

Program Report, June 2014 Northfield Conference

"Koru"

Program Chairs: Kathy Lowe-Bloch and Peter Bloch

Every Northfield Conference week is the product of the collaborative efforts of the entire community, and this year was no different. Planning Meetings took place throughout the year and were always well attended. Various electronic communications systems allowed every member to keep tabs on the progress of the planning. We were never short of ideas and volunteers, so that by the time we assembled at the Mt. Hermon campus on Sunday, June 21, we felt sure that it was going to work, and was going to be a memorable experience for everyone.

The Executive Retreat took place in September at our home in NH. That was followed by autumn Planning Meetings in Montreal (hosted by Tracey Briscoe) and Connecticut (at the Mason's). MidWinter was an opportunity to provide a good status report to the large number of attendees, and then one more Planning Meeting was held in March at our house. Our appreciation to all who came to those meetings, they were great fun and highly productive.

At the Montreal Planning Meeting, we chose our theme. It is always a fascinating process to sort through many dozens of ideas, and find out what resonates. Gradually, the alternatives got winnowed down, and there was an enthusiastic consensus for the word "KORU" as our theme. KORU is an ancient concept from New Zealand and appears around the world in many artistic representations. It is the Maori word for "loop," and refers to the new unfurling fern frond in nature. As the fern unfolds, it holds its rooted foundation and manifests out to what it was meant to be. KORU was a rich theme to unfold within our Northfield week. Stories, artwork, and theme dance costumes all reflected this theme.

Finally, it was June, and 170 members arrived on campus, and got to enjoy the fruits of our labors during the prior year. The program for our week included myriad bits and pieces, but for this report, we will focus on the Conference Hours, workshops, and a couple of changes from prior years. The changes that we chose to unfold this year were:

- Returning to a simple closing the last morning of the week, and having a more elaborate closing the night before at Sacred Circle. This allowed an easier exit from campus Friday morning.
- Returning to having the Craft Sale event along side the CoffeeHouse, simultaneously. And the Craft Sale was for that night only.
- Steve Schuch and Jonathan Krupp offered story telling for an evening for the young children in a dorm. This was very well received and it was requested to have this again.

Our Conference Hour speakers were simply amazing: courageous, well spoken, thoughtful, and emotionally vulnerable. Our speakers were:

Tracey Briscoe - Birthing my Voice

Jerry Blum - My Brother Was an Only Child: A Story of Resilience

Alicia Harris - Living Outside the Box: Defying Racial Expectations of Identity

Marco Giannozzi - Never Give Up

Amanda Richards - Love Unfurling

For the two of us, Conference Hours are the epitome of what Northfield is about, and we will always be grateful to these five amazing people for stepping forwards and being willing to share their deep important stories.

We were fortunate to have Lisa Schermerhorn as our Workshop Coordinator. It is a big job to sort through many proposals and come up with a roster of presentations that will fill the afternoons with attractive and meaningful offerings. This year we had about 28 workshops, perhaps more than ever before at Northfield. There were too many to list here, but again, our gratitude goes out to all the presenters, and most especially to our friend Lisa.

KORU appeared to offer a lot in terms of how we came together the last night at the "Fern Gully Theme Dance." Participation in costumes was high. Carol, Gail, and Frank went all out to decorate the space in an amazing Rain Forest of greenery and KORU art. A slide show was projected on the huge screen, displaying artsy photos as well as pictures from taken during Conference, and even pictures from the dance itself! The slide show was a huge hit, planting the idea to have it every year at the Theme Dance.

Overall, we are quite pleased how the week flowed and we are honored to be able to serve the community as Program Chairs. As a married couple, it was our second time as planning partners. We looked at it as an opportunity to work together along a spiritual path that keeps our hearts open so that we may better serve each other and the Northfield Community.