

USA Independence Day with Rev. In Jin Moon

Ariana Moon

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More than 300 Unificationists celebrated as one family for Independence Day during the fourth annual July 4, 2012 party at the Manhattan Center and the New Yorker Hotel. Attendees included approximately 200 high-school students, middle-school students and staff from the Lovin' Life Camp, as well as the 40 participants of the second summer Leadership Program, more than 40 students and staff from the Blessed Teens Academy (BTA) and a handful of local families.

Second-generation Unificationist Gene Huneycutt, 20, from North Carolina said, "The event was great! I wasn't expecting anything like that. I happened to be in the city and seeing so many people I knew and catching up with them was really nice. I felt that I was in such a family-like atmosphere, and I was surrounded by good people with great standards of life. It was also very lively. People looked good, and the fireworks were really amazing!"

"This was my first time in New York for the Fourth of July, and it was really exciting," said BTA staff member Rev. Michael Hentrich. "There were so many people there. I made the comment to several people, 'Wow, you can really see how far our church has come in the last few years when you come to an event like this.'"

The party kicked off with a ballroom-dance lesson by father-daughter duo Ariana Moon and Jin Sung Park around 4:30 p.m., and featured the following dance performances: a Swing by BTA, a Foxtrot by graduates of Generation Peace Academy, a Chacha by New Jersey-residents Miyeong Mendonca and Michael Roman and a Samba and Jive by Moon and her partner. The party also included a video-game contest, which was projected on two screens in the Grand Ballroom and facilitated by Truston and Paxton Moon. Chef Jatoma Gavin, assisted by participants of the Leadership Module, provided a hearty buffet dinner of pulled pork, chicken, beans and salad. After several hours of fellowship, all attendees made their way to the 30th and the 38th floors of the New Yorker Hotel to secure a spot on the balconies in time to watch the fireworks explode over the Hudson River. However, according to many of the attendees, the fact that Rev. In Jin Moon, senior pastor of Lovin' Life Ministries, attended the event outshone even the brightest bursts in the sky.

Feedback from Participants

Second-generation Unificationist from Japan Sunnie Ogawa, 24: "The whole day was really great, and

watching all the performances was really exciting. Later, when we were standing out on the balcony of the New Yorker to watch the fireworks, I had a meaningful experience. Rev. In Jin Moon walked out and I happened to be standing right behind her. I really wanted to have an opportunity to greet her and thank her, but as soon as one person finished talking to her, another would come right in. As I listened to her talking with other people, and then later when the fireworks began, I stood there behind her, watching her and wondering what she was thinking. I'm sure there must have been so much going through her mind. She was so still while watching the fireworks. After the fireworks were over she left, and I didn't get the chance to greet her properly as I'd wanted to, but even just that short, small experience for me was deeply meaningful and wonderful."

Second-generation Unificationist and California-resident Sarah Rischl, 16: "It was great to be around everyone and have the experience of being in New York. For me, it was awesome being around Rev. In Jin Moon and seeing how she related with people. I felt really moved when she went around and greeted everyone from the Leadership Module with so much patience. I felt that I really wanted to attend her more while she was there. I was thinking about how she grew up going to bed with prayer and singing and how that was similar to how I grew up as well. I know her life was so much more intense, but that's where my heart was. I also stood behind her the whole time we watched the fireworks, which was really nice."

Leadership Program participant and Massachusetts-resident Iris Quesada, 23: "It was really nice seeing everyone dance together. We had an awesome mix of first-, second-, and third-generation Unificationists. I just loved watching the first-generation dance together, doing the Waltz across the floor. Also, Ariana's dancing was awesome!

"On the 38th floor, I actually cried. The sun was still out a little bit and the view was extraordinary. I thought I would never see something like that. I'm not the kind of person who gets to go to these special events – I consider myself a very ordinary person, and I never thought I'd be so lucky to spend Fourth of July here.

"I was really excited to meet Rev. In Jin Moon. I've met her twice before, but years ago. She really gave us each specific attention, and you could see her heart to get to know us. We introduced ourselves to her through a microphone, and so everyone else got to meet us too, but still, the conversation we had with her was so personal; when she spoke, she didn't broadcast what she had to say to each of us through the microphone. I was so hyper with all my enthusiasm."

Jerry Tamayo, founder and director of BTA: "This is my first time being in New York for the Fourth of July event. I heard many stories of it. When I saw the children practicing ballroom during the class before the social, I was very impressed by everyone's attendance. I was really surprised by how much they were paying attention, and it really moved my heart. I felt really comfortable there. How nice it would have been to have Ariana when I was 19 years old so I could dance like that! Watching the performances and everyone dancing were wonderful. Some kids [from BTA] mentioned how they made this or that mistake during their Swing-dance performance, but I didn't see any. And of course, being there with Rev. In Jin Moon when she came in just made the event so special. I felt that God had opened the clouds when she came."

Second-generation Unificationist and Colorado-resident Nolan Ichinohe, 19: "This is my first time in New York for Fourth of July, and during the whole celebration, I just felt such a sense of family," said second-generation Nolan Ichinohe, 19. "There were so many different people there – young and old Unificationists – and that was a good thing to see. I wish we could have grown up with these kinds of events, where people are having a good time with each other. It was really beautiful to see everyone's interaction. People were all so friendly and kind towards each other, embracing each other and loving

each other as family. I think that was the most meaningful thing. Of course, having Rev. In Jin Moon there was like icing on the cake. She's really our older sister and mother taking care of us and leading us in the right direction. "

Leadership Program participant Phil Brown, 23, from the United Kingdom: "The Independence-Day celebrations were impressive from the ballroom dancing to the fireworks on the 38th floor. American independence from Britain? Somehow it didn't matter. It was a celebration of the word 'free,' and I think we can all relate to that.

Brown continued: "For me, in America, there's been a consistent theme of being overwhelmed. Maybe it started when I saw the New York skyline or perhaps it was walking in Times Square. All I know is that it peaked at meeting Rev. In Jin Moon. It was only a few weeks ago that I'd go to Sunday service in England and watched Lovin' Life on a rusty old projector hooked up to a laptop, but suddenly, there she was. No more pixels on a white wall but here was True Father's daughter. I was moved by her willingness to allow us all to introduce ourselves one by one to her against what is surely a busy schedule."