

# THE MUSE

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*Reflections, Memoirs, & Vignettes  
From Cornell University*

VOLUME III - 2013



*So enter that daily thou mayest become more  
learned and thoughtful. So depart that daily thou  
mayest become more useful to thy country and to  
mankind.*

— Inscription on Eddy Street Gate

# THE MUSE

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** Diana Rypkema '13  
dcr78@cornell.edu

**MANAGING EDITOR** Meril Pothen '13  
map329@cornell.edu

**ASSOCIATE EDITORS** Corey Ryan Earle '07  
cre8@cornell.edu

**EDITOR EMERITUS** Nathaniel Schorr '12



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## EDITOR'S NOTE



ear Reader,

I am absolutely thrilled to share the third edition of *The Muse* with you! We've been on hiatus for a while, but we're back and ready for action with submissions from the Classes of 2012 and 2013.

Publishing *The Muse* has been a personal journey for me, testing my perseverance and what it truly means to commit to something. When I agreed to take on the project last year, I didn't really know what *The Muse* was about—it's hard to understand what people would write about as a memoir of their time on the Hill when you're still in the middle of your own. Throughout this year, I have learned a lot about Cornell and the diversity of experiences students have here. Reading past issues and immersing myself in this edition's pieces illustrated the changes in the campus culture over time and those threads that all Cornellians share.

Please relate to the pieces on the following pages in your own way—whether they make you laugh or cry, surprise you, or make you smile. Most of all, I hope these words and images from those leaving Cornell help you learn something new about this community, as those who contributed did when they reflected on their Cornell experience. Please enjoy reading the good, the bad, and the ups and downs we all took part in during our time on the Hill.


— DCR





# NICE TO MEET YOU. PLEASE GIVE ME A JOB.

*Ankur Bajaj, '13*

 heap housemates suck. It was 4:30 am, my throat was sore, and the room was freezing, cold enough that someone had to have either left buckets of snow on my dresser or converted my house into an ice-skating rink. But no, my housemates were the real culprits, and their refusal to turn on the heat until Thanksgiving was their *modus operandi*. To be fair, our housing situation was pretty unique—an eighteen-person fraternity annex, where heating was expensive, and made worse by the fact that some idiot had smashed open one of our windows during a mixer with a sorority a few weeks before.

Cursing my housemates nonetheless, I threw on my bathroom slippers and towel, brushed my teeth, and after tossing a few beer cans that had been left in the bathtub, took the hottest shower possible. It was an absurd hour, and yet I was used to it by then: catching the 5:30 am bus from Ithaca, New York, only a four and half hour hop over to New York City. I was final-round interviewing with consulting firms there, and had to do the 5:30 am bus to the city for a “Super-Day” of questions concerning leadership, how I handle stress, my fit for the firm and of course the case questions—the portion of the interview that every aspiring consultant dreads. But I’m a little ahead of myself; this is towards the end of my application process. The process really started in the fall of my senior year of college. Full time recruitment in the fall is handled in a few stages: Networking Events, Info Sessions, Online Application, Interviews, Offers and Decision.

But wait, the process doesn’t really start your senior year. Perhaps it’s best to go back a bit to junior year of college. Arguably,

your junior year internship matters the most because the biggest firms on the street hire a lot of their intake from their junior year interns, their so-called “Summer Analysts”. In that sense, if finance or consulting are your goals, and why wouldn’t they be—securing the best junior year internship is the most important step for your career.

But truthfully, starting there doesn’t make sense either, given that the process really begins during your senior year of high school. When you choose your college, you really should consider the school’s prospects for career placement, in the context of its academics and extracurricular activities of course. And take what other aspiring consultants and bankers have done before you as proof: enrollment in business-oriented institutions has dramatically increased over the last decade. Once students arrive, they’re also increasingly choosing pre-business majors and joining pre-business extracurricular activities.

But honestly, that might not be a fair starting point either, as most likely, your parents begin planning for your career development before you could even fathom what career development meant. Prep schools, SAT classes, College Planning tutors—you name it. If the product or service is marketable as something that will enhance their son or daughter’s career prospects, you can guarantee that there will be upper middle class parents in suburbia that will buy it. In America’s winner-take-all culture, it pays to start early.

But I digress. As we’re running short on our time together, and given that I have to start somewhere, let’s begin towards the end of my junior year internship in New York City.

## **Networking Events**

I lived in New York City during my summer internship at a

bank, and the city was thrilling but still not over stimulating. Even though I was raised in Austin, Texas (population 1.2 million), which is by no means rural, I still felt like a country boy in the big city—the opportunities to eat, drink, dance and live back home couldn't compete with New York City's offerings. I was thriving, excelling at work and making new friends. My average day included first waking up around 6:45 am in my rented NYU dorm room, which was perfectly temperature controlled. I'd then begin work by 8:00 am, when the office was still quiet, working to 6:30 pm, which was when my boss usually got off work. After, I'd grab a quick drink on Wall Street until 7:30pm, where bankers sat while postponing their return home to their families. Finally, but yet most importantly, I'd spend many evenings in networking events held by my company, honor society or university. These events provided access to and potentially a chance to influence those who would make decisions regarding your potential candidacy, and so I attended every one I could, shaking hands with recruiters and employees, gathering business cards almost as if I were using them to make a sanctimonious shrine to job recruitment, drinking the free alcohol and reciting my "elevator pitch", a quick five sentence summary about myself so called because it was short and powerful enough to impress a stranger with whom you may share an elevator. I had perfected mine after my three hundredth recitation.

As soon as I was old enough to dream about what I wanted to be when I grew up, I remember aspiring to be three things: an astronaut, a firefighter and a DJ. I was mesmerized by how these professions were depicted on television, and so I spent much of my childhood reading scientific fiction novels and pretending to spin record players. But as a senior in college, I was left with two options: finance or consulting.

Positions in finance didn't interest me too much, as the nature of the work was limited to buying and selling parts of businesses and inherently grounded in finding abstract ways to use money to make even more money. That left consulting as my option, where

I'd help companies solve their problems, even though they also often consisted of their desire for more money. But I'd make it work.

## **Information Sessions**

So you spent your summer pretending to add anything, and I mean anything, of substance to your firm, while you actually consumed your workday by checking your facebook on your phone every ten minutes or reading the Wall Street Journal trying to look important. You of course, don't need to know the Journal's information given that your job really only consisted of formatting powerpoints, sending emails, grabbing the takeout and getting far to intimate with Microsoft Excel.

But now, you're back on campus and if especially if you're bored with classes (because why would you ever need to read Nietzsche or study Chemistry—how is that going to help you be a better consultant?) you've probably logged into your campus career services website. Amid the clutter of company advertisements there were notices posted: Information Sessions, for every firm imaginable. So you sign up, understandably. If the firms are going to the trouble of the expense and time investment, their information sessions must be useful.

That's what I thought at least. I signed up for as many information sessions in the consulting field as I could. I had declined my offer at my bank from the summer, so applying broadly to a large number of firms was important—otherwise I'd end up unemployed at my parents house, where my mother would fatten me up on a diet of chicken tikka masala (creamy chicken) and kheer (rice pudding), compensating for “how skinny I had become at college”. The thought still makes me shudder. I declined my offer primarily because I wasn't as excited about the work as I thought I should be.

The recruiting firms held their information sessions in the conference facilities of the *Statler*, our on-campus hotel, so though location was convenient, timing wasn't—every firm decided to schedule them in the early afternoon, leaving no time to change after class. So every morning for about two continuous weeks I'd wake up in my dingy fraternity annex and wear my dark navy suit to class, sitting among friends and strangers who were wearing hoodies, pajamas and sweatpants, not quite fitting into the ambiance. I'd even have to wear my suit to yoga class and my job at the café. Every day I had an info session scheduled, you'd see me in western business attire doing “the downward dog pose” and making “grande nonfat cappuccinos”. I spent a lot on dry cleaning to remove the sweat and smell of caffeine.

I'd arrive at the Statler hotel, looking and feeling like I was meant to be there. I'd go to the conference room, and first stand in line outside to mark my attendance, jumping through another hoop that was utterly needless but absolutely necessary. After signing in, I'd enter to be greeted by a wide stage, a large array of hors d'oeuvres, and other of my friends in ill-fitting suits, uneven and lumpy ties, and belts that didn't match their shoes. I, however, outwardly demonstrated how seriously I took the process, and so was wearing a bespoke suit, pocket square and cufflinks. The food was usually a nice spread: artichoke and spinach dips, crostini, grilled vegetables, mini sliders, hummus and lavash. No alcohol however—Cornell had misguidedly prohibited employers from offering that for students. So we could be trusted to make a decision as important as our jobs, but not trusted with any amount of alcohol? Therefore, in order to rightly prepare, I had to arrive at the Statler hotel early to have time to sit in the hotel lounge for a long espresso and local microbrew. And the mix of caffeine and alcohol was absolutely necessary to even sit through the recruiters' chatter. Their information was sparse and consisted of the same tired talking points: how the firm was diverse, with momentum, uniquely forward-looking, well poised for success. They threw up glittery

powerpoint presentations with smiling stock photos of young people while talking about our opportunities for career advancement and unlocking our potential for achievement. I bounced from one info session to the next, sometimes fitting in five or six in a two-hour window, skipping countless others. You judged the prestige and quality of the firm by the number of appetizers, the length of their line and the quality of their free stuff. The best arrive early, before the event, and try to effectively engage the recruiters in genuine conversations before anyone else arrives. Remember to shine your shoes, have a firm handshake and choose your flat and lifeless questions regarding the firm's work-life balance, diversity initiatives and corporate culture wisely. And don't eat too much—the firms will think you're greedy.

## **Applications**

So you've sat through too many info sessions, worn out your suit, and have gone to the hotel bar enough times that the waiters know you on a first name basis. Now that the information has sunk in, it's time to apply online in order to be selected for an interview. The first step is resume building, and it's really important to spend hours pouring over every word and formatting choice, because you've got one shot to stand out in the recruiters' mind, one shot to show that you're different, intelligent, and worthy of further consideration. What you don't know is that the average time a recruiter will look at your resume is thirty seconds.

After reading that statistic somewhere, and unhealthily obsessed with standing out, I spent a lot of time working on my resume, asking my friends, advisers and parents to take a look, critique this word, change that font. Tweaking and pruning and nipping so much that the document felt alive, organic, with its own character. But it wasn't—it was a mere slice of my life, an image that I wanted others to see me as. My GPA, a simple number, was supposed to convey my intellectual curiosity; my past leadership

experiences were supposed to demonstrate my type-A personality and drive; my prior internships were supposed to show my relevant skills and industry knowledge; my interests and hobbies section at the bottom was supposed to prove that I was noteworthy, unique person. My twenty one years of life was to be crystallized into less than three hundred words on one sheet of paper, and as I was forced to do so, I made sure mine was brilliant: perfectly formatted, aesthetically appealing, and only slightly embellished.

The next step is drafting a cover letter. Before online applications and the Internet, the cover letter was inserted into the application envelope to literally cover the resume, thus being the first document that employers read. It detailed your interests, past experiences and formally declared your intent to interview with the firm, and so was a document that humanized an otherwise sterile process. In modern times, even without physical manifestations, the cover letters could conceivably serve the same purpose—providing the recruiter with more of your life story and your genuine interest in the firm. But with technology's forward march and the advent of the easy-to-fill online applications, that isn't the case. Instead of applying to one or two choice firms, college students are regularly selecting twenty or thirty, slightly altering the cover letter to fit whatever firm it's going to. And I absolutely did the same—submitting close to forty applications with slight variants to my cover letters. Then I waited for the employers to respond.

## **Interviews**

Congratulations! You've polished your resume and sent off your cover letters to the most prestigious consulting firms. And now you wait. Patiently. Though you've submitted your applications diligently you cannot embark on the next phase of the journey until employers notify you regarding whether or not you've been

deemed worthy enough to interview. Being selected for further discussions is an honor in and of itself—with increasingly higher sticker prices on college recruiting due to higher transportation costs, fewer HR staff and lower new employee retention rates, only serious candidates are extended an invitation for a first round interview.

Most of my first round interviews were held on campus, in one of the countless career services buildings. My attire had to be the same, if not even more professional with a briefcase and resume portfolio. I'd arrive always ten minutes early to the interview location and sign in using the convenient tablet app that had been developed by career services. They were presumably trying to connect with students by using technology with which we were familiar, but it was honestly off-putting for me, providing me more a video game experience than an interview sign in. I'd wait, anxiously, until my name was called, stand up slowly, look the recruiter dead in the eye and lie by saying that "It's great to meet you", shaking his or her hand. I'd be shepherded down the hall to one of the interview rooms and wait for the employer to take his or her seat before I took my own. The interview rooms were always dangerously warm, not only due to the tight quarters, but also because of the Ithaca summers which were unbearable when in western business attire. You'd think the career services would recognize that problem and dedicate the resources to fixing it, instead of developing their tablet app or spending time using social media to tell us "How to build a better resume!"

Uncomfortable, and sweating in all of the wrong places, I'd first answer the recruiter's so-called "personal fit questions", all for which I'd already prepared general answers.

**"What experiences do you have working on a team?"** *Start off by talking about a group effort in which you helped organize the team, because they really care about your leadership here.*

**"Tell me about yourself?"** *Elevator Pitch, easy.*



**“Why consulting?”** *Mention that the learning curve never ends, that you want to be analytical, that you want to surround yourself with the best and the brightest.*

The next few were tougher, and some required a moderate amount of research beforehand (let’s say five minutes).

**“Why our firm?”** *Spit back the reasons that they list on their website as “Things that set our Firm Apart”*

**Tell us about a time you failed.** *Start off with something that you did badly, talk about how you fixed the problem, learned from it, and ended up benefitting in a way you didn’t think initially possible.*

Finally were the case interview questions during some consulting interviews. These types of questions are used to gauge the candidates’ analytical skills, ability to create structure out of an ambiguous problem and their capacity to stay organized, thoughtful and inquisitive under pressure. To prepare, candidates can read a book—and all serious candidates do, and they all read the same one. You learned the same frameworks and applied them, adding a bit of creative flair as you saw fit. Given you were given new information on the spot, answering these questions took more effort than the fit questions, but not by much. For a process that entailed thousands of dollars in investment by the firm and significant time and effort by the student, one would think that each interview would feel unique, would provide insight into the firm and what it would be like to work there. All of mine ran together, and so the dance continued.

The interviews would always end with a final question, “Do you have any questions for us?” My research kicked in here, and I used to ask something intelligent about a specific action that the firm had taken recently in a specific industry, or perhaps their commitment to training and personal development. I sometimes also used to ask personal questions: “What’s the work-life balance

like?” or “What type of support is there for LGBTQ employees at your firm?”

The last question was pretty difficult for me to ask. Not only had I very recently come out of the closet, but also I asked the question intentionally to demonstrate my added diversity in hopes it would give me an edge, which made me feel guilty, guilty because I had used my sexual orientation almost as a poker chip. I wagered that by mentioning my diverse status I'd make the recruiter that much more likely to remember me and pull my application into the next round rather, but the obvious risk was that I might perhaps be killing my own candidacy if he or she were homophobic. Even more, by leveraging my sexual orientation I felt that I was perhaps claiming an unfair advantage.

At the same time, how were my actions any different than the son of a wealthy businessman claiming his family connections or the student of a university claiming his alumni connections? Somehow it felt right though, especially because I was transforming a part of me that was often ridiculed or belittled into something positive. And who knows, maybe if I was successful as an openly gay consultant, I could be a positive role model for those after me. I hoped.

If you fared well enough, you were asked to the final round of interviews that were almost always held at the office headquarters, which in the consulting world were most frequently in New York City. So we're back to where we started: 5:30 am bus rides to the interview site, followed by four or five hours' worth of interviews concerning fit, case questions and then questions for the firm, topped off with a stellar 5:30 pm bus return to Ithaca: 450 miles in twenty four hours. Sometimes I'd get lucky, and they'd get me a hotel for the night before. By the end of each day I was emotionally and physically exhausted—but I got those business cards for my shrine.

## Offers/ Decision

The moment of truth is now upon you. You receive a call from a number you don't recognize, but you know the area code is New York City. Your heart stops, stomachdrops and you panic. You clear your throat, stop wherever you are pick up the phone, mentally preparing yourself for what's next. You're able to tell within seconds whether the call was going to be a happy or sad one. Firms that were denying you will be merciful and keep things short, warmly greening you, immediately stating that it was a pleasure to speak with you but unfortunately the firm will not be continuing further conversations. "Thank you for your time."

Positive calls will have a different tone. The recruiter will ask how your day has been, if your hotel or travel arrangements were comfortable, and what you thought of your final interview performance. You'll of course answer that it was a pleasure to meet the people you met and that you think you demonstrated your abilities well. The recruiter will say that they agree, and would like to offer you a position. Congratulations.

Everyone gets a mix of those phone calls, and everyone feels the sting of those first five seconds of a negative one. Even though I got seven positive calls, pretty successful in the years of the Great Recession, I couldn't help feeling disappointed, a personal failure every time the words "Thank you for your time" were said to me. You try to rationalize the situation. Many of the firms I heard be by negative feedback from rarely hired at Cornell, and so I shouldn't be disappointed. *But I was.* I was kidding myself, I didn't really want work there, and I wouldn't have enjoyed it. *But I did, and would have.*

The sad truth is that you'll feel the same way as any other college participant in the process, as I did—you'll ground your entire conception of self-worth in external metrics and material possessions: to your GPA, which firms didn't give you offers, the quality

of your resume paper, the brand of your suit. American society is defined these external assessments. From our very birth, we're groomed for greatness, by how society defines greatness. We attend school to get an education, by how society defines an education. We grow, mature, marry, and love, dancing through life as we're expected to.

But my parents were paying for college, and so I didn't have time to ponder such questions. I needed to move on and decide. My next steps were to attend some "offer weekends", which were held by a specific firm and consisted of two days of filet mignon, rich desserts, and open bars held in order to convince me to accept their job offer. It felt strange to be sought after, especially given that I had spent the larger part of three months kowtowing to every one of them. They were networking with me now, and it felt empowering. There's a reason that finance and consulting jobs are most popular with students from top universities: they're sexy. Beyond the allure of career advancement, 401 (k)s, exit opportunities, the quality of life at these firms is superb. You're surrounded by intelligent, type-A, attractive people—what's not to like?

And so you lose sight of what inspired you in the first place. You accept your offer and when the afterglow has faded, when the recruitment process is just a memory you realize that you're not much further than where you started. You embarked on this journey to determine what direction your career path should take, and yet even with a signed offer, you are clueless.

But it can't be that bad....right? Worst case—I know I can sign up for DJ classes in the city.

# WHAT THE HELL IS ILR?

*Casey Sweeney, '13*



e're assembled in a sort of interwoven blob of comfort on the couches and floor, covered by the same blankets and sharing the same bowls of popcorn and M&Ms (mixed). We feel cozy in our seven-person annex in Collegetown after a year living in the house with forty sisters. There's some wonderfully awful movie on the TV and at least two of us are on our laptops looking at Facebook and Tumblr, while at least two more of us are laying across the floor painting our nails. This Thursday night, after-dinner laziness in our living room serves as a pre-prgame if we ever decide to get ready to actually go out. Someone is reading *Cosmo Sex Tips* aloud, trying to suppress uneasy giggles, while some of us blush and others of us roll out of our snuggle-bound positions in full body-shaking laughter.

"So, Case, where are you off to in the world this weekend?" asks my med school-bound roommate Meghan, who is playing with her Organic Chemistry model kit on the corner of the couch. Meghan's parents are professors in rural Pennsylvania, and when she was in middle school, she was sent to the principal when she wore a Kerry-Edwards button to school in protest when her teacher told her she couldn't campaign at school. Now, she diligently studies away, hoping to earn an MD-PhD to become as, or more, successful than her future husband and has bullied me into high heels for a night out on too many occasions. As she lounges, she's wearing an Alta Gracia Cornell T-shirt, union-made in the Dominican Republic by former Nike workers whose factory closed when they first tried to form a union. Now, the workers at Alta Gracia are paid a living wage, making college-logo apparel for the

Cornell Store and hundreds of other university bookstores, a fact that Megan is probably unaware of.

“I just have another conference to go to. I’m gonna be in Ohio, only ‘til Sunday.”

“Ah. Typical, off saving the world again. Our little activist jet-setter, freeing the laborers one conference at a time,” she says, throwing her arm and blanket in the air in a cape-swinging motion.

I sigh, simultaneously smiling, laughing, shaking my head, and snickering, making some sound meant to express humility, gratitude, and disapproval. As I try to reject this idea that I, as an individual, am responsible for saving or freeing anything or anyone, I stop to wonder if my sisters take this as feigned modesty or an inability to accept compliments. Though I hope this isn’t the case, I also know these women do not wake up in the morning wanting to take on multinational corporations and build worker power in the US and the Global South. But by coming to watch me jazzercise at my “Work-out for Workers’ Rights” protests outside Olin Library, donating to United Students Against Sweatshops for my 21st birthday, and by giving me moments like these on the couch to unwind, they are playing their own unique part in changing the power dynamics at play in the global economy. They might not get it or be totally down for the cause, but they love me for whatever it might be, and that I can appreciate.

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

I was spending eight weeks in El Salvador with our union partners as an international representative of United Students Against Sweatshops in order to develop stronger relationships with workers on the ground, investigate abuses, conduct research

into apparel supply chains and explain to workers the role that students play in our campaigns in solidarity with them. When I arrived at the airport in San Salvador, the guard mistook me for Salvadoran when I approached customs and he inquired about my citizenship so as to direct me to the appropriate line. He very quickly realized with a chuckle that I was not a native when I couldn't understand that he was asking me a question that required an answer and instead stared blankly with an uneasy smile. My first interactions with my Salvadoran coworkers and supervisors would all mirror this exchange with airport security, filled with nods, pleasantries and confusion, and a mutual understanding amongst all of us that my Spanish skills were not as strong as I had anticipated they'd be for the summer ahead. My confidence sunk as I relied heavily on my two American comrades to translate through introductions and presentations and at meal times with our host-family.

So, at the end of my first week in the country, I ventured alone for the first time on a warm and humid Salvadoran afternoon during the rainy season, a little before the evening shower would start to pour down. I walked around the same three paved streets for the better part of an hour, looping around the windy roads and crouching down to read street names painted along the edge of the sidewalks, in search of Avenida Bolivar #103. When I left the office about a mile away, I assured my American friends that I could make it to the Spanish School on my own and asked them to please express that to our union hosts who had been very politely struggling to understand my accent. I could not wait to begin my lessons so I could stop wandering aimlessly and finally ground myself in the real work of communicating and connecting with workers from garment factories in the region.

That grounding was contingent on my actually finding the school, but instead, I was lost on the streets of this country that was strife with civil war thirty years ago, and whose economy is now dollarized. As I attempted to walk with purpose down the

block, I picked up my local phone to dial the school's number with only one bar of battery remaining. No one on the other end could find the women who spoke English. I struggled to find the words to describe the corner where I was standing—I don't think I ever learned the word for swing-set and I certainly couldn't remember how to describe houses and yards. After one more circle around the block, I received a call from one of the English teachers and she walked up around a tree-covered bend that I had seen but hadn't thought to turn up, and she escorted me back to the building. I assured her I would certainly remember it for next time, but she seemed to have her doubts.

I walked in, caught my breath, filled a mug with water from the cooler, glanced at the tchotchkes they were selling from their women's cooperative, and made my way up the stairs to meet my instructor in the second room on the right. The building was open and bright, with fences for walls on the second floor, overlooking rainforest with tin ceilings covering overhead, but down the hallway were more traditional classrooms with painted white brick walls and chalkboards and ceiling fans, long tables and colorful plastic outdoor patio chairs stacked in a corner. The walls in my classroom were covered with sheets of butcher paper with "Slang Words for Money" in English and "Comida Tradicional Salvadoreña" in Spanish. In the lesson, my petite and patient instructor Nora laid out twenty-some-odd strips of construction paper with different verbs written on them to assess my vocabulary, comprehension, and ability to express myself by asking me to go through and explain the definitions of each of them. I recognized a decent number of them and rambled off definitions and gesticulated to get my point across.

I picked up a crumpled sheet and read out loud—Luchar—rolling my eyes upward and to the right as one tends to do when trying to re-call knowledge that is hidden somewhere in the mind but has remained untouched since those days in third period during sophomore year of high school.



Ah! “Es como...like...” and I began to awkwardly and enthusiastically act out a “Jab-Hook-Cross-Uppercut” punching sequence. She shook her head no as she adjusted her thick plaited hair on her shoulder, and I felt a bit defeated.

“Oh, no no no, es mas como...like” and I began to chant the words from picket lines I’ve walked on at home, “Hey Hyatt, escucha, estamos en la lucha!” swinging my arms as if marching in my seat as I started to recall the actual significance of the word in terms of social justice.

“Si, eso es más correcto. Comprendes la diferencia?” she says with a smile.

Luchar is not meant to mean physical fighting, with fists and blows and injuries. It is to fight for something, to fight against something, to struggle and fight on. She goes onto explains that a lot of her American students act this verb out in that way and confuse it with the other word which means to fight, but it is incorrect. We try to think of why this might be, but I chalk it up to my own imperfect memory, placing only a bit of blame on the US education system’s de-prioritization of foreign language and our American cultural tendencies to associate fighting with violence before struggle.

After four weeks of classes, I had gained a bit more confidence and could actually follow along on our house visits on the outskirts of the city, in the neighborhoods on the edges of the free trade zones of El Salvador. One afternoon, Estela, the President of the union SITRASACOSI, finally brought me along to a worker’s home without one of my more capable colleagues, a sign of approval and trust that I had yearned for. I met her at the bus stop, where she stood with her hands held delicately in front of her body and smiled warmly as she saw me approach the corner. She wore a

button-up blouse with short sleeves that she had sewn herself in a khaki color with a long black skirt that hung just past her knees, and her perfectly oiled, curly black hair held back by a charming but simple plastic headband. Estela used to work at a sweatshop called Hermosa, until she started to organize a union in her plant and was blacklisted when brands pulled out orders and the factory shut down in 2005. Since then, she has continued leading SITRASACOSI, organizing other workers in the maquiladoras despite the machismo-masculine attitudes of the factory management and within the Salvadoran labor movement. On the way there, she explained to me that we would be meeting a new contact from the plant where her cousin now works and told me some of the conditions in this particular factory that the union was hoping to organize.

Estela's voice is an octave higher than my own, but her words ring much deeper as we sit in this woman's home and listen to her story. The worker fed us cookies and soda which we warmly and graciously accepted, despite my not caring too much for the carbonation, because this hospitality probably cost her nearly a day's wages. The woman was young, not much older than me, with two children, one around three years old and the other a baby sitting in her lap. She told us a story of a day at work when she cut her hand and the supervisor refused to allow her to see the medic until she began to bleed onto the garments. She showed us her scar. She showed us her pay stubs and detailed the costs of living in comparison to her below-minimum wage salary. She pointed to the Cornell sticker on my notebook and said she made sweatshirts with that logo. She spoke to us most about her fear of getting involved in the union. Estela responded compassionately, but with unwavering confidence,

“Si, hija, este trabajo no es facil. Pero esta situación no es justo, tu sabes. La vida sin lucha no es la vida. Compañera, vivir es luchar.”

Yes, my dear, this work is not easy. But this situation is unfair, you know this. Life without struggle is no life at all. Compañera, to live is to struggle.

We are not the same, Estela and I. Her struggles are not my own, and I have not struggled as she has. My father was not persecuted and killed for his political beliefs. I was never harassed, fired, and threatened for trying to organize for respect at the sweatshop where I worked. I have not lived through US interventionism and guerilla warfare in my community. But because of the way in which our world is set up, we are on the same team. We have common enemies in this global economy. Patriarchy, imperialism, sexism, racism, inequality, injustice. This is what we are fighting against, and we cannot do it alone. In my daily life, I would be blind not to see my privilege and all of the opportunities afforded to me. In moments like this one, sitting on a wicker chair in a room with cement floors in this worker’s home, with her child on her lap and tears in her eyes, I can do little but think about it. Walking to class on my elite Ivy League campus, overhearing stranger’s phone calls on Ho Plaza, weighing their offers from JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs. On breaks from school when I return to my home to a family who raised me to care about others, who wrap their arms around me as I walk in the door and who support me through everything I do, whether it’s traveling to El Salvador or rallying outside President Skorton’s office. This privilege is never not a part of me, but it impacts me in different ways.

There’s that boy who told me I only got into this school because I’m a woman of color the day after I received my acceptance letter—that is always a part of me, also. The wealthy, white, male university official, whose voice bellows over mine when

he interjects, “Yes, yes, Casey, I think we certainly all know how you feel. You’ve made that loud and clear. I’m very interested, though, in what the rest of you might have to say,” in meetings with my professors and peers. The emails to my landlord where I need to ask for a few more days to pay this month’s rent, and explaining to my housemates how and why I can’t just ask my parents. The stories of my grandmother, an immigrant, working in the sweatshops in New York’s Chinatown. The fraternity brother whose hand slips slowly down my back because he’s drunk and my skirt is short and he feels like he can. Her struggles are not my own. But if you have come to help me, you are wasting your time.

The big players in the global apparel industry were a driving force in reshaping and restructuring our global economy and the power dynamics within it today. The industry is a web of subcontracting, spun by the world’s biggest brands, headquartered in the richest countries in the world. They set the standards, putting downward pressure on buyers, subcontractors, factory owners, local management, and workers to produce for less than their competitors halfway across the world. And when workers come together to try to form a union to bargain for improved conditions in these sweatshops, they face intimidation and threats from factory management. Then, brands pull out orders and move them to non-union facilities, and hundreds to thousands of workers lose their jobs when the factories shut down. When factory owners flee the country or can’t sell off sewing machines for enough cash, workers often never receive their legally mandated backpay because brands refuse to pay it, denying responsibility for their subcontracted workers. This is what happened when Estela’s factory, making Adidas apparel for schools like the University of Wisconsin-Madison, shut down seven years ago. To this day, her and her coworkers are left without the nearly one million dollars in severance pay they were legally owed, and this is what happens around the world, from Indonesia to Honduras to Bangladesh, when workers try to organize to protect themselves from abuses on the job.

Today, the German-based Adidas Group places some orders directly with a buying agent and broker based in the US. Once the buying agent gets off the phone with Adidas, he is totally responsible for distributing orders amongst different factories in the region in order to meet deadlines and costs set by the brand. One of those factories subcontracts work to a smaller, less sophisticated factory, which then subcontracts its overflow orders to an even smaller factory. Clothes must be made faster, and for cheaper, as conditions worsen down the supply chain. Workers who had been a part of a union in this smallest factory were laid off and ended up taking work at little clandestino workshops—underground and completely undisclosed sweatshops—which can shut down at any moment and operate illegally without paying into workers’ state-mandated health insurance program. One of the tags from the garments they sewed in the workshop revealed they were making Adidas apparel for an American sporting goods store, producing garments that were passed down the supply chain without any accountability from the brand as to where its goods are actually being made. This distance between the workers making the apparel and the brands profiting from it is the norm in the industry, and it allows brands to further themselves from problems that arise in their supply chains. This could be a tale about any one of Adidas’ 1,232 disclosed contract factories worldwide that produce 17 billion dollars worth of products annually for the corporation, according to the company’s website and Social and Environmental Affairs department. To remove responsibility from themselves, these billion-dollar, multinational corporations instead lay the blame on local governments with weak labor laws, irresponsible buyers who breach toothless company codes, and poorly trained or uneducated native factory managers and supervisors. But those with the most power to change the industry must be ultimately responsible when things go horribly wrong, whether it is when workers are fired illegally, locked in the plants, killed in tragic factory fires or threatened with death for organizing.

Noemi is a younger, but experienced organizer with SITRASACOSI and worker at a factory called Chi Fung, which is in the same free trade zone where the Hermosa factory used to be. She works on the sewing lines and wears high heels to do house visits in neighborhoods with dirt roads. She plays with her dark, long, wavy hair, rolling it into buns and braids in between meetings and poses for photos in the office to pass the time on long conference calls. Taking her lead from Estela, she attends trainings and workshops to sharpen her natural organizing skills and ability to connect with any worker she meets. She greets us with a hug and kiss as we enter the union office and shares the latest chismes, about who told her this or that and the new intel she heard on the bus about the Human Resources Manager at the plant. She has four children and lives with a man, but they're not married and she works to support her family.

On a day off from work, Noemi woke up early and met us in the city so that we could take the bus to a lake in her hometown to swim and relax. The lake was sublime. It was wide and vast and in the distance its edge met a mountain range and a volcano, covered by thick clouds. The sun beat down on us in our summer-best, with floppy hats and long skirts and swimsuits packed away in our brightly patterned tote bags we bought on our last trip to the beach. We joked about how luxurious our long vacation in El Salvador has been, facetiously mocking how hard the other students in Honduras and Nicaragua had to work, after we ourselves had spent every day in the office for the past two weeks. Noemi initially sat on a bench under a shady tree as we went in for a dip, but she could not resist coming in for a swim and we laughed as we tried to launch each other into the air to dive back into the water, with no one else around on this workday morning but the vendors hoping to feed us that afternoon. We posed hands-on-hip together near the water for photos on Noemi's camera that the union had paid for so that she could document what she saw on her way to work or on house visits. We stood there, going through every possible combination and pair and asked a stranger

snap a group shot as we all smiled widely. We stayed in the sand, clicking through each picture on the digital screen, soaking up the perfect coolness of the lake's water and the warmth from the humid air around us, laughing at the cheesy poses and funny faces and the beautiful blue skies and waters set behind us.

We finally got out and got changed and she took us away from the painted food stands meant to attract tourists. We went past the paved walkways, across a parking lot towards a muddy, grassy path down around the lake, down to a fenced neighborhood. We stood in tall grass mixed with dirt and rocks, and on the other side of the fence stood shacks lined in rows and children running around, as they do at recess or when there are strange white people wandering past their homes. Noemi pointed out a restaurant in the distance where her mother used to work, which looked like a dark, three-walled structure with a tin roof covering two sets of picnic tables, but then she brought us to a stand nearby to eat salty fried sardine-sized fish instead. The woman serving us knew Noemi's mother, and Noemi explained to her that she had not been back to her hometown for seventeen years.

As we sat drinking Coca Cola from glass bottles and picking at these fish, Noemi told us about growing up and spending time here. She tried to explain why she had not been back in so many years, sharing memories we could tell she had not spoken about for a lifetime.

"I used to work at the restaurant with my mother. I started very young, probably nine or ten. I would want to go and play and climb trees, watch the birds with my friends, but that's where I learned to make pupusas," she tells us, clapping her hands together, left over right, right over left, patting together the imaginary cheese and bean-filled dough, making our favorite Salvadoran food.

"I got older, and I left," she continued without saying more about her departure. "That was when I got my first job in the

maquila. I was much younger back then so it was easier to get hired and I learned to sew, first T-shirts, then long-sleeve, now everything,” pointing to the sleeves on her shirt and then running her fingers down her arm to her wrist as she explained. She had her first child ,who is now a bit younger than me, and had her own life and never really had a reason to come back, until she brought us here today.

Finally, I found myself asking, “Noemi, why do you do the work you do?” feeling more comfortable with her and with my Spanish than I had over the past six weeks.

“I love working for the union,” she answered, clasping her hands tightly in front of her, resting them on her chest. “I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t,” she added, releasing her hands to jokingly shake her finger at me. She paused before reaching for my hand across the table.

“To be able to work to help others, to work with you all, to work together to make things better. Es increíble, chicas. I did not think that this is where I would be, but now I could not imagine doing anything else,” she said. She shook my hand playfully and our fingers interlocked and I smiled widely back at her and my friends as we all looked at each other, trying to express in our eyes and with our smiles how happy we were to be there together, at this lake, in El Salvador for the summer, as compañeras in this movement.



The next day, we sat Noemi down for an interview so that we could record her and use the video in our campaign materials to educate students on campus and to share her story. She joked about becoming famous and was never shy in front of a camera. The four of us moved to a back room area in the office that is somewhere between a storage closet and a patio, with some sunlight shining through as we sat and could hear the construction happening over the cement wall. I didn't want to fuss and we all seemed to think we'd be able to get what we needed on film, despite the flow of people walking through looking for various tools or squeezing behind us to use the hose that was nearby. We spoke through the topics and themes with Noemi that we all thought would be most powerful—her experiences working inside the factories, the hours, wages, and conditions, her life at home with her family, and why she continues to organize.

“Ok, lista?” I asked to make sure she was ready.

She folded her hands across her lap and nodded her head slowly with a timid smile. When we got started, she became stiff and nervous, speaking softly and slowly and with apprehension I had never heard in her voice before. About a minute into her introduction, she began to explain the physical pain that she has suffered working 12-hour shifts of forced overtime in the maquila industry for more than a decade, that some days she would come home from work and could not bathe because it was too excruciating to lift her arms, and the sharp pains she gets in her neck and the migraines that she feels from her forehead down through her spine. And then she began to cry.

As I sat there, I wondered if I would have had the will to fight on. I felt my chest sink deeply as I exhaled, and my body was consumed with the deepest respect and admiration for this woman who sat before me. It can be easy to get caught up in one's own successes, accomplishments and achievements. The headlines in the New York Times and the Cornell Daily Sun may read:

“Nike Bows to University Pressure on Labor Conditions,” and “Labor Fight Ends in Win for Students,” but it is not just a win for students—it is a win for workers, for unions, for people of color in the Global South and in the US, for all of us, because it is all of our fight and all of our struggle. This is what I’ve learned most in my time at Cornell, that when people come together, so much is possible. And so we turned off the camera, got out of our chairs and reached out to hug Noemi and hold her hand, whispering that it’s okay and everything is fine, and thank you for everything that you do.

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# MR. TALL, DARK AND HANDSOME

*Diana Rypkema, '13*

A

t 5'4", I have an intimate relationship with a Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome who's a little over 6 feet—the upright bass. Although I am a marine ecologist and will be pursuing a PhD in biology next year, I am also a musician. My time at Cornell has been split between science and music, often with more spent in Lincoln Hall than the library. Although I have learned so much from my classes, I grew the most through my involvement with the music program. From the Music Department, I had a job, became a better musician, made some of my greatest friends, and learned who I am and who I strive to become.

The bass is a foundational instrument in jazz, typically understated and reserved, much like me when I began. Over the past four years, I discovered that my favorite players were those who took risks—they were not afraid of being wrong if it offered the possibility of taking the music to a deeper level. My involvement with jazz at Cornell inspired me to leave my comfort zone to engage my fellow musicians in conversation. This motivates me to take the plunge in other aspects of my life, including my academic work and personal life.

Few women are jazz musicians and I am often the only woman in the ensembles I play with. Some of my peers have turned this difference into a barrier, with comments that “Women can't be good at jazz,” and the climate in rehearsal isn't as fun because you're in the room and you're a girl. Recently, I played at a Cornell donor event in New York City with my friend who plays piano. After the event, a Cornell alum came up to me and told me they thought I should have been playing piano and my friend should have been playing bass because I am a girl and he is a man. This

has been one of the most infuriating and disappointing themes of my time at Cornell; I am surrounded by some of the most well- educated people who still seem to make incredibly ignorant comments. Over the past four years, these comments could be extremely frustrating and alienating—one semester, I was so upset after our weekly rehearsal that I would inevitably cry on my walk home.

However, through these challenges, I grew. Besides being discouraged on a personal level, music has always been a struggle for me. Growing up, music didn't come naturally for me and I was constantly told I was tone deaf. From the moment I auditioned for the jazz program my freshman year, I received incredible support from the jazz director—personally and musically. He always encourages me to push myself beyond the limits that other people set for me, and supports me even if I miss the mark. He understands that mistakes are part of the learning process and he taught me that failure does not determine your character—it is how you respond to failure that speaks to who you are. Before I came to Cornell, I associated success and perfection with happiness and love. I believed that people would not love me if I was not outstanding. However, as William Somerset Maugham said, “Only a mediocre person is always at his best.” I have failed at Cornell—failed a test (or a few...), failed to follow through, failed relationships. My time at Cornell has shown me that it is not the failure that matters, but how we respond to our mistakes and inadequacies where we are judged. Music has given me the confidence to push beyond other's expectations for me and strive to do better, even if I fall down the hill a few times along the way.

# RECREATE THIS IN RED

*Angela Lu, '13*

*L*ooking up at the blue sky while walking across the Arts Quad on a sunny day

Dipping your foot into a tub of cold grapes and squishing them between your toes

Running up to the Sky Lounge to watch the sun rise after a night of movies

Wrapping a stack of warm chocolate chip cookies in brown napkins to take home

Freezing, stamping your feet and shivering while waiting for the last TCAT bus to come

Walking home with snow up to your hips

Slipping down Catherine Street and ripping a hole in your jeans

Passing by 626 Thurston to get an ice cream sandwich

Gazing at goslings behind Appel and feeding them veggie burgers left over from Slope Day

Going “all in” at Casino Night poker and raking in all the chips in seven plastic cups

Arriving back on campus at 3 AM on a Monday morning after a debate tournament

Squeezing your way into a crowded, sweaty party in the basement  
Running out of breath while streaking across the Arts Quad  
Circling Beebe Lake in late May  
Skipping an exam to visit your first winery after your 21st birthday  
Getting lost deliberately at Wegmans  
Catching a cruise at the Farmers' Market  
Getting caught in the rain outside Willard Straight Hall  
Getting caught in the snow outside Risley Hall  
Getting caught in the sleet outside the Schwartz  
Listening to the Marching Band play to a Homecoming game won  
with pride  
Stripping on stage for the Vagina Monologues  
Spinning upside down on a pole for Rocky Horror Picture Show  
Winning Quidditch as Cho Chang in a suit skirt at Harry Potter  
Night  
Making rainbow-colored mocktails for Filthy/Gorgeous 2012 and  
accidentally staining the carpets with half-thawed blueberries  
Winning an iPad Mini by accident in a silent auction  
Soldering a 3D stained glass lotus

Getting a hug from the Fire Marshal as a seal of approval after planning Filthy/Gorgeous 2013

Giving a sermon at a Jewish service

Calling up alumni to ask for career advice

Seeing your first hookah on the Court-Kay-Bauer courtyard

Binging on Eggs Benedict during Sunday brunch with Paul Hyams

Learning to be unpunctual

Climbing up to the top of McGraw Tower to cry into the wind as the chimes concert starts

E&M  
*Megan Baker, '13*

J

esla made the coils zap,  
and shock and arc onto the cage  
of mesh, wherein young Faraday  
had sat and pondered lines of force  
like ivy or like earthquake cracks  
that radiate in parallel,  
and never cross or end in tears-

But Thomson was the first to find  
the plums inside a copper wire  
that too, don't touch but move to shake  
unease at finding one too close  
and speed up to avoid a crash.  
And that allows for Oprah's voice  
to beat its way inside your head  
inducing circuitry to glow  
and fizzle out in frazzled ends,  
with thoughts of home, and lack of sleep,  
and maybe calling her tonight,  
and settling instead for beef  
and broccoli, and soft white light.

You learn this here, in E&M:  
You've never touched a single thing.  
That feeling in your skin when she  
would tuck your hair behind your ear  
is just the same as flicking on



tv, and seeing talk show hosts  
show sympathy for those in pain-  
Revulsion is the only way  
to kiss and have her feel your breath  
when you lay side by side, in dark,  
your metal ribcage to protect  
your body from the coils' sparks

# HOW TO SURVIVE AN INTERVIEW

*Ariella Zwerling, '13*

**S**urviving an interview is essential to achieving success. It's an important skill that is hard to master and therefore learning how to do so is of utter importance. You will never be left alone until you prove yourself worthy of the corporate universe. At least, your parents won't.

The night before your interview, you will undoubtedly be stressing over what you should say, how you should act, and most importantly what you should wear. Fear not, for this is a normal thing to do, especially since this is a position you desperately, desperately need. You will find yourself, as you prepare for bed, stretching to come up with why you want this job (because you're broke), why this job is better than any other job (because they gave you an interview), and why you are the right person for this job (because you have a very expensive degree). These questions will plague you throughout the night and you will wake up repeatedly from nightmares that you missed the interview. Be wise: set an alarm. And set one for every ten minute interval prior to the time you actually need to wake up because knowing yourself, you are most certainly going to hit the snooze button.

After you have found the strength inside of you to peel yourself from your bed in the morning, do not eat breakfast. You will be angry at yourself for the self-inflicted starvation, but the last thing you need is to spill some orange juice on the blouse you spent a whole week pairing with every single blazer in your closet, an hour before your interview. Or worse, have something lodged in your teeth that you won't notice until after you have left the meeting (don't argue; you know it's happened before). Grab a to-go cereal bar with a bottle of water. Your future self will thank you.

If you can, it is best not to drive to the interview. Your mind will not be focusing on the road, but rather on a time where you made a mistake and learned from it. The other drivers on the road will become livid and contemplate making retrospective mistakes of their own. However, if there is no other option take the time at red lights to ponder how you work in groups. Speaking of groups, if you are fortunate to take public transportation, give yourself two hours for travel time and an additional half an hour to actually find the building and the correct floor. It's a longer process than you initially think.

Upon arrival at the interview, take a deep breath. You have not overslept, you do not have onion bagel breath, and you are only sweating in places that are covered up by your jacket. For once, you have done everything right. You have achieved perfection. After you check in, go to the bathroom and take a moment to collect yourself. You can do this. You want to do this. You desperately need to do this or else you will be evicted. Once you are ready, return to the waiting area and remember to smile. Everyone is watching you. Be courteous to the receptionist when you ask for the time. Offending the receptionist could cost you your job. Make sure you are on your absolute best behavior. Do not be intimidated by the other applicants in the room. They are inferior to your college-educated self. Except for the fact that they have just as much of a chance to obtain this job as you do. And they don't have thousands of dollars of debt to repay. Now who is the smart one in this scenario? This is a good lesson in humility. Nobody will hire you, the person at the low end of the totem pole, if you believe you are smarter than the CEO. You might be, but you will also remain unemployed for the rest of your life. Sit tight and study your résumé. It calms the nerves. Then, your name is called. You apprehensively look up and you tentatively smile. Here goes nothing.

You immediately shake hands with the person who has called your name. You introduce yourself while trying to maintain eye contact and exerting the correct amount of force in the handshake, all with a smile of course. Never stop smiling. You are never grumpy. You are never sad. In fact, you are never yourself. Do not tell the truth. The truth will leave you in bankruptcy. You are whoever they want you to be. The quicker you learn that, the quicker you are eating real meals again and not the kinds that come out of the 99¢ cans. You sit down and place your black résumé binder with the imprint of your school's insignia in front of you. And now you wait for the first question.

The interviewer will ask you to talk a little about yourself. You recite the mantra you have been practicing for the past two weeks. You are determined, you are innovative, you are collaborative. You are every HR buzzword that comes to mind. You are not irritable in the mornings, passive aggressive, nor sarcastic. These are characteristics of most senior executives you have ever met, but they are not your personality traits. You are not allowed to have those yet. The following questions will focus on your interests, your past experiences, and your decision to work for this particular company. You have rehearsed these questions so much that your friends can answer them for you. You are so prepared you can spare yourself a second to take in the pale off-white room surrounding you, the view of the water outside of the window you so hopelessly wish you were on, and the clock ticking away behind you signaling that the interview is almost over.


The time is now five to and you are nearly there. Just one final question and you're free to eat that slice of pizza that tormented you from the window on your walk here. The end is so close that you can nearly (and almost literally) taste it. Then the interviewer drops the bomb: do you have any questions for us? This is not good. You have not prepared for this question. The one that seems so obvious and yet you rack your brain for a response that is unconventional, articulate, and important. Yet, everything you

have ever read about this company is lost in the abyss of your mind and all you can recall is the current controversy over the infidelity scandal of the Vice President of the business. You have worked so hard for this moment. You have read every interview-related article, begged your friends to role-play with you, and spent \$200 on this now very damp suit for the sole purpose of getting this job. But never did this one question occur to you. And so you do what you always do when you're nervous: you be yourself. You ask about how the company is handling their current spotlight in the media. The interviewer's face falls, but continues on with the scripted answer.

You exit the building that day deflated and discouraged. Maybe it's time to give up on this dream and move back home with Mom and Dad. Although they would be happy to see you, you know that they expected more out of you and their costly investment. You know you won't survive long under their roof anyway. You walk towards the grocery store on the corner to appease your growling stomach and see an elderly woman examining a tomato. Suddenly she loses her balance and without thinking you sprint forward and catch her before she falls. You steady her and she thanks you profusely. Her son comes running towards her and then thanks you profusely. He is much older than you and is dressed in a suit. He then asks where you are from and what you are doing in this part of town. You explain you had an interview, but didn't think the company was a great fit (which is the most honest and unplanned thing you have said all day). He explains that his company has an opening and believes that someone with such good intentions is exactly the right person for the job. He hands you his business card and tells you to call him tomorrow. It is then as he walks away you realize that the only way to get a job is not at all by surviving the interview, but by surviving yourself.

# “MUSIC WITH THE TWILIGHT FALLS”

*Meghan Burns, '13*

very Wednesday at 7:15 I walk out of rehearsal in Sage Chapel and into a circle of friends. We have backpacks slung over our shoulders, scarves tucked into puffy jackets, and sheet music tucked under our arms. We have prelims to study for and essays to write and problem sets to finish, but at 7:15 we spend four blissful minutes putting those things aside and singing together.

Freshman year I didn't know the words to the Evening Song. I didn't know why I was being herded into the center of Ho Plaza or who the people putting their arms around my shoulders were. But when someone hummed a pitch and the singing began I realized that I was part of this circle: a circle of music, of friends, of Cornellians.

Every Wednesday since that first day I've joined my Chorus and Glee Club friends in singing Cornell's Evening Song outside Sage Chapel. In the fall we sing to a setting sun over the orange hills, in the spring to rows of pink flowered trees lining the campus, and in the winter we stand against the bitter wind and biting cold in the pitch-black Ithaca night. The tradition has gone on for generations, and in joining it we join a legacy of Cornellians who know both verses to the Alma Mater, who regularly sing the Fight Songs beyond Lynah Rink, and who can laud their alma mater in perfect four-part harmony. Singing always makes me feel an overwhelming sense of pride and connection to Cornell: I'm uttering the words countless proud alumni have uttered before me, the words that have celebrated Cornell over its nearly 150-year history. I'm one of twenty thousand students on this campus, and

one of hundreds of thousands of Cornellians across the world, but my voice is part of the sound.

School songs may be a dying tradition, but in the Chorus and the Glee Club we keep them very much alive. Our Wednesday nights have been for me a moment of rest in a busy week, a time for catching up with friends and taking a moment to look out over the Hill and appreciate its beauty, its history, and its penchant for bringing people together. “Music with the Twilight falls,” we sing, “over the dreaming lake and dell, ‘tis an echo from the walls, of our own, our fair Cornell.” Singing is what makes fair Cornell my own, and I hope that wherever I may be next year, in ten years, in fifty, I may look up at 7:15 on a Wednesday evening and hear the faint echo of song from the walls I love so well.

# “WELCOME TO EARTH, MR. BONICA”

*Joseph Bonica, '12*



It seems that self-reflection on your college experience is the sexy thing to do these days, so I am going to give this a crack. Everyone tends to focus on how college provides insight as to “who you are”, and how one should live their lives once they hit the real world. Now this is extremely important and something we should all think about; after all, what’s the purpose of spending four years here if you aren’t going to engage in a little bit of self-discovery, accidental or otherwise? However, I think something gets lost in this hustle of contemplation: college is just as good at teaching us at what we are not.

First, a bit of background, some time travel if you will, to Joe Bonica ca. 2008. I have just graduated from high school, looking wide-eyed at the prospect of four years at Cornell University. Now, throughout high school, I would boldly claim that I was probably less involved than the average Cornell student was in high school. I played sports only for the first two years, and didn’t really stand out. I was the treasurer of my school’s chapter of Operation Smile, but other than that my extracurricular activity was mainly consumed by Halo 3 and attempting to (read: typically failing at) romancing women from nearby all girls schools, the result of my institution being dudes-only. However, I did have very high GPA/SAT and associated statistics, and that was strong enough to land some good schools. One cannot say I was the hardest worker in high school, and I expected college to be much the same: maybe have to work a bit more here and there, but use my free time wisely to engage in all the other activities I can, productive or otherwise. Essentially, I went in with the thought that I was going to be Superman, with minimal effort.



Unfortunately, I learned rather quickly that I am not Clark Kent, and Cornell is not the Daily Planet. The great experiment was showing gaping holes. I signed up for a good number of club activities, and even got into research my second semester, but at the price of good grades. Now, my freshman year was not horrible by GPA standards, but a far cry from the crops I was reaping back in high school. Fair enough, the naïve Mr. Bonica said to himself: I will simply work harder. And work I did-long hours in the library, very little sleep, to the point in which my life felt almost empty. It was akin to running on a treadmill, working myself as hard as I could and not going anywhere. I was at a loss, trying to figure out how I can succeed.

And then, an epiphany happened. The problem wasn't that I was not working enough; the issue was I was doing far too much. In my sudden desire to work as hard as I could, I forgot the necessity of working smart. Most importantly, I came to the conclusion that to be great, I did not have to do everything. The overachiever culture is highly prevalent at Cornell, and for good reason. Everyone was the valedictorian, the three-time letter winner, the musical prodigy. Get 13,000 of them within a few miles of each other and of course there will be a battle to be the best. And it was important for me to participate in this battle, but I also had to realize that it should not be fought at the expense of a sense of fulfillment. I didn't need to be Superman to be happy; I just needed to do the best that I could in what I wanted to do most. And that strategy, for so long as I have been applying it here, has been a winning one.

Over Spring Break, I took the time to peruse my old high school yearbook, and found my picture with my yearbook quote. The quote was from Vergil's Aeneid, in the invocation to book 7: "For me this is a higher order of things; I now set a greater work in motion". What was true in in 2008 holds true now in 2012; with what I have learned about what I don't need to be, I can now set a

greater chapter of my existence in motion. I hope you, humble reader, will be able to look back on what you have learned here on the Hill and say the same.

# AN OPEN LETTER TO FUTURE CORNELLIANS

*Rhea Fernandes, '12*

*A*s graduation day looms on the horizon, I have put all of my effort into refraining from reflecting on the past four years and becoming nostalgic. Yet, the very persistent editors of *The Muse* have persuaded me to do just that. In what you have learned here on the Hill and say the same.

When I was accepted to Cornell, I visited campus on one of those unbelievably beautiful April days that only arrive with prospective students. As I strolled the Arts Quad with my parents, I was struck by how picturesque and academic the buildings and fine oak trees seemed (and possibly also the scantily clad students playing Frisbee). I headed to The Cornell Store, bought a pair of shorts with “Cornell” stamped on the backside, and the decision was made.

Even as a senior, I have to admit that I envy freshmen on campus. Freshman year is one of those irreplaceable experiences where Cornell is simply a place of opportunities waiting for you to make your mark. I absolutely loved my first semester, in which I joined an unrealistic number of student organizations, had a perpetual cold, slept 5 hours a night and violated quiet hours daily by having shouting matches with my Republican roommate. Second semester, I did something that changed the course of my Cornell life. With the prompting of my beloved RA, I decided to check out the Women’s Resource Center and ask how I could be involved. I spent a few weeks trying to convince my roommate to come with me, but to no avail. Finally, one afternoon, I timidly walked into the Women’s Resource Center on the second floor of Willard Straight Hall and found the little niche at Cornell where I

would spend the next three years, meet some of the most inspiring people I know, and participate in some pretty wonderful events. I didn't realize it right away but it was having a space that allowed me to think through my beliefs, learn how to articulate them, defend them and change them that molded me into the person I am and illuminated the path that I am going to take. And, the Center changed with me, as much of Cornell has since I've been here. It is something we forget when we look at the scholarly exterior from 1868 and imagine it remaining stagnant as students flow in and out of its halls. As much as Cornell exists with its abundant resources, talented faculty, and supportive staff to shape our plans and viewpoints, we are also here to shape *it*.

I would love to fill this piece with sweeping generalizations that will encapsulate the one emotion I feel in reflecting on all of this, and the one sentiment you should carry with you as you embark on your journey, but there isn't and there shouldn't be one. Cornell has given me a lot things, exposed me to amazing people, challenged me, and made me cry on multiple occasions, but mostly it has given me the tools to believe in what I can do.

When I walk across the Arts Quad now, I know that there is more than just a façade of academia because I've sat inside those buildings, heard lectures by some of the most brilliant people and sat beside future Supreme Court justices, politicians, badass activists, entrepreneurs, and CEOs. As I think about leaving, I am sad about not hearing the Clock Tower chimes play "Here Comes the Sun," or being able to walk down Ho Plaza and see a llama, or just sitting on the Arts Quad watching people scurry to class. But, the thing that I will really miss is hearing heated debates and philosophical discussions, being quartercarded about controversial political issues, meeting people who challenge my beliefs and push me to grow. Cornell enables these micro-revolutions because of the place that it is and the students it holds who are theorizing, inventing, debating and pushing Cornell to be a better place.

The *Cornell Daily Sun* compiles a list of 161 things every Cornellian should do. I advise you to get it, tear it up and create your own list. Cornell is a big place, a mysterious place, and if you can't find 161 things nobody else has ever done yet, then you just aren't looking hard enough.

Sincerely,

Rhea Fernandes

A SENIOR YEAR RETROSPECTIVE,  
AS TOLD THROUGH TWITTER  
AKB

*I*'ve always felt that being a college journalist, people assume you're a bit of a narcissist. After all, the high we get from seeing our names in print is rivaled by no other "natural" feeling on earth. It is for this reason that I avoided getting a personal Twitter account for as long as possible — I really didn't see the need to fuel the unnecessary self-promotion. In fact, the only reason I made a Twitter in the first place was because my friends insisted I live-blog their antics — you know, so they would have a running play-by-play of what transpired the nights they inevitably blacked out. So marked the beginning of "AKBlog007," officially created during Senior Week 2011. It has since been renamed "CollegeAKB" — an homage to the notorious, now-defunct gossip website that refined social perceptions and what it means to "judge" at Cornell. As we approach the one-year anniversary of my foray into the Twittersphere — which has drawn much inspiration from the memo Tom Cruise writes in Jerry Maguire entitled "The Things We Think and Do Not Say" — I figured it was about time for some self-reflection, just to see how much my life has changed (if at all) over my final year of college. Here are the results of that self-reflection, complete with additional commentary.

12:02 a.m., August 20, 2011: Ohhh it's gonna be a fun year. (AKB: Timestamp says it all. That, and the fact that it was O-Week.)

6:50 p.m., August 20, 2011: Apparently @mehta\_n's and my new neighbors are none other than the men's hockey team. How bout that.

5:18 p.m., August 22, 2011: Apparently the only place I shop at in Ithaca is going out of business. This is going to sting worse than Dino's.

(AKB: *R.I.P. Morgan's*)

3:09 p.m., August 23, 2011: Nothing says "welcome back to Cornell" like a University parking ticket!

(AKB: *LOVE YOU CUPD <3 <3 <3*)

9:48 a.m., August 24, 2011: Last first day of school! I hope all the kids like me :/

11:52 a.m., August 25, 2011: Prof just referred to this class Reena and I are in as an "anti-suicide course"

(AKB: *Underclassmen: if you ever have the opportunity to take FREN 2270: Versions of Versailles...DO IT*)

9:23 p.m., August 28, 2011: Currently writing what promises to be a 4,000+ word article for The Sun. I feel like a Vanity Fair contributor...or at least Bill Simmons.

1:27 p.m., August 30, 2011: Baker Lab, we meet again. #Lowiclass ... also blatantly watching the US Open on my laptop, remember Donald Young?

4:40 p.m., August 30, 2011: So Peter & I decided we definitely need to live-blog this Sun-sponsored Ithaca mayoral debate, which, by the way, is in a church

4:56 p.m., August 30, 2011: This is just like the first student trustee debate...just not nearly as exciting...and on that note, not nearly as annoying

5:07 p.m., August 30, 2011: Svante's strategy for today seems to be to name-drop everyone in the audience

10:45 a.m., September 6, 2011: My new goal for the year is to get arrested for protesting a cause and have my picture splashed across the front page of The Sun.

*(AKB: This has yet to happen...but I suppose there's always Senior Week. Then again, The Sun doesn't actually publish during Senior Week #AKBsenioryearproblems)*

11:23 p.m., September 15, 2011: Bryan Walters

6:24 p.m., September 16, 2011: Everyone is getting ready for Llenroc formal, I'm getting ready for Cornell Football Association reception...clearly I'm already 35.

*(AKB: I met Ed Marinaro that night!)*

9:21 p.m., September 21, 2011: Duffield is in full Club Duff mode right now

8:20 a.m., September 24, 2011: DU wine tour postponed until next week bc bus company triple-booked us...is there a single place in Ithaca practicing good business strategy?

*(AKB: As you'll see later...The Palms clearly was not)*

8:22 p.m., September 28, 2011: Apparently everyone remotely affiliated w/ Cornell Athletics thinks I'm now Editor in Chief of The Sun. Not sure how this rumor got started.

5:05 p.m., October 1, 2011: Convinced the bus driver to stop at Arby's. Best wine tour EVER.

12:48 p.m., October 17, 2011: Just realized this is the last Halloween when I can dress like a total slut, and no other girls can say anything about it.

*(AKB: The truth be told, I can't even remember what I was for Halloween this year)*



10:39 a.m., October 20, 2011: That time Mary Katzenstein thought I was on the polo team because I was wearing a Ralph Lauren shirt

1:44 p.m., October 20, 2011: TFA...EMAIL ME ONE MORE TIME.  
(AKB: ...and they did. Many times.)

4:55 p.m., October 21, 2011: I would say a trustee dinner calls for Chanel No. 5

7:24 a.m., October 24, 2011: 4-day weekend next semester officially procured. Additionally, my only obligation on Wed. is Wines...&, of course, the pregame before Wines.

12:19 a.m., October 27, 2011: “Who would you rather have sex with - Louis XIV or Henry XVIII?” Reena and I studying for our Versailles quiz

9:01 p.m., October 28, 2011: Who the fuck yelled out “Palms!” when Jon Stewart asked where we were going tonight? Everyone knows celebrity drinking happens at Rulloffs  
(AKB: #JonDaniels)

11:56 a.m., November 4, 2011: Socially acceptable to drink alcohol before noon if we’re talking mimosas

3:47 p.m., November 4, 2011: Felt more excited watching DU play TKE in the intramural flag football championship than I did watching any CU athletic event the past 2 yrs

12:45 p.m., November 11, 2011: For the third year in a row: impromptu trip to Boston for the Cornell/Harvard hockey game. Can’t let it die now.

8:31 p.m., November 11, 2011: You would think given the size of Harvard's endowment they wouldn't have to charge so much at their concession stands

*(AKB: Still didn't stop me from buying three hot dogs at Lynah East)*

12:41 a.m., November 20, 2011: Social-climbing convention at Rulloffs...BYOB

11:23 p.m., November 21, 2011: That time Anisha elected to have us hold hands and say grace over margaritas at Loco...

11:29 p.m., November 21, 2011: "Dear lord, may this semester be merely a pregame for next semester"

*(AKB: My friend Matt right there...and let me just say: truer words were never spoken)*

4:24 p.m., November 23, 2011: Editorial compet email just went out, to which I say: Grab your shades and your sunblock ... this one looks like a scorcher.

2:08 p.m., November 24, 2011: Quoted The Big Chill in my "what am I thankful for" Thanksgiving dinner speech. I don't think anyone noticed.

11:15 p.m., November 26, 2011: Who wants to start a fight with some BU people?

*(AKB: Why does Red Hot Hockey just never seem to go our way?!)*

12:24 p.m., December 1, 2011: Sig Nu Little Sisters Formal and DU formal are the same night #AKBsenioryearproblems

11:29 a.m., December 2, 2011: You know it's the morning after the #lastnightofpublication when I'm walking down to the office to retrieve my car

8:46 p.m., December 3, 2011: \$45 most expensive brand of Patron shots don't mind if I do.

*(AKB: And I wonder why I have to sign up for Cornell psych studies every other week to fuel my expensive alcohol habit)*

1:08 p.m., December 7, 2011: Catherwood, the place I come to watch Gossip Girl and Desperate Housewives online, for there is no fear of judgment

11:20 p.m., December 9, 2011: It's our fearless leader's 22nd birthday if you're not at 122 Catherine right now I feel sorry for you slash you're a traitor to journalism

*(AKB: I recall I had a 9 a.m. French final the next morning...why they make these language finals earlier than the actual classes is beyond me)*

12:15 p.m., December 10, 2011: These don't look like the types of people who would sell back their books, and use the money to buy alcohol

*(AKB: All in the name of checking No. 97 off the 161 list...)*

12:10 p.m., December 13, 2011: Must they do these chimes concerts during Finals Week?! I'm in 6th-floor Olin conference room for crying out loud

12:11 p.m., December 13, 2011: And if this keeps up, I might very soon be out the window of said 6th-floor conference room

9:13 p.m., December 15, 2011: Referenced Prohibition and Kurt Vonnegut in my two essays for Lowi's final--the class I'm still not entirely sure what it was even about

9:48 p.m., December 17, 2011: If nothing else, I learned how to write a check this year.

3:57 p.m., December 19, 2011: Bloomberg is so over this press conference

*(AKB: I don't know if you heard...but Cornell won the NYC tech campus bid \*obligatory clapping\*)*

5:10 p.m., Jan 10, 2012: Prof. Sanders was just assigned as my new advisor, since my old one is apparently on Sabbatical. This marks advisor No. 5.

12:46 p.m., January 13, 2012: If the Broncos beat the Patriots tomorrow, I am going to church on Sunday.

*(AKB: This obviously did not happen.)*

5:19 p.m., January 13, 2012: RT @corzak89: I always wondered how Palms O'Clock was a successful business strategy. Turns out that it wasn't

5:39 p.m., January 25, 2012: Post-gaming #Wines at Regent  
*(AKB: Repeat every Wednesday at this time, for remainder of semester)*

8:10 p.m., January 28, 2012: That time the Q&D-only picture got hijacked and everyone was really uncomfortable about it  
*(That happened. Forgot to include #CALC)*

4:58 p.m., February 1, 2012: #Regent after #Wines. Come one, come all.

*(AKB: ...told you)*

8:47 p.m., February 17, 2012: "Fred Gatsby would take shots."... "You mean Jay?"

*(AKB: Clearly someone never read The Great Gatsby in high school. To clarify, this was before the Gatsby-themed Johnson Museum opening)*

5 p.m., February 22, 2012: “Wow, you guys need to drink more” -- Wines prof. On that note, #Regent. Now.  
*(AKB: Professor Mutkoski knows what’s up)*

5:27 p.m., February 29, 2012: Kent Fuchs at Regent...this is going to end well.

6:31 p.m., February 29, 2012: Bloomberg tech campus press conference round 2  
*(AKB: Senior Convocation 2012!)*

11:59 p.m., March 3, 2012: Just talked to a guy from Yale who hadn’t heard that Cornell won a NYC tech campus...clearly this must mean Cornell hasn’t promoted it enough

10:48 p.m., March 5, 2012: Mondays are climbing in the power rankings when it comes to best drinking days of the week.

9:38 p.m., March 8, 2012: Wait Bob Harrison is not who I thought was Bob Harrison  
*(AKB: Bob Harrison, of course, being the current Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Apparently I had mistook someone else for him at CALC, which led to me being very confused upon meeting the “real” Bob Harrison)*

11:02 a.m., March 9, 2012: What does it say about the current social scene at Cornell that my drunkenest night this semester was at a trustee reception

3:45 p.m., March 11, 2012: To go to Major Lazer, or to not go to Major Lazer & (hypothetically) study for Wines? Questions that plague the mind.#AKBsenioryearproblems

5:36 p.m., March 11, 2012: Anyone want a free Major Lazer ticket, let me know  
*(AKB: So you see how that internal debate ended)*

11:11 a.m., March 17, 2012: Week-long bender in Punta Cana

2:55 p.m., March 21, 2012: I feel like I'm in the middle of a Girls Gone Wild Spring Break edition video shoot.

*(AKB: Cornell SB booze cruise, that is all)*

11:51 a.m., March 23, 2012: Our bus ride to the airport has turned into a PSA about why we should add the Dominican Republic to our list of charity cases.

*(AKB: Sorry, gave all my \$\$\$ to the Senior Class Campaign... have you made your gift to Cornell yet?!)*

6:34 p.m., March 26, 2012: I have returned to the phase in my life where I'm going to Northside at least once a week...often multiple times a week.

7:57 p.m., March 26, 2012: The same Cornell crew that Harvard & Yale refused to compete against, was forbidden from eating desserts...someone tell DJ that. #amst2001

*(AKB: Corey Earle's history of Cornell class is a must-take. Honestly cannot think of a better way to spend a Monday evening)*

2:11 p.m., March 28, 2012: There is a Sig Chi dressed up as Mark Sanchez signing autographs outside CTB. Discuss.

*(AKB: This would eventually lead to my first-ever Deadspin tip)*

2:29 p.m., April 3, 2012: I essentially just wrote a paper about DJ and recapped the past five-year history of the Cornell rowing coaching carousel.

*(AKB: Yup, I wrote a five-page paper for one of my classes based entirely on an interview with my apartment-mate)*

11:34 p.m., April 5, 2012: Ou'est la blessed rum

*(AKB: Good to know despite my limited college instruction in the subject, I can still speak French)*

12:01 p.m., April 11, 2012: "What's Regent?" ...I cry for the future of this school

*(AKB: Naïve freshman cashiers at the Cornell Store...they have so much to learn about life here)*

3 p.m., April 11, 2012: This dude owns a chateau.

*(AKB: "This dude" referring to the French guest lecturer we had in Wines...back-up career plan anyone?)*

# GLITTER AND BENEVOLENCE

*Meril Pothén, '13*



I'm a perfectionist. A competitive, procrastinating perfectionist. I pulled all-nighters in middle school, got in trouble for "over-using" the glitter (psh, like there's such thing) in elementary school, and toted around a French Horn, tumor angiogenesis research papers, and color-coding markers in high school. At Cornell, I've done all of the above. As I gear to complete 16th grade, I look back in utter astonishment at the number of steadfast professors, friends, and email recipients who have dealt with and loved Meril "I got 17 minutes of sleep last night and this quad shot mochaccino makes me pee a lot" Pothén. This is a long overdue thank you letter. But firstly, some context.

I'm positive Cornell admissions took a hell of a chance sending me an acceptance letter. Starting as a pre-med urban planner in AAP with an interest in Chinese studies (um, come again?), I later toyed in anthropology, "committed" to molecular biology, had a brief stint in ORIE, looked at ILR/Ives and ran away, and finally found a home in Human Ecology. After swearing off math in freshman year, I (geek alert!) found myself, and a new perspective for my passions, in statistics. I learned how to drive results with data, use econometrics for the causes I care about, and induce PAM major-wide eyerolls with Stata jokes, robust.

When I wasn't breaking all the rules at the academic buffet that is Cornell, I had my plate piled high with extracurriculars. I learned about the complexities of identity, social justice, and the path to equity through the Ordinary People Social Justice and Peer Education Theater Ensemble and as an actor in many Tapestry of



Possibilities shows. As an RA in Balch Hall, I had the privilege of mentoring brilliant (and ridiculous) young women, witnessed many unique college transition journeys, and gained my best friend. Here, I experienced firsthand the power of a strong support system and the importance of audacious friends who will make you one of their top priorities. From Model UN through the Cornell International Affairs Society and the Cornell Model United Nations Conference (CMUNC), I gained so much more than the typical skills in public speaking and conflict resolution. Model UN gave me a voice, and the confidence in myself to speak without quiver. In Model UN, I found a family that forges conscientious global advocates through nearly impossible challenges and loves its members with fierce camaraderie.

My time at Cornell has been a strange, wonderful smorgasbord of academics and extracurriculars (but let's be honest, largely the latter) and consistency has always been a far-off goal. But, through the whirlwind of emails, people, and me spinning in circles (more literally than figuratively), I've luckily had one constant thread throughout: benevolence. Whether it was a professor seeking me out during one of my more tumultuous times, friends putting up with hours of diatribe on CMUNC, or a barista at CTB adding a free espresso shot "because you look like you need it," I've been subject to so much grace and love from this incredible University and city.

*To my professors and administrators:* Thank you for never batting an eye when I showed up 15 minutes late to a meeting or class in a suit and pulled out a gavel instead of a notebook from my backpack.

*To my parents:* Thank you for tolerating the alphabet soup of acronyms that I spew when talking about school and for your steadfast dedication to explaining PAM to a home community versed in biology, engineering, and CS. I promise I vaguely know what I'm doing.

*To the ballsiest people I know, my friends:* I have no idea why you all decided to stick around, but I have a sneaking suspicion that I may have bought your love through cupcakes. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for letting me tag along on your Cornell journeys, my entire experience is credited to you all. Thank you for calling me out on bad ideas, building me up to defy my own expectations, and sitting back and enjoying the hilarity when I've had one too many Sazeracs.

As I leave Cornell, I have a mile-long list of IOUs to so many of you. And to be honest, I cannot wait to get started giving back to all of you that have given me so much. You've all taught me that humility and loving others reigns supreme over any personal goal, and that spirit is what I believe makes Cornellians distinct. To current and future Cornellians, I hope that my small contributions to this University help you create legacies larger than yourselves and friendships forged in kilns of Nasties milkshakes, late TCATs, and snow in April. I cannot wait to see Cornell continually transform from your impact.

Thank you, and keep it Slope-y,

Meril

# WHAT I WOULD TELL MY FUTURE KIDS

*David Ge, '12*



If I had to leave three pearls of wisdom to my kids right before they went off to college, they would be the following: (1) pursue who and what you love with reckless abandon (2) remove the distractions that stifle your growth (3) develop friendships over a meal to brace you against the storms in life. Of course, it's doubtful whether any of these lessons would stick. Their minds would instead be fixated on the taste of freedom, parties, and alcohol just around the corner. Sure, I could warn them about the hard work that lay ahead in the next four years and up until they retire, or about the need to rise above the cavernous pits of self-doubt, social approval, and gullibility. But that's not what they would want to hear.

Hopefully, the example I set for my children as they grow up will allow me the luxury to be listened to and respected. Yet I fear transforming into a tire pump to overinflate their schooling with that dreadful parental pressure. I just don't want them to take their education for granted. While many adults they encounter may be blue-collar workers, an inkling of their privileged existence can easily creep into awareness. Humility is a tricky trait to instill into a young soul. They must realize that nothing will be handed to them in life. Even more difficult would be encouraging the qualities of open-mindedness, persistence, compassion, authenticity, and gratitude. As a parent, the deck is stacked against you. Which makes me question how my own mother and father were able to raise me into the man I am today.

I don't understand why my parents never criticized me for a poor academic performance in my first two years at Cornell.

They seemed cognizant that I was practically throwing away thousands of their hard earned dollars by choosing to prioritize the fraternity I joined over my classes. Even so, they continued to fund (without a single trace of opposition) the extra-session classes I took for three consecutive summers and one winter to offset my shoddy grades. Somehow, they trusted their money was going towards improving not only my education but also my budding wisdom. As it turns out, I would consider myself a worthy investment - I will finish my master's in health administration degree one year after graduation and then head to medical school. However, my bachelor's degree will probably be the most expensive piece of paper handed out during the graduation ceremony in the history of Cornell University.

That bachelor's degree, though, embodies the lessons I will pass on to my children: it's okay to overenthusiastically search for friends when you don't click with anyone on campus because the friends you do find will be those few lifelong friends; it's okay to break away from the pack if you don't fit in because then you'll be free to discover your true self; it's okay to declare your intention to become a doctor while possessing a 3.13 cumulative GPA because it tests your determination to climb the steep hill before you; it's okay to forgive yourself for your flaws because no one else will; it's okay to muster every ounce of strength only to expend it all because then you'll feel satisfied at the end of the day; it's okay to replenish yourself with the things you love to do because then you'll renew your focus. Above all, it's okay to let your dreams surpass the self-limiting boundaries you set, to challenge yourself to shoot for the stars, and to worship the blessing of life.

Yes, learn from my mistakes. I entered Cornell as a young naïve kid and will leave Cornell as a worldlier, more self-aware adult (or so I think). I've found that the people I surround myself with can either inspire me or undermine me. I've found that ruminations filled with fear don't get anything done in a timely manner. I've found that failure makes you re-evaluate who and what are

absolutely essential in your life. The approach I would advise for college - and life for that matter - is to surf each crashing wave to the best of your ability. You inevitably fall, but that fleeting sense of balance, poise, and control at the moment you realize you're actually floating on water will keep you coming back for more. While Cornell has given me the experiences to fortify my strength as an aspiring physician, my parents have given me the wisdom to become a better father to my future kids. In tandem, chances are good that I will be able to reach my fullest potential and to serve society through the art of unconditional love. Lastly, I'll leave you with this one simple idea: happiness stems from how you care for yourself and how you care for others around you. Cultivate self-love and set it free. Do it up. Peace.

# CORNELL THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

*Gina Elia, '12*

I don't know what possessed me to accompany my dad to his 1971 Cornell reunion in early June, the first weekend after I had returned to the United States from studying abroad for a semester in Harbin, China. It was a change of pace, to say the least—a somewhat jarring transition from speaking Chinese to speaking English (though I'm a native speaker, my English was pretty bad in those initial days back in the States, as I struggled to become re-accustomed to using it), from hanging out with students from all over the United States and Canada who were also interested in China to rediscovering my family, and from traveling and living in unfamiliar environments that every day taught me something new to the old, more-than-familiar setting of the Cornell University campus on a warm summer weekend.

My father was apparently one of the few people whose children had opted to go along with him to keep him company during the reunion. As a result, my sister and I were pretty much the youngest people around. It was funny seeing every part of campus, from the Arts Quad to the West Campus houses to the dining halls, buzzing with people of my parents' generation and older, as though someone with a strange sense of humor had decided to wind the clocks forward on a typical day at Cornell. Rumor had it that there were some people at the reunion who had graduated from the Hill before either of my parents were even born, though it was hard to spot them because rumor also told that they took buses to all of their events. (At one point when we were running late to an event at Bailey Hall, my dad insisted that we flag down a bus near Statler that also seemed to be heading to the concert.

That was when I finally met this wizened generation, their snowy white heads resting against their seats as they gazed out at Cornell's campus—how unfamiliar it must have looked to their probing eyes!)

Many of the people I met, friends and acquaintances of my father's from college, as well as people to whom he was introduced for the first time that weekend, held high-level positions in companies, had invented many products, had published all manner of novels and textbooks, had served as leaders in some capacity or other, and had traveled the world. This was the concrete proof that, just as my father had, I was attending university along with the future leaders of my generation, and it led me to wonder what many of my classmates would end up doing, and how many of the ones that inevitably became famous I would be able to point to and say something ridiculous like, "I remember sitting next to her in Wines class!"

The most significant realization occurred, however, as I was sitting with my father and sister in a dining room at the Statler eating a formal lunch with the class of '71. A current history professor, whose name I unfortunately forget but whose classes I greatly regret not taking while at Cornell (though come on, seriously—how many of us have time to take every single class that interests us?), gave a speech about the similarities, and then the differences, between members of my father's generation and those of my own. Some of these similarities and differences I could have expected. For instance, our generation was, at the time of the reunion, much more apathetic politically than our parents', who immortalized themselves in American documentaries and textbooks with their anti-Vietnam war protests, rallies, and marches—though since the reunion, our own generation's apathy has started to crumble with the advent of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. Other comparisons surprised me--we are overall much more accepting of people of different races, creeds, sexual orientations, and so on than our parents were, which seems ironic,

given the “make love, not war” attitude that has come to form the stereotypical representation of their generation in our society.

While these similarities and differences in and of themselves were illuminating, the reactions of my father’s generation were even more revealing. Some of the statements the professor made caused the audience to shout and whoop for joy, some caused them to boo, and some—revealingly—led to a half-hearted mixture of both sentiments, such as the surprising revelation that my generation is actually more religious, overall, than theirs. At that moment in time, hearing the dining hall filled with such charged responses to the professor’s speech and looking around at the glimmer in every set of eyes, all fastened attentively on the podium where he stood, I felt for the first time like I was part of something bigger. In some regards, my generation was taking up where my father’s generation had left off, while in others, my generation had chosen to leave some of the passions that generation held dear behind. But though the causes may differ, these alumni were as passionate about their beliefs and their desire to see positive changes in the world as our generation is today. We might sometimes think of our parents as stodgy curmudgeons, but the changes they made to the society they cared about formed the exact foundation upon which we now build our own protests and actions. In this way, generations continue to perpetuate the flame of social progress, never resigning themselves to an unjust status quo. Tied into this fervor with which we pursue our passions is our experience at Cornell, where I am certain many of our generation have learned some of the most important intellectual and emotional lessons of our lives thus far. The fervor with which members of my father’s generation still held Cornell closely to their hearts, after so many years, seemed to indicate that it had held an extremely important place in their lives as well, and continues to do so.

Future generations at Cornell will continue to change. They will differ from us in remarkable ways, but no matter how distant



we become from them in age and no matter how little we seem to have in common with them, we all are connected in our passion for pursuing our causes that attracted us to the hills of Cornell in the first place. I can only hope that someday, at my Cornell '12 reunion, my eyes will be as tearful with the memories and strong presence of Cornell in my heart as those of my father's generation were at that remarkable luncheon.

# THE HOUSE ON MITCHELL STREET

*David DyTang, '12*

Cornell is a funny place. It truly does open up a wide range of opportunities and provide windows into altogether new, yet exciting experiences. Arriving on campus as a freshman, I had barely considered the thought of being involved in campus media, much less the student radio station. Even during my freshman year, as I trained to become an on-air newscaster, I saw my involvement as little more than a hobby. But at some point, that changed.

For the past four years, my home away from home has been a nondescript, white house sitting on the corner of Pine Tree Road and Mitchell Street near East Hill Plaza. There isn't much around to distinguish the building, other than a small, pothole-ridden parking lot and a fading illustration of a large Holstein cow mounted on the front lawn. After all, who would expect to find a radio station here?

There's a strangely alluring quality about the Cornell Radio Guild offices and studios. By most accounts, it's a dingy, decrepit facility, largely hidden away in a dark cinderblock-lined basement that rivals some of Collegetown's cheapest apartments. The cold, stone floor peeks through the heavily worn carpet where students file in and out each day. A tangled mess of cables and wires that somehow keep operations afloat loops in and out of rooms just above the carpet layer, seemingly devoid of rhyme or reason. A couch whose age is indeterminable hides in the corner, longing to be used. And the grassy, musty smell of old papers revisiting the light of day permeates the air every time we open a file cabinet.

Yet, this is my home. The radio station has something of a magical aura about it, decorative and structural deficiencies aside. Being there places you on a historical timeline that stretches back to the station's founding in 1935. It creates a different world where we follow in the footsteps of media industry titans and experience first-hand managing operations in the broadcast business.

It also creates a world where fun and creativity thrive. On a beautiful Friday afternoon, the door and window to Air One sits open, the echoes of laughter from the student news- and sports-casters emanating from the building. They're probably giggling about a particularly good on-air joke or embarrassing blooper. Downstairs, someone sits in the soundproof Production studio, eyes closed, listening intently for the best sound bites from the previous day's band interview. Another person is shuffling back and forth between rooms, sifting through the expansive vinyl record collection that lines the walls of this old, yet mystical building.

This is the Cornell Radio Guild. A hub of frazzled students dashing around and somehow keeping two radio stations in operation. A group of young men and women swapping funny stories and the week's experiences in the studio. An escape from the confines of campus to a world of our own, where we can learn, build, experiment, and fail together.

That's the beauty of being at Cornell and finding ourselves in centrally isolated Ithaca, New York. Over the past four years I've been able to carve out my niche and find myself at home running a radio station, working closely with a team, and building a history of accomplishments, friendships, and experiences that are permanently etched into my mind. It's been a place where I've grown personally and has opened up a world where I can confidently say I've lived my legacy.

# BROTHERS ARE WE

*Elissa Cohen, '12*



It is not about tme, it is about We-  
Sharing in our collective humanity.

A Brotherhood united by higher principles,  
ever growing, ever learning, ever knowing

that we are only as strong as our weakest bonds of understanding.

It is about me, and yet not at all –

My roots are strong, but my branches of knowledge weak.

I became a scholar through winding words of communication  
with others – my Brothers.

It is about We, and so it goes -

A pipeline of leaders from which I learned

How to hold out my hand to those in need;

How to vanquish ignorance with experience;

How to be both citizen and friend.

It is about me, it truly is –

Finding love where light was lost

After leading myself through a maze of uncertainty.

Certain that my Pilgrimage would lead me

to a world of omnipotent acceptance.

It is about me, but also about We -

As I depart for my next stage, I can thank you all:

I am a better leader because of all We accomplished

I am a better scholar because of the knowledge You imparted to  
me, and

I am a better friend because of the trust I learned to have in We.

We are never alone.

We are questions and answers.

Brothers are We.

# HOMECOMING

*Rachael Kermis, '12*



In high school, I always told my parents that I wanted to go to college where I could wear flip-flops to class all year long. Somehow I ended up at Cornell, a school three hours down the thruway, and in an area that is potentially colder than the arctic tundra that is Buffalo. This was one of the best decisions I have made so far. I don't think I truly appreciated Cornell until I worked CUEMS at Reunion of my sophomore year. Seeing all the alums being so excited about coming back to their alma mater and hearing their Cornell stories, made me realize what an amazing community Cornell is. From that weekend onward, I was madly in love with Cornell. As the May graduation ceremony looms in the near future, I think back on all the things that I am going to miss...

- My amazing roommates who I have lived with since freshman year, I can't bear the thought that there is a chance I might not see them for two whole years after graduation. They have been an amazing support system through all the good times and even through the random mental breakdowns brought on by college stress.
- My wonderful group of friends who can make even the most stressful week that much better through our lunch dates (and now our Ruloff's dates). I know that when we get together at future Reunions and over the years, that we will be those people laughing obnoxiously loud and not caring what other people think.
- My EMS family. I can't picture Cornell without them and refuse to picture the future without my 201 Palm Road buddies. They have all helped me grow so much as a person, have not only caused but have helped me deal with my coffee addiction, and more importantly have given me life-long friends.

- OMG CTB!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I am going to miss that amazing caffeine providing heaven! I know I have a problem because I am addressed by first name whenever I place my order and that I no longer get IDed when I get sangria. There is nothing like sitting outside on a warm spring day, drinking sangria, catching up with friends, and watching the student body walk by.
- 4th Floor of Mann Library. The view, the huge desks, actually having an outlet for my computer, and of course sometimes sitting at the “Table of Excellence”. Many exams have been prepared for and many Hulu shows have been watched within Mann’s walls.
- The View from the Hill. From countless sunsets to random thunderstorms, I have fallen in love with the view from Cornell. The top of the slope is a fantastic place to have a picnic at dusk, to watch the struggling students huff and puff their way up to the top, and to catch an early summer thunderstorm come rolling in off of Cayuga Lake.
- The College of Human Ecology. All the faculty, fellow students, and staff have made my college into my second home. From my visit during Cornell Days my senior year of high school until now, I am always greeted by a smiling face and a warm voice asking me how everything is going.
- The clock tower from Tower Road. Driving down Tower Road towards the clock tower and seeing the icon of Cornell. In autumn, the tower is framed by bright orange, red and yellow leaves. In winter it represents a pinnacle of strength against the icy winter. In spring, the tower appears to be surrounded by a casing of bright blossoms.

These represent only a fraction of what I am going to miss about Cornell (and are the limit of what I can write without crying). There will not be a day that goes by when I do not think about life on the hill and all these memories which have become a part of me. I know that whether it is a couple of months from now, a couple of years or even decades, that when I return to Cornell it will feel like I am returning home.

# THE LIFE-CHANGING CORNELL COMMUNITY

*Amanda Maass, '12*

*T*hink about this: What would life be without having met your favorite professor, your best friend, or Happy Dave? As time passes and graduation is imminent, I contemplate this question more than any other time in my life. The community at Cornell has completely changed my life, and the people that I've met throughout my years here are more than blessings. To me, the individuals and the culmination of experiences with them define my life at Cornell. Reflecting on my encounters, here are some of the top people we all know at Cornell:

The one who has never seen snow and finds it literally irresistible freshman year, but by senior year hates it just as much as the rest of us.

That friend who will always be up for an Insomnia Cookies or bubble tea run at any time of the night.

The one who shares your deepest passion and starts a new student org with you to add to the 900 other ones.

The one who texts you at 11am Saturday morning, bragging about their poor decisions at a frat party the night before.

The friend who is always studying and blows you off because they have a date with Mr. Olin, but when you finally get together, it's like you just hung out yesterday.

That socially awkward one who sits in Duffield that will eventually become your boss.

The guy you know on Ho plaza throwing quartercards at you, who you avoid by pretending to look at your iPod.

The ones who live in Schuyler or Eco House who you never want to hike to visit.

The architecture friend you met as a freshman and only see once a year on Dragon Day, when his whole body is painted with neon paint and spandex.

And last but not least, the one that yawns in class and creates a YouTube sensation.



# THE CIRCUS FREAK

*Khamila Alebiosu, '13*

empty  
unwanted unloved unwritten stories  
live within  
my smoked shadows

lighted by false smiles  
smirks out of not compassion  
but cordiality

my reality my world my place  
is not simple or easy

forced into a circus  
put into cages  
living as a  
spectacle

II.

as we are all watched,  
judged  
stepping into the big top  
i am made small

you watch me,  
as i shiver, shake ,shoulders hunched-  
walking,  
trying to find balance

as i walk the thin line  
the tightrope between two sides  
two worlds  
two spheres of life I must

a trembling, staggering paradox  
i am a Black Woman in a White Man's world  
i am queer, in a heterosexist dimension

and it this binary complex that branded me your circus freak

your bearded woman;  
my androgyny is for your entertainment while ostracized from  
respect  
gendered by your charcoal stares

III.

met by false applause

The same claps which revel in the sights of Black buffoonery  
Minstrelsy through jerk dances, Tyler Perry, BET, Soulja boy  
rap music videos

this loudness, silenced my voice

radical, progressive, I am despised, feared  
and so your hatred submerged my strength into anger,  
aggression,

bitterness

in this power-driven, capitalist ring, i juggle

juggle between those two worlds,  
Black against White

Blackness as NIGation of the norm

staggering between being a nigger,

and an actual human being

between truth and lies

the beautiful and the grotesque

IV.

i am ugly in your eyes  
and those are the eyes i am forced to see my self  
you took the rivers, and created your own reflections

destroying any vision

blind to true beauty  
blindfold by reality  
blindsided by denial of my history,  
my culture

your eyes lead the way,  
a mere ventriloquist dummy,  
speaking your words, your voice  
their gaping, gawked jaws guide my fate

V.

Your circus freak has no

p o w e r

she is yours to experience,

to love

to exploit

yours, not mine

powerless, broken, vulnerable,

laughable, animated,

loud, aggressive,

Black and

F o r

y o u r

e n t e r t a i n m e n t

o n l y.

# 15 WAYS TO NEVER GO HUNGRY AT CORNELL: FOOD GUIDE, TIPS, AND SUGGESTIONS

*Ariella Weintraub, '12*

*I*f there is one thing I've learned at Cornell it is that we all eat... a lot. After all, nothing gets you through an all-nighter like a good late night snack. And no one can deny the usefulness of coffee breaks, whether it's to refuel, catch up with friends, or spy on your library crush. When deciding what to write about for The Muse, I realized the most useful advice I had was related to food. Sad, but true. After all, how can you take advantage of all of the amazing opportunities Cornell affords, if you don't even realize the amazing food potential it holds? So I present to you my top 15 list of food choices at Cornell. Consider it the 161 list, but for sustenance. Bon Appétit!

1. Get a warm cup of coffee or hot chocolate from Darren at Goldie's in the Physical Sciences Building.
2. Grab a muffin at the Green Dragon Café... if you can find it.
3. CTP > Mama T's.
4. Listen to Happy Dave's rockin' playlist at Okenshields
5. When you get tired of Mongo at RPCC, make a pizza bagel at Appel using the pasta sauce from the pasta section and the Panini maker by the pizza section.
6. Make a Chipwich at any West Campus dining hall using cookies and ice cream.

7. For the best grilled cheese on campus, try the garlic-toasted cheese at Cascadeli
8. If you can catch a ride, venture off campus to “The BoatYard” and try their blue crab stuffed shrimp.
9. The Martha’s Best sandwich at Martha’s really is the best.
10. When the weather is nice (or not, since it’s normally not nice in Ithaca), take a walk down to Taste of Thai in the Commons for the best Thai food in the world.
11. Try the green tea flavor and cinnamon flavor at Purity Ice Cream.
12. Stay at Libe Café until a quarter til midnight and take home a free bagel. Pay 30 cents for butter and you have yourself a gourmet midnight snack.
13. For \$2.49 you can get scrambled eggs, toast and home fries at the Ivy Room.
14. Cinnamon Scones and Blueberry Scones > Lemon Scones and Cranberry Scones any day.
15. *The* sandwich at CTB is the “Zoe”. No exceptions. The “Vegetarian” Bagel Sandwiches are pretty delicious too.

# THAT BIG DAY

*Nicole Mormilo, '12*

I'll never forget the day...

I had just picked my younger brother up from school. We drove home and grabbed the mail before heading inside. I wasn't even paying attention to the letters in my hand. Once inside, I saw a thin envelope with Cornell's monogram on the top left corner. I ripped open the envelope and read the first line. I then proceeded to jump up and down, holding my brother's arm and making him jump with me as I screamed for at least ten minutes.

Who would have thought? Who would have thought that I'd end up studying Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY? What the heck does any of that even mean? I didn't know anything about college, never mind Ivy League Universities. I didn't know anything about Industrial and Labor Relations. I had applied to the ILR School after reading a pamphlet that asked if I was a peacemaker among my friends. Thanks to that pamphlet, things were about to get real different.

Looking back on that moment now, I was more right that I could have ever known. Things are different now. I used to think that I knew everything about everything. Well, I was wrong. I didn't know a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of the things I know now. And that which I know now is only a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of the things that can be known. Coming to Cornell University was like pulling the rug out from beneath me. Over the past four years I have slowly started to develop into myself; some aspects of my lifestyle are extremely different than they were



when I rolled up to High Rise Five back in the day, and qualities of my personality have solidified through the ups and downs of life on the Hill.

With graduation quickly approaching, I'm getting into this really inquisitive place. So much is uncertain and it's easy to spend hours working through thousands of questions in my mind. So, in my efforts to find a little piece of mind, I always go back to my favorite quote:

*Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.*

-Rainer Maria Rilke

# FAITH IN SCHOOL AND LIFE

*John Rhee, '12*



Coming out of a night prelim at about 9:30PM, the stress of the test over, the muscles still cramped in my neck yet the tension still fresh in my mind, there is and has been one thing at Cornell able to relieve and relax me. I sit down in the dimly lit space, the ceilings high above me, joining at an apex as they reach towards the heavens. I tense my wrists and curve my fingers and bring them down, some on the white, some on the black. The notes reach out like waves, constructively interfering in the magnificently acoustic hall, and the sounds all merge back to where I am sitting, behind the grand piano, at the front of Sage Chapel, a place I have held close to my heart since freshman year.

As I sit behind the grand piano, feeling the crescendos and decrescendos, the staccatos and the pianissimos, I look up through the pews to where it all started freshman year. I am naturally a timid person. In fact, freshman year, I had a difficult time making friends with the people on my floor because --unlike them -- I had never really partied before college. I didn't drink, and it was hard to fit in at Cornell, where fraternity parties felt like the norm; and what happened to those intellectual conversations I thought I would be sharing? I felt lost and confused, even disappointed in the university I had dreamed of.

But it was at Sage Chapel where I found peace. Despite my loneliness and discomfort, religion had always been a constant in my life, especially Roman Catholicism, where the masses and traditions are the same wherever you go. There is something altogether familiar for that hour of mass, where you feel surrounded by familiarity, despite not knowing the person sitting next to you. At one of those first masses, I met Father Bob Smith, a priest who would

play an integral role in the development of who I was then and who I have come to be. And on those Sundays, I was surprised when the masses were always full of people. Even in a seemingly liberal atmosphere like Cornell, I was happy to see religion was an integral part of other people's lives as well.

And so, as I touch and release the keys on the piano, and reflect on my time at Cornell, it is clear religion that has grounded me and kept me focused. In my sophomore year, a particular difficult time due to family problems, lack of direction for my future, and difficulties with friends, I retreated more and more into a shell. It was at this time Father Bob reached out to me. His goal was to create the intellectual Catholic, one that would believe with both faith and logic. He helped me start my own project of self-study, both spiritually and academically. However, as sophomore year continued, I retreated even from Father Bob.

At the end of sophomore year, when I went to work for a hospice, I realized I had fallen into a hole, and I was having difficulty finding myself out. I thought focusing my energy on others -- as well as finding the meaning to life through the process of death -- would help me figure out my purpose in life.

The hospice experience changed my life.

I am shadowing Roni, the six-foot hospice nurse. I decided to volunteer here because I felt a hospice is where people need the most support. I also volunteered because death confuses me. The possibilities of either living forever or disappearing forever after death scare me. I shrug off that specific reoccurring thought and tune my car radio to STAR 99.1, trying to keep up with Roni's crazy driving.

Michael, 90, only has a few more hours to live, Roni explains. I nod calmly, although there is a small voice screaming in my head. I've never seen a dying person before in my life. Actually, I've

never even seen a dead person in my life, outside of the movies. The home health aides are walking about, bringing a wet towel to clean Michael's face or readjusting his ventilator. Michael's daughter is standing nearby, occasionally bursting into tears. The television is streaming the Catholic channel, where a group of nuns are chanting the rosary out loud. He looks so tired and every breath seems to take so much effort. I freeze a few inches from the foot of his bed as I absorb everything around me. At one point, I feel like Michael is watching me. I try to smile back but can't, so I turn to the TV and follow the rosary in my head, partly to pray for this old man because every time the health aides move him I feel like he is going to stop breathing, and partly for myself. Roni is tapping my shoulder. Time for our next patient; I didn't realize that it had been an hour and a half. I look at Michael once more and turn out the door.

Dennis, 53, has a cheerful personality as he suffers through metastatic pancreatic cancer. He directs us upstairs and we sit as he explains he has just made his funeral arrangements, even though he only found out he would die a few days ago. He has already received his last rites from his priest. He's such a kind man, and he is more worried about what will happen to his wife. He seems so calm about his impending death.

I step onto Dennis's porch, confused. Michael's attitude was what I expected from a dying person, but Dennis was so...unnatural. I feel emotionally exhausted, but when I turn to Roni, she is still her energized self with her constant smile. It almost makes me angry that this is not phasing her one bit.

"Roni, how do you do it?" I ask.

"Faith," she smiles. She explains she had not been religious before, but after working for years in the hospice, she witnessed many patients telling her about the peace that comes over them right before they die, or that there are others waiting for them.

In the healthcare profession, people are caught up by evidence, rightly so to diagnose patients, but sometimes, we have to believe in the unknown. She told me that Dennis's faith in the beyond is what is helping him through this moment. Although she has to distance herself from her patients for her personal mental health, she gets close to one once in a while, to remind herself of the humanity of the process. I thank her and drive off, somewhat satisfied but still confused.

My work at the hospice does not prepare me for my first personal death three weeks later. I receive the news of Father Bob's death in the middle of teaching English in Korea. I do what the hospice taught me and hold back my emotions, but for the rest of that day, I just feel numb.

That night, I take a walk and process everything. I realize I had felt uncomfortable at the hospice because of what I perceived to be a lack of emotion. Not only that, I realize that during the whole past semester, I had been bottling up my emotions, making me feel hollow, never rejoicing small achievements but also ignoring difficulties in my life. I stop and realized how negative I have been, suddenly seeing Dennis' inspiring perspective; looking at life with a positive outlook not only shapes your interactions with other people, but also sharpens your understanding of their struggles and hardships. Plus, watching Michael and Dennis, my difficulties during the past semester do not seem insurmountable, but rather insignificant compared to the hardships they experienced. After all, the ultimate difficulty must be coming to terms with death.

I don't know if I agree with Roni. A death, no matter how many times one goes through it, is a death. The loss of someone, the absence of his/her presence, should bring sadness. The hospice experience helped me look at death through the lens of faith, but what I got most out of it was completely different. I want to connect directly and intimately with all of my patients. Some people might say that that is not healthy, but I think the opposite: lacking

the basic connection with people is unhealthy. Post-death is no longer as important to me as what should happen pre-death. That night, I cried because of Father Bob, Michael, and Dennis. And I felt much better.

I hold the pedal and lift my arms, allowing the final V – I chord progression to subside on its own through the echoing of Sage Chapel. It was and still is my faith that keeps me going.

# OF BRUSSEL SPROUTS AND GOGO DANCING

*Nicole Offerdahl, '12*



esterday, at dinner, I sat down and savored a large helping of Brussels sprouts. Delightedly I chomped down on their leafy, buttery exteriors, releasing the healthy juices into my mouth. Suddenly, mid-chew, I was hit with a realization. When did I learn to like Brussels sprouts??

Now I know this is a poor way to start an expository paper on my time at Cornell, but it holds great promise as an extended metaphor. Cornell has opened my eyes and exposed me to many things, the least of which is probably Brussels sprouts. I am most grateful for my time here because I have had the opportunity to try so much. And, I still feel like I could spend another four years here trying many more things!

Cornell is a place replete with possibility. If the experience you want doesn't exist, you can create it. Any person, any study permeates everywhere here. It isn't just the classes...you can find any club, (almost) any food, explore any interest. I've attended lectures about ideas I didn't even know existed. I've been brought to the dendrochronology lab (didn't even know that was a discipline), seen people yell "CUNT" on stage (four years in a row), seen Margaret Cho's ass tattoos, found a book that was last checked out in 1914, found the entire gay section of the library, almost become an innertube waterpolo champion, gogo danced at a big gay dance party, and been on the roofs of several buildings (all climbed sketchily). The best part is that this is only a small sampling of what I've encountered here.

For the Brussels sprouts metaphor to work, I need to expand the theme beyond merely trying new things. I also have to grow to like them, right? Fair enough. Being at Cornell has allowed me to deeply investigate myself as a person—trying the any person any study of my personality, if you will. The thing I tried and liked the most, as clichéd as it will indeed sound, is helping others and helping communities to grow. Over my time at Cornell I have had the opportunity to be an RA, lead a community service organization, worked to begin dialogue about sexual assault, and, most recently, helped facilitate LBQ, a queer women’s group on campus. All of these activities have allowed me to explore various ways to leave Cornell a better place than when I arrived. In trying out all these things, I have learned how good it truly feels to engage with a community so thoroughly that it feels necessary to seek to improve it. And, in doing so, I have learned a great deal. I have learned the importance of broad mindedness and exploring intersectionality of identity. I have learned the importance of the supposedly simple act of listening, of genuinely hearing someone’s cry for help or just a request for a shoulder to lean on. And I have learned the importance of compromise while holding true to one’s foundational beliefs. Trying these different roles has allowed me to grow and discover that I like leading and I like helping others help themselves. And this, in turn, has allowed me to figure out how I want to shape my future.

Really, though, all of this trying things would be nowhere without my friends. They are the butter and bacon that really make the Brussels sprouts dish, if you will grant me that. Without them, life would be leafy, green, healthy, and delicious, but nowhere near as complete. The people I have met here at Cornell are some of the best people I have met anywhere. Though I know great people exist everywhere in the world, it is going to be hard for me to not interact with these people every day in person. Some I met my first day of orientation. Others I have only recently come to know, and find it a shame that we will have so little time together in the same place. I would be content to have the people in my community



here be my community for the rest of my life. I would encourage anyone who comes here to meet as many people as possible—you never know who they are going to be and what they are going to mean to you. Their place in your life could be brief, or you could meet someone you'll know forever. A beautiful and painful part of life is that it is never certain which it will be.

So, future Cornellians (and anyone else who has yet to become a senior), live long and prosper. Go forth and explore all that this wonderful university has to offer you. May your experience be as enriching as mine has been. I'm going to miss it and all that it has provided me more than I can articulate. I can only trust that the rest of life will be this rewarding and developmental.

Oh. And about the Brussels sprouts. When did I actually learn to like them? I'm not entirely sure. But I think it involved a Hotelier friend (now a chef) and a lot of bacon.



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Want to get involved?  
Email Diana Rypkema ([dcr78@cornell.edu](mailto:dcr78@cornell.edu))  
for more information.

