Challenge, resilience and hope: Gretchen Ryan ’97

Visitors to the McGraw bell tower know her as chimesmaster, and students as a source of wisdom and caring; her friends jokingly compare her to Hermione in the Harry Potter books: pursuing knowledge, seeking social justice and overcoming all obstacles with strength and perseverance.

At the Soup and Hope event Jan. 30 in Sage Chapel, Gretchen Ryan ’97 – widowed at age 28, overcoming her own health concerns in her 30s and now wife to Leah O’Connor and mother to twins – told an audience of about 175 that, in her life, “hope has become intertwined with challenge and resilience.”

Ryan’s childhood in Louisiana was “magazine-perfect,” with swim practice, piano lessons, a two-story house and plenty of food, Ryan said. “For the most part, life has been amazingly grand and fairly easy and I’ve been able to be optimistic and happy-go-lucky.” Ryan graduated Cornell with a “positive sense of self and a boatload of confidence,” she said.

But a decade ago, her partner of four and a half years was diagnosed with cancer and died nine months later. “We spent our last months together attempting to live life fully,” Ryan said. “My goal was to help her die as pain-free as possible, with compassion, love and a lot of humor.”

At the time, Ryan was the residence hall director of Ecology House. She found support in her dog, work colleagues and friends, she said, but she was often lonely and she struggled with her identity as a young widow. Her students and her job gave Ryan purpose and focus, and she found she could empathize with students who were in various stages of struggle or grief, “in ways that I wouldn’t have been able to do previously.”

She also took up biking and became a chimesmaster. “The physical challenge of playing provided a healthy way for me to let off steam – I could make music from what I was feeling, and in the end, my body would be tired and my soul would be a bit more fulfilled,” she said.

Biking mixed coping and redirecting mechanisms: “I noticed that I was doing some of my best thinking and feeling on my bike rides. I could grunt and groan up a hill and not only was I letting go of the hill when I reached the top, but I was also letting go of all that was bothering me.”

Happiness, hope and purpose began to return. Ryan changed jobs, moving to the financial aid office, met O’Connor and together they bought a house. About a month later, Ryan confronted her own medical crisis, requiring surgery and a recovery process.

Ryan coped by calling up two visions: one the view from her bicycle seat upon reaching a hilltop, and the second of holding a baby.

Recovery came, and so did the second vision, when O’Connor gave birth to twins. “Talk about a source of hope!” Ryan said. The twins “stole my heart completely.”

In spite of the sleepless nights, laundry and baby-food making that came during the twin’s infancy, Ryan has learned that life is “precious indeed.”

Recently, the boys’ great grandmother moved in with them. “These months have been some of the sweetest months of my adulthood,” Ryan said. She enjoys watching the generations interact, having the twins learn rhyming ditties and having an older and wiser person to consult with.

“Sometimes life hangs in the balance,” Ryan said. “I have learned to free-fall into the more difficult and unknown times, hoping for the best, but acknowledging the possibility of the worst. And I have learned to celebrate the great times.”

Ryan said she is thankful for her family and community – and added, “I’m also thankful that even Hermione grows up and settles into a much less dramatic life in the end.”
Today, the term “worksite wellness” is common, maybe even something prospective employees look for when choosing an employer. But in 1989, no one could have imagined the groundbreaking effect and innovation that a small pilot program of about 40 Cornell employees, led by Toni McBride, would have in the world of worksite wellness.

Fast forward to 2014. In a span of 25 years, the Cornell Wellness Program now serves more than 3,800 staff, faculty, retirees and their spouses/partners – almost a 100-fold increase. “In the areas of fitness, nutrition, health and wellness, Cornell’s wellness professionals inform and educate not just Wellness Program members, but the whole Cornell community,” says Beth McKinney, director of the Cornell Wellness Program.

To mark the Cornell Wellness Program’s 25th anniversary, two special programs are planned for this spring:

Get Your Wellness Socks On!:
Share how the Cornell Wellness Program has been a part of your Cornell life, in your own 100-word story. “Postcards” for submitting your story are available at wellness.cornell.edu and via hard copy by request. All who submit (deadline April 30) will receive one pair of exclusive 25th Anniversary Wellness Socks (only one pair per person). You better believe you are going to want to “Get Your Wellness Socks On!”

25th Anniversary Parade: May 21, 9:45-11 a.m.:
Join in this parade, which will start from three different locations on the Ithaca campus and culminate at the Biotechnology Building to celebrate 25 years of Cornell Wellness. Participate in any way that you can – walking, wheeling, jogging, biking or skating, for instance. Participants will gather at G10 Biotechnology Building at 10:30 a.m. for remarks and to receive healthy goodie bags.

You can participate in both programs, or choose one that suits you best. For more information or to request a postcard, contact Beth McKinney at bm20@cornell.edu or 255-3703.

Tech Training Spotlight
Want to learn how to create and format such multi-page publications as newspapers, books, newsletters and brochures? Would you like to be able to correct photos or create photographic special effects?

Register now for an Adobe InDesign or Photoshop class scheduled for Feb. 27.

To receive training announcements, send an email with the subject: join to IT-Training-Lrequest@cornell.edu.

For a complete listing of technical training resources, see www.it.cornell.edu/training. Email questions to workshop-info@cornell.edu.
**Cornell recognized for faculty work-life balance**

John MacDonald, attorney with the national labor and employment law firm Constangy, Brooks & Smith LLP, presented Mary Opperman, Cornell’s vice president for human resources and safety services, and John Siliciano, senior vice provost for academic affairs, with a commemorative crystal trophy Jan. 28 in Day Hall in recognition of the university’s efforts to improve the work-life balance of Cornell faculty.

MacDonald traveled to Ithaca to deliver Cornell the law firm’s eighth annual Excellence in Work-Life Balance Award. “We developed this award to demonstrate our commitment to work-life balance, which is one of our core principles,” MacDonald said. “We strive to cultivate an environment that supports work-life balance, not just for our employees but for others,” he said.

MacDonald highlighted two of Cornell’s programs that his firm found particularly relevant to its own efforts to attract and retain employees: the university’s faculty tenure clock-stop policy for families with new dependents and the financial support faculty can receive to defray the cost for their dependents to accompany them on professional travel or to arrange home care for dependents while the faculty member travels.

Thanking MacDonald for the recognition and the work his firm does to recognize the importance of the work-life balance, Opperman said, “Supporting our valuable faculty and staff works for Cornell as much as it does for them. Giving them a little support when they need it pays back over and over again and helps us retain our top talent.”

Cornell’s child care grants of up to $5,000 per year to defray child care expenses and its Engagement and Integration Program, which helps new faculty hires and their partners assimilate on campus and in the Ithaca community, were other factors that led to Cornell’s receiving this award.

Siliciano noted after the award presentation that data from 2005 and 2010 faculty work-life surveys show the importance of all the university’s efforts to support work-life balance, as the percentage of faculty satisfied with their role increased from 77 to 80 percent and the average length of faculty tenure of full professors increased from a little more than 21 to more than 24 years. Also, recent data reflects increased success in recruiting women hired into faculty positions: 35 percent of new faculty recruited in FY ’11 were women, compared to 41 percent this year.

The award also included $1,000, to be given to a nonprofit organization of the university’s choosing. Cornell designated the YMCA of Ithaca and Tompkins County, which is a member organization of the United Way of Tompkins County, as recipient of these funds. MacDonald presented the YMCA’s board of directors and Frank Towner, chief executive officer of the Ithaca YMCA, a $1,000 check, which will be applied to the Ithaca YMCA’s scholarships and membership support program.

“The YMCA is a mission-driven charity organization that last year provided scholarships to about 2,000 people,” Towner said. “We have about 4,300 members, so nearly half of our members were given support to better themselves through our programming and classes.” Cornell’s gift, he said, will help continue YMCA efforts to strengthen families and build community.
Father and son share a happy moment.

Carleton Potter ’40, likely the oldest volunteer.

“A We have a great team of volunteers.”
- Cheryl McGraw, human resources and safety services event manager

A family enjoys the men’s basketball game.

A family gathers wristbands and pencils.

About 2,400 staff participate in Employee Celebration, Jan. 25.

Teo enjoys his day.

Ricky gets his cast autographed by Crossroad Clown.

Crime Prevention Officer Beverly Van Cleef hands out badges.

Master composters show how to compost table scraps.
Karen Brown is glad that Cornell is nearing its campaign goal.

Employee Celebration participants pack Ramin Room

About 2,400 faculty, staff, retirees and their families took advantage of a brief break in recent cold weather to cheer on Cornell athletes and attend the winter Employee Celebration dinner in the Ramin Room at Bartels Hall, Jan. 25.

In his mid-90s and possibly the oldest volunteer in the event’s history, Carleton Potter ’40 joined senior administrators, students and staff members in serving chicken parmesan and pasta dinners to participants.

McGruff the Crime Dog, canine patrol Chase and handler patrol officer Justin Haines, and Crossroad Clown provided entertainment, while displays and giveaways by such groups as the United Way of Tompkins County, the Cornell University Police and Master Composters of Tompkins County were an additional draw.

The Cornell wrestling team beat Rutgers 29-9 while raising funds for Hospicare of Ithaca; Columbia won over Cornell in men’s basketball, 74-58; and Cornell women’s basketball dominated Columbia, 76-51.

“We have a great team of volunteers,” said Cheryl McGraw, human resources and safety services event manager. “Students from Cornell Traditions and the Women’s Lacrosse Team provided much needed support, and I want to give special thanks to Nancy Pagliaro, May Lovelace and Kelly Chan, who helped coordinate the day.”

The Employee Celebration event is sponsored by the Division of Human Resources and Safety Services, Cornell Catering, the Department of Athletics and Physical Education, and Facilities Management.

Karen Brown is glad that Cornell is nearing its campaign goal.

Mason poses with a United Way water bottle.

Landon wants a water bottle, too.
New workshop series help prepare expectant parents

A new “Preparing for Baby” workshop series, sponsored by Career/Life Services in the Division of Human Resources and Safety Services, begins Feb. 7 and will be held biweekly on Fridays, noon-1 p.m. through April 4; weekly April 25-May 9.

All workshops are held in 163 Day Hall, except where noted otherwise. The series focuses on birthing options, postpartum care and breastfeeding education, with a special emphasis on self-care. All workshops are free of charge.

All Cornell community members are invited to any of the workshops. Participation by one’s partner (for instance, the spouse, Lamaze coach or friend) is welcome.

Register at https://cornell.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1Baol9VOrUg8pS8J.

Contact Michelle Artibee, program manager, Career/Life Services, email wellbeing@cornell.edu; phone (607) 255-5298, with questions.

More information: https://www.hr.cornell.edu/life/support/wellbeing_programs.html.

Prenatal and birth preparation

Prenatal and birth preparation workshops are presented by Kate Dimpfl, owner of Holistic Childbirth and co-founder of The Center for Perinatal Education and Support.

What to Expect When You’re Expecting in Ithaca

This class, Feb. 7 in G-08 Uris Hall, is designed to help you understand the different care models available during pregnancy. Explore your beliefs about birth and find the right provider to meet your needs.

How to Have an Easier Pregnancy: Complementary Care for Comfort

This Feb. 21 workshop will explore common pregnancy aches and pains and will look at nutrition, exercise, complementary care models and self-care suggestions to ease your pregnancy.

Being an Informed Consumer of Prenatal and Birth Services and Resources

Held Mar. 7, this workshop explores the importance of being an informed consumer during pregnancy and helps you find the childbirth class that fits your beliefs about birth.

Postpartum adjustment workshops

These workshops are led by Stephanie Haskins, a birth and postpartum doula and lactation educator.

Beyond the Birth Day: What To Expect in the Immediate Postpartum

This Mar. 21 workshop outlines what to expect during the first few weeks after your baby’s birth and includes group discussion on cultural and familial postpartum practices as well as evidence-based information on infant sleep, healthy diet and maternal recovery from birth.

Postpartum Relationship Changes

Presented April 4, this workshop examines the postpartum relationship between the mother and her partner, and how perinatal distress is related to that relationship. The workshop will outline the distinct needs of each parent and discuss how to strengthen partner and parental bonds and keep positive communication flowing.

Breastfeeding

Presenter Jeanette McCullough, co-founder of BirthSwell, has been teaching breastfeeding education for the past six years at Cornell.

Breastfeeding Basics

In this April 25 workshop, participants will learn the fundamentals of successful breastfeeding, including holding techniques, latching on and maximizing comfort.

Pumping with Success

Participants will learn about the various pumps available, how to select a pump, when to begin pumping, and the fundamentals of pumping techniques, May 2.

Returning to Work as a Breastfeeding Mother

Participants will learn how to build up a freezer supply for the return to work, introduce the bottle, juggle breastfeeding and work, and about the Cornell policy on lactation accommodations and resources available, May 9.
Gary Stewart receives Chamber of Commerce Award

G ary Stewart, director of Cornell’s Office of Community Relations, received the 2013 Key Member of the Year Award from the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce at its annual dinner meeting Jan. 30.

The award was “in recognition of Gary’s enduring support and leadership. His advice is always absolutely on-point and utterly reliable,” according to the dinner program.

“Gary has served the chamber as the producer of ‘All Things Equal’ on WHCU since 2008. As a board member, he also chaired our sector analysis task force, a major part of our 2013 work plan. Gary’s wit, energy and hard work make him an invaluable member of the Tompkins Chamber,” said Jean McPheeters, president of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce.

Stewart joined Cornell in 2001, after nine years at the Ithaca Journal, where he was the editor of its opinion page. In his current position, Stewart strives to forward town-gown connectivity, including shared challenges and opportunities. The office works with community and campus leaders on matters of mutual interest, including area infrastructure, sustainability, public schools, economic development, transportation and planning.

Stewart also writes a twice-monthly column for The Ithaca Journal and serves on several boards, committees and project teams, including the Campus-Community Coalition, Collegetown Neighborhood Council, President’s Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs, President’s Sustainable Campus Committee, Tompkins County Area Development, Local Leaders of Color, Tompkins County Environmental Management Council, Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes, Cornell United Way, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, SUNY Council for University Advancement, and the International Town-Gown Association.

He is a former winner of the Tompkins Trust Co. Award for Excellence and Cornell’s George Peter Award for Dedicated Service, and he has been honored several times by statewide orga-
FOR SALE


Furnace Filters. Precision Aire Filters 20 x 22 x 1”. Qty : 10. $10. dm68

Furnace Home on Dryden Lake. 150’ lake frontage, 3 bdr, 2 1/2 bath, 3,300sqft, on 6 acres, runs contiguous to Dryden Lake Golf Course, geothermal heat & A/C, 3 car grg, $ 439,000. jsm29 or call 327-2542

Counter Top/Portable Dishwasher-rarely used. Energy Saver, perfect for small kitchens. $100 OBO. Paid $279.00 new last yr, contact for more info: jlp342. 253-3166.

2 Simplehuman Trash Containers, 40-liter, semi-round, stainless steel, step trashcans. Like new. $50 each. Take one or both. List price is $100 each. jb24, 539-7681.

2010 Honda Civic EX with spare set of Michelins, $13,499. 46k miles. Fun, zippy, ride. Sad to see it go. Included: custom windshield shade, all-season floor mats, and splash guards. USB audio. vni3@cornell.edu or 255-7223.

Kitchen table, 37” diameter, 2 wooden red chairs plus red lamp $120. es37@cornell.edu or 272-9476.

Solid Paint Horse, $1,200. She is a Reg. Solid Paint Mare 15h, great trail horse, great manners and personality, stands good for vet. & farrier. Need to sell. wsm67@cornell.edu or 532-4167.

BRAND NEW IN BOX: Dell Inspiron 14R Touch screen (14 inch), laptop $600. Computer is 2 days old. Purchased for $768 ($719 price + tax), ghs63@cornell.edu.

2000 Dodge Pick up 4wd, $3,500. Dodge 1500 1/2 ton, 8 ft box, 4 wheel drive, PW, PL, body in good shape, runs well. mh23@cornell.edu or 592-6645.

Baldwin M’1” Piano, $3,000. OBO. Mahogany, well used, but tunable and playable, and includes a humidity control system. Buyer responsible for move. seq227@cornell.edu or 255-8999.

FOR SALE BY OWNER


The Cornell Store events

Celebrate Valentine’s Day

The Cornell Store has a selection of greeting cards, plush, Cornell chocolates, books, Cornell Valentine’s Day apparel and other gifts to choose from for Valentine’s Day.

Feb. 10: To say Happy Valentine’s Day to its customers, The Cornell Store will pass out scratch-off coupons to the first 1,000 people in the door. The coupon is valid for 20, 25, 30 or 40 percent off almost everything in the store through Feb. 14. Note: one coupon per person; excludes hardware, software and Café Jennie and Market items.

Feb. 10-14: Purchase two slices of Cheesecake Factory cheesecake at Café Jennie for only 57 plus tax.

Feb. 13: Purchase and decorate a heart sugar cookie for your Valentine. Check store.cornell.edu for details.

Technology trade-in program

The Cornell Store has a new trade-in program for your electronics. Trade in your old cell phone, iPod, laptop or tablet (even if it’s used or broken), and receive a Cornell Store gift card. It’s fast and easy. Get an online quote or come to The Cornell Store for a quote. The gift card is valid to use on anything in the store and never expires.

Note: University-owned technology cannot be traded in. To recycle university-owned electronics, contact Cornell University RS Operations. Remove your data before you trade in your device. The Cornell Store and Encore are not responsible for data left on devices.

Insect book signing and tasting

Marcel Dicke, professor of entomology at Wageningen University and Rhodes Professor at Cornell University, will discuss “The Insect Cookbook: Food for a Sustainable Planet,” Feb. 11, noon-1:30 p.m., at The Cornell Store.

In “The Insect Cookbook,” two entomologists and a chef make the case for insects as a sustainable source of protein for humans and a necessary part of our future diet. They provide consumers and chefs with essential facts about insects for culinary use, with recipes simple enough to make at home, yet boasting the international flair of the world’s most chic dishes.

The talk will cover all you want to know about cooking with insects, where to buy them, which ones are edible, and how to store and prepare them at home and in commercial spaces.

Advance copies of the book will be available for purchase at this book signing.

PAWPRINT PICKS

DARWIN FAMILY DAY

Families can enjoy a live-animal presentation on the evolution of turtles, with both fossil and living specimens, at Darwin Family Day, Feb. 8, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at the Museum of the Earth. Fun activities include a scavenger hunt through the museum, making origami frogs, and learning about whale evolution. Cost: regular museum admission.

YOUNG MEN SINGING

A free concert, “New York Young Men Singing,” will feature the Cornell University Glee Club, with Robert Isaacs, conductor, and the Young Men’s Chorus of Ithaca, with Mikey Wade, director, and Janet Galivan, Ithaca Children’s Choir artistic director. The concert will be held Feb. 8, 3:30-4:30 p.m., at Sage Chapel.

RISKY DECISIONS

Valerie F. Reyna will discuss the new book she edited with Vivian Zayas, “The Neuroscience of Risky Decision Making,” Feb. 10, noon-1 p.m., 160 Mann Library. Reyna is professor of human development, director of the Human Neurosciences Institute in the College of Human Ecology and co-director of the Cornell MRI Facility; Zayas is associate professor of psychology at Cornell.

PRIVATE AND CELL PHONES

Stephen Wicker, professor of electrical and computer engineering, will discuss “Cellular Convergence and the Death of Privacy,” Feb. 12 at 4:30 p.m., Rm. 106G, Olin Library. Cellular convergence – the growing trend for all forms of electronic communication to consolidate onto the cellular handset – has dramatically increased the impact of cellular surveillance. In his new book, Wicker explores this unprecedented threat to privacy.

FILM FESTIVAL

The 38th Banff Mountain Film Festival includes films ranging from an exploration of remote landscapes and mountain cultures to adrenaline-fueled action sports, and will show at Cornell, Feb. 14-7; 10 p.m., in Bailey Hall. Cost: $12 Cornell affiliates; $15 general public; $20 day of show.

VEGETABLE GARDENING

A class for the beginning vegetable gardener will be held Feb. 18, 6:30-9:30 p.m., at the Tompkins County Cornell Cooperative Extension Education Center, 615 Willow Avenue, Ithaca. Learn about locating your garden, preparing the soil, starting seeds, planting, mulching, and which easy veggies to try first. Fee $5-$10 (self-determined sliding scale fee); pre-registration preferred. Call 272-2292.