

# Vitamin L News

Fall 2011

## A Landmark Experience for Vitamin L



**Emily Swenson and her Kindergarten Class at Rochester Prep Elementary**

Last June I received a special phone call. It was from a young woman in Rochester, NY who had a favorite childhood memory of seeing a Vitamin L concert at her elementary school. She has since become an elementary school teacher--and was calling to inquire about bringing Vitamin L to her school. This was a profound and joyful landmark occasion for Jan and I.

- Janice Nigro,  
director, Vitamin L

"As a third grader at Elizabeth Cady Stanton Elementary in Seneca Falls, N.Y. there was one day we looked forward to the most, the day the rock-stars, Vitamin L, came to town. I remember listening to the CD with my cousin, memorizing every line. To us, the kids in Vitamin L could have been Miley Cyrus or Justin Bieber, we were so impressed. I went on to be very active in music and theater in high school and college, in part inspired by the energy I saw on the stage.

When I became a teacher and moved to Rochester NY, my principal asked staff if there were any groups or programs we'd like to bring to school to celebrate the end of the year, and I immediately thought of the group. When I googled their name I was so pleased to see the group was still in existence and able to visit my school. My students enjoyed the performance just as much as I had 15 years prior and I'm so pleased I was given the opportunity to share such a wonderful group with them. Thank you to Vitamin L for the great music as a child and as an educator."

- Emily Swenson, Rochester Prep Elementary, Rochester, N.Y.

Emily's music teacher from Elizabeth Cady Stanton school writes:

"What a perfectly happy picture of Emily and her young students! It is particularly gratifying to find out that one of our former students, now a teacher herself, was so inspired by the talent, enthusiasm and joy of experiencing Vitamin L when she was an elementary student, that she has been able to engage your group to perform for her very own students.

The powerful messages that your songs portray transcend age differences so well that audiences of any age bracket fully enjoy their Vitamin L experience. Not only do our Stanton School students love your shows, our teachers do as well, and often ask me when will you be returning.

Congratulations on your long history of powerful and wildly popular performances! Your stellar record of inspirational performances now crosses several generations of students and teachers. Many, many thanks for all that you do to enhance the teaching and learning process, that hopefully, many more generations of students can be so enlightened and inspired."

- Jan LaValley, Elizabeth Cady Stanton School, Seneca Falls, N.Y.



**Vitamin L singers greet the Rochester Prep audience**

## From a Current Member:

### “Keep an Open Mind, and Enjoy Every Opportunity as it Comes.”

When Teta Alim was younger, she always wanted to travel the world. So it's no surprise that she took advantage of an opportunity offered by the Rotary Youth Exchange program to go to Australia for the 2010-2011 school year. We caught up with her this summer to ask her to share some thoughts about her experience, especially from her perspective as a Vitamin L chorus member.

One of the first challenges she faced was being completely new in the small school she was attending. She quickly realized that she was accustomed to having a network of friends she knew well and felt comfortable with. But at her new school, she needed to reach out to people she didn't know—putting herself out there while wondering what others thought of her. “It was pretty stressful at first,” she admitted. “Being the ‘new kid’ is really hard, especially in a small, private school.” The Vitamin L song “I Made A New Friend” came to mind for her many times in those first few weeks.

Teta feels that her Vitamin L experience gave her the courage she needed to reach out and make new friends in this completely new and unfamiliar situation. Before joining Vitamin L at age 10, she was a shy kid who wouldn't sing alone in front of anyone.

While she was in Shepparton, a small country town two hours away from Melbourne whose economy is

largely dependent on its fruit production, Teta lived with seven different host families, both in town and on outlying farms. She volunteered at a community center, helping refugee children with their homework. She learned about Australian government and politics, toured government offices, and kept up with local and world news. Citing an interest in international affairs, she also took courses in international and legal studies.

Not surprisingly, it was music that opened doors for her and brought her into a closer circle of friends in Shepparton. In Australia, Teta took music classes in school, was involved in a musical production, and even performed at Rotary events. “Music helped me connect with both the Australian kids and the exchange students. It's easy to connect with people through music because it is a universal language and it's something everyone can enjoy.”

Singing with Vitamin L helped Teta develop the confidence that served her so well as a Rotary Exchange student on (literally!) the other side of the world. While there, she was able to push herself even further to be independent, to be open to new experiences, and to make her own decisions. In the process, she says, she learned a lot more about herself.

Of all the Vitamin L songs Teta has sung over the past five years, she feels that “Tear Down the Walls” has made the



biggest impression on her. Her sense of that grew deeper during her time in Australia. “It speaks to me about stereotypes,” she explains. She adds that she is determined not to “look at people at face value” and judge them.

One other song that came to her mind often was “Every Moment.” This was because she found herself willing to try new things, to explore new places, to say yes to every new chance she was given. She wanted to take advantage of every opportunity that came her way—and she adds that she had so many interesting and wonderful experiences there as a result!

Back home in Ithaca, Teta is now enjoying her senior year at Ithaca High School. She has also returned to Vitamin L, and we're happy to have her back with us, singing with an enriched perspective about many of our core messages!

*“There are walls of concrete,  
walls of steel,  
But the thickest ones you'll find,  
Are the walls that people put up  
In their hearts and in their minds.  
Walls because of different skin  
Or the features on a person's face.  
Walls because of their religion,  
Their language or native place.  
The more walls you put around you,  
The more walls are gonna  
block your view!”*

*Tear down...tear down the walls!  
Love flows freely when they fall.  
In your heart can't you hear that call,  
To tear down, tear down the walls.”*  
- by Jan Nigro



Teta with a baby kangaroo

*“Every moment that comes to me,  
Is filled with opportunity,  
Many possibilities, in every  
moment that comes to me.*

*Every moment, it can be filled,  
With many wonders, many thrills,  
Love and friendship  
and goodwill,  
Yes, every moment it can be filled.*

*So take it, take it right now!  
Make it, make it what you want.  
Get up, get up and dance,  
‘Cause every moment is a brand  
new chance!”* - by Jan Nigro

## Vitamin L's New Recording Project - Read All About It! *and perhaps you can become a sponsor...*

Something exciting, creative, and wonderful has been brewing behind the scenes at the Vitamin L Project. A new Vitamin L recording is in the works that will be an excellent resource nationally for educators across the country and locally for Ithaca's Martin Luther King Community Build.

The recording will be a compilation of new and existing Vitamin L songs that are in alignment with Dr. King's teachings and ideals.

My husband Jan Nigro, Vitamin L's songwriter, has written four dynamic new songs for the recording and Vitamin L will also be recording "This Little Light of Mine" with veteran civil rights leader Dorothy Cotton, who has graciously agreed to participate on this project. The recording will include two new songs about Dr. King and a song about the heroic Freedom Riders of 1961.

This project is deeply meaningful for me. Why?...

Dr. King is a hero to me and has been since I was first met him at age five. I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia during the height of the civil rights movement and my parents were quite involved with Dr. King and his work.

My father, Gerald Reed, was also Dr. King's dentist, and the dentist for his family. Among other things, my father helped with boycotts of firms that were practicing segregation, and he helped efforts to desegregate the Coca-Cola company and the Atlanta Opera. Dr. King's father, King Senior, was a lead speaker at my father's memorial service.

Dr. King's teachings about non-violent social change and the interconnectedness of the human family molded my development and deeply inspired me as I was growing up. The first time I heard Dr. King speak in person was at his church when I was 5. I sat in the balcony with my brother and Dr. King's children, and I was enthralled and riveted by his words and his presence. He spoke with great conviction, and he exuded tremendous love and light.

I was fortunate to see him on several occasions.

I think it is vitally important to keep Dr. King's messages alive and for people to learn more about his courage and his life.

I also look forward to have the Freedom Riders honored in this Vitamin L recording. Their astounding bravery in their non-violent actions taken 50

years ago need to be remembered and honored, and I'm so glad Jan has written a song that serve this purpose. Hank Thomas, one of original 13 Freedom Riders, is a long time family friend. He was the national chair of the 50th Anniversary Reunion of the Freedom Riders last may in Jackson, Mississippi.

I am so pleased that Vitamin L is embarking on this recording project that means so much to me. When the recording is complete, all Ithaca elementary teachers will receive a copy to use in conjunction with lesson plans that were created based on ideas from Dr. King's last book: "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community."

We are currently making efforts to complete fundraising for the initial phase of the project.

In addition to a grant from a foundation, several individuals have chosen to be sponsors of this recording project. Additional sponsorships are being sought to fully fund this effort. If you are interested in becoming a sponsoring for this recording project, please contact Linda Hoffmann at [linda.hoffmann@hotmail.com](mailto:linda.hoffmann@hotmail.com) or by phone at (607) 273-4786



Some of our current and alumni Vitamin L chorus members - 2011 Ithaca Festival



“The Vitamin L music is used throughout the entire school year because the message they share in their music is truly part of the values that we instill in our students everyday. Thank you again for your support and kindness!” – Jean Ciesla, principal, Fairgrieve Elementary, Fulton, NY

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**Inspiring children since 1989!**

**for concert schedule  
and more info:  
[www.vitaminL.org](http://www.vitaminL.org)**

The Vitamin L Project is a Project of The Center for Transformative Action in Ithaca, New York





