

Vitamin L News

Fall 2009

Vitamin L's Songs Walk A Mile—Or Make That 8,900 Miles!

For 20 years, the Vitamin L Project has enriched the development of youth who spend years performing with the group and also of youth who grow up listening to this music.

Many of our alumni have felt empowered by their Vitamin L experience and are now contributing to society in a variety of places and ways. We've met and heard from young adults who listened to Vitamin L's music when they were growing up and now tell us about how much the songs influenced them and encouraged them to believe that they can make a difference in this world. We're always grateful for and encouraged by these firsthand accounts.

We never know how a song will touch someone, or where a recording might wind up.... In celebration of our 20th year, we are sharing a few examples of the impact of Vitamin L's music on people's lives—some of them quite distant from our home in Ithaca, New York. Enjoy!

In Nigeria...

I wanted to let you know we are singing your songs in Africa! The kids at Mona School Nigeria are singing "Joy, Joy, Joy" and "Think for Yourself." The virtue [we studied] this term was endurance, and all of the children sing your "Endurance" song. Everyone loves your songs. — Martha Garman, Mona School, Nigeria

And St. Louis, Missouri...

After raising three kids on Vitamin L, I find myself living in St. Louis and teaching English as a Second Language to middle schoolers. I've found Vitamin L songs to be useful in my classroom, not only for teaching tolerance and encouraging positive attitudes in a very diverse group, but also as a non-threatening introduction to the English language. I use the songs to teach idioms, pronunciation, and vocabulary. We begin each day singing "Walk a Mile." It helps to build a feeling of group identity and enthusiasm for students who arrive on their first day of middle school with no friends and no way of communicating their desire to make friends.

Thanks for your help and your songs.

— Betty Litsinger, St. Louis, Missouri

And Rwanda...

We recently had this report from Cornell professor John Weiss: "This summer at the International Education Exchange in Rwanda, Gilbert Imanikuze translated 'Walk a Mile' into the difficult national language, Kinyarwanda. Gilbert had lost his family in the genocide of 1994 and found the song deeply moving, a most promising tool in his country's effort to find reconciliation and forgiveness — a gift."

And Madagascar...

Vitamin L alumna Nathalie Louge wrote that she ran a three-week training for secondary school teachers in the villages of Madagascar in August. She used Vitamin L songs with the English teachers to show them the power of music for their civic education unit. They loved the songs and requested lyrics and a copy.

And St. Petersburg, Florida...

I grew up listening to "Walk a Mile." I think I listened to the tape all the way through high school; the music and lyrics were always enjoyable and fun to sing with. I particularly enjoyed singing "So Much to Share" [a song about appreciating senior citizens]. I actually enjoyed it so much that even after seven years of not hearing the music, I was finally able to remember the words tonight.

I am convinced that "So Much to Share" is part of the reason that I have been so motivated to get my two dogs certified as therapy dogs for visits at nursing homes and assisted living facilities. It's so rewarding to see the elderly taking so much joy from the visits. The song seems to express what I feel and why I want to continue our visits to the elderly. I am now 25 years old and teach kindergarten. I cannot wait to share these songs with my students.

Thank you so much for wonderful music that leaves a lasting impact.

— Yuri Yamashita, St. Petersburg, Florida

And closer to home...

I must say THANK YOU! When I was in third grade, a singing group came to my school. Now, at 22, I still remember how much fun that concert was, even though my class ended up at the back of the auditorium. It's my first memory of interacting with music—dancing with purpose and doing sign language along with song.

To this day, I remember some of the words to two of the songs in particular: "I wanna walk a mile in your shoes, I wanna know what you think and what you feel so I really wanna walk a mile in your shoes," and "Just think, you've got a whole world of brothers."

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And closer to home...(continued)

I remember dancing at the concert when I was seven and thinking, “Wow, I’ve always wanted a brother!” But until recently, I had no recollection of who the fantastic group was.

I now teach for Head Start in Binghamton. While shopping in Ithaca I saw a tape called “Walk a Mile!” I was so excited. I asked the store worker if I could listen to the song, and I knew instantly that it was what I had heard at the concert when I was seven.

You have absolutely no idea how excited I am to have found your music all over again! I use it in the classroom; the children love to sign along with “Family Feeling.” I’ve also recently started an intergenerational program with a senior living center in the area, and I plan on incorporating “So Much to Share” for that program.

I must thank you from the bottom of my heart. I don’t remember many songs from when I was seven—especially the ones that I only heard once. Your songs are incredibly special, and I can tell you first hand that they are influential, not to mention fun and inspiring.

Thank you again! I can’t emphasize enough how much I appreciate the music you’ve given us all!

– Jennifer Rogers, Binghamton, New York

From an alumna...

Vitamin L: Planting the Seeds of Empathy and Community

I have found that there is a Vitamin L song for every chapter of my life: a value or message that floats to the top and becomes the overarching theme of my daily existence. Since I joined the *Fiddler on the Roof* national tour in January, that value has undoubtedly been empathy. The song that touts that value, fittingly enough for my traveling lifestyle, is “Walk A Mile.”

For those who have never been on the road, being on tour is like deciding to spend the next 16 months of your life with everyone who is waiting for the same plane as you. It’s a strange amalgamation of people who might never otherwise be friends, might never even have voluntarily spent time together, all bound together, in our case, by a common purpose: let’s put on a show. Thus, the tour community is born.

I used to think communities were full of people who were essentially alike, but I’ve realized that, beyond the one major thing that brought those people together in the first place, a community is more likely to be a showcase for differences. For us, that means 72 very different personalities and opinions in constant negotiation. Each day brings its challenges. But when we are able to reach beyond ourselves and support each other, despite conflicting personalities, it’s incredibly inspiring. It’s at moments like these that I inevitably have “Walk A

Mile” floating through my head. Because what makes those beautiful moments possible, what makes us all able to coalesce, is empathy.

For me, Vitamin L is embodied by the message expressed so beautifully in “Walk A Mile”: With empathy, anything is possible. It is a powerful sentiment of which we need to be constantly reminded. I believe that empathy is something that we cultivate, more than something we inherently have or don’t have. It is something to which we are exposed, invited, introduced. Especially in the crucible of my tour community, I have constant opportunities to be grateful for this essential tenet, instilled in me by my family, and by Vitamin L. When I think of how many people Vitamin L touches with this message every day, every month, every year, it gives me great hope: hope that with those seeds of empathy that Vitamin L plants and cultivates, we can grow communities again.

My syllogism is this: Embracing community life requires empathy, and with empathy anything is possible; so if we can thrive in communities, then anything is possible. It’s so easy in our modern world to choose not to connect with each other, and so we get out of practice. What Vitamin L provides is the opportunity to do just that: to practice embracing differences, seeing both sides of con-



flicts, having a compassionate viewpoint, and choosing to connect. Because if I am learning anything by living in my little traveling village, it is that by allowing our investment in one another to be a measure of our worth—that is, by continuing to walk that mile in another’s shoes—we are working toward the dream of a global community: a lesson that Vitamin L has long understood.

- Kaitlin Stilwell

Kaitlin became a member and lifelong fan of Vitamin L at the age of nine. She continued singing with the group through high school. After getting her BFA in musical theater at IC, she moved to NYC to pursue a career in theater. Currently on the national tour of Fiddler on the Roof, Kaitlin is applying to grad programs in dramaturgy and in theatre research for next fall.

Vitamin L



*20th Birthday Celebration
Hangar Theatre 8/8/09*





From a current member... Changing the World One Song at a Time

As a senior, I've put post-high school plans at the top of my "to do" list. On the college applications I've been working on, you list all of your extracurricular activities—and elaborate on one of them. Vitamin L seemed like a great choice for elaboration; it has been an important part of my life for six years, and I have been on the advisory board for one year. I did wonder, though, how I could express everything I thought and felt about Vitamin L (not to mention the mission of the organization itself!) in 150 words or less.

I thought about everything that was memorable in my experience as a Vitamin L member and began with the purpose: Vitamin L works to "uplift and inspire young people and encourage positive character development through music."

During concerts, it is easy to see the influence that Vitamin L has on the kids in the audience: They look up to us as though we were pop stars—kids sometimes ask us to sign their napkins during lunch period! One of the

greatest rewards of being a Vitamin L chorus member is the opportunity to be a role model to so many kids, both on-stage and in the classroom visits we do before or after concerts. Vitamin L has the power to change the way many children think about social issues, and it is fun and inspiring to be able to bring these messages into elementary schools.

For the past two summers, I have been teaching rehearsals for the newest members, and, by teaching the songs, I have had the chance to reflect even more on their meaning. As I taught, I found myself hearing the songs in a new way; the teaching experience reinforced my belief that the words are what make the songs truly great.

Vitamin L songs are fun, entertaining, and capable of inspiring everyone to be a better person. Watching new chorus members learn the music is a great way to see the mission of Vitamin L continuing!

Vitamin L is more than just "an extracurricular" in my busy high school schedule; it is a fun and fulfilling way



of giving back to the community, and it draws attention to many ideals that otherwise might tend to slip away in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Vitamin L is a part of who I am; without it, I would not have the chance to reach out to children and to change the way people think of themselves and one another, one song at a time.

*-Kalila Booker-Cassano
Senior, Ithaca High School*



Vitamin L T-Shirts now available in lots of vibrant colors at vitaminL.org.

THE GRATITUDE REPORT

In the last six months The Vitamin L Project received donations from numerous individuals and groups, including grants of \$15,000.00 from the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, \$1,000.00 from Target, \$900.00 from the Puffin Foundation and support from the Rosamond Gifford Charitable Trust.

Special thanks to Dr. Joe Piskorowski for his leading 20th Birthday sponsorship!

Thanks to Chemung Canal Trust, Cayuga Family Medicine, Wegmans, Audrey Edelman Associates, Purity Ice Cream, Ithaca Child and the Ithaca Times for sponsorship and help with our 20th Birthday celebration, and thanks to all the businesses and individuals who contributed 60 wonderful raffle prizes.

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

Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation online at www.vitaminl.org, or to: The Vitamin L Project 105 King St. • Ithaca, NY 14850
Thank You!



***Our 20th Birthday Celebration on 8/8/09 was concert #798!
Here's to many more years of Vitamin L music!***

In 2008, Vitamin L:

- * Performed 57 concerts.***
- * Reached 14,200 youth and 3,800 adults in concerts.***
- * Performed at 33 schools and 12 festivals and community events.***
- * Gave leadership and performing opportunities to our 80 chorus members.***

Center for Transformative Action

The Vitamin L Project

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***Inspiring children
(and grownups!)
since 1989!***

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