

2012 – Connecticut Center for Non Violence

MLK celebrated, audience motivated

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By Steve Smith, Staff Writer

Connecticut Center for Nonviolence founder Victoria Christgau led the featured presentation at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration by telling about King's life and legacy, as well as her own inspirations. Christgau's storytelling was interlaced with musical selections by the combined voices of the Lift Every Voice and Sing Community Choir and the Peace Is Possible Chorus.

Christgau added that King should be remembered for who he was and how his world shaped him, as well as what he accomplished. "[King] was an ordinary man." Christgau said. "When he was 7 years old, it was a pivotal time in his life. He had been friends with a white child in his neighborhood for a long time, but when he arrived one day at the ball park, that child's mom came out and she said, "My son can't play with you," and she sent Martin home. He went home crying. He said to his mom, "why on earth did this happen?"

She also related the Beloved Community concept to how people of Glastonbury and other towns pulled together after the October snow storm and subsequent power outage, and people shared their experiences and needs with each other, while many lent a hand to those who needed one. "Neighbors were talking to each other," she said. "It actually created a Beloved Community, couldn't you see that? Does it take a storm to bring us that close together?"

Christgau said afterward that she was glad that many people reacted to her presentation by standing up, clapping and dancing. "They did not know what to expect," she said. "They seemed to respond very well."

After the main presentation, the audience broke into workshops, including one led by Christgau, that invited adults to learn about the six principles of Martin Luther King, Jr. Another workshop, which was geared towards children taught about the concept of a peaceful community by asking participants to share something they like, and then others in the room had to switch chairs if they espoused the same affinity.

Glastonbury resident Laura Zeppieri, who attended the event with her two sons, Will, 10 and Joey, 7, said she really enjoyed the emotion Christgaus brought to the event.

"I think it's important to teach my boys about Martin Luther King." Zeppieri said, "And just learning to get along with all types of the people in the community and interacting."

"I liked the musical chair activity," Joey said. "Some people like the same things, but some people don't like what other people like."

In the workshops, Christgau said she was impressed by the numerous people who said they hadn't thought of King's concepts and how to relate them to themselves and their lives in quite the same way before.

"Many of them said they wanted to go back and study Martin Luther King deeper," she said. "It's not taught. It's not as if it is out there for people to get that information. You have to seek it. People have to go out and get it. What I would like to see is that this information becomes mainstream-that people get to know about this, and there are principles to live by."

Linda Ferreira, the event's chair, said Christgau was everything that the group wanted. "I thought she brought in the history," Ferreira said, "And then we wanted the emotional piece. We're going to work next year on getting the audience up clapping [again]. She just gets you up and doing that."

Christgau said her expectations of the event were met and exceeded by the Glastonbury Community.

Having worked with the GMLKCI in the past, Christgau said she was well aware of their dedication, which shone through again. "I've seen that they are very sincere in their desire to expand the diversity base, and to really start working on projects that can create more community and diversity," she said. "I am honored by what I see going on in Glastonbury. I'm impressed by Glastonbury."

Ferreira said she was happy with the event overall, and its effect on Glastonbury, as well as the planned year round events, outreach and community discussions. Plans included a community conversation at the Riverfront Community Center on Jan. 26, a book presentation and discussion on Feb. 12, and a trip to see "The Whipping Man" at Hartford Stage on March 7.