



This month's circle tale is written by Lori Gustafson. Though she has not gone through a full PeerSpirit circle training, she shares this circle tale as one who has participated and learned by being part of the process. Lori is a third grade teacher in Minneapolis. MN.

## **Circle Tale #46, December 2003**

### **Circle in Conference Planning**

Last January, in the cold north woods of Minnesota, I gathered with a group of women for a weekend called Heart in the Earth. The purpose of the weekend was to learn to enjoy being outdoors in the middle of the winter, immersed in the beauty of nature. About two dozen of us gathered in Brimson, Minnesota under the organization of Kathleen Anderson of Wintermoon. We had the opportunity to learn about dog sledding, bird watching, quinzee building, ice bowling and many other outdoor activities. The weekend began and ended with all of us gathered in circle, sharing our stories. I found this first experience in circle to be very powerful, in a centered and heartfelt way, due to the honest sharing, attentive listening, and learning.

Then in June, I was blessed to be with another group of amazing women in circle as part of a kayaking trip on Lake Superior with PeerSpirit and Kathleen Anderson. The ten of us spent our days camping, cooking and kayaking along the North Shore of Lake Superior. Each morning and evening we would gather in circle and through the use of animal cards and focused thought we would reflect on the day, the trip, our life stories and our connectedness to nature. By the end of the trip I had experienced not only the beauty and adventure of paddling on the world's largest lake, but also the stories and wisdom of each of the women on the trip. I felt ready to go back and make a difference in my place in this world.

Shortly after this trip, I was in San Antonio, Texas for the annual, national spina bifida conference. I am a co-director of their teen program. This conference brings together families from all over the United States who have a child or children with spina bifida. The goal is for the families to gather together, learn from and with each other, share experiences and attend sessions relevant to their needs regarding issues connected with spina bifida. The teen program brings teenagers (ages 13-19) who have spina bifida together in one group. This year we had over 70 teens in our program.

Our first day of conference was "one of those days." What could go wrong did! Our first speaker didn't show. A back-up speaker came, presented a short session on the para olympics. At this point we were a bit behind schedule and needed to transition to the IMAX Theater seven blocks away. After navigating sidewalks under construction, we made it to the theater only to find out that they could only accommodate 15 people in wheelchairs. We had around 50 people in chairs! After much discussion with the staff, we realized there was no way to make this work. I was the one to break the news to the teens. They handled it with so much grace and understanding!

A magic shop in the mall where the theater was located put on a show for the teens. They all gathered around to watch, only to be told by mall security that they couldn't all be in one spot because they would be blocking the fire escape routes. So, in small groups they saw the show. We transitioned back, had lunch, and then had a great experience visiting the Alamo because their staff HAD made careful preparations for our visit. While we were at the Alamo, we learned another speaker wasn't able to make it due to car trouble.

In the six years we have been co-directing this program my co-director and I had never had a day like this. We were completely exhausted, but I suggested that it might create a nice ending to our day to call a circle with our 70 teens and 25 volunteers. Using a microphone as the talking piece, we went over the agreements, and set up the circle. The teens began to share and really listen. They spoke from the heart and listened with care and understanding. I don't think I can even begin to put into words the quality of spirit and connectedness that evolved. By the end, ALL of the teens in the program shared something!



This closing activity brought all of us together in a very powerful way despite the disjointed day. It created connections that became stronger over the next two days of conference. My co-director and I were humbled by the learnings that occurred in the calling of a very big circle!

*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](http://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.*