



This month's circle tale is the story of the heart space created by council when a family is faced with grief. It was written by Vicki Hesse to share the circle she facilitated with her family on the night after her mother died. Thank you, Vicki, for sharing this private moment and for the inspiration it provides others.

Circle Tale, August 2005

A Circle to Remember Mom

Gathered together in Marie's home were four of the six siblings – Marie (who had been the primary caregiver for Mom), Elizabeth (who flew in from the West Coast), Ann (who flew in from out of the country), and Katherine (who drove in from the Midwest), Kirk (Marie's husband), three teenage grandchildren, and me. Anxious that the family had been totally consumed with travel, funeral arrangements and frenzied planning, Katherine wanted to create a time and space for everyone to get away from the busyness and focus on Mom's passing. I encouraged her to create what she needed, suggesting that she invite her family members into a circle to share together.

During the afternoon, Katherine began inviting individuals to this planned time of sharing. She explained that it would be a simple, quiet time for family to gather, recount what had happened in the last few days, and share stories about Mom.

To prepare for the evening, Katherine and I created a simple center for a circle by covering a small box with a sheet. On this center, we placed a candle, Mom's red hat, hand lotion, a picture of the siblings, the four stuffed animals that were on Mom's bed when she died, and Mom's glasses. We also set candles at the perimeter of the living room, encircling the space where people could sit on the sofa and pillows on the floor.

At 9 p.m. Katherine invited everyone into the living room. She set the intent by saying, "I just want us to share some stories about how everyone is feeling right now and what has happened in the last 36 hours. We have all been so busy with phone calls, emails, travel plans, and funeral arrangements... <Everyone nodding> ... and, I for one, want to catch my breath. What I'd like to do first is go around the circle and have everyone "check in" – 'How are you feeling right now?' After we have finished checking-in, Marie and I will share what it was like to be with mom when she died." She explained that Mom's glasses would be the talking piece and that only the person holding the talking piece would speak; everyone else would listen. She then lit the candle in the center and offered a simple prayer.

Katherine began by sharing how she was feeling. As the glasses were passed around the circle and family members shared, they slowed down and got in touch with their grief and fears. All, including the grandkids, were able to speak in an honest and vulnerable way and convey what was in their hearts and minds. Marie's husband shared that he was worried about how Marie was handling the loss, the oldest sister shared her fears around becoming the matriarch of the family and the expectations that would come with that new role, one grandchild shared that she just wanted things to get back to normal again, and another grandchild shared how helpless he felt.

Next, Katherine and Marie tearfully recounted to the other family members the final hours in hospice with the caregivers, the Chaplain and Mom. The glasses were laid back in the center and people began to spontaneously reach for them to share stories. Shared memories were both serious and funny, evoking tears and laughter. Family members also conveyed some of their own concerns and fears about "what next?" One sister verbalized, "...we don't have a mom anymore!" Amidst the storytelling there were moments of silence.

To close the circle, Katherine asked for the glasses to be passed around again and invited each person to share what they needed and what they could offer to each other in the weeks ahead. The eldest sister asked for acceptance of her intense need to control and offered to back off if asked to do so. Marie's



husband offered to break the tension with his silly jokes. The youngest grandchild asked for directions about how he could help and offered, "...to just to be around when you need me."

It was an amazing intergenerational experience – and it brought the focus back to Mom, the family, their love for each other, and what really is important in the midst of the chaotic planning.

If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at www.peerspirit.com and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*