

Worship & Action for Peace Letter
December 22, 2004

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting,

On December 10 to 12, 79 young friends and 12 older friends gathered for WinterSong 2004 at Powell House. Chris DeRoller, codirector of the Powell House youth program, sends the report below, together with the WinterSong Epistle written by four of the young Friends. Chris asks that we affirm the growth and work of our young friends, for “the skills our youth are honing ... will transform [our] communities ... now and in the future.”

Jesus called the children to him and said,
“[F]or the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.
I tell you the truth,
anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God
like a little child will never enter it.”
(Luke 18:16-17 [NIV])

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer, Lu Harper
Worship and Action for Peace working group

These large “Song” conferences are celebrations of the tremendous work, joy, and love these young friends put into building a supportive, radiant community. I spoke at Representative Meeting about the young friends being “A People” bound by the leadings of love, embracing diversity, dealing with conflict constructively, deeply alive in the Spirit. And at this year’s WinterSong a people truly gathered, worshiped, played, and dove deep into the Spirit. Sunday found us all in a sacred space during our closing worship. The young friends recognized and named their growth. They spoke with excitement and conviction about the need to carry what they had learned back to their communities. They shared how they had discovered that everyone has a bit of “PoHo ... Light ... Divine ... Whatever” within them. They struggled mightily trying to put into words what was sweeping over them. But they felt it. We all felt it.

Friends, the youth of this yearly meeting are engaged in powerful work for peace, and they are beginning to understand that in profound and transforming ways. I would ask each of you who has a child or who knows a young friend who participates in the Powell House youth program to greet them and thank them for the work they are engaged in. For although conferences are enriching, great fun, and welcome reprieves from school and family, they are also work. And the skills our youth are honing in these gatherings will transform the communities they find themselves in now and in the future. So acknowledge that work. Affirm it. It is a small thing to do but I believe one which will have tremendous impact in the way things are now unfolding.

Christine DeRoller

The WinterSong Epistle

The WinterSong of '04 began on a rainy day, in contrast to the snow we're so accustomed to. Nevertheless, we began with our usual tasty meal cooked by Jacki and Chris K. We then became divided into small groups, our mission was to tell a story about the light using the contents of a brown paper bag. We had a refreshingly brief reminder of the rules, and then fell into 'news of me' which gave us a chance to reveal what has happened in the dark, dreary world outside of Powell House. The free time gave us a chance to converse with friends we hadn't seen in a long time. In quiet time, we settled down, listening to Helen read "The Bird's Family Christmas Carol." We managed through the chaos to get to bed and prepare for the next day.

On Saturday morning we had workshops like Christmas decorations, song writing, jewelry making, peace discussions, poetry writing, movement, button making, improv, and walk and talk. Then many people enjoyed a game of ultimate Frisbee. After lunch we attempted to get everyone at PoHo in one huge couch pile. We almost succeeded until we faced a chain reaction of people screaming "oww!" and tons of flashing cameras. After unearthing those on the bottom, we went into small groups dealing with honesty, spirituality, and some dining room decorating for the dress-up dinner. To relax and center, we broke off into 3-way massage or Tai Chi. Then we segued into self-space. And after, we got ready for the dress up dinner.

The evening began with the dazzlingly elegant dress up dinner, followed by spontaneous outbreaks of song. Cabaret was a favorite. Highlights included many inspiring songs, brilliant skits, soulful poems, and readings of interesting documents that shed new light on the hardships of life (OMG). The cookie skit was revived in what has been described as "respectful and amazing."

An impromptu dance-off followed the tree lighting ceremony (see below), filling the ACC with loud music and vibrant energy. Once we had mellowed down a bit we enjoyed the traditional showing of The Grinch complete with sing-alongs and moans of pity for the Grinch's dog Max. After, we had a calming and much needed quiet time with a continuation of the "Bird's Family Christmas" and a huddle full of connected energy. It felt as if, out of the 80+ individuals, we had truly become One.

The tree lighting. It is ... it is ... indescribable. Seldom have we felt such community, love, unity, and peacefulness. In the silence that followed this beautiful and moving moment, several of our number were moved to speak. Jerehme attempted to put into words what each of us felt. His speech, assuring us we were all awesome, that we just didn't understand the passion he saw us all lose ourselves in, but we do, Jerehme; We do. It was and still is indescribably beautiful ... incredible ... perfect ... indescribably indescribable. It was just ... just ... wow! Well, I d'no.

As it was, this was one of, if not the most, for some, incredible weekends imaginable. From dancing to kitchen crew, singing to work projects, the love and support washed over the whole group, and we basked in our friendships. Powell House. What is Powell House? Lovely as they are, the Powell House buildings, the grounds, are not Powell

House. Powell House is nothing, **nothing** without us. On its own, empty of love, laughter and light, Powell House is an empty egg shell that we must fill to almost bursting. Powell to the people!