

# Vitamin L News

Volume 5, Issue 1 • Fall 2007

## Vitamin L honored!

This past April, Vitamin L had the honor of being recognized by New York Governor Eliot Spitzer at the 2007 Dr. King Leadership Symposium, "Pathways to Peace in the Classroom and Community." We brought 15 of Vitamin L's 70 members and three teachers to Albany to attend the symposium. This included a dynamic keynote address that our kids loved, workshops about peace in the community and the classroom, a Dr. King Community Service Award reception, and a performance by Vitamin L!

For our Vitamin L participants, the symposium was filled with a great deal of positive energy, hope, and inspiration that spoke directly to the purpose, mission, and impact of Vitamin L. Our members had a chance to interact with youth from other areas in a way that expanded their awareness and provided valuable personal perspective.

Vitamin L was presented with a special certificate of recognition from the governor that day. It states: "To The Vitamin L Project - for being in the forefront of helping to promote the ideals of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by promoting peace in our schools and communities."\*

The letter we received prior to the event from the State of New York Executive Chamber read, in part: "Congratulations! It is with great



pleasure that we honor your organization for its outstanding and tireless work to establish peace and heal conflicts in our schools and communities throughout the Empire State. Your organization is part of the fabric of communities across the state, playing a vital role for those in need, and it is organizations like yours, and specifically the hard work of you and your staff, that make differences in people's lives every day."

It was the NYS Service Learning Leadership Institute that recommended that Vitamin L receive a special certificate of recognition from the New York State governor's office. Consideration was given to community-based organizations or programs whose professional involvement has provided a major benefit to the public through mentoring as well as a significant contribution to young people.

This recognition is truly a great honor for everyone involved with Vitamin L: for all of our chorus members past and present, our advisory board, and our many community and foundation supporters who have helped keep Vitamin L prospering over the last 18 years.

*\*Personally, the wording on the certificate is deeply meaningful for me because Dr. King played a huge role in my development, and I love him. I first met him when I was five years old, and growing up I was highly influenced by his teachings and his great love. I had the blessing of this influence because my parents, Gerald and Elizabeth Reed, were heavily involved in the civil rights movement in Atlanta during my youth.*

*Janice Nigro, Director*

## From One of our Alumni...

For the past two years I have had the pleasure of living in Ithaca once again while my husband attended Cornell's Johnson School of Business. I mention this because it was in Ithaca a few months ago that I was getting my hair cut, and from the moment I sat in the chair, the stylist knew she knew me from somewhere. She also grew up in Ithaca, so we started sharing: which schools we went to, who our friends were, etc. - none of this seemed to answer the question of how she knew me. We left it at that and started chatting about other things. Then she had her eureka moment: "I got it...you were in Vitamin L, weren't you!" She began spouting out the names of the other members of the chorus during my time, her favorite songs...she couldn't stop. Her animated voice and facial expressions painted a wide smile on my face and got me thinking about just how lucky I was to be part of Vitamin L growing up.

I have always known that being a part of Vitamin L was a positive force in my life. I learned how to sing, and I did so in front of large audiences, forcing me to face and conquer stage fright at the early age of 11. Once the concert dates started booking, our demanding practices and concert travel schedule kept us busy; being a member of the chorus was a job. And like in any job, you learn responsibility, organizational and scheduling skills, how to get along with other people, how to deal with stress and how to give it your all, even on the days that you are not

feeling up to it. However, sitting in the stylist's chair, I realized that the most amazing part about Vitamin L is not how it touched me, but how we touched the people whom we sang to.

This past winter, Jan and Janice knew that I was living in Ithaca, so when they had a concert scheduled at Belle Sherman Elementary School they asked me if I would like to sing with the chorus. Of course I wanted to do this because not only did I attend Belle Sherman, it is also where I met Jan and Janice and auditioned to be a member of the very first generation of the Vitamin L chorus in 1989. And so, this past March 15, I sang with Vitamin L in an afternoon concert which will remain with me a cherished memory because this time I was singing to young children while an even younger child was growing inside of me - I was five months pregnant at the time. It had been over 14 years since I stood up on stage in my solid colored shirt singing songs to a crowd of small faces who are so excited that they look as if at any moment they will burst through the seams of their clothes.

Our audience was singing along, signing along to the songs that incorporate sign language, and just plain beaming with joy. When it was announced that Vitamin L would be holding auditions, the crowd went wild; the energy in the room could have been harnessed to power the whole town! When Vitamin L performs, those listening are touched



**Belle Sherman Concert March 07**

profoundly, in a positive, inspirational and cheerful way, and that was never clearer to me than at that concert. Vitamin L is a pure source of goodness.

My daughter, Lyla Thiessen Stebbins, was born on July 27, and I look forward to playing her the Vitamin L CDs that I so proudly sing on. Jan and Janice, you have created a precious thing - thank you for the opportunity to be a part of it. May it live on forever touching generation after generation. - *Johanna Stebbins (formally Johanna Zeserson)*

*Johanna was a member of the very first Vitamin L chorus. After graduating from Ithaca High in 1996 she attended Vassar College and then the French Culinary Institute in New York City. She has worked in management in the hospitality, catering and educational fields. She and her family now live in Albany, NY. Johanna can be reached at [jzstebbins@yahoo.com](mailto:jzstebbins@yahoo.com).*



Johanna in 1989



Johanna singing "Walk a Mile" at her wedding reception with Vitamin L alumni Matt Green, Rebecca Green, and Jill Ford 8/2/03



Tom, Lyla and Johanna 7/27/07

## From a Vitamin L Member...



**“I would love to see Vitamin L expand and reach so many more people...”**

To say I've been in Vitamin L for a lifetime would be a lie. Many other members and supporters have known this comforting program for many years, but I have not been that fortunate. I have been in Vitamin L for a little over two years. But, Vitamin L does not need a lifetime to affect a kid's future. How long does it take for Vitamin L to change a person's life? Let's find out.

Vitamin L has had such a strong impact on me that it's hard to express it in words. From the great kids involved, to the message that we send to the audience, all the way to the amazing behind-the-scenes people, this program is run so smoothly and efficiently, and sends out such a positive message. To reach out to the younger kids, not only in the audience, but the newcomers in the group, makes me feel as though I can make a significant difference in such a big world.

Although we mainly perform in this geographical area, when I get up on that stage I feel like I'm singing to the world. That's a great feeling to have: the feeling of making a difference.

Speaking of difference and community, one example of how Vitamin L has made its mark was at the Dr. King Jr. Leadership Symposium in Albany. This conference was about bringing peace into schools and communities. Vitamin L won an award for peaceful community action, and I was very proud to travel to Albany to accept that award with other members of the group, and Jan and Janice. The conference was very inspiring for us, and reminded us to keep pursuing our beliefs of peace.

Through my two years in Vitamin L, I've learned that not only does one affect the kids in the community, one makes special bonds with the other members of Vitamin L, from different

schools, ethnicities and races. We become like a family, and I believe one goal of Vitamin L is just that: to create a worldwide family. A bunch of kids sharing a common belief is a very powerful thing.

I would love to see Vitamin L expand and reach so many more people, and touch the lives of everyone in the world. Who knows? One day it might happen, but until then, I will keep the values Vitamin L has instilled in me - unconditional love, courage, acceptance, and self-esteem - and practice these values every day of my life in the hope that it will educate our generation and all generations toward a better future. This is exactly why I love Vitamin L. How long does it take for Vitamin L to affect a member? Not even two years!

*Andy Lockwood,  
Freshman,  
SUNY Brockport*

### MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of The Vitamin L Project is to encourage positive character development through music, by uplifting and inspiring young people with lessons that are meaningful in their daily lives. Our goal is that young listeners absorb the lessons of confidence, kindness, persistence, cooperation and forgiveness presented in the songs, and weave those concepts into the fabric of their character in ways that help them make positive choices and have healthy relationships with their families, friends and the world around them. Our goal is to reach and positively influence as many children as possible.

**Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation online at [www.vitaminl.org](http://www.vitaminl.org), or to:**

**The Vitamin L Project • 105 King St. • Ithaca, NY 14850 • Thank You!**

## Transformation Through the Arts

In March 2003, The Vitamin L Project became a Project Partner of The CRESP Center for Transformative Action (formerly CRESP, the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy) affiliated with Cornell University. The CRESP Center is an umbrella organization that provides not-for-profit status and shared administrative services for 12 dynamic projects that are working for positive social change. Each Project Partner must generate its own income; the CRESP Center's core staff handles financial management, payroll, insurance, grants administration, and not-for-profit management. The CRESP Center also provides access to work study students who can help Project Partners with databases, web-sites, and graphics. We are very grateful for this helpful partnership and for our growing connection to other non-profit organizations working for social change.

Four years ago, I volunteered to represent The Vitamin L Project on the board of The CRESP Center. This has been a meaningful and enlightening personal experience, while also enabling Vitamin L to explore ideas and possibilities with others in The CRESP Center community. The CRESP Center is committed to making a difference by embracing the concept of "transformative action," which it defines as follows: approaching conflict and injustice with the intention to speak honestly, without blame, and to listen with empathy first to achieve connection, then understanding, and finally collaboration. Transformative action is about dealing with fear and suffering with an open heart, when our instincts may be to hide behind protective barriers.

I confess to bouts of discouragement, anger, and depression about the state of our nation and world. I have been guilty of an "us" versus "them" approach, making assumptions about those with opposing opinions. Yet having such a stance has not changed anyone's ideas, serving only to increase my personal frustration. I'm weary of a world of polarization, blame, and violence, and I appreciate that transformative action offers an alternative way of channeling our energy and strengthening our capacity to work for equity, peace, and sustainability. Learning to suspend assumptions, to listen without assigning immediate blame, and to remain open to other perspectives is a challenging and a lifelong journey. The sincerity and dedication of our Vitamin L community, and the commitment of The CRESP Center and its Project Partners, inspire hope that a better way is possible and within our reach.

Vitamin L is indeed part of this vision, as our purpose is to encourage positive character development through music, inspiring young people with memorable messages of confidence, kindness, cooperation and tolerance. Our values fit perfectly with the concept of transformative action because Vitamin L is about encouraging our performers, audiences, family members, and schools to embrace a vision of a caring community.

I reach out to those who share this vision to encourage your involvement in any capacity, whether through volunteering time or providing financial support. Vitamin L is part of an exciting movement to engage all of us in working toward a world with fresh possibilities.

Robin Dubovi  
Vitamin L Parent and Advisory Board member



## A Tribute to Yolanda King...

Yolanda King, daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., was a special friend to Vitamin L. She passed away unexpectedly on May 15, 2007, at age 51, so we wanted to take a moment to recognize and honor our connection with her in this issue of the *Vitamin L News*.

In August 2004, Yolanda attended a Vitamin L concert and graciously agreed to meet with the Vitamin L families for a presentation and a question and answer session. She invited active participation from chorus member youths in the audience, inspiring them toward a pairing of self-knowledge and global awareness. She was like a bright light, full of positive energy and obvious concern for all people. This was a memorable experience for all who attended—and a very meaningful moment in Vitamin L's history.

A generous supporter of Vitamin L, Yolanda contributed funds specifically to enable Vitamin L to give a concert a low-income school. She was an extremely talented motivational speaker and actress, dedicated to carrying on the work of her parents and helping people all over the globe.



Yolanda King and Vitamin L director Janice Nigro, at the happy occasion of Yolanda's 50th birthday

To learn more about Yolanda's sincere, heartfelt work, visit [www.highergroundproductions.com](http://www.highergroundproductions.com).

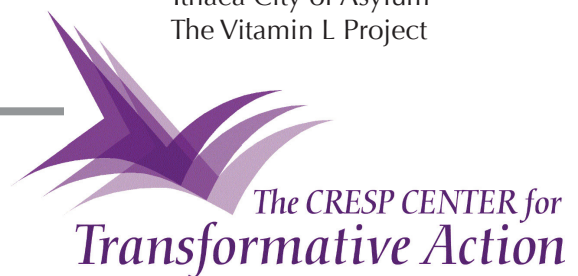
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## Project Partners of The CRESP Center for Transformative Action

- **Economic Justice**  
Tompkins County Worker's Center  
Take Back Your Time
- **Culture of Sustainability**  
Ecovillage/CRESP  
Engineers for a Sustainable World  
Simple Living America
- **The Power of Knowledge**  
The Durland Alternatives Library  
Positive News  
Theocracy Watch
- **Connecting the Americas**  
CUSLAR: Committee on US-Latin American Relations  
Centro de Idiomas/The Language Center
- **Transformation Through the Arts**  
Ithaca City of Asylum  
The Vitamin L Project

To learn more, visit  
[www.cresp.cornell.edu](http://www.cresp.cornell.edu)



### THE GRATITUDE REPORT

In the last six months The Vitamin L Project received donations from numerous individuals and groups, including a \$10,000.00 grant from the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust for performance subsidies for public schools, \$5,000.00 from the Triad Foundation, and \$5,000.00 from a foundation that wishes to remain anonymous.

*A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS!*



Galen Gibian, Edwin Carstensen, Lydia Billings, Jan Nigro, Ahmed Telfair, Juliet Bentolila, Anya Gibian, Katie Bruno, Vicky Sisouphone, Karin Andersson

## In 2006, Vitamin L:

- *Performed 60 concerts*
- *Reached 14,700 youth and 4,000 adults in concerts*
- *Performed for 33 schools, 2 education conferences, festivals, camps and community events.*
- *Gave leadership and performing opportunities to our 70 chorus members*

CRESP

### **The Vitamin L Project**

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*"The music of Vitamin L provided powerful and uplifting messages that the students truly embraced!"  
- Thomas Decker, music teacher,  
Freemont Elementary*

**We're on the Web!**  
**[www.vitaminL.org](http://www.vitaminL.org)**

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The Vitamin L Project is a Project Partner of The CRESP Center for Transformative Action at Cornell University