

Vitamin L News

Spring 2017

Walk a Mile turns 30!

Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick declared February 11 "Walk a Mile Day" to celebrate Vitamin L's new "Walk a Mile" video and iconic song, and to honor Vitamin L and its contributions to fostering empathy and understanding through music.

Vitamin L held a community event at Cinemapolis movie theater to celebrate empathy, hear stories of how the song "Walk a Mile" has traveled across the globe and has been used in many settings, and to debut the new video. Guest speaker Michelle Berry described the event as a beautiful afternoon of meditation on the power of empathy and love. The positive energy in the room was palpable and such a healing balm in contrast to troubling headlines in the news.

Alum Charles Blake came from Rochester to M.C. the event. Several guests shared inspiring reflections on empathy and their experiences connected with the song. Some of what was shared is included in this article.

New York State Representative Barbara Lifton spoke and surprised Vitamin L with a Citation from the New York State Assembly (see back page).

Dr. Nia Nunn, former school psychologist at Beverly J. Martin Elementary School spoke about the important conflict management program that has been in place for many years at BJM. The program teaches elementary students empathy, compassion and perspective taking, and they start each weekly session with the song "Walk a Mile." Children who go through this program become conflict managers who help their school community.

Now teaching at Ithaca College, Dr. Nunn emphasized the importance of self-reflection in taking responsibility for being a caring person who is empathetic and good to other people. She said part of creating safe spaces is that we have to be safe people. She asked us to ponder 3 questions: "Who am I?" "Am I a good friend?" "If I wasn't me, would I be my friend?"

(Read what Toni Murdough and Dani Copeland shared on p. 2 and 3)

City of Ithaca Proclamation

Whereas, practicing empathy in our lives is very important to the individual, the community, and the world;

Whereas, empathy can increase compassion, and encourage clear communication and a spirit of helpfulness;

Whereas, empathy can help us understand each other and resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner;

Whereas, music, song, and lyrics are powerful tools for communicating values at both the emotional and the intellectual levels;

Whereas, 30 years ago, the song "Walk a Mile" was written in Ithaca, NY by local composer Jan Nigro for Vitamin L to inspire empathy in children;

Whereas, this song has come to encourage empathy among thousands of children and adults locally, nationally, and internationally;

Whereas, in the song's 30th birthday year, the Vitamin L Project is releasing on YouTube a music video of "Walk a Mile";

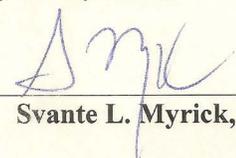
Whereas, the more we take the time to embrace empathy in all of our relationships, the more we will contribute to a caring community;

Now, therefore, I, SVANTE MYRICK, Mayor of the City of Ithaca, do hereby proclaim Saturday, February 11th 2017 as:

Walk a Mile Day In the City of Ithaca

In Witness whereof, I have hereto set my hand and caused the great seal of the City of Ithaca to be affixed this the 24th day of January in the year 2017.



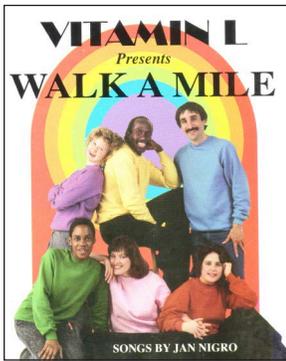

Svante L. Myrick, Mayor

Songwriter Jan Nigro shared: "I want to walk a mile in your shoes" is a direct proactive statement. It does take an effort to do this. It doesn't come naturally to all of us in every situation to take the time to really explore what someone is thinking or feeling. Especially when we've fallen into an adversarial position. The peaceful, very human act of putting your needs and your opinion to the side for a moment is not always easy. Right now, there is a desperate need for more empathy and understanding in this country."

Vitamin L performed a few songs and showed a video montage compiled by filmmaker Jeff Hodges of singers from far and wide (including New Zealand) performing "Walk a Mile."

(continued on p. 3)

One of these things is NOT like the other...



What could a hospital possibly have to do with a singing group? First of all, we are never too old to be taught by each other. For people who work in healthcare we know that patient care is more than just healing -- it is building a connection to mind, body, and soul. Making that kind of human connection means we have to be compassionate, kind, and show our empathy to patients, and their families. How do we learn how to do that? By walking a mile, of course!

My name is Toni Murdough, and I am the patient experience officer at Cortland Regional Medical Center. Our daily mission at CRMC is to *provide safe, high-quality care with skill and compassion* to anyone who walks through our doors.

Health care is relationship based care - we build relationships with our patients, with our residents, with our physicians, and with each other. Caregivers touch lives so deeply - at times of great tragedy, or great joy. How do we train for the task? How do we connect? How do we express compassion, empathy, and love to those around us who are suffering? By walking a mile in our patients' shoes. Making this our

guiding principle inspires us to provide great care - every patient, every time.

My grown up kids LOVED Vitamin L when they were young. They collected all of their music; we listened to tapes in the car, at home, and caught the singing troupe live whenever we had the opportunity. Fast forward 20 years, to about a year ago, when Cortland Regional Medical Center began setting the groundwork for patient centered care, aka "walking a mile in your shoes". I was thrilled when I contacted Vitamin L and we were given permission to use Walk a Mile as our theme song. Yes, adults need a theme song too sometimes and we have been using it ever since. When I meet with staff to highlight patient experience at CRMC, Vitamin L singing "Walk a Mile" is playing in the background. It is pure joy to see staff reactions or when they ask - is that Vitamin L? Or say, that's Vitamin L - they came to my grade school!! Or hear them telling their peers - Vitamin L - I loved them as a kid, I collected all their music. Watching staff building connections, building relationships, hearing and telling their stories is the perfect way for us to walk in each other's shoes.

The Vitamin L "Walk a Mile" song heightens our awareness and inspires us to use our hearts daily and to translate that into excellent patient care. We have taken it a step further too, making our framework out of a play on the word soul - we've got SOLE. By employing this framework of *SOLE* - *Smile, Observe, Listen, Engage* we are more likely to walk in each other's shoes. If we always *Communicate* with SOLE and *Respond* with SOLE, we can't help but touch the heart and soul of our patients.

I believe that music has the power to transform, to help us make connections and to inspire us to something bigger than ourselves. I feel so lucky that as adults, we get to keep learning and those Vitamin L songs keep teaching us - long after we are grown up.

How do **you** walk a mile?



PATIENT EXPERIENCE
walking a mile in your shoes

Expanding Vitamin L's Online Resources on YouTube

Vitamin L chorus and youth board member Erin Hilgartner suggested that we create scrolling lyric videos of each Vitamin L song to put on our YouTube channel. We jumped on this good idea and recruited the volunteer help of Vitamin L parent Paul van der Veur, a film professor at SUNY Cortland.

With Paul's help we are gradually putting these videos on our Youtube channel until all 52 Vitamin L songs will be accessible online in this format. These scrolling lyric videos are a wonderful resource for both classroom and music teachers and they provide an easy format for teaching the songs. The videos can also be used to practice reading skills for young readers.

On April 4, the 49th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Vitamin L released a concert video of the song "Martin is Calling," which is a call to action in his honor.

You can view it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQWGNvIs4ZE>

See all of our videos at Vitamin L's youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/vitaminlproject>

Please support Vitamin L's work with a tax-deductible donation online at <https://www.vitaminL.org> or during GIVING IS GORGES day, from May 9, 6:00 p.m. - May 10 at 6:00 p.m. at <https://www.givingisgorges.org/organizations/the-vitamin-l-project>





Current Member's Reflections on Empathy

I have always been someone who school comes easy to. I'm not used to seeing grades outside of the nineties, so when I got the chance to tutor sixth graders at my school, I took it. I had assumed that people who didn't like school and didn't do well in school didn't feel like trying. I thought that I could help them learn to like school, like I did. What I didn't realize was that I was completely wrong.

When I walked into that classroom on the first day of tutoring, it wasn't anything like I thought it would be. Everyone was sitting down and being respectful, and when I walked in I was received with kindness. These kids wanted to be helped, and they were willing to hear anything I had to say. Just reading a paragraph was hard work for them. I have never experienced that, being an avid reader is just something I was born with. I sat down, introduced myself, and got to work.

It was more difficult than I expected, because I didn't think I would be helping them understand things. I thought I would be helping

them try. Teaching somebody a subject that they don't have a natural aptitude for is challenging. For the first half of that hour, teaching was like walking through hardened concrete. I just couldn't seem to get through to them. But at some point, I had my ah-ha moment. I started to think about how lucky I am to be blessed with book smarts. I began to understand that school isn't just a matter of wanting to try hard; it's a matter of finding the right way to learn. For some people, that just requires more work.

Some of these kids came from very difficult circumstances. No money, no best friends, no one to sit down with them and work through a homework sheet with. I have always had a loving mother at home who would go through anything for me. I really needed to understand their perspective. When I did, they started to understand the material. I told them long division was like a puzzle and showed them where to start, broke up word problems into bite sized pieces, and turned multiplication into sets of shorter problems that they already knew how to solve. I stopped pushing, and let things flow. When you understand how things look from somebody else's perspective, you can help a person. And that makes you feel really good.

What is life without doing good in the world? Without using the things that come easily to you to help people? This experience taught me so much about being grateful. The things you take

for granted can look like diamonds in other people's eyes. It can be anything. For me it's a family that is whole because my parents aren't together. For some it's food to eat, and for these kids it was book smarts. So I tried to teach them how to learn. When they got that spark of understanding, it made me so happy. I almost felt selfish, because really empathy let's you feel other people's joy.

Through song, Vitamin L teaches things that you can't learn out of a book, or in school. Empathy is one of the biggest things that we teach, because if you can walk a mile in someone else's shoes, you can understand why you are lucky. You can make stronger connections, you can help people, you can teach. I encourage you to look at your own life and find what you are good at. Realize how lucky you are. Because no matter what, we are all gifted in some way. Some people can sing, some people have book smarts. Some people can make a sad person laugh with a single word. The most valuable thing on this earth is a connection with people, and that can't be made without understanding what they are going through, and being there for them. Letting someone know you care, and that you want to help them can mean the world. So get out there and get grateful. Pass your gift onto others, so they see that something they once thought was a pile of scrambled letters can have a greater meaning.

- Dani Copeland, 8th grade,
Dewitt Middle School

(continued from p. 1)

Michelle Berry, former city alderperson and poet laureate who raises money for kids for the Child Development Council, shared her experience with an empathetic nurse and radiologist who helped her get through a scary medical procedure. She also spoke about how her own empathy toward her mother grew tremendously when she became a parent herself.

Alumna Addy Cooper Davidoff sent a message from overseas that her mother Randi Beckmann shared: "I grew up in Vitamin L singing my way through so many changes in the world and in myself. Now, as I live as a religious feminist Jew in the land of Israel, I work every day to own the words I used to sing. I work with Palestinian and Jewish farmers and dialogue with them about experience and peace. Much of this work is informed by my experiences with Vitamin L.

As a feminist orthodox Jew, I often feel alone in my shoes in the liberal context. The song "Walk a Mile" pushes past even the liberal narrative, and asks us to literally walk in each other's shoes. It gives not just the ideals of openness, but the tools for how to grow empathy. This song represents real acceptance, not just acceptance of what we're comfortable with and familiar with.

I work to see the good in each person, no matter how uncomfortable, and to see the beauty in this oh so complex world. Whether you're in Ithaca NY or in one of the most contested countries in the world, trying to walk a mile in your sister's shoes is always the first step. A big shout out to Vitamin L from Jerusalem!"

Vitamin L director and co-founder Janice Nigro spoke about the impact that focusing on empathy has had on her life. She's pretty sure she's heard "Walk a Mile" more than any other person on the planet - at least 3,500 times in rehearsals, sound-checks and concerts. We saw a video clip of Alumna Nathalie Louge speaking about how the message of the song "Walk a Mile" has helped her in her work in multicultural settings in Africa and in her personal relationships. (See this clip on Vitamin L's Facebook page).

Social worker Shannon Oakes of Elmira shared how a chance experience hearing Vitamin L sing "Walk a Mile" on the Ithaca Commons led to her bringing Vitamin L into several schools in Chemung County in addition to having Vitamin L perform several times at a "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" walk for suicide prevention that she organizes each year for 2,000 participants.

Then came the debut of the video filmed by Jeff Hodges and produced by Janice Nigro. Seventy five people, including many current chorus members, took part in the filming of this video that was made with a lot of love. Thank you to our lead actors Keara Byron and Erin Hilgartner, to everyone who participated, and to Jan Nigro for writing the song 30 years ago! You can see it on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_tTrwSXIE.

May we all help create a caring community with empathy in our hearts and actions!

Center for Transformative Action
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Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage

PAID

Ithaca, NY 14850
Permit No. 780

Inspiring children since 1989!

Vitamin L
sings at the
Ithaca Festival
Saturday, June 3
12:15 - 12:45
GIAC Stage

For concert schedule and more info: www.vitaminL.org

The Vitamin L Project is a Project of The Center for Transformative Action



New York State Assembly

Citation

Whereas, Vitamin L has been a unique and wonderful organization

founded in 1989 by Jan Nigro, along with his wife, Janice, with the support of Ithaca's Center for Transformative Action, in the hope that their program would expose as many young people as possible to songs containing meaningful messages of empathy, confidence, kindness, perseverance, cooperation, respect, non-violent conflict resolution and resistance to peer pressure, that these young people would internalize these messages and, ultimately, make better choices and have healthier relationships, with the song, Walk a Mile, which Jan wrote thirty years ago, becoming the signature song for Vitamin L, which they have recently released in a new video, to much fanfare and excitement; and

Whereas, Vitamin L is now being honored on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of their nationally-recognized song and new video release, which is being showcased in celebration of the inspiration it has given to thousands of young people and adults over the last thirty years, and, no doubt, for years to come; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the New York State Assembly, by its member, the Honorable Barbara S. Lifton, does hereby recognize

Vitamin L

as an outstanding organization -- with the inspired leadership of Jan and Janice Nigro, and the talent and exuberance of several hundred young singers -- worthy of the esteem of the entire community and the great State of New York.

Date: February 11, 2017

In Witness Whereof, I have Hereunto
set my Hand and Signature

Barbara S. Lifton
Member of Assembly
125th District

An honor for Vitamin L...

This citation reads: *Whereas, Vitamin L has been a unique and wonderful organization founded in 1989 by Jan Nigro, along with his wife, Janice, with the support of Ithaca's Center for Transformative Action, in the hope that their program would expose as many young people as possible to songs containing meaningful messages of empathy, confidence, kindness, perseverance, cooperation, respect, non-violent conflict resolution and resistance to peer pressure, that these young people would internalize these messages and, ultimately make better choices and have healthier relationships, with the song, Walk a Mile, which Jan wrote 30 years ago, becoming the signature song for Vitamin L, which they have recently released a new video to much fanfare and excitement, and*

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Feb. 11, 2017

It's audition season for youth currently in 5th - 10th grades.

**For more info call 273-4175 or
contact us at vitaminLproject@hotmail.com.**