They did not come to class, they didn't do homework, they talked on their phones while I taught, and they even slept," he said. When he talked with his mother on the

phone, he told her he wanted to quit.

After allowing him to vent, she said, “Get over yourself.” She explained that though she had not been able to give him much, others had invested in giving him a chance for success. “It’s your turn to pay it forward,” she said. That feedback changed Woodson’s attitude.

“I started listening to their stories and found that they had experienced similar life experiences to my own and some even worse. While it does not mean I could completely understand their pain, I could relate. I could create a space where their stories were validated.”

The young men shared stories of wanting to be loved by their fathers; the young women shared stories of sexual assault and the feeling they had nothing to offer the world. “These stories consumed their minds, and no wonder school was the last thing they were thinking about,” Woodson said. The students and Woodson bonded through their shared experiences; because Woodson helped the students see themselves differently, he became known as “Pops.”

“I was an example of how possible it is to overcome life’s struggles,” Woodson said. “Because I could relate in some way to their personal stories, we could support one another through the journey of understanding what it all means.” Woodson realized that his childhood experiences and imposter feelings “all made sense now”: they help him identify with and help others. Woodson dedicated himself to social justice and to supporting students from marginalized backgrounds.

“I subscribe to the idea that what we are going through or have gone through isn’t always about us or for us. Sometimes it’s for the people that we have yet to meet,” Woodson said. “I truly believe we experience a life event and overcome it because, at some point, our path will cross with someone who is going through the same thing.”

Then we can move past our internalized thoughts and share our stories, “so that someone else might see hope in their own,” Woodson said.

New director joins Cornell Child Care Center



Since its opening in 2008, the [Cornell Child Care Center](#) (CCCC), operated by Bright Horizons Family Solutions, has provided on-site child care for children of Cornell faculty, staff members and students, ranging in age from six weeks to five years old. For most of that period, the center has been directed by Patty Sinclair.

With Sinclair’s promotion to field director, a new CCCC director, Katie Weber, has been hired. She assumed her new

responsibilities last December and worked alongside Sinclair until her departure in January. Weber, who led a Bright Horizon's child care center in Boston, expects to continue the programs Sinclair initiated as well as implement new ones.

"The health and safety of the children attending was Patty's and is my top priority, and that priority permeates everything that happens at the center," said Weber.

"Our excellent, dedicated teachers and staff have a real passion for working with children that is demonstrated every day, and I will strive to support them with the resources and connections they need as they provide the individualized, attentive care that makes this center special," Weber said.

Weber also highlighted the ways Patty increased the enrollment at the center and enhanced the Emergency Backup Child Care Service to meet the needs of Cornell parents whose regular care arrangements are not available. In 2015 alone, more than 500 days of care were provided on an emergency basis to families, she noted. Weber would like to make further improvements to the emergency backup child care program.

Additional special events to strengthen the partnerships between the center, parents and other campus and community resources are also in Weber's plans. "Patty developed strong parent partnerships through the Parents Advisory Council and formed a staff group specifically to support diversity in the center. We will be continuing with these efforts and seeking new and creative ways to help these relationships and initiatives flourish," Weber said.

"It has been exciting to welcome Katie to her new role and to the Cornell family and watch her build relationships with the children, parents and staff," said Michelle Artibee, liaison to the center on behalf of Cornell's Division of Human Resources. "Katie understands how important it is for our employees and students to have a safe and nurturing environment for their children. She is highly committed to providing the same caliber of leadership to the CCCC, continuing its very successful programs and partnering with parents and community members."

"I have enjoyed returning to the sense of community present in upstate New York," said Weber, who received her bachelor's degree from SUNY Cortland and her master's at Buffalo's Canisius College. "We have a very active parent community here; I hope to develop new programs that will build that parent community and increase our diversity."

The CCCC can serve up to 170 children (48 infants, 50 toddlers and 72 preschool children). For more information, see https://www.hr.cornell.edu/life/support/child_care_center.html, contact cornell@brighthorizons.com or call the center at 607-255-1010.

Reuse during Recyclemania 2016

Cornell's annual [Recyclemania](#) has begun and runs through **April 2**.

A quick, easy and rewarding way to participate this year is through Cupanion.

How it works: Pick up a Cupanion sticker for your reusable cup or mug (limit one per person) at either the Big Red Barn, Carol's (Tatkon Center), Bear Necessities, Rusty's, Bus Stop Bagels, Café Jennie, Martha's, Green Dragon, Amit Bhatia Libe Café (Olin Library) or Synapsis.

Through the Cupanion app (download at the App Store or Google Play), collect 1,000 points and you get a free beverage (drip coffee, espresso drinks, hot tea or fountain soda). For every 1,000 points earned you are entered to win a FREE NYC Campus-to-Campus round trip pass to New York City. Refills provide even more chances to win.

Upcoming Inclusive Excellence Academy workshops



Understanding Unconscious Bias and Micro-Inequities

This workshop by the Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble (CITE) will be held Feb. 29, 9-11:30 a.m., G10 Biotechnology Building. The CITE presentation leads to discussion about recognizing unconscious bias and micro-inequities, and identifies skills and strategies that are useful in creating a climate of respect.

Register: <http://tinyurl.com/IE-Academy-2-29-16>

Safer People, Safer Places LGBTQA Support Network

Brian Patchcoski, associate dean and director of the LGBT Resource Center, will lead this workshop, March 9, 10 a.m.-noon, in 226 Weill Hall. This workshop defines concepts and language relating to sexuality and gender identity; explores the experience of homophobia, and identifies actions to create inclusive space for those marginalized by their sexuality and/or gender identity. Limited seating. Register: <http://tinyurl.com/IE-Academy-3-9-16>

Build up your savings habits during America Saves Week

This year, [America Saves Week](#) runs Feb. 22-27.

At Cornell, you can use America Saves Week to plan for your future by attending free live [Fidelity Web workshops](#) on managing finances, college planning strategies and learning to invest with confidence, or see how saving is possible with [TIAA-CREF's rules of thumb for savings](#).

The [2015 Annual National Survey Assessing Household Savings](#) revealed savings improvement in the past year:

- 71 percent are spending less than their income and saving the difference, up from 68 percent in 2014.
- 52 percent are savings at least 5 percent of their income, up from 47 percent in 2014.
- 40 percent are making good or excellent savings progress, up from 35 percent in 2014.
- 78 percent had no or were reducing their consumer debts, up from 76 percent in 2014.
- 66 percent have sufficient emergency savings, up from 65 percent in 2014.

America Saves Week is coordinated by [America Saves](#) and the [American Savings Education Council](#). Started in 2007, the week is an annual opportunity for organizations to promote good savings behavior and a chance for individuals to assess their own saving status. Typically thousands of organizations participate in the week, reaching millions of people.

March Cooperative Extension workshops and events



Unless otherwise indicated, all classes and events will be held at the CCE-Tompkins Education Center, 615 Willow Ave., Ithaca.

To register for classes, call 607-272-2292. Some classes have [online registrations](#).

Getting started with vegetables

This class for the beginning vegetable gardener will be held March 30, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Learn where to site your garden, how to prepare the soil, how to start seeds, how to plant, when and how to mulch, and which easy veggies to try first. Also covered: favorite varieties, container gardening and harvesting tips. Cost: \$5-\$10 self-determined sliding scale; pre-registration preferred. Call 272-2292 for more information or registration.

Gardening for native pollinators

Attractive flowering plants that support native pollinators add another dimension to gardens and landscapes. Learn how to diversify your plantings to support pollinators throughout their life cycles, April 6, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Cost: \$5-\$10 self-selected sliding scale. Pre-registration recommended. Call 272-2292 for more information or registration.

AARP Smart Driver Workshop

Way2Go, in partnership with AARP, will offer the nationally recognized [AARP Smart Driver Workshop](#), April 6-7. This two-day course is open to AARP members and the general public. While the course is designed to meet the needs of older drivers, it is suitable for all drivers - regardless of age. **You must attend both dates to get credit.**

- Wednesday and Thursday, April 6 and 7, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Call Way2Go at 607-272-2292 to register.

None of these times work for you? Lifelong also offers Smart Driver classes. Call 607-273-1511 for their schedule or go to www.tclifelong.org

4-H offers veterinary science program

With a deadline to enroll of April 1, a four-week mini-course for 9-12th-grade students, “Animals and Medicine,” will be held Friday evenings, April 15-May 6, 6-8 p.m., at the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine. This four-week mini-course will be taught by Cornell veterinary students, and lessons will incorporate guest presentations by veterinary professors.

The mini-course is designed for those youth with a sincere interest in biology, medicine and animals. Each week will focus on a different animal species or group of animals, including cats, dogs, horses and dairy. Hands-on activities will be comprised of practicing a physical exam, discovering the inner workings of the rumen, and learning about different anatomy and physiological systems.

Registration deadline is April 1. A \$50 registration fee will cover the cost of all program materials and resources, including a pizza party. Enrollment is limited; parents are welcomed to stay. Contact Athena Steinkraus, 4-H administrative assistant, at ahs38@cornell.edu to register

CRC offers a day on your own in Philadelphia



The Cornell Recreation Connection offers ☐ Cornell staff and faculty a day on your own in Philadelphia, March 12.

See the annual Philadelphia Flower Show, tour historic sites, dine at a favorite restaurant – the choice is yours.

Contact Swarthout Coaches at <http://www.goswarthout.com/tours/cornell-faculty-tours-31.html>, or 257-2660, to make a reservation. Cost: \$50 per person round trip bus fare for Cornell employees and their guests.

Full payment is due at the time of reservation. No refunds.

Participants are responsible for all event reservations and ticket costs in Philadelphia.

Swarthout Tours is not responsible for the cost of any tickets you may have purchased to concerts or shows that you may miss in Philadelphia in the event of trip cancellation due to bad weather/road closure. Seats are going fast. Make your reservation

today.

Itinerary for “Day on Your Own in Philadelphia” trip

- 6:30 a.m.: Bus leaves Cornell’s B-Lot (you must have your boarding pass)
 - 11:30 a.m.: Bus arrives in Philadelphia□ - dropping off/picking up at The National Constitution Center
 - Spend the day on your own in the city□
 - 8 p.m.: Bus leaves at 8 p.m. sharp from The National Constitution Center only, returning to Cornell at about 12:30 a.m.
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