


What does it take to be a peacemaker?

by Ernie McCray



I had the honor of hanging out with some kids at the Youth Peace Camp at the San Diego First Church of The Brethren, and I enjoyed every single second I spent with those beautiful people, leaving them at the end of the evening, with a glowing smile on my face which I maintained listening to some soulful old school rhythm and blues as I kick-backed on a smooth Lyft ride home that allowed me to think about how nicely the evening had gone, how it had begun with the singing of a couple of songs: “What Does it Take to be a Peacemaker?” and “Let’s Circle Up,” songs written by the campers gathered there, one song conveying that what it takes to make peace is kindness, love, patience, grace, courage, hope, forgiveness, mindfulness, the other song about getting together to know each other and solving problems and getting rid of walls and telling and listening to stories and sharing feelings and treasuring and honoring each other for our uniqueness, all of this a perfect lead-in

for my reading of a poem I had written for my first assembly with students when I was a new principal at a school, a poem where I made fun of my feet because they’re size 14, and I shared things I like to do and how big a jock I am, my point being to the campers that the poem was written in a spirit of love and it bonded me with a few hundred students at the beginning of a new school year, and how love, playing on one of their themes, is essential to creating peace, as it’s a way of letting people you’re around know who you are and what you have to offer towards keeping peace in your human interactions. A simple loving gesture as an action.

When I arrived home I felt hope in my soul and in my bones. Listening to those kids I sense they’re on the right track to creating a peaceful world as they’ve already set the tone. 

Poet Ernie McCray is a college basketball record-setter and retired principal and educator. He is active in promoting peace, social justice, and civil rights. A friend of San Diego (Calif.) First Church of the Brethren, he was a speaker at the church’s Youth for Peace Camp in July. The songs mentioned in his poem are available at <https://betterworld.bandcamp.com>. The poem is reprinted with permission from McCray and the *Ocean Beach Rag*.