

## With Starbursts in Their Eyes, Young Unificationists Celebrate a Memorable Independence Day

Ariana Moon

July 8, 2011



*Two attendees, Liz Kernon (left) and Inja Angelino (right), look over the balcony of the New Yorker Hotel during the BBQ.*

For the third year in a row, July 4th fireworks exploded over the Hudson River off the West Side of Manhattan (instead of the traditional venue on the East River), affording more than three hundred Lovin' Life youth as well as veteran church members on the upper balconies of the New Yorker Hotel an unobstructed and enviable view of the show.

Spectators included more than a hundred high-school students and staff bused in from the Lovin' Life Camp in Red Hook, New York in order to attend Lovin' Life Ministries' long-awaited holiday package of a ballroom dance class and social, and a BBQ hosted by members of the True Family. Young adults currently enrolled in the International Lovin' Life Leadership Initiative Program at the Lovin' Life Learning Center, local blessed families, and the participants in this fall's Generation Peace Academy (GPA), (formerly known as Special Task Force), also took part.

Earlier that Independence Day afternoon, attendees had gathered to participate in a ballroom class and social hosted by members of the True Family in the Grand Ballroom of the Manhattan Center.

Young adults later commented that the environment facilitated interaction among people who had never met. "It was nice to see so many people warming up to each other through dance," said Zack Pobanz, an intern for New Jersey Lovin' Life Ministries.



*Ester Allen (left), Jessica Sattinger (center) with her mother, Asae Sattinger (right) pose for a picture before the fireworks.*

After several lively hours of grooving to Swing, Cha Cha, Tango and Waltz music, all members were led into True Parents' suite in the New Yorker Hotel to enjoy the festivities. Out on the balcony of the suite, massive quantities of hamburgers, hot-dogs, and salmon filets made their way on to and off of a single persistent grill, carefully handled by second generation who had generously volunteered hours of their day to provide a memorable holiday dinner for all.

"It was just nice to talk to everyone and see how they are doing," Pobanz went on to say. "I saw a lot of members who had distanced themselves from our church community come to attend this event, and it was really good to hang out with them. It seems like everything that In Jin Nim's trying to do is coming

together.”

David Schanker, who recently completed a second year of GPA and who will be attending Boston College this fall said, “This year’s get together in comparison to last year’s was a lot more refreshing in that the spirit was a lot more vibrant. The sheer number of people who showed up was overwhelming.”



*Members of all ages help themselves to the July 4th dinner prepared by young volunteers.*

Natasha Honey, who spent the last year with Schanker on GPA and who currently is training for a second year of the program said: “I had a really awesome time. First, I was intimidated because there were so many people, but then I realized that these people were my brothers and sisters and that I was just going to have a good time. So I started talking to people – some I didn’t know, some from the local community, and even though I’d been sad that my own family hadn’t been able to come, I realized that the people here were my family. I think our being there and obviously having such a good time would have been inspiring for first generation to see.”

Each of the six barges sponsored by Macy’s Department Store that functioned as launch pads for the fireworks floated within comfortable view from the New Yorker balconies. At around 9:20 p.m., an explosion of light and sound dazzled an enthusiastic audience, lingering in the air for a shimmering second before the next barrage of firecrackers took their space.

“The fireworks were pretty amazing. I come from Hawaii, and the fireworks there are a lot smaller,” said Chelsea Legay, an intern for Lovin’ Life Ministries. “As for the people, there was a lot of energy. Having a big group was really nice and it felt like everyone was happy to be there.”



*Spectators on the balcony of the New Yorker cheer as fireworks explode over the Hudson River.*

During the show, members of all ages tirelessly raised their voices to sing hits such as Taio Cruz’s “Dynamite,” Katy Perry’s “Firework,” “America, America,” “Amazing Grace,” “The Star Spangled Banner,” and many more.

“The event felt like a big family reunion, and I met a whole bunch of new people,” said Yoshiko Miller, who had traveled from her home in Louisiana to enroll in the Leadership Initiative Program. “Even after the fireworks and after we cleaned up, people were playing guitar and singing while looking up at the sky for a while. I just loved being on the balcony – the sun was setting, it was breezy, music was playing. My dad said he used to watch the fireworks from the balcony of the New Yorker when he was younger, so being there was a special experience for me. Maybe next year they can open up even another balcony for more people!”



*The fireworks sponsored by Macy's Department Store burst over the waters, impressively synchronized.*

Acknowledging the success of this event, Lovin' Life Senior Pastor In Jin Moon said, "For the first time ever, we've used the resources of the New Yorker Hotel really to serve the young people in our community, because for me, they are our highest priority. This year we had to expand to a second balcony and next year we're even hoping to expand to a third balcony. Let's all thank True Parents for providing us with a beautiful venue in which we can celebrate as a community – as one family under God!"