Helen T. M. Bayer was born November 28, 1921. She was a valued colleague and friend who died on December 8, 2019 at the age of 98. She joined the Department of Child Development and Family Relationships in the College of Home Economics (the forerunner to what is now the Department of Human Development in the College of Human Ecology) in 1955, the year she completed her Ph.D. in that same department. Her B.A. was from the University of Buffalo. She was promoted to full professor in 1965. Helen retired in 1989 and was elected to emeritus status that same year.

Helen served as Department Extension Leader from 1960-1970 and was project director of the Head Start Regional Training Office from 1965-1977, which conducted professional development for Head Start staff in upstate New York. She authored or co-authored a range of guides and bibliographies for professionals and parents and co-produced two instructional films. She taught and did research in the area of parental-child-rearing behaviors. She was a member of various professional organizations such as the Eastern Sociological Society and the National Council of Family Relations, and the American Home Economics Association. In recognition of her contributions, Helen was elected as a fellow in the American
Sociological Association. She was also a member of Pi Lambda Theta, Omicron Nu and Phi Upsilon Omicron honorary societies.

During her long tenure as a faculty member Helen bridged several major transitions in the evolution of the college now called Human Ecology. When the College morphed from Home Economics to Human Ecology in 1969, to highlight its interdisciplinary exploration of the human experience, Helen played an important role within the newly-formed Department of Human Development and Family Studies in helping alumnae, students and county extension colleagues understand the historical roots of the expanded mission. This historical perspective served her well in the role of Department Extension Leader, which she held from 1960 through 1970.

A second transition for the college during the 1960s was from a largely state-wide to a more national presence in its commitment to the Land Grant mission. One of the Great Society programs embraced by the College was Head Start, established by the Johnson Administration in 1965. Helen recognized the potential in Head Start for improving the lives of low-income New York families and their children, and chose to invest a significant portion of her career on bolstering program quality through the professional development of Head Start staff, serving as project director of the Upstate Head Start Regional Training Office from 1965-1977.

Closely allied to Helen’s work with Head Start was her interest in and contributions to the understanding of parenting education. In that arena she authored or co-authored a range of teaching guides and bibliographies for Extension professionals and parents and co-produced two instructional films.

During the 1980s, Helen led the outreach arm of the Department of Human Development through a third transition, from its more limited focus on childhood and adolescence to a life-course perspective and educational programming related to aging populations. Helen was an early supporter of Cooperative Extension outreach to aging populations. She was a valued mentor and friend to many colleagues, and her strong ties to County extension agents.
served as a conduit for younger faculty.

Throughout her long career with the College of Human Ecology Helen Bayer was a steadying, gentling presence in the Department of Human Development, constantly in search of a positive, constructive way forward for the department, the college, and Cornell University.

Written by Stephen J. Ceci, Moncrieff M. Cochran, Karl A. Pillemer, and Stephen F. Hamilton