

Vitamin L News

Volume 3, Issue 2



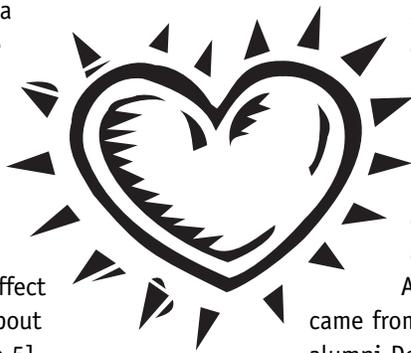
Sebastian Guitierrez, Jesse Bonney-Burrill, Sam Harris, Cassie Burkhauser, Alexis Suskin-Sperry, Zuri Sabir, Lauren Meador, Andy Lockwood, Jan Nigro, Nate Ruan

The Inspiration of Music

Vitamin L performed a concert in Scarsdale that was part of a celebration for the principal's upcoming retirement. The experience was profoundly touching to us, because the principal's approach of love had a big effect on the school. [Read more about Principal Ronne Marantz on p 5].

She had a motto from a song she would use with younger grades. The motto was: "3 special words: I LOVE YOU." Her loving approach with her students had such an impact that on the day of our concert, to surprise the principal, every student and staff at the school wore a tee shirt that read: 3 special words (on the front) and I Love You (on the back).

The concert was great fun, with the principal dancing in the aisles and the whole student



body standing up and clapping and singing along to many of the songs. We kept imagining what this country, and for that matter, this world would be like if all principals approached their students with an attitude of love.

Another recent inspiration came from reconnecting with Vitamin L alumni Devin Mack, who wrote an essay for this issue. Devin was extremely shy in elementary school, one of the shyest children we have ever met. He has completely overcome his shyness and has accomplished a great deal in his higher education, while working full time. His determination and focus are a wonder to behold! Happy Spring!

— Janice Nigro - director
— Jan Nigro - songwriter

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From an alumni...



“I sit here as a testament to the power of character building through song.”

As I sit here and ponder over life’s past, present, and future I realize that thus far my life’s journey makes me worthy of contributing to the Vitamin L Newsletter. The lessons learned during my Vitamin L years, which I refer to with a smile as the years where I had to sing and dance for strangers, make me appreciate the road that I continue to travel as I work my way through early adulthood. Vitamin L is something that I continue to carry with me as I define who I am personally, academically, professionally, socially, and spiritually.

It is comical now, but during my academic obstacles I played Endurance, a Vitamin L anthem, in my head as I worked to graduate near the top of my class from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (class of 2001, with a major in Communication and minors in Political Science and African American Studies). That particular song continued to resonate for me as I completed my law degree at American University, Washington College of Law in December 2005, and as I complete my Masters in International Politics at American University, School of International Service. If that is not enough I revere the song, which now seems to be my personal theme song as I await news of my application to be a Presidential Management Fellow, and as I prepare to

begin work on my Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration at either George Washington University or Georgetown University.

When Janice asked me to contribute to the newsletter I was humbled, although for a moment I hesitated to add another project to my already hectic life. In spite of this, it was Jan and Janice, hometown friends and mentors asking, therefore I agreed with honor and sit here in the present to wholeheartedly support the inspirational message that the Vitamin L Project offers. I sit here as a testament to the power of character building through song and serve as a reminder that the Vitamin L Project is a movement worth supporting. It is a movement worthy of our close attention: it is a project with a heart, a project that influences children and adults alike in a world of uncertainty.

When I joined Vitamin L, I was perceived as a shy, African American, “pre-tween,” from a family of eight, who had a voice that could carry a note. However, few knew that I welcomed the adventure that lay ahead and fully appreciated the opportunity to take part in something that was greater than my self. Vitamin L introduced me to fellow members of the group, that I would have never formed meaningful relationships with on my own, and allowed me to spread a message of inspiration, love, peace, and

strength to my contemporaries. I truly believe that I made a difference in the lives of audiences that sang and danced along, while immersing themselves in the power of change. I continue to make a difference, building on the foundation of social consciousness that Vitamin L helped to create in me.

Vitamin L is an important part of my past and a contributor to my present, and I know my Vitamin L experiences will stay with me as the future approaches. The lessons learned through Vitamin L will continue to provide a source of strength and reference for me as my role in this world changes. This brings me to a point where I deliberate my message of the past as a springboard for my message of the future and forces me to acknowledge that my message of the future must be one of social peace and improvement. After taking this time to understand what my participation in Vitamin L means I know that I will use my professional career to develop public policy that will embrace tolerance and differences. I will also remember that shy, black American, “pre-tween,” from a family of eight, who had a voice that could carry a note. I will remember and know humility by accepting that I am only one voice, yet as a group delivering a constructive message I can be a voice of progress.

— Devin Mack

Community Service



Vitamin L performs several community service concerts each year. In October Vitamin L performed for the CROP WALK and had a team of over thirty walking as well. The Crop Walk raises money for hunger efforts locally and globally.

From a Vitamin L member...



“Amidst inevitable political and social disparities, Vitamin L’s message penetrates these barriers.”

I have never had the best voice. Some chorus members struggle with the choreography. Some are scared before a performance. We are tall, short, of diverse cultural backgrounds, have various body types, sit with different cliques in the cafeteria. But when all of us get on stage, our talents, strengths, and weaknesses blend together to form a dynamic harmony.

When I joined the Vitamin L Chorus six years ago, I was intimidated by the poise and talent of the older members. It was all about finding my niche. When first given the chance to do a solo, a flood of anxiety overwhelmed me. What if I forgot the lyrics? What if my voice cracked? Can I really hit that note? Unfortunately my fears were fulfilled when the connection between my mind and mouth malfunctioned, resulting in indecipherable gibberish! It was at that moment when I first experienced the type of support that we practice in Vitamin L. Before I could see anyone’s reaction, several chorus members came to my rescue, filling in the missing lyrics. It is hard to believe that now I am a senior member, accustomed to filling in when new members find themselves in similar stressful circumstances.

Over the years, I have learned to be equally animated for a crowd of twenty or two hundred. The size of the audience does not determine one’s impact, as getting through to a single individual is all it takes to make a difference. When I get into the Vitamin L van to go to a concert, I have ended up in a broad spectrum of communities. Living in a place like Ithaca where many share similar political views, it is easy to forget that preaching “open-mindedness” does not, in and of itself, make you an open-minded person. Vitamin L has forced me out of the protective canopy of my social comfort zone and brought me to places where my perspective might represent a minority opinion. Amidst inevitable political and social disparities, Vitamin L’s message penetrates these barriers.

The Vitamin L message represents international human rights and values. We have an opportunity to take our message to thousands of children each year regardless of their unique religious, cultural and political backgrounds. Because our message has universal meaning, the songs and tapes can be welcomed in a wide variety of households. Each concert is an investment in our future because working with children is like planting a seed

that will continue to grow.

I remember the excitement when Vitamin L came to my elementary school. Now I have the chance to return there, and I realize that I have become the next generation of the Chorus. While performing in front of the current students at my former school, it has dawned on me that this project has worked. As a young child, I understood that making a small difference might entail helping a friend on the playground. Now I incorporate the same message by performing with the Chorus.

It is especially rewarding when I see kids enthusiastically singing along. From my personal experience, this probably indicates that they have not yet reached puberty and still think we are pretty cool. After this period of time, they may deny thinking that Vitamin L qualifies as “awesome.” But I can recall the early adolescent times when I avoided peer pressure and found the courage to offer a voice of dissent. It was in these social situations that it was evident that I had internalized the message. Now as I go off to Allegheny College in the fall, I look back on the positive influence that Vitamin L has played in my life and can honestly say that it meets the criteria of very cool!

— Abi Dubovi

The Gratitude Report

With gratitude, in the last six months The Vitamin L Project received donations from numerous individuals and groups, including a \$10,000.00 grant from a foundation that wishes to remain anonymous, \$2,500.00 from the Triad Foundation, \$1,000.00 from The Service League and \$1,000.00 from Tompkins Trust Company.

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

Music of the Heart as an Educational Tool

I was an Elementary Special Education and English as a Second Language teacher for twenty years and a principal for twelve. In both roles I viewed myself as caring and loving. But it was not until music, the language of the heart, came into my professional life, that I could truly say that the children actually felt the love.

How did this come about and what were the effects? In 1981 I attended an educational workshop on Education in Human Values (EHV). It was in India and conducted by the Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Education (deemed University). There I learned of five Human Values: Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love and Nonviolence. We were shown five teaching techniques that could bring those values into the classroom and the lives of the children:

Storytelling, Silent-sitting/Tuning-In, Quotations, Activities, and—group singing. Each of these techniques touches another aspect of human growth: physical, intellectual, social/emotional, moral and spiritual. I was inspired to bring this program into every aspect of my teaching. Each component touched my students deeply, but none so much as the music. As soon as a song from one of the CDs I used came on, shy smiles and the light of love in their eyes, filled the room.



When I became an elementary school principal, I knew I had to bring this program and the power of love into our school. As the district curriculum left teachers little room for any non-authorized programs, I decided to do it myself. You can well imagine the initial reaction of teachers and students to this singing principal. As time went on the language of human values and LOVE became the hallmark of our school.

The songs written and sung by Jan Nigro and Vitamin L were my favorite. When we sang 'Endurance' or 'I Want to Get to Know You' the children really 'got it,' in a loving and fun way. A friend of mine wrote a song that I used with kindergarten and first graders (not available on CD). The name of the song is 'Three Special Words' and it repeats the phrase, I love you,

many times. I retired in June 2005 and the school had an assembly in my honor. Vitamin L was invited to perform. When I walked into the auditorium, to my surprise, every student, parent and teacher was wearing a tee shirt. On the front was written, Three Special Words, on the back, I Love You. What an assembly.

It filled our hearts.

— Ronne Marantz, Ed.D.

I learned of five Human Values: Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love and Nonviolence.

In 2005 Vitamin L :

- performed 48 concerts
- reached 9,500 youth and 2,600 adults in concerts
- performed at 27 schools, community events, festivals, and camps
- gave leadership and performing opportunities to our 70 chorus members

Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation to:

"THE VITAMIN L PROJECT," • 105 KING ST., ITHACA, NY 14850 • THANK YOU!



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.

Nate Ruan, Sam Harris, Jan Nigro, Ilana gilovich, Adam Beckwith, Katie Lane, Nikki Page, Zach Montague, Fatima Sowe, Gillian Weitz

CRESP

The Vitamin L Project

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Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 273-4175

**Come see
Vitamin L perform at
the Ithaca Festival!!!
Sat. June 3 at 1:00 p.m. at
the Center Pavilion on the
Ithaca Commons**

Non-Profit Organization
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Permit No. 34

*"The concert reinforced our character education program we work on all year. The students came away with the idea that it's COOL to strive to be a good person. They loved it! Thanks again - we are still singing your songs."
- Dottie Kelly, Special ed Teacher, McEvoy Center, Cortland, NY*

We're on the Web!
www.vitaminL.org

The Vitamin L Project is an official non-profit project of CRESP (Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy) at Cornell University.