The crash that changed everything

Gaby O’Shea’s father talks about his daughter’s medical condition

Stephen O’Shea had an accident while riding his bicycle this past summer. Turning onto South Putt Corners Road, he looked over his shoulder at just the wrong moment, hit the curb, and was rendered unconscious for a half-hour or more. He got back on his feet thanks to the tireless efforts of the staff of Helen Hayes Rehabilitation Hospital, and after three weeks his daughter Gaby brought him home.

O’Shea and other families’ members are again spending their time at Helen Hayes now, at the bedside of Gaby, who was struck by a car along Route 299 on September 11. He and his daughter’s mother, Blanca Babits, spend nearly all their waking hours there. Admitting that talking about his daughter is difficult, O’Shea agreed to speak about what’s transpired.

“It’s very, very difficult to see my daughter in this condition right now,” he said. He and Babits have made the decision to remain upbeat, and celebrate her progress. After the crash, Gabriela was flown the Westchester Medical Center for treatment before being transferred to Helen Hayes for rehabilitation. O’Shea said that his daughter has regained consciousness and is responsive, but has not yet spoken. “She is making steady improvement,” he said. Moments to celebrate include giving a thumbs-up at the request of a therapist, and moving her left leg this Monday.

“We were worried that the leg was paralyzed,” O’Shea explained, but after New Paltz massage therapist Marissa Pileggi worked on it she finally moved it. “It was beautiful to see her facial expression after that,” he said. Among her injuries is a hairline fracture of the pelvis. O’Shea suspects his daughter hadn’t moved the leg due to remembered pain. Pileggi is only one of the people that O’Shea and Blanca are grateful for who traveled around the country to spend time with 18 families, both urban and rural, to gain a better understanding of how the 1.5 million households living “under the radar” in such extreme poverty, including three million children, are able to get by at all.

The poorest of the poor

Study of living on almost nothing, a non-fictional account, is One Book/One New Paltz’s featured volume this year

This year’s book selected by the One Book/One New Paltz Committee, “$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America,” by Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer, is a non-fictional account of the lives of people living in extreme poverty.

The committee looks for a representation of diversity in both topics covered and authors as well. The multi-tiered selection process starts each year around mid-winter with a list of 50 or 60 titles suggested by members, derived from surveys of attendees at the previous year’s events or added to suggestion boxes placed at the Elting Memorial Library, the Sojourner Truth Library at SUNY-New Paltz and local bookstores.

The initial list is weeded down to about 20 semifinalists, then to five or six titles thought to be especially strong.

Certainly the long, slow recovery from the Great Recession and many of the topics in the air during a presidential election year make a book about the poorest of the poor in America a good fit with the current zeitgeist. “You know that saying about how we’re all one paycheck away from poverty? Well, most people are, to some extent,” committee member Shelley Sherman notes. She says that the families profiled in the book often start out middle-class, but are struck by one or more turns of ill fortune, such as the catastrophic illness of a breadwinner or the need to take in other relatives who have a disability or an unplanned baby on the way. When the family’s income is nearly nonexistent, efforts to improve their circumstances are often severely limited by such factors as the cost of child care, transportation and other logistical difficulties or simply the inability to afford to buy appropriate clothing for work.

Edin and Shaefer are sociologists who traveled around the country to spend time with 18 families, both urban and rural, to gain a better understanding of how the 1.5 million households living “under the radar” in such extreme poverty, including three million children, are able to get by at all. Some manage to get sporadic seasonal work; some collect grants, among them the level of support received from community members, a sentiment with which O’Shea heartily agrees.

In addition to raising money for her care — $63,854 was contributed to an online campaign before it was shut down, and numerous other fundraisers have been planned — O’Shea said that individuals have offered to use their own talents to help with her recovery or with raising money to pay for them. Many of those stepping forward have never met Gaby, or anyone else in her family.

“We’re also grateful to people like [bicycle-pedestrian committee chair] Best at both ends of the leash

New Paltz

Better at both ends of the leash

Sue Books and Charlene Martoni, Myra Sorin, Shelley Sherman and Linda Welles.
Air of expectancy

Water Street Market will push for greater bike awareness

By Terence P Ward

This SUNDAY will be Bike Awareness Day at Water Street Market in downtown New Paltz. The October 23 consciousness-raiser was organized in response to the injuries to Gabriela O'Shea, hit from behind by a motorist just two days after O'Shea, Kaufman and others met with county executive Michael Hein. “I went to that spot the following day,” O’Shea recalled. “I was so, so angry. The pavement just stops at the white line.” It drops off precipitously from there to the rocky shoulder. “As a cyclist, you do your best to ride on that white line, but it’s very hard to do so. There is nothing provided for cyclists; this road is simply for cars.”

The newly-widened shoulder gives him a “bitersweet” feeling. O’Shea said. “It’s good, but why wasn’t it done before? Peter [Kaufman] has been working on this for years.”

Peter Kaufman for trying to do something positive, so a tragedy like this doesn’t happen again to someone else. It is not yet clear why. “We’d like to see more responsiveness,” O’Shea said. “It could be that she’s just tired of answering all the questions. We were told that she’s expending more calories in that mental work repairing her brain than she would rock climbing, She’s trying to re-create her world.”

Stephen O’Shea admits to sometimes feeling overcharged. He’s struck by a wave of emotion when he asks himself, why he bought her “a nice bike for her 21st birthday.” He was the best route to her destination. Sometimes he doesn’t react. It’s not yet clear why.

The day’s theme will be “Expect a Bike.” Safety information will be available from employees of local bicycle shops. Village mayor Tim Rogers, well-known for using his bicycle to get nearly everywhere locally, will speak. Some business owners at Water Street Market, including Theresa Fall, who runs Parish and Jar’d, will be offering specials and donating proceeds to O’Shea’s care.

The proceeds from a variety of group classes at Mosaic Movement, held monthly from 7 to 11 a.m., will also be donated to O’Shea; those interested should make reservations by calling 255-4663. Chair massage will also be offered under the auspices of Mosaic Bodyworks. Members of the Vanaver Caravan dance company will be performing at 12:30.

Participants will be invited to join a letter-writing campaign seeking safer roads for cyclists. Four-foot-wide shoulders along Route 299 from the Carmine Liberta Bridge to Butternut Road were installed soon after O’Shea’s accident. Some organizers believe that only the public response led to progress on this long-promised improvement. Additionally, they believe that the shoulders should be six feet across and include a buffer for safety’s sake.

County officials have promised to extend the white line along Route 299 in Sojourner Truth Park to Woodland Pond Circle. Structured book discussion with Tom Olsen, associate professor of English.

1 p.m., Elting Memorial Library, 93 Main Street.

The Thursday course, “$2 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America,” can be found at local bookstores (Inquiring Minds and Barner Books, both on Church Street in New Paltz) and at the Elting Library and Sojourner Truth Library, as well as on Kindle.

In part as a fundraiser for her care. Most of the people are doing something to change the situation

Main Street. Insights into poverty with reverend Steve Ruete, New Paltz minister in Newburgh, and some of his congregants

7-8:30 p.m., Elting Memorial Library, 93 Main Street. Poverty in Ulster County with Casandra Bream, chief executive officer of the Ulster Literacy Association, Michael Berg, executive director of Family of Woodstock, and Amy Drayer, executive director of Ulster Court-appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

Friday, November 18

3-4:30 p.m., Sojourner Truth Library from Mon. SUNY-New Paltz Casual book discussion with Bruce Weisner, One Book/One New Paltz Committee member.

6-7 p.m., Elting Memorial Library, 7-8:30 p.m., Elting Memorial Library, 93 Main Street. Watch Shamed and discuss.