

Catherine

LAWRENCE 1977

receives Havergal Old Girls Life Achievement Award

Written by Brenda Morrow Barry 1978, Judy Lawrence Stirling 1979 and Anne Lawrence Harrop 1983

Laughter has always been Catherine Lawrence's currency. It is her way to share joy and to heal. Catherine's parents taught her that humour is essential. In the chaos of a family of five children, she learned not just to laugh, but also to laugh at herself.

Armed with her sense of humour, Catherine hit Havergal's halls in Grade 11 and embraced all that the school had to offer. In addition to her success as a student, as an athlete and in leadership roles, Catherine soon discovered her love for "working the room." She enjoyed making announcements during morning prayers, acting in a male role in the school play and toasting the dads at the inaugural father-daughter dinner.

From there, it was off to Queen's University and on to law school at the University of Windsor. Despite her success as a corporate lawyer, Catherine took a hard left in a pursuit to expand her knowledge of laughter. She saw it as a means for people to harness their natural sense of humour and to infuse energy and enthusiasm into their work and life. Curious and committed, Catherine toned her laughter muscle

and honed her skill as a practitioner and speaker by travelling the world to motivate people in the art of joy.

She founded Survival of the Funniest, wrote a series of books and touched thousands of people, including terminally ill patients at Gilda's House, youth, community members and businesses. She motivated people to use laughter to affect change, spark playfulness and contribute to mental balance.

Even as a young woman, she was motivated through volunteerism. At 18, she was selected to participate in Operation Drake – a program sponsored by HRH Prince Charles that brought young people from around the world to sail on tall ships following Sir Francis Drake's voyages. Through Operation Raleigh, she travelled to South America to deliver vaccinations and to build an important landing to service an indigenous community of Campa people.

In 2006, Catherine faced her greatest life challenge. She was diagnosed with lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM), a disease affecting just five in every one million women. Rare diseases such as LAM are often misdiagnosed, misunderstood



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differently.” Guided by her belief in the power of laughter to heal, Catherine and a dedicated team of volunteers have organized Laugh Out LAM (LOL) events which now raise \$500,000 annually.

Preferring to focus on “what is right with [her],” Catherine does not discuss her limitations. In addition to laughter exercises, her daily routine embraces wellness practices such as acupuncture, yoga and Pilates. For Catherine, a sense of humour is a mainstay to survival, but even she doesn’t get it right all of the time. Some days, she’s on top of her game; other days, she has to regroup.

Catherine has received many awards and accolades for her achievements, but nothing compares to her leadership in fighting this disease. Says Dr. Stanford: “Catherine has changed my life and the lives of many others. On the bad days, I remember Catherine and I laugh. Suddenly, the day isn’t quite so bad.”

Catherine is equally devoted to her husband Jerry and her three children, who all participate in fundraising for LAM.

Through her tenacity and creativity, Catherine has thrived in three entirely different and highly successful undertakings. She is “living strong” with a rare, incurable disease, while making great use of her equally rare talents. Her efforts brought an obscure disease to the forefront, spawned much-needed funding and enabled partnerships and collaboration in medical research. Her accomplishments have far-reaching implications for present and future generations.

and are rarely the focus of mainstream medical research. Becoming her own advocate, she started Green Eggs and LAM, an organization that has raised \$2 million towards LAM research. The funds support the work of world-renowned stem cell researcher Dr. Bill Stanford and the McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine.

“This is my exploration,” explains Catherine. “This is my adventure. I’m hopeful because I feel I have the equipment to tackle this. As well-meaning and skilled as the medical people are, I’m the only one who can advocate for me. I don’t want to look back and wonder what I could have done