

Bro/Sis Retreat Reflections

The Brotherhood

**Handle Ya Business! Strive for Excellence,
Never Accept Mediocrity
March 2005 - Poconos, PA**

Members from the *Intrinsic Kings* (Thurgood Marshall Academy, Central Harlem) and *Eternally Unbreakable* Chapters (Central Park East Secondary School, East Harlem), along with alumni and staff spent three days on a wilderness retreat. We focused on the social and personal problems we face as Black and Latino men, the emotional and spiritual conflicts we confront, and methods for overcoming these struggles. We bonded, learned and developed through an array of physical, mental and spiritual challenges. These words are the reflections of some of our members at the end of the weekend. Words written as they lay outside on snow-covered ground, amidst trees and the warmth of the sun. Their words after a intensive weekend of reflection.

I learned a lot from this retreat. I learned what you do is up to you. Life is up to you. What path you take, what road you walk. This is the most important thing I will take home. All of my personal demons I will put behind me from now on. I am starting over. I will not let fear, guilt, laziness or anything else hold me. I will do what I need to do for me, my family and all my brothers and sisters that are not blood. I will be mentally strong, physically strong, and spiritually strong. I will be a man.

This was my first retreat here. I can say that I absolutely loved it. Things can't really get any better with a group of men.

To tell the truth, I had one of the best times of my life this weekend.

This retreat was a very good experience and I appreciate everything we did. I learned a couple of things on this retreat. One is nothing comes easy in life and you have to work hard for everything. And also to get together with a bunch of people you never met before and just get along like family is a very deep thing. Out of all the kids I have met in school and become cool with, I don't look at them the same way I look at my Brothers in Brotherhood. If we could all do that in the street it would be a much better place because all of us would have love for each other. I am going to be in Brotherhood for a long time.

This weekend was the best I could ever ask for. It cleared my mind and set me up for things I need to take care of. It made me realize that you have to start and do your goals. Struggle for them. It's never gonna come to you without a battle. This

weekend helped me relax my mind and start over fresh in New York. I gained love from my brothers and leaders. The trip opened my eyes and told me anything was possible. I think I was meant to be in this organization for a purpose and that purpose was to be successful. Without The Brotherhood I would probably be doing nothing for myself. I will bring back all the memories, statements and love that my Brothers have gave to me to be strong and say that nothing could stop me now because we are a strong unit that will never die or go out. Brotherhood forever.

*This is one of the greatest moments of my life. The bonfire was one of the most spiritual moments of my life. Even though I didn't say much I learned a lot from my brothers in *Intrinsic Kings* and *Eternally Unbreakable* and I think this trip has made us closer and we all made one big step toward becoming men. When I go home my mind will be totally different from when I left. I am really going to start going after my priorities. I just want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

My experiences from this retreat have been phenomenal. I have learned many life lessons and many lessons about becoming a man. These memories and experiences will stick with me. It will change me and make me a better man. These lessons have made the path to becoming a man an easy one. They have helped tremendously. One specific event that showed what I was capable of was 'follow the light' because it showed that no matter what, if you have a goal nothing will stop you from accomplishing it. I think this retreat has made me a better person, a better being. To see how much love and compassion is expressed here, to see that there are people just like me, struggling to become better people, to become men, has really amazed me. The experience that affected me the most was the bonfire. I never have seen so much emotions, so much spirit, so much unity. It truly touched my heart. I will never forget this retreat. When I go home today I'm going to bring these experiences with me. I'm going to apply them to my everyday life. I'm going to use them to succeed in life and on my journey to becoming a man. I have released myself from the chains that hold me back, now I will truly try my hardest and achieve my dreams. Today we talked about depression and it moved me how right they were, how right they were to solving the depression. I am one of these people who suffer from depression, who always has weight on his shoulders and I was surprised at how they said love was a cure and it is.

I want to bring home with me the will to actually do the many

things I've talked about here. I don't want this to all be words, but instead actions. I will start practicing what I preach.

I come back to NYC's mean streets changed in attitude like my foot steps printed in snow.

The thing I would bring home with me is the fact that I have total and complete trust in all of my brothers.

I wouldn't take this experiences back for anything in the world.

I hope to keep this bond with my brothers until the day I die.

This weekend has helped to open my eyes. Looking at people's faces during the bonfire really showed me that this moment would stay in everyone's life forever. I just hope that everyone, myself included, takes the experience with them back to the City because we all need to apply what we learned this retreat to our everyday life. I hope everyone remembers what they threw into the fire and that they have the strength to do anything they want in life. I remember every experience with The Brotherhood well. I know this one will be just as special as the others. I can't wait until the next time I have another learning experience like this.

Being out here with brothers I really care about is a hi-light of my life. I truly do believe that I will always remember the talks and the fire, the sight of burning problems, the smell of burnt marshmallows and the tears that were dropped. I felt that when everyone spoke they recited words that came directly from the heart. The level of respect, humor and love made the heart-felt tears feel more comfortable showing up to kiss the fire warmed faces. These days will always be remembered. I will never forget being surrounded in love by those who really care. Everything around us was a symbol for our dreams. The fire burning represented our will to strive. The wood represented the demons we need to get rid of. The trees stood for the way we stick together and our unity. The stars above was us someday shining above it all. One thing I truly learned was the love from others was indeed true. What I taught was that the fight is in all of us and our dreams are to come.

Sister Sol Retreat **Will the Real Women Please Stand Up** **Spring 2005** **Beacon, NY**

Challenging
Explosive
Healing
Inspiring
Moving

These are words our members used to describe their experiences on during Sister Sol Spring Retreat, **Will the Real Women Please Stand Up**. We had 2 ceremonies - one to recognize our newest members and the other recognition of completion of our older members' Oaths of Dedication. We took a 9am hike, finding inspiration to move forward and to celebrate each other and nature's beauty. We conducted several tasks community service tasks for the camp which hosted us. Triumphant over the physical challenge of rope courses, freeing ourselves from cliques and personal biases were members, alumnae and staff - sharing memorable moments and taking another step forward in becoming true sisters, women and leaders.

I bet that if all of these activities weren't done with my sisters, I know I wouldn't have done [them]. I also got a chance to get to know more about my chapter members and leaders and also other girls. Hearing about these stories and being here without my mother made me realize that I have to lighten up my relationship with my mother. When I go home I'm going to start fresh like buying a new notebook for my journal. In my journal there's a lot of things that make me sad and hurts me. I want to put an end to that.

One day I'm going to break all of my walls down and clear myself from the pain and live for myself and only myself. This is one reality they won't be able to say is wrong.

Right now it's raining. It feels so good. I haven't been in the rain writing. That's different. Life could be filled with so many surprises. I guess that's what God blesses us with each day. I feel complete and incomplete at times. Especially when I too keep things bottled up and the only way to release it is to cry. Cry and cry. This hopefully is a good reflection. My mother is molding me into a woman - someone who's dedicated, can face any obstacle and try to overcome it, confidence, courage, the will to keep going, true to myself and know my future ambition. One who will struggle but pick herself right up. A woman who can find herself and stick with it. My reflection of myself, my life, my career will always improve for the better. You know.

Being here has placed so many goals into perspective. The activities we've done have brought down a wall that I've been hiding behind, a wall that keeps my pain, frustrations and sadness locked up. It is so clear to me now what has been holding me back. Climbing that mountain yesterday was even better than the first time I climbed it. The further I climbed the harder it became because I was getting tired and breathing became more difficult. But I kept climbing, at my own pace, not worrying about the ones in front or in back. I kept climbing and it got harder, but Cidra was singing and so were the other girls. That motivated me and encouraged me to keep going. And finally when I reached the top it was a sense of worth and accomplishment. I can compare climbing a mountain to life because I set goals for myself and reaching my goals haven't and will not be easy. But to succeed and reach my full potential, I must believe in myself. And it helps a lot when I have significant individuals in my life who encourage me and refuse to allow me to ever give up or fail. I set a goal for myself a long time ago and now I'm graduating from high school, despite all the negativity and obstacles. Sister Sol has become a part of me and a part of me that is extremely positive and enlightening. I thank everyone for just being unique and special in your own way. You all encourage me to be who I am. Sisterhood keeps me going, God keeps me going, and I keep me going.

I think of those I love [and] those who love me.

Sisterhood isn't just a word it is a state of mind. It is a true blessing. It is a crown that is earned and must be worn proud. You have to rock it right. Every single one of my sisters here are doing more than giving it justice. And not only are our chapter leaders teaching us the numerous, countless ways to be a sister but they are teaching us how to spread and share sisterhood. I only hope that I am learning how to rock it and that I will be able to share it. I am truly and deeply in love with Sister Sol. Ashé.

When I think of Spring Retreat 2005, I think of togetherness. I say this because from the time when we stepped off the bus, it was a link. New and old members learned new things. And I always like making a closer connection with my sisters.

This retreat has been very, very exciting for me. I got the chance to meet new sisters and the opportunity to welcome them to Sister Sol. I'm very happy to see how much the Sister Sol chapters have grown to the point where we would all be in the same place and give, express and show love to one another. I'm happy we've grown to accept each other's differences.

I am looking forward to next time me and my sisters go on a trip together.

What have I been feeling throughout this whole retreat? At first I wasn't really sure if I wanted to come. I haven't been feeling like myself lately and I thought my negative energy would rub off on some of the girls but I was wrong. I walked into the brownstone and although I felt a little weird I knew everything would be okay. I been physically challenged and my whole body is killing me because of

the ropes course and hike but it served as my reminder that I need to start taking better care of myself. Every time I come to a retreat what really gets me is the Talking Circle around the campfire. I can never really leave the campfire if it's not with tears in my eyes. Sometimes when I look at a person you don't really see what's inside. You look at them from the outside and they seem to have it all together when in fact that's not the case. What I was really thinking throughout the campfire listening to the girls just speak was admiration. They are young but for young women they are very wise and I know if they keep at the pace they are going they are going to be okay. As for me I know I'm going to be alright too

I always ask myself, what makes a woman? But I can't say I still know the answer. What I am sure of is that one word can't define it. It definitely takes more than one thing to be a woman. I am heading in the right way to become one. I am going to miss having sessions on Tuesdays. I think I will need them when I'm in college. I'm going to need the comfort of home when I'm away. But I'm going to keep in touch and I am going to come back. This retreat has been very fun and very challenging. It has proved to me I am strong.

Over the last couple of days, I've been asked, what is a woman and what does it take to be a woman? Can you honestly say that you are a woman? Some of these questions, I have answers: a woman is not a person that you might like or becomes friends with. However you have respect for her because she has her head on right. A woman is strong in whatever she does. She's not perfect; but who is? She may not sit behind a desk or wear flashy shoes but I'm sure she has her reasons for what she does. I am fortunate to have several women in my life. And someday I will walk in similar paths, one day. She motivates others and others want to emulate her. However you have to become your own woman.

The theme [of this retreat] perfectly reflects every individual on this retreat. Over the years I've had the opportunity to watch each young women grow progressively. For some reason this retreat more than others I've observed the growth. During the Circle I wasn't as talkative as other retreats. Mostly, my year went well and I wanted this year to be the sister that sits back and absorbs everything. And I'm glad I did that because I see the real women on this retreat and open my eyes to how people have grown.



512 West 143 Street
New York, NY 10031
212.283.7044 fax 212.283.3700
www.Brotherhood-Sistersol.org